

Introduction

Europe and the British Geographical Imagination 1760-1830 sets out to answer a single, albeit very complex, question: what did literate British people in this period understand by the word ‘Europe’? The book’s purpose is to show that certain ideas about the European continent are very deeply embedded in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century popular British mentalities. But it also demonstrates that those ideas are often nuanced, multi-faceted and even contradictory: they form patterns of contestation which tap into longstanding – sometimes ancient – debates, and continue to resonate throughout the modern period. It may not be a surprise to discover that British ideas about Europe have long been a cause for reflection and dispute, but this book seeks to establish the precise grounds of those arguments, and to show their broad dissemination in texts for the general reading public.

To suggest that ideas about Europe play a discernible role in the intellectual life of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literate Britons is to court historiographical controversy. It questions the view – still influential in Britain – that British and European history are distinct fields which may overlap in places, but which are best narrated and analysed separately. Commentators frequently remark on the ‘neglect of Europe by most British historians’, and draw attention to the traditional separation of British and European history in school and university curriculums.¹ Neither is it difficult to find historical studies

Note: Parts of the introduction expand points from Paul Stock, ‘Histories of Geography’, in Paul Hamilton, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of European Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 644-59.

¹ Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 5; Robbins, *Eclipse of a Great Power*, 385. See also: Evans, *Cosmopolitan Islanders*, 1-2; Robbins, *Britain and Europe*, x, xvii-xviii.

which advocate various forms of British exceptionalism. A particularly common version of the argument contends, for example, that Britain's unique political, social, economic, and cultural conditions led 'to an earlier conception of a unified state than was the case on the European continent and a common national identity at a comparatively early stage of its evolution'.² Such exceptionalism is in some respects integral to all state- and nation-based histories; and there is certainly a long historiographical tradition – traceable at least to the eighteenth century itself – which seeks to locate Britain's distinctiveness in a range of supposedly exclusive characteristics from commercial aptitude and naval expansion, to Protestantism and the parliamentary constitution. But whereas one review of this tradition confines itself to the nineteenth century, and another concludes with Winston Churchill's *History of the English-Speaking Peoples* (1956-8), the core presumptions still remain visible in twenty-first-century historiography.³ Writing in *History Today* in 2015, one historian claimed to speak for likeminded colleagues who together seek 'to show how the United Kingdom has developed in a distinctive way by comparison with its continental neighbours'. Britain's 'different legal system based on precedent, rather than Roman law or Napoleonic codes', its parliament, and its 'ancient institutions, such as the monarchy and several

² Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, 7-8, 477n28. Grob-Fitzgibbon cites several influential volumes which he suggests are predicated on arguments about Britain's unique state development. These include: Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*; Colley, *Britons*; Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England*. For wider discussions of British exceptionalism see: O'Brien, 'Fiscal Exceptionalism'; Prados de la Escosura, *Exceptionalism and Industrialisation*; Spiering, *Cultural History of British Euroscepticism*.

³ Burrow, *Liberal Descent*; Brundage and Cosgrove, *British Historians and National Identity*.

universities, have survived (and evolved) with scarcely a break over many centuries. This degree of continuity is unparalleled in continental Europe'.⁴

It is to counterbalance such views that efforts have been made – especially since the turn of the millennium – to reintegrate British and European history. Focusing on a wide range of themes – including foreign policy, trade, culture and creative arts, religion, and migration – these works typically insert Britain into broader continental narratives, or discuss British domestic affairs in the context of European influences and encounters.⁵ They typically posit that the history of Britain 'is primarily a continental story, [and] that her destiny was mainly determined by relations with the rest of Europe'.⁶ According to this perspective, many of the supposedly distinctive British traits which emerged in the early modern period – from an assertive parliament to a powerful navy – are 'not so different from their continental counterparts as exceptionalist accounts would have us believe'.⁷ The 'Glorious Revolution' in 1688, for example, has traditionally been upheld – almost from the moment of its occurrence – as a marker of 'British specificity and uniqueness' thanks to its presumed avowal of parliamentary sovereignty at the expense of monarchical authority. But it can also

⁴ Abulafia, 'Britain: Apart From or a Part of Europe?'. Abulafia's argument generated controversy: see Andress, Blakemore et al., 'Fog in Channel, Historians Isolated'.

⁵ See: Bromley, 'Britain and Europe in the Eighteenth Century'; Black, *Convergence or Divergence?*; Doran and Richardson, *Tudor England and its Neighbours*; Robbins, *Britain and Europe*; Davies, 'Not Forever England'; Claydon, *Europe and the Making of England*; Peters, 'Early Hanoverian Consciousness'; Mori, *Culture of Diplomacy*; Conway, *Britain, Ireland, and Continental Europe*; Houlbrooke, *Britain and Europe*; Simms, *Britain's Europe*.

⁶ Simms, *Britain's Europe*, xiv.

⁷ Conway, *Britain, Ireland and Continental Europe*, 2, 292.

be interpreted as part of a wider ‘reconciliation between crowns and elites that was so characteristic of Europe in the late seventeenth century’.⁸ And Britain’s emerging naval power was far from unique: ‘for all the rhetoric about Britannia ruling the waves, [it] faced serious competition from other European navies, and could not always be certain of achieving superiority’. In short, Britain does not stand apart: it is ‘integral’ to Europe in the sense that it has significant confluences and commonalities with continental states and societies.⁹

Scholarship which seeks to assimilate British and European history tends to focus on cultural, political, or economic encounters, particularly among social and intellectual elites: travel, diplomatic ties, the circulation of texts, commercial exchanges, shared religious allegiances, and so on. The present book has a different objective, and is concerned much more overtly with ‘popular’ British mentalities. It explores the idea of ‘Europe’ by asking what the concept meant to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literate Britons. How is ‘Europe’ defined? Where is it located, and how far does it extend? What principles and assumptions – what supposed qualities, contents, or activities – identify ‘European’ spaces and allow them to be both distinguished from non-European areas, and discussed collectively? As these questions suggest, Europe is inherently a spatial concept: it is

⁸ Black, *Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 256-7, 252; Black, *Kings, Nobles and Commoners*. For mythologizations of the Glorious Revolution see: Slaughter, “‘Abdicate’ and ‘Contract’ in the Glorious Revolution”; Wilson, ‘Inventing Revolution’; Schwoerer, ‘Celebrating the Glorious Revolution’; Pincus, *1688*, esp. 3-29; Kumar, ‘1066 and All That’; Niggeman, “‘You Will See Who They Are’”.

⁹ Conway, *Britain, Ireland and Continental Europe*, 2, 293. For nuanced interpretations of Britain’s naval strength in the eighteenth century see: Duffy, *Parameters of British Naval Power*; Rodger, ‘Sea-Power and Empire’; Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*.

ultimately premised on theories about ‘emplacement, distribution, and connection’.¹⁰ And since geography is the field of enquiry which seeks to investigate spatial phenomena, the present volume must also examine the foundations of wider geographical knowledge in this period.

It is important to recall that geographical analysis combines both empirical and conceptual aspects. When we describe the ‘geography’ of a space, we are in part seeking to establish its physical features and arrangement. Empirical definitions of Europe might therefore refer to its observable topographical features and climactic conditions, or the existence of material borders between states. But ‘geography’ is also a disciplinary structure – that is, an organised form of thought which analyses the world according to codified parameters. ‘Geography’ therefore does not simply refer to empirical attributes: it is also a *way* of seeing the world, a method of interpretation which structures how we understand spatial phenomena. For this reason, geographical enquiry also incorporates questions about the conception and perception of space. It asks how humans have sought to interpret the world and to intervene in it – an enormous topic which includes, among other things, theories about territory and borders, and attitudes towards the environment.

Precisely because Europe is a spatial concept, definitions of the continent are therefore also interpretations of the world and not merely passive descriptions of it. Europe ‘is a series of world-views, of peoples’ perspectives on their reality, sometimes only dreamt or desired, sometimes experienced and realised’. It is a ‘classificatory scheme’ or a ‘cognitive frame’

¹⁰ Stock, ‘History and the Uses of Space’, 1.

through which one can view and understand the world.¹¹ Put simply, ideas about Europe are examples of what scholars have called the ‘geographical imagination’, or ‘ways of thinking about space and place’.¹² The ‘geographical imagination’ has become the subject of a rich theoretical literature, but in this book I use the term to mean ‘the ways that humans view, represent, and interpret spaces both actual and imagined’.¹³ This can incorporate both ‘specific techniques of knowledge’ – in other words, the conventions of disciplined thought – as well as informal ‘modes of comprehension and experience’ which form part of general mentalities in a given context.¹⁴

Evidently, there are a number of complexities here, regarding not just the purpose of ‘geographical’ analysis, but also the most suitable methods to acquire geographical knowledge. To some extent, these issues still preoccupy the twenty-first-century discipline with its broad diversity of mathematical and humanistic approaches, and so it is perhaps unnecessary to note that fundamental questions about geographical epistemology and

¹¹ Rietbergen, *Europe*, xxxvii; Malmberg and Stråth, ‘Introduction: The National Meanings of Europe’, 10. Both cited in Stock, *Shelley-Byron Circle*, 2.

¹² Giesecking, ‘Geographical Imagination’, 5:2657.

¹³ Apap, *The Genius of Place*, 3. For theoretical discussions see: Lowenthal, ‘Geography, Experience, and Imagination’; Harvey, ‘Between Space and Time’; Daniels, ‘Place and the Geographical Imagination’; Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations*.

¹⁴ Daniels, ‘Geographical Imagination’, 183. Among the many works investigating the ‘geographical imagination’ in a variety of contexts see: Matless, ‘Regional Surveys and Local Knowledges’; Lestringant, *Mapping the Renaissance World*; Tomasch and Gilles, *Text and Territory*; Schulten, *The Geographical Imagination in America*; Cosgrove, *Geographical Imagination and the Authority of Images*.

methodology remain unresolved in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century geographical thought. But as we shall discover, these contentious issues – especially regarding knowledge acquisition and the perception and interpretation of the world – directly inform how ideas about Europe are both conceived and presented in the period. The continent can serve, for example, as both the object of geographical analysis, and as an interpretative lens through which to understand reality. This creates a circular process whereby ideas of Europe both derive from, and generate, interpretations of the empirical world. Europe, in other words, exists on the ‘boundaries between the real and the imagined, between the material world and its symbolic representations’.¹⁵

How, though, can we investigate the idea of Europe? How do we establish what eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literate Britons understood by the term ‘Europe’? How can we analyse the different perspectives and beliefs which together constitute the British ‘geographical imagination’? Several scholars have elucidated the history of the idea of Europe in very broad terms across long periods of time, usually beginning in antiquity and often continuing to the immediate present. These works typically cover certain themes which Richard Swedberg has itemized based on a survey of books on the idea of Europe published between 1947 and 1990. Familiar topics for discussion include: the (mysterious) etymology of the word ‘Europe’; the mythological story of Europa and her abduction by Zeus; the supposed equation of ‘Europe’ and ‘Christendom’ in the medieval period; the role of Charlemagne’s empire as ‘an early incarnation of a united Europe’; plans for European peace formulated, for example, by Henri IV of France’s minister the Duc de Sully, the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, and William Penn; the rise of the eighteenth-century European ‘Republic of Letters’; modern attempts to integrate the continent by military force, economic means, or

¹⁵ Stock, *Shelley-Byron Circle*, 3.

diplomacy, for example Napoleon's Continental System, the nineteenth-century 'Concert of Europe', and, latterly, the European Union.¹⁶ Denys Hay's *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (1957) – an exceptionally scholarly contribution to the genre – both conforms to and helped to establish this analytical pattern.¹⁷ It opens with the myth of Europa and Zeus; notes the unclear etymology and classical uses of the word; traces early and medieval Christian uses of the word 'Europe', proposing that 'Christendom was virtually interchangeable with Europe' until the early modern period; makes particular mention of, among others, Charlemagne, Sully, Penn, and Saint-Pierre; and concludes that, by the late eighteenth century, an increasingly secular idea of Europe had been 'fortified by the notion of a "republic of letters"'.¹⁸ These developmental themes have proved enormously influential, and are redeployed or developed in many books and introductory essays.¹⁹

¹⁶ Swedberg, 'The Idea of "Europe"', 382. Swedberg's sources are: Chabod, 'L'Idea d'Europa'; Gollwitzer, *Europabild und Europagedanke*; Hay, *Europe*; Curcio, *Europa*; Chabod, *Storia dell'idea d'Europa*; Rougement, *Vingt-huit siècles d'Europe*; Foerster, *Die Idee Europa*; Voyenne, *Histoire de l'idée européenne*; Duroselle, *L'idée d'Europe*; Brugmans, *L'idée européenne*; Lipgens, *History of European Integration. Volume 1*; Lipgens, *Europe: Documents on the History of European Integration* [Swedberg only cites vols. 1 and 2]; Duroselle, *Europe*. See also Woolf, 'Europe and its Historians'.

¹⁷ Hay's book is sometimes considered to be so important that it 'inaugurated a new field of study'. See Kivelson, 'The Cartographic Emergence of Europe?', 39

¹⁸ Hay, *Europe*, esp. 1-2, 115, 51-2, 119, 123.

¹⁹ For works published after 1990 see: Wilson and van der Dussen, *History of the Idea of Europe*; Mikkeli, *Europe as an Idea and an Identity*; Delanty, *Inventing Europe*; Heffernan, *Meaning of Europe*; Pagden, 'Prologue: Europe and the World Around'; Wintle, *Image of Europe*.

This broad approach to the idea of Europe generates, however, a number of problems. Most obviously – because it works across so many centuries and linguistic contexts – it is prone to generalization, often extrapolated from a small or familiar source-base. When Pim den Boer explains eighteenth-century notions of ‘European civilisation’ in his essay ‘Europe to 1914: The Making of an Idea’ (1995), the discussion focuses on a handful of figures, particularly Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Adam Smith.²⁰ Similarly, Biancamaria Fontana illustrates ‘the Enlightenment view’ of Europe with reference to just three French sources: the Chevalier de Jaucourt’s *Encyclopédie* article, Montesquieu, and Voltaire.²¹ Of course, such concision is unavoidable in large-scale or summative works, and pointing out these economies might seem churlish and unfair. But an even more serious problem is that general surveys can sometimes reify the ideas of Europe that they purportedly investigate. Many works begin their accounts with classical Greece and thus present antiquity as the first step in an intellectual teleology which leads – via the Romans, the medieval period, and the Renaissance – to European modernity. In doing so they appear to affirm – rather than scrutinize – certain longstanding assumptions about classical legacies. Firstly, they imply that the ancient Greeks are the initiators of cultural questions – in this case about Europe – which are to some extent perennial and thus directly correspond to modern problems; and secondly, it bolsters a version of European history and culture which seeks its own origins in classical civilizations.²² In other words, the books can (inadvertently) reproduce and sustain

²⁰ Boer, ‘Europe to 1914’, 58-65.

²¹ Fontana, ‘The Napoleonic Empire and the Europe of Nations’, 117-19.

²² Eurocentric histories of ancient Greece have been challenged most prominently by Bernal, *Black Athena*. The immense controversy generated by this work can be glimpsed from:

particular ideas of Europe even while it ostensibly analyses them.²³ Something similar can occur when texts assert that ‘Europe’ and ‘Christendom’ were at once stage commensurate, and that Christianity has thus been a unifying force in the continent. This can serve to cement the contention that Europe has been (and remains) a predominantly Christian space – a belief which ‘ignores the presence of other faiths in European culture, Christianity’s global (not just continental) reach, and the long history of denominational conflict in the region’.²⁴

Another approach to the history of the idea of Europe focuses on more specific case studies. In part, this emerges from the need to find examples upon which to base generalizations; but it can also be seen as a reaction to excessively broad views and an attempt to provide more precisely contextualized perspectives. One such tactic is to compile anthologies of past ideas about the continent, usually concentrating on authors already regarded as historically-significant. Accompanied by editorial notes which explain the writers’ and texts’ intellectual backgrounds, these compilations can provide thorough and nuanced understandings of the (sometimes very contentious) debates about Europe in a given era.²⁵ A related method involves the close study of especially prominent figures, whose thoughts are typically said both to reflect and to influence wider ideas about Europe in their contemporary societies. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have proved especially fruitful grounds for research

Lefkowitz and Rogers, *Black Athena Revisited*; Bernal, *Black Athena Writes Back*. See also Vlassopoulos, *Unthinking the Greek Polis*.

²³ There is a relatively unusual acknowledgement of this in Jones, ‘Europe: Land, Peoples and Languages’, 18. See also Blaut, *Eight Eurocentric Historians*.

²⁴ Stock, ‘What is Europe?’, 26. For more on the idea of Christendom see: Perkins, *Christendom and European Identity*.

²⁵ See: Drace-Francis, *European Identity*; Seth and Kulesa, *Idea of Europe*.

in this respect, and there are detailed studies of the ideas of Europe possessed by various canonical thinkers, including Montesquieu, Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, Germaine de Staël, and G. W. F. Hegel.²⁶ As a result, one can argue persuasively that intellectual and political elites did indeed ‘think systematically about Europe’.²⁷

However, as valuable as these findings are, elite views are not necessarily representative of wider cultural trends. In my earlier book, *The Shelley-Byron Circle and the Idea of Europe* (2010), I examined the published and unpublished writings of nearly forty individuals associated with the poets Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley, including journalists, politicians, political campaigners, and travel writers. I also contextualized their output within a range of contemporary documents from newspapers and travelogues to political treaties and parliamentary debates. My discussion reveals a great deal about these individuals’ ideas of Europe; and because these people are often well-known figures expressing themselves in print, it also taps into the public discourse about ‘Europe’ in the early nineteenth century. This includes, for example, debates about post-Napoleonic diplomacy, and philhellenic enthusiasm for the Greek revolution against the Ottoman Empire (1821-32).²⁸ But there is an inevitable bias created by the circle’s personal predilections and experiences. Their extensive travel, political radicalism, knowledge of the classics, and hostility to organized religion, for

²⁶ See: Walsh, ‘Edmund Burke and the Commonwealth of Europe’; Tully, ‘Kantian Idea of Europe’; Dainotto, *Europe (In Theory)* (Montesquieu, Staël, Hegel); Fontana, ‘Literary History and Political Theory’ (Staël); Sullivan, *Montesquieu and the Despotism Ideas of Europe*.

²⁷ Simms, “‘Minsters of Europe’”, 112.

²⁸ Stock, *Shelley-Byron Circle*, esp. 151-97.

example, mean that one cannot necessarily extrapolate conclusions about ‘public opinion’ from these sources alone.

How, then, can one discern widespread or ‘popular’ ideas about Europe in a manner which avoids both ungrounded generalizations and an overly specific source base? One obvious solution is to concentrate on a defined period to allow for thorough contextualization, and also to widen the evidential base beyond elite and canonical figures. Unfortunately, this is not a straightforward task. If the ‘geographical imagination’ is understood to encompass all forms of spatialized ‘comprehension and experience’, then geographical perspectives necessarily permeate a vast array of materials. In order to comprehend how British people in a given period understood ‘Europe’ one could plausibly investigate, among other things: published and unpublished travel writings; military, foreign policy and diplomatic correspondence; governmental or parliamentary publications on European matters; newspapers and other current affairs serials; books and pamphlets on politics, religion or commerce; trade policies and statistics; official and commercial maps; paintings and other visual arts; and consumer activities and goods (e.g. tourist paraphernalia). Taken collectively these materials constitute an unmanageably huge archive, and attempts at selection would generate problems of over-privileging within and across genres. For instance, attention to diplomatic correspondence or political pamphlets during a specific foreign policy crisis could tell us a great deal about governmental, political-factional, or individual ideas of Europe; and perhaps show a range of competing views circulating among vocal and elite personnel. But for obvious reasons it would be misleading to equate those views with wider mentalities in the period overall.

Instead, we have to search both more broadly and more specifically to discern the British ‘geographical imagination’ about Europe. We need to employ sources which are discrete enough to allow thorough investigation, and yet reach more extensively throughout literate culture. A few existing studies have attempted versions of this method by choosing to focus on specific literary or artistic genres. Examples include literary texts, travel narratives, and maps, although in some cases the analysis still covers many hundreds of years, and the processes of source selection are not always systematic or clearly delineated.²⁹ The present book therefore takes a unique approach. It concentrates on mainstream British geographical books from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a large but distinct category of published writing which includes gazetteers, geographical encyclopaedias, reference works, and schoolbooks. These texts were widely read and disseminated, but with a few exceptions have been neglected by cultural and intellectual historians. The books typically seek to collate conventional ideas for wide consumption; and thanks to their popularity and summative nature they can thus help to uncover the commonplace ideas about Europe circulating in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British culture. Through repeated use of familiar arguments and rhetorical devices, the texts address a literate audience which they presume will comprehend established frameworks and terminologies for understanding the term ‘Europe’. In this way, geographical works both appeal to, and help to construct, a community of readers who share a similar way of talking about and understanding Europe, or who can be persuaded to think about it in comparable terms.³⁰ In short, they allow us to perceive widely-held, conventional, and thus ‘popular’ conceptions of the continent.

²⁹ See: Fendler and Wittlinger, *Idea of Europe in Literature*; Wintle, ‘Renaissance Maps and the Construction of the Idea of Europe’; Suleimen, ‘Idea of Europe’; Gephardt, *Idea of Europe in British Travel Narratives*.

³⁰ Stock, ‘Towards a Language of “Europe”’, 651.

For the purposes of my analysis, I define a ‘British geographical text’ as a book devoted wholly or predominately to ‘geography’ and published anywhere in the British Isles. Importantly, this includes works originally published in other states and subsequently translated and (re)published in Britain or Ireland. The processes of translation and adaptation inevitably affect content and argumentation, and it is logical to assume that such texts would have circulated among the reading public more widely in English. It therefore makes sense not to exclude these often influential and widely-cited books from consideration. I have also utilized texts produced across the whole of the British Isles. There is an inevitable bias towards the publishing centres of London, Edinburgh, and Dublin, but I have also examined works published in, among other places, Glasgow, Perth, Montrose, Manchester, Newcastle, Exeter, Oxford, Liverpool, Derby, Bath and Ipswich. While it would be erroneous to suggest that texts from different locations and markets all offer identical viewpoints, it is also clear that the themes and debates contained in geography books are certainly comparable – and often very similar – regardless of their place of publication. Furthermore, the publishing industries across the British Isles were deeply interconnected. Scholars have argued that ‘collective publishing between members of the book trade in London and Edinburgh was widespread’ throughout the eighteenth century.³¹ Less restrictive interpretations of copyright law in Scotland (until 1774) and in Ireland (until 1800) also aided the circulation of texts, as books published elsewhere in the British Isles could be reprinted or adapted and sold more cheaply both locally and in the country of origin. Eventually, after the Act of Union in 1801, the English, Scottish, and Irish book industries were ‘brought within the same statutory regime’, all subject to the ‘same textual controls, the same intellectual property regime, and

³¹ Sher, *Enlightenment and the Book*, 270, 444

the same restrictions and taxes at the borders'.³² Given this, it would be difficult and potentially misleading to try to discern from these sources ideas of Europe which are unique to particular parts of the British Isles. To which country, for example, should we assign an Irish reprint or adaptation of a text originally published in England and which is subsequently sold and read in Scotland? My purpose is therefore not to discriminate between English, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh views of Europe, but rather to identify and analyse the commonplace ideas about the continent which circulate throughout the British Isles

I have chosen to focus on the period 1760-1830 principally because geographical texts proliferated in these decades. While this partly results from wider expansions in book production and consumption from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, it is also clear that geographical works were an increasingly popular genre among the reading population. When read in bulk, the books can therefore tell us a great deal about commonplace knowledge and widely-accessible viewpoints about Europe. Furthermore, the substantial political, social, and intellectual changes which accompanied the French Revolution and the Napoleonic conflicts provide an opportunity to explore the consistency and fluctuations of British ideas of Europe at a formative moment in the modern history of the region. It is unnecessary to provide here a summary of these events, but it is notable that several historians consider the period to be formative both in the development of nationalisms and the consolidation of cosmopolitanism, the latter typically mediated by an international 'republic of letters'.³³ Unfortunately, these two frequently-employed perspectives offer

³² St Clair, *Reading Nation*, 106, 293, 484-6.

³³ For well-known accounts of nationalism in the period see: Colley, *Britons*; Newman, *Rise of English Nationalism*. For analyses which emphasise cosmopolitanism see: Schlereth, *Cosmopolitan Ideal*; Scrivener, *Cosmopolitan Ideal*.

somewhat over-simplified interpretations of the period; and, as we shall discover, neither can provide an adequate framework through which to understand popular British ideas about Europe. An emphasis on nationalism usually interprets cultural interactions through the lens of opposition, and cannot always account for exchanges of people, goods, and ideas which were not mediated by hostility or competition. Conversely, cosmopolitanism – often pitched as an alternative to ‘local loyalties and rivalries’ – can sometimes stray close to a contextless universalism which mistakes the sentiments and aspirations of specific intellectuals for universal ideals shared by all people everywhere. Taken at face value, these two interpretative positions would characterize British ideas of Europe in terms of either antagonistic rivalry or celebratory elite connectivity.³⁴ Instead, as geographical texts reveal, it can be hard to separate local, national, continental, and universal perspectives; and ideas about Europe are much more complex than these two established readings of the period can permit.

Europe and the British Geographical Imagination 1760-1830 begins with two chapters about the geography books which form the primary source base for my analysis. The opening chapter outlines the characteristics and popularity of these books: it discusses their production, dissemination, and audiences, and explains how they can reveal the broad cultural assumptions circulating in the period. The second chapter provides details on precisely how geographical works structure and present geographical knowledge. Its purpose is to uncover the methodological procedures and epistemological presumptions which underpin the books’ claims about Europe. The remaining chapters explore eight themes which frame how the continent is understood in literate British culture. A chapter each is devoted to: religion; the natural environment; race and other theories of human difference;

³⁴ Stock, *Shelley-Byron Circle*, 3-7.

the state; borders; the identification of the ‘centre’ and ‘edges’ of Europe; commerce and empire; and ideas about the past, progress, and historical change. Each chapter explains how geographical texts use these immensely complicated concepts to communicate and construct widely-understood ideas about the European continent. For the sake of clarity – and this is an important point – I am not trying to identify the factors or qualities which supposedly define Europe in an objective or essential sense. As we shall discover, geographical texts are replete with assertions about particularly ‘European’ features and achievements, often generated through derogatory comparisons with non-European regions. It would be a serious error to take these contentions at face value; that is, to treat them as straightforward descriptions of fact, rather than as interpretative discourses. Instead, the purpose of this book is to recognize and to explore the rhetorical strategies – the tropes, narratives, images and vocabularies – with which British geographical texts identify and describe an area called ‘Europe’. In doing so, we can understand more fully and more clearly what the concept meant to the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British reading public.³⁵

Given that debate about Europe is an ongoing political issue as well as a topic of historical importance, a further clarification is also necessary. My investigations into the history of British ideas about Europe are not designed as a commentary on more recent developments in the continent, especially the inception of the European Union project and its complex relationship with the United Kingdom in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Some studies employ reflections of this sort as guiding principles. There are numerous works, for example, which set out to authenticate the ‘unity of Europe’, and argue by extension that

³⁵ Stock, ‘What is Europe?’, 26; Stock, ‘America and the American Revolution’, 69-70. For a more detailed discussion of this methodology, see Stock, ‘Towards a Language of “Europe”’.

modern political union is a desirable realization of long-term trends.³⁶ Jean-Baptiste Duroselle's *Europe: A History of Its Peoples* (1990), for example, narrates European history as an incremental process of unification, culminating in the mechanisms of the then European Community. This objective, says Duroselle, is 'natural, realistic and legitimate, because there has long been a community of Europe – embryonic at first, but growing with time, despite centuries of war and conflict, blood and tears'.³⁷ Others warn against such teleological accounts, and instead present themselves as sceptics of modern European political and ideological projects. J. G. A. Pocock writes about the idea of Europe as a self-confessed 'Euro-sceptic', adding that he is also sceptical 'about the use of "Euro-sceptic"' because it implies criticism of a particular notion of Europe which he regards as coercive. He goes on to define this notion as 'the submergence of the state and its sovereignty [...] in which the global market demands the subjugation of the political community and perhaps of the ethnic and cultural community'. The European Union is thus 'an organisation designed to break the will of the state to govern itself', and 'a construction called "Europe" is being invented and imposed' in the service of this purpose. Instead, Pocock says, 'there are several

³⁶ See: Barraclough, *European Unity*; Albrecht-Carrié, *Unity of Europe*; Bowle, *Unity of European History*; Heater, *Idea of European Unity*; Pasture, *Imagining European Unity*.

³⁷ Duroselle, *Europe*, 413. This work is described on the title page as a 'European initiative', and was published simultaneously in English, German, French, Spanish, Danish, Dutch, Italian and Portuguese. Duroselle's earlier works also exhibit enthusiasm for Europe's late twentieth-century economic and political union. Tellingly, his 1965 volume on the idea of Europe contains a preface by Jean Monnet. See Duroselle, *L'idée d'Europe*, 11-13, 329-30.

“Europes”, or ways of using the term’, and ‘to write history which critically explores the meaning of “Europe” is to oppose oneself to this hegemony’.³⁸

In writing a book about British ideas of Europe, I am conscious that it is impossible to extract oneself entirely from controversies of this sort. From one perspective, the fact that I consider ‘Europe’ to be legitimate unit for enquiry, and that I regard ideas of Europe to be integral in British intellectual life, might imply implicit support, firstly for an ideological and political category called ‘Europe’, and, secondly, for Britain’s participation in that entity. Conversely, the fact that I discuss British ideas of Europe as a set of complex, often contradictory, ideas, and that I do not seek to validate particular interpretations (not least the notion of ‘European unity’), might offer precisely the ‘Euro-sceptic’ approach which Pocock advocates. However, while full objectivity in historical analysis may be unobtainable, it is not my purpose to use the arguments of this book to reflect either on the merits or demerits of the European Union project, or the often tumultuous course of British-European Union relations. Indeed to do so would have significant undesirable consequences. If one were to adopt a pro- or anti-European stance in the twenty-first-century sense – that is, to press historical evidence into service as either a cheerleader or a critic of the European Union – then this would impose anachronistic and distorting parameters on our comprehension of past mentalities. As we shall see, such interpolations would misrepresent the vast complexities of British ideas about Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the most basic level, for instance, geography books from this period often generate ideas about Europe’s collective unity whilst simultaneously arguing for the continent’s diversities and disunities. To allow one side of

³⁸ Pocock, ‘Some Europes in Their History’, 55, 70; Pocock, ‘Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment’, 125. See also Pocock, ‘What Do We Mean by Europe?’.

this equation to overwhelm another – especially in pursuit of an immediate political agenda – would be to oversimplify the available evidence.

Europe and the British Geographical Imagination 1760-1830 does, however, speak to our own times in one important respect. Many of the debates about Europe in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain hinge on topics which are still recognizable. There are questions about: religious unity in the continent; the effects of human action on the natural environment; the development of racial categorizations; the identification of borders; the role of the state; the effects of commerce; and the legacies of empires. While it is beyond the scope of this book to trace the development of these themes throughout the intervening centuries, they are evidently all issues which continue to have purchase in the contemporary world, and which certainly still inform current conceptions of both Britain and Europe. I have argued that it can be undesirable to interpret the past in terms of the present; but like most historians I also believe that it is necessary to interpret the present in terms of the past. By tracing the histories and popularizations of these debates, we can better understand the contexts, uses and consequences of certain questions and assumptions about Europe which continue to exert great influence. The point here is not to suggest that historical disputes somehow filter down to the present in an unchanged form. Instead it is to observe merely that the preoccupations of past societies and cultures are often bequeathed to, and adapted by, their successors – something which applies no less to the history of ideas than it does to, say, political or economic legacies. Popular, mass-media controversy in Britain about both the idea of Europe itself, and about Britain's place in the continent, might seem to be a relatively recent phenomenon. But as this book shows, it has a very much longer history than we might otherwise presume.