Current debates on cosmopolitanism, world literature and post (or trans) nationality open new and exciting perspectives on “Europe”. At the same time they also raise the question as to what exactly “Europe” has come to mean at a time when moves towards further European integration clash with fears of growing uniformity. My contention is that the debates mentioned open the way to understand how current issues are also very much old issues in the European context. My argument will rest primarily on two critiques that I will outline at the very beginning: a critique of Eurocentrism and a critique of presentism. I will then proffer the possibility of a postnational (or transnational) Europe within three different critical frames. I will also try to show that these frames, though they assume contemporary (and therefore present) forms, also manifested themselves in earlier forms that should be recognized in order to properly evaluate what would otherwise appear as a uniformly nationalistic conception of Europe.
present) forms, also manifested themselves in earlier forms that should be recognized in order to properly evaluate what would otherwise appear as a uniformly nationalistic conception of Europe.

As I have intimated, two essential critiques underlie my argument. The first is a critique of Eurocentrism as excellently defined by Enrique Dussel\(^1\) and subsequently adopted by Roberto Dainotto, as “the emergence of modern theories of Europe that assume one can explain Europe without making recourse to anything outside of Europe”\(^2\). Like many another seemingly simple definition, this one too has the merit of not being simplistic. What this does is to relocate “Eurocentrism” not as a discourse about Europe (what else could it be?), but a discourse about Europe that sees the latter as a self-contained and self-explanatory unit, closed off from the rest of the world. Roberto Dainotto situates the beginning of Eurocentrism as such in the eighteenth century, and as rooted in a process more or less concurrent with that of the widespread nationalization of Europe – this is hardly a coincidence, as we shall see. Previous to the eighteenth century Dainotto argues, and specifically to Montesquieu, Europe had always taken shape through a reflection on the Other, and mainly Asia.

Dainotto is also interested in what he sees as the “internalization” of the South of Europe as at one and the same time part of Europe as well as the latter’s periphery or liminality. In his view this is a decisive step in the formation of Eurocentrism. Montesquieu, Mme de Staël, and Hegel are three of the main actors responsible for the production of a European North/South divide, which is to say for the systematization of a centre/periphery opposition within Europe. It is the recognition of a profound heterogeneity in the history (and theory) of Europe that leads Dainotto to emphasize questions of power and knowledge, and to do so from the perspective of subaltern studies. From showing how the South was conceived as liminal Europe, he then moves on to other specific European heterogeneities, from the Balkans to Eastern Europe, and the Extreme North.

This sense of a heterogeneity that is not immediately subordinated to national formations has in fact a strong hold in European cultural history.

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