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A Love Letter to Europa: Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer's *Grand Hotel Europa*

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Abstract

In this article I review Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer's 2018 novel Grand Hotel Europa in order to explore the themes of hospitality, tourism, and European cultural identity. I argue that Pfeijffer masterfully intermixes multiple plots to make palpable the current (though pre-COVID) crisis in Europe, that is, the refugee crisis since 2015 and the on-going transformation of (Western) Europe's capitals because of mass tourism. Following Pfeijffer's lead, I review some work on hospitality and the legacy of the European Enlightenment by such writers as Jacques Derrida, Jürgen Habermas, and Aleida Assmann to draw some conclusions about European cultural identity. The tradition of European hospitality links the contemporary migrant and tourist in a general problematic that challengingly tests European identity. While a "thick," positive Judeo-Christian tradition can no longer be assumed as constituting the identity of Europe, the learning processes of the 20th century bring forward the unfinished European project of Modernity and contribute to an identity around which solidarity can be forged today. I argue that Pfeijffer's novel is a valuable contribution to thinking through these issues of pressing contemporary interest, and a successful example of what a new, European artwork can be.

Keywords: hospitality, Europe, tourism

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"Welkom op Lampedusa, arme vriend,
een vreemd hotel met prikkeldraad om gras,
waar elke gast veel beter had verdiend
en heel veel beter nooit gekommen was.

Nu word je hier als een problem benoemd.
We lieten je creperen als we konden.
Je wordt door uns gelukszoeker genoemd,
maar het geluk heb jij niet gevonden."

Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer, "Lampedusa," (2015, p. 70)

"Welcome to Lampedusa, poor friend,
a strange hotel with barbed wire around grass,
where every guest deserved much better
and would much better had never come.

Now you are listed as a problem here.
We'd let you die if we could.
You are called 'fortune seeker' by us,
but you have not found fortune."[1]

Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer (2015, p. 9) begins his 2015 book *Gelukszoekers* with a "Letter to Europa," reimagining her history from the arrival of the bull on the shores of North Africa to the present day in Brussels and asking her "bent u te oud om uzelf nog te verjongen en om iets anders to doen dan uw herinneringen te exploiteren" ("are you too old to rejuvenate yourself and to do anything but exploit your memories").

1 The translation here, and throughout the article, is by me in the absence of an English-language edition of the cited work.

Reviewing the flood of refugees from Africa and from the Middle East ("Ze zijn op de vlucht voor oorlogen, onderdrukking en armoede die u zelf hebt veroorzaakt." "They are fleeing from wars, oppression and poverty that you yourself have created."), Pfeijffer (2015, p. 17) advises: "U moet niet bang voor hen zijn. U hebt hen nodig. Zij zijn precies wat u nodig hebt. U hebt niets anders méér nodig dan hen. Zet uw ramen open, haal uw deur van het nachtslot en verwelkom hen. Haal hen binnen en omhels hen. Leg bloemenkransen om hun nek. Zij zijn uw toekomst" ("You shouldn't be afraid of them. You need them. They are exactly what you need. You don't need anything else but them. Open your windows, unlock your door and welcome them. Bring them in and hug them. Put garlands of flowers around their necks. They are your future."). Out of a concession to youth and the future, as much as out of a tradition of hospitality, Europa must accept these migrants as her own responsibility and indeed her own chance at regeneration.

This becomes a major theme of Pfeijffer's subsequent novel, the 2018 international bestseller (translated into 20 languages), *Grand Hotel Europa*. The novel seeks to explore the role of Europe in the contemporary phenomena of mass tourism and the global refugee crisis, but does so intertwined with an appealing story of love and loss, an art-historical mystery and detective search, and a sort of re-vising of Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* in a sustained reflection on the meaning of Europe, European cultural history and European identity, all narrated by a certain Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer, successful poet and author of a novel about Genoa, *La Superba*: in short, an auto-fictional exploration of the contemporary state of Europe by the well-known Dutch novelist long resident in Italy.

The celebrated, earlier novel about Genoa was admittedly a novel about "het thema van migratie en de fantasie van een beter leven elders" (Pfeijffer, 2016a, p. 123; "the theme of migration and the fantasy of a better life elsewhere."), and so his trans-European journey (see *De Filosofie van de Heuvel* – "De reis op de fiets naar Rome is achteraf een reis gebleken naar een nieuw leven" [Pfeijffer, 2009, p. 172; "The journey by bicycle to Rome turned out to be a journey to a new life."]) and relocation leads to the larger theme of Europe and migration. *La Superba*

had already established the parallel between his "migration" and that of contemporary refugees in the harrowing story of Djiby from Senegal in the Second Intermezzo, *Fatou Yo* (also collected in Pfeijffer, 2015, pp. 21-68). Pfeijffer, while transitioning from being a tourist himself, after his epic bike ride, to a resident in Genoa, is forced to think more seriously about this issue of migration and the challenges it poses to European identity, and it is to these themes that he devotes the subsequent large novel.

In this essay I want to follow the novel in exploring the main themes of hospitality, migration, tourism, and European identity. As an international bestseller, obviously the book has had considerable success in reaching a wide audience, and it has been widely reviewed in the press,[2] but it seems time to give it a little closer scrutiny, to see what questions it raises and what tentative answers it proposes. At a certain point in the novel, Ilja[3] is trying to coax the migration story out of Abdul, the bellboy and factotum of the hotel who is reluctant to re-live the trauma of his journey in narration. Why must he tell his story, asks Abdul?

> Because stories give meaning to the events and without meaning everything becomes senseless. Because if you don't find your story in the random chaos, you can give up hope of ever understanding anything. Because we're people and that's what people have been doing since the beginning of time: telling each other stories. Culture is mostly the collective memory of all the stories that define who we are and what it means to be human. The day we stop telling each other stories, empathy for our fellow human beings will crumble, the joint venture that we call society will topple, and like characters in a post-apocalyptic dystopia, we will be dependent on each other's survival instinct and on whether the producer nevertheless wants to impose an unbelievable happy ending on things for commercial reasons.
>
> (Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 218; 2018, p. 220)

2 Conveniently available at https://iljapfeijffer.com/en/work/prose/grand-hotel-europa/

3 In the discussion I will refer to the novelist as Pfeijffer and the protagonist as Ilja.

How does Pfeijffer's story help us make sense of contemporary Europe? How can the Abdul narrative balance with the Ilja-Clio plot and the story of the Grand Hotel Europa and add up to a coherent contribution to a critical understanding of contemporary European culture? By following the novel closely and exploring its main themes, I seek to assess its significance as a guide for understanding Europe today.

The book starts out with the novelist escaping from Venice and arriving at the hotel in some unspecified Western European country – apparently not Italy, but also not explicitly Switzerland. The hotel itself is clearly meant as a figuration of a glorious and faded European past, embodied in its "sensational chandelier, which hung with breathless antiquity" (2022, p. 7; 2018, p. 15), a painting of Paganini commemorating a famous visit and performance, and other objects and symbols, including statues of a sphinx and a chimaera by the grand marble staircase. All of this is established under the sign of Virgil: "sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt" (the Latin phrase is merely hinted at in the Dutch but provided in the English translation by Michele Hutchison, 2022, p. 7). The tears of the old things in the hotel indeed touch the mind of Ilja and establish a melancholic mood for the hotel episodes in the novel.[4] Ilja is pleased with this nostalgic if somewhat dilapidated furnishing, as consonant with his own retrospective mood as he works through his recent past and the end of a love-affair during his stay at the hotel. "There was no destination without clarity about the origins and no future without a readable version of the past" (2022, p. 11; 2018, p. 19). This will be counter-posed later in the novel, as a particularly *European* idea, against the future-oriented civilizations of America and China, with Ilja and the majordomo, Montebello, as well as the several other permanent guests, on "the losing side of history" (2022, p. 478; 2018, p. 475).

4 While the novel lacks the gravitas of those discussed by Ellison, Pfeijffer still belongs in the movement Ellison (2022, p. 4) seeks to establish in Modiano, Sebald, and Muñoz Molina according to "their backward-facing, tradition-oriented articulations of lateness and their resultant melancholy aesthetics [which] may yet be imagined as a collective expression in European fiction of a more optimistic sense of futurity." Pfeijffer focuses less on the disasters of the 20th century, but still emphasizes lateness and melancholy, and also, as I suggest below with respect to Damien Hirst, an aesthetic exhilaration that looks forward to a more hopeful future.

The opening chapters thus set up the overlapping narratives of the love story and the thematic story: "The love of my life lives in my past…I don't want to come to the conclusion, just as the hotel I am staying in and the continent it is named after, that the best times are behind me and that I have little more to expect of the future than living off my past" (2022, p. 48; 2018, p. 56). We are given the sense that a future for him (and indeed for his relationship with Clio) will also correspond to a sort of future of Europe. And, indeed, in the tradition of Mann's *Magic Mountain*, the retreat to the secluded Grand Hotel Europa is marked by speculation about the current cultural crisis in Europe, primarily through the figure of Patelski, who acts as the novel's Settembrini figure (also including a toned-down Naphta pessimism).

1 Old Europe

> "Wir können es nicht ändern, daß wir als Menschen des beginnenden Winters der vollen Zivilization und nicht auf der Sonnenhöhe einer reifen Kultur zur Zeit des Phidias oder Mozart geboren sind. Es hängt alles davon ab, daß man sich diese Lage, dies *Schicksal* klar macht und begreift, daß man sich darüber belügen, aber nicht hinwegsetzen kann. Wer sich dies nicht eingesteht, zählt unter den Menschen seiner Generation nicht mit."
> ["We cannot change the fact that we were born as people of the beginning winter of full Civilization and not at the height of a mature culture at the time of Phidias or Mozart. It all depends on understanding this situation, this fate, and realizing that you can lie to yourself about it, but you can't ignore it. If you don't admit it, you don't count among the people of your generation."][5]
>
> (Spengler, 2006, p. 62)

Resisting the cultural pessimism of Spengler, philosopher (and former mayor of Venice) Massimo Cacciari (1997, p. 11) in his book on the *Arcipelago* posits a new Europe conceived as a unity in difference, a "nuovo Ordine" according to its *logos*:

> "fatica di raccogliere e custodire i distinti, di intendere come lo

5 At one point, in a conversation with his editor, Ilja himself refers to these famous forebears – Mann's *Magic Mountain* and Spengler's *The Decline of the West* – and moots the idea of a title: "Love in times of mass tourism." Clearly Pfeijffer understands his book as in dialogue with this tradition (2022, p. 302; 2018, p. 300).

> stesso movimento intrinseco di ciascuno possa volere una tale raccolta e una tale comune custodia."
>
> ["a struggle to collect and keep the distinctiveness, to understand how the intrinsic movement of each distinct part can want such a collection and such a common custody."]

Cacciari was writing before the current refugee crisis and concerned rather with shoring up the ruins of Europe in the face of the imminent *naufragio* of the European Union – a *catastrofe* he characterizes according to the

> "universale forma a priori, annullante in sé ogni tópos, dello Spazio uniforme e indifferente, dove il dominio del Mezzo sovrasta ogni 'invenzione' di senso, dove la fedeltà diviene calcolo, la verità correttezza procedurale, la bellezza buon gusto, l'amor intellectualis' dello híst̀or semplice tolleranza;"
>
> ["universal a priori form, nullifying in itself every tópos, of uniform and indifferent Space where the dominion of the Mediocre dominates every 'invention' of meaning, where fidelity becomes calculation, truth procedural correctness, beauty good taste, amor intellectualis of the historian simple tolerance."]
>
> (Cacciari, 1997, p. 11)

This leads him to wonder:

> "È questa l'unica possibile destinazione d'Europa? È questo l'unico senso del suo necessario tramontare: perdere se stessa, fare naufragio senza avere 'ben navigato'?"
>
> ["Is this the only possible destination for Europe? Is this the only meaning of its necessary decline: to lose itself, to be shipwrecked without having 'sailed well'?"]
>
> (Cacciari, 1997, p. 32)

Pfeijffer too wonders whether Europe has any other future than such a uniformization, standardization in Americanization-globalization for the sake of mass tourism. But in the meantime, the refugee crisis and mass tourism are posing a far greater challenge to European identity than Cacciari could imagine in 1997.

In one of the extended discussions between Ilja and the philosophical permanent guest Patelski (Pfeijffer, 2022, pp. 122ff; 2018, pp. 126ff) reference is made to George Steiner and European identity. In an article on "The Idea of Europe" Steiner identifies the key elements of European identity: cafés, or intellectual debate and the exchange of ideas; domesticated nature – navigability; permeation with its own history; the dialectic of Athens and Jerusalem, or reason and revelation; and awareness of its own decay. (Steiner [2016] actually writes: "Five axioms to define Europe: the coffee house; the landscape on a traversable and human scale; these streets and squares named after the statesmen, scientists, artists, writers of the past; our twofold descent from Athens and Jerusalem; and, lastly, that apprehension of a closing chapter, of that famous Hegelian sunset, which shadowed the idea and substance of Europe even in the noon hours.") Rather than pinpointing a specific Christian tradition and history, Steiner focusses on space (the café, domesticated nature, historical memory) and tone (memory as nostalgia) and then, in a general sense, the dialectic between the Enlightenment and the Judeo-Christian religious tradition as essentially characteristic of Europe.

Patelski notes that Europe is not so much losing its global significance today (which is certainly the case) as resorting back to its own provinciality and geopolitical (in)significance with respect to Asia and America that was abnormally exaggerated for several hundred years since the Renaissance ("the world's future won't be devised by Europe" [Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 456; 2018, p. 454]). The current crisis of Europe is thus not to be bemoaned but to be accepted as a reasonable, indeed inevitable, return to a historical norm. But, as Steiner notes, Europe is obsessed with its glorious past. It thrives on memory. As Ilja muses, "Existence in the Occident is an act of memory. Living is reliving. Nothing can

ever be new on an old continent" (2022, p. 149; 2018, p. 153). The aptly named Clio, Ilja's beloved and an Italian art-historian specializing in Caravaggio, embodies this backwards focus, in her aristocratic lineage (as the future marchioness Chiavari Cattaneo) and in her sense of being trapped in the old way of doing things in Italy that prevents innovation and change. This theme comes to a climax in Clio's rant about dead Italy (2022, pp. 35 ff; 2018, pp. 43ff), institutionally and culturally averse to innovation (indeed modernization) and reeking of "rot, decay, stagnation and death" (2022, p. 37; 2018, p. 45). (This is documented comically and exasperatingly in *La Superba* when the Ilja character is trying to deal with apartment acquisition and renovation in Genoa.) Yet even as she laments the inertia and nostalgia of Italy, Clio herself is precisely interested in Renaissance and not Modern or contemporary art, and must be understood as a custodian of tradition rather than an enabler of a living, thriving art. So even for Clio the question is not so much how to be new, as how to keep the old alive in the present. This leads inevitably to issues of decline.

Ilja is quite obsessed with decline. "Europe has become irrelevant on the world stage and has lost its influence on the future…We have nothing left to sell but our own past" (2022, p. 128; 2018, pp. 131-2). This of course raises the theme of tourism and Europe's place in the global tourist industry in the past 25 years. "Europe has become a theme park…an open air museum, a fantastic historical park for tourists…" (2022, p. 129; 2018, p. 133). A glorious history from classical Greece through the Renaissance and the Enlightenment to the global expansion of bourgeois capitalism in the 19th century culminates, after globalist de-industrialization, in the mass tourism phenomenon of the affluent 1990s-2000s (prior to the Covid-19 crisis[6]). Present day Europe can only survive by presenting itself to others –notably Americans and Chinese– as entombed, once-glorious antiquity. The current European crisis –the provincializing of Europe– thus gives a new spin to the question raised by Naphta to Settembrini,

6 Pfeijffer's entertaining and insightful comments on the COVID crisis in Italy can be found in his journal *Quarantaine* (2020).

> "ob die mediterran-klassisch-humanistische Überlieferung eine Menschheitssache und darum menschlich-ewig – oder ob sie allenfalls nur Geistesform und Zubehör einer Epoche, der bürgerlich-liberalen, gewesen sei und mit ihr sterben könne"
>
> (Mann, 1969, p. 713)

> ["whether the Mediterranean, classic, humanistic tradition was bound up with humanity and so coexistent with it, or whether it was but the intellectual garb and appurtenance of a bourgeois liberal age, with which it would perish"]
>
> (Mann, 2020, p. 521)

Pfeijffer grapples with this question and in the end cannot provide anything more satisfying than a very ambiguous answer. To address this we need to assess the twin themes of migration and tourism, both of which fall within the tradition of European hospitality.

2 Hospitality

> "Quelle définition pourrait convenir à l'hospitalité? – demanda, à son maître, le plus jeune de ses disciples. Une définition est, en soi, une restriction et l'hospitalité ne souffre aucune limitation – répondit le maître."
>
> (Edmond Jabès, 1991, p. 57)

> "(Whatever the enigma of this name and the "thing' to which it refers, "Europe" perhaps designates the time and space propitious to this unique event: it was in Europe that the law of universal hospitality received its most radical and probably most formalized definition…in Kant's text Perpetual Peace…)"
>
> (Dufourmantelle and Derrida, 2000, p. 141).

Derrida here claims as central not just to the Enlightenment but to the very identity of Europe this law of universal hospitality: "*hospitality* means the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else's territory" (Kant, 1991, p. 105: "Hospitalität (Wirtbarkeit) [bedeutet] das Recht eines Fremdlings, seiner Ankunft

auf den Boden eines andern wegen, von diesem nicht feindselig behandelt zu warden" [Kant, 2020, p. 213]), although, as Kant explains, "this natural right of hospitality, i.e. the right of strangers, does not extend beyond those conditions which make it possible for them to *attempt* to enter into relations with the native inhabitants" (1991, p. 106: "…Hospitalitätsrecht aber, d.i. die Befugnis der fremden Ankömmlinge, sich nicht weiter erstreckt, als auf die Bedingungen der Möglichkeit, einen Verkehr mit den alten Einwohnern zu versuchen." [2020, p. 214]) – further rights of treatment depending on specific national laws (and subject to the larger eventual system of cosmopolitanism).

Derrida, via Levinas, seeks to extend this universal right impossibly to an *un*conditional or absolute hospitality. "Absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names" (Dufourmantelle and Derrida, 2000, p. 25).[7] Here hospitality is obviously an ethical and not a political matter whose imperative, according to philosopher Peter Venmans (2022, p. 111), is something like: "ontvang de vreemde zoals je zelf ontvangen zou willen worden als je je in de vreemde bevindt"; ("receive the stranger as you would be received were you the stranger"), or simply: "Gij zult gastvrij zijn!" (p. 119; Thou shalt be hospitable!).[8] This "hyperbolische," "roekelozen" (p. 134; hyperbolic, reckless) conception of hospitality can clearly serve at best as an ideal in the practical politics of migrancy management, but by juxtaposing the Abdul narrative with the criticism of the tourist industry, Pfeijffer aims to pose the question of hospitality at the highest level. The question of hospitality, but also that of the good life – and what this can mean in a super-personal sense on a finite globe

7 Even more radically: "Let us say yes to who or what turns up, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any identification, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female" (Dufourmantelle and Derrida, 2000, p. 77].

8 Indeed, in another essay on Cosmopolitanism, Derrida (2001, p. 17) even writes: "ethics is hospitality."

with limited resources. (Kant [1991, pp. 107-8] could already write in 1795, "The people of the earth have thus entered in varying degrees into a universal community, and it has developed to the point where a violation of rights in *one* part of the world is felt *everywhere*" ["Da es nun mit der unter den Völkern der Erde einmal durchgängig überhand genommenen (engeren oder weiteren) Gemeinschaft so weit gekommen ist, daß die Rechtsverletzung an einem Platz der Erde an allen gefühlt wird…" (2020, p. 216)], thus leading to "die Idee eines Weltbürgerrechts" – the idea of a cosmopolitan right.)

Derrida goes to some length teasing out the implications of the right of hospitality not just as articulated by Kant but as fundamental to European culture dating back to "Jerusalem and Athens." Again, showing that this is not simply a matter of politics (or economics), Derrida (2021, p.83) states that "la question de l'éthique ne faisait qu'une, dans son extension, avec la question de l'habitat comme hospitalité" ("the question of ethics, in its extension, is the same as that of habitat as hospitality."). This ethical ideal is, as usual with Derrida (2022, p. 152), pushed to an extreme, an openness to the other leads to the sense that "l'hospitalité est le déconstruction du chez-soi" ("hospitality is the deconstruction of home/self").[9] The stranger, the one who arrives, though, again following Levinas, is not a burden but an opportunity, a sort of a blessing:

> "…comme si l'étranger pouvait sauver le maître, libérer le maître, come si le maître était prisonnier de son lieu et de son pouvoir, de son ipséité, de sa subjectivité (sa subjectivité est otage): c'est donc bien le maître, l'invitant, l'hôte invitant, qui est l'otage et l'hôte otage invité qui devient l'invitant de l'invitant et le maître de l'hôte (host)"
>
> ["as if the stranger could save the master, free the master, as if the master were prisoner of his place and his power, of his ipseity, of his subjectivity (his subjectivity is hostage): it is thus the master, the one who invites, the inviting host, who is hostage,

9 As Jabès (1991, p. 35) writes, "Exclure c'est, en quelque sorte, s'exclure soi-même. Le refus de la différence conduit à la negation d'autrui, Oublie-t-on que dire 'Je' c'est, déjà, dire la différence?"

> and the hostage invited guest who becomes the one who invites, the inviter and master of the host."]
>
> (Derrida, 2021, p. 161)

Like Pfeijffer, Venmans (2022, p. 176) links two types of "Gelukszoekers" [fortune seekers]: *hedonist* (tourists) and *vital* (refugees). In both cases it is a matter of hospitality and an essential openness to the other, with – via Derrida – the ideal that

> "vluchtelingen verwelkomd moeten worden op dezelfde hartelijke manier als toeristen, hoe verschillend hun situatie verder ook is. Een gast is een gast, of hij nu geld meebrengt of dat hij moest vluchten uit zijn land: een gast krijgt een goed onthaal, punt uit"
>
> ["refugees should be welcomed in the same warm way as tourists, however different their situation may be. A guest is a guest, whether he brings money or has had to flee his country: a guest receives a good welcome, period."]
>
> (Venmans, 2022, p. 192;)

Pfeijffer entertains the idea of Europe as the origin and center of the law of hospitality in both senses, as the site of migrancy and of tourism. What sort of hosts can (Western) Europe manage to be, in fidelity to its own ideals and traditions? Venmans (2022, p. 179) notes that the West-European is typically the "welkome gasten" (welcomed guests) when they travel the world but "onwillige gastheren" (unwilling hosts) when it comes to refugees – but also, recently, in respect of mass tourism. What hospitality is this?

The refugee plot of *Grand Hotel Europa* centers around Abdul, the bellboy. Over the course of the novel Ilja coaxes the story of his flight from Abdul: escape from unspecified upper (sub-)Saharan African village under violent attack (Sudan?) via Libya and a corrupt network of Mediterranean people smugglers and so forth, the dangerous crossing and through Lampedusa and then by luck arrival at the Grand Hotel Europa. It turns out that when learning the language (Italian?) Abdul is lent a

translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* by Montebello. He then models his epic tale of escape on the illustrious European model, not out of artistry or flattery (or plagiarism) but out of the real resonance of the story and his experience. Pfeijffer, the former classicist, could hardly be more explicit about the epic nature of these refugees and their traumatic experiences of flight and survival. Nor does he mince words about the obligation of Europe to receive these "gelukszoekers" and indeed to let their tales be known. "All Europe's writers should write the stories of all the Abduls so that there are no readers left who don't realize that they have lived in the past up to now" (Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 72; 2018, p. 78). Narration here is understood as the communication of a harsh reality to awaken consciousness and lead to real social change. A *power* of art –and a contemporary *duty*.

Pfeijffer is quite clear about his stance on the refugee crisis. At one point in *Gelukszoekers*, referring to the apparent hospitality of the Islamic State towards global jihadi, he writes

> "Tegenover die zoegenaamde gastvrijheid van de jihad stellen wij ons waarlijk humane vreemdelingenbeleid, dat aan iedere buitenlander die zich bij ons komt voegen een volwaardig bestaan belooft me dezelfde rechten als alle andere EU-burgers en dezelfde kansen om te delen in onze onmetelijke rijkdommen"
>
> ["We counter the so-called hospitality of jihad with our truly humane immigration policy, which promises me the same rights as all other EU citizens and the same opportunities to share in our immeasurable wealth for every foreigner who comes to join us."]
>
> (Pfeijffer, 2015, p. 92).

These rights, the heritage of European history and political culture, should be shared as our greatest achievement, over and above the economic and technological achievements fostered by that political culture since the Enlightenment. How to conceive the basis of European *solidarity* [Habermas] beyond the Judeo-Christian inheritance of history in order to welcome the stranger? This raises the question of cosmopolitanism.

According to Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006, Kindle loc. 138), there are "two strands that intertwine in the notion of cosmopolitanism[:] one is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship[;] the other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance [which means respecting difference]". These "two ideals – universal concern and respect for legitimate difference – clash. There's a sense in which cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge" (Kindle loc. 143). As such, cosmopolitanism thus remains an ideal, an aim. In the spirit of Kant, Habermas (2012, p. xi.) writes, "the *international* community of states must develop into a *cosmopolitan* community of states and world citizens." Figuring out how it can do so is hardly the task of *Grand Hotel Europa*, but Ilja, that is Pfeijffer, seems committed to the ideal. "All concepts of justice assume the equality of all people. Since ethics are universal and egalitarian, the principle of open borders is actually implied by ethics" (Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 228; 2018, p. 230). (Derrida: "toute éthique est sans doute éthique de l'hospitalité" [2021, p. 60] or "l'hospitalité [est] l'éthique même" [2022, p. 22].) However "Christian" in origin this ideal is,[10] it must be aimed at in secular practice if Europe is to stay true to its identity. But if that ideal seems clear in the case of refugees (however difficult its practical application!), it is somewhat less clear in the case of mass tourism. As Pfeijffer (2022, p. 110; 2018, p. 115) writes,

> Tourism forms an uneasy contract with other forms of migration which is a consequence of globalization and which we unreservedly consider as problematic. While we open our borders as hospitably as possible to foreigners who have come to spend their money, we want to close them to foreigners who come to earn money. Both forms of migration interfere with each other in an unsavoury manner. Tourists visiting the Mediterranean Sea swim in a mass grave. From a Greek perspective, the main rea-

10 Saint Paul: "there is neither Jew not Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

son the 2015 refugee crisis was so urgent and had to be solved as quickly as possible was because the presence of refugees on the beaches was driving away tourists.

3 The Age of Tourism

> "So globalization is a dilemma as well as an opportunity: and the plague, the pandemic, is also an allegory of expansion - that other triumphantly expansionist and imperialist species—the rat—having now been replaced by the tourist."
>
> Fredric Jameson (2022, p. 564)

A major theme of the novel is tourism. The move from Genoa to Venice allows Ilja (and Clio) to view the Serenissima with critical eyes and they do not like what they see. The city is famously "deluged with 18 million tourists per year" (Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 78; 2018, p. 84) (in a city with only 53,986 inhabitants), many of them arriving in those massive cruise ships which dock right at Piazza San Marco. Venice, while it still stays above the water, is a city completely transformed by tourism, every corner shop catering to souvenir-minded tourists (carnival masks and Murano glass). The irony, though, as Pfeijffer notes, is that places like Venice can only survive because of the very tourism that seems to be destroying them. In a chapter on urbicide, Marco d'Eramo notes the fatal designation with the UNESCO "World Heritage" label (which has been applied to Venice since 1987). This designation, intended to protect sites of world historical cultural significance, in fact consigns them to entombment, preventing any of the sort of innovation and creation that made them what they were in the first place. D'Eramo (2021, p. 105) writes of the phenomenon in general,

> "The UNESCO label opened the [tourist] industry up to a vast and marvelous new hunting ground: why build a new Disneyland when we have plenty of real, living cities waiting (or indeed begging) to become theme parks through the simple process of mummification, that is, through their emptying out."

Through zoning and restrictions on development, cities are frozen in time, and then businesses naturally cater to the transient tourist populations, so practical shops for residents get replaced by souvenir shops or ice cream parlors. Then of course Airbnb moves in to facilitate the gutting of the most desirable residential neighborhoods again to cater to the transient tourists.[11] The result is that "Tourism destroys the very thing it is attracted to" (Pfeijffer 2022, p. 108; 2018, p. 113). The local shops and citizens that give a place its character become replaced by transients and a "touristic monoculture" (d'Eramo 2021, p. 94) that make one place very much like any other similarly geared to tourists (just as the high streets or the airports all resemble each other in their domination by the same handful of global brands: globalization as uniformity).

Naturally then it is in everyone's economic interest to exploit the only resource they have got: their own past, but in a preservation or mummification that kills that which it seeks to prop up. Venice is also infamous for the bad behavior of its visitors, a fact spoofed late in the novel when a Dutch tourist, trying to get a knock-out selfie, breaks the head off of a 17th century statue which leads Clio to complain: "The capture of Rome by the barbarians did less damage than the hordes in shorts flooding our streets these days. We are witnessing the last, definitive barbarian invasion of Italy. What you see here is Europe's funeral, and all those tourists are standing there, watching and taking pictures without realizing that they've wrung the neck of three thousand years of European culture" (Pfeijffer 2022, p. 437; 2018, p. 437).

An unspoken sort of classism perhaps lurks in the criticism of tourism voiced by Clio as by Ilja. Ilja, with his fancy name-brand suits and courtly behavior, likes to think of himself not at all as a tourist but at worst as a traveler and rather as a resident, and in any case as a gentleman.[12] Late

11 D'Eramo notes that "the company was founded in 2008, and after only 10 years it offered 4 million units to 150 million users in 65,000 cities in 190 countries" (2021, p. 80). In just three years between 2015 and 2017 the number of apartments offered in Venice went from 5.8 to 11.8 percent – with similar numbers in Rome and Florence.

12 Pfeijffer's distance from Ilja within the auto-fictional conceit renders possible an irony that is not always entirely clear; here, where to the reader Ilja seems somewhat vain, we can assume this is an intentional effect by Pfeijffer, but in other episodes, as in the silly sketches of Dutch tourists which Pfeijffer had earlier published on-line in his own name, it is not at all clear that Pfeijffer distances himself from his fictional avatar. In general, the ironic distance allows Pfeijffer to moot important issues without

in the novel he is discussing tourism with Patelski, who pinpoints two big factors in global tourism: "the low-cost airline" – "In 2016, Ryanair alone transported 117 million passengers" (Pfeijffer 2022, p. 449; 2018, p. 447) – and the rise of "a well-off middle class" (2022, p. 450; 2018, p. 448) – first the Americans and Western Europeans in the 70s and 80s, then the Japanese, and now of course the Chinese. Or as d'Eramo (2021, p. 227) puts it more neutrally, "a technological revolution in transport and communications that made travel shorter, safer, more comfortable, and cheaper; and the social revolution that allowed increasing numbers of the world's population to enjoy paid leisure time." The unspoken criticism is that the mass tourism phenomenon is deplorable not only because of the sheer numbers of people flooding small towns and overwhelming ancient infrastructure, but also because the masses of budget tourists are so tacky and uncultured! Pfeijffer is more comfortable aiming this criticism at Americans with their short pants, baseball caps, and sneakers so out of place in old Europe, but the criticism lurks there also about "the Chinese invasion of Europe" (Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 446; 2018, p. 444). At one point Clio, who has organized a conference on the future of museums in Europe, moots "raising museum prices drastically, since it was both absurd and scandalous … that we were putting up for grabs mankind's greatest art treasures for the price of a Big Mac and a Diet Coke…What about paying 400 euros for a ticket?" (Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 442; 2018, p. 442). Reading about the destruction of the Vatican Museum or the Uffizi by an incredible number of tourists (Pfeijffer, 2022, pp. 439-41; 2018, pp. 438-440) can make this seem reasonable, but it would in fact be just a turning back against the democratic shift in tourism since the 1980s. Earlier in Malta Clio had suggested exams to test the knowledge of potential museum goers to determine their worthiness for ticket of entry:

> I can't think of a single good reason that we [Europeans] should make our valuable art collections accessible to American and Chinese people wearing shorts. They've got sweaty feet and not even the faintest idea of the meaning or value of the paintings

officially ascribing to Ilja's positions, which can be comically hyperbolic. This is certainly one of the novel's strengths, but it also raises the question of exactly which positions in the fiction the author really endorses, an issue endemic to the form of auto-fiction that I cannot address here.

> they're queuing up to see. Do you think a Chinese person knows who authored the vulgate translation [they are looking at a Caravaggio St Jerome]? With his selfie-stick and his silly hat. And what's an American, whose entire cultural baggage consists of being able to tell two different kinds of cola apart, to make of the existential fears of a complex, ambiguous artist like Caravaggio?... How much do these tickets cost? Four euros. See? That's ridiculous. Much too cheap. They should cost at least a hundred times that. Or you should only be able to view Caravaggio upon appointment, to be made at least a year in advance, with a written motivation, after an entrance exam. But instead we're selling off our past at bargain prices.
>
> (Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 156; 2018, p. 159)

Pfeijffer clearly thinks this is unreasonable, but he also suggests that the museums and cities of Old Europe, among other places, simply cannot bear the through-put of masses that it has endured in the last 25 years. This is simply unsustainable. Something has to change: the price of tourism must better reflect its real costs.

Pfeijffer is interested in *Grand Hotel Europa* in this tourism specifically to Europe, and his novel deals with trips to Venice, Porto Venere and le Cinque Stelle, Malta, Amsterdam, Giethoorn, and Skopje. Scholarship on the mass tourism phenomenon however shows an even larger trend. As Elizabeth Becker (2013, p. 17) writes: "the tourism industry contributed $7 trillion to the world economy in 2007 and was the biggest employer, with nearly 250 million associated jobs…" There were by 2012 one billion international trips and "at least one out of every ten people around the world is employed by the industry." This has led Marco d'Eramo (2019, p. 15) to write that tourism is "in realtà l'industria *più pesante*, più importante, più generatrice di *cash flow* del XXI secolo" (the first chapter of the English version of the book, responding to COVID, is modified and not at all the same as the Italian original; so, "tourism is the heaviest and most important industry and the one most generative of cash flow in the 21st century"), leading him to dub ours the "Age of Tourism" (2021, p. 2). It is certainly not a "problem" that can

easily be solved, as Pfeijffer recognizes in his novel, although he highlights the absurdities and calamities of the industry. As d'Eramo (2021, p. 20) notes, "In every normal year [not counting the COVID years], one out of every seven people on the planet takes an international trip" and in 2019 there were "69 million flights (an average of 188,901 flights per day)" (2021, p. 21). This makes it the "single most polluting industry" (d'Eramo, 2021, p. 5), yet another reason why it is unsustainable. Everyone is traveling and seeing the world: flights and budget airlines, cruises, hotels and Airbnb, selfie sticks and Instagram –these are the main culprits in the story of contemporary mass tourism. In his way Pfeijffer tries to answer the question: why? What is everyone looking for?

One answer is that tourism is a search for authenticity ("the desperate search for authenticity" [Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 466; 2018, p. 463]). This is spoofed several times in the novel, in a Dutch couple's visit to Pakistan (in chapter 10, "The Panchayat of Muzaffargarh") and in the existence of the Xtreme Xperience company (Pfeijffer, 2022, pp. 462-65; 2018, pp. 460-63). A minority of Western tourists thus seek out pre-modern, real places and experiences in order to escape from the very affluence and development of their own societies, which can seem alienating and fake. These staged and privileged experiences, like luxury safaris in East Africa, are very far from the authentic (colonial!) experiences they claim to be. But on the flip side is majority tourism where people want to see new and different places, but want those places to have all of the logistical and culinary advances of home (ATM machines, reliable police, healthy and sanitary restaurants and restrooms, and so forth). What results is, again, far from authentic, especially in cases where it presents itself as more real, like Airbnb. As D'Eramo (2021, p. 39) puts it: "the crux of the matter, then, is that escape from an alienated society can only be itself alienated."

We travel for various reasons: authenticity, adventure, and of course cultural tourism – to see things that one's own home lacks. If, unlike the sheikhs in Abu Dhabi, you cannot afford to bring the Louvre to you, then you have to go to Paris to see it. Such tourism is of course often characterized by a superficial knowledge – at best – of what one is at-

tempting to see, and perhaps more important for the subsequent selfies and social media posts than any sort of thoughtful contemplation of artworks and cultural artifacts. But again, the suggestion is classist and elitist that taking a selfie in front of the Venus de Milo is by definition illegitimate and superficial (is it more meaningful if I simply take a picture of Venus without myself in the frame? Or is photography itself the problem, mediated seeing for recollection?) What is inauthentic about taking a selfie in front of the Mona Lisa? The protective glass cover? The 35 tourists in the room elbowing me while taking their own photos? What would it mean these days to have an authentic and even "auratic" interaction with *that* painting?

Many of those 35 tourists in the room at the Louvre would be Chinese (at least before COVID), and the Chinese enter the picture in Pfeijffer's novel since a certain Mr. Wang has taken over the Grand Hotel Europa and is remodeling it to appeal to his compatriots. But before they begin to arrive, the Americans do, in the family of Richard, Jessica, and their adoptive daughter, Memphis, from Crystal, Michigan. Memphis is an updated Lolita: America figured as not-so-innocent (female) youth and immaturity. Her visit to Ilja's hotel room in a miniskirt and "pink pussy fur porn shoes" and armed with a sexual consent affidavit leads to a porn experience that marks the whole episode as fantastical and comic. But Memphis, too, is a writer, committed to honing her skills through horror stories so that eventually she can tell her own traumatic story of parental abuse and rape, abortion, foster homes, and so forth (Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 281; 2018, pp. 280-81). The parallel with Ilja (and with Abdul) is clear. For Memphis writing may be thought of as a form of revenge, but in any case, it is a commitment to story-telling as a way of getting a grip on experience and indeed surviving it. In any case, what Memphis' family wants from a trip to Europe – fashion and a bit of culture – is gently mocked by Pfeijffer. When Jessica complains about the confusing change of languages from one country to the next (at least the Euro is uniform!), Ilja explains, "Linguistic diversity is a symptom of cultural diversity, which I and many others like me consider one of Europe's greatest riches, even though that cultural diversity is under pressure from Americanization and tourism" (Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 280; 2018, pp.

279-80). Europe, caught between the American stage of globalization and the nascent Chinese phase, will find it difficult to retain its own identity, especially as it increasingly has to cater its own image for those specific groups and their interests and tastes.

Today (COVID notwithstanding), the main group in question is the Chinese. In a conversation on tourism late in the novel, Patelski speaks of "the Chinese invasion of Europe" (Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 446; 2018, p. 444). The prodigious growth of the Chinese economy in the last 20 years has produced a sort of a middle (and elite!) class with resources for travel, and Europe is a key destination. This leads to palpable changes – not just the availability of Chinese translators at the Louvre and Chinese-language menus at tourist restaurants, but a total modification of the self-image presented to an audience presumed not to know too much about the past but to value a clichéd image of tradition. This is reflected in the novel in the changes Mr. Wang makes to the hotel. He has the old "Chinese Room" – very typical of 19th century European Orientalism but not of obvious interest to actual Chinese people – replaced by a "typical" British pub which couldn't be more touristically designed (and has absolutely nothing to do with the vaguely Italian or Swiss location of the hotel). "The antique chandelier has been replaced by a modern monstrosity made of Swarovski crystal [tradition replaced by name brands], and the portrait of Paganini by a photograph of Paris" (Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 446; 2018, p. 444). In each case, something actually reflecting the real history of the hotel and that specific part of Europe is replaced by something more "typically" European and clichéd – for outsiders who have a very simplified conception of a sort of undifferentiated "Europe." Thus "tourism destroys the things it is drawn to" (Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 446; 2018, p. 444). This is not the fault of the *Chinese* tourists per se – they are just taken – rightly or wrongly – to know even less about what they are visiting in Europe than the Japanese and the Americans who preceded them. But as Pfeijffer notes, via Patelski, in 2017 there were 145 million visits by Chinese to Europe and "if you bear in mind that only 7 percent of the 1.5 billion Chinese people own a passport, it will become clear to you that there is still potential for considerable growth. Forecasts predict 400 million Chinese tourists by

2030" (Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 450; 2018, p. 448).

The reason people are visiting Europe in such numbers, besides the chance to have "typical" European gastronomic and other experiences, is of course to see the wonderful art and architecture bequeathed to the present by a definitively *past* glorious history. This is a main theme through the character of Clio and her devotion to Caravaggio. The search for the missing last Caravaggio painting is both a plot device and an emblem of the love between Ilja and Clio,[13] but her profession as an art historian and association with the Italian Renaissance tradition of aristocracy-patronage-artistic flourishing is clearly backwards focused in a way that will seem ironic in the juxtaposition with the new initiative of the Abu Dhabi Louvre. Before this final move of contrast between the old, glorious, Italian/European cultural tradition and the new money and space of Arabia, Pfeijffer sets up a different art-internal contrast as the couple in Venice visit the Biennale (bemoaning the meager present art offerings) and then an exhibition of the *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable* by Damien Hirst. Fully aware of the radical changes in the notion of art and artist between the time of Caravaggio and that of the notorious YBA Hirst, Ilja (and Pfeijffer?) is nonetheless in awe of the monumental, post-modern show. Looking at the gigantic sculptures, carved in classical marble or cast in bronze in a foundry in Florence just like the great works of the Renaissance, but pseudo-aged and caked with rust and coral accretions, Ilja has a sort of experience through Hirst of a post-modern sublime.

> That's how I must write, I thought, in the spirit of this show of strength, of munificence, this pleasure in the adventure. I shouldn't avoid classical forms and a desire for monumental perfection in fear of not seeming modern, but have the courage to encompass the times I was living in in marble sentences, bronze words and sculpture made of gold, silver and jade, and erect a memorial to the present using the best means and materials from the past…I must have the courage to write about major topics

13 See also Ilja's comment on their narrative – the Caravaggio search as a point around which they can construct a shared story, and thus a relationship (Pfeijffer, 2022, p.370; 2018, p. 370).

> like the world and the passing of centuries, and to be as clear and comprehensible as a classical marble sculpture in the shimmering light of the midday sun. I shouldn't seek the dark, fearing that light might be old-fashioned and outdated…
>
> (Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 496; 2018, p. 493)

This poetic credo then reflects Ilja's project of connection back to traditional form and material (like a 500-page well-crafted novel) as a resource for confronting the present in all of its complexity, and – through Hirst – a sense of joy and exhilaration in the very monumentality and tradition-connectedness of the endeavor.[14] This is his way of belonging to the past yet keeping it alive in the present – and thus his sense of how European art can continue to thrive in the present without either being overly caught up in the past or simply ignoring it and foreswearing one's greatest resource.

4 Der europäische Traum

> "War die europäische Idee einer transnationalen Allianz ein neues, geschichtswirksames Modell eines demokratischen Staatenbunds oder war sie nur ein ephemeres historisches Ereignis, das schon bald wieder folgenlos verschwindet?"
>
> ["Was the European idea of a transnational alliance a new, historic model of a democratic federation of states, or was it just an ephemeral historical event that would soon disappear without consequences?"]
>
> (Assmann, 2018, p. 15)

Thanks to Habermas, among others, it has long been clear that the legacy of the Enlightenment in Europe and thence to rest of the world is complex and ambivalent.

14 This is of course not as easy as it sounds. At one point in the book Marco, the director of the "European" film project on tourism that Ilja has been associated with, decides to quit being a filmmaker, not feeling up to the demands of tradition: "I've come to understand just how much naivety is required to believe in the illusion that you could add anything of value to all the artworks already in existence" (Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 469; 2018, p. 466). The weight of the European past on present artists is clear. Pfeijffer for one seems to feel capable of contributing. Whether Pfeijffer really thinks Damien Hirst occupies a position similar to Caravaggio in the contemporary art scene is uncertain. However controversial the British artist may be though, one thing is totally uncontested: his success – the mega-millionaire Hirst is one of the wealthiest artists of all time!

> "The project of modernity as it was formulated by the philosophers of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century consists in the relentless development of the objectifying sciences, of the universalistic foundation of morality and of law, and of autonomous art, all in accord with their own immanent logic."
>
> (D'Entrèves and Benhabib, 1996, p.45).

However, "with cultural rationalization, the lifeworld, once its traditional substance has been devalued, threatens to become *impoverished*" (ibid). Indeed, impoverishment and alienation accompany the rationalized life of the subject in capitalist modernity, a process which has only accelerated since Habermas' main contributions to understanding modernity in the 1980s. Thus, the ambivalence of the yet unfinished project of Modernity is clear even at the forefront of modernization in the rationalized Western metropoles, to say nothing of the peripheries linked to them in the combined and uneven development of capitalism in the 19th and 20th centuries (as well as the global ecological consequences of eco-cidal development and consumption). In 1980 Habermas (D'Entrèves and Benhabib, 1996, pp. 52-53) wrote that "a differentiated reconnection of modern culture with an everyday sphere of praxis that is dependent on a living heritage and yet is impoverished by mere traditionalism will admittedly only prove successful if the process of social modernization can *also* be turned to *other* non-capitalist directions, if the lifeworld can develop institutions of its own in a way currently inhibited by the autonomous systemic dynamics of the economic and administrative system." He did not see how this goal could be served by the three forms of conservativism he identified at that point, but a turn away from a utopian modernist attempt at reunification was not the answer. There is no merely cultural solution to deep, structural socio-economic problems, but the utopian ambition of the avant-garde to break down barriers of autonomy and over-rationalization remains an important urge. In this light we may want to be cautious in a wholesale celebration of the Enlightenment project of Modernity. We see the consequences of this revolution in modernization, globalization, alienation, standardization, exploitation, commodification, the famous colonization of the lifeworld by the rationalizing and commodifying values of

the market, and so forth, but also of course in the Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen, in liberal democracy, human rights, and the Enlightenment ideals that culminate, after the disasters of the 20th century, in the project of the European Union (and the United Nations).

Aleida Assmann, in *Der europäische Traum*, argues that Europa must be understood not just with respect to the Enlightenment, much less to classical Greece and Rome, but to the 20th century, to coordinates 1945, 1989, and 2015, and the hard-fought result of a continuing learning process.

> "Ohne eine europäische Verständigung über diese Geschichte und ihre bis heute anhaltenden Folgen ist es unmöglich, einen gemeinsamen Richtungssinn…in der aktuellen Krise zu entwickeln und eine gemeinsame Zukunft zu gewinnen"
>
> ["Without a European understanding of this history and its consequences, which continue to this day, it is impossible to develop a common sense of direction...in the current crisis and to win a common future."]
>
> (Assmann, 2018, p. 87).

Assmann (2018, p. 31) identifies four facets of the European ideal: das Friedensprojekt, das Demokratisierungsprojekt, die Erinnerungskultur, and die Menschenrechte (the project of peace, the project of democracy, cultural memory, and human rights) – so this Idea of Europe corresponds largely to the European Union, born out of the postwar desire for peace, for democracy, and for the protection of inalienable human rights, but with a special kind of historical sense characterized by self-critique: "…die Auseinandersetzung mit den negative Episoden der eigenen Geschichte, die nicht einfach gelöscht und vergessen, sondern noch einmal zum Gegenstand der Auseinandersetzung gemacht warden" (Assmann, 2018, p. 51: "the confrontation with the negative episodes of one's own history, which are not simply erased and forgotten, but are once again made the subject of confrontation."). It is not exactly a positive shared history that constitutes Europe, but a collec-

tive willingness to learn from the mistakes and disasters of that history and move forward towards a better future. In contrast to the famous "American Dream," Assmann (2018, p. 83) speaks of "der europäische Traum" as "der Selbsvergewisserung und Selbskritik der EU-Staaten," and the commitment that "Menschen bereit sind, aus der Geschichte zu lernen und diese Lehren al seine Orientierung fär die Zukunft zu verinnerlichen" ("the self-assurance and self-criticism of the EU states," and the commitment that "people are willing to learn from history and to internalize these lessons as their orientation for the future.").

There is currently a crisis of the European public sphere, reflected in divisive nationalist and populist movements that risks undermining the hard-won benefits and promises of this tradition (and it is not obviously to be fixed by the social network and digital technology, as Byung-chul Han argues – *au contraire!*). Habermas (2020, p. 28) himself expresses uncertainty about this:

> "Die klassischen Massenmedien konnten die Aufmerksamkeit eines großen nationalen Publikums bündeln und auf wenige relevante Themen lenken; das digitale Netz fördert die Vielfalt kleiner Nischen für beschleunigte, aber narzisstisch in sich kreisenden Diskurse über verschiedene Themen…Die digitalen Öffentlichkeiten würden sich dann auf Kosten einer gemeinsamen und diskursiv gefliterten politischen Meinungs- und Willensbildung entwickeln"
>
> ["The classic mass media were able to focus the attention of a large national audience and direct it to a few relevant topics; the digital network promotes the variety of small niches for accelerated but narcissistic discourses on various topics… The digital publics would then develop at the expense of a common and discursively filtered political opinion and decision-making process."]

In short, as Han (2022, p. 17) explains, "the public sphere disintegrates into private spaces, and our attention is dispersed rather than directed

towards issues relevant to all of society." The digital media are in fact very far from the original utopian ideal of connectivity that might have revolutionized the public sphere and marked a positive third revolution in communication, after written language and the printed book (Habermas, 2020, pp. 26-7).[15] Ninety-year-old Habermas seems quite confused and pessimistic about this.

Among other things, the development of the idea of communicative reason was a way to imagine the ground for collective deliberation, if not consensus, and a viable political community *not* based in shared linguistic, religious, or cultural traditions. But what happens when this conception of the public sphere is no longer tenable? Not any kind of tribalist appeal to a positive identity. So, what are the possibilities for the collective future of Europe? Elsewhere Habermas celebrates the idea(l) of "solidarity" (Habermas, 2015, pp. 23-4) over and above mere law and technical procedures of isolated individuals. "Whereas 'morality' and 'law' refer to the equal freedoms of autonomous individuals, ethical expectations and appeals to solidarity refer to an interest in the integrity of a shared form of life that includes one's own well-being" (Habermas, 2015, p. 23). Solidarity is formed through face-to-face interaction, "it is the *trust-founding Sittlichkeit* of informal social relations that, subject to the condition of *predictable reciprocity*, requires that one individual 'vouches' for the others" (Habermas, 2015, p. 22). But how can this interactive reciprocity be expanded to a larger community, for example Europe as a whole? Historically this has been a matter of *Öffentlichkeit*, of those famous cafés, newspapers, and so forth so important to Habermas, as well as George Steiner, as the sites of deliberation and consensus-building. As highly individualized and isolated persons connected merely to specific niche-groups and bespoke news-feeds, it is difficult to see how contemporary Europeans can form a "we," and can even want to, except through the private (for-profit) initiative of individuals engaged in the heritage custodian-ship for the tourist industry.

And yet, as Pfeijffer intimates, there is such a rich history and tradi-

15 Pfeijffer has elsewhere spoken critically of the digital media, e.g. "Internet is het paradoxale domein van massa-individualisme en gedeelde intimiteit" (Pfeijffer, 2016, p. 281), etc.

tion that links Europeans in a common story, from Caravaggio through Rousseau to Kafka and beyond. Habermas, like Assmann, stresses the international spread of European ideals, not just the capitalist economy and its gradual encompassment of the whole world to benefit (Western) Europe: "The first human rights declaration set a standard which inspires refugees, people who have been thrust into misery, and those who have been ostracized and insulted, a standard which can give them the assurance that their suffering is not a natural destiny. The translation of the first human right into positive law gave rise to a *legal duty* to realize exacting moral requirements which has become engraved into the collective memory of humanity" (Pfeijffer, 2012, p. 95). The development, through learning processes –that is, through mistakes and failures, absolute disasters, and their historical critique– of a "bestimmten europäischen Form des civilizierten Gesammenlebens" (Habermas, 2020, p. 11: "a particular European form of living together in a civilized manner."). But we should keep in mind the argument of Cacciari's *Geofilosofia dell'Europa*:

> "fin dalle guerre persiana, anzi fin dall' "Asia" ionica, l'Europa è instabile intorno ai suoi confine, inquieta nel suo cuore, incerta sul suo destino. Fin dal suo apparire, nella coscienza ellenica, procede per decisioni – e, dunque, problemi, enigma, bivi si aprono continuamente di fronte al suo sguardo...guerra/pace, mare/terra, Oriente/Occidente, legge/sradicamento…proprio il tentative di ridurre questa tensione di opposti, la volontà di forzarli a un accordo è alll'origine di quella violenza che vediamo sprigionarsi dall'interno dell'Europa."
>
> ["since the Persian wars, indeed since Ionian "Asia", Europe has been unstable around its borders, restless in its heart, uncertain about its destiny. Since its appearance, in the Hellenic conscience, it proceeds by decisions - and, therefore, problems, enigma, crossroads continually open up before its gaze... war/peace, sea/land, East/West, law/eradication... precisely the attempt to reduce this tension of opposites, the will to force them into an accord is at the origin of that violence that we see ema-

nating from within Europe…"].[16]

A unity within plurality and a hard-earned commitment to Assmann's four ideals: peace, democracy, critical memory,[17] and human rights: these are the foundation of European identity and must be re-affirmed in weathering the current crisis.

At one point late in the novel, Ilja criticizes "Classical" music, as it is treated on the concert circuit throughout Europe (and the rest of the world) as precisely the *wrong* relationship to one's past.

> In no other art form is the adoration of the past and the refusal to accept contemporary developments so total. Classical music is not a living culture but a pitiful relic, a mummy hooked up, against better judgment, to a life-support machine because no one dares to say it's been dead for over a century. An ever-ageing audience revels in a subsidy-swallowing nostalgic celebration of a brief but glorious past, when Europe conquered the world and the lacily dressed bourgeoisie with the Sachertortes crawled out from under the shadow of the aristocracy. A better metaphor for the current state of Europe is barely imaginable.
>
> (Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 514; 2018, p. 512)

I am not sure how seriously Pfeijffer intends this remark (here we see his ironic distance from Ilja which allows him to make an audacious critical point and thereby raise a serious issue), but it is clear that Ilja thinks it would be more appropriate to invest resources in contemporary

16 This is actually a useful summary found on the cover inset of Cacciari, 1994.

17 Assmann notes, in respect of critical memory, the development of a new historiography attempting to rethink European identity and cites as a positive example Étienne François and Thomas Serrier, eds. *Europa – notre histoire. L'héritage Européen depuis Homère* (Paris, 2017). So much has been made by historians of the epoch of empire and the combined and uneven development of the world during the period of European global domination, and we must keep in mind how much not only this era transformed Europe, but how much Europe has continued to change in its aftermath. See for example Buettner (2016, p. 9) whose book begins to really promote an "understanding of how Europe was *re-created* once its territorial expanse receded." Re-creation – yet another chapter in the story of a complex and changing region which will survive the current crisis by transformation, mutation, even metamorphosis.

creativity to match that of musicians circa 1790. Europe must invest more in its present than its past to sustain a future. Instead, we have the moribund, artificially-respiring mummified tradition of Bach to Mahler: funeral music!

Towards the end of the novel, we indeed have a funeral where Europa, the former owner of the Grand Hotel *Europa,* is buried and seen off by the last surviving luminaries of a distant and glorious past. The book ends with three main scenes: the Paganini concert in the Grand Hotel Europa given by a twelve-year-old Chinese virtuouso (suggesting a future for the supposedly dead European past in a hybrid mixture); the disastrous trip to Abu Dhabi (amidst "the despair, the vacuity, the emptiness" [Pfeijffer, 2022, p. 533; 2018, p. 531] of that commodity paradise cum cultural wasteland) where Clio accepts a job at the Louvre branch museum and the couple break up; and the final funeral for old Europa which motivates Ilja on the last page to set forth for Abu Dhabi to seek a future with Clio away from Old Europe. This somewhat unbelievable, romantic conclusion does nothing to undermine the affirmation of Ilja: "I want to be a patriot of the European Union [like Habermas!], which struggles day in and day out with outmoded national interests and continues to struggle on bravely" (2022, p. 538; 2018, p. 536). It sounds at the end as if Ilja is leaving Europe to its own demise and escaping to the future in Abu Dhabi, but of course Ilja and Clio will remain Europeans committed in the fight for its continued identity, and they will continue to visit, if not as tourists, then as a kind of migrant making use of the tourism infrastructure. Clio, curating the presentation of the European past to visitors of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, and Ilja, writing grand novels à la Thomas Mann (or Damien Hirsch!) uniting past tradition with present day critical themes, will themselves contribute to a 21st century European cultural identity. With *Grand Hotel Europa*, Pfeijffer – who has certainly *not* moved to Abu Dhabi – gives us a sense of what this on-going European cultural identity could look like. It will be anchored in the past, concerned with the present, and exhilarating in its complex interweaving of the two.

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