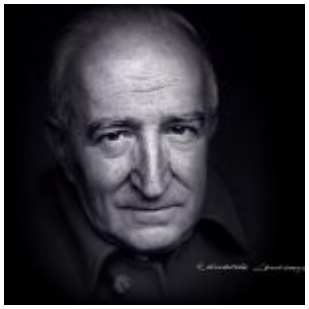
AMIN MAALOUF

(1923 –)



Eduardo Lourenço was born in São Pedro do Rio Seco, a village of the Almeida county and the region of Guarda. Having published more than thirty original books, Eduardo Lourenço has gained prominence in Portuguese language literature and thought, as a philosopher and an essayist.

The theme of Europe has always taken a prominent place in the *lourencian* literary work, as has been pointed out by Miguel Real and João Tiago Lima, among others. We can even state that it belongs to one of the main chapters of the so-called "*lourencian* mythologies" (Cruzeiro 1997: 76) [Cross]. In the essay symptomatically titled "Europa ou o diálogo que nos falta" [Europe, or the Missing Dialogue] *, from his début book Heterodoxia (1949) [Heterodoxy], the young philosopher places Europe at the centre of Western History and Culture, however, he was already pointing to the fact that the sturdiness of yore is now "chaotically fragmented" (1987: 11). Another characteristic of the *lourencian* essayism is the reflection on Portugal's position – almost always together with neighbouring Spain– with respect to Europe beyond the Pyrenees, emphasising France's role that, especially since the 1870's Generation, has transmuted into a cultural and civilizational paradigm. These are the times of the "stone raft" of the *lourencian* Iberian vision. The lack of a dialogue with Europe, indicated in the title of the inaugural essay, interacts with the negative diagnosis on the Portuguese culture in the concert of the most developed European nations, a marginal position that mirrors Portugal's "crepuscular existence" in the last four centuries. In Eduardo Lourenço's perspective, Europe finds itself in brackets since the Second World War, divided in

the political, military and geographical order established by the two superpowers of the world's board: the United States of America and the former Soviet Union, wherefore the cultural epicentre also shifted from the European space, namely from France, to the "Western-American" (*vd.* 1990: 54). It is the time of a disenchanted Europe without a guiding myth, nor a prevailing ideology.

For Eduardo Lourenço, the peninsular marginalisation effectively commences at the time of Voltaire and Montesquieu. In the previous period, that of Descartes and Pascal, he recognises that the Iberian time and space of Cervantes, Quevedo, Gracián and Vieira still engage in a dialogue with Trans-Pyrenees Europe without any resentment or emulation. They are the two cultures or "the two reasons" – Cartesian and baroque – of the essay "Nós e a Europa ou as duas razões" [*We and Europe, or the Two Reasons*] that makes the title of his first essays' collection on Portugal's (and Spain's) dialogue with the other Europe: that of Descartes, Hume and Kant. After all, we are facing two visions, geographically and culturally separated, but that still "communicate with each other as they will never do again, whilst a double answer to a single crisis of the world's traditional image, the *realist* image inherited from the Middle Ages" (*idem*: 63). However, in Eduardo Lourenço's analysis, it becomes obvious the antagonism between the Europe of Reformation with its "lights" and scientific knowledge and the Counter Reformation's, "*not as bright and, in the most pessimistic moments*, [observed] as almost an 'absence of light'" (1990: 61).

The end of Europe as a world power occurs, for Eduardo Lourenço, in the Suez "under the double *ultimatum* of the United States and the Soviet Union" (2001: 34). With the stunning defeat of the Soviet-led East Bloc, a defeat symbolically marked by the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Europe transmuted itself into a crepuscular continent and, "for the first time since the French Revolution, [into] a continent without an ideology" (*idem*: 132). The extinction of the Soviet Empire and the implementation of the *Pax* Americana, mark the end of a world and, most importantly, of a utopia that nurtured a considerable part of the 20th Century's Western thought, heralding a new order and exacerbating Europe's marginal role after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. The American victory in the Gulf War did not

clarify, and much less did it appease the Near East's crisis. It only demonstrated, if need be, that it is not possible to translate the American version of Western democracy to the Arabic language.

The Gulf War was, then, "Europe's second Suez", as noted in the title of a brilliant essay by Eduardo Lourenço. This conflict inflicted the "*biggest defeat of Europe – of all of Europe, from Lisbon to Moscow – since the conquest of Constantinople*" (*idem*: 22-23) having taken part in it only to serve the North-American "masters of the game" in their senseless crusade. Now the "Islamic 'time' is a long time. Long is the memory – false and true – of the Abbasids' splendour, nowadays obsessive for millions of Muslims, shared between the natural claim of their dignity and the resentment. It was in that machinery, better known by them than by the Americans, that many Europeans hesitated in meddling. It is to be feared that it may have been a useless gesture and that, from now on, the Islamic spiralling resentment becomes a nightmare for the Western world as if we returned, on a flying carpet, to the times of Saladin or Suleiman II" (*idem*: 72). Unlike Eduardo Lourenço's friend, Vergílio Ferreira, who defended, from the outset, the American intervention in faraway Kuwait, the author of *Nós e a Europa ou as Duas Razões* analysed in a different way the "Islamic time" and the consequences that will be brought upon Europe by the humiliation inflicted upon Iraq by the United States of America. Today's terrorist attacks, without ethics and with no possible connection to nihilism – attacks perpetrated in the heart of Europe, under the black flag of Daesh –, and the thousands of refugees that everyday strive for a safe haven in the largest European countries, unfortunately corroborate the tragic forecasts formulated by Eduardo Lourenço right after the last American ultimatum to Saddam Hussein in 1990.

The author of *A Europa Desencantada* [Disenchanted Europe] also observes with unease the new dangers facing Europe. The emerging nationalisms, within and outside the European communitarian space, the biological revolution and, most importantly, the "white plague" founded on "a suicidal anti-birth reflex [which has reached, nowadays,] catastrophic proportions" (*idem*: 40), together with the technological revolution that has been setting up a future "legion of unemployed people" (*ibidem*), offer the European space an "'end of the

world' atmosphere, or the promise of another with respect to which, we already have the conscience of being mere 'mutants'" (*idem*: 40-41).

The above notwithstanding, Eduardo Lourenço is a staunch Europeanist and a promoter of the European project, always present in his mythical discourse. Accordingly, he considers that "nowhere in the world does one live better than in Europe [...] and at every level" (2014: 119-120). Europe and its culture of anxiety "of anguish and of doubt" (1990: 159) continue to be, for, despite the contemporary dearth of myths and the constant threats to the European spirit, the space, par excellence, for freedom and for the reflection on man's place in the world and in his time. We are thus left to celebrate Camões, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Kierkegaard, Pessoa, Camus, among many other luminaries of European bliss and to accept "the risk of being 'European*', of a new kind, citizens of a mediating Europe, open to the world because it is in charge of its own house*" (2001: 31).

Brief Anthology

"Consequently, the first and fundamental of the European spirit demands is freedom. Being the concrete foundation of the feasibility of valuable human actions, freedom is the actual mould of human exigency, when one can consciously use it. The sophists, either obscurely or clearly interested in the defence of any kind of tyranny, found it always appropriate to state, like the Thrasymachus of *Republic* or the unforgettable Callicles of *Gorgias*, that freedom is an empty concept. Mentally terrified with the magnitude of the tension entailed by the exercise, they would rather deny it. However, no tyranny has ever been sufficiently honest or strong to publicly confess to its subjects that they are not free."

in *Heterodoxia I & II* (1987: 12).

"What is Europe? As a political reality, almost nothing, as a cultural reality, almost everything. But the formula could be inverted: something as a political reality and almost nothing, as a cultural reality. In the latter case, the formula presupposes an attachment: it is

as a ‘cultural reality’, shared at a communitarian level, that Europe is (still) little. […] if that space is not that of a culture that still deserves to be called, to be lived and to be developed as a *European culture, that would mean that* Europe will be an empty shell, a reality without a soul, nor a memory. A Europe cut off from its relation with the cultural values it created, indifferent to its heritage and its cultural richness, will be but a Disneyland for our pseudo-childhood of Europeans.”

in *Nós e a Europa ou as Duas Razões* (1990: 157)

“Under siege like the old Jericho, Saddam Hussein should have already fallen. But, if he does not fall ‘from within’ – like the United States have been expecting since August – the infamous ‘butcher of Baghdad’ will fall as a hero of the Islamic world, Saladin and D. Sebastião [Sebastian, King of Portugal] * at the same time. *Bad* for the West, who slightly assumes the reasons why it is in the Gulf, the cause od Saddam Hussein is *good* for Islam. And it is in this that lies, not only the political and military tragedy of this ‘white war’, but the cultural tragedy, that of an absurd, because it is avoidable, widening of the divide which has, historically, separated the West from Islam. And this happens at the precise time when the mentioned ‘West’, out of its treasure, does not know who it is, nor where it is. Even in its most objectionable or catastrophic confrontations with Islam, the West at least knew why it was there, in Jerusalem, in Tunis, in Tangiers, in Alcazarquivir, in St. John of Acre.”

in *A Europa Desencantada* (2001: 65)

*Information added by the translator.

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Jorge Costa Lopes (trans. Rui Miguel Ribeiro)

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