The April 29, 1985, issue of *Time* contains the following passage. This has been written to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Allies' victory over Germany. The second paragraph arrests my attention.

Then too, there is Europe to consider. Finally, after centuries, a purely European war is unthinkable, but the peace has difficulties. Rough times for Europe in 1985: high unemployment, signs of racism, ennui. So far all the dreams of a united Continent have resulted in a relatively successful economic alliance but not a political entity.

There are subtler problems: How does the Continent retain the glory of its history and avoid functioning merely as America's antique shop? How should Europe and the U.S. deal with each other? "Can we never extract this tapeworm of Europe from the brain of our countrymen?" asked Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1860. World War II performed the extraction. The U.S., a child of Europe, became an uncomfortable parent, uncomfortable in part because it is often right. (Underlines mine.)

The superstate that is America, giving voice to her pride, confidence, even condescension. Today, it is not infrequent that we come across in *Time* remarks of this kind. With Vietnam far behind, under President Reagan, the United States, if I dare to say, seems to be having a long spell of sunny days. But a student of American literature, of its earlier period in particular, I find myself inclined to say a word in this connection. All the more so, since the present passage quotes Ralph W. Emerson.

* This is a translation of a paper presented at a meeting of the American Association of Teachers of Japanese.

True it may be, that Europe was once a "tapeworm" for the Americans. That its relative superiority in terms of culture and tradition was a cause of shame for them. And that today, with America nothing short of an "uncomfortable parent" to the former, the tables have marvelously been turned in their favor. But this, as I understand, leaves unsaid what is known to be one important element in America's mental, spiritual history. My first step, then, must be to devote some space to an account of it, an account of American ambivalence, as it is commonly termed.

_Time_ does not seem especially fortunate in having Emerson in agreement with the tone of its present argument. It is certain that chauvinism such as his was, and is, a distinctive note of the so-called American spirit. More famous for setting forth the same idea is his "American Scholar" (1837), but the phrase cited above is from "Culture" (1860):

I think there is a restlessness in our people which argues want of character. All educated Americans, first and last, go to Europe; perhaps because it is their mental home, as the invalid habits of this country might suggest. An eminent teacher of girls said, "the idea of a girl's education is, whatever qualifies her for going to Europe." Can we never extract this tape-worm of Europe from the brain of our countrymen?

Writers, however, considered it necessary to be true to their inmost heart. Washington Irving, for one, explained in his _Sketch-Book_ (1819—20) how he admired Europe for its "accumulated treasures of age", a feeling that was to be shared by many who would come after him.

But Europe held forth the charms of storied and poetical association. There were to be seen the masterpieces of art, the refinements of highly-cultivated society, the quaint peculiarities of ancient and local custom. My native country was full of youthful promise: Europe was rich in the accumulated treasures of age. Her very ruins told the history of times gone by, and every mouldering stone was a chronicle. I longed to wander over the scenes of renowned achievement—to tread, as it were, in the footsteps of antiquity, to loiter about the ruined castle, to meditate on the falling tower, to escape, in short, from the common-place realities of the present,

and lose myself among the shadowy grandeurs of the past.3)

Nathaniel Hawthorne, after two years of Italian sojourn, declared that it was wiser of a writer to write a romance about Italy, "a sort of poetic or fairy precinct", than about America, where "there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, . . . nor anything but a common-place prosperity."4) No one acted out this idea better than Edgar Poe. He never, almost never, made America the setting of his stories.5) Let me recall the beginning of "The Oval Portrait" (1842). A mountain path in the Apennines. Chateau, turret, armorial trophies. Poe has never been to Italy, but his imagination easily changes him into a warrior of that faraway country.

The chateau into which my valet had ventured to make forcible entrance, rather than permit me, in my desperately wounded condition, to pass a night in the open air, was one of those piles of commingled gloom and grandeur which have so long frowned among the Apennines, not less in fact than in the fancy of Mrs. Radcliffe. To all appearance it had been temporarily and very lately abandoned. We established ourselves in one of the smallest and least sumptuously furnished apartments. It lay in a remote turret of the building. Its decorations were rich, yet tattered and antique. Its walls were hung with tapestry and bedecked with manifold and multiform armorial trophies, together with an unusually great number of very spirited modern paintings in frames of rich golden arabesque.6)

To return, I notice that the Time paragraphs above refer to Europe as "the Continent" or "a . . . Continent" (as underlined). Not counting the Antarctic, we have five "continents" on the earth. Among them, Europe is in actual fact a large peninsula. Why should it be called by that name? And that with a capital letter? For capitalization, the North American continent is obviously a better candi-

5) His favorite places: France, Italy, Britain. Many of his stories do not mention the locality. For some of them, there is no ground for specifically considering them non-American, but unnamed kingdoms and principalities are perhaps European. Even when the heroes are residents of the U. S., they travel outside the mainland of America, or are taken by mesmerism, or by delirium, away from their real life.
date. (The articles: “The”, along with the capital, signifies that Europe is thought of as the only important continent, while “a” occurs because this continent is being spoken of as having a certain characteristic.)

I am afraid I am being meticulous about a trifle. As if I were a scribe, my thought tends to turn to the text and to orthography. But this happens to be a question having an apparent correspondence to that aspect of American psychology I have just stated. In the sections which follow, I will focus my attention on this particular point.

II

As is quite understandable, the whole thing started from the fact that the British people lived on the islands off the coast of Europe. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) describes it as in the following. 1 The word “continent” denoted “the main land, as distinguished from islands, islets, or peninsulas”, a usage which is obsolete today. *Islanders covet the commodities of the continent, or firme ground.* (1576. This is the oldest among the instances given for the same meaning. In the following, except where otherwise noted, my quotations from the OED will follow this example.) 2 The same word, with its meaning as above, was used for denoting “the mainland of Europe, as distinguished from the British Isles.” *They are in the continent, where everie kingdome and state doth joyne one to another without anie partition of sea.* (1590. There was no capitalization yet.) 3 It also meant, more generally, “one of the main continuous bodies of land on the earth’s surface.” *Europe, Afrique, and Asia...the south or Antarique continent, etc.* (1614. The Antarctic continent is perhaps imaginary.)

Incidentally, however, the description above seems partly questionable. I remember seeing in books (see footnote) a world map of the 13th century. An heirloom to an old church at Hereford, England, the medieval representation of the world shows us a single large, circular landmass with its center at Jerusalem. The land is subdivided by the water into three parts, Europe, Asia, and Africa, all

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almost similar in size. There is a dent on the rim of the lower left division, and that is where the British Isles nestle.

The OED's editorial principle is "historical". In so listing the meanings of a word in the order of development, the method it employs is one of "inference", so that the dates of the quoted material are not necessarily decisive. If so, would it not be better to place Item 3 before Item 2? It seems reasonable to assume that "continent" was at first the name of that single, three-part world landmass. That with its actual usage occurring most often when people spoke about the European part of the land, which was nearest to Britain, the word gradually took on a narrower meaning.

Now, apart from this question, the two usages, 2 and 3, coexisted. Hence the necessity of capitalization for the 2, in order to make it clear when the word denotes Europe. *Holland ... is content To [sic] be our outguard on the Continent.* (c.1654.) This practice was to be followed by the dutiful Americans. The result is that today, when they make mention of Europe, American citizens are willingly or unwillingly uttering the same world outlook as that of Britishers in days of yore, when the islanders used to place themselves humbly at the bottom of what

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was regarded as the great world continent.

Of course, this usage is now quite common in America. Illustration may be unnecessary, but the single *Time* passage already given may not sufficiently represent the state of things. So I will quote another, which happens to deal with an occurrence in Britain, a past one.

Macpherson went on maintaining the provenance of his work. He eventually produced as evidence some Gaelic passages that later proved to be inept translations of his own English. But the question was growing ever more academic. Macpherson’s inventions had inspired a passion in readers that was not to abate for nearly a century. On the Continent, Goethe praised the works. Napoleon decorated the ceiling of his study with paintings of scenes from Ossian and carried a translation of the poems on his military campaigns. When Macpherson died in 1796, at 59, he was buried in Westminster Abbey, not far from Dr. Johnson, (May 16, 1983. Underline mine)\(^{10}\)

III

It must be noted, on the other hand, that the same capitalization was once attempted for the American continent, too. The *OED* tells us how at the time of the American Revolutionary War the original 13 states enjoyed that distinction.\(^{11}\) *There are some collections of forage and provisions belonging to the Continent, and some to the State.* (1781, while the oldest instance of this meaning is dated 1760,\(^{12}\) “The State” is perhaps one of the 13.) But this practice (4th, as it were) soon died out, with an instance of 1784 concluding the *OED* enumeration.

Which means that the United States, a country truly continental, did not succeed in winning from Europe possession of the capital letter, a right that could have saved her soil from being merely “one of the main continuous bodies of land on the earth’s surface.” This fact is interesting, for it occurred to a people who in fact has various verbal practices, some of them even orthographic, that do differ from their British counterparts. The awe and respect the nation entertained for

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11) *OED*, Vol. II.
12) That appears in the 1933 Supplement to the *OED*, where, however, the meaning now in question is not satisfactorily obvious from the quoted sentence alone.
Europe must have been difficult to overcome.

Still, what is honor? A word, as Falstaff, that Shakespearean jovial knight puts it. It seems good that the Americans, as if to save face, and that deservedly, should have as theirs good ways of referring to their continent: “the New World”, “this side of the Atlantic”, “our hemisphere”. Magnificent perspectives. They thus compare the two worlds. They thus think of the great ocean, and of the planet Earth. True, that they are also thinking of what is “old”, what is on “that side”, what is “theirs”, what was once a “tapeworm”. But when those names appear on pages of Time, magnificence seems everything. They sometimes function as virtual signs of America’s strength and stature. By way of example, I will cite here the following.

Normandy was, of course, a joint Allied operation. But the Americans, from Eisenhower down, dominated the drama. The invasion, in a way, was a perfect expression of American capabilities: vast industrial energy and organizational know-how sent out into the world on an essentially knightly mission—the rescue of an entire continent in distress. There was an aspect of redemption in the drama, redemption in the Christian sense. The Old World, in centuries before, had tided westward to populate the New. Now the New World came back, out of the tide, literally, to redeem the Old. (May 28, 1984. Underline mine)

IV

But to return, “the Continent” ( “a...Continent”) is a venerable, if not grand, designation of Europe. Prior to the aforesaid items 1 to 3 of the OED, the dictionary mentions what was original, though now obsolete, of the meaning of this noun: “A containing agent or space”, “That which contains or holds”. Heart, once be stronger then thy continent, Cracke thy fraile case. (1606. The earliest

14) To be exact, the expression “our hemisphere” (“the hemisphere”, “the Western hemisphere”) covers Latin America and Canada, too.
16) OED, Vol. II.
instance given is in 1541) Which causes me to remember a fact concerning the *Holy Bible*.

When the *Old Testament* was translated from Hebrew into Greek, the Garden of Eden, that place of supreme happiness, was referred to as *parádeisos*, the Greek equivalent of “paradise”. Which was a word that had derived from Old Persian noun *pairidaëza*, the meaning of which had been "enclosure"—namely, “a piece of land that is enclosed.” This etymology is often a topic, and the *OED*, too, testifies to it.

Whether this is by chance or by intention, I do not think I need here question. People saw Europe, and still see it, in the same light as the ancients had seen what they piously believed to be the very home of our species. And that same biblical Weltanschauung, that identical consciousness of space, must have been especially important to those Founding Fathers of America, when they first arrived on the shores of their own continent. But nationalistic mentality must have been only a later development. Is the usage of “the (a) Continent” as part of the present-day American language, then, a mere usage? Is there not something that can aptly be symbolized by it, something nostalgic as it were, still lying somewhere in the heart of the American people?

D. H. Lawrence, treating of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), left us recondite lines: “All begins with A. / Adulteress. Alpha. Abel. Adam. A. America.” In that story, the letter “A”, after all, makes its appearance on the surface of a tombstone. The tomb. The past lingers in and around this object. “A” may be America, indeed. *Still may*. So, allow me to embellish the end of my unsightly composition with this richly exquisite prose:

Yet one tombstone served for both. All around, there were monuments carved with

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17) But I quote the former for better clearness of my argument.
19) *OED*, Vol. VII.
armorial bearings; and on this simple slab of slate—as the curious investigator may still discern, and perplex himself with the purport—there appeared the semblance of an engraved escutcheon. It bore a device, a herald's wording of which might serve for a motto and brief description of our now concluded legend; so somber is it, and relieved only by one ever-glowing point of light gloomier than the shadow;—

“ON A FIELD, SABLE, THE LETTER A, GULES.”