

REVIEWS

Wolf Lepenies, *Die Macht am Mittelmeer: Französische Träume von einem anderen Europa*

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FANCIES AND FEARS OF A LATIN EUROPE

The *feuilletons* of Western Europe, pale shades of their former selves, still occasionally allow an argument to pinball around the continent. In March 2013, two months after the EU's Fiscal Compact came into force, Giorgio Agamben published a polemic in *La Repubblica* under the headline, 'If a Latin Empire Took Shape in the Heart of Europe'. Seeking a foothold against what he took to be the German economic imposition of a common way of life for all Europeans, Agamben invoked a curio: Alexandre Kojève's confidential *aide-mémoire*, perhaps intended for de Gaulle. In 'The Latin Empire: Outline of a Doctrine of French Policy', Kojève, four months after the defeat of Nazi Germany, warned of coming German economic resurgence. Hitler had made the anachronistic mistake of basing his empire on national socialism: the USA and the USSR, equipped with extra-national, universalist ideologies, were the future. It was only a matter of time before Germany was enlisted as a proxy by one side or the other. De Gaulle's boldest course of action, Kojève advised, would be to build a Latin customs bloc, with Italy, Spain and eventually Portugal as junior partners. Only then could there be a true imperial socialism—powered by the fossil fuel of Catholicism—that could avoid the cyclical crashes of the Anglo-American market and the forced stability of the Soviet economy. As a bonus, the 'contradictions' between *latinité* and Islam could be resolved—and they could resume pollinating each other's cultures—if the Latin Empire were to extend toward the Middle East and embrace its former imperial subjects ('A giving colonialism', Kojève would

call this in another context). Pooling together French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese colonies would solve the problem of raw materials. If Latin collective bargaining for German coal did not suffice, perhaps the Saarland could be annexed. These reveries, elevated to the idiom of *raison d'état*, seem to have been crafted to affect de Gaulle—who probably never read the memorandum—like the dream that convinced Emperor Constantine to turn Europe Christian.

Kojève's diplomatic lunge of 1945 was reduced by Agamben to a parry for endangered species. 'Not only is there no sense in asking a Greek or an Italian to live like a German', Agamben wrote, 'but even if this were possible, it would lead to the destruction of a cultural heritage that exists as a way of life.' When his article appeared in France in *Libération*, the headline was upgraded to 'Let the Latin Empire counter-attack!' The German press volleyed back contempt. 'Against Germany?' cried *Die Zeit*. 'A Latin Europe Coming Soon?' rang out the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*. Twitchy readers could find solace by flipping to the *Politik* and *Wirtschaft* sections. The closest any coordinated 'Latin' action had come to slowing Berlin's austerity roll-out was the pebble Mario Monti, along with Rajoy and Hollande, had placed before a weary Merkel at 4am on 29 June 2012, when they squeaked out a deal to ease access to the EU bailout fund. But the concession may in fact have smoothed German advances by making its policies appear more consensual. While in the wake of Brexit, there were faint rumbles that, without Tory intransigence in the EU, the voting rules in Brussels might be changed to favour a Latin gang-up against the North—a tactic preferred by Thomas Piketty—those worries evaporated with the election of Emmanuel Macron, whose first trip was to pay tribute to Berlin, where he assured the Chancellor that he did not want to 'pool debts from the past', and two days later cemented his pliancy with the appointment of the impeccably neoliberal Bruno Le Maire, a UMP stalwart, as Finance Minister. Spain, where unemployment has dipped to 17.2 per cent, and Greece—only 23 per cent—are now lofted in the German press as evidence that Berlin's policy is finally bearing fruit.

Wolf Lepenies's *The Power on the Mediterranean: French Dreams of a Different Europe* can be read as the most sophisticated of the German establishment's responses to Agamben's *cri de cœur*. In the form of a courteous inspection of French conceptions over the centuries for building 'Latin' coalitions of various dimensions, Lepenies gently lets the suggestion surface that dissenters to the rules of the game of German Europe would do better to dispose of their illusions—especially the French, whose periodic attempts to map the North–South conflict onto the external world are more often than not the projection of conflicts inside their own national culture. *Die Macht am Mittelmeer* was treated as a skilful diagnosis of a French obsession by German reviewers. The only objections were that Lepenies made his case

in too leisurely a fashion; that there were too many redundancies; and that the book is mistitled, since the Mediterranean is only one feature in a wider landscape of delusion.

Born in East Prussia, from where his family fled the Red Army, Lepenies grew up in Koblenz and studied at Münster, then a centre of conservative sociology led by Helmut Schelsky and Dieter Claessens, who supervised the thesis that became his first book: *Melancholy and Society* (1969), a study of the European culture of boredom and its relation to political defeat and exclusion. The examples were wide-ranging. Lepenies argued, for instance, that the uprising of the Fronde against the consolidation of the monarchy in seventeenth-century France was the result of aristocrats who were desperate to find social meaning even in the form of a doomed rebellion. Louis XIV attempted to compensate for their political impotence by making the officer corps their exclusive domain, and continually adding to the elaborations and time-consuming activities of his Court. Lepenies's main interest, however, lay—as it has done since—in the values and sensibilities of the German bourgeoisie. Excluded from the political power that was being extended to their peers elsewhere in nineteenth-century Europe, the German middle classes, so the story goes, retreated into aesthetics, savouring the productions of their great writers and thinkers, when they themselves were not buried in work. What had once been the aspirational melancholy of an entire class—the ‘Werther Syndrome’ of the eighteenth century—became increasingly, as the bourgeois ideal of work gained self-legitimizing force, the province of disparate individuals. The particular target of Lepenies's attack on the aestheticization of boredom (and in the Nazi period, of politics)—the inclination of the bourgeois to imagine themselves private aristocrats without political responsibilities—was the dominant conservative of post-war German sociology, Arnold Gehlen. Ascribing the timeless attraction to melancholy to a basic human nature that could only be overcome by Supreme Leadership Systems or, as he amended his text after the war, ‘the founding of institutions’, Gehlen had declared that ‘the history of ideas has come to a conclusion, and that we have now arrived at *post-histoire*. Thus Gottfried Benn's advice to the individual—namely, “count on using your own reserves”—should now apply to mankind as a whole.’ By disparaging the project of the Enlightenment as utopian and historically defunct, Gehlen—declared Lepenies—had ‘discovered a way of proving modernity worthy of tragedy’.

Lepenies's intent to reduce the entire corpus of Gehlen to a variant of aristocratic escapism, while expressly avoiding any debt to the Frankfurt School (indeed treating Adorno—who had famously sparred with Gehlen on television a few years earlier—as the other side of the same syndrome), set his course as a left-liberal critic of conservatives in the German academy. It has

been a fruitful career. Lepenies may be the least known yet best connected of leading German intellectuals. A longtime head of the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin, his personal ties extend across the Anglosphere, where he edited the *Ideas in Context* series with Skinner and Rorty, and found a side of paradise at Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study. After 1989, he became a tireless sower of cultural seeds in the East, instrumental in the founding of the Bibliotheca Classica in St Petersburg, the Centre for Advanced Study in Sofia, the Collegium Budapest and the New Europe College in Bucharest; he is rumoured to have been a whisperer in Stockholm's ear to help Banat-born Herta Müller clinch the Nobel Prize. As a public intellectual, his graceful, if at times orotund, style distinguishes him from the staid expositions of the generation of German sociologists that trained him. A past member of the Axel Springer Board of Supervisors—an ostentatious badge of heresy for the 1968 generation—Lepenies contributes light, learned columns to the conglomerate's acceptable daily *Die Welt*, where he writes on philosophy, film and the *agon* of the NBA.

Culture versus power, bourgeois decency versus aesthetic transcendence: these oppositions have been at the centre of Lepenies's work since the beginning. In his best-known book, *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology*, Lepenies had looked back at a lost age of his discipline when the boundaries between the social sciences and literature scarcely existed, and Balzac, Taine and Zola 'had probed reality with the scalpel of science'. But with the politicization of sociology in France—literati attacks on the Dreyfusard science of Durkheim—French reactionaries regrouped into literature in such numbers that by the time of Vichy the French novel was a form dominated by fascists. In the postwar German Federal Republic, the situation was nearly reversed, with left critics of the regime such as Böll and Koeppen taking to the novel as their cudgel, while academic sociology was dominated by conservatives. Against these breaches, Lepenies's defence of the bourgeois man of letters who keeps the politicization of science at bay found expression in the book that may be closest to his heart: an extraordinary biography of the critic denounced by Nietzsche ('wanders around, cowardly, curious, bored, eavesdropping') and attacked by Proust ('as though the persevering falsehood of his thought had derived from the artificial dexterity of his style') that could have been entitled *Pour Sainte-Beuve*. Indeed Sainte-Beuve, notwithstanding his animosity to the democratization of culture, was despite himself a beneficial liberal force, in his determination to bring art back down to earth and anchor artists in their personal context—he championed the scientific affinities of literary realism—and his consistent engagement as a public intellectual, punctilious in his response to the issues of the day.

A decade later, with *The Seduction of Culture in German History* (2006), Lepénies took up a theme developed by George Mosse and Fritz Stern a half-century earlier, a version of which could already be found in Peter Viereck's *Metapolitics* (1941) if not before: the baleful effects of the construction of culture as an aesthetic or spiritual realm of the sublime, above the compromises and chicanery of politics, and especially parliamentary politics. It was Nietzsche who first gave vivid expression to a fatal opposition between culture and power that became engrained in the sensibility of so many Wilhelmine and Weimar intellectuals. After serving as a young medical orderly in the Prussian army in 1870, he had reacted to its triumph over France not with jubilation but regret, predicting the new German empire would spell the eclipse of German culture: 'the extirpation of the German spirit for the benefit of the "German Reich".' Between power and culture a choice had to be made. 'One lives off the other, one prospers at the expense of the other. All the great ages of culture are ages of decline, politically speaking: what has been great in the cultural sense has been unpolitical, even *antipolitical*.' The only remaining artist or philosopher worth the name in Germany, Nietzsche ironized with a mocking 'blush', was 'well, Bismarck'.

It was in the grip of this outlook that a generation of German artists and intellectuals abdicated political responsibility during the Nazi years, with Gottfried Benn as a prime dodger. These were Germans who were willing to fellow-travel some way with the Nazis, only recoiling after events like the Night of the Long Knives, if at all. 'The Nazi crimes left them not morally appalled', Lepénies writes, 'but aesthetically disappointed.' Distinguishing Lepénies's critique of this attitude was less his indictment of such past escapism than his pursuit of it in the present—a year after the opening of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, he went so far as to argue that even Germany's reckoning with its past retreated into 'awe-inspiring aesthetics'—and the positive alternative he proposed for what the life of a modern European intellectual should look like. His model was, not too surprisingly, Thomas Mann, who like Nietzsche before him had been attracted to the prospect of a Germany whose people remained apolitical as long as possible, but after realizing that an ironic conservatism would not allow enough democratic spirit to germinate, became a committed speech-maker for Anglo-American liberalism. Refusal to experiment with utopianism is a sign of intellectual health in a society.

En cours de route, Lepénies devoted a chapter to the 'culture wars' between France and Germany from the time of Napoleon to that of Hitler, observing that 'whenever one country was defeated on the battlefield, cultural policy served the need for revenge until renewed spiritual strength made retaliation in a "real" war possible'—after 1806 for Germany, after 1871 for France.

(Hitler's *Second Book* was in large part a screed against France, which, he reminded his readers, had since 1870 attacked Germany *twenty-nine times*.) But if reciprocal boasts and slurs were the coinage of these episodes, from the epoch of Frederick the Great and Madame de Staël onward, voices expressing admiration rather than animus towards the other nation were rarely absent. Not conflict but reconciliation between the two countries had been the eloquent wish of Guizot, not to speak of Sainte-Beuve, who 'hated what he called "transcendental chauvinism"'. Durkheim and Weber might have ignored each other, but later in the century such an emblematic French figure as Aron owed his intellectual awakening to Germany, where since the Second World War the importance of mutual understanding between neighbours has for its part become accepted. Perhaps no German intellectual since Ernst-Robert Curtius has given more time and devotion to a sympathetic interest in French culture than Lepenies himself, invited by Bourdieu to a chair of European Culture at the Collège de France, and decorated by Chirac with the Légion d'Honneur. Given his critical work on delicate dimensions of the German past, and the recognition of his services to France, Lepenies may have felt he had insulated himself from any charge of chauvinism in tackling sides of French culture and politics suspect to many Germans.

Die Macht am Mittelmeer opens with a survey of three recent episodes of French pretension and illusion. At the time that the European crisis began in 2008, Nicolas Sarkozy had embarked on his plan for a Union pour la Méditerranée, a French-led collection of states that would include the countries around the Mediterranean basin, including Turkey, Israel and Mauritania, and promised France an alternative leadership role in Europe outside of the Barcelona Process. (The project would in due course be satirized in Michel Houellebecq's novel *Submission*, where it is adopted by Ben Abbas, newly elected Muslim president of France, who cannily embraces the same clichés about Europe extending a generous hand to the South, democratizing itself through the incorporation of former colonial peoples.) Vetoed by Merkel, Lepenies points to the plan's strategic shortcomings: Ankara immediately recognized it was being offered a second-class European membership, while North African states balked at what they took to be a fresh round of neo-colonialism. Lepenies also revisits the hinge moment of 1989. German unification had not been foreseen by the Élysée—Mitterrand even paid a visit to the crumbling post-Ulbricht regime shortly before the Wall fell. When Kohl announced re-unification out of the blue, Mitterrand met with Gorbachev in Kiev in what Bonn perceived as yet another phase of Russo-Franco intrigue to contain a greater Germany. For Lepenies there is something naive about the French expectation that it would command the same level of influence in a post-Cold War Europe: for all of the country's talent for dreaming different Europes, it could not fathom German unification.

In 1989, it was Bernard-Henri Lévy who printed Kojève's white paper in the first number of his new magazine, *La Règle du jeu*. But the ground for the misapprehension of 1989 had been prepared earlier, Lepenies suggests, by Mitterrand's mismanaged push in the 1970s to form a Union de la Gauche that would bind together socialist parties across Europe, including Willy Brandt's SPD. The *socialisme du cœur* in this vision would be reconciled with the *socialisme de la raison*. Lepenies relates the scene of Mitterrand boarding Brandt's train in Stuttgart, and entering the saloon carriage that had belonged to Göring. 'We ate quickly in the evening', Mitterrand recalled in his memoirs:

After the coffee, I stood up and through the train window observed the German night . . . Brandt approached and we spoke together. Not much, to tell the truth. Perhaps a few phrases. If I have a more lively recollection of this encounter than so many others, which at first glance seem more important, with their agendas, questions, answers and communiqués, it's because this time everything was completely different. How to put it? I believe we were dreaming together. When I got off at the station in Mainz, Brandt held me back for a moment by the shoulders, and told me: 'It is important that you know something. I am without a doubt the last of the German-Northerners who accepts a Latin Europe.'

Lepenies excels at deploying these kinds of vignettes, for which he supplies sardonic fringes: it is not only that Brandt later denied making this statement, and turned against what he mocked as the 'Olive Internationale' of Mitterrand, who, to the horror of the SPD, was willing to signal relationships with European Communist parties—Mitterrand counted Santiago Carrillo as a friend—in order to secure PCF votes at home and reap the rewards of waning authoritarian rule in southern Europe. For Lepenies the deeper point is that the entire construction of a North–South divide—which Mitterrand and the French papers repeatedly referenced—is a persistent trope that wraps imagined conflicts in the gauze of false solidarities. When it came time for Spain's accession to the EU, Lepenies points out, it was only possible after Paris had systematically neutered the threat that Spanish agricultural imports and US-capitalized industry posed to France's protected position. In each of his episodes from the recent past—2008, 1989, the 1970s—Lepenies levels the same critique: the French cleavage to its 'Southern' identity only underscores its impotence and entrenches disappointment.

For the most part, the rest of *Die Macht am Mittelmeer* proceeds chronologically, reviewing critical moments in French conceptions of the North, which variously comprises Prussia or Germany or all German-speaking lands, at other times Germany or Germany/Britain/USA or the Protestant world *in toto*. The Midi, too, was a movable quantity: its heartland southern France, but stretching to include, in some variations, Latin America,

North Africa and Romania. Lepenies traces the genealogy of the North/South myth to what Bourdieu called the 'Montesquieu Effect'. In the eighteenth century, the literary members of the French academies transferred the descriptive rigour of the physical sciences onto the bundle of prejudices that would emerge as the social sciences. Noting that Montesquieu drew his climatic theories directly from Arbuthnot's 'Essay Concerning the Effects of Air on Human Bodies', and tabulating the oppositions that fell under the rubric *Nord=Froid/Midi=Chaud*, Bourdieu remarked that such transfers rested on the revival and reawakening of dormant metaphors—the way heat caused the 'relaxation of physical fibres', for instance, could be extended to the 'relaxation of customs, of the vital spring, of virile energies'. Once legitimated as a literary science, climatic determinism could be modified to meet new needs, whether those of colonial adventures, for which the South was the immature field of action in need of cultivation, or in the context of inter-European rivalries, for which the South was more free and spirited and in touch with ancient civilization than the constricted, barren, barbarian North.

As Lepenies shows, the European North/South divide could be just as easily inverted. By the early nineteenth century, Saint-Simon, aiming to combine the political gains of the French Revolution with the social cohesion of resurgent Catholicism, looked to Germany as a promising land for experimentation, and a linchpin for his plans to unify modern Europe. Having been deprived of the easy economic development of a sea power, the Germans, according to Saint-Simon, had not been corrupted by the calculating spirit of the English. But the land of *Dichter und Denker* would still need to be modernized, and there was a danger that its abrupt entry into Europe could result in another Reformation. In order to avoid this spectre, Saint-Simon proposed that a modern French-English Parliament devise a constitution for Germany and oversee its unification, which would benefit Europe because the free spirit of the Germans would compensate for the over-developed rationalism of England and France. The underside of this seemingly generous political scheme, as Lepenies notes, was that the Saint-Simonians were themselves avid colonizers, and that the Mediterranean System they envisioned, while it would gradually incorporate most of the world's peoples, would be lorded over by France, 'Christ among the Nations'. Some of the achievements of the Saint-Simonians and their admirers under Napoleon III were impressive—de Lesseps built the Suez Canal—but the disastrous overall arch of French foreign policy during this period, which, among other things, stoked German colonial competition and included a foolish war against Mexico, serves Lepenies as yet another exhibit of the damage caused by French delusions of grandeur.

Bismarck's defeat of France in 1871 figures in Lepenies's account as a crucial turning point in French attitudes about their position in Europe. Even non-nationalist aesthetes such as Flaubert were driven to despair. He would rather see Paris in flames, he told George Sand, than consumed by the violence of the 'compatriots of Hegel', exclaiming: 'How sad I am! I feel that the Latin world is dying, what we once were is over!' Nietzsche drew the opposite conclusion from French defeat: 'a nation usually rejuvenates itself on the political sickbed and rediscovers its spirit, which it had gradually lost in its pursuit and assertion of power', he wrote. 'Culture owes this above all to the ages of political weakness.' As Lepenies shows, typical French responses to the defeat of 1871 did not subscribe to Nietzsche's antinomy of power and culture. The bulk of *Mittelmeer* is devoted to his excavation of a family of attempts among French writers, publicists, poets, historians and journalists to respond to the loss, the effects of which lasted up through the Second World War, and produces his most original findings. Some of these—Jacques Bainville, Gabriel Audisio, Léon Bazalgette, Gabriel Hanotaux—are little known today. Others—Charles Maurras, Frédéric Mistral, Léon Daudet, Paul Valéry—are more familiar. (Oddly, there is no glimpse of Daudet's friend Proust, an early interest of Lepenies, in this gallery, though Germanophilia and Germanophobia are major themes of *Time Regained*.)

Most of these figures would fall within the fester of the interwar Catholic Right, but there were exceptions. Lepenies charts the trajectory of the novelist Paul Adam (1862–1920), who founded the League of Paris and the journal *La Renaissance Latine* as a storehouse for Latin cultural renewal—and as a counter to the contemporary forces of Pan-Slavism, Pan-Germanism, Pan-Turkism, Anglo-Saxonism, etc. Surveying Europe at the close of the nineteenth century, Adam saw a continent devoid of gratitude. Ever since the Congress of Vienna, it was the Latin spirit, he contended, that had risen up against northern authoritarianism, producing the revolutionary surges and—under Napoleon III—benevolently unifying Italy and Germany (for Adam interpreted the French defeat as a sacrifice that had made the latter possible). Instead of savouring any of this, however, the Germans were busy plotting how to unload their vast overproduction on the South, while the British wanted to drive the Latins from Africa, land of their ancient grain supply. Adam did the demographic tally: there were 75 million Germans in Europe in the year 1900, against whom could be counted 80 million Latins. To bind these Latins together would require new political foundations, including a Latin Parliament and a Latin Senate, near the site of the original, in Rome. Instead of a new-fangled Religion of Humanity, as the Saint-Simonians had proposed, Adam pressed for the revival of the

Mithradaic Cult of Ancient Rome (and here again he wanted the Germans to take note that some of their great western cities, Aachen and Cologne, had sprung from the settlements of the Mithradaic Roman legions).

Adam was not, Lepenies stresses, an eccentric, but a major intellectual of his time—and the conduit of an entire Latin complex whose anxieties stretched back to the Napoleonic aftermath. For the ‘benevolence’ that Adam identified in French foreign policy had in fact been a disaster in terms of grand strategy. France had not had a sensible foreign policy since Talleyrand: Napoleon III backing Prussia against Austria, unifying Italy and invading Mexico had all jeopardized France’s position in the first rank of powers. As Adam himself came to realize on a 1906 trip to the World Fair in Saint Louis, the trouble had begun with Napoleon I’s impetuous sale of French North America to Jefferson, who had only wanted ports on the Gulf of Mexico. The Louisiana fire sale doubled the size of the US, and put an early end to any grand-strategic ambitions on France’s part. Adam was full of admiration for the ‘magnificent industriousness’ he found in his travels in America, from which he came to believe the ‘lazy well-being’ of the Latin world had much to learn. This was an element in a counter-strain within the Latin movement that Lepenies teases out: the desire to be more like the North.

Charles Maurras, the central figure of interwar Catholic reaction, took a less compromising view of the Anglosphere. Lepenies follows Maurras on an assignment as a young sports journalist at the first Olympic Games in Athens. Observing the still ‘hyperborean’ aura of a royal family imported from Nordic climes, Maurras was not pleased by what he found. After having watched three German runners win sprints—the result of a misjudgement on the part of the referee, he was sure—he was relieved to learn from a Greek spectator speaking ‘in the idiom of Shakespeare’ that a Frenchman had won the first contest. As Lepenies points out, Maurras’s pride in his race was not biological—a belief he held in contrast to Nazism, which he called the ‘Islam of the North’—but civilizational. Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the Games, was the target of Maurras’s ire because in his swooning Anglophilia he had fallen for the wrong kind of cosmopolitanism. ‘What then, if you please, is this cosmopolitan living if not English living. It is a stupid mimicry of the English lifestyle.’ But despite Maurras’s tragic pessimism, the interwar period would seem to have delivered much of what he wanted: three ‘Latin’ dictators spanning southern Europe—with Pétain joining in 1941—who, if not monarchists, at least shared Maurras’s reactionary outlook. For the most fulsome hopes of the period, Lepenies turns to the arresting record of Henri Massis, a disciple of Maurras, who believed even more fervently in the possibility of Latin Union in the age of dictatorship. In his extraordinary 1939 book of conversations with Salazar, Mussolini and Franco, Massis—the most vocal French defender of Mussolini’s invasion of Africa and a

confidant of Il Duce—found much to admire: Salazar in Lisbon, a student of Thomas Aquinas, was ‘the most candid, wise and restrained dictator in Europe’. Franco was ‘God’s soldier’, who assured Massis that he had already paid Hitler back for his aid in the Civil War. But whereas Salazar and Franco sought stability and ‘normality’, Mussolini alone saw eye to eye with Massis on the imperative of putting Latinity forward as the culture of fascism. When Massis covered Hitler’s visit to Italy 1938, he delighted that his visit fell somewhat flat with the natives: what played in Nuremberg didn’t work in Rome. But during the war, Massis found Mussolini complaining that Germany’s position in the middle of Europe made it easier for its culture and ideas to predominate, while Hitler was taken aback that Franco, instead of pledging solidarity to the cause, inquired as to what scraps of the French Empire he could expect. The interwar period thus neatly obeys Nietzsche’s principle: when Latin dictators had power, they let Latin culture fall by the wayside.

The substantive shortcomings of *Mittelmeer* fall in two related categories. The first is that by focusing so exclusively on French visions of Europe and Germany, Lepénies neglects other ideological oppositions of the period he covers—France/Germany versus the Anglosphere, or Latinity versus Anglo-Saxonism—which were at times more significant. As he acknowledges in his discussion of Kojève’s memorandum, its probable addressee de Gaulle came to realize that he would need Adenauer’s Germany to fend off Anglo-American hegemony. Much of the maneuvering on both sides of French decolonization—the rhetorical flourishes of Aimé Césaire in the *Assemblée nationale* with a view to a deal for Martinique, for instance—expressly appealed to common desires to counter US imperial ambitions wherever they might materialize. As the historians Michael Geyer and Charles Bright have shown in a powerful series of essays recalibrating the twentieth century, many conspicuous diplomatic shifts of the period look like epiphenomena when the period is viewed along an axis from the German–American Samoan Crisis of 1888–89 to the crossing of the Rhine by the US 12th Army Group in 1945: two recently unified, rapidly industrializing regional powers, which vacillate between conflict and cooperation, and which try to adapt themselves to the technologies and mobility adopted by the first truly global and not exclusively territorially-based power, Britain. While Germany failed to evolve beyond a land-based power, the US ‘managed to fuse the capacity of the national state for mobilization with the logistical capabilities of maritime power—largely through its wars with Germany’.

At the outset of *The Seduction of Culture in German History*, Lepénies explained that he was not intending ‘to compete with the well-established approaches of political and social history’, to which ‘intellectual history is an addition, not an alternative’. It was possible to see ‘the history of ideas as not much more than an ornament on the building of social and political history

that could easily be removed from it. After it was removed, though, the building would certainly not collapse but it would not be the same building any more.' Tacitly, the image conceives ideas as a kind of *appliqué*, affixed to states or societies as an external adjunct without inner connection to them, and points to the principal weakness of *Die Macht am Mittelmeer*. For in focusing largely on the belle-lettrists of an earlier epoch, in a spirit not entirely distant from them, Lepenies hews to a level of cultural analysis that, while it proceeds in the shadow of public events, tends to displace high politics and render his own stake in them opaque. The result reads like an unwitting adaptation of Nietzsche's hydraulic view of the relation of culture to power, whereby each excludes the other, in method if not in argument.

Politically, as intellectually, there is the same strange astigmatism. Though no radical, Lepenies has never been the conventional product of a German *juste milieu*. Sympathetic to Palestinian rights in a country where unconditional support for Israel has long been the norm, he was openly critical of Germany's backing for Croat ambitions in the break-up of Yugoslavia, disliked Yeltsin from the start, and warned against capitalist triumphalism in the wake of the collapse of the USSR, predicting that ideas of communism might come to have another life. Nor has he any affinity with the increasingly vocal heralds—Herfried Münkler and others—of the necessity of German hegemony in Europe. Yet at no point in his extended critical account of French dreams of another Europe is there any acknowledgment that there might be good reason to fear such German dominance, with its consequences for Mediterranean members of the EU. In its absence, *Die Macht am Mittelmeer* inevitably resembles a self-satisfied brief on the follies of the French for his country's *Bildungsbürgertum*.

One twinge of conscience there is, but it too is a displacement. Lepenies ends his book with some limp words about the need for the European Union to do more for the less fortunate parts of the world it has not always treated well in the past, especially Africa, which can only be helped when France and Germany work together. But this merely highlights how little attention his narrative has paid to 'Eurafrrique', the set of French plans to incorporate and exploit North Africa in colonial, and later post-colonial, arrangements under the aegis of Europe. The extent to which European integration was made possible by acceptance of these plans has been laid out in detail by the Swedish scholars Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson in their book *Eurafrica* (2016), who stress the continuity between fascist plans for Eurafrica and René Mayer's vision, drafted alongside Jean Monnet in Algiers during the war, of a heavily industrialized Rhineland state under joint French and German control, to be supported by North African agriculture. After the war, commitment to Eurafrica—'a dowry for Europe' as a means to 'seduce the Germans'—was written into the Schuman Plan by Mayer and became a background condition

of the Treaty of Rome from the start. Adenauer, a staunch supporter of the Anglo-French attack on Egypt in 1956, stood fully behind it. Lepenies was certainly aware of Hansen and Jonsson's study, which sports his praise for it. But though Eurafrika was historically the most persistent of French dreams for Europe, since it was not aimed against, but on the contrary supported by Germany, it finds no sustained place in Lepenies's account.

In the spirit of Sainte-Beuve, *Die Macht am Mittelmeer* provides much background, and overflows with genealogies of contemporary discourses about North and South. Lepenies has eavesdropped on the invalids on the sickbed of Europe for decades, and has on occasion offered penetrating comments about the place of culture elsewhere in the Union. In a review of his time as *Kulturträger* in Eastern Europe, he speaks bluntly of its mistakes:

Overemphasizing the role of culture became a strategy of the European Union to deal with its bad conscience. While the countries of Eastern Europe were still denied entrance into the Common Market, they were invited to join NATO and were commended above all for their cultural achievements. Military and cultural invitation had to make up for economic discrimination. Western cultural policy thus acquired a rather bad name in the East. It was seen as an escape and a cheap excuse.

This is a frank view from the inside. But the South/North problem in Europe was not displaced by an East/West problem. What remains puzzling is how this sensitive listener to Europe's lost voices could not discern in Agamben's muddled desperation the cry of the weak no longer content with what passes for mercy on the Spree.