Is Europe a Peninsula of Asia?: Paul Valéry's "The Crisis of the Mind"(1919) and Its Diffusion[1]

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Abstract: Paul Valéry's 1919 treatise "The Crisis of the Mind" warned that World War I signaled the decline of Europe's global leadership. Valéry called for a revival of Europe's intellectual and cultural spirit. He questioned the continent's future, implying two options: Europe could maintain its influence or become a mere "peninsula" of Asia. This metaphor became prominent after the Russo–Japanese War, underscoring Europe's geographic and historical entanglement with the larger Eurasian landmass, particularly in its conflicts with Asia. White supremacists in the United States, such as Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard, appropriated this concept to support racial theories. Stoddard portrayed World War I as a "civil war" of the white race and advocated for immigration restrictions. In the 1930s, Japan also intensified its endeavors to assert dominance over Asia and the Eurasian continent. Japanese intellectuals influenced by Valéry's Committee for Intellectual Cooperation argued in favor of Japan assuming the task of shaping a new modernity to replace Europe. Valéry acknowledged Europe's crisis but simultaneously envisioned its potential to remain a leading intellectual force. This idea still resonates, as is reflected in French President Emmanuel Macron's 2024 speech on Europe's global role.

Introduction

Herodotus asserted that "the boundaries of Europe are quite unknown" (Rawlinson, 1859, p.38). Europe and Asia exist on the same continent. They are interconnected; therefore, it is still considerably challenging to determine the boundaries dividing the continents (Derrida, 1992). This demarcation difficulty is not merely geographical. It is also intricately associated with the definition of the very ideas and concepts originating in Europe. In other words, the European identity is inherently delineated by the ways in which its conceptual constructs are contrasted against representations of beliefs emanating from the Orient or Asia. Edward Said suggested in *Orientalism* (1978) that the Oriental has long been represented as non-European, whether or not this characterization is traced as far back as Aeschylus' *The Persians* (Said, 1994, p.21).

Herodotus rejected his predecessors' geographical construal of Europe, contending that Europe was a larger entity than Asia (Rawlinson, 1859, pp.33–34). He did not accept the world map proposed by Hecataeus of Miletus, which depicted

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a planet comprising the three roughly equal-sized regions of Europe, Asia, and Libya (Africa) (Figure 1, Bunbury, 1879, pp.148–149). Later Europeans "discovered" that Earth also encompassed the continent of America. Thus, they realized that in geographical terms, Europe was merely a peninsula of the vast Eurasian continent. However, Europe's geographical smallness generated a complex mix of confidence and anxiety in Europeans. The subsequent rise of the American continent further destabilized the demarcation of Europe's boundaries[2].

Shortly after World War I, Paul Valéry's "The Crisis of the Mind" (1919) highlighted this European dilemma, terming it a historical crisis (Roger, 2005, pp.283–290). Before "La crise de l'esprit" (1919) was published in French, its contents were originally published in English in *The Athenaeum*, London, in two parts titled "The Spiritual Crisis" (April 11, 1919) and "The Intellectual Crisis" (May 2, 1919). Valéry expressed a profound concern in these articles, stating that World War I had precipitated Europe's decline and had transformed what he deemed the pinnacle of civilization into a site of internal conflict and instability. He favoured a revival of Europe's intellectual and cultural spirit, which he believed should counterbalance the forces of science, military power, and mass movements emerging internally or springing from Asia and America. In the process, Valéry questioned: would Europe decline as a mere peninsula of a massive continent, or could it wrest the initiative of becoming an intellectual centre? Valéry's article was written in English; thus, it was unexpectedly repurposed in ways he had not anticipated, particularly in America and Asia, including Japan. This paper focuses on the metaphor of Europe as a peninsula of Asia to examine how Valéry's question was received and appropriated over time.

Macron's Updated Version of "The Crisis of the Mind"

French President Emmanuel Macron's 2024 speech evidenced that geopolitically, Valéry's question remains significantly and critically challenging. Macron issued a stark warning about Europe's future in a speech titled "Europe: It Can Die," delivered on April 25, 2024 (Macron, 2024). Notwithstanding whether he articulated a genuine concern or intended the speech as a strategic action to further his personal political prospects, Macron's 2024 address surpassed his first Sorbonne

[2] This can be linked to 20th-century scholarly research and debates surrounding the historical causes of the rise or decline of the "West," particularly in the context of America's emergence as a global power. Europe's characterization as a peninsula is often associated with fears of revolution and the potential for mass movements to disrupt its aristocratic cultural foundations. Since the late 20th century, and especially following Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (1997), there has been a notable increase in studies investigating the origins of modern civilization in Europe and its subsequent global dominance. These studies, including Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence* (2000), have shifted focus toward structural and environmental explanations, moving away from interpretations based on race or religion. However, the metaphor of Europe as a peninsula remains influential, particularly in contemporary discussions surrounding immigration issues.

speech seven years ago in its urgency and lecture-like tone. Macron emphasized the "existential risk to our continent," urging his audience to recognize the gravity of the situation and act decisively. He cited threats posed by Russia, China, and US protectionism and warned that Europe risked fading into irrelevance unless it made well-defined choices and prepared itself accordingly.

Notably, Macron referenced Europe's crisis in terms reminiscent of Paul Valéry, as is illuminated by his words: "At the end of World War I, Paul Valéry remarked that we now know our civilizations are mortal. We must be clear about the fact that today, our Europe is mortal (. ...) It can die, and it all depends on our choices." This passage apparently echoed from the first sentence in Valéry's "The Spiritual Crisis," "We civilizations now know that we are mortal" and France or England would be remembered like Nineveh in the future (Valéry, 1919a, p.182). Valéry, partly because he wrote in English, likened the situation in Europe to that of Hamlet and asked whether it is possible for Europe to hold its pre-eminence in all fields, posing a following question.

> Will Europe become what she is in reality, that is, a little promontory of the continent of Asia? Or will Europe remain what she seems to be, that is, the precious part of the terrestrial universe, the pearl of the sphere, the brain of a vast body? (Valéry, 1919b, p.279).

Macron avoided the symbol of a promontory or peninsula, emphasizing its presence and potentiality. In Macron's words, "Europe is not just a piece of the West, but a continent-world that thinks about its universality and the planet's great balances." Macron cleverly repurposed Valéry's peninsula metaphor, emphasizing Europe's importance as a still-relevant ideal and force of reason while carefully evading racial discourse. He simultaneously hinted at geopolitical concerns, stating, "Europe has begun to clearly reaffirm the existence of its borders. However, it has forgotten to take responsibility for and protect its external borders—not as impenetrable fortresses, but as boundaries between the inside and the outside." In so doing, he also signalled that he was ready to address immigration-related issues.

Thus, while Macron did not explicitly use the term "peninsula," he echoed and inherited the geopolitical crisis consciousness surrounding the concept since Valéry's postulation. How did this once prevalent yet unfamiliar designation of Europe as a peninsula first gain traction?

Europe: a Continent or a Peninsula?

Europe has been portrayed as a distinct continent since Herodotus. For example, renowned medieval European maps, often rendered in the "T and O" shape, depicted the world as comprising three major regions: Europe, Asia, and Africa. These maps showcased Europe's dominance and positioned it centrally while illustrating Asia and Africa as appendages. The concept of four continents emerged with the discovery of the Americas, and each landmass was then associated with a cardinal direction from the European perspective: Asia with the East, Africa with the South, Europe with the North, and America with the West. Allegories associated with the four continents had become widespread by the 16th century and appeared frequently in paintings, sculptures, and fountains that symbolized Europe's

perceived global supremacy (Arizzoli & Horowitz, 2020). Europe was typically represented in this artistic tradition as a Greco-Roman goddess like figure. This embodiment of Europe was often accompanied by an owl, which signifies wisdom, and a horse, which denotes military strength. Conversely, allegorical depictions of Asia, Africa, and America frequently featured semi-nude male or female figures in subordinate roles offering exotic crops, spices, and animals, symbolizing their perceived functions of these regions as resource-rich lands serving Europe.

The Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II (1865-77) in Milan showcases a striking example of such imagery (Figure 2). The gallery was built when European imperial dominance peaked in the 19th century, and its original iconography remains generally intact even though some details have been updated over time. The poses of the goddess like allegorical manifestations of the four continents are particularly revealing. The figures embodying America and Africa engage actively with their surroundings with one hand outstretched as if to direct their attendants. Thus, both representations resemble plantation overseers managing their labourers. Africa is associated with abundance and is depicted holding a cornucopia. America carries the Rod of Asclepius, a symbol of healing and medicine. Conversely, Asia is notably passive; she appears as a weary odalisque: her hands are lowered, and her gaze is averted, evoking an image of decline.

In stark contrast, the European goddess wields a sceptre, which denotes kingship. She also holds a book representing the law. Both objects serve as visual indicators of Europe's economic and legal dominance over Africa and America and, by extension, the world. The composition subtly reinforces a hegemony: Europe governs and organizes, while the other continents serve it as sources of its material wealth and labour. This imagery emphasizes stationery and diagrams, which symbolize knowledge, science, and civilization. Europe's global economic distribution network is also featured via a fertile corner overflowing with fruits sourced worldwide. The military power underpinning Europe's civilization is subtly integrated into the composition through a horse. The divergence in the skies presented in the four images is another striking detail: the paintings depicting Asia, Africa, and America exhibit hues suggesting sunrise or sunset; only Europe basks under clear, open skies. This visual contrast reinforces the idea that the other continents require the guiding light of European civilization, notwithstanding their perception as primitive or in decline.

Asia's picturization incorporates a camel standing beside an aged Mandarin figure veiled by incense smoke. Meanwhile, the goddess figures in the panels representing Africa and America are attended exclusively by robust young men. The inclusion of the elderly Mandarin in the characterization of Asia probably insinuates a once-great civilization now past its prime. The contrast becomes immediately evident when one enters the Galleria from Milan's iconic landmark, the Piazza del Duomo. Asia is to the right, marked by despotism, as suggested by the Mandarin figure. Europe, radiant in the light of civilization, is positioned on the left. This juxtaposition renders the intended message unmistakable: Europe is the beacon of progress, opposing the supposedly stagnant or regressive East. The four allegorical panels embody the European civilizational and economic network. This

system collects resources available worldwide and transforms them into commodities showcased in a grand hall replete with symbols of modernity and progress: electricity, steel, and glass.

The prototype for this representational system can be traced to the first World's Fair in London. The Galleria is a prime example of this model of collecting and reorganizing objects from across the world, assigning differential labour values to their production, and displaying them for sale or admiration. Department stores and museums throughout Europe replicated this framework in later years. The paintings in the Galleria (Figure 3) subtly overlay the metaphorical "fire" of civilization onto the artificial glow of the Galleria's electric lighting, particularly in the images on the European panels, merging industrial progress with the ideological legacy of European supremacy. It is no coincidence that in the film *Wonka* (2023), the protagonist's dream of launching his chocolate shop was fulfilled by Galéries Gourmet, which was modelled after the Galleria, albeit the four allegorical paintings were removed.

Despite its stature as a global hub for gathering and trading goods, Europe's modest scale often surprises visitors from the previously designated three other "continents." Europe's diminutive size becomes strikingly apparent compared to America, India, China, and even Japan. American historian Boorstin cites the words of a well-known British novelist from an unknown source:

> "For the American tourist," Aldous Huxley has shrewdly observed, "the greatest charm of foreign travel is the very high ratio of European history to European geography. Conversely, for the European, who has come to feel the oppressive weight of a doubtless splendid, but often fatal past, the greatest charm of travel in the New World is the high ratio of its geography to its history." (Boorstin, 1953, pp.30-31)

This observation underscores Europe's relatively limited physical presence. The fact that the language of an island off Europe's coast is now spoken worldwide further reinforces this point.

A discourse emerged as Europe's pre-eminence came under increasing scrutiny during the First World War, recasting Europe not as a continent but as a peninsula in the vast Eurasian landmass. The term "European peninsula" was already used during the early modern period. However, it served primarily as a geographical descriptor without attracting significant geopolitical attention. That Europe might be attacked and cornered by hostile horns instead of receiving a cornucopia from Asia, Africa, or even America essentially explains the anxiety underpinning Valéry's metaphor. Notably, these threats were first articulated by Halford Mackinder, the father of geopolitics. According to Halford Mackinder's Heartland theory, the demarcation between Europe and Asia on the Eurasian continent became focal for geopolitical deliberation. Mackinder proposed a tripolar world structure in which the Heartland, the central region of Eurasia, represented the pivotal element. He argued that control over this region would translate into dominance over Eurasia and, by extension, the entire world (Figure 4, Mackinder, 1904, p.435). He further contended that the two poles of Eurasia were counterbalanced by a confederation of maritime states, including the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia.

Mackinder employed the term "European peninsula" (Mackinder, 1904, p.427), but the core of his argumentation was grounded in his broader historical perspective that Europe and Asia have long been in opposition. This theme continues to shape global history. Notably, Mackinder formulated these ideas in 1904, the year that Japan went to war with Russia. That conflict instigated the coining of the term "yellow peril" to denote the perceived threat posed by Asian peoples to European civilization (Mackinder, 1904, p.437). However, at that time, Mackinder's perspective did not attract widespread attention.

American zoologist Madison Grant was one of the earliest personalities of the English-speaking world to popularize the European peninsula metaphor as a geopolitical pivot (Grant, 1916, p.11, p.88). Grant argued in *The Passing of the Great Race; Or, The Racial Basis of European History* (1916) that the white race in Europe was a minority on the global stage from a biological—or, by contemporary standards, pseudo-biological—perspective. Thus, it was destined to be overwhelmed by the numerical majority of racial identities populating other regions. Understandably, his writings significantly influenced the movement to control immigration in the United States. Grant's ideas were adopted from the work of the French eugenicist Georges Vacher de Lapouge, whose now-discredited work *The Aryan* (L'Aryen, 1899) attempted to define the white race as a distinct species (Spiro, 2009, pp.113-116). Paul Valéry did not overtly advocate white supremacy, but he was a known devotee of de Lapouge's ideas. As a student at Montpellier, Valéry joined de Lapouge's laboratory around 1891, assisting in the measurement of six hundred skulls from an old cemetery (Hecht, 2005, p.194). In this context, the reference in Valéry's articles to Hamlet holding his friend's skull acquires a different significance because Valéry implied that the present-day European Hamlet confronted the haunting presence of the war dead.

> From an immense terrace of Elsinore which Extends from Basle to Cologne, and touches the sands of Nieuport, the marshes of the Somme, the chalk of Champagne, the granite of Alsace, the Hamlet of Europe now looks upon millions of ghosts. (Valéry, 1919a, p.184)

and

> If he picks up a skull, it is a famous skull. Whose was it? This was Leonardo. He invented the flying man; but the flying man has not exactly served the intentions of the inventor. (…) And this second skull is Leibnitz, who dreamed of universal peace, And this was Kant, who begat Hegel, who begat Marx, who begat... (Valéry, 1919a, p.184).

This passage aligns with the genealogy of *memento mori* and *vanitas* that predated Hamlet. Simultaneously, Valéry implied cleverly that the white male skull, long credited with embodying and generating European intelligence from Leonardo to perhaps even Valéry himself, was imperilled. The final omission probably alludes to Lenin, reflecting contemporary perceptions of Russian communism as a monstrous hybrid of Oriental despotism combined with the European ideals that ignited the French Revolution. In light of the Russian Revolution, one could construe this extract to symbolize the beheading of past kings. In any event, Valéry and Grant were linked through their portrayal of the European peninsula. They probably never

met; however, both drew from the Aryan-supremacist rhetoric inherited from figures such as de Lapouge, and both depicted a European peninsula under threat from the continent of Asia.

Madison Grant's postulations in *The Passing of the Great Race* resonated globally with readers and scholars who felt threatened by the so-called "colored" peoples. In the United States, Grant's ideas strongly influenced the historian Stoddard, who authored *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (1921), a notorious white supremacist text that remains in circulation. Grant wrote the foreword to Stoddard's book, reiterating that Europe was nothing more than a peninsula that needed a breakwater to guard against tsunami-like hordes of coloured people (Stoddard, 1921, p.xi). This sentiment is depicted sensationally on the book's cover (Figure 5). It is unlikely that Grant envisioned Japan's Great Wave; nevertheless, the metaphor of a breakwater to protect civilization would become a recurring motif alongside the expression "European peninsula."

Interestingly, Stoddard's work cites Valéry's "Spiritual Crisis" as a justification for erecting a white racial bulwark to curb immigration (Stoddard, 1921, pp.193-195). Stoddard's familiarity with Valéry was limited: he quoted an article, summarizing only "The Spiritual Crisis" without mentioning the phrase "a little promontory of the continent of Asia," which suggests that Stoddard was unaware that Valéry had employed the same metaphor. Nonetheless, Valéry's sense of crisis resonated deeply with Stoddard. Stoddard quoted an extended extract from Valéry before drawing attention to the line, "The rolling of the ship has been so heavy that at the end the best-hung lamps have been upset" (Stoddard, 1921, p.195). In his statement, Valéry alluded to the Lusitania, which sank during the First World War. This reference would have appealed strongly to Stoddard. In his view, the First World War was essentially a civil war of the white race—a modern Peloponnesian conflict. Valéry warned that the world would progress "from Taylorization to Taylorization" as Europe struggled internally. He contended that "a perfect and final antheap" would emerge, ultimately leading to the European peninsula being overrun by a powerful and tyrannical megalopolis (Valéry, 1919a, p.184). Ironically, for both Stoddard and Grant, the term "antheap" derived from "Taylorization" evoked the image of skyscrapers then emerging in the United States. Valéry's analysis encompassed Asia as well as America as threats to the privileged status of the European spirit, which was traditionally considered the guardian of civilization, destined to support, control, and renew. Indeed, in his forward to *Reflections on the World Today* (Regards sur le Monde Actuel, 1931), Valéry noted both Japan's victory over China in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, when Japan acquired European military technology, and the U.S.A.'s victory over Spain in the Spanish–American War of 1898, in which European science and technology played a similar role (Roger, 2005, p.148). From Valéry's perspective, both conflicts foreshadowed a European crisis. Incidentally, Macron's reference to China and the U.S.A. in the previously cited speech reinherited and updated Valéry's warnings.

Valéry's Miracle of Changing Water into Wine?

Noteworthily, Valéry's analysis of the diffusion of European civilization was marked by ambivalence. He warned that the European peninsula risked being overwhelmed by the vast continent of Asia, but he also believed that Europe could continue to discharge its erstwhile functions as the intellectual nucleus of Asia. This duality is exemplified by Valéry's participation during the 1930s in the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, an advisory body for the League of Nations. Given Valéry's ambivalence, it is worth quoting one of his most famous poetic works, "Lost Wine"(Le Vin Perdu, 1922):

Once on a day, in the open Sea
(Under what skies I cannot recall),
I threw, as oblation to vacancy,
More than a drop of precious wine....

Who decreed your waste, oh potion?
Did I perhaps obey some divine?
Or else the heart's anxiety,
Dreaming blood, spilling the wine?

Its habitual clarity
After a mist of rosiness
Returned as pure again to the sea....

The wine lost, drunken the waves !...
I saw leaping in the salt air
Shapes of the utmost profundity.... (Lawler, 1977, p.267)

The laws of physics mandate that any wine poured into the sea would vanish without a trace. This natural phenomenon is metaphorically analogous to the impending engulfment of the European peninsula by the turbulent waves of Asia. Miracles such as transforming the colour of the sea become conceivable in poetic or spiritual realms that are not governed by physical laws. Jesus is said to have turned water into wine at the wedding at Cana; similarly, Valéry's verse envisions the supernatural power of culture, language, and ideas.

The phenomenon of a globally influential yet diminutive European outpost was debated even after World War I as a manifestation of undercover Eurocentrism, and questions were asked about why and how Europe came to dominate in science, economy, and culture. Denis de Rougemont, a prominent French cultural historian in Switzerland, invoked another celebrated exemplar of European scientific excellence from his country of residence: Einstein's $E = mc^2$. According to de Rougemont, the formula may be inferred as an assertion that *Europe*'s *culture* magnifies its *mass* despite the mediocrity of its scale (de Rougemont, 1965, p.54). The precise meaning of Einstein's original equation may be elusive, but de Rougemont's intentional echoing of Valéry's "Lost Wine" is evident: the soft power of European culture can transcend physical laws and trigger a global-scale chain reaction resembling an atomic superpower.

Yet, this phenomenon remains an illusion, as the poem elucidates. We can no longer stop the spread of European-generated science and its methodologies. That feat would amount to trying to put a genie back in the bottle. In many ways, the science that was once the hallmark of European innovation has turned against its creators. In his forward to *Reflections on the World Today* (1931), for example, Valéry specifically highlights two points: that "Europe founded science", but "by its very nature science is essentially transmissible," and, like the American continent, "Asia is about four times larger than Europe." Accordingly, perhaps with the political rapprochement between Germany and Japan in mind, he expresses concern that the following is occurring:

> Now, *local* European politics, dominating *general* European policy and making it absurd, has led rival Europeans to export the methods and the machines that made Europe supreme in the world. Europeans have competed for profit in awakening, instructing, and arming vast peoples who, before, were imprisoned in their traditions and asked nothing better than to remain so. (italics original, Valéry, 1989, p.17).

Valéry's resignation in this extract appears to reaffirm the tragic vision of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818.)

Twenty-first-century audiences, especially individuals born in this century, would find it difficult to fathom that science was once considered a localized pursuit. It was widely assumed in the nineteenth century that non-Europeans could imitate European science but could never independently develop the discipline. This sentiment is partially reflected in the design of euro banknotes (Figure 6), which feature fictional bridges and windows in accordance with the tradition of "capriccio." Both Valéry and Macron championed the spiritual concept of Capriccio, which refers in the present context to architectural fantasy meticulously informed by research into ancient artistic styles. The images imprinted on the euro notes symbolize Europe's capacity to both connect (bridges) and segregate (windows). In emphasizing the need to reaffirm borders, Macron urged people to remember that such windows could also function as gates. Noteworthily, the euros depict the evolution of bridges and windows from the Roman and Baroque eras to the modern, technologically advanced designs on 500-euro banknotes. In essence, modern science and technology have shifted considerably further from the European spiritual ideals that these images once symbolized.

The onset of modernity is often dated to the First World War. At that time, the war was perceived as a civil conflict in which the Europeans were pitted against the science they had created. The Great War was sometimes even regarded as a second Thirty Years' War. One consequence of this perception was a movement to study and compare literature from across national boundaries as a unified European and world literature(s) as a countermeasure to rising jingoism. The seeds of what we now call European or global history were sown in such a context.

The Peloponnesian War was reinvented as a prototype of an ancient global conflict; similarly, the Persian Wars came to be interpreted as a precursor to a future world war. American historian Frederick John Teggart popularized this perspective. Teggart stressed the inseparable connections between Europe and Asia in *The*

Processes of History (1918) inspired by Mackinder's Heartland Theory, criticizing Eurocentric historical narratives. He argued that the Persian Wars, as chronicled by Herodotus, illustrated the enduring clash between the East and the West. He summarized *The Histories* of Herodotus, adding the following insight: "the epochs of European history were marked by alternating movements across the imaginary line that separates East and West" (Teggart, 1918, p.44). Interestingly, Andre Gunder Frank later mistakenly quoted this passage as "History is marked by alternating movements across the imaginary line that separates East from West in Eurasia" at the beginning of his *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (1998) as Herodotus's words, even though Tegart issued the statement (Frank, 1998, p.vii). Nevertheless, Teggart's vision of a Eurasian history did not attain widespread recognition until the latter half of the twentieth century. His ideas underscored that the borders of the European peninsula were important to fend off stormy advances from Asia.

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) incorporates an example of this geopolitical metaphor. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is considered one of the most influential novels in the English-speaking world. It envisions a future tripolar world in which Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia are locked in a perpetual stalemate. As indicated in a color-coded diagram from the Wikipedia article "Political geography of Nineteen Eighty-Four" explaining this novel, the "disputed territories" are marked in grey, a detail that alludes subtly to Mackinder's theories (Figure 7). Novelist Thomas Pynchon highlighted this connection in his introduction to the Penguin Modern Classics edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, noting that the world Orwell described was derived directly from Mackinder's ideas (Pynchon, 2003, p.xii, see Figure 4 too). A notable passage near the end of the novel encapsulates this sentiment: "He [Winston, the protagonist] looked up again at the portrait of Big Brother—the colossus that bestrode the world! The rock against which the hordes of Asia dashed themselves in vain!" (Orwell, 2003, p.342). The map of Orwell's dystopia evidences the constant conflict between Eurasia and Eastasia over the Eurasian Heartland, and their boundaries remain in constant flux. The text implies Oceania's tensions with Eurasia, but the metaphor of the rock against the hordes of Asia is reminiscent of the bulwark image found in Valéry's writings and suggests a more expansive dispute.

Indeed, neither Orwell nor Valéry could have predicted it, but Valéry's sense of spiritual crisis resonated in Japan during his own time, particularly as Japan sought to displace the European empire in Asia in the 1930s. In this context, Yonekura Hisahito's oil painting (Figure 8, Yonekura, 1937, pp.27-28) delivers a striking visual representation of how Valéry's crisis was received in Japan. Yonekura was one of the first Japanese artists to introduce surrealism centred on Salvador Dalí. His work titled "Crisis of Europe" was produced in 1936 in the period between the Manchurian Incident and the Sino-Japanese War. The title itself indicates indebtedness to Valéry's treatise, even though this connection has not been thoroughly examined. Yonekura employed a double image technique reminiscent of Dalí to superimpose an ancient world map (attributed to Hecataeus, see Figure 1) onto a human skull. Valéry observed that the skulls of great intellectuals spawned

subsequent generations of thinkers whose ideas eventually betrayed their original intent. Similarly, Yonekura suggested that no "horse" or "carriage" was being steered by the skull of Europe. Instead, some "ideas"—symbolized by Asia—had slipped away from the region's grasp as the helpless figure remained tethered to the past. The apparently random machine parts emerging from the skull further evoke uncertainty about their potential for good or evil. The painting's title implied that Europe could be crisis-seized, but the situation could differ elsewhere; it intimated that peninsula-thin Europe was losing its productive capacity, and Asia was poised to drive future change.

A counterargument in response to these transformative developments emerged in Japan in the 1940s: Japan would supplant Europe and usher in a new version of modernity. A seminar titled "Overcoming Modernity" was organized in 1942 by Kawakami Tetsutaro, a fervent admirer of Valéry. Kawakami claimed he had been inspired by the Committee for Intellectual Cooperation that Valéry had helped establish for the League of Nations[3]. In this sense, Valéry's discourse on crisis was repurposed to justify Japan's dominance in Asia and bolster the argument that Japan should transcend Europe's spiritual malaise and forge a new civilization. In a manner of speaking, Valéry's pouring of wine unexpectedly generated "Shapes of the utmost profundity" and tainted the seas around Japan.

Conclusion

In summary, explorations of Europe's ambiguous boundaries, both physical and intellectual, reveal the long intertwining of the continent's identity with its representation as a peninsula of Eurasia. The previous sections have demonstrated that European self-definition has always been shaped by its perceived relationship with Asia and the broader world, from Herodotus' rejection of earlier world maps to Valéry's poignant exposition on Europe's "Spiritual" and "Intellectual Crisis." The historical discourse is replete with metaphors of fragile boundaries, hostile forces, and the fleeting nature of cultural dominance. It evolved from early geographical descriptions into a complex critique of Eurocentrism.

This evolution also involved the contentious transfiguration of the peninsula metaphor to a tool of racial politics. Personalities such as Madison Grant and, subsequently, Stoddard appropriated the notion of Europe as a mere appendage, a vulnerable peninsula. This conception implied that Europe's diminutive physical scale foretold its eventual demise because of pressures exerted by non-European populations. Stoddard's white supremacist rhetoric warned that Europe needed a protective breakwater against the overwhelming "colored" hordes. Such expressions are emblematic of dangerous conflations of geographical metaphors with racial ideologies. Conversely, the warnings of Valéry and Stoddard were reinterpreted in Japan as an opportunity to articulate Japanese imperialism. This development best

[3] The relationship between "Overcoming Modernity" and Valéry is explained in detail by Yamada (2001) and Calichman (2008).

demonstrates the ambivalence of Valéry's "The Crisis of the Mind" and the metaphor of the European peninsula.

Valéry's ambivalence was expressed in his "Lost Wine" and more expansive poetic meditations on Europe's destiny. It was repurposed over time, first by geopolitical thinkers such as Halford Mackinder and later by critics and political leaders such as Emmanuel Macron. Macron's 2024 speech echoed Valéry's concerns but reframed them to suit the contemporary context. It underscored the persistent anxiety that Europe risks being reduced to a mere peripheral entity unless it reasserts its intellectual and cultural agency. His call to action is intensively interlaced with symbolic imagery, for instance, the bridges and windows on the euro banknotes that evoke Europe's historical role of both connector and divider.

Ultimately, such dialectical double meanings embedded in historical and literary discourses serve as reminders that Europe's crisis has never solely concerned physical geography; the predicament equally relates to ideas. The tensions between Europe's modest physical presence and its global cultural influence have spurred debates on its future. These deliberations continue to shape conversations on the European identity, global migrations, and the evolving power balance in an increasingly interconnected world. Poetry and discourse command remarkable powers. They can disseminate ideas and legitimize even opposing ideologies and can thus challenge the natural decay of cultural certainty, just as precious wine diffusing into water can seemingly defy the inexorable march of entropy.

Figure. 1, "The World According to Hecataeus"

Figure. 2, the Galleria in Milan

Europe

America

Africa

Asia

Figure 3.

Left: Carlo Canella, “The New Gallery in Milan with night-time passers-by” (1870)
Right: Angelo Morbelli, “The Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in Milan” (1872)

Figure 4, “The Natural Seats of Power” (1904)

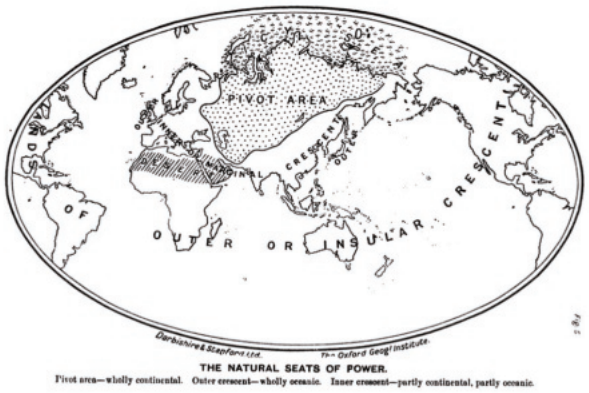

Figure 5, Cover Jacket of Stoddard’s *Rising Tide of Color* (1918)

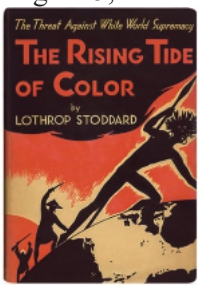

Figure 6, Euro Banknotes

Figure 7, Oceania (black), Eurasia (red) and Eastasia (yellow) per the Tripolar World Described in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* ("Political geography of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*")

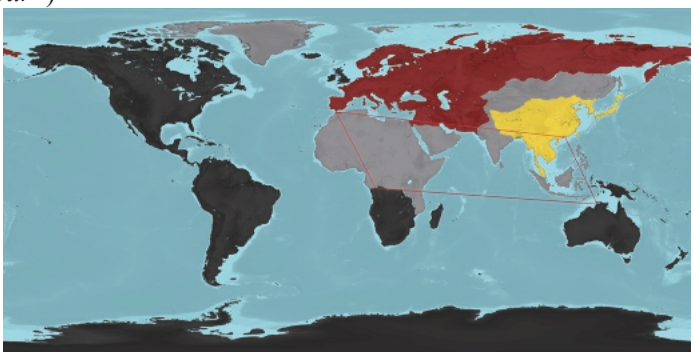

Figure 8, Yonekura Hisashito, "Crisis of Europe" (1936)

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