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**Michael E. Nolan**, *The Inverted Mirror: Mythologizing the Enemy in France and Germany, 1898-1914*. Vol. 2, Studies in Contemporary European History. New York: Berghahn Books, 2005. ix + 141 pp. Figures, tables, bibliography, and index. \$50.00 (hb). ISBN 1-57181-669-0.

Review by Christopher Fischer, Indiana State University.

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The rivalry between France and Germany in the decades before World War I—as well as for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—has possessed a central place in European diplomatic, military, and political history. Within this much-tortured relationship the French and Germans considered themselves hereditary enemies, a view exacerbated by three wars.

Michael Nolan's *The Inverted Mirror* takes up one strand of this broader history by examining how the two archenemies imagined one another in the decades before World War I. Drawing upon literary works, economic tracts, political writings, newspapers and journals, Nolan seeks to explicate how mythologies, drawn from a “strange pastiche of national caricature, selective history, and twisted facts” (p. 3), contributed to the tensions in the decades before World War I. In addition to juxtaposing French and German images, Nolan offers a second twist to these representations; both the French and Germans ascribed to their enemies “exaggerated or negative versions of precisely those qualities that it felt to be lacking or inadequate in itself” (p. 2). Each side saw its own anxieties and fears reflected in the “inverted mirror” of the other.

The first of five thematic chapters offers an overview of French and German perceptions of the major events from the mid-1890s to the eve of World War I. For example, the Dreyfus Affair served to confirm mutual suspicions on both sides of the Vosges. Rather than using the occasion to ponder their own troubled civilian-military relations, German commentators instead saw in the Affair a confirmation of French parliamentary degeneracy and failed leadership. Many French saw the duplicitous hand of German espionage at work. Further crises, most notably the two Moroccan Crises, punctuated by minor slights (e.g. the desertion of Germans from the Foreign Legion or arguments between German tourists and natives in Nancy), only served to heighten mutual distrust. The chapter ends with a fascinating if brief discussion of the image of Wilhelm II in France as it changed from a potentially hopeful figure of rapprochement to the embodiment of either supreme incompetence or “Teutonic evil” (p. 20).

The following chapter, “Hereditary Enemies,” examines literary representations of the Franco-Prussian War. In both countries, the memory of 1870-1871 underpinned negative images of the other. The French, unwilling to accept their role in the events of 1870-1871, projected onto Germans (especially Prussians) “duplicity, barbarism, and cruelty” (p. 30), to cope with the strange defeat. The Germans, in contrast, viewed the victory as the natural culmination of efforts begun during the Napoleonic Wars. Alongside such imaginings, some writers such as Paul and Victor Margueritte, Guy du Maupassant, and Walter Bloem depicted the war in more balanced terms. Yet such objective voices were largely lost in the din of approaching war. Here the experience of 1870-1871 played into future plans: the Germans downplayed French capabilities by planning instead for the hard fights against England and Russia; the French, viewing 1870-1871 as an aberration, saw in French *élan* the antidote to German mindless obedience and militarism. The failures of Plan XVII and the Schlieffen Plan, grounded in false notions of the enemy and the nature of war, proved both mythologies wrong.

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Past and future wars served as one venue for French and Germans to ascribe stereotypes to their enemies. The realms of production and reproduction too stood as sites of mythologizing. Here, positive elements crept in at times. Some French writers, for example, admired German industrial efficiency and skill. Nolan notes, however, that solely positive views were the minority. More French saw such efficiency as dehumanizing thereby twisting their own concerns about French industrial power to create a more sinister vision of Germany's alleged superiority. In contrast, the French possessed a spirit of ingenuity that the Germans could not match. German commentators on the economy not surprisingly praised such efficiency and order in contrast to the anarchism, socialism, and general radicalism in French society. According to Nolan, this displacement allowed Germans to ignore social and political problems closer to home.

Reproduction and cultural mores more generally likewise allowed the hereditary enemies to paint a dark picture of the foe. The Germans, viewing the French as decadent, weak, and feminized, used the image of Marianne in at times almost scandalous fashion to caricature French social traits. The French, fearful of their own relative decline in birth rates, pointed to Germany's high rates of alcoholism as a sign of German decay, and as an explanation for the high levels of maternal and infant mortality. On a less serious note, the French also spent a good deal of time elaborating on the apparently inedible meals that Germans were compelled to wash down with copious quantities of beer. By invoking, exaggerating, and stereotyping each others diurnal habits, Nolan argues, the Germans and French helped solidify notions of the allegedly immutable national character of the enemy.

The ensuing chapter, "The Elusive Alsatian," looks at the place of the Alsatian in the national imagination. In French literature, Alsace no longer stood as a bridge between two lands. Rather, drawing on the works of writers such as Alphonse Daudet, Maurice Barrès, and René Bazin, Nolan argues that several iconic concepts of the Alsatian emerged. One image was the Alsatian (or Lorrainer) who had fled before the German onslaught or in light of ongoing oppression to seek refuge in the *mère patrie*. A second image of the Alsatian—one seemingly confirmed by French travelers to the region and by the work of Alsations such as the caricaturist Hansi—was that of the defiant French patriot, suffering under German rule and awaiting a return of French power. This ossified and idealized image of the Alsatian, according to Nolan, made compromise over the region all the more difficult.

One might add to this analysis that the Germans, too, played out many of their national fears and anxieties through the Alsations. Nolan does point out that the Germans viewed the status of Alsace-Lorraine as German territory a closed question. He further suggests that the Germans remained continually frustrated by Alsatian refusals to accept their "Germanness." Debates between Alsations and German nationalists did not, however, take place in the realm of literature but rather in newspapers and journals. Such debates reveal many German fears and anxieties which the Alsations came to symbolize. What was the relationship between national and regional identity in the relatively new, and federal, German nation? On what grounds—language, history, race, culture—were Germans to be united, and could one be German with elements of a French heritage? And finally, as seen in the 1913 Zabern Affair,<sup>[1]</sup> what were the relationships between the military and civilian leadership in Germany and between the crown and Reichstag? Alsations proved elusive on both sides of the border.

The final chapter, "Shades of Opinion," surveys the broad attitudes of French and German political parties from the Left, Right, and Center. In both countries, the Lefthere consisting primarily of the mainstream socialist parties did not generally partake in the creation of nationalist mythologies, but rather remained divided internally and externally as how best to react to a potential war. The Right in both countries, not surprisingly, held stronger views. The French Right feared and envied German strength compared to the weakness of the Republic, the German Right desired an empire comparable to France's (and England's). The center of the political spectrum harbored a mixed bag of positive and negative images. The chapter ends with a consideration of pacifism and its limits.

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While it is certainly a challenge to capture the main thrust of broad political opinion in both the Third Republic and Kaiserreich, one might wish for a bit more precision. The views of the Center Party, for example, are largely relegated to broad generalization. Likewise the French center, represented almost entirely by Joseph Caillaux, remains vaguely defined in Nolan's account. Nolan is correct that nationalism by and large tinged views of Franco-German relations across the political spectrum. Yet one is left to ask how large non-party forces nationalist associations such as Souvenir Français, the Ligue des Patriotes, the Pan-German League, the Naval League influenced the reciprocal views of the two nations.

The conclusion of the work eschews tying together the various strands of the argument. Rather, Nolan describes the often tortuous, though progressively after 1945 promising, evolution of Franco-German relations across the twentieth century. This sweeping perspective does the work an injustice by too briefly considering the concrete links between the images developed over several decades and the propaganda of the First World War.

More centrally, the notion of an inverted mirror needs further elaboration and clarification. How, for example, did the Alsatian serve as an inverted mirror? Was the region's allegedly steadfast loyalty a reflection of France's inability to hold onto the territory? More importantly, it remains unclear to what extent domestic debates influenced the creation of these images of the enemy in the respective countries. The issue of decadence, for example, haunted French writers. Many in Germany especially outside of Prussia worried about the militaristic, overbearing nature of German (Prussian) society. Did such domestic critiques merely conform to respective prejudices, or did French and German writers twist such debates to fit their own ends, and how?

*The Inverted Mirror* offers several contributions to those studying French and German relations in the years before the Great War. First, although Nolan may not always break new ground in laying out the image of Germany in France (and the reverse), his clear, concise descriptions serve to capture the essence of French and German mythologies of one another. This simultaneous examination of both French and German images likewise stands as one of the clear strengths of the work. Furthermore, Nolan consistently probes for countercurrents; objective understandings of the Franco-Prussian War, observers who saw a positive light across the Vosges, and representatives of the pacifist movement all have a place here. Nolan therefore offers not only a study in hatred, but one also sprinkled with the vague potential of a future rapprochement.

The decade before World War I was rife with the concerns and fears of a coming war. The French, as Nolan here shows, had their mythological beast to slay. The Germans, however, faced not just the French but an entire tetology of French, Russian, and English monsters. With the catalyst of war, such myths would be transformed into propaganda.

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## NOTES

[1] The Zabern Affair started with an altercation between a German lieutenant and a group of Alsatian recruits in 1913 and through a series of unfortunate events expanded into a national crisis which called into question the basic constitutional relationship between the Reichstag on one hand and the Emperor and Chancellor on the other.

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Christopher Fischer  
Indiana State University  
cfischer@isugw.indstate.org

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