"Good Romanians Go to Paris When They Die": Reflections on the Life and Work of Eugen Weber

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The only thing – the only – that makes me less nervous is that I know Eugen won't be critically judging this performance. (I hope.) I don't know if you all realize what it means to me to be chosen to address you. Quite simply, it is a dream come true.

I have two aims in this talk, and no matter how hard I try to define or massage them, I find they remain incompatible: evoking Eugen, the extraordinary and wonderful man who was my good and loyal friend for thirty-seven years (and the good friend of many of us in this room), and, on the other hand, critically assessing the views of the recently deceased Joan Palevsky Professor Emeritus, as they emerge in his large and brilliant oeuvre, accumulated in over half a century of research and composition. Infinitely less sure of myself than Mark Antony, I stand before you, wondering, "Have I come to praise Caesar or to bury him?"

In what follows, please forgive my talking at all about myself – it is off-putting in the context of celebrating a great man and a great historian – but as we had a long and close friendship, I cannot avoid a minimum of solipsism. I shall first talk about my meeting Eugen and my general impressions, how he struck me compared to other historians I had known or known of. In a second time, I'll discuss Peasants into Frenchmen, and then, in a third, I'll talk critically about Eugen's work on French politics and ideology. Finally, as a coda, I'll close, as I started, trying evoke the man – maybe even invoke his spirit, if we can.

I met Eugen Weber in the late fall of 1970. The meeting took place during the Christmas holidays. He was forty-five and an already important historian; I was twenty-five and a tyro
journalist who'd recently elected to go back to graduate school to take a Ph.D. in French history. I was intending to write a dissertation on the same topic that I had looked at closely in a master's thesis some years before: Paul Déroulède and the League of Patriots, 1882-1889. It went without saying that I was eager to meet the author of The Action Française and The Nationalist Revival in France, nor would I be lying if I said I wasn't curious to know the confectioner of charming sentences such as "le petit bonhomme reading his petit journal, while sipping his petit café," etc. As I was a native of Los Angeles, this was not hard to arrange. Eugen was accessible; he liked people, including students. At least he liked meeting them. After that, they were on their own.

I arrived around five. Professor Weber received me graciously, almost ceremoniously, opening his front door while I was still thirty feet away, so that the remainder of my walk up the steps toward the house felt like the ascent of a newly named diplomat approaching the dais to present his credentials to royalty – albeit broadly smiling royalty. I won't go on about Eugen's person; many of you knew him: a very handsome Mitteleuropäisches Mann dressed nattily à l'anglaise (I read in my journal that he had on a tweed coat and a red vest and wore Church shoes), who spoke slowly and melodiously with a British accent – an accent cut with very occasional hints of ethnic points far southeast of Great Britain.

When you combined Eugen's look and sound and style with his surroundings – a large beautiful modern home off Sunset Boulevard in Brentwood – you no longer had any feeling whatever that you were in the company of even a sophisticated academic; rather it reminded me of the time my father had taken me with him when he went for a story conference to the Beverly Hills home of the director Michael Kertesz. We made small talk while Eugen mixed martinis. Eugen could be scathing about people, including very much about people he loved – for repeated example, the French, collectively and individually. He was precise and deliberate in speaking, having nothing of the well-known American rapidity or obscurity of speech. He hugely
enjoyed wit and witticisms – his own, to be sure, but yours, too, if you could; they were rewarded with great gales of delight and knee-slapping laughter.

His favorite mood, nevertheless – his conversational angle of repose, I would say – was dour irony about everything under the sun. Did it come from a true pessimism about the human race and its prospects? I don't know. What I wrote in my journal the day after this long late-afternoon and evening get-together (around seven, Jacqueline invited me to stay for dinner, which I gratefully did. That turned out to be extremely rare; dinners chez Weber were always planned) was this: "boredom is his great challenge in life." Now I don't know if I was right – I was twenty-five years old, for God's sakes – nor did the next thirty-seven years bring me definitive proof for that over-confident assertion, though it certainly brought many, many more reflections about the question. In any case, and to summarize this over light, over frivolous, over long overture, let me say that it swiftly became as clear to me as Steuben crystal that I was not in the presence of an academic so much as of an Old Regime cultivated aristocrat. I should note I have never had the pleasure of knowing Peter Gay, Fritz Stern, or Jacques Barzun, who might have reminded me of Eugen. On the other hand, I had met Gordon Wright, Gordon Craig, Joseph Strayer, and Denis Brogan, and they most certainly did not. And I might add this impression – that he was not like the others – turned out to be precisely the one the host wished people to have.

Eugen was convinced in those days that historians needed to take a far closer look than they had done at the incredible decade of the 1880s, when, politically speaking, all was still possible. Gigantic Boulangism, stretching from mid-1886 (actually, in any meaningful sense, from the shocking elections of 1885) through the end of the '89 legislature in 1893, and raising every knotty political issue known to Western man, utterly fascinated him, as it did me. For Eugen – and, not to forget, he'd been for a time a student of Raoul Girardet's – Boulangism was mainly about wounded patriotism, defensive nationalism (revanchism), and charismatic leadership, beginning of course with this strange,
pathetic, and rather tragic-comic fellow who was *le général Revanche* himself but going on to include a number of the intellectuals Boulanger drew to his colors – notably the dandyish figure of the young Maurice Barrès, who quite captivated Eugen. (He was set to do his biography, he told me, but he knew that Robert Soucy was doing one, so he backed off.) Boulangism was also about the "americanization" and the theatricality of French electoral politics but seen against the ongoing attractions of the authoritarian savior.

Now amidst such a panoply of items, politics, per se, did not figure legion to Weber, as it did to me. I came at the complexity of the '80s armed with categories like "conservative," "reactionary," "counterrevolutionary," or "Right" and "Left," or the *primat der Innen-politik*, the State, and the disloyal opposition, the importance of political language, and the relevance of certain works in social science. Boulangism, in all its admittedly complex overlap with culture and *mentalité*, was, I thought, still a fundamentally *echt-politisches und ideologisches* affair and therefore required close analysis with concepts suited to studying politics and ideology and their conjuncture. Eugen believed that Adrien Dansette had said enough about "all that," not to mention about the covert royalist subventions and alliance with the Boulangists, right-wing alliance, and if he hadn't, well then Seager, in his English reduction of the *thèse d'État* of Jacques Néré, sufficed pretty nicely, thank you.

Now language interested Eugen – very much so – as of course it did me, but I presently came to realize, as we talked and the sun went down, that while Eugen liked to delectate on the ambiguities of the language, say, of Barrès in *La Cocarde* (not to mention fondling the metaphors of his novels, which I found *assomants*), I was constantly trying to see through what I considered to be the intentional obfuscation of Barrésian ambiguity and to pin down what I was sure were his meanings, regardless of what he said. (I'm not saying I was right any more than I'm saying he was wrong.) I was not particularly interested in Barrésian, Maurrasian, or Déroulédian prose, per se; I was far more intent on noting (even counting) the incidence of what,
even then, I was calling nation-talk ("nation," "national," "nationalitaire," "nationaliste") in the barodets and the other campaign literature. This sort of thing bored Eugen out of his skull, striking him as academic tedium, with a low pay-off rate. To sum it up, a book like Wolfgang Schivelbusch's recent The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery (2001), had it appeared then, would thus have pretty largely answered Eugen's prayers and removed Boulangism from his list of "must knows," while it has answered few of mine.

In sum, what was clear to both Weber and me at the end of only the first half of this long conversation was that, although we liked each other, we were nevertheless temperamentally, politically, and historiographically far apart. Weber was simply far more conservative than I, in all senses of the term, even if he was not nearly as conservative as I later often heard him alleged to be. It was apparent that he had little or no interest in my approach to the historical subjects that beguiled us both, but he was quite obviously fascinated by my work as a journalist and freelance writer and by my life as an expat Francophile. By the end of the first martini, it was clear we were going to be friends, but it was equally clear that our friendship would center around shared tastes (France, wine, bouffe, irony, wit, etc.) as well as my affection for his wife, the incomparable Jacqueline, and not around the academic study of French nationalism. This dawning realization was not an easy acquisition for me, as I sat there on his terrace – believe me.

Eugen, from start to finish, was like no other "international grandmaster of history" I have known. Unlike "the best of our breed" – say, a Stone, a Tilly, or a Mayer – he was not striving to be a historian's historian. He wasn't striving exactly to be a popular one, either, though he respected Barbara Tuchman and enjoyed reading her. Eugen would always say, "I write to please myself," which is how, I well knew, writers often approached their art, but in all honesty it did not seem to me to be the m.o. of scholars, even the great ones, who were straining very hard to impress each other. Yet with Weber, it was, and remained,
different; as he so often put it (citing Hilaire Belloc), "I want my sins to be scarlet and my books to be read."

Well, his books were read, including sometimes by historians, which brings me to Peasants into Frenchman, the second part of my talk. Now isn't Peasants, you'll say, an exception to the rule I've just adduced about Eugen's not writing for colleagues? Yes and no. Peasants was Eugen's masterpiece — a flawed one, to be sure, but a masterpiece nevertheless, winning for its author an apparently endless litany of praise and critique, brickbats and honors. The brickbats many of you are familiar with, and I'm not going to discuss them at length, for I have other cats to whip in my limited time before you. Suffice to say, and for only one example, Eugen simply overlooked or misinterpreted as local feuding the massive peasant politicization and resistance in the Midi in 1851. His modernization thesis as he elaborated it holds, some specialists say, for eight or nine departments, and that's about it. Then, too, Eugen seems to have tendentiously cited sources in archives and systematically ignored evidence that ran against his strong thesis. Finally, there is the criticism that has been made of his whole, underlying perspective: some scholars regard his view of the peasants as essentially that of a Parisian aristo, riding in an elegant diligence to a chateau: he opens up the window, sees rural people in farm attire, remarks, "regarde, chérie, qu'est-ce qu'ils sont sauvages!", then shuts the window. Bref, Eugen's sources were ethnographers, urban military officers, prefects, writers, etc., and so his view remained a thoroughly Parisian one.

As for the praise for Peasants, I need only refer you to the papers given last fall at UCLA on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of Peasants' publication, held with Eugen and Jacqueline dans la salle. I'll summarize in Stéphane Gerson's words:

[Weber's] cultural process perspective [in Peasants] anticipated trends of the 1980s and 1990s, [but] most historians (myself included) either overlooked or downplayed it. This is partly because we read the book too fast and partly because this perspective is, ultimately, a series of gestures, openings, and suggestions rather than

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a forceful argument, taken to its logical conclusion. Even the leaps of imagination, made to recover this elusive world, remain hidden behind mounds of evidence and authoritative statements.

Gerson adds that the "most resonant" of the book’s voices "is the voice that ventures from the realm of the certain to the realm of the possible, the voice that opens itself to imagination, the voice that asks, 'What do I dare conclude from all this information?' Eugen Weber took risks and challenged other historians to do the same."

*Peasants* also won Eugen renown in "outer" spheres, rather to his surprise and delight. Here's a story I bet you didn't know. Harvey Shapiro, then editor of the *New York Times Book Review*, could not at first be prevailed upon to review "so academic" a work, but after six or nine months (maybe longer), he was obliged to relent and commission a very favorable review of *Peasants*. Eugen was thrilled. He felt vindicated; the *Times* review meant more to him than nearly any other.

Which leads me to my main point about *Peasants* – the only one where I can add something to the well-known reflections noted. This concerns the motives of its conception. In the years before he conceived *Peasants* and during the time he researched it, Eugen and I saw a good deal of each other, not least because I was working for *Time* magazine in Paris, occasionally covering restaurants, and I had a munificent expense account that allowed me to take my friends to very high class jernts. Often in these elegant surroundings, though more likely during our weekly lunches near the B.N. or dinners chez Weber, Eugen and I talked about the book he had in mind – or, rather, I listened to him sound off about it. *Peasants* was very much a *contre-travail*, a work designed to put in their place certain academics – French, mainly, but also Anglo-Saxon – who had long gone about construing French nationhood as some kind of perennial flower – a hot-house orchid, if you will – successfully cultivated by a patriotic State in the furthest reaches of medieval times, if not late antiquity. *Peasants* was intended as a shock work of anti-theory, an empirical journey through folk archives, after which
nameless peasants would live again in Eugen's prose and in carefully culled tidbits of songs and sayings, charivaris and jacqueries. "Nothing is more concrete than history," Eugen loved to say, "nothing less interested in theories or in abstract ideas. The great historians have fewer ideas about history than amateurs do; they merely have a way of ordering their facts to tell their story. It isn't theories they look for, but information, documents, and ideas about how to find and handle them."

In short, if Peasants was Eugen's only book written expressly for colleagues, it was also, ironically, his only book to "break away," as publishers say, to be widely bought and read outside the circle. Moreover, it was flung at other historians like a flèche or a javelin, not offered up as a friendly poke or wake-up call. I don't know how much Eugen sought or hoped to begin the "conversation" he in fact began with Peasants; I know it pleased him to be taken note of and responded to. However, reaction to the work proved to be far more conflictual than lively, let alone friendly; it morphed into a dialectic engendering hammer-blow antitheses, like The Agony of the Republic, by a certain John Merriman, Ted Margadant's French Peasants in Revolt, Peter McPhee's Rural Politics in France, 1848-1852, or a host of hostile essays by Charles Tilly and many others. Through the later '70s and after, Eugen was obliged to defend his Opus magnum with long articles that cost him, whose polemics weighed on him. This was no longer the happy old days when he was having at Arno Mayer for counterrevolution.

Yet no doubt about it, Peasants changed things among American historians of France. It simultaneously stimulated and empowered them to do what Eugen had done: discover the world beyond Paris and do it in all humility before the mystery of life in such variety, do it with your own personality showing. I think of John Merriman on his beloved Balazuc, even if in that case, I suppose, Laurence Wylie is as much the father or grandfather of the work. There would be great satisfaction for Eugen to page through Graham Robb's recent The Discovery of France and see how much the Weber legacy continues to exert attraction, even when, unfortunately, it goes scandalously unacknowledged.
Eugen would have adored being able to inspect France up close and personal by riding its routes and byways on a vélo; he would have shed tears of joy over the Pyrenean dancing bear. We used to talk about co-authoring a piece together for *Sports Illustrated* on the Tour de France, just like we talked for a time about collaborating on a biography of Lyautey. I am not sure why he never undertook it, nor why, indeed, he never did a biography—for he enjoyed reading lives and frequently advised others to write them.

I'm going to close this section of my paper—the one on *Peasants*—by sharing with you an email I received just this morning from a young historian of high talent: Simon Jackson is a graduate student of Tony Judt's at NYU and is my colleague at the American University of Paris. He wrote,

> In *Peasants into Frenchmen*, Eugen Weber does not write in a conventionally learned way, by which I mean he does not give the impression of having been corralled and disciplined by the profession, before coming to love its conventions by necessity. To pursue the equine analogy, reading him one thinks of those racehorses which, having dumped their jockey and harness at the first fence, romp to a furlong victory over the rest of the field, as natural-looking as if they had appeared on the course fresh from the prairie.

*Peasants* was Eugen's last major work; its research and composition, the subsequent reception, and above all the polemics cost him too much to want to risk it again any time soon. The books after *Peasants* amount to comparatively short *jeux d'esprits* (*Fin de Siècle France*) or essays (*My France, The Hollow Years, Apocalypses*), in which the author focuses on disparate topics that interest, amuse, or edify him, and he sovereignly ignores matters, even central ones, that don't, like the church-state conflict or taking positions in the scholarly discussions about issues touched on. After *Peasants*, Eugen was even less interested than he had started out to be by academic intercourse.

I come now to part three of this talk, and I'm going to have to take a step resolutely backward in time in order to engage
Eugen's work on politics. The pieces in his great collection of essays *My France* (1991) that make for the most interesting reading still today – and by "interesting," I may well mean "provocative," even "infuriating!" – are precisely the polemical ones about political history that he lost the taste for producing after the Peasants war. These pieces from the 1960s and 70s contain a strong viewpoint and a method may be inferred from them. They concern things like the politics of Maurice Barrès, the left and right of the political spectrum, nationalism and socialism, and national-socialism, anti-Semitism, and revolution and counterrevolution. They raise issues I could never raise with Eugen himself, because rowdy intellectual discussion wasn't our thing.

If I raise them now, it is not only because I have been asked to speak to you on the man's work as much as the man, but because for me personally these essays of his are relevant: I have been intensively at work for over a year now on a book about French anti-Semitism in the pre-1914 era, considered from an international perspective (read, as compared with the German and Austrian cases). As I have slowly threaded my way in Berlin, Vienna, and Paris through a truly horrifying (I was thinking in terms of quantity, but the adjective also holds for the content "quality") set of tableaux that constituted organized anti-Semitism in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Osteuropa and France, I have occasionally asked myself: what help or aid – heuristic, organizational, analytic, stylistic – do I get from the ideas, writing, and methods of Eugen? He was after all a leading expert in the larger field of which this is an important part.

So, what were his ideas about politics and ideology in the late nineteenth century and about how to study them? In the four or five articles in question, Eugen is straining to perform a sort of *sartor resartus*, and if we are to understand his re-tailoring, we must know what was the pattern he was rejecting, for it was not theory in general he lit out against – there were many theorists he cited often and approvingly: Sorel, Parsons, Malraux, Ellul, Aron; I even heard him speak warmly of Edward
Whiting Fox's *History in Geographic Perspective: The Other France*. The one theory he excoriated was, of course, Marxism, the theory that had held great sway in the British acade of his youth and young manhood. Eugen, in his way, was a variation on Alfred Cobban, even if there is bitter irony in this, for it was Cobban who, as external examiner of Eugen's dissertation, failed him, with the result that Cambridge—rather than stand by their man, as they should have done—denied him a Ph.D. It is not possible to over-estimate, I believe, the importance of that event, or non-event, to the formation of Eugen's permanent attitude toward the profession. So let us be kinder and say that he is Furet avant la lettre and never more so than when he writes, "[T]he difference between fascism and communism is relative rather than absolute, dynamic rather than fundamental. . . . Fascism was only 'accidentally' directed against Communism, and as a rival, not as a counterrevolution."

The Weber method is dissolution: he takes the Marxist categories and dissolves them back into the eddying slop that is any history, but particularly late-nineteenth-century or entre- guerre nationalism, before it is sifted and titrated through the reason of scholarship. Eugen regarded concepts like class and counterrevolution as the anachronisms of latter-day self-styled "radicals." In a sense, and in order to retain this chemistry metaphor I've got going, you could say that Eugen, in his look at the nineteenth- and twentieth-century political pathologies, was seeking to recreate the Miller-Urey experiment: to dissolve things back into the original primal soup and see them as they really were before the Eric Hobsbawms and Arno Mayers got hold of a microscope and tweezers.

He had a number of ways he went about this. First, he collapsed common historical categories and period distinctions. For example,

the basic "fascist" themes, including epic project, theatrical transfiguration, and constraint, appear in the French Revolution as naturally as in China or Cuba of the 1970s. So does the theme of death and transfiguration: in the Commune of 1871, in the novels of
Malraux, in the proclamations of Che Guevara, or in Régis Debray's likening of Che's passion to that of Christ.

Or a different type of erasure of distinction: "Joseph de Maistre was right. In the end, all governments are monarchies; no matter what you call them, all governments are aristocracies. . . . [T]he state is always counterrevolutionary."

Consider his rip-roarin' attack on the distinction between revolution and counterrevolution. Which is which, he asks, in Berlin in 1953, in Poznan in 1956, in Budapest 1956, in Prague 1968? What is the revolution/counterrevolution distinction in Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Egypt, and Libya? He concludes,

the constant confusion of simple opposition with revolutionary, antirevolutionary, or counterrevolutionary actions [is] a confusion that has its roots in fact, fantasy, theory and reality, [and] allows whoever wills to give a dog a bad name before attempting to eliminate it. . . . The pastures of objective perdition are broader than those of the Lord. . . . When we describe something as revolutionary or counterrevolutionary, half the interpretive process has been performed already, the other half will reflect what went – or, rather, what failed to go – before.

And finally comes the echt-Weber quietus, the coup de grace efficace (et élégant): "We know too much nowadays to explain very much. We certainly know too little to explain anything thoroughly."

Now it’s not that Weber doesn’t score points in these quotes – he does. It is the operation I want us to consider. Thinkers like C. Wright Mills drew out these distinctions in order to try to get at subjects who were resolutely trying not to be seen for what they were; Weber went about his work by dissolving these distinctions and instead taking contemporaries at their own words. Thus the Miller-Urey effect: the primeval stew emerges. And of course it serves its rhetorical function by permitting Eugen to ask grandly, "Can we ever untangle this skein?" The answer thus has to be, well, no, we can’t, not if you willfully re-scramble it each time we try, not if we sincerely follow you in your conclusion that "we know too much to explain anything,
and know too little to explain anything thoroughly." A serious scholar (say, Arno Mayer, in *The Dynamics of Counterrevolution in Europe*) sees his tentative proffer of a intricately woven tapestry of analysis and heuristic definition unraveled, as if it had no use whatever, as if there is no point in drawing distinctions between action designed to make a social revolution, on the one hand, and that launched or released against it, on the other, as if foreign policy and war had no important, if not evident, domestic components or goals, as if a reactionary, a conservative, and a counterrevolutionary were more or less all the same thing.

Instead of the anachronistic concepts served up by tendentious posterity – and now I arrive at my second point about the Weber method of political-historical analysis – Eugen prefers to recycle the words, labels, and claims of the actors themselves. He accepts, for example, the fin-de-siècle or entre-guerre nationalists' self-proclaimed identity as "social" and "socialist"; we get no sense reading him that party labels were fought-over affairs or that a history which quietly adopts the étiquettes of the objects of study may well not climb out of the conflicts themselves and thereby prove explanatory. It would help if at least Eugen discussed the opponents and the contesters of the labels that the nationalist socialists tendentiously appropriated, but he doesn't. Instead he writes, "It is easy to understand why Léon Blum should be appalled by the heretical prospects he could glimpse in the speeches of his fellow Socialists." "His fellow Socialists"? Eugen is talking here about the Rassemblement National Populaire and the Mouvement Social Révolutionnaire, 1941-1944, of Eugène Deloncle, based on the ideas of Marcel Déat. So my question would be: what is the point – besides polemics, I mean – of asserting these groups' identity with Léon Blum, tout court? A neophyte reading this would seriously misconstrue the historical reality of 1890-1945, for the piece is entirely out of balance. One gets no sense of the isolation of the "national socialists" within the Socialists' ranks, nor of the fierce, enduring conflict between them and the entire Left: Radical, Socialist, and Communist.
Another Eugen device – a common one – was to deploy high and literate erudition – perverse, contrarian, provocative, elegant, and endlessly amusing – to make points that are essentially rhetorical. For example, "The first rebels were angels. The first rebellion the Fall. We shall not be rid of the ilk in the foreseeable future. Perhaps we ought not to be." Or rhetoric deployed to ridicule the whole idea of revolution: "Perhaps all revolutions are false: they lead elsewhere than they claim. Why should one [counter]revolution be more false than others?" "Do revolutions really change, or do they [simply] transform, modifying institutional or ideology expressions of fundamentally similar structures? . . . The new society is not the opposite of the old, but its prolongation and its heir. . . . Consumer society has consumed the revolution. . . . In a way, all revolution is reaction."

Sometimes his rhetoric takes the form of shock therapy: the French Revolution was "conservative [and] reactionary" is an example. And why so? Well, because it borrowed so much from Rousseau, including the ancient Roman category of "proletarian." Or I particularly love this one: "There is no evidence that Boulanger, Barrès, Maurras, were particularly concerned with fighting socialism." And he adds, "They were not insincere."

So I ask myself how would I, in my current comparative study of European anti-Semitism before 1914, follow the Weber Way? Well, let's see, Édouard Drumont will hove into my reader's view, then, as a socialist more than a Jew-hater; he will be a "romantic conspirator, sometimes dangerous, sometimes fascinating," a nationalist more interested in gestures than in doctrine, a righteous hater of the despicable State (Eugen did not like States), as obsessed with the plots of the Freemasons, Protestants, and Anticlericals as with the subversion of the Jews and the Socialists.

Now if I really disdain anachronistic labels and dissolve latter-day categories of analysis, I will be left with seeing French anti-Semitism as the highest form of nation-talk, as Eugen saw it, even though something deep within me warns me that there must be a reason that the anti-Semites avoid nation-talk and prefer

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France-talk – the two discourses just aren't interchangeable, but in order to elucidate the difference, one has to be armed with the tools that come with reading books like J. G. A. Pocock, not Eugen Weber. Continuing on, I will see the Ligue Antisémitique as "revolutionary," because it caused a lot of trouble and billed itself thus. And, if I really need to invoke a word Drumont, et al. rarely used for themselves – a label that I as historian, following the lead of my friend and would-be mentor, Eugen Weber, would have felt sore-pressed to use – then I might just throw caution to the winds and see Drumont and his ilk as "kinds of anarchists."

At bottom, thus, it is clear, Eugen was a deeply conservative man who reluctantly accepted what he considered were the abiding fundamentals of human structures (hierarchical, unjust) and human nature (not-good). That was his vision, avowed or not. His unique way of depicting the human (all-too-human) condition, however, etched a view – not exactly a vision, but an underlying view – of deep sadness and irony, encapsulated in merry skepticism that proved to be real dynamite for most readers' sensibilities.

And there I've done it: I have used, and been glad to use, have benefited from, a Eugen distinction imposed after the fact. Consider these words that he wrote on Marc Bloch, a speech he could not deliver (who could?) without tears in his eyes. Now every time Eugen says the name of the co-founder of the Annales, I want you to substitute the name "Eugen Weber":

No one demonstrates better than Marc Bloch that the great historian contributes, not a model, but the suggestion of a new way of going about our business, not a vision, but a view; vision surviving at best as a document of its times, the view adding to historical understanding. There is not so much history that we can learn from Bloch today. His history has become part of the history we have learned already – to such an extent, indeed, that reaction may be timely, if not already underway. [He means that local and regional study is coming back, as against Bloch's and Febvre's nationalization and comparative internationalization.] . . . But it would be naïve to dismiss Bloch just because we have already learned his history. There is more to history than a story, however richly we go about its telling. "The distant past," Bloch wrote only a few months before he was
arrested, "inspires the sense and the respect of differences between men, at the same time as it refines our sensitiveness to the poetry of human destinies." In this context all past may be considered distant; all meditations upon other lives and times to inspire and refine. The essential that is left of Bloch's writings is his style, and there he remains idiosyncratically singular and fascinating.

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I'll end as I began, with Eugen the man, not the scholar, for that is how I lived him – and how he lived me – lo these too-swiftly-passing decades.

In the dark theatre of the mind, as you sit waiting for the whoosh of the rising curtain, an expectancy and a hope beat in all your synapses: "Please God, let there be breath-taking décor, exciting characters, a fabulous story to unfold." Most of the time when the lights come on, and you see the maid answering the phone or the happy peasants dancing around the maypole, you think, "Yes, yes, but whom is this going to be about?" And once in awhile, if you are very, very lucky, it will be about someone like Eugen Weber.

First you hear the jolly rumble of his baritone bouncing off the walls (even from afar off, before he is seen), and your ears tingle in anticipation of what you just know will be some wonder of intelligence and wit as he enters the scene. When you finally see the place from which that marvelous timbre issues, you encounter with delight the mischievous Roman satyr sculpture that is his head, now wide-eyed with astonishment, now purselipped in a moue. "That's it! That's what I've been hoping for!" you say to yourself. You clap your hands the minute you realize you are contemplating a marvelous imp, a sort of operetta devil, Eugen-le-Diable, who will explain it all for you: his countrymen, their terroir, the forces of history that rush around and through them. And always with the crack of intelligence, the embodied amusement of the soul that never deserts him.

As he stands there in his Mitteleuropa drawing room, introducing Joan of Arc on his right ("dear girl, if a little carried away with herself from time to time") and Dracula on his left.
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("amusing chap, but avoid that goodnight bisous!")', you see in an instant what he is all about. That smile, upward curling at the corners, and the sly, glistening eyes, bushy eyebrows dancing above them in a barely contained paroxysm of mirth, tell you that this time the divine playwright has got it right. He has given you someone to enjoy immensely sur scène and take home with you to savor in charmed memory for the rest of your life.