



Spengler's *The Decline of the West* and Monika Maron's Novel *Artur Lanç*

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Abstract

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I. Introduction

In the following, we will discuss the reception of Oswald Spengler in Monika Maron's new novel *Artur Lanz*, published in 2020. The part of violence in Spengler's *Decline of the West*¹ is

¹ On Spengler's work in general, see Manfred Schröter, *Metaphysik des Untergangs. Eine kulturkritische Studie über Oswald Spengler* (München: Leibniz Verlag, 1949); *Spengler Studien. Festgabe für M. Schröter zum 85. Geburtstag*, ed. Anton M., Koktanek (München: C.H. Beck, 1965); *Spengler heute. Sechs Essays mit einem Vorwort von Hermann Lübbe*, ed. Peter Chr. Ludz (München: C.H. Beck, 1980); Klaus P. Fischer, *History and Prophecy. Oswald Spengler and the Decline of the West* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989) ; *Der Fall Spengler : eine kritische Bilanz*, ed. Alexander Demandt and John Farrenkopf (Köln : Bohlau Verlag, 1994) ; Karen Swassjan, *Der Untergang eines Abendländers. Oswald Spengler und sein Requiem auf Europa* (Berlin: Raphael Heinrich, 1998) ; Frits Boterman, *Oswald Spengler und sein Untergang des Abendlandes* (Köln: SH-Verlag, 2000) ; John Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline: Spengler on World History and Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2001) ; Domenico Conte, *Oswald Spengler – Eine Einführung* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2004) ; *Oswald Spengler. Tramonto e metamorfosi dell'Occidente*, ed. Maurizio Guerri and Markus Ophälders (Milano: Mimesis, 2004); Frank Lisson, *Oswald Spengler. Philosoph des Schicksals* (Schnellroda: Antaios, 2005); Samir Osmancevic, *Oswald Spengler und das Ende der Geschichte* (Wien: Turia + Kant, 2007); *Spengler – Ein Denker der Zeitenwende*, ed. Manfred Gangl, Gilbert Merlio Markus Ophälders (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009); Dezső Csejtei, Aniko Juhász, *Oswald Spengler élete és filozófiája* (Máriabesnyő: Gödöllő, 2009); *Oswald Spengler als europäisches Phänomen*, ed. Zaur Gasimov, Carl Antonius Lemke Duque (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013); *Spengler ohne Ende*, ed. Gilbert

not so much related to the issue of physical aggression, let alone the spectacular downfall of civilisations. To the contrary, Spengler insisted himself often enough on the fact that, instead of speaking about the “decline” of the West, he could have also used the word “fulfilment.” Nevertheless, this is to be taken with a grain of salt: There is indeed a lot of violence involved in the process of the slow death of each civilisation — but it is not so much indebted to aggressions from the outside than rather to the passivity and pacifism from the inside.² Indeed, Spengler greatly dwells on the subject of the dwindling power of resistance against any physical or psychical threat as typical symptoms of the late stage of every civilisation. Despite the pacifism movement of the time after the First World War, this diagnosis was difficult to accept for most readers still under the impression of the terrible events that lay just behind and the heyday of colonialism and imperialism.³ Today, however, Spengler’s predictions seem to concord oddly enough with the relatively new phenomenon of “post-heroism.”

Maron, née Iglarz, was born in Berlin in 1941, came from a Polish-Jewish family and is one of the best-known German writers.⁴ She lived in the GDR from 1951 to 1988, where, after graduating from high school, she first worked for a year as a milling cutter in an industrial company, then studied theatre studies and art history, and after graduating was an assistant director for television; later she wrote as a reporter for the *Wochenpost*. Since 1976 she has lived as a freelance writer, whose debut novel *Flight of Ashes* (*Flugasche*) could not be published in the East due to its criticism of the totalitarian living conditions in the GDR and was instead published by the West German publisher S. Fischer in 1981. In 1988, Maron moved from East Berlin to the Federal Republic, first lived in Hamburg and now lives in Berlin again. Since then, Monika Maron has written more than ten novels and other works of essays and short stories, among which we would like to highlight *Pavel’s Letters* (*Pawels Briefe*), in which she created a literary memorial to her Polish-Jewish grandfather Pawel Iglarz, *Animal triste*, which met with a particularly strong response, and *Silent Close No. 6* (*Stille Zeile Sechs*), which she herself considers her best work to date. Maron has received a number of awards, including the Kleist Prize. Recently, Monika Maron has come under the spotlight of the German public on several occasions, after she addressed many of the social controversies of our present day in her last two novels *Munin* (2018) and *Artur Lanx* (2020) in a way that was as sensitive as it was critical, and which not only triggered a controversial media polemic but also prompted her traditional publisher Fischer to terminate further cooperation with her due to her alleged

Merlio, Daniel Meyer (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2014); *Tektonik der Systeme. Neulektüren von Oswald Spengler*, ed. Arne De Winde, Sven Fabr , Sientje Maes, Bart Philipsen, Le Prince-Ev que (Heidelberg: Synchron, 2016); Alexander Demandt, *Unterg nge des Abendlandes. Studien zu Oswald Spengler* (K ln: B hlau, 2017); *Oswald Spenglers Kulturmorphologie*, ed. Sebastian Fink and Robert Rollinger (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018); *Der lange Schatten Oswald Spenglers. 100 Jahre Untergang des Abendlandes*, ed. David Engels, Max Otte and Michael Th ndl (Waltrop: Manuscriptum, 2018) ; David Engels, *Oswald Spengler. Werk, Deutung, Rezeption* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2021).

² See Gregory Swer, “The Revolt against Reason: Oswald Spengler and Violence as Cultural Preservative,” *The Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* vol.3, no. 2 (2020): 123-148.

³ See for instance Spengler’s response to these positions in his short 1936 text “Is World Peace possible?”, to which he inevitably replied negatively. Oswald Spengler, *Rede und Aufs tze* (M nchen: C.H. Beck, 1937), 292-293.

⁴ On Monika Maron, see Katharina Boll, *Erinnerung und Reflexion, retrospektive Lebenskonstruktionen im Prosawerk Monika Marons* (W rzburg: K nigshausen & Neumann, 2002) ; Antje Do mann, *Die Diktatur der Eltern, Individuation und Autorit tskrise in Monika Marons erz hlerischem Werk* (Berlin: Weissensee, 2003); Christian Rausch, *Repression und Widerstand. Monika Maron im Literatursystem der DDR* (Marburg: Tectum, 2005); “Doch das Paradies ist verriegelt ...” *Zum Werk von Monika Maron*, ed. Elke Gilson (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 2006).

“political unpredictability”; a decision which, in view of the broad support Maron received in the German media, very quickly turned out to be a brilliant own goal for Fischer.

Interestingly, Oswald Spengler plays a key role in understanding the pessimist view Monika Maron seems to nurture concerning the present and future of the Western civilisation in her novel *Artur Lanz*, and in the following, we will discuss the relevant passages and place her in the general context of both her novel and Spengler's thoughts.

II. Oswald Spengler and Monika Maron

Artur Lanz,⁵ a middle-aged, slightly shy man who owes his name to his mother's fascination for the legends around king Arthur and the knights of the Round Table, has well assimilated contemporary Germany's deep doubts about the values of heroism. However, through the daring rescue of his dog, he discovers the unknown happiness of self-sacrifice to protect the life of others.⁶ Thus discovering a hidden part of his own personality and the fulfilment that his passing act of heroism has provided him, he starts to question his value system and longs to integrate his new-found courage and masculinity in his daily life.

This is when he meets Charlotte Winter, an elderly writer whose personality and biography resemble in many points those of Monika Maron herself, and who develops a certain interest in Artur's struggle with his masculinity, mingled with pity.⁷ Through her meetings with Lanz and her discussion of his doubts and hopes with her friends and acquaintances, Winter realises how divided German society is when it comes to dealing with issues such as gender roles, patriotism, religious tolerance, climate change and many others; all subjects coalescing into the question to what extent modern man (and woman) still can (and should) have the right to stand up for their opinions knowing they have most of the *Zeitgeist* against them,⁸ especially

⁵ Monika Maron, *Artur Lanz* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2020).

⁶ “If I dreamed of being a hero at all, it was as a companion to Lancelot and Parzival and not as a hero in my own life. [...] I have only been thinking of Arthur and Lancelot again in recent months, since I rescued the dog from the rape [*Wenn ich überhaupt davon geträumt habe, ein Held zu sein, dann als Gefährte von Lancelot und Parzival und nicht als Held in meinem eigenen Leben. [...] An Artus und Lancelot denke ich erst in den letzten Monaten wieder, seit ich den Hund aus dem Rapsfeld gerettet habe.*]” Ibid., 23. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from German are my own.

⁷ “But more than for the old men I felt pity for their sons, for men of the age of Artur Lanz, in whom much of the new masculine misfortune seemed to unite [...]. For in front and behind the backs of their fathers, men's lives were deconstructed, to use a postmodern term to describe the process. Everything that, until yesterday, was considered praiseworthy about them, strength, courage, determination, had over the years come under suspicion of being responsible for the evil in the world [*Noch mehr Mitleid als mit den alten Männern hatte ich aber mit ihren Söhnen, mit Männern im Alter von Artur Lanz, in dem sich viel von dem neuen männlichen Unglück zu vereinen schien [...]. Denn vor den Augen und hinter dem Rücken ihrer Väter wurde das Leben der Männer, um es mit einem dem Vorgang entsprechenden Begriff der Postmoderne zu beschreiben, dekonstruiert. Alles, was bis gestern an ihnen als rühmend wert galt, Kraft, Mut, Entschlossenheit, war im Laufe der Jahre unter den Verdacht geraten, für das Böse in der Welt verantwortlich zu sein.*]” Ibid., 63.

⁸ See, for example, *ibid.* 33.

“About heroes, I think about heroes.

Penelope: Oh my God!

Mrs Müller-Hermsdorf: If anything, then heroines.

Ulrike Zeisig: When I think of heroes, I immediately think of war. [...]

I said that a chance encounter had inspired me to think about why heroes have fallen into such disrepute and are only to be honoured as everyday heroes (preferably heroines), and whether the longing for heroes is also lost with them.

These heroes have really caused enough mischief in history, Penelope exclaimed.

[*Über Helden, ich denke über Helden nach.*

Penelope: *Ach du lieber Gott!*

so after the traumatising collective experience of the moral bankruptcy of Germany's Third Reich.⁹

A. Introducing Spengler

In a crucial chapter right in the middle of the book, Charlotte Winter discusses her thoughts and doubts with her friend Lady who talks to her about her new reading: Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*:

But she had really experienced something, Lady said, a reading that had disturbed her, no, that had shaken her. She was editing a book for which she had verified some quotes. [...] And some of the quotes, Lady said, were from *The Decline of the West* by Oswald Spengler. Have you read the book, she asked. No? Neither had I, but now I couldn't stop. Why didn't we read it earlier? In the few chapters I know so far, there are sentences that explain my whole feeling of life.¹⁰

It is typical for Monika Maron's style of writing, that the references to texts or authorities such as Spengler are never put forward in an academic or all-too bookish fashion, but rather as tentative hints to an un-going process of discovery. Also, at the same time, it reflects the obvious fact that not only Lady, but many other people of the past did not necessarily read Spengler's monumental 1200 page *The Decline of the West* from beginning to end, but rather limited themselves to the introduction and some chosen chapters, induced by the rather associative and fragmentary style of writing of the author himself.¹¹

At the same time, it is certainly not too far-fetched to analyse the complaint "Why didn't we read it earlier? [*Warum haben wir das nicht früher gelesen?*]" as a potential criticism of the

Frau Müller-Hermsdorf: Wenn schon, dann Heldinnen.

Ukrike Zeisig Bei Helden denke ich sofort an Krieg. [...]

Ich sagte, dass eine zufällige Begegnung mich inspiriert habe, darüber nachzudenken, warum Helden so in Verruf geraten und überhaupt nur noch als Helden, am besten Heldinnen des Alltags zu ehren seien, und ob mit den Helden auch die Sehnsucht nach ihnen verloren sei.

Diese Helden hätten nun wirklich genug Unheil in der Geschichte angerichtet, rief Penelope.]"

⁹ "We are, so to speak, burnt children and have brought up our own children in this sense. This is what happened to all Germans, to all Europeans. We are the anti-war, anti-nuclear, anti-colonial, the anti-fascist generation, which has also brought too few children into the world. We are a thoroughly pacified society for which the very thought of sacrificing one's life to an idea or to the fatherland is an imposition. [*Wir sind sozusagen gebrannte Kinder und haben in diesem Sinne unsere eigenen Kinder erzogen. So ist es allen Deutschen, allen Europäern ergangen. Wir sind die Antikriegs-, Antiatom-, Antikolonial-, die antifaschistische Generation, die außerdem zu wenig Kinder in die Welt gesetzt hat. Wir sind eine durch und durch pazifizierte Gesellschaft, für die allein der Gedanke, das Leben einer Idee oder dem Vaterland zu opfern, eine Zumutung ist.*]" Ibid., 36.

¹⁰ "Sie hätte aber wirklich etwas erlebt, sagte Lady, eine Lektüre, die sie umtreibe, nein, die sie erschüttert habe. Sie lektoriere gerade ein Buch, für das sie einige Zitate überprüft habe. [...] Und einige der Zitate, sagte Lady, stammten aus dem *Untergang des Abendlandes* von Oswald Spengler. Hast du das Buch gelesen, fragte sie. Nein? Ich auch nicht, aber nun habe ich gar nicht aufhören können. Warum haben wir das nicht früher gelesen? In den paar Kapiteln, die ich bis jetzt kenne, stehen Sätze, die mir mein ganzes Lebensgefühl erklären." Ibid., 137-138.

¹¹ See, for instance, the interesting reading experiences of Henry Miller and Francis Scott Fitzgerald: David Engels, "'Spengler emerges biggest and best of all.' Die Rezeption Oswald Spenglers bei Henry Miller," *Sprachkunst* 43 (2012): 113-130; "'This is an extraordinary thing you've perhaps heard of.' Die Rezeption Oswald Spenglers bei Francis Scott Fitzgerald," in *Spengler ohne Ende*, ed. Gilbert Merlio and Daniel Meyer (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2014), 217-242.

“*damnatio memoriae*” imposed upon Spengler in the post-war period, when the founding father of cultural morphology was regularly (and falsely) accused as being a “spiritual ancestor” of national-socialism (a reproach still to be found in today’s presentations of his work).¹² This was even more so the case in the communist countries of Eastern Europe, and as Monika Maron as well as Charlotte Winter and Lady grew up in Eastern Germany, it is only understandable why *The Decline of the West* was not part of the usual cultural and academic curriculum.

Placing the responsibility of introducing Spengler to the novel with Lady and not Charlotte seems also an interesting auctorial move by Monika Maron, as the novel is not only about Artur Lanz’s rediscovery of his lost masculinity, but also — and perhaps even more so — about the inner evolution of Charlotte, the novel’s true protagonist. Indeed, the novel contains at least partly many elements of the classical *Bildungsroman*, where the main character journeys through a series of stages of awareness. While already at the beginning of the novel, Charlotte is certainly depicted as a critical observer already well at ease with identifying many of the cultural and political issues of contemporary Germany, it is telling that the impetus for her soliloquies and reflections generally comes from the outside, repeatedly pushing her to a series of new stages of socio-cultural consciousness. This enables the author to somehow “exculpate” Charlotte from any responsibility for the dark image of Germany’s collective identity that emerges from the novel, as its different building blocks are provided by Artur Lanz, diverse acquaintances and, of course, friends such as Lady.

B. The Decline of Civilisation and the Decline of Religiosity

In the following of the chapter, Lady expands on her fascination with Spengler and explains:

Already the sentence about civilisation as the old age of culture. It follows Being, he says, as that which Has Become, so we live in an old age, that explains everything. And he already wrote that a hundred years ago.¹³

Thus, it appears that, even 100 years after the publication of the *Decline of the West*, the diagnosis of the Western civilisation as having reached the morphological stage of old age seems still adequate enough to be put into the mouth of one of Maron’s protagonists; even more so as Lady, being one of Charlotte Winter’s best friends, plays the role of her “confidante” and spiritual mentor, whose assertions are only seldomly put into doubt and thus have a particular importance.

Of course, Lady as well as Charlotte are already elderly women; thus, Charlotte’s reply to Lady’s reflections about the Western civilisation’s high age is quite logical:

¹² On Spengler und National Socialism, see Anton M. Koktanek, “Spenglers Verhältnis zum Nationalsozialismus in geschichtlicher Entwicklung,” *Zeitschrift für Politik* 13 (1966): 33–55 ; Michael Thöndl, “Das Politikbild von Oswald Spengler (1880–1936) mit einer Ortsbestimmung seines politischen Urteils über Hitler und Mussolini,” *Zeitschrift für Politik* 40 (1993): 418–443; Hallvor Brunstad, *Nationalsozialismens stefedre? En ideologihistorisk analyse av Friedrich Naumanns Demokratie und Kaisertum (1900) of Oswald Spenglers Preußentum und Sozialismus (1919)* (Bergen: Universiteti Bergen, 2006); David Engels, “Das Gescheiteste, was überhaupt über mich geschrieben ist.” André Fauconnet und Oswald Spengler,” in *Oswald Spengler als europäisches Phänomen*, ed. Zaur Gasimov and Carl Antonius Lemke Duque (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 105-156.

¹³ “Allein der Satz über die Zivilisation als das Greisenalter der Kultur. Sie folgt dem Werden, sagt er, als das Gewordene, wir leben also in einem Greisenzeitalter, das erklärt doch alles. Und das hat er schon vor hundert Jahren geschrieben.” Maron, *Artur Lanz*, 138. See Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), vol. 1, 107: “Every Culture passes through the age-phases of the individual man. Each has its childhood, youth, manhood and old age.”

Actually, we should feel comfortable in it, I said, we are also what has become of the Being. Feel comfortable, Lady repeated grimly. One has more of a sense for the transience and the naturalness of man. The youth rejects the idea that societies age like people, animals and plants, that they become, are and pass away, simply because they are young, Downfall as future, the very thought is unreasonable. If you no longer have a future yourself, it's easier to accept.

It's sad. The thought that everything that was precious to you and that you loved should no longer be there is sad, even if you yourself are no longer alive.

All those before us may have thought the same, I said, and we think we are living in the best of times.

Those before us hoped for heaven.

Perhaps those after us will do so too, if they are as bad off as those before us.¹⁴

This is a most interesting reflection on the reason why Spengler's determinism is so seldomly popular:¹⁵ for people living under the impression of perpetual youth, the idea that entire civilisations can not only grow, but also decline must seem unacceptable. One could transfer this analysis, *mutatis mutandis*, from individual people to societies as a whole in order to underline the point Monika Maron is trying to make. The intellectual life of the Middle Ages was based on the impression of being "dwarves on the shoulders" of giants" and living at the "end of history" while waiting for the apocalypse,¹⁶ thus making it easy to accept the idea that all earthly creations were only passing phenomena. The modern West, however, with its cult of eternal youth¹⁷ (in such a striking contrast to its demographic reality), entertains the opposite point of view and must thus view Spengler's cultural pessimism with utmost repugnance.

¹⁴ "Eigentlich müssten wir uns darin doch wohlfühlen, sagte ich, wir sind auch das aus dem Werden Gewordene. Wohlfühlen, wiederholte Lady grimmig. Man hat eher Sinn für die Vergänglichkeit und die Naturhaftigkeit des Menschen. Die Jugend lehnt den Gedanken, dass Gesellschaften altern wie Menschen, Tiere und Pflanzen, dass sie werden, sind und vergehen, allein deshalb ab, weil sie jung ist, Ein Untergang als Zukunft, schon der Gedanke ist nicht zumutbar. Wenn man selbst keine Zukunft mehr hat, kann man es leichter akzeptieren.

Es ist traurig. Der Gedanke, dass alles, was einem wertvoll war und was man geliebt hat, nicht mehr da sein soll, ist doch traurig, auch wenn man selbst dann gar nicht mehr lebt.

Das haben alle vor uns vielleicht auch gedacht, sagte ich, und wir denken, wir leben in der besten aller Zeiten.

Die vor uns haben auf ein Himmelrecht gehofft.

Werden die nach uns vielleicht auch wieder, wenn es ihnen so schlecht geht wie denen vor uns." Maron, *Artur Lanz*, 138-139.

¹⁵ David Engels, "Von der Einsamkeit des Spenglerianers," *The Journal of the Oswald Spengler Society* 1 (2017-2018): 13-18.

¹⁶ John of Salisbury, *The Metalogicon* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2009), 3.4.47-50. See also Edouard Jeuneau, "Nains et géants," in *Entretiens sur la renaissance du 12^e siècle*, ed. Maurice de Gandillac (Paris: Mouton, 1968), 21-38 ; Albert Zimmermann, "Antiqui" und "Moderni". *Traditionsbewusstsein und Fortschrittsbewusstsein im späten Mittelalter* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1974).

¹⁷ On the modern cult of youth, see James S. Coleman, *The Adolescent Society* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1961); *Express Yourself! Europas Kreativität zwischen Markt und Underground*, ed. Eva Kimminich, Michael Rappe, Heinz Geuen, Stefan Pfänder (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007); Richard I. Jobs, *Riding the New Wave: Youth and the Rejuvenation of France after the Second World War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); Jon Savage, *Teenage: Die Erfindung der Jugend (1875-1945)* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus-Verlag, 2008).

It is also interesting how Maron, who describes herself as an agnostic, sometimes even an atheist,¹⁸ brings in the classical reductionist idea of religiosity as being intimately linked to material scarcity,¹⁹ and thus establishes a connection between previous eras, believing in a transcendence in order to better cope with material deprivation, and the future generations living “after” the fall of the West, returning to religion. This strongly resembles Spengler’s idea of “second religiousness,”²⁰ though it remains unsure whether Monika Maron was familiar with the precise concept, as it is unclear to what extent her own lecture of the book differs from the only partial approach confessed to by her protagonist Lady. However, we should note the fundamental difference between Spengler and Maron’s depiction of his theory, that the former considers the age of religion as the spring- and summertime of every culture, while rationalism and atheism appear as a typical symptoms of “civilisation” and thus of decay,²¹ while for Maron, it is precisely the severance of religious ties which represents the necessary step forward a civilisational stage Lady seems to consider as some form of apogee.

Also, it is not sure what Maron, with her allusion to the revival of religion, exactly refers to, as her novels as well as her essays make possible a whole range of interpretations. Thus we could think about a return of Christianity, the ancestral religion of Western society²² (as

¹⁸ “Those who, like me, don’t believe in any God at all, are particularly at risk, because the mere imposition of constantly having to show consideration for a religion gets on my nerves, which might offend the believer and therefore cause him to demand even more consideration from me, which would then get on my nerves even more, so that in future, I would rather avoid the person making the demand, which he in turn could understand as my fear of him, and there I am among the phobics, and if the believer I want to avoid is a Muslim, then I am an Islamophobe. [*Wer wie ich an gar keinen Gott glaubt, ist besonders gefährdet, weil mir allein die Zumutung, ständig auf eine Religion Rücksicht zu nehmen, auf die Nerven geht, was den Gläubigen vielleicht beleidigen und ihn darum veranlassen könnte, von mir noch mehr Rücksicht zu fordern, was mir dann noch mehr auf die Nerven gehen würde, so dass ich dem Fordernden in Zukunft lieber aus dem Weg ginge, was der wiederum als meine Angst vor ihm verstehen könnte, und schon gehörte ich zu den Phobikern, und wenn der Gläubige, dem ich aus dem Weg geben möchte, ein Muslim ist, bin ich eben eine Islamophobikerin.*]” Monika Maron, “Zeitungslesen,” *Der Spiegel* (August 19, 2013), www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-107728933.html (accessed April 16, 2022).

¹⁹ On the origins of religion and the diverse functional or reductionist approaches, see *Secular Theories on Religion*, ed. Tim Jensen and Mikael Rothstein (København: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2000); Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books 2001); Ivan Strenski, *Thinking about Religion: An Historical Introduction to Theories of Religion* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2006); Barbara King, *Evolving God: A Provocative View on the Origins of Religion* (New York: Doubleday Publishing, 2007); *Sociology of Religion: Contemporary Developments*, ed. Kevin J. Christiano, William H. Swatos, Peter Kivisto, 2nd edition (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield 2008).

²⁰ On Spengler’s idea of a “second religiousness,” see Heinz Barta, “Recht, Religion und Gesellschaft in Oswald Spenglers Morphologie der Weltgeschichte,” in *Oswald Spenglers Kulturmorphologie*, ed. Sebastian Fink and Robert Rollinger (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018), 77-152; Wolfgang Krebs, “Zivilisationskrise und “zweite Religiosität.” Spenglers Vorhersagen und die Tendenzen der Gläubigkeit im frühen 21. Jahrhundert,” in *ibid.*, 331-342. “But from Skepsis there is a path to “second religiousness,” which is the sequel and not the preface of the Culture. Men dispense with proof, desire only to believe and not to dissect. The individual renounces by laying aside books. The Culture renounces by ceasing to manifest itself in high scientific intellects.” Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 1, 424.

²¹ See Swer, “The Revolt against Reason: Oswald Spengler and Violence as Cultural Preservative,” 137-139.

²² “For some time now, I have had the impression that among Christians, at least among their ecclesiastical authorities, a concealed envy is spreading towards the devout Muslims, whose high sensitivity in matters of faith has proved very successful. It could be that Christians are now asking themselves why they have to put up with all the blasphemous talk, writing and singing, why their God may be insulted and not the other one. [*Seit einiger Zeit habe ich den Eindruck, unter den Christen, jedenfalls unter ihrer kirchlichen Obrigkeit, breite sich ein verhöblener Neid auf die gläubigen Muslime aus, deren hochgradige*

Spengler indeed did),²³ but also about the growing sacralisation of certain political positions (such as the protection of the climate),²⁴ or finally about the increasing importance of Islam,²⁵ which Maron has repeatedly and controversially characterised as a threat to Western civilisation. Of course, these three positions do not exclude each other, but can be even seen as mutually reinforcing. However, we should note in this context that Maron — as well in her novels as in her essays — identifies the very essence of the “West” not with Christianity, but rather with liberalism²⁶ (quite differently from Spengler, for whom it is the “Faustian” spirit that defines Western identity), so that the “return” of religion appears as a relapse to a specific form of identity whose outdatedness is seen as a fundamental progress and as the true birth of western identity.

C. *The Crisis of Masculinity*

A last relevant reference to Oswald Spengler deals with heroism and brings us to the core of *Artur Lanz*:

According to Spengler, this would be no reason at all for depression, because nature is nature. After winter comes a spring and after a perished culture a new one, as fresh as spring, perhaps the next barbarism, but a new one, so you can give up your search for heroes. I'm not looking for heroes, I'm just wondering why everyone is suddenly talking so proudly about our post-heroic age. Besides, impending doom would be even more reason for heroic deeds. Lady laughed. Yes, in the movies, when the aliens attack the earth. But when there is no more goal, when a civilisation does not know what to do

Kränkbarkeit in Glaubensdingen sich als sehr erfolgreich erwiesen hat. Es könnte ja sein, dass sich die Christen jetzt fragen, warum sie all das blasphemische Gerede, Geschreibe und Gesänge ertragen müssen, warum ihr Gott beleidigt werden darf und der andere nicht.]” Maron, “Zeitungslesen.”

²³ “The material of the Second Religiousness is simply that of the first, genuine, young religiousness — only otherwise experienced and expressed. It starts with Rationalism's fading out in helplessness, then the forms of the Springtime become visible, and finally the whole world of the primitive religion, which had receded before the grand forms of the early faith, returns to the foreground, powerful, in the guise of the popular syncretism that is to be found in every Culture at this phase.” Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, 311.

²⁴ “In the past you could still say, keep to the ten commandments, otherwise the good Lord will throw stones at you, but nobody believes that anymore. That's why you need a new god, now he's called the climate, so it works again, said Lady and reached for her cigarettes. [Früher konnte man noch sagen, haltet euch an die zehn Gebote, sonst schmeißt der liebe Gott mit Steinen, das glaubt aber keiner mehr. Darum braucht man einen neuen Gott, jetzt heißt er gerade Klima, damit klappt es wieder; sagte Lady und griff nach ihren Zigaretten.]” Maron, *Artur Lanz*, 76.

²⁵ “Religion has crept back into our everyday lives and now spreads into them, since wars are waged again in its name, not only on its ancestral territories in Iraq or Syria, but among us, on our streets and squares, since our conquest was blatantly announced to us, with weapons and birth rates. [Die Religion wieder in unser alltägliches Leben zuerst geschlichen und dann darin breügemacht hatte, seit in ihrem Namen wieder Krieg geführt wurden, nicht nur auf ihren angestammten Territorien im Irak oder in Syrien, sondern bei uns, auf unseren Straßen und Plätzen, seit uns unverbohlen unsere Eroberung angekündigt wurde, mit Waffen und Geburtenraten.]” Monika Maron, *Mumin, oder: Chaos im Kopf* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2018), 188.

²⁶ On Maron and Islam, see Monika Maron, “Der Islam gehört nicht zu Deutschland.” *Der Tagesspiegel Online* (October 5, 2010), www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/glaube/zur-rede-des-bundespraesidenten-der-islam-gehört-nicht-zu-deutschland/1949762.html (accessed April 16, 2022) ; “Politiker müssen Muslimen Grenzen aufzeigen.” *Die Welt* (February 2, 2014). www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article124442866/Politiker-muessen-Muslimen-die-Grenzen-aufzeigen.html (accessed April 16, 2022).

with itself, then that's the end. We are already taking back our inventions, suddenly the great deeds of science turn out to be misdeeds. Fertiliser, aeroplanes, nuclear power, cars - they are all now only deadly dangers.²⁷

The beginning of the quote refers to a somewhat rash interpretation of Spengler's morphological theory. Contrary to a general belief, Spengler's determinist worldview is not, strictly speaking, cyclical, but rather curvilinear; an important distinction often forgotten.²⁸ This means that all civilisations experience rise and fall, but that after the fall of a given civilisation, there can be no revival, only the rise of another civilisation in the nearer or (more probably) further future; and Spengler insists often enough on the fact that the primordial landscape which gives birth to a civilisation can never be the proper heart of an ulterior civilisation.²⁹ This implies, that, from a Spenglerian perspective, after the end of Western civilisation, Europe will and cannot become the centre of a new, "young" civilisation (the only civilisation whose advent Spengler hesitantly expected being situated "somewhere between the Vistula and the Amur").³⁰

Nevertheless, even though after the winter of the West, there will be no more spring, as Lady erroneously holds it, this does not mean she is false in expecting a new "barbarian" and thus the advent of a new "Heroic" age. However, this age will rather be dominated by the battles fought by the rulers of the post-historic West and the numerous barbarian foes from

²⁷ "Dabei wäre das nach Spengler überhaupt kein Grund zur Depression, weil die Natur eben die Natur ist. Nach dem Winter kommt ein Frühling und nach einer untergegangenen Kultur eine neue, so frisch wie der Frühling, vielleicht die nächste Barbarei, aber eine neue, Deine Heldensuche kannst Du also aufgeben.

Ich suche keine Helden, ich frage mich nur, warum alle plötzlich so stolz von unserer postheroischen Zeit reden. Außerdem wäre ein drohender Untergang doch erst recht ein Grund für Heldentaten.

Lady lachte. Ja, im Kino, wenn die Außerirdischen die Erde stürmen. Aber wenn es kein Ziel mehr gibt, wenn so eine Zivilisation mit sich nichts mehr anzufangen weiß, dann ist eben Schluss. Wir nehmen unserer Erfindungen ja schon zurück, plötzlich stellen sich die Großtaten der Wissenschaft als Untaten heraus. Der Dünger, die Flugzeuge, die Atomkraft, die Autos — alles nur noch todbringende Gefahren." Maron, *Artur Lanz*, 139-140.

²⁸ On the differences between these approaches towards the philosophy of history, see David Engels, "Biologistische und zyklische Geschichtsphilosophie. Ein struktureller Annäherungsversuch," in *Von Platon bis Fukuyama. Biologistische und zyklische Konzepte in der Geschichtsphilosophie der Antike und des Abendlandes*, ed. David Engels (Bruxelles: Latomus, 2015), 8-46.

²⁹ Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, 106: "A Culture is born in the moment when a great soul awakens out of the proto-spirituality of ever-childish humanity, and detaches itself, a form from the formless, a bounded and mortal thing from the boundless and enduring. It blooms on the soil of an exactly-definable landscape, to which plant-wise it remains bound. It dies when this soul has actualized the full sum of its possibilities in the shape of peoples, languages, dogmas, arts, states, sciences, and reverts into the proto-soul." On the importance of landscape for Spengler's theory of civilisation, see Dezső Csejtei and Aniko Juhász, "The Role of Landscape in Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes*," in *Spengler in an Age of Globalisation*, ed. David Engels, Gerd Morgenthaler and Max Otte (Lüdinghausen and Berlin: Manuscriptum, 2021 [in print])

³⁰ On Spengler and Russia, see Gary L. Ulmen, "Metaphysik des Morgenlandes – Spengler über Rußland," in *Spengler heute. Sechs Essays mit einem Vorwort von Hermann Lübbe*, ed. Peter Chr. Ludz (München: C.H. Beck, 1980), 123-173 ; Hans-Christof Kraus, "Untergang des Abendlandes." Rußland im Geschichtsdenken Oswald Spenglers," in *Deutschland und die Russische Revolution 1917-1924*, ed. Gerd Koenen and Lew Kopelew (München: Fink-Verlag, 1998), 277-312 ; Frol Vladimirov, "Die russische Vorkultur. Eurasische Beiträge zur Morphologie der Weltgeschichte," *The Journal of the Oswald Spengler Society* 3 (2020): 27-176. <https://www.oswaldspenglersociety.com/online-journal>.

within and without³¹ than by a revival of the heroic spirit of the Westerners themselves, who will become, following Spengler, modern-time “fellahs,” unable to shape their own destiny,³² such as the homonymous old-Egyptian peasants stoically living in the middle of the Pharaonic remnants.

This leads over to yet another important aspect of the novel, Charlotte’s — the protagonist’s — surprise not only in front of the anti-heroic pacifism of her age, identified in other parts of the novel with outright cowardice,³³ but rather the religious zeal with which this anti-heroism is made into the object of pride instead of concern. This too triggers some Spenglerian reflections from Lady, who explains that the West has no interest anymore in defending itself: Instead of cultivating a healthy heroism, the West is in a process of self-negation, which Lady illustrates — in a quite Spenglerian fashion — by alluding to what she perceives as the decline of Western technology. Indeed, the growing distaste with which many contemporary Westerners consider those inventions which once made the technological superiority of the West is an evolution Spengler himself could not yet witness during the 1910s and 1920s, but which he already foresaw in the *Decline*³⁴ and heavily expanded upon in

³¹ Once again, it is to be expected that the allusion to the “new Barbarians” refers not only to the “tattooed biker gangs as last defenders of chivalry [*tätowierten Bikerhorden als letzte Verfechter der Ritterlichkeit*]” (Maron, *Artur Lanz*, 104:), but mainly to immigration, as Maron also suggests, when she describes the positions of the “politically correct” Penelope: “Never, never had she defended Islam, always only the Muslims, the people who had a damn right to our help, no matter where they came from and what they believed in. We have oppressed and exploited these people for centuries and we have to face up to the damage we have caused. [*Nie, niemals habe sie den Islam verteidigt, immer nur die Muslime, die Menschen, die ein verdammtes Recht auf unsere Hilfe hätten, egal woher sie kämen und woran sie glaubten. Wir haben diese Menschen jahrhundertlang aunterdrückt und ausgebeutet und müssten uns dem von uns angerichteten Unheil eben stellen.*]” Ibid., 38. A similar clue is also given in *Munin, oder: Chaos im Kopf*: “Some time ago, I read an article by a scholar who said that the danger of current wars lies above all in the surplus sons of poor, but populous countries. These young men, who are also sexually frustrated because they cannot marry without having a professional future, would act like dynamite in a society in which they would have to conquer what is denied them. Either they would become criminals or invent a theory of a ‘just’ society with which they could justify killing all those they declared enemies. [*Vor einiger Zeit hatte ich den Artikel eines Wissenschaftlers gelesen, der die Gefahr gegenwärtiger Kriege vor allem in den überzähligen Söhnen armer, dafür bevölkerungsreicher Länder sah. Diese jungen Männer, obendrein sexuell frustriert, weil ohne berufliche Zukunft nicht beiratsfähig, würden wie Dynamit in einer Gesellschaft wirken, in der sie sich erobern müssten, was ihnen verwehrt sei. Entweder würden sie kriminell oder erfänden sich eine Theorie zu einer "gerechten" Gesellschaft, mit der sie das Töten aller, die sie zu Feinden erklärten, rechtfertigen könnten.*]” (86).

³² “With the formed state, high history also lays itself down weary to sleep. Man becomes a plant again, adhering to the soil, dumb and enduring. The timeless village and the “eternal” peasant reappear, begetting children and burying seed in Mother Earth — a busy, not inadequate swarm, over which the tempest of soldier-emperors passingly blows. In the midst of the land lie the old world-cities, empty receptacles of an extinguished soul, in which a historyless mankind slowly nests itself. [...] And while in high places there is eternal alternance of victory and defeat, those in the depths pray, pray with that mighty piety of the Second Religiousness that has overcome all doubts for ever.” Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, 435.

³³ “I suspected that all the talk of post-heroism was a cover-up for our cowardice; that post-heroic was just a synonym for cowardly, like the word courage had been lost in the word civil courage. One is cowardly or courageous alone, but post-heroic is the fate of our time, shared with all for which one was not responsible. [*Ich hatte den Verdacht, dass das ganze Gerede vom Postheroismus eine Verschleierung unserer Feigheit war; dass postheroisch nur ein Synonym für feige war, wie das Wort Mut in dem Wort Zivilcourage untergegangen war. Feige oder mutig war man allein, postheroisch war das Schicksal unserer Zeit, das man mit allen teilte, wofür man nicht verantwortlich war.*]” Maron, *Artur Lanz*, 58.

³⁴ “But science exists only in the living thought of great savant-generations, and books are nothing if they are not living and effective in men worthy of them. Scientific results are merely items of an

his seminal *Man and Technics*,³⁵ where he announced that, in the nearer future, the Western intelligentsia would desert its commitment to technology and prefer to live a life in accordance with nature and pursue lofty esoteric interests — leaving the West open to the attacks of its foes.³⁶

It is a further telling point in this context that the crisis of masculinity which is at the centre of *Artur Lanz* is, finally, depicted from a second-hand perspective. Of course, placing a female protagonist strongly resembling her own biographical evolution in the centre of her novels is typical for Monika Maron; however, it seems highly relevant and an important literary move that the issue at hand is depicted in such an indirect way. The crisis of masculinity is not described as an experience immediately lived by the main character, but as a far-away development scarcely present in Charlotte's own personal life, but only present in the form of *Artur Lanz*'s occasional biographical tales, of stories told by personal acquaintances (mainly women), and finally, of references to Oswald Spengler's predictions.

In this context, it may be objected that Spengler himself is perhaps not the best witness to the specific topic of the decline of Western masculinity. Of course, as we have seen, he predicted pacifism, complacent hedonism, and the rise of barbarianism as inevitable features of all civilisations; however, he scarcely addressed the question of female emancipation and also firmly believed that the emasculated masses would only fall under the sway of hyper-virile "Caesarian" individuals, recreating primitive systems of domination and hierarchy with the tools of modern technology. This feature is obviously missing in *Artur Lanz*'s description of the evolution of contemporary Germany. However, it could be put forward as hypothesis that at least the growing influence Artur's friend Gerald Hauschildt exerts over the hero and which ultimately leads to his masculine burst-out, occupies something resembling a "Caesarian" place within the narrative. Should this be correct, we have to suspect that Maron

intellectual tradition. It constitutes the death of a science that no one any longer regards it as an event, and an orgy of two centuries of exact scientific-ness brings satiety. Not the individual, the soul of the Culture itself has had enough, and it expresses this by putting into the field of the day ever smaller, narrower and more unfruitful investigators." Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 1, 424.

³⁵ On this subject, see Swer, "The Revolt against Reason: Oswald Spengler and Violence as Cultural Preservative," 128-137.

³⁶ "The Faustian thought begins to be sick of machines. A weariness is spreading, a sort of pacifism of the battle with Nature. Men are returning to forms of life simpler and nearer to Nature; they are spending their time in sport instead of technical experiments. The great cities are becoming hateful to them, and they would fain get away from the pressure of soulless facts and the clear cold atmosphere of technical organization. And it is precisely the strong and creative talents that are turning away from practical problems and sciences and towards pure speculation. [...] The flight of the born leader from the Machine is beginning. Every big entrepreneur has occasion to observe a falling-off in the intellectual qualities of his recruits. But the grand technical development of the nineteenth century had been possible only because the intellectual level was constantly becoming higher. Even stationary condition, short of an actual falling off, is dangerous and points to an ending, however numerous and however well-schooled may be the hands ready for work." Oswald Spengler, *Man and Technics*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932), 96-98. On the rise and fall of technology in Spengler, see Gilbert Merlio, "Spengler und die Technik," in *Spengler heute. Sechs Essays mit einem Vorwort von Hermann Lübbe*, ed. Peter Chr. Ludz (München: C.H. Beck, 1980), 100-122 ; Dina Gusejnova, "Concepts of Culture and Technology in Germany, 1916-1933. Ernst Cassirer and Oswald Spengler," *Journal of European Studies* 36/1 (2006): 5-30 ; Hans-Peter Söder, "Visionen des kommenden Technikzeitalters. Macht und Ohnmacht in Oswald Spengler Der Mensch und die Technik," in *Tektonik der Systeme. Neulektüren von Oswald Spengler*, 177-194 ; Christoph Asendorf, "Zwischen faustischem Futurismus und Posthistoire. Spenglers Technikschrift im Kontext," in *Spenglers Nachleben. Studien zu einer verdeckten Wirkungsgeschichte*, ed. Christian Voller, Gottfried Schnödl and Jannis Walter (Springe: zu Klampen, 2018), 159-178.

might imply such characters will soon have an increasing influence over Germany and the Western world and, as predicted by Spengler, organise the “last stand” of the Western civilisation against its impending decline and fossilisation.

D. Reception

A last important aspect we should address is the reception not only of *Artur Lanz*, but of Monika Maron’s reference to Spengler. The book being still very recent, it is still too early to look for academic analyses and thus for an objective treatment of the novel, but the media reception seems to form an already quite uniform picture — that of an outright rejection of the positive manner in which Oswald Spengler appears in *Artur Lanz*.

Thus, shortly after the interview mentioned above, Hannah Bethke published a commentary on this discussion in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Already its somewhat derogatory title, “Does the West decline once again? [*Geht das Abendland schon wieder unter?*]”, is representative for the generally negative view on Maron’s novel in the German press³⁷ and on how her own view is (erroneously) conflated with those of Oswald Spengler:

Once again, the decline of the West is threatening, once again a clear enemy image is being placed on the horizon of decay these days: ‘Islam’. [...] With the dissolution of the (traditional) family, the core of our coexistence is allegedly threatened, the media only allows one opinion, there is also brief talk of the alleged gender and climate mania, and Oswald Spengler hovers over everything as the prophet of the hour. We are in exactly the same phase as Spengler described in his ‘Decline of the Occident’ about a hundred years ago, Maron thought. Society no longer knows what to do with itself. At this point, at the latest, it became clear that if the publishing house Fischer had clearly referred to such positions of its former author to justify her expulsion, the decision would have been much less contestable. Because this is not just a bit of criticism of Angela Merkel’s refugee policy. Maron combines clichés of Islamic ‘mass immigration’ with diffuse fears of a shimmering cultural pessimism whose call for community-based order runs counter to the democratic self-image and principle of tolerance.³⁸

Without undue polemics, let us stress the extent to which this analysis is based on an understanding of Spengler that is, at best, very sketchy, but nevertheless highly interesting for the 21st century perception of Spengler in the general media.

First, the *Decline of the West* is not, as suggested, a punctual phenomenon that was considered allegedly as imminent by Spengler and is so, now again, but rather an evolutive process that was expected to take many generations – a point that is also made by Monika Maron.

Furthermore, when stating that this view implies, allegedly “once again,” the narrative construction of an “enemy,” this is outright false, as, at least for Spengler, the rise and fall of civilisations is a general morphological principle and not the work of any “enemy” — and certainly not of “Islam,” which appears nowhere in Spengler’s *Decline of the West* as antagonist of the West; quite to the contrary to Maron, even more so as the latter seems to insist on the

³⁷ “Verlagsfreiheit” *WDR3* (November 10, 2020), www.peter-meisenberg.de/2020/11/10/verlagsfreiheit (accessed April 16, 2022).

³⁸ Hannah Bethke, “Geht das Abendland schon wieder unter?”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine* (November 6, 2020), www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/autorengespraech-mit-monika-maron-17039867.html (accessed April 16, 2022).

civilisational incompatibility between Islam and the West, while Spengler insists on the fact that Islam, having already reached the stage of “post-historical” society, is (tragically) much in advance of the West.³⁹

Let us mention, as final remark, that the author seems to imply anyone upholding views (allegedly) akin to those of Spengler would fully merit to be outed for this by his or her publisher, as such views would be opposed to “democratic self-perception and tolerance.” This is not only based on a certain shortcut when it comes to Spengler’s view on democracy and tolerance, as on the one hand, Spengler’s whole work is based on the idea of a radical equality of all civilisations, while, on the other, democracy is neither considered better nor worse by Spengler than all other constitutions, but simply a passing phase in the history of each and every civilisation. The author also seems to imply that only such writer defending (allegedly) democratic and tolerant positions should be worthy to be published in the present age. This would, quite logically, not only lead to the elimination of nearly all past writers from Homer and Plato over St. Augustine, Dante, Goethe and Hegel up to the early Thomas Mann, it also betrays a somewhat problematic view of tolerance on the side of the author and thus negates the very values allegedly defended.⁴⁰

Conclusion

In order to complete this picture, let us address the origin and extent of Monika Maron’s interest in Oswald Spengler, before summarising the results of this study. Whereas it may be possible that the lacunary appropriation of Spengler’s morphological theory by “Lady” may reflect Monika Maron’s own approach to the book, the question as to the origins of her interest is easier to answer.

Indeed, it is the author of these lines who sparked Maron’s interest in Oswald Spengler, as she recently confessed during an online interview given on the 5th November 2020. Indeed, after a public discussion in Berlin in which both Maron and myself participated in 2019, I had

³⁹ On Spengler and Islam, see David Engels, ““Der Islam ist eine neue Religion fast nur in dem Sinne, wie das Luthertum eine war” – Oswald Spenglers “magische Kultur”: Historische Anmerkungen zu einem denkwürdigen Konzept,” in *Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion VI. Vom umayyadischen Christentum zum abbasidischen Islam*, ed. Markus Groß and Robert Kerr (Berlin / Tübingen: Schiler & Mücke, 2021), 262-294.

⁴⁰ It is certainly interesting to confront these positions with Spengler’s expectation that, in the end phase of the Western civilisation, the plurality of opinion would slowly disappear not despite, but because of the mass media and their economic and political connections. “The idealist of the early democracy regarded popular education, without *arrière-pensée*, as enlightenment pure and simple, and even to-day one finds here and there weak heads that become enthusiastic on the Freedom of the Press — but it is precisely this that smooths the path for the coming Caesars of the world-press. Those who have learnt to read succumb to their power, and the visionary self-determination of Late democracy issues in a thorough-going determination of the people by the powers whom the printed word obeys. In the contests of to-day tactics consists in depriving the opponent of this weapon. [...] Unleash the people as reader-mass and it will storm through the streets and hurl itself upon the target indicated, terrifying and breaking windows; a hint to the press-staff and it will become quiet and go home. [...] The reader neither knows, nor is allowed to know, the purposes for which he is used, nor even the role that he is to play. A more appalling caricature of freedom of thought cannot be imagined. Formerly a man did not dare to think freely. Now he dares, but cannot; his will to think is only a willingness to think to order, and this is what he feels as his liberty. And the other side of this belated freedom — it is permitted to everyone to say what he pleases, but the Press is free to take notice of what he says or not. It can condemn any “truth” to death simply by not undertaking its communication to the world — a terrible censorship of silence, which is all the more potent in that the masses of newspaper readers are absolutely unaware that it exists.” Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, 462f.

the occasion to explain to her to what extent Spengler could be considered as a key to the understanding of the West's current problems, and this inspired Maron to follow my advice and, afterwards, to include her personal impressions into her newest novel, as she explained:

Engels: May I ask how you came across Spengler and what the study of the 'Decline of the Occident' did for your understanding of our time?

Maron: Well, I came to it through you: We talked, we got to know each other, and I knew you liked Spengler, so I thought, I'll take a look. So of course I'd always heard about it, but I'd never really read Spengler. And then I started reading it and was very deeply impressed, for example the chapter 'Volk und Stadt', although I don't remember anymore exactly what is in it. What I quoted there [i.e. in 'Artur Lanz'] also somehow made sense to me. And I thought to myself: we are in such a phase right now. This society really doesn't know what to do with itself anymore. It no longer has any inspiration.⁴¹

This autobiographical testimony is highly interesting, as it permits us to infer that Lady's and Charlotte's obvious approval of Spengler should not be seen as mere literary device, but rather as the result of a personal interest leading to a general agreement with Spengler's basic hypothesis, though *Artur Lanz* is, of course, not a full-fledged endeavour to transpose the Spenglerian morphology on a novel, but a very punctual and selective use of some key concepts in order to flesh out the novel's general subject with a broader philosophical context.

This enables us to wrap up the different analyses presented in the context of this short paper. In *Artur Lanz*, Monika Maron uses the reference to Oswald Spengler as a general framework explaining the phenomenon of the decline of Western masculinity. Thus, Spengler appears as one of the intellectual guides of Charlotte's journey towards a better understanding of the current identity crisis of the West as a pre-ordained, inevitable crisis of civilisation. One of the aspects especially singled out — apart from the general idea of the rise and fall of civilisations — is the idea of a future return of religion, obviously considered as a negative perspective by the author, differing thus significantly from Spengler's own depiction of the spiritual history of each civilisation. Finally, Spengler is referred to as an intellectual authority when it comes to explain the declining "heroism" of Western civilisation; focussed so much on self-castigation and a false understanding of "safety," that not only progress comes to a halt, but also nobody seems interested anymore to defend our declining civilisation — an interesting point whose nostalgia and defeatism, nonetheless, goes beyond what Spengler is indeed saying in the *Decline*, where the fossilisation of civilisation is accompanied by the rise to power of "Caesarism" and thus of ruthless, ultra-masculine individuals.

Of course, most of these subjects are considered as politically rather unsavoury in the contemporary Western public discourse, and a significant part of *Artur Lanz* deals precisely with the frustration of seeing these perspectives been rather repressed than openly discussed, so that it is scarcely surprising that the reception of Maron's novel has hitherto been generally negative or lukewarm — not for literary, but political reasons. As showed by the review in the highly influential *FAZ*, Maron's mention of the conservative philosopher Spengler as ultimate historical guide through the understanding of today's crisis scarcely helped to

⁴¹ "Monika Maron im Gespräch mit David Engels," (November 5, 2020), www.youtube.com/watch?v=yfrYxtZUXpE&feature=youtu.be (accessed April 16, 2022). My translation. Let us state, however, that Maron displayed a certain interest towards historical analogies in previous works, antedating her lecture of Oswald Spengler. Thus, *Munin, oder: Chaos im Kopf* contains many allusions to potential parallels between the prelude to the disastrous 30 Years War (1618-1848) and the present times.

improve the reception of *Artur Lanz*, though it should be noted that the critics generally display a somewhat selective understanding of Spengler which does not do justice to the historical width of his analysis.

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