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Easternisation and Enlightenment. Larry Wolff, Marquis de Ségur and the Younger Europe

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The article describes two accounts of Poland and the culture of its people. The first of these dates from 1784 and was written by the Marquis de Ségur, a French diplomat travelling to St Petersburg. The second, from 1840, was written by the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz, at the time working as a professor at the Collège de France in Paris. I try to show the most important differences between the Enlightenment and Romantic images of Poland. An important context is provided by Larry Wolff's monograph, which 30 years ago initiated a new phase in research on the European invention of Eastern Europe.

Keywords: Marquis de Ségur; Adam Mickiewicz; Larry Wolff; Intellectual History; Younger Europe

Introduction

For at least a few different reasons, 2021 will go down in history as a remarkable, extraordinary time. It was a year of catastrophes caused by advancing climate change and another year of the pandemic; those two issues seem obvious associations. But beyond that, it was also a year in which the price of producing "green energy" fell by a record amount, and for the first time in history, its profitability far outstripped that of fossil energy (Stöcker, 2021). And it was also the year that COVID vaccines were developed at a record pace. Science tried to keep up with the harrowing events, but the various attempts at recapping that time still felt more like a disaster movie than the usual flashback leading up to New Year's Eve. These days, it is the disaster films that need to be more intimate, as the horror of newspaper and television headlines has caught up with the apocalyptic cinema of the past 20 years (Hess, 2022).

An important point in the world of European politics is also the major change in attitude towards Russia (Luther, 2021) that occurred last year. The image of a partner of Europe and aspiring democracy from the 1990s has been taken over by a power in decline, dangerous because it bases its functioning on rivalry and conflict with the European Union and the United States. Russia's growing presence and involvement, especially militarily, in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa have forced European states to seriously rethink their future relations with the country responsible for poisoning opponents, gas blackmail and the threat of a full-scale war with Ukraine. Since the time of Peter the Great, the Western European perspective on Russia has been dominated by the view—obviously not the only and exclusive one (Krauß, 2007)—that Russia is the missing piece of Europe, moving inexorably towards it in the course of its history. This view is currently undergoing the deepest reevaluation in its history, which is important because for geopolitical and historical reasons, the image of Russia is strongly connected to the image of Poland.

This article was drafted in 2021. When I was preparing it for print in mid-2022, I had to address a very different reality. The threat of war, which seemed extremely dangerous for Europe, turned into brutal and cruel Russian aggression against Ukraine, causing tens of thousands of

deaths and unimaginable destruction of the infrastructure of the entire country. For the first time since 1945, Europe has had to face the risk of a conflict that in the long term could lead to a confrontation between NATO and Russia, and in the nearer term, has led to a serious economic crisis and social unrest, linked to high inflation and energy insecurity. This is a moment when the positions of both Russia and Poland on the intellectual and geopolitical map of the world are changing rapidly. The ambitions of this article, however, do not extend to a presentist assessment of the images of the two countries; I would like to backtrack to the turn of the European Enlightenment and Romanticism to show, using two examples, the historical ambivalence of the formation of the place of Poland and Russia in the sphere of European imagined communities.

Eastern Europe as seen through the eyes of foreigners in the 18th century is now an extensive and important topic in Slavic regional studies. When we look at European modernity as an offshoot of the Enlightenment, it is the history of the relations between the West and the East at that time that plays an important role in historical and literary studies. How Western Europe viewed our part of the continent has played an important role in later relations, and many stereotypes with Enlightenment roots remain valid even today, especially in situations of crises and political tensions.

I think that almost 30 years after its publication, Larry Wolff's monograph *Inventing Eastern Europe* remains of fundamental importance for this topic and should be revisited, the more so as it has only recently been translated into Polish, and this will certainly mark a completely new phase in its reception. The great strength of Wolff's work is that it is deeply rooted in its time. The book owes its shape to the bloodless revolution of 1989 and the need for Europe to confront its new shape after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dismantling of the Iron Curtain. But Wolff was not motivated by the idea of "ending history," for he saw in the regained geopolitical unity the danger of developing stereotypes and antagonisms that were more than two hundred years old. Rejoicing at the end of the Cold War was a common experience in different parts of Europe, but this did not prevent shopkeepers in Paris immediately after the fall of the Wall from arbitrarily checking and searching customers of Eastern European appearance, for fear that they would steal their

goods. Increased migration within Europe rapidly resulted in a wave of anti-migrant resentment, for example, in Germany and Italy. Western Europe created an image of its Eastern counterpart and believed in it unconditionally, and this belief has proved surprisingly durable and its recurrence astonishingly regular. Wolff wrote:

> Eastern Europe defined Western Europe by contrast, as the Orient defined the Occident, but was also made to mediate between Europe and the Orient. One might describe the invention of Eastern Europe as an intellectual project of demi-Orientalization. This was a process that could also work the other way. Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* has proposed that purposeful Hellenism purged our understanding of ancient Greece of its African and Asian influences. It also helped to exempt modern Greece from inclusion in the idea of Eastern Europe, and Churchill still celebrated the salvation of its "immortal glories" from the shadow of the iron curtain in the twentieth century. The parallel intellectual processes of Orientalism and Hellenism, both dating back to the eighteenth century, created important points of reference and influential parameters for the evolution of the idea of Eastern Europe (Wolff, 1994, 7).

Wolff cites the creation of the Orient, Ancient Greece, and Eastern Europe as three parallel intellectual processes, all characterized by their Enlightenment origins and involving similar actors and institutions. It was a phenomenon in which the present and the past were simultaneously subject to creation. The inspiration drawn from Edward Said's publications is quite obvious (especially Said 1978, 1983), less obvious is the presence of Martin Bernal. He too was an American professor who became interested in modern Hellenism at some point in his academic career.

Bernal is the author of *Black Athena* (Bernal, 1987, consisting of three volumes), in which he reasoned that the impact of ancient Greek history and culture since the 18th century in Europe was associated with a rise in nationalism and racism in the humanities and literature. "Purifying" the image of Greece of Jewish and African influences involved, according to Bernal, the identification of scientific interest with that of the state's, largely subordinating science to the colonial imperative in

Britain, France, and the German states. The problem is that Bernal's concept has been widely criticized and has not stood the test of time (Lefkowitz, MacLean Rogers 1996). There were many reasons for this criticism, but the simplest was that over the past three hundred years, there have been a great number of different visions of Greece in Europe, and Bernal laid claim to describing one current model.

Does this affect Larry Wolff's reflection in any way? In part, naturally, it does, because the Hellenism described by Bernal is no longer a reference point for constructing an image of Eastern Europe. Indeed, the journeys of diplomats, officers, travelers, geographers, and philosophers contributed to the formation of a ready-made template that described the East as a borderland connecting (and at the same time separating) Europe from Asia. But on the other hand, it must be added that the end of the Enlightenment is not a permanent caesura for this process. The negotiation of meanings between the East and the West continued throughout the 19th century, but the difference is that this time the East was a very active participant in this discussion.

This is where the question of Russia resurfaces; because of its superpower position, it was the voice of its supporters that was the loudest in the 19th century. The division into Slavophiles and their opponents dominated discussions of the Slavic part of the European continent, especially those concerning the future of Slavic politics (or policies). A matter of great importance, from the point of view of intellectual history, is how the special role of Russia became a reference point in the imaginary world of Enlightenment intellectuals and politicians, as well as how this thinking evolved in the last two hundred years of European history. The newcomers from Italy, France, and Britain did not colonize Eastern Europe but created a kind of "language" that enabled Prussia, Russia, and the Habsburg Empire to control 19th-century Slavdom.

Marquis Louis-Phillipe de Ségur

One of the first journeys through Poland described by Wolff is the business trip of the Marquis (Count) Louis-Phillipe de Ségur, a special diplomatic envoy of the French court sent to Russia. I would like to focus

on this account described in the Marquis' memoir, as it touches on issues of interest to me. Ségur's biography involves a whole series of intriguing events and political processes that left their mark on 19th-century Europe. First, as a very young man, he participated in the American Revolutionary War, obviously as an ally of the rebellious states. Second, at a crucial moment in Polish history, between the First and Second Partitions, he was appointed special envoy of the king to the St. Petersburg court. On his way to Russia, he stopped in Berlin and Warsaw, traversing Europe from west to east, and made a number of interesting observations that reflect the emergence of Poland's image just before its final collapse. How Poland was perceived before its disappearance from the map of Europe later played a powerful role in defining who Poles are and how their efforts to regain an independent state should be interpreted. Third, the author of the memoir did not become an opponent of the revolution after its outbreak, but actively joined the ranks of revolutionaries. His views do not represent any of the factions of conservatism and monarchism of the late *Ancien régime*. He was a democrat with an aristocratic background, for whom the most important values were the Enlightenment ideals of the freedom of peoples to determine their own destiny, the rules of continuity and devotion to the law of international treaties, and concern for his own career and the success of his entire family. This mixture makes his account particularly relevant.

I would like to draw attention to an earlier episode related to the American phase of the marquis's diplomatic and military work. Before he started his journey to the East, he served as a colonel during the American War of Independence, and later he underwent a kind of diplomatic training in Paris and London, which strongly influenced his way of evaluating the situation in Europe and in the world. Eastern Europe was a part of a certain global order, threatened by rapid changes on the horizon, which this very young politician with an excellent background and connections aptly noted in his reflections. I think that the marquis's memoirs form a whole and illustrate a certain process of shaping his views. I am referring here to both his recollection of America during his mission in Russia and his recollection of his diplomatic career after a certain time, when the marquis wrote down his accounts. Let us start

with the confrontation between the young American state, helped considerably by France and its army, and the old empires whose glory days were behind them:

> Ces rocs sourcilleux, ces formidables montagnes paraissent une sorte de barrière que le destin avait voulu placer autour de cet immense continent pour en défendre l'approche contre l'avarice européenne et pour lui cacher ses inépuisables mines d'or, d'argent et de diamant, funestes trésors qui excitèrent la cupidité de tant d'aventuriers, la rivalité de tant de puissances, et qui firent de l'Amérique un théâtre sanglant, où des peuples entiers, moissonnés, devinrent les victimes d'une farouche hypocrisie.
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> Là le fanatisme et la soif de l'or tuaient pour convertir, ravageaient pour s'enrichir, dépeuplaient pour dominer, et, l'Évangile d'un Dieu de paix à la main, allumaient partout des bûchers sur lesquels, malgré les vertueux efforts de Las Casas, on immola, comme au temps des faux dieux, une foule de victimes humaines.
>
> Les révolutions de l'antiquité ne furent que des jeux en comparaison des révolutions qui renversèrent l'empire pacifique des Incas; dans celle-ci des peuples entiers périrent et disparurent (Ségur, 1859, 227).

(These huge rocks, these formidable mountains seem to be a sort of barrier that fate had wanted to place around this immense continent to make it unapproachable to European avarice and to hide from it its inexhaustible mines of gold, silver and diamonds, disastrous treasures which excited the greed of so many adventurers, the rivalry of so many powers, and which made America a bloody theater, where whole peoples, decimated, became the victims of a fierce hypocrisy.

There fanaticism and the desire for gold killed in order to convert, ravaged in order to enrich themselves, depopulated in order to dominate, and, with the Gospel of a God of peace in their hands, lit bonfires everywhere, on which, despite the virtuous efforts of Las Casas, a host of human victims were immolated, as in the time of the false gods.

The revolutions of antiquity were only games compared to the revolutions that overthrew the peaceful empire of the Incas; in this one, entire peoples perished and disappeared.)

Long before his journey to the East, still on the other side of the Atlantic, Ségur had experienced a history in which great empires fell victim to the greed and unscrupulousness of European colonizers. There was, however, more to the story of the fall of the Incan state than the simple realization that the world beyond Europe was about to collide with the ruthlessness of European interests and their representatives. This is not a picture of colonizing determinism. Ségur observes a world in upheaval, abandoning a stable and predictable past to take a direction that is not fully understood and predictable. This is the beginning of that phase of European history which in *Phänomenologie des Geistes (The Phenomenology of Spirit)* (Hegel, 2013, 10) Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel called the "crossing" or "transitional phase" (*Übergang*). Modern man has abandoned the past in the name of the future, but although he no longer identifies with the time of the past, he has not yet learned what specifically awaits him and in which he will participate. I deliberately cite Hegel at this point because the marquis's perspective is mapped by deliberate retrospection; it is a recollection that brings the past out of oblivion, but with an awareness of what the young author of the memoir did not know at the time when France was at its peak.

This phenomenon can be seen in the description of the city to which the young soldier returns from America after the victorious war. It is a magnificent place, full of splendor and glory resulting from the power of the French monarchy. However, Paris at the height of its fame and power is described by Ségur from the perspective of an impending catastrophe, namely the revolution, which would displace and change the actors of the dazzling Parisian scene. Documenting people, places, and events at this point serves to highlight the fact that a great historical turn of fortune (from the Latin *revolvo, -ere*) would annihilate the familiar world:

> […] je trouvai, à mon retour, la cour et la société de Paris plus brillante que jamais, la France fière de ses victoires, satisfaite de la paix, et le royaume avec un aspect si florissant, qu'à moins d'être doué du triste don de prophétie, il était impossible d'entrevoir l'abîme prochain vers lequel un courant rapide nous entraînait (Ségur, 1859, 257).

([…] I found, on my return, the court and society of Paris more brilliant than ever, France proud of its victories, satisfied with peace, and the kingdom with such a flourishing aspect, that unless one was gifted with the sad gift of prophecy, it was impossible to glimpse the approaching abyss towards which a rapid current was drawing us.)

In recalling the experiences of his youth, the marquis used the metaphor of a man placed atop a high tower. Vertigo experienced in such a place can lead to a tragic fall. But only this impression allows us to describe a world in which literature, philosophy, engineering, chemistry and physics are developing so dynamically that human possibilities seem to have no limits, a real empire of sciences (*Des Lumières à l'Empire*, Chappey, 2016, 27–57) busy discovering the secrets of the world and subjugating it. And on the other hand, not only the world of science but also of politics was experiencing an incredible development, especially in terms of liberal and egalitarian ideas. The golden age (*l'âge d'or*) meant, at that moment, pride in being a Frenchman of the 18th century and in the fact that that world was still a model for the rest of Europe. This belief proved true, but the place of French culture and science was taken by an anti-feudal and anti-monarchical revolution. Paris just before the collapse, France a moment before the catastrophe, Europe before the devastating war: these elements comprised the picture of the world right before an abrupt change of course.

One other important element of the marquis's memoirs played an important role in describing his journey to the East. Before setting out for St. Petersburg, he visited London so that he could learn about the complexity of France's diplomatic relations with the British Empire and how they related to his future assignment. The comparison with the recently defeated superpower fared terribly for the homeland of the future diplomat:

Je restai six semaines en Angleterre, logé chez M. d'Adhémar, qui répondit complètement à mes espérances. […] L'activité du commerce, la perfection de l'agriculture, l'indépendance des citoyens, sur le front desquels on croit voir écrit qu'ils n'obéissent qu'aux lois, tous les prodiges d'une industrie sans entraves et d'un patriotisme qui sait faire de tous

> les intérêts privés un faisceau uni indissolublement par le lien de l'intérêt général, les ressources sans bornes que leur donne un crédit fondé sur la bonne foi, affermi par l'inviolabilité des droits de chacun, […] et cette heureuse combinaison de royauté, d'aristocratie et de démocratie, qui avait élevé une île de peu d'étendue sous un ciel rigoureux, une île à peine connue des Romains au rang de l'une des plus riches, des plus heureuses, des plus fortes, des plus libres et des plus redoutables puissance de l'Europe (Ségur, 1859, 274).
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> (I stayed in England for six weeks, lodged with M. d'Adhémar, who completely fulfilled my expectations. […] The activity of commerce, the perfection of agriculture, the independence of the citizens, whose foreheads seem to read that they only obey the laws, all the prodigies of an unfettered industry and of a patriotism, which transforms all private interests into a bundle indissolubly united by the bond of the general interest, the limitless resources given to them by a credit based on good faith, […] and this fortunate combination of royalty, aristocracy and democracy, which had raised an island of little extent under a rigorous sky, an island scarcely known to the Romans, to the rank of one of the richest, happiest, strongest, freest and most formidable powers in Europe.)

The empires became increasingly powerful, but this did not guarantee their permanence. Both antiquity and modernity, including the Old and New Worlds, document a cycle of change inexorable to human pride, ambition, and hubris. But this does not exhaust Ségur's method of thinking; through broad horizons, travel, military service, conversations with high-ranking officials, and access to the official diplomatic records of the French monarchy, the young politician came to believe that history does not happen linearly and that it is not a single, irreversible process. Different epochs can happen simultaneously in different parts of the world; barbarism and civilization are not successive stages in the development of mankind; they do not follow each other in a cycle of eternal transformations of systems and states, but describe extremes on the scale of ongoing socio-political processes. Every nation, every state can be civilized and barbaric in its own way, and histories of primitivism, uncouthness, and crude political relations can occur at

different times and places in the world. In a way, the marquis's thinking seems to draw on the writings of Giambattista Vico and Johann Gottfried Herder about the separate trajectories of nations throughout history. Assuming that de Ségur looked at the world in this way, the experience of the "East," which he was about to traverse on his way to Russia, can be portrayed more accurately.

He traveled there via Berlin and Warsaw, intending to tour the lands that were on the way from France. The marquis's reflections of 1784, published much later, show his fascination with the Prussian court at Potsdam. The gracious king devotes a great deal of time to him as part of "la faveur d'une audience particulière" (a special audience as a token of grace) (Ségur, 1859, 281) in order to familiarize the young diplomat with the specifics of the political and civilizational situation in the region. Poland is the anti-hero of the story. It is inhabited by slaves deprived of political rights. Their life resembles the one known from the stories about ancient barbarians, and their primitivism, backwardness, and ignorance are a challenge to the civilized nations of Europe.

The monarch juxtaposes the extremes that characterize Poland: it is a country of free people, inhabited by people deprived of freedom; it is huge, but actually deserted, without inhabitants; contentiousness, a lack of character, and a fierce political temper among the representatives of the Polish nobility mean chivalry and anarchy at the same time.

Frederick the Great omits the facts inconvenient to him. He does not mention that twelve years earlier the first partition had taken place and the Prussian state had in effect become almost twice as large, at the expense of Poland. Ségur also seems to be unaware of this fact, looking at Polish-German relations as if Prussia bordered with an abyss somewhere deep in Asia. He accepts the king's perspective as convenient for him, because it makes his diplomatic mission an existential challenge, a borderline experience, a balancing act on the narrow border between life and death.

What Wolff fails to mention is that Frederick the Great repeatedly directed similar disdain toward his subjects and the German language as he did toward the Poles. His complexes toward France influenced the hierarchy of peoples, languages, and cultures that he followed in his daily politics. In 1780 the king published a short treatise on the condition

and prospects of German literature, *De la littérature allemande, des défauts qu'on peut lui reprocher, quelles en sont les causes, et par quells moyens on peut les corriger* (On German literature, the defects that can be ascribed to it, their causes, and how they can be corrected). He began with the traditional compilation of the achievements of ancient and modern nations, only to later look around with rhetorical flair and conclude that this was a search doomed to failure. German-language writing had no Homers, Horaces, Ciceros, or Thucydideses of its own:

> Jettons à présent un coup-d'oeil sur notre Patrie: j'entends parler un Jargon dépourvu d'agrément que chacun manie selon son caprice, des termes employés sans choix; les mots propres et les plus expressifs négliges, et le sens des choses noyé dans des mers épisodiques. Je fais des recherches pour déterrer nos Homères, nos Virgiles, nos Anacréons, nos Horaces, nos Démosthenes, nos Cicérons, nos Thucydides, nos Tites-Lives; je ne trouve rien, mes peines sont perdues. Soyons donc sincères, et confessons de bonne foi que jusqu'ici les Belles-lettres n'ont pas prospéré dans notre Sol. L'Allemagne a eu des Philosophes, qui soutiennent la comparaison avec les anciens, qui même les ont surpassés dans plus d'un genre: je me réserve d'en faire mention dans la suite. Quant aux Belles-lettres, convenons de notre indigence (Frederick II, 1883, 5).
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> (Let us now take a look at our homeland: I hear a jargon devoid of pleasure which each one handles according to his whim, terms used without choice; the proper and most expressive words neglected, and the meaning of things drowned in episodic seas. I am searching for our Homers, our Virgils, our Anacreons, our Horatii, our Demosthenes, our Ciceros, our Thucydides, our Titus-Livius; I find nothing, my efforts are in vain. Let us therefore be sincere, and confess in good faith that up to now, the Belles-lettres have not prospered in our soil. Germany has had Philosophers who compare favorably with the ancients, and who have even surpassed them in more than one respect: I reserve the right to mention them later. As for the Belles-lettres, let us agree on our indigence.)

"Our homeland" (*notre Patrie*) is an ambiguous term, to say the least. Prussia was still a young kingdom seeking a place for itself on the map

of European political powers (Martus, 2015, 21–81). However, it could certainly not be equated with the entirety of German culture and civilization. The king of Prussia was one of several prominent German rulers and political leaders. Prussia itself was one of the most important states, but formally, only one of nearly two hundred different political organisms. After its victory over Austria in the war over Silesia and the first partition of Poland, its importance increased, but so did the other German states' fear of Prussian imperial ambitions. The king, who failed to recognize the achievements of German literature that did exist around him and who then proposed significant changes to German spelling and pronunciation, behaved unceremoniously and brashly. He treated the German literary language as yet another area of conquest that, without royal interference, would never be a match for the French language. The complex of France was an important part of Frederick's worldview, parts of which he consistently attempted to transfer to German territory. Marc Fumaroli emphasizes that the young heir to the throne preferred to write and speak using only French, as his intellectual life, taste, and education stemmed from his attachment to French culture and fascination with Paris (Fumaroli, 2014, 122–123). The path to literary prestige and the elevation of German culture (Casanova, 2007, 18–19) meant abandoning peripheral "barbarism" and entering the center of "civilization." When Frederick criticized Poles and their kingdom, we must remember that the scope of his pervasive criticism and discontent knew no bounds. Everything needed correcting and nothing was good enough unless it bore the stamp of belonging to *esprit français*. I cite the royal treatise not as an arbitrarily chosen context, but because Frederick II declared his commitment to French culture at the very beginning of the conversation: "J'ai toujours aimé la France, le caractère des Français, leur langue, leurs arts, leur littérature, et je vous vois avec plaisir chez moi" (I have always loved France, the character of the French, their language, their arts, their literature, and I see you with pleasure in my home) (Ségur, 1859, 288). The French envoy disregards all the subtleties of the situation. Eastern European barbarism needed to be civilized, and Prussia and Russia were the natural executors of this mission, laid out on the pages of Enlightenment philosophers who knew little or nothing about the region, even when they had the opportunity to see it with their own

eyes. Regardless of who or what the king was talking about, the diplomat felt comfortable because France always remained the point of reference.

The problem of the first partition is particularly complicated in the account of the young politician. In the story of his Berlin conversations, the issue of the territories taken away from Poland appears, but it is presented by his Prussian interlocutors as an act of civilizational necessity. Ségur expresses his opinion, which is critical of any claim to Poland and supported by the peoples' right to self-determination. His resistance, however, does not sound strong and essentially is reduced to a question of a violation of customs accepted in European inter-state relations.

Ségur's journey is an apt illustration of the problem of differing cognitive perspectives on Central European states. The politician spared us the details of his departure from Berlin, but there is a possibility that he traveled through lands taken from Poland as a result of an earlier partition. Where Prussia is, the diplomat is delighted with German civilization; where Poland begins, he lacks words to describe his disgust. It is possible, however, that it was the Polish lands taken by Prussia that delighted him, and that it was also the Polish lands that were the subject of severe criticism.

The marquis's account deserves closer examination. He structured his thoughts and observations in such a way as to emphasize that this was a journey through a country filled with the deepest extremes.

> Les arts, l'esprit, la grâce, la littérature, tous les charmes de la vie sociale, rivalisant à Varsovie avec la sociabilité de Vienne, de Londres et de Paris; mais , dans les provinces, des mœurs encore sarmates; enfin un mélange inconcevable de siècles anciens et de siècles modernes, d'esprit monarchique et d'esprit républicain, d'orgueil féodal et d'égalité, de pauvreté et de richesses, de sages discours dans les diètes et de sabres tirés pour fermer la discussion, de patriotisme ardent et d'appels trop fréquents faits, par l'esprit de faction, à l'influence étrangère (Ségur, 1859, 301).

> (The arts, wit, grace, literature, all the charms of social life, rivaled in Warsaw by the sociability of Vienna, London and Paris; but, in the provinces, morals which were still Sarmatian; finally, an inconceivable mixture of ancient and modern centuries, of monarchical and republican

spirit, of feudal pride and equality, of poverty and wealth, of wise speeches in parliaments and of sabres drawn to close the discussion, of ardent patriotism and of too frequent appeals made, in the spirit of bias, to foreign influence.)

Poland is "an unimaginable melange" (*un mélange inconceivable*) of antiquity and modernity, poverty and wealth, refinement and vulgarity, education and primitive customs. In the political dimension, the diplomat is astonished by the clash of institutions based on the search for consensus in discussions and exchanges of views, with the ubiquitous violence and influence of foreign countries. Poland is not a civilized country, because, according to the spirit of French culture, civilization means an even and proportionate improvement in human relations, political institutions and the material shape of the environment in which a society lives. Thus, the juxtaposition of a fully European Warsaw with a primitive province indicates that Poland is a hybrid, functioning according to rules different from those familiar to Ségur.

What is striking, however, is that the closer the aristocrat gets to his departure from Warsaw, the more chaotic and disorderly his account becomes. This is probably due to the fact that the narrative is subordinate to several different aims. The diplomat describes the deep patriotism of the Polish elite and an equally intransigent aversion to Russians, especially those present in Warsaw and, like Ambassador Stackelberg, exercising direct supervision over the Polish court. Ségur describes France's approval of the partition of Poland as disgraceful, but quickly adds that he does not mean to ascribe to Poland and Russia the roles of victim and persecutor. He decided to use his visit to Warsaw to increase the chances of realizing the project of free passage of goods from Poland to Russia using the Dniester ("Ceux-ci travaillaient à obtenir la liberté du passage des denrées de Pologne par le Dniester," Ségur, 1859, 315 [They were working to obtain free passage of goods from Poland through the Dniester.]) In his view, this project would contribute to the enrichment of all the countries involved, including Poland, Russia and France. The deep resentment of Poles, triggered by the instrumental approach of Russians to the affairs of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, caused the diplomat's concern, but not because he admired the noble warriors

fighting for a good cause and standing up for independence that was in danger of being lost. He merely feared that frozen Polish-Russian relations would prevent the implementation of economic projects that would ultimately prove beneficial to France.

His departure from Warsaw proved particularly complicated; heavy snowfall stopped him near Białystok, where he accepted an invitation from the royal sister, Izabella Poniatowska. Ségur describes this stage of the journey in the spirit of chivalric romance, casting himself in the role of a knight-errant, lost at the ends of the earth. However, the paralyzing effect of winter on basic life and diplomatic plans turned out to be quite bearable when the royal sister invited her guest to avail not only of her castle, but also of a whole host of butlers, servants and cooks ready to fulfill the aristocrat's whims ("[…] à ma grande surprise, je vis que, par l'attention la plus délicate, la comtesse y avait envoyé maître d'hôtel, cuisiniers, valets de chambre, et un grand nombre de domestiques qui vinrent prendre mes orders," Ségur, 1859, 316) [To my great surprise, I saw that, with the most delicate attention, the countess had sent a butler, cooks, valets, and a great number of servants who came to take my orders.]) Lost among the endless snows of the foreign East while living in interiors worthy of the finest families of Europe, Ségur suddenly discovered the Polish magnate within himself and adapted to the unfortunate circumstances. Incidentally, in 1801 the king's other sister, Ludwika Maria Poniatowska, similarly made her Warsaw estate, the Kazanowski Palace, available to Louis XVIII, the king in exile, who lived there with his family until 1804. This analogy certainly did not appear in the memoir by accident. Just as in the case of the exiled king, the young diplomat found himself virtually outside of time and space. Bound to his pleasant seclusion, he had to wait for the weather and his fortunes to improve.

At this point there is a radical change of opinion; while the journey through Poland necessitated his submission to the forces of nature, in the Russian Empire it was nature that had to recognize the superiority of man. The journey from Riga to St. Petersburg, also in snowy and freezing conditions, is described by Ségur as pleasant and proving the genius of Peter the Great: "Je trouvai une route superbe, traversant quelques jolies villes et de nombreux villages, partout des postes bien

servies et des auberges très-commodes. Sous un ciel âpre , malgré les rigueurs d'un froid qui s'élevait à vingt-cinq degrés, on reconnaissait à chaque pas les signes de la force, delà puissance, et les traces du génie de Pierre le Grand. Son heureuse audace, changeant ces froides contrées en riches provinces et triomphant de la nature, était parvenue à répandre sur ces glaces éternelles la chaleur fécondante de la civilization" (Ségur, 1859, 318) [I found a superb road, passing through some pretty towns and many villages, everywhere well-served posts and very comfortable inns. Under a harsh sky, in spite of the rigors of a cold which rose to twenty-five degrees, one recognized at every step the signs of the strength, of the power, and the traces of the genius of Peter the Great. His fortunate audacity, changing these cold regions into rich provinces and triumphing over nature, had succeeded in spreading the fertile warmth of civilization over this eternal ice.])

The history of the reign of Peter the Great's successors is an era of darkness and madness that the author does not want to discuss in detail. He fast-forwards to Catherine the Great, which, of course, is not coincidental, since it was at her court that he carried out his diplomatic mission. What resurfaces is the idea of "Europeanization of Russia," a profound change along the lines of Western solutions, which left its mark on Russian destiny:

> Catherine, avant de terminer son règne, changea en ville plus de trois cents bourgs, et compléta l'organisation administrative et judiciaire de toutes les provinces de l'empire. Sa cour fut le rendez-vous de tous les princes et de tous les personnages célèbres de son siècle.
>
> Avant elle, Pétersbourg, dans son horizon de glace, était un point presque inaperçu et qui semblait tenir à l'Asie; sous son règne, la Russie devint européenne; Pétersbourg brilla entre les capitales du monde civilisé, et le trône des czars s'éleva au premier rang des trônes les plus puissants et les plus respectés.
>
> (Before ending her reign, Catherine turned more than three hundred towns into cities and completed the administrative and judicial organization of all the provinces of the empire. Her court was the meeting place for all the princes and famous people of her century.

Before her, Petersburg, in its icy horizon, was an almost unnoticed point which seemed to belong to Asia; under her reign, Russia became European; Petersburg shone among the capitals of the civilized world, and the throne of the Tzars rose to the forefront of the most powerful and most respected thrones.)

Ségur's biography, and especially his later life, shows us a man who was most influenced by his early experiences in the American Revolutionary War. After several years in Russia, after he succeeded in concluding a trade deal that was very favorable to France, he returned to France. There he got involved on the side of the Revolution as a diplomat, and later served in various capacities in the Napoleonic administration and France from the era of the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty. Just before he died in 1830, he sided with Louis-Philippe I. His three volumes of memoirs were published in 1824, introducing us to another strand of the story: the influence of the 19th century on the earlier vision of Eastern Europe.

From the perspective of an experienced author, who had participated in many important events in public life (not only in France), the moment of publishing his memoirs is a time when a century of revolutionary change, when "everything changed," was confronted with an era of stability:

Jamais la curiosité ne dut être plus active qu'à l'époque où nous vivons: cette époque arrive après le siècle le plus fécond en orages. Pendant sa durée, institutions, politique, philosophie, opinions, lois, coutumes, fortunes, modes et mœurs, tout a changé.

L'existence de chaque État n'a été qu'une suite de révolutions; la vie de chaque homme, semblable à un roman, a été pleine d'aventures […]. Échappé au naufrage et arrivé dans le port, on aime à se rappeler avec calme les tempêtes qui nous ont tant agités; on veut rendre compte à soi même, à sa famille, et même au public […] (Ségur, 1859, 1–2).

(Curiosity has never been more active than in the period in which we live: this period comes after the most tumultuous century. Over that period,

institutions, politics, philosophy, opinions, laws, customs, fortunes, fashions and mores have all changed.

The existence of each State has been a succession of revolutions; the life of each man, like a novel, has been full of adventures [...]. Having escaped from the shipwreck and arrived in the harbor, we like to calmly reminisce about the storms that agitated us so much; we want to give an account to ourselves, to our family, and even to the public [...].)

A variety of threads intersect in this passage. There is a clear tendency to place the memoirs in the interpretive frame of an "picaresque novel" of a man who returns to safety after a tragic maritime disaster and feels obliged to testify to his experiences. Indeed, Ségur casts himself in the lead role of the story and weaves a tale of a young man who is constantly on the move, traveling through continents, countries and regions, exuberantly characterizing all the places he visits. His method of making sense of the events in which he participates is far from the account of a soldier and diplomat. As a narrator, he removes himself from the events he describes, outlines their historiosophical background and shows the impact of various processes from a wider perspective. However, in order not to discourage the reader with the lack of "tasty" political facts of the past, he elaborates on the behavior and lifestyle of key political figures, politicians, aristocrats, European rulers and members of their royal families. It reveals the "human" side of their functioning, their habits, the way they speak, their scholarly and elegant conversation, their style of dress, and daily life in their courts, and who the most important members of their families are. Rather than a diplomatic account, we get the lives of kings and empresses; this is more of a social chronicle, where the author is a welcome visitor roaming around Europe, and not a professional diplomat. While minimizing descriptions of the economic, social and political conditions of Prussia, Poland and Russia, Ségur tends to emphasize more or less schematic descriptions of landscapes, climate, roads, the appearance of inns and taverns, and basic depictions of the living conditions of various population groups. However, he is most absorbed by court life led in palaces and country estates, dissected in dozens of different activities of a non-political nature.

In the account that emerges from Ségur's memoirs, however, one thing is surprising: he made little attempt to fulfill his promise of presenting a century in which everything changed. It appears that the author paid special attention to describing those moments and places that actually documented a lack of evolution and rapid change. The collapse of ancient empires in America took place centuries earlier, and he affirms the development of science and philosophy after his arrival in Paris from the United States. However, he remarks on it as an already accomplished fact that he did not witness. He looks at France, which was going to be rapidly transformed by the Revolution, but the world he sees is only a harbinger of great events; by itself, it is a beacon of order. He travels to the East at a moment when a catastrophe seems to be impending, but describes a world frozen in a static *status quo*, where nothing happens. This writing strategy highlights a peculiar tendency of Ségur, who places the violence of historical change somewhere on the margins of his considerations, asking the reader to activate his imagination and extra-textual competence. As in an ancient tragedy, the author removes drastic and bloody scenes from the stage and does not allow them to violate *decorum*.

From the point of view of Central Europe, that is, Poland after 1815, Ségur's interpretation would have to raise objections. It was this moment that initiated profound transformations throughout the region and helped accelerate the transformation of the nascent Central European nations. I am interested in precisely this opposition of Younger Europe, for whom the 1830s were not a time for reflection, but for action. This was the case with the generation of Polish Romantics, who entered the historical arena at this very moment. I do not mean exclusively writers, but rather the entire movement of the young intelligentsia of noble birth, people for whom the future meant an inevitable change of order. The most important of these was the poet, Adam Mickiewicz.

Adam Mickiewicz

Wolff's summary moves toward making a grand historical analogy between the frontier of the Enlightenment mentality and that of

the immediate postwar era: "The iron curtain in the twentieth century descended exactly where the Enlightenment had drawn the border between Western Europe and Eastern Europe, hanging cultural curtains, not of iron, but of subtler stuff" (Wolff, 1994, 283). In his description, Wolff moves seamlessly from the first decade of the 19th century to Churchill's famous Fulton speech. It glides over the entire "Herder Hour," the era of the evolution, development of European nationalisms, and "nation-building." It is this gap that I find particularly significant.

In 1840, Adam Mickiewicz also characterized the border dividing Europe. He was hired as a professor of Slavic literature in Paris on a wave of interest in the eastern half of the continent, as it became apparent in governmental spheres and French journalism of the period that this was the part of Europe where the dangerous rivalry with the Russian Empire was intensifying. Mickiewicz divided Europe into two parts only: Slavic and non-Slavic parts, drawing a boundary that ran from Hamburg to Venice. He did this during his first lecture at the Collège de France:

> Soixante-dix millions d'hommes, qui couvrent la moitié de l'Europe et le tiers de l'Asie, parlent des dialectes de la langue slave. Si on tire une ligne du golfe de Venise à l'embouchure de l'Elbe, on trouve en dehors de cette ligne, et sur toute sa longueur, les restes, les débris des populations slaves refoulées vers le nord par la race germanique et par la race romane. Leur existence posthume, ici, n'appartient déjà plus qu'au passé; mais plus loin, vers les Karpats, ce rempart séculaire de la Slavie, aux deux extrémités de l'Europe, on voit les races slaves engagées dans des luttes acharnées (Mickiewicz, 1849, 6).

> (Seventy million people, inhabiting half of Europe and a third of Asia, speak dialects of the Slavic language. If we draw a line from the Gulf of Venice to the mouth of the Elbe, we find outside this line, and along its entire length, the remains, the debris of the Slavic populations driven northwards by the Germanic and the Romanic races. Their posthumous existence here is already a thing of the past; but further on, towards the Karpats, that age-old rampart of Slavia, at the two extremities of Europe, we see the Slavic races engaged in bitter struggles.)

In this way, he tried to justify a hypothesis concerning the history of Europe, namely, that it would not have become what it was without the Slavic contribution to its development. Mickiewicz went on to argue that it was not the contribution of the Slavic states alone, but of the Slavic peoples as well. The poet does not say so explicitly, but by means of certain allusions, especially to Tacitus's *Germania*, he makes it clear that when lecturing on the history of Slavic culture in France he will argue with the German writings of thinkers, philosophers, and politicians. His voice is meant to replace the prevalent opinions initiated by Herder's famous "Slavic" passage. What is salient about this dispute is the tribunal of the French public opinion, which was placed in an impossible situation: which side to choose and which vision of Slavism to believe in?

Mickiewicz's lectures coincided with a time of increased interest in Slavism in France, which was linked to the weakening of the Ottoman Empire and growing tensions in the Balkans and the Black Sea coasts between Russia and the European powers, France and Britain. Poles, who lived in exile in France, but also in Belgium, Switzerland and the British Isles, arrived there after 1831, when the November Uprising, known at the time as the Polish-Russian War or Revolution, collapsed. Poles, mostly former soldiers, traveled to France through the German states. They were welcomed as heroes of the struggle for the freedom of all Europe, continuators of the revolutionaries' efforts from earlier decades. They were not heading for emigration for political or economic reasons, as they hoped for the imminent outbreak of another war and a return to their homeland to continue the fight. This scenario did not materialize.

When Mickiewicz spoke in his inaugural lecture about the mission of the whole France, which had a duty to be at the forefront of endeavors to expand the freedom of nations and oppose feudal, absolute monarchies, he was referring to those very events of a decade ago. Moreover, Mickiewicz believed that a profound change in political, systemic and social relations, also associated with a deep modification of European borders, was rooted in the civilizational project of Slavism, which from the 9th century A. D. had consistently moved toward integration into the commercial, legal and religious life of the continent. Younger Europe demanded acceptance of its past in Europe to make thinking about a common future a possibility.

Summary

As Wolff notes, "Such was a light of the Enlightenment, permitting the pellucid penetration of darker domains" (Wolff, 1994, 258). What is striking in the Polish reception of Wolff's book is that, according to most Polish scholars, the one-sidedness of Enlightenment reflection was juxtaposed with the total silence of Polish authors, thinkers, and politicians. This silence was not absolute. Wolff devotes considerable attention to Stanisław August or Józef Wielhorski. However, these accusations are not on point. Wolff's book shows how much French-language opinions meant, whether spoken or written down by appropriately respected individuals, and what role German or Russian intermediation played in shaping opinions about Poland.

It must be emphasized, however, that Western European travelers to Poland and Russia did not arrive into a vacuum. The countries they visited had their own literature, art, historiography, political culture, system of science and education, and—what is especially important—their own image of Paris, London, and Berlin. These, however, were things more widely unknown. What is striking in the Marquis de Ségur's account is his acceptance of the views held by his few interlocutors as a certain universal image of Poland "as such." It was precisely this element in French-Slavic relations that Mickiewicz tried to combat: the fragmentary nature, the residual knowledge, the lack of motivation to learn more about the Slavic part of the continent. In the 19th century, a great many Slavic authors, thinkers, and scholars made sure that editions and translations of their works were published in French and German in the then-existing centers of political and intellectual debate. The study of the impact of these works and their reception remains one of the great Slavic research challenges.

Translated by Katarzyna Szuster

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