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Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Euro-Orientalism: Liberal Ideology and the Image of Russia in France (c. 1740-1880)*. Oxford and New York: Peter Lang, 2006. 358 pp. Figures, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$66.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 3-03910-516-7.

Review by N. Christine Brookes, Central Michigan University.

In 2002, acclaimed Russian director Alexander Sokurov released *Russian Ark*, an official selection for the Cannes Film Festival. Though primarily an artful tribute to Saint Petersburg's Hermitage and its history, the main character "Stranger" spends much of the film contemplating Russia's relationship to Western Europe, discussing its rulers, art, and history. The "Stranger," as attentive viewers later learn, is in fact the Marquis de Custine, one of France's most famous visitors to Russia. Custine's travel account, *La Russie en 1839*, was a tremendous success with French and European readers after its publication in 1843. The account, a description of the marquis' time in Russia, is filled with judgments about the nature of Russia and Russian civilization. With his account's *succès de scandale*, as prominent scholar of Franco-Russian cultural relations Michel Cadot put it, "toute l'Europe se mit à réfléchir sur l'énigme russe."^[1] Custine's work was one of many during the nineteenth century that posed, explicitly or implicitly, the following questions: What is Europe? What is or is not European? What is civilization? What is Russia? But, as Ezequiel Adamovsky's new study demonstrates, the French--and not just Voltaire and Diderot--had been thinking about the puzzle of Russia for many decades prior to the publication of Custine's firebrand travel account.

Adamovsky's work, generally, "examine[s] the relationship between perceptions of Russia (and, to a lesser extent, of Eastern Europe) and the making of a Western identity" between 1740 and 1880 (p. 13). If French representations of Russia designated Russia as "European," "Asian," "civilized," "barbarian," or somewhere in between, what do those perspectives divulge about France's posture in relation to Russia? In judging Russia, the French took positions about France's own relationship to questions of civilization. An examination of French perspectives of Russia, in short, is at the same time inherently a study on the formulation of a French--not just Russian--national identity. A study of France's representations of Russia--with Russia functioning as a prism of sorts through which to see France--brings to light aspects of France's construction of itself. In Adamovsky's case, he aims to define one way in which France imagined itself, namely "how the perception of certain characteristics of Russia and Eastern Europe, whether real or attributed, was shaped by (and used for) the construction of a liberal narrative of the West, which eventually became hegemonic" by examining a broad swath of philosophical treatises, political analyses, grand historical narratives, and travel literature (p. 13).

Largely an intellectual history, his study begins with the *philosophes* and ends with the period in which the first major academic publications about Russia were issued in France during the second half of the nineteenth century.^[2] Taking care to point out that his investigation is an inquiry not of stereotypes but rather of "the deeper level of identity-making," Adamovsky examines the construction of identity in the context of the *longue durée*, not in that of Franco-Russian diplomacy (p. 15). Basing his approach to identity on Jacques Lacan, Paul Ricœur, and Stuart Hall, he takes issue with the discourses of identity surrounding Russia and Eastern Europe, noting with Homi Bhabha the anxiety that came with the French (and Western European) articulation of self in the face of their puzzling eastern neighbors.^[3] "Neither fully Asiatic nor sufficiently European, neither entirely civilised nor completely barbarous, Russia's otherness was difficult to place in the symbolic organisation of time and space predominant in eighteenth-century France" (p. 19). He argues that this difficulty in locating Russia on an East-West

axis (and consequently the European and Western identities) was normalized finally by French academics by the end of the nineteenth century within the ideological framework of liberalism.

Certainly, “liberalism” can be taken to mean many different things; Adamovsky is clear to point out what it is and what it is not. It is not, in this context, to be taken in the North American sense of social justice and progressive politics (p. 24). Nor is it “coterminous with the ‘Enlightenment’ or ‘Modernity’” because it lacks the “immanence” component of the “two Modernities” cited by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.[4] It emphasizes only the “transcendental” aspect of these two Modernities, the *ideological* component in which liberalism “endeavors to control the radical implications of the modern discovery of immanence, by reestablishing a transcendental authority over human affairs.” Again with Hall, he goes on to state that the individual is an *ideal* with certain “transcendental rights” not defined by society and therefore “untouchable” by society” (p. 25). This leads to the second component of Adamovsky’s definition of liberalism as it pertains to the actions of “civil society” and a necessarily limited role of the state. The individual is therefore free in action without any unnecessary outside restrictions.[5] Finally, he associates liberalism with a “*bourgeois* ideology” that was not strictly limited to class interests, but extended into the role of the individual, their rights, property, and the role of society and the state (pp. 26-27). His goal in the book, thus, is to show how this “liberal-bourgeois ideology” defined now hegemonic views of Russia and Eastern Europe and “the hints of resistance that the struggles for this hegemony bring to light” (p. 27).

Euro-Orientalism begins by summing up the general knowledge about Russia in France prior to the period under examination. Apart from a few relations during the Middle Ages between the two entities, very little was written about Russia under the Tartar occupation. Prior to the eighteenth century, those in Western Europe were not convinced of “Muscovy’s” place in Christendom, nor were they sure of Russia’s geographical status within (or without) Europe. The remainder of the two preliminary chapters examines Enlightenment thinking about Russia. It is against this background that chapter one explores the perceptions of Russia in writings by Leibnitz (“Russia as a blank sheet”); Montesquieu (“a Northern European nation with a cold climate, and yet despotic and with other Southern and Asiatic characteristics”), missing the critical elements necessary—namely “independent intermediary bodies” of a liberal vision of a “good” government or society; and Voltaire (as admirer of Peter the Great’s efforts to Westernize Russia and as *philosophe* who “turn[ed] Russia and Peter into symbols and weapons for his enlightenment combats”).[pp. 32-38] Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s take on Russia was less enthusiastic about Peter’s “unnatural reforms,” but again Rousseau used Russia as a means through which to articulate his own political perspectives. Chapter one ends with an exploration of brothers Etienne Bonnet de Condillac and Gabriel Bonnot *abbé* de Mably who, in a similar vein, criticized Peter for his reforms, more specifically for having failed to turn the Russians into citizens. Chapter two develops specifically around Denis Diderot’s vision of Russia and his eventual progression toward the notion that, because the country lacked a middle class, it could not be fully European (i.e. “civilized”).

Post-revolutionary representations of Russia are the subject of chapter three, most of which “tended to follow the line established by Montesquieu and Diderot...depict[ing] Russia as the space of an *absence* [Adamovsky’s emphasis], lacking either intermediate bodies or a third estate, or both at the same time” (p. 85). Here, Adamovsky traces French thinking about Russia through the Revolution, Empire, and the Restoration via such authors as Saint-Marc Girardin, Alexandre Dumas (*père*), Victor Hugo, and the Marquis de Custine. Through this first half of the nineteenth-century, Russia was consistently depicted as the non-European with an “uncivilized” void that could only be filled by a middle class. This definition, he asserts, thus began to be “hegemonic” (p. 116). Chapter four deals with subsequent challenges to this established vision of Russia through the “Romantic Conservatives” and Socialists. These groups saw a Russia that “could show Europe the way back to the *lost community* (for the conservatives) or forward to the *desired community* (for the socialists)” (p. 121).

In chapter five, Adamovsky explores the liberal rejection of any other vision of Russia where Alexis de

Tocqueville's (and others') vision of America entered into the definition of "Western," erected in opposition to "Russia's supposed communism" (p. 175). "Thus, the parallel Russia/USA acquired now the sense of a clash of civilizations, in which geopolitical and national security issues were confusingly mixed with internal ideological disputes" (pp. 175-176). The following chapter deals with these ideas as they became a fixture of academic writings about Russia during the second half of the nineteenth century, an "univocal liberal interpretation with the authoritative voice of scientific truth" (p. 208). This definitive placement of Russia outside Europe thus "gave way to an *explicit* [Adamovsky's emphasis] programme of reforms that emphasized the need to 'penetrate' Russia with Western investments, technology, social classes, legal codes...." (p. 209).

Moving finally to the ideological legacies of this "liberal-bourgeois" entrenched representation of Russia and the definition of "civilization" beyond the nineteenth century, chapters seven and eight are of much interest to scholars of contemporary Russia and Eastern Europe. Chapter seven opens a critical discussion about ideas of civilization (as defined by the West) and contemporary academic declarations of a lack of civilization in Russia and Eastern Europe. Chapter eight, a pointed and fascinating concluding chapter, further elaborates this criticism. Ultimately, Adamovsky's assertion is that "Western identity kept Russia as one of its fundamental others, and extended many of the prejudices originally designed for Russia to the rest of the Slavic nations" (p. 280). He describes this as "Euro-Orientalism," "a discursive formation by means of which the area of the world that we were taught to call 'Eastern Europe' was (and is still being) incorporated into the global capitalist system" (p. 269). It is precisely his articulation of Euro-Orientalism that is most worthy of note because of its persistence even today in Western studies of Slavic countries and in perceptions of a post-1989 Europe.

Euro-Orientalism is certainly a valuable addition to Franco-Slavic studies specifically, as well as more generally to European and, with its parallel Russia/USA, transatlantic studies. While some may not fully appreciate Adamovsky's approaches based in intellectual history and class ideologies, his sketch of the discourse of Euro-Orientalism will be useful to cultural historians and scholars of literature looking at representations of Russia and Eastern Europe. Though the book is a rather dry read and the images he uses at the end of his chapters at times lack continuity with the preceding text, his study and bibliography are thorough and sharp.

Finally, in light of current questions surrounding the European Union's expansion into former Soviet-bloc countries, as well as the West's disappointment and frustration with Vladimir Putin's recent brazen posturing at home and abroad, Adamovsky's critique of the West's vision of the Slavic East is well worth scholars' attention. His study encourages a break with long-standing perceptions of (and policies toward) Europe's East, calling ultimately for new conceptualizations of Slavic countries in relation to the West that would replace "an ideological conceptual framework that deserves quick retirement" (p. 282).

NOTES

[1] Michel Cadot, *La Russie dans la vie intellectuelle française, 1839-1856* (Paris: Fayard, 1964.), p. 257. See also Charle Corbet, *A l'ère des nationalismes. L'opinion française face à l'inconnue russe (1799-1894)* (Paris: Didier, 1967); Martin Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999); Marie-Pierre Rey, *Le Dilemme russe: La Russie et l'Europe occidentale d'Ivan le Terrible à Boris Eltsine* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002).

[2] See, for example, Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, *L'Empire des tsars*, 3 vols., (Paris: Hachette, 1881-1889); and Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, *Le Roman russe* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1886).

[3] Jacques Lacan, *El Seminario (2): El Yo en la teoría de Freud y en la técnica psicoanalítica* (Buenos Aires: Paídos, 1988); Paul Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1990); Stuart Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?", in Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996), pp. 1-17; Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse," in Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall eds., *Visual Culture: The Reader* (London: Sage, 1999), pp. 370-378.

[4] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Labor of Dionysos: A Critique of the State-Form* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

[5] Stuart Hall, "Variants of Liberalism," in James Donald and Stuart Hall eds., *Politics and Ideology* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986), pp. 34-69.

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