

## Introduction

“From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent,” announced Winston Churchill in 1946, from Fulton, Missouri, deep in the heart of a different continent. It was to be his most stupendously successful rhetorical coinage, that iron curtain, dividing Europe in two, into Western Europe and Eastern Europe. For almost the next half century it stood as a crucial structural boundary, in the mind and on the map. The map of Europe, with its many countries and cultures, was mentally marked with Churchill’s iron curtain, an ideological bisection of the continent during the Cold War. “A shadow has fallen upon the scenes so lately lighted by the Allied victory,” Churchill observed, and that shadow too was cast upon the map, darkening the lands behind the iron curtain. In the shadow it was possible to imagine vaguely whatever was unhappy or unpleasant, unsettling or alarming, and yet it was also possible not to look too closely, permitted even to look away—for who could see through an iron curtain and discern the shapes enveloped in shadow?

The lands behind the iron curtain were identified geographically by Churchill as “these Eastern States of Europe.” They were joined together now “in what I must call the Soviet sphere,” all of them states in which Communist parties were seeking to assume “totalitarian control.” Yet the line from Stettin to Trieste, delimiting that Soviet sphere, was not one of absolute geographical determinism, and Churchill admitted one excep-

tion: "Athens alone—Greece with its immortal glories—is free." As for the rest of the Eastern states, on the one hand Churchill recognized that "the safety of the world requires a new unity in Europe, from which no nation should be permanently outcast." On the other hand, there was also reason to accept, approve, even enforce the increasingly apparent separation. "In front of the iron curtain which lies across Europe are other causes for anxiety," said Churchill, and from the very first he had no directional doubts about which lands were "in front"—he named Italy and France—and which were consigned to behind. He was anxious about political infiltration, about ideological contamination, for even in Western Europe "Communist parties or fifth columns constitute a growing challenge to Christian civilization."<sup>1</sup> Throughout the Cold War the iron curtain would be envisioned as a barrier of quarantine, separating the light of Christian civilization from whatever lurked in the shadows, and such a conception was all the more justification for not looking too closely at the lands behind.

Churchill's Fulton speech proved to be prophetic, and his figure of speech was cast in iron as a geopolitical fact of international relations. In the next generation, however, diplomatic historians of the Cold War, like Walter LaFeber and Daniel Yergin, would wonder whether this was in part a work of self-fulfilling prophecy, whether the provocation of the speech at Fulton actually contributed to the crystallization of ideological spheres in Europe, hastening the hardening of lines. Churchill himself, when he published his memoirs, showed that he was a far from entirely innocent observer of what befell the Eastern states of Europe, that he had been eager to play a part in drawing the line and hanging the curtain. Not even two years before he went to Fulton, Missouri, accompanied by Harry Truman, to warn against the Soviet shadow, he was in Moscow with Joseph Stalin in 1944, proposing percentages for postwar influence in those same Eastern states. Jotting on a piece of paper, he offered Stalin 90 percent in Romania, 75 percent in Bulgaria, 50 percent in Hungary and Yugoslavia, but only 10 percent in Greece—with its "immortal glories." Churchill then suggested that they burn the paper, but Stalin told him he could keep it.

In 1989 there was a revolution in Eastern Europe, or rather a series of related revolutions in the different Eastern states, which toppled and replaced the Communist governments whose history dated back to the postwar years. Political revolution brought democratic elections, an opening to market capitalism, the lifting of restrictions on travel, the withdrawal of Soviet troops, and eventually in 1991 the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. It was the Warsaw Pact, facing its counterpart of NATO in Western Europe, which since the 1950s had given military structure to the division of Europe, organizing the continent into confrontational blocs engaged in the Cold War. The revolutionary collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War rendered meaningless the conven-

tional terms that formulated the sharp separation of Europe into opposing halves: Churchill's iron curtain, the Soviet sphere, the ominous shadow. The division of Europe suddenly appeared to be over, erased, abolished, the halves all at once reunited as one continent. Such was the thunderbolt of revolution. I was in Poland in 1988, along with a party of other American professors, meeting with Polish professors to discuss the knotty and uncertain significance of Soviet *glasnost* for Eastern Europe. All our combined academic expertise produced a wealth of reflections, analyses, paradoxes, predictions, and pronouncements, but not an inkling of the revolution that was about to strike in the following year. Neither I nor anyone else had the faintest notion of what the opaque future was hiding just out of sight; no one guessed that the significance of *glasnost* would prove so tremendous that in a year the very idea of Eastern Europe, as a distinct geopolitical entity for focused academic analysis, would have become dubious and equivocal.

The revolution of 1989 in Eastern Europe has largely invalidated the perspective of half a century, compelling the reconsideration of Europe as a whole. The maps on the wall have always showed a continent of many colors, the puzzle pieces of many states; the dark line of the iron curtain, supplying the light and shadow in front and behind, was drawn on the maps in the mind. Those maps must be adjusted, adapted, reconceived, but their structures are deeply rooted and powerfully compelling. In the 1990s Italians are worriedly deporting Albanian refugees: *Albanesi, no grazie!* reads the graffiti on the wall. Germans are greeting visitors from Poland with thuggish violence and neo-Nazi demonstrations, while tourists from Eastern Europe are being arbitrarily stopped and searched in Paris shops, under suspicion of shoplifting. Statesmen, who once enthusiastically anticipated the unity of Europe, are looking away from the siege of Sarajevo, wishing perhaps that it were happening on some other continent. Alienation is in part a matter of economic disparity, the wealth of Western Europe facing the poverty of Eastern Europe, but such disparity is inevitably clothed in the complex windings of cultural prejudice. The iron curtain is gone, and yet the shadow persists.

The shadow persists, because the idea of Eastern Europe remains, even without the iron curtain. This is not only because the intellectual structures of half a century are slow to efface themselves, but above all because that idea of Eastern Europe is much older than the Cold War. Churchill's oratorical image of the iron curtain was powerful and persuasive, and its success was in part on account of its apparent aptness in describing the contemporary emergence of a Soviet sphere as the international cataclysm of the historical moment. Yet its aptness and prescience also concealed a part of what made Churchill's imagery so powerful, the traces of an intellectual

history that invented the idea of Eastern Europe long before. Churchill's demarcation of a boundary line "from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic" followed a line that was drawn and invested with meaning over two centuries, dating back to the age of his most famous ancestor, the warrior duke of Marlborough. The "iron curtain" seamlessly fit the earlier tracing, and it was almost forgotten, or neglected, or suppressed, that an older epoch in the history of ideas first divided the continent, creating the disunion of Western Europe and Eastern Europe.

The distinction is older than Churchill and the Cold War, but it is by no means a matter of time immemorial, undiscoverably ancient. It was not a natural distinction, or even an innocent one, for it was produced as a work of cultural creation, of intellectual artifice, of ideological self-interest and self-promotion. Churchill might remove himself to Fulton, Missouri, to produce a semblance of external perspective, discerning from a distance the division of Europe. The original division, however, happened at home. It was Western Europe that invented Eastern Europe as its complementary other half in the eighteenth century, the age of Enlightenment. It was also the Enlightenment, with its intellectual centers in Western Europe, that cultivated and appropriated to itself the new notion of "civilization," an eighteenth-century neologism, and civilization discovered its complement, within the same continent, in shadowed lands of backwardness, even barbarism. Such was the invention of Eastern Europe. It has flourished as an idea of extraordinary potency since the eighteenth century, neatly dovetailing in our own times with the rhetoric and realities of the Cold War, but also certain to outlive the collapse of Communism, surviving in the public culture and its mental maps. One may begin to understand and confront the idea of Eastern Europe by exploring the intricate historical process that left it embedded and encoded in our culture.

In the Renaissance the fundamental conceptual division of Europe was between the South and the North. The city states of Italy were the almost unquestioned centers of art and learning, of painting and sculpture, rhetoric and philosophy, not to mention finance and trade. The Italian humanists did not hesitate to proclaim a perspective of cultural condescension, most dramatically expressed in Machiavelli's famous "Exhortation to Liberate Italy from the Barbarians," the last chapter of *The Prince*. He was looking back to the landmark event of his generation, for every Florentine and most Italians, the invasion of Italy in 1494 by Charles VIII, the king of France, which inaugurated a period of "barbarian" invasions from the north, presaging the end of the *quattrocento*, the most glorious age of the Italian Renaissance. Even more traumatic was the great disaster of the next generation, the sack of Rome in 1527 by the German soldiers of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. The Italian Renaissance saw itself battered by the blows of northern barbarians, and classically conscious humanists

could look back a thousand years, from the sack of Rome by Germans in 1527, to the sack of Rome by the Goths in 476, to reinforce their directional perspective on the lands of barbarism. Ancient Romans and Renaissance Italians alike read Tacitus on the Germans to discover people who performed human sacrifices, wore wild animal skins, and generally lacked the refinements of culture: "When not engaged in warfare they spend a certain amount of time in hunting, but much more in idleness, thinking of nothing else but sleeping and eating."<sup>2</sup> Tacitus knew of other barbarians further to the east, such as the Sarmatians and the Dacians, but his chief concern was the Germans to the north, and this classical perspective was marvelously suited to the Italians of the Renaissance. Indeed, Machiavelli seized upon the perspective of ancient Rome with the same splendid verve and rhetorical opportunism that Churchill demonstrated in exploiting the perspective of the Enlightenment for the foundation of the iron curtain.

The polarization of Europe between Italy and the northern barbarians, so obvious to the ancient Romans, so convenient to the Renaissance Italians, survived into the eighteenth century as a rhetorical form. William Coxe, publishing in 1785 his *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark*, could still sum them up as "my travels through the Northern kingdoms of Europe."<sup>3</sup> Yet this geographical perspective had begun to appear seriously anachronistic, and it was the intellectual work of the Enlightenment to bring about that modern reorientation of the continent which produced Western Europe and Eastern Europe. Poland and Russia would be mentally detached from Sweden and Denmark, and associated instead with Hungary and Bohemia, the Balkan lands of Ottoman Europe, and even the Crimea on the Black Sea.

From the age of the Renaissance to the age of the Enlightenment, Europe's centers of culture and finance had shifted from the treasures and treasuries of Rome, Florence, and Venice to the now more dynamically important cities of Paris, London, and Amsterdam. Voltaire's perspective on Europe from eighteenth-century Paris was altogether geographically different from that of Machiavelli in sixteenth-century Florence. It was Voltaire who led the way as the philosophes of the Enlightenment articulated and elaborated their own perspective on the continent, gazing from west to east, instead of from south to north. In so doing, they perpetrated a conceptual reorientation of Europe, which they bequeathed to us so that we now see Europe as they did; or, rather, we have passively inherited the Europe that they actively reconceived. Just as the new centers of the Enlightenment superseded the old centers of the Renaissance, the old lands of barbarism and backwardness in the north were correspondingly displaced to the east. The Enlightenment had to invent Western Europe and Eastern Europe together, as complementary concepts, defining each other by opposition and adjacency.

Travelers were essential to this work of orientation, eighteenth-century travelers from Western Europe to Eastern Europe. The lands of Eastern Europe were sufficiently unfamiliar in the eighteenth century, still such unusual destinations, that each traveler carried a mental map to be freely annotated, embellished, refined, or refolded along the way. The operations of mental mapping were above all association and comparison: association among the lands of Eastern Europe, intellectually combining them into a coherent whole, and comparison with the lands of Western Europe, establishing the developmental division of the continent. This book will begin with a traveler, the count de Ségur, one of the French heroes of the American Revolutionary War, entering Eastern Europe on his way to St. Petersburg in the winter of 1784–85 to serve as French ambassador to the court of Catherine the Great. When he passed from Prussia into Poland—roughly where the iron curtain would descend two centuries later—he was powerfully conscious of crossing an extremely significant border. He felt he had “left Europe entirely,” and furthermore had “moved back ten centuries.” This book will end with another traveler returning to Western Europe, an American, John Ledyard, who had traveled around the world with Captain Cook, and in 1788 was returning from a solo expedition to Siberia, which ended in his arrest by order of Catherine. Traveling west across the Russian empire, then through Poland, he did not consider himself to be back in Europe until he reached the Prussian border. There, between Poland and Prussia, Ledyard located “the great barrier of Asiatic & European manners,” and he “leapt” across with gushing enthusiasm: “Once more welcome Europe to my warmest embraces.”<sup>4</sup> It is hardly necessary to consult an atlas to see that Ségur, when he felt he had “left Europe entirely,” was nowhere near the boundary of Europe, and that Ledyard, traveling in the other direction, was all at once welcoming and embracing Europe in sheer defiance of the fact that he had already been traveling in Europe for more than a thousand miles.

Ledyard had a name for such freely constructed geographical sentiment; he called it “Philosophic Geography.” Such was the Enlightenment’s subordination of geography to its own philosophical values, its investment of the map with subtleties that eluded the stricter standards of scientific cartography. Ségur had a name for the space that he discovered when he seemed to leave Europe but still remained in Europe; eventually he located himself in “the east of Europe,” which in French, as *l’orient de l’Europe*, offered also the potently evocative possibility of “the Orient of Europe.” As late as the eve of World War I, French scholarship still alternated between two seemingly similar terms, *l’Europe orientale* (Eastern Europe) and *l’Orient européen* (the European Orient).<sup>5</sup> Edward Said’s *Orientalism* has proposed that the Orient was constructed by the Occident “as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience,” an image of otherness, while Orientalism served as “a

Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”<sup>6</sup> The idea of Eastern Europe was entangled with evolving Orientalism, for while Philosophic Geography casually excluded Eastern Europe from Europe, implicitly shifting it into Asia, scientific cartography seemed to contradict such fanciful construction. There was room for ambiguity. The geographical border between Europe and Asia was not unanimously fixed in the eighteenth century, located sometimes at the Don, sometimes farther east at the Volga, and sometimes, as today, at the Urals.

Such uncertainty encouraged the construction of Eastern Europe as a paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, Europe but not Europe. 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. Interestingly, the idea of Europe as a whole came into cultural focus at the same time that the continent was conceived in halves. The Italian historian Federico Chabod, looking toward European unity after World War II, argued that the idea of Europe emerged with a coherent character and secular philosophical significance in the age of Enlightenment. Chabod placed special emphasis on the writings of Montesquieu, on the opposition between Europe and the Orient in the *Persian Letters*, and between European liberty and Asiatic despotism in the *Spirit of the Laws*.<sup>7</sup> Those oppositions, however, allowed for an intermediary cultural space, in which the idea of Eastern Europe evolved.

Philosophic Geography was a free-spirited sport, so much so that it was not actually necessary to travel to Eastern Europe in order to participate in its intellectual discovery. Some would make the voyage, with portentous anticipation and international publicity. Madame Geoffrin left the philosophes of her Paris salon to visit the king of Poland in 1766, and Diderot made his way to St. Petersburg in 1773 to pay his respects to Catherine the Great. Yet no one wrote more authoritatively and enthusiastically about Russia than Voltaire, who never traveled east of Berlin, and no one was engaged more passionately and creatively on behalf of Poland than Rousseau, who never went east of Switzerland. Mozart made the voyage between Western Europe and Eastern Europe, crossing the border at a point of inti-

mate and intricate proximity, between Vienna and Prague. In fact Prague is north of Vienna, and just slightly to the west, but for Mozart, as for us in the twentieth century, it was a voyage into Eastern Europe nevertheless, into Slavic Bohemia. He marked the border crossing in the Mozartian mode, by adopting new identities for himself, his family, and his friends, expressed in pseudo-Oriental nonsense names: "I am Punkitititi. My wife is Schabla Pumfa. Hofer is Rozka Pumpa. Stadler is Notschibikitschibi."<sup>8</sup> The curtain between Vienna and Prague went up on this frivolous operatic comedy long before it descended in its iron incarnation.

Whether fanciful or philosophical, in a spirit of imaginative extravagance or of earnest erudition, the study of Eastern Europe, like Orientalism, was a style of intellectual mastery, integrating knowledge and power, perpetrating domination and subordination. As in the case of the Orient, so also with Eastern Europe, intellectual discovery and mastery could not be entirely separated from the possibility of real conquest. France's eighteenth-century experts on Eastern Europe ended up in Napoleon's regime and academy, and the Enlightenment's discovery of Eastern Europe soon pointed the way to conquest and domination. Napoleon's creation of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw in 1807, his annexation of the Adriatic provinces of Illyria in 1809, and finally his invasion of Russia in 1812 put Philosophic Geography at the service of military mapping. It was not to be the last time that armies of Western Europe sought to establish an empire in Eastern Europe.

Immanuel Wallerstein, in his economic history of the "Origins of the European World-Economy," assigns to the sixteenth century the emergence of a capitalist "core" in Western Europe, exercising its economic hegemony over a "periphery" in Eastern Europe (and Hispanic America), creating a "complementary divergence" out of an initially minimal economic disparity.<sup>9</sup> As Western Europe's "periphery," Eastern Europe's essential economic role was the export of grain, cultivated by coerced labor with the establishment of a post-medieval "second serfdom." Yet, Wallerstein's argument is based almost exclusively on the case of Poland, whose economy was indeed significantly and dependently based on the Baltic export of wheat from Gdańsk to Amsterdam. He recognizes clearly that not all of modern Eastern Europe participated even in the periphery of the European world economy in the sixteenth century: "Russia outside, but Poland inside. Hungary inside, but the Ottoman Empire outside."<sup>10</sup> The identification of Eastern Europe as economic periphery involves, to a certain extent, taking the culturally constructed unity of the eighteenth century and projecting it backward to organize an earlier economic model. In fact, social and economic factors were far from fully determining Western Europe's associative construction of Eastern Europe.

The historical issues of core and periphery that Wallerstein raised in the 1970s focused the further study of Eastern Europe, and in 1985 an international academic conference convened at Bellagio to discuss the "Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe." Eric Hobsbawm compared the cases of Switzerland and Albania, superficially similar in terrain and resources yet dramatically different in their economic fates. Robert Brenner argued that "the problem of backwardness in Eastern Europe is a question badly posed," inasmuch as "historically speaking, non-development is the rule rather than the exception," and therefore the real question should be that of Western Europe's exceptional capitalist development. The conference recognized that "Eastern Europe is by no means a single entity," that different parts became "economic adjuncts" of Western Europe at different times and were "backward in many different ways."<sup>11</sup> The issues of backwardness and development in Eastern Europe were broached and defined in the eighteenth century, not essentially as economic issues, and they continue to frame our conception of these lands. It was Eastern Europe's ambiguous location, within Europe but not fully European, that called for such notions as backwardness and development to mediate between the poles of civilization and barbarism. In fact, Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century provided Western Europe with its first model of underdevelopment, a concept that we now apply all over the globe.

The very idea of an international conference of academic experts, meeting at Bellagio under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation, to discuss "the problem of backwardness in Eastern Europe" is profoundly consistent with the Enlightenment's approach to the same problem. At Ferney, across the Alps from Bellagio, Voltaire applied his own genius for twenty years to an ongoing one-man expert symposium on backwardness in Eastern Europe. In Paris the physiocrats met regularly at the salon of the elder Mirabeau to discuss the problem's specifically economic aspects. In fact, the Paris salon sent a physiocrat to Poland in 1774 with great fanfare, just as the Harvard economics department sent a professor to Poland in 1989. The revolution of 1989 has certainly dramatized the issue of "backwardness" in Eastern Europe, as new governments seek to clear away the economic debris of communism and enter the world economy of market capitalism. The recourse to expert advice and economic assistance from abroad will certainly be construed as the ultimate vindication of our own economic success and the backwardness of Eastern Europe. As the European Community prepared to constitute itself as an economic union, "the Europe of 1992," a special bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, was created to deal with the special problems of Eastern Europe. In the Europe of the 1990s Eastern Europe will continue to occupy an ambiguous space between inclusion and exclusion, both in economic affairs and in cultural recognition.

The philosophes of the Enlightenment explored and exploited this ambiguity, fitting it into a scheme of backwardness and development, making it into a defining characteristic that combined different lands under the sign of Eastern Europe. Already in the Renaissance it was possible to apply such a scheme to Poland, and Erasmus wrote in 1523 “to congratulate a people who, though formerly ill regarded as barbarian, now so blossoms in letters, laws, customs, religion, and in whatever else may spare it the reproach of uncouthness, that it can vie with the most distinguished and praised of nations.”<sup>12</sup> For Erasmus the rise from barbarism had nothing to do with economic development. Montaigne in the sixteenth century accepted all men as his compatriots and would “embrace a Pole as Frenchman,” though perhaps such vaunted cosmopolitanism implied as much condescension as Erasmus’s congratulations. When a French prince became king of Poland in 1573, only to abandon the crown the next year to return to France as Henri III, the French poet in his entourage, Philippe Desportes, wrote a sarcastic “Farewell to Poland.” It was farewell to ice and snow, bad manners, and “barbaric people.”<sup>13</sup>

In the first half of the sixteenth century Rabelais mentioned in association “Muscovites, Indians, Persians, and Troglodytes,” suggesting that Russia was part of an Oriental and even mythological domain.<sup>14</sup> After the English naval explorer Richard Chancellor discovered the Arctic sea passage to Russia in the 1550s and the trading Muscovy Company was established, accounts of Russia became a more serious concern. They were included in Richard Hakluyt’s Elizabethan collection *Principal Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation*, along with accounts of the New World in America. In 1600 a French mercenary soldier, Captain Jacques Margeret, entered the military service of the Russian tsar, Boris Godunov, and ended up publishing the most serious seventeenth-century French account of Russia. The Russians were identified as “those formerly called Scythians,” in general “a thoroughly rude and barbarous people.” Russia was furthermore reported replete with mythological wonders of natural history, including a rooted animal-plant: “The sheep eats the grass around itself and then dies. They are the size of a lamb, with curly wool. Some of the hides are completely white, others a little spotted. I have seen several of these hides.”<sup>15</sup> While Captain Margeret was in Russia, another adventurous soldier, Captain John Smith, crossed the continent from England to Ottoman Europe on an expedition that was summed up as “his Service and Stratagems of war in Hungaria, Transilvania, Wallachia, and Moldavia, against the Turks and Tartars.” He was taken prisoner by the Crimean Tartars in 1603, as he would be again in Virginia in 1607, by the American Indians of the Powhatan Confederacy, to be saved by the thirteen-year-old Pocahontas. He saved himself from slavery among the Crimean Tar-

tars—by murdering his master—and then traveled through Russia, the Ukraine, and Poland, which were summed up simply as “Countries rather to be pitied, than envied.” His experience as a prisoner and slave among the Tartars left him in a position to report that Tartary was indescribable: “Now you are to understand, Tartary and Scythia are all one; but so large and spacious, few or none could ever perfectly describe it; nor all the several kinds of those most barbarous people that inhabit it.”<sup>16</sup> The Scythians were known from Herodotus as barbarians from the perspective of ancient Greece; when Europeans leaped back beyond the Germans of Tacitus to seize upon the Scythians of Herodotus, the orientation of barbarism shifted from the north to the east. The designation of Scythians was extended in the eighteenth century to cover all of Eastern Europe, until Herder appropriated another identification from among the barbarians of ancient history, and gave Eastern Europe its modern identity as the domain of the Slavs.

The most influential account of Russia in the seventeenth century was written by Adam Olearius, who traveled in the 1630s with a German mission from the court of Holstein, seeking to negotiate the commercial concession to establish trade with Persia through Russia. Such a mission suggested Russia’s economic significance as well as its relation to the Orient, but the Olearius account, first published in German in 1647, and constantly republished throughout the century in German, French, Dutch, English, and Italian, evaluated Russia according to generally non-economic standards. Olearius related of the Russians that “their skin is of the same color as that of other Europeans.” Such an observation suggested how little his readers were presumed to know about Russia. “When you observe the spirit, the mores, and the way of life of the Russians,” Olearius wrote, at a time when very few had had such an opportunity, “you are bound to number them among the barbarians.” He went on to censure them on largely moral grounds for using “vile and loathsome words,” for lacking “good manners”—“these people fart and belch noisily”—for “lusts of the flesh and fornication” as well as “the vile depravity we call sodomy,” committed even with horses. There was perhaps a hint of economic consideration in his judgment that the Russians were “fit only for slavery” and had to be “driven to work with cudgels and whips.”<sup>17</sup> The Enlightenment would reconceive Russia in a redemptive spirit that envisioned an emergence from barbarism, an improvement of manners. The possibility of such redemption might be glimpsed in the *Brief History of Moscovia*, written by John Milton, probably in the 1630s. The future poet of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* explained that he was interested in Russia “as being the most northern Region of Europe reputed civil.”<sup>18</sup> The Enlightenment would rediscover Russia as an eastern region of the continent, and would align

its reputation, philosophically and geographically, with the other lands of Eastern Europe.

On March 23, 1772, James Boswell found Samuel Johnson "busy, preparing a fourth edition of his folio Dictionary." They discussed a certain contemporary neologism that Johnson excluded from the dictionary as improper English: "He would not admit *civilization*, but only *civility*. With great deference to him, I thought *civilization*, from *to civilize*, better in the sense opposed to *barbarity*." That same day there was also a discussion of etymologies and language families, and Johnson observed that "the Bohemian language was true Slavonick." When someone noted some resemblance to German, Johnson replied, "Why, Sir, to be sure, such parts of Slavonia as confine with Germany, will borrow German words; and such parts as confine with Tartary will borrow Tartar words."<sup>19</sup> Looking back on that day, more than two centuries later, one can see two ideas simultaneously under evolution: the idea of civilization, conceived as the opposite of barbarism, and the idea of Eastern Europe, conceived as "Slavonia." Boswell and Johnson treated them as two separate problems, related only inasmuch as they both concerned the dictionary, but one can see with historical hindsight that their relation was far more intimate. The new idea of civilization was the crucial and indispensable point of reference that made possible the consolidation and articulation of the inchoate idea of Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century.

Dr. Johnson's dictionary proudly insisted on the now virtually archaic definition of "civilization" as a purely legal term, the making of criminal process into civil process. Yet in the 1770s other dictionaries in both France and England were already admitting the new meaning of the word: in the Jesuits' *Dictionary of Trevoux* in Paris in 1771, in John Ash's *New and Complete Dictionary of the English Language* in London in 1775. The first prominent deployment of the new word has been traced to the elder Mirabeau and his physiocratic circle, where there was also an active interest in Eastern Europe. Beginning with his extremely successful *Ami des hommes* in 1756, Mirabeau used the word in both economic and cultural contexts, associating civilization with the increase of wealth and the refinement of manners. He was also, however, sensitive to "false civilization," especially with reference to the ambitions of Peter the Great in Russia. Another physiocrat, the abbé Baudeau, who actually traveled to Poland and Russia, wrote of stages and degrees of civilization, of the "progress" of civilization in Russia especially, and added an important twist to the new notion by qualifying it as "European civilization." The French Revolution, as interpreted by the French philosophes, further related the idea of civilization to a model of development. Volney envisioned the progress of civilization as the "imitation" of one vanguard nation, and Condorcet wondered whether

someday all nations would achieve "the state of civilization reached by the most enlightened, most free, most unprejudiced peoples, such as the French and the Anglo-Americans." Auguste Comte, early in the nineteenth century, was still following the Philosophic Geography of the Enlightenment when he employed "civilization" as a measure of the coherence of "Western Europe."<sup>20</sup>

Eastern Europe was located not at the antipode of civilization, not down in the depths of barbarism, but rather on the developmental scale that measured the distance between civilization and barbarism. Ségur in the late eighteenth century saw St. Petersburg as a confused combination of "the age of barbarism and that of civilization, the tenth and the eighteenth centuries, the manners of Asia and those of Europe, coarse Scythians and polished Europeans."<sup>21</sup> Eastern Europe was essentially in between, and by the nineteenth century these polar oppositions acquired the force of fixed formulas. Balzac, in the *Comédie humaine*, casually summed up all of Eastern Europe from the perspective of Paris, in a passing reference that employed precisely the same terms: "The inhabitants of the Ukraine, Russia, the plains of the Danube, in short, the Slav peoples, are a link between Europe and Asia, between civilization and barbarism."<sup>22</sup>

I first started to think about writing this book ten years ago, when I was spending a year doing research in the Vatican Secret Archive for a study of Poland and the Vatican in the eighteenth century. I read the dispatches of Rome's apostolic nuncios in Warsaw. In 1783, after seven years in Warsaw, the nuncio Giovanni Archetti was preparing for a delicate and momentous diplomatic mission to St. Petersburg, to the court of Catherine. One of the many things on his mind at this important juncture in his career as an ecclesiastical diplomat was the fact that when he arrived in St. Petersburg he would be expected to kiss Catherine's hand. He was afraid that the pope in Rome would strongly disapprove, out of concern that the kiss would compromise the absolute independence of Roman Catholicism. There was some irony in the fact that Rome would worry about such trivialities of court etiquette in what was, after all, already the decade of the French Revolution. There was also humor in such preoccupation with merely kissing the hand of the tsarina, when her sexual excesses were already a legend in her own lifetime. Most interesting to me was the way in which Archetti justified in advance, in a dispatch to Rome, the kiss that he was resolved to bestow. From his experience in Poland he claimed to possess a special understanding of "these northern countries," thus associating Poland and Russia. There was, he observed, a gap between "more cultivated nations" and "those nations becoming cultivated at a later date." The latter nations, "the northern countries," practiced an exaggerated etiquette, kissing hands, for instance, in an attempt to equal "the more genteel nations."<sup>23</sup> Archetti's magnificent condescension suggested that, as far as he

was concerned, there was little likelihood of such equality being achieved. However, his scale of cultivation—more or less, sooner or later—demonstrated a sophisticated and modern conception of backwardness and development. All that was lacking was the word “civilization”—and the re-orientation that would recognize northern countries as eastern countries. Archetti, an Italian, still held to the Renaissance perspective. Catherine was also capable of condescension; she later described Archetti as a “good child,” and she gave him a fur coat.

Archetti claimed that it was the less cultivated nations that made more of a fuss about courtesy, and yet it was he himself who had seized upon a detail of etiquette and dramatized its significance to construct a mental mapping of Europe. Norbert Elias has proposed that the idea of civilization developed from that of civility, as a culminating moment in the history of manners. The construct of civilization was so fundamental an aspect of identity, for those who claimed to possess it, that it found its most satisfying modern expression as a standard for others—for other classes, for other nations. It was when I read Archetti, summing up the northern countries as less cultivated, less genteel, that I began to think about the mapping of civilization within Europe. I thought about the way that his condescensions almost anticipated those of our own times—almost but not quite—and I wondered whether he spoke from the threshold of a great continental reorientation. I began to think about how people came to conceive of Europe as divided between east and west.

I thought about Archetti and Catherine’s hand some years ago when I was somewhere behind the iron curtain, in Eastern Europe. I went to an apartment in the middle of the night to visit someone I didn’t know very well, to get from him some messages and materials I had agreed to stow in my luggage on the train and carry back across the iron curtain. As I left, he kissed me three times, ritually alternating cheeks—Slavic style, as he said. I couldn’t help thinking about Archetti and the way that details of manners sometimes seize upon the imagination and seem to represent worlds of difference. There are such details that have ended up mentally entangled with my whole experience of Eastern Europe, of encounters with underground political life, of hushed conversations and uneasy border crossings.

That Eastern Europe has ceased to exist since 1989, along with the iron curtain. Either we will find new associations to mark its difference, or we will rediscover old ones from before the Cold War. Or else we may take the extraordinary revolution of 1989 as an incitement and opportunity to reconsider our mental mapping of Europe. In 1990 the American Academy of Arts and Sciences marked the occasion with an issue of *Daedalus* entitled “Eastern Europe . . . Central Europe . . . Europe,” which seemed to suggest the slippage of signifiers as Europe semiotically shifted and reshaped itself in all our minds. The lead essay in the collection, by Timothy Garton Ash,

the English writer who became Western Europe’s most insightful analyst of Eastern Europe during the fateful decade of the 1980s, was punctuated with a question mark: “Mitteleuropa?” That question mark hearkened back to another essay by the same writer, published before the revolution of 1989: “Does Central Europe Exist?” This was a delicate and thorny issue of mental mapping, for the idea of *Mitteleuropa* first made its mark in 1915, during World War I, when Friedrich Naumann published in Berlin a book with that title and without any question mark. Naumann’s *Mitteleuropa* described a domain marked out for German economic and cultural hegemony, including lands more conventionally located in Eastern Europe. The idea of *Mitteleuropa*, and also those of *Osteuropa* and *Ostraum*, then played an important ideological role during World War II, as Hitler sought to carry out a program of vast conquest and terrible enslavement in Eastern Europe, beginning with the occupations of Czechoslovakia and Poland in 1939, culminating in the invasions of Yugoslavia and Russia in 1941. There was some irony in the fact that in the 1980s the idea of Central Europe was rediscovered by intellectuals in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, as well as in Western Europe—and promoted as an ideological antidote to the iron curtain. The question of whether Central Europe existed therefore hinged on the distinction between intellectual construction and geopolitical reality, and Central Europe was only an idea: “It does not yet exist. Eastern Europe exists—that part of Europe militarily controlled by the Soviet Union.”<sup>24</sup> Yet Eastern Europe also began as only an idea, and now, since 1989, it has become an idea once again, no longer under the military control of the Soviet Union. Eastern Europe, however, remains an extremely powerful idea, deeply embedded in the history of two centuries, so influential in its political consequences that its intellectual origins are barely recognized, hidden in historical camouflage.

Russia may resign its military domination of Eastern Europe, but it cannot banish the idea of Eastern Europe, for it did not invent or impose that idea. The idea of Eastern Europe was invented in Western Europe in the age of Enlightenment, and Russia was included in that idea. Russia was subjected to the same process of discovery, alignment, condescension, and intellectual mastery, was located and identified by the same formulas: between Europe and Asia, between civilization and barbarism. The advocates of Central Europe today are committed to shattering intellectually the oppressive idea of Eastern Europe, to redeeming the Czech Republic and Hungary, maybe Poland, even perhaps Slovenia. Yet the rubric of Eastern Europe may still be invoked to perpetuate the exclusion of the rest, to preserve the distinction that nourishes our own identity. Mikhail Gorbachev, the man who brought down the iron curtain and ended the Cold War, also demonstrated the most profound understanding of the division of Europe. “We are Europeans,” he declared in *Perestroika* in 1987, envi-



sioning a “common home” that stretched from the Atlantic to the Urals, noting the “artificiality” of the blocs, the “archaic nature” of the iron curtain. He challenged those in the West who would exclude the Soviet Union from Europe, and equate Europe with Western Europe.<sup>25</sup> That exclusion, and that equation, were in fact the axioms underlying two centuries of intellectual history, the history of “civilization” in Europe, the invention of Eastern Europe.

## Entering Eastern Europe: Eighteenth-Century Travelers on the Frontier

### *“These Demi-Savage Figures”*

In 1784 Count Louis-Philippe de Ségur left France for Russia, appointed as minister plenipotentiary and envoy *extraordinaire* of Louis XVI to the court of Catherine II at St. Petersburg. Ségur was only 31 and owed his posting to the fact that his father was the French minister of war. The young man went by way of Berlin and received a royal audience at Potsdam with the already old and famous Frederick. The king observed aloud that Ségur was wearing the decoration of Cincinnatus, the mark of his military service under George Washington in the American Revolutionary War. “How could you for so long forget the delights of Paris,” asked Frederick sarcastically, “in a land where civilization is just beginning?” Such condescension toward America was typical of eighteenth-century assumptions about the locus of civilization, and both men, the Parisian and the Berliner, had to be aware that the comment carried a double significance, for the present posting to St. Petersburg as well as past service in America. In Russia, too, by enlightened consensus, civilization was just beginning in the eighteenth century, and Ségur would have many opportunities to reflect upon that in the five years that followed. It was a matter of reflection that interested him, though, the stages and progress of civilization in backward places,