Western Images and Stereotypes of Central and Eastern Europe

The brevity of this presentation precludes a theoretical discussion of national stereotypes and images. Hence, only a few general observations are in order. Beginning with Walter Lippmann's classic work that introduced the concept itself, we have fairly rich literature that deals with stereotypes in terms of social science and psychology.[1] According to the definition in *The Modern Dictionary of Sociology*, a stereotype is 'a set of biased generalizations about a group or category of people, that is unfavorable, exaggerated or oversimplified'.[2] An ethnic stereotype, according to one definition, is 'an image of a given ethnic group which exists in the consciousness of another group in the form of interconnected value judgments.'[3] Its characteristic features include the following: a generalized vision independent of experience, resistance to change, divergence from reality or a certain part of reality, unjustifiable generalization, connection with emotional and value-colored attitudes toward reality, and a link with linguistic forms. Another definition suggests that stereotypes held by educated people are generally more accurate than those held by the uneducated.[4] By and large, stereotypes may be negative, neutral or positive.

A recent study of German-Polish historical stereotypes contains several observations which seem particularly relevant here. Its author insists that 'without the reconstruction of the image of one nation in the consciousness of another it is difficult to explain rationally the relations between them.' He opines that the 'function of stereotypes in international relations was not always the same; it increased in periods of conflicts and diminished during periods of stabilization.' He suggests that a better knowledge of other nations was not decisive for the modification of existing stereotypes and may have affected to some extent only such groups as intellectuals or political leaders but not the general public. Polish research in the field, he says, has shown that 'a historical argument ... has almost always served to bring out negative characteristics', and he rightly observes that arguments based on stereotypes are more easily accepted than attempts at objectivity since they lend themselves to facile categorization and may better correspond to a general system of beliefs and images.[5]

It would seem obvious that personal contacts, travel, visual representations, literature, film, press, school and university, all contribute their share in building stereotypes which are rooted in or reinforced by less easily traceable traditional beliefs derived from religion, history or a given culture. National 'features' may at times be a generalization of personal characteristics of a statesman, or be the attributes of a social class (for instance, the nobility). In some cases auto-stereotypes are taken up by the outside

world and made into their own images.[6] All this means that the range of sources which ought to be studied in a search for stereotypes is immense; the difficulty in dealing with historical stereotypes is augmented by the absence of statistical data or opinion polls. Hence, there is an even greater element of arbitrariness.

In order to make the present inquiry manageable, the term Western is to be understood as confined to three countries: France, Britain and the United States. Since the coverage of all of Central and Eastern Europe in a short article would be equally impossible, we shall concentrate on Poland and the Poles who have been the center of international attention to a higher degree than some of the other peoples and have also been the object of a good deal of stereotyping. The Czechs and, even more so, the Hungarians will be briefly handled, while the Balkan nations, frequently viewed as one area and virtually as one people, will appear only marginally.

The focus of our attention is the connection between stereotypes and Western political decisions or attitudes toward the East Central European region in 1919 and 1945. Images relevant for the years 1989-91 will be only mentioned by way of a conclusion. In view of this approach we are concerned more with the images of the decision-making elites in the United States, Britain and France than with those held by the masses. While a distinction is not always easy to make between elitist and popular images, it is reflected here in the kinds of sources we draw upon. Finally, we wish to make it absolutely clear that the remarks which follow must not be mistaken for a systematic survey. All that can be done here is to present an impressionistic sketch, a somewhat arbitrary sample, and to offer very tentative conclusions.

Partitioned Poland

To begin with the decades preceding the First World War, interest in East Central European matters on the part of the West was extremely limited and highly selective. To be sure, since the Congress of Berlin, Balkan affairs had periodically occupied the center of the diplomatic scene, and the nuisance value of Balkan affairs was generally recognized. As the old journalist in Rudyard Kipling's *The Light that Failed* who kept repeating that with the coming of spring, there will be another war in the Balkans, the western public – insofar as it followed international events – had a vision of semi-barbarian, exotic and picturesque Balkans constantly torn by conflicts, assassinations and Macedonian-style terrorism.[7] There was also something grotesque in such states as the minuscule Kingdom of Montenegro and its colorful ruler Nikola. The Bulgaro-Serb war of 1885 came to the attention of the Western public through the light opera, the 'Chocolate Soldier'; an imaginary Ruritania often seemed to symbolize a Balkan state. Romanians were seen in France as being composed of French-speaking 'messieurs' and a peasant mass.[8]

The interest of political circles in the Poles which had been pronounced throughout a good part of the nineteenth century began to decline after 1870.[9] The old image of the Pole as a revolutionary, France's friend and the victim of oppression, was still operative in some quarters, as was the stereotype of the beautiful Polish woman. Such adjectives as 'poor' and 'unfortunate' (pauvre et malheureuse) continued to appear whenever Poland was mentioned. The shock produced in France by defeat in the Franco-Prussian war and the loss of Alsace and Lorraine, as well as the active participation of Poles in

the Paris Commune contributed to the changing image of Poland and the Poles. The more stable, bourgeois France, bent on colonial expansion and seeking out Russia as a potential ally against Germany, had little use for the Poles. Some voices did, however, continue to compare Alsace-Lorraine with Prussian Poland – both oppressed by the Germans – and voice criticism of official France which 'semble avoir oublier ses élans d'autrefois.'[10]

Broad generalizations with regard to the historic Polish state and the causes for its disappearance often became stereotypes. *La Grande Encyclopédie* listed the demoralization of the ruling classes, their selfishness and intolerance as well as their lack of political abilities, in short that well-known Polish anarchy (once described by Ruhlière) as the reason for the partitions.[11] Complex and controversial causes were reduced to one simple formula, and it was too often forgotten that the first partition occurred because Poland was weak, the remaining two because it was regaining strength. Polish faults of the eighteenth century were projected back into the past. Thus, the prominent historian Ernest Lavisse could write: 'la Pologne à aucun moment de son histoire n'a fait ce qu'elle devait faire.' Referring to the Middle Ages, he added 'jamais elle ne s'est recueillie, soit pour apprendre à ce gouverner, soit pour entreprendre une conquête suivie'.[12]

The knowledge of East Central Europe on the academic level 'en est à ses balbutiements', a historian wrote.[13] The Slavic chair at the Collège de France held by Poles or polonophiles until 1883 went afterwards to the French pioneer of studies of Slav languages and civilizations, Louis Léger. Originally favorably inclined toward the Poles, Léger recalled how 'Pour les Français d'alors [at the time of the uprising of 1863], la Pologne était ... une sorte de Christ des nations ... Elle devait ressusciter et offrir à la France la plus chevaleresque des alliances'.[14] Several years later, having broken with the Poles, he characterized them as follows: 'C'est un peuple brave, idéaliste, poétique et musical. Mais il lui a de tout temps manqué; le sentiment de la réalité'.[15]

The developing group of French Slavists which was comprised of such prominent historians as Louis Eisenmann, Louis Rambaud, Ernest Denis (the author of a monumental Czech history) or the director of the Ecole des Sciences Politiques, Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, looked toward Russia as the leader of the Slav world. This russophile trend was particularly visible after 1893 when St. Petersburg became France's chief continental ally. The attitude toward the Poles was bound to be affected by this development. A contemporary description of Russian Poland by an anonymous author offered a picture of a land in which the cities were exclusively Jewish, the peasants, having helped the government to put down the 1863 uprising, were happier than in the past, and Polish national sentiment was dying out. In the view of a biographer of Tsar Alexander II, who accused the Poles of being 'atteints de folie incurable,' this approached a caricature of reality. A book by the *Le Figaro* St. Petersburg correspondent, René Marchand, sought to convince readers that the Poles oppressed by Germany looked up to Russia, although the author voiced some criticism of the latter's Polish policies. Similarly, Leroy-Beaulieu opined that Russian Poland prospered and the Poles, with their irreconcilable attitudes, were committing national suicide.[16]

The 1905 revolution in Russia, which revealed glaring weaknesses in the empire of the tsars, contributed to a certain revival of pro-Polish feelings in France among the socialists on the one hand, and the Catholic circles on the other. But it was only the

outbreak and the course of the First World War which, by internationalizing the Polish Question, affected the French outlook and the French attitude toward Poles and, indeed, toward all of East Central Europe. Military and political strategy determined the change. One historian analyzing this phenomenon wrote: 'L'image français de l'Europe centrale enseigne plus sur les impératifs stratégiques et sur la politique étrangère de Paris que sur la nature même de la région'.[17]

World War One and the Formation of the Polish State

The stereotype of the gallant though unfortunate Pole, a faithful ally of France, had once again surfaced. When the historian Frédéric Masson wrote in 1915 about traditional Polish individualism which under the pretext of defending liberty led to Poland's fall, George Bienaimé protested that this view was cultivated and spread by the partitioning powers.[18] He praised the Polish nation for being, more than any other nation in the East, attached to its homeland, its history and its national tradition. In his memoirs, undoubtedly colored by their ex post character, Georges Clemenceau expressed a sweeping condemnation of Poland's partitions: 'No outrage had ever less excuse, no violence penetrated against humanity ever cried louder for a redress that had been indefinitely postponed.'[19] Commenting on the Manifesto of the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaievich promising the Poles unity and autonomy under the scepter of the tsar, *Le Temps* wrote on August 17, 1914 that Poland would be able to develop its own genius and like no other nation contribute its own share to the renaissance of thought and art. Poland, another article claimed, was the 'France of the north'.[20]

Franco-Polish solidarity was stressed by Edouard Herriot with reference to the Polish martial spirit that had assisted France so many times in the past.[21] As the war went on this image of trusted ally received even greater emphasis. Yet, it occasionally was accompanied by the old stereotype of Polish anarchy, when for instance, an otherwise pro-Polish writer stressed that there could be no unity among the Poles without the French cement assuring their cohesion.[22]

The Poles were relatively well known in France, although Ernest Denis noted that before the war even educated people were convinced that Poland and Hungary were one and the same country. He also recalled how after his return from Prague, a colleague at the faculty of Bordeaux university commented: 'so you know Hungarian'.[23] It was even worse on the other side of the English channel. True, the *Chambers Encyclopedia* provided an image of historic Poland comparable to that which figured in French reference works, the *liberum veto* being notably cited as evidence of Polish political incompetence. Those few who bothered with Polish history at all saw it through the eyes of German scholars (or admirers of Frederick the Great like Thomas Carlyle) – a highly negative stereotype. Others knew nothing at all.

Writing retrospectively the British diplomat Sir Esme Howard opined that most

> Englishmen of my age at least were brought up in such complete ignorance about everything connected with Poland that before attempting to deal with the Polish question at the Paris Conference, it was practically necessary to go through a course of instruction on the subject, a duty for which unfortunately most of the principal delegates had not the time, if they had the will, to do.[24]

He recalled that one hundred years after the partitions the name of Poland was so effectively wiped off the map that it did not appear in the great pre-war German atlas *Stieler's Hand Atlas*. 'Poland indeed was like a closed and forgotten book put away on the topmost shelf.'[25] The Canadian scholar William Rose, who spent most of the war years in Silesia, noted in 1919: 'I soon discovered that there was almost complete ignorance, outside official circles, about Central Europe – in particular Poland'.[26] The term official circles did not encompass all the British and Dominion politicians. David Lloyd George, for one, averred that he had never heard of Teschen. Jan Christian Smuts 'asked whether Moravia' was 'in Austria and whether [there was] any difference between Slovakia and Slovenes'.[27]

There is little doubt, as a British historian put it, that in 1914 the British government 'knew little and cared less about the subject nationalities of Eastern Europe'. Comprehension of the Polish problem was probably 'rudimentary' at best.[28] Jacques Bainville opined that 'les Anglais n'ont jamais cru que la Pologne fut viable,'[29] and there is a good deal of evidence to support this view. Balfour's position expressed in a memorandum in 1916 opposed an independent Poland not only because it would separate Germany from Russia and thus jeopardize the Franco-Russian alliance, but also because a Polish state was likely to return to its prepartition performance of weakness. Even the pro-Polish Lord Eversley did not think in 1916 that Poland could be independent. Lord Robert Cecil who asserted that 'the Slavs have never shown the slightest capacity for self-government' opined that the 'Poles always were a most unreliable people.' Lloyd George said that the Pole 'who is the Irishman of Continental Europe, is like him a good politician. Both are highly gifted races – both temperamentally highly geared'.[30] It is doubtful whether the prime minister intended this as a compliment.

Wartime contacts between the British and the Polish political emigrés of the Roman Dmowski and Jozef Pilsudski camps helped to absorb and develop existing stereotypes. The bitter interparty conflict among the Poles was used as an illustration of their political immaturity. As a naval intelligence report stated: 'it is difficult sometimes for the casual observer to avoid the uneasy suspicion that the whole of Polish politics is incredibly crude and raw, and has a general character of brutality and stupidity'.[31] Lewis Namier who was widely regarded as the person most knowledgeable about Poland – until his bias became too obvious – contributed more than his share to a negative image of the Poles.[32]

During the Paris Peace Conference the negative stereotype to which Lloyd George, Smuts, Maurice Hankey and Philip Kerr subscribed accorded well with the policy of keeping Poland small so that it would not strengthen France and unduly antagonize Germany and Russia. The outpourings of Lloyd George became proverbial. 'What can we think of a country which sends us a pianist as its representative?', he allegedly said when Ignacy Jan Paderewski became Poland's delegate at the Conference. As for Pilsudski, there was 'no worse Jingo than a Jacobin turned Jingo', he declared.[33] Opposing Polish territorial claims, the prime minister likened Poland to the 'old Norman baron who, when he was asked for the title to his lands, unsheathed his sword .... No one gave more trouble than the Poles', he complained on one occasion. On another he called them 'very troublesome people in Europe,' adding that the Poles had not a high reputation as administrators.'[34] Smuts echoed: 'Poland was a historic failure, and always would be a failure, and in this Treaty we were trying to reverse the verdict of history'.[35]

Hankey displayed the same attitude when he voiced his doubt 'if Poland is of as much value, as her people is unstable'. Confessing to a 'dislike and contempt for the Poles,' he wondered if anything could be done 'to save them' and whether they 'are worth saving'.[36] Last but not least there was the stereotype of the Pole as an anti-Semite. Enhanced by Dmowski's anti-Jewish stance and Namier's adjectives – 'most rampant, aggressive, intolerant' – the image was enlarged by the news of pogroms in late 1918 and 1919-20 mainly in the Polish-Ukrainian and Polish-Soviet battle zones.[37] The report of Henry Morgenthau's investigating commission reduced these deplorable events to their true proportions, but for John Maynard Keynes Poland remained 'an economic impossibility with no industry but Jew-baiting'.[38]

Such diplomats as Esme Howard, Horace Rumbold, Herbert Paton, Frederick Kisch, or soldiers like Adrian Carton de Wiart and even the Foreign Secretary did not share all of these views. Arthur James Balfour disagreed with the assumption that Germany could undergo a conversion while Poland could not behave 'as a reasonably civilised state'. James Headlam-Morley was not 'entirely convinced that the Poles are incompetent ... they are not, as far as I can see, any worse than the other minor states that are being created'. Howard felt that the Poles 'possessed a resiliency of character which enabled them to retain their natural buoyancy even in the most adverse circumstances'. Their elite was 'clever like most Slavs, artistic, friendly, companionable', but he admitted that their 'former greatness was really a serious handicap if it made statesmen anxious to return to the glories of ancient frontiers'. William Rose was impatient with 'all of the nonsense ... about the incapacity of the Poles as a people to deal with vital issues affecting common life', and Carton de Wiart praised Pilsudski as one of the greatest men he knew, although he also called Poles 'very childish over their disappointments' and foolishly allowing 'their public happenings to overflow into their private and social life'.[39] The stereotype of Polish 'feudal' characteristics would also surface occasionally, as when Thomas Jones spoke in February 1918 of 'an army of Polish landowners fighting Socialists' in Russia.[40]

The negative image of the Poles seemed the dominant one with the British decision-makers. The balanced views of the few experts on East Central Europe such as Robert Seton-Watson, Henry W. Steed or William J. Rose had limited chances of being accepted. Besides only Rose was a Polish expert, the others specialized in Danubian or Balkan issues. As for the Foreign Office people, their relations with Lloyd George were at times 'impossible and they (were) treated with a maximum of discourtesy and lack of scruples'. In fact they hardly counted.[41]

Were American stereotypes of Poles different from those held by the British, and did they account for a more friendly stance toward Poland during the war and the 1919-20 period? The Polish image in America may be said to have been a composite of two elements which related respectively to history and to immigration. Historic Poland had disappeared from the political map at roughly the same time as the United States appeared on it. Except for the brief interlude during which the Polish 'Revolution' (meaning the May 3, 1791 Constitution) was being compared to the American Revolution, and the Poles praised by George Washington for making 'large and unexpected strides toward freedom', American successes contrasted with Polish misfortunes. Influenced by German scholarship, American textbooks of European history propagated an image of the Polish past in which an anarchic aristocracy oppressed the peasant, terrorized the

Jews and was responsible for all their country's misfortunes. The first university courses dealing with Eastern Europe were initiated at Harvard in the 1890s and the first serious monograph on Polish history by Robert H. Lord (subsequently an American expert at the Paris Peace Conference) appeared only in 1915.[42] True, there were occasional pronouncements such as William H. Taft's 1908 speech in Milwaukee in which he referred to Poland's partitions as 'a historical fact lamented by nearly every heart' and deserving 'the most severe condemnation'. But, as an article in the *Nation* in 1914 aptly stated, 'the interest of our people remained largely rhetorical and literary'.[43] Many Americans undoubtedly shared President Woodrow Wilson's view that 'historically it (Poland) had failed to govern itself'.[44]

Reminiscing about Joseph Conrad, the publisher Alfred Knopf called him 'typically Polish' by which he meant that he was dramatic and emotional. Another American commented on the 'characteristic Polish exhibition of insouciance' in the face of external danger. Such adjectives as romantic, nationalistic, gallant, troublesome, individualistic and unreliable frequently emerged from comments of various Americans who were in contact with Poland and its elite. If all this was roughly comparable to British views, the phenomenon of a mass Polish emigration to the United States contributed another dimension to the American image of the Poles. This poor, often uneducated mass was looked down upon, even despised, a phenomenon which survived in the form of 'Polish jokes'. Woodrow Wilson in his *History of the American People* referred to southern and eastern European immigrants as being of 'the meaner sort', and questioned their skill, energy, initiative and intelligence. Thus, the negative American stereotype of the Polish historic elite as incapable of successful conduct in public affairs was reinforced by the view of the primitive, hard drinking and uncouth immigrants. Yet, interestingly enough, all this did not prevent Wilson and the American delegation in Paris from supporting the Polish case during the war and at the Peace Conference.

It was not, as Lloyd George believed, because Wilson was an 'enthusiastic pro-Pole', or that the American experts were biased toward Poland, or because the Poles had a 'hold' over the American delegation in view of the 'powerful Polish vote'.[45] American policy toward Poland formed part of the Wilsonian vision of the postwar world with emphasis on democracy and national self-determination. If at times his views came closer to those of Lloyd George it was because of French policies toward East Central Europe which Wilson considered to be smacking of imperialism and expansion. The president would also subscribe to the prime minister's condemnation of the 'unrestrained rapacity of nations who owed their freedom to a victory won by the tremendous efforts and sacrifices of the Great Powers'.[46] This limited the extent of Wilson's support for the Poles and other East Central European nations.

Czechs and Hungarians

Contrasting the international standing of the Poles at the outset of the war with that of the Czechs, Tomas G. Masaryk wrote: 'of us, on the contrary, the French knew little'.[47] Yet, by the time of the Peace Conference the Czechoslovak position was stronger than that of the Poles, and Prague papers could write with only some exaggeration that 'the whole world considers us a nation of extraordinary ability'. The 'attitude of the Entente toward us is one of love mingled with admiration'.[48] This evolution from ignorance to a

positive image was indeed striking. The Czechs, wrote Lloyd George, were 'especially favored by the Allies', having rendered 'considerable service to the Allied cause'.[49] Indeed, the British 'thought highly of the Czechs'.[50]

Czechoslovak political successes and the projection of a positive national stereotype were largely due to the high moral prestige of the 'wise leader' (to use Lloyd George's term), Tomás Masaryk and to the diplomatic and propagandistic abilities of Eduard Benes. The two men along with Milan Stefánik enjoyed the strong support of such previously mentioned French slavists as Eisenmann, Chéradame and Ernest Denis. According to Clemenceau, Benes 'won general esteem and confidence by the high rectitude of his speech and by his lofty intellect'.[51] Harold Nicolson described him as 'an intelligent, young, plausible, little man with broad views'.[52] Even Lloyd George, who subsequently criticized Benes for short-sightedness, hardly ever took an anti-Czech stand. The general secretary at the Quai d'Orsay, Philippe Berthelot, who made politics 'with sympathies and antipathies for men or for nations' and was contemptuous of small nations, always 'made an exception when Czechoslovakia was concerned'.[53] In Britain such experts as Robert Seton-Watson assisted the Czech wartime propaganda effort through *The New Europe*. The link between the Hussite democratic tradition and Wycliff was recalled on the occasion of the fifth centenary of Hus' burning on July 6, 1915.[54] The high stature of the two Czechoslovak leaders, their universalistic outlook, and a tendency to see them as personifying the Czech nation undoubtedly contributed to a policy summed up by a British delegate: let 'our friends the Czechs have what they want'.[55]

The thought of the new Czechoslovakia, Serbia or Poland which according to Harold Nicolson made the hearts of the young Britons in Paris 'sing hymns at heaven's gate', turned them against the defeated Bulgaria and Hungary. Nicolson himself 'had feelings of contempt' for the Bulgarians whose 'traditions ... history (and) ... actual obligations' should have made them side with Russia and the Allies. He spoke of their treachery. As for Hungary, he regarded

> that Turanian tribe with acute distaste. Like their cousins the Turks, they had destroyed much and created nothing. Buda Pest was a false city devoid of any autochthonous reality. For centuries the Magyars had oppressed their subject nationalities. The hour of liberation and retribution was at hand.[56]

How typical was such a view? Some older British diplomats subscribed to the stereotype of the Hungarian as someone having a 'bold, and to some extent romantic conception' of exclusive Magyarism 'scarcely reconcilable with the dictates of a sound, farsighted policy'.[57] Others, mainly conservatives, considered Hungarians 'a very high-spirited people', 'freedom-loving', showing a 'sporting spirit in adversity which we admire', 'always favourites in this country;' the 'nature of her [Hungary's] institutions, and the spirit of her aristocracy' being 'regarded as closely analogous to our own.'[58]

In nineteenth-century France the Hungarians together with the Poles were the only East Central European nation known to a wider public. The historian Edouard Sayous extolled the noble tradition of Franco-Hungarian friendship. The Hungarians were seen as 'knightly and picturesque and were dear to French hearts as brave fighters against the Turkish barbarism and the Vienna centralism'.[59] While a certain pro-Hungarian

sympathy continued among the French conservatives and surfaced during the secret exchanges of the winter of 1919-1920, it had no visible impact on the decisions that culminated in the Treaty of Trianon.

The Interbellum and the Second World War

The New East Central Europe which emerged from the war and subsequent peace treaties became scarcely better known in the West than the nations that had composed it in the past. The Balkans 'were still a rather exotic region, imagined from afar as part Graustarkian, part Merry Widowish.' It was said that peace was 'something what almost never existed' there. The American specialist who wrote this could still speak of the abolition of *serfdom* in Yugoslavia in 1918.[60] There were references to the 'conspiratorial politics of Eastern Europe'[61], as if the rest of the world were free from them. 'It was characteristic of the British attitude,' wrote a keen observer, 'that from the first it took little interest in the new children of the Treaties'. It was easy to blame their complex problems by implying that 'they were unfit for nationhood' – a theory which 'was freely advanced both in Paris and London'.[62] Sir Neville Chamberlain expressed the views of many when he spoke of Czechoslovakia at the time of Munich as a far away country of which 'we know nothing.' This sentiment applied also to her neighboring countries.

The feeling of nostalgia for the defunct Austro-Hungarian monarchy was visible among some French and British circles. Winston Churchill, for one, spoke disparagingly about the nationalities of the former Dual Monarchy 'none of whom had the strength or vitality to stand by themselves in the face of pressure from a revivified Germany or Russia'. There were none to whom 'gaining the independence has not brought the tortures which ancient poets and theologians had reserved for the damned.'[63] While the number of academics specializing in East Central Europe increased in the West, to mention only the School of Slavonic Studies in London, to an average Englishman a Central European refugee was 'a term of scorn in those days, when Hitler was a joke, and Central Europe wasn't so highly thought of either'.[64]

The resurrection of Poland, wrote Bainville, 'a trouvé le public français froid, ignorant et même méfiant'.[65] The ignorance went so far that a cabinet minister assumed that a Polish statesman spoke to his secretary in Russian. Some Frenchmen believed that Polish was 'un idiome germanique'. According to Ambassador Jules Laroche, the French neither knew nor understood the issues connected with the Polish 'corridor'.[66] Many kept repeating that Poland had always been unhappy, occupied, partitioned, hence the calamity which befell it in 1939 was in 'conformité avec la nature de choses'.[67] The French ambassador in Warsaw, who mentioned the above instances of ignorance, subscribed to a stereotyped vision of Polish aristocracy as historically turbulent, disrespectful toward monarchy, egotistic, deprived of patriotism, calling in the foreigner on every occasion.[68]

Old images survived with few changes. Ambassador Léon Noël's list of adjectives under 'le caractère polonais' comprised: 'esprit vif, très doué, spirituel, porté à la vanité, changeant, versatile, courageux, témeraire, léger, insouciant, prodigue'. He cited the saying: one Pole a genius, two a dispute, three a revolution. He also drew attention to the identification of Polish patriotism with Catholicism.[69] The rightist wri-

ter and journalist Wladimir d'Ormesson generalized more on the positive side when he called the Poles 'une race saine, nerveuse, indépendante, fière de ses grandes origines, sûre de ses grandes destinées'. Ambassador Laroche stressed among the most pleasant Polish traits hospitality and politeness and like Noël recalled the historic role of Polish women[70].

Political and military alliance between interwar France and Poland did not seem to have greatly affected or improved the mutual images, or increased mutual knowledge. The French had little liking for Pilsudski whom General Maurice Weygand allegedly called 'an usurper even in his legend'. According to Edouard Daladier, the socialists hated the Polish marshal more than they hated Hitler.[71] Laroche considered the Poles a nation which 'vivait logtemps dans le regret du passé'. While more moderate in his criticism of the Polish governmental elite, he felt that they, particularly foreign minister Józef Beck, were exceedingly preoccupied with matters of prestige. On one occasion, he wrote in seeming desperation that 'the subtleties of the Slav soul are inaccessible to us.'[72]

The continuing lack of knowledge of Poland did not seem to have prevented the British from expressing on occasion strong opinions about Poland and the Poles. 'The point about which public opinion in Great Britain appears to be most ignorant and most misled is the so-called 'Danzig Corridor',' opined Ambassador Howard.[73] The most emphatically drawn Polish image came from Winston Churchill's pen:

> The heroic characteristics of the Polish race must not blind us to their record of folly and ingratitude which over centuries has led them through measureless suffering.... It is a mystery and tragedy of European history that a people capable of every heroic virtue, gifted, valiant, charming, as individuals, should repeatedly show such inveterate faults in almost every aspect of their governmental life. Glorious in revolt and ruin; squalid and shameful in triumph. The bravest of the brave, too often led by the vilest of the vile![74]

A superb example of Churchillian prose, the above passage referred to Polish behavior at the time of Munich. Yet, it was written after the war when the prime minister's conscience toward the erstwhile Polish allies needed perhaps to be assuaged at their expense, and when, as a historian put it 'Britain ceased to have any East European policy at all'.[75]

As was the case with the other Western powers, American interest in and knowledge of Poland did not increase in the 1920s and 1930s.[76] The nature of American-Polish relations in the interwar period and during the Second World War found, however, reflection in the emphasis on certain stereotypes. A sympathy which existed toward the underdog diminished by 1919-1920 as the Poles, like every other nation, engaged in power politics. The assassination of President Gabriel Narutowicz by a rightist fanatic seemed to confirm the low opinion of Polish political life; the difficulties connected with credit negotiations fortified the view of the Pole as an unreliable negotiator and a poor businessman. The envoy in Warsaw, Hugh Gibson, condescendingly referred to Poles as 'children ... (who) are playing with a toy republic, a toy army and a toy Diet'. He also spoke of the Polish 'mania of persecution.'[77] A young diplomat opined that the Pole 'is by nature sanguine. He lives in the present'.[78] According to reports from Washington, the American press was on the whole projecting an image of Poland as a weak and barbarian country specializing in the murder of Jews.[79] The stereotype of Polish

anti-Semitism then became less pronounced, although Harry Truman would still refer in his memoirs to the terrible persecution of Jews in interwar Poland. A marked improvement in the Polish image appeared in the mid to late 1920s, and was at least partly connected to a stabilization of the country under Marshal Pilsudski. But as the international situation became more tense and German territorial revisionism grew, Warsaw's intransigent stand appeared unreasonable to Secretary Henry L. Stimson, who scornfully termed a strong demarche by the Polish ambassador 'a typical Polish production'.[80] The country was unlikely to survive, opined *The Nation* in 1921 and Ambassador John Cudahy echoed this sentiment in the mid-1930s. A generally balanced image of the Pole provided by a perceptive American who spent seventeen years in the country, centered on the role of tradition which he saw as a key to understanding the Poles.[81] It is difficult to say whether his views affected the prevailing beliefs.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's pronouncements during the Second World War seem to offer a good illustration of the use of stereotypes in a changing political scene. Wishing to exploit Polish resistance to the Nazis in order to mobilize American public opinion, Roosevelt called Poland an inspiration to the world; at Yalta he said that the country 'has been a source of trouble for over five hundred years'.[82] Aiming to discredit the Polish government in London, Ambassador W. Averell Harriman resorted to another stereotype when he accused them of being 'reactionaries' seeking to restore after the war the aristocrats' position, their 'landed properties and the feudalistic system'.[83] As for the Polish character, one diplomat believed that the Pole 'is by nature sanguine ... and has the happy faculty of closing his eyes to gathering storm clouds'.[84] Somewhat different adjectives appeared in a survey conducted at Yale University in 1938 and 1940, when the students (presumably having Polish-Americans in mind) listed: least progressive, least egotistical, least sure of himself, least ambitious, low educated, unhappy, religious.[85]

Czechs and Hungarians

In the interwar years and during the Second World War the Czechoslovak, or should one rather say the Czech image continued to be clearly positive. If d'Ormesson characterized Czechoslovakia as an 'édifice mal équilibré', he added that it was Benes – 'un homme qui vaut un peuple' – who held it together.[86] The perception of Masaryk and Benes as the embodiments of Czechoslovak democracy was evident. To the editor of *Foreign Affairs*, Hamilton Fish Armstrong, they 'were a balanced team without equal in any other European government'.[87] George Kennan appeared to have been one of the few American diplomats who did not share 'that sentimental enthusiasm for the Benes regime and the post-World War Order of Central Europe which had inspired so many English and American liberals.'[88] Western ignorance of Czechoslovakia, however, did not seem to have diminished. Noël wrote that the country was 'particulièrement mal connue et inexactement jugeé'. In some quarters it was fashionable to call it an artificial creation and to doubt its viability. Catholics and rightists were critical of the Hussite and freemasonic influences in the country. Constant misspelling of Czech names including that of Masaryk seemed a norm in France. *L'Illustration* printed a map on which Yugoslavia was marked Czechoslovakia; *France militaire* committed similar mistakes.[89]

On the British side, politicians and diplomats were more critical of Benes whom the idiosyncratic envoy Sir Joseph Addison called 'little Jack Horner'. Clement Attlee felt that he was too clever and self-confident about his diplomatic skill. Lloyd George from the 1938 vantage point called Czechoslovakia a 'polyglot and incoherent state.'[90] To Sir Neville Henderson the Czechs were a 'pig-headed race'; noting the Czechs' ability and intelligence, Sir George Clerk nonetheless called them 'conceited and suspicious.' The pro-Czechoslovak Bruce Lockhart observed that circumstances have made the Czech 'a provincial' and 'like the Lowland Scot, too, he has a fine conceit of himself.' Anthony Eden commented in his memoirs that whatever the 'faults of the Czechs, they are tough and they have a good fighting record.' By way of contrast, Sir Robert Vansittart spoke in 1936 of the Czechs having 'ruined themselves by their follies and corruptions,' and the writer George Gedye who had denounced both the Anschluss and Munich still remarked that 'Czech nationalism lacks the saving grace of a sense of humor'.[91]

Commenting on the national character of the Czechs, the auto-stereotype – 'our creative faculty and our characteristic trait express themselves in the domain of the practical'[92] – did not seem to have been contested by outsiders. Masaryk's remark that there was something in the Czech character 'which courts martyrdom' was more debatable, although the American envoy Lewis Einstein sought to detect a touch of Hus in Jan Masaryk. The envoy described the Czechs as 'slow and methodical people,' while Slovakia was 'a kind of Czech Ireland'. He voiced surprise over Czech 'exuberant nationalism' which he thought was 'fostered by politicians'. Noël noted the absence of military tradition among the Czechs and recalled the Svejk stereotype, but added that the Czech was 'patriote, résistant et tenace'. D'Ormesson used the adjectives 'travailleur, intelligent et obstiné'. By contrast he saw the Slovak peasant as primitive although intelligent and animated, and even brilliant when transplanted to the city, eloquent but volatile.[93]

Ruminating about the postwar developments in Czechoslovakia, George Kennan wondered if there would be a return of 'the petty bourgeois timidity, and the shallow materialism' and assumed that there may be a 'demand for greater personal responsibility and greater spiritual authority among those who pretend to lead'.[94] This seems like an isolated view. Although the favorable image of Czechoslovak democracy did not prevent Munich, a bitter aftertaste remained in many Western quarters. Was it by accident that Hollywood chose a Czech intellectual to personify a defiant stand vis-à-vis the Nazis in the film *Casablanca*? In turn, Czechoslovak realism and pragmatism were favorably contrasted during the Second World War with the romantic and hopelessly unrealistic Polish policies, vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Even in the 1960s Czechoslovakia, was 'still to most Americans, one suspects, a symbol of what was most democratic and most like the United States in interwar Central Europe'.[95]

Adjectives used to characterize the Hungarians did not seem to have changed, or to put it differently, their positive or negative content continued to correspond to given political positions. To d'Ormesson, a Hungarian was 'fier, orgueilleux, romantique'.[96] The supporter of Hungarian revisionism, Lord Rothermere's press, propagated a similar image, stressing the injustice that had been done to them.[97] At Westminster Captain Victor Cazalet remarked that Hungary had 'two friends in this country, the House of Lords and the *Daily Mail*.[98] The leftist quarters dwelt on Hungarian 'feudalism' and 'reaction'.

The sequel of the Second World War brought for the second time in the twentieth century a drastic change in the international position and the domestic situation of East Central Europe. Despite this fact one author has claimed that in the postwar decades 'hat an der Einstellung Westeuropas gegenüber Ostmitteleuropa nichts geändert'?[99] Indeed, demands for liberation and democratization rang hollow at times; John Campbell compared Eastern Europe to 'something of a football of American domestic politics kicked most vigorously at four-year intervals when presidential elections' occurred. Another scholar opined that 'the orientation of most Americans toward foreign policy is one of mood, and mood is essentially an unstable phenomenon'.[100] Then there were those in the West who somewhat cynically considered that Soviet order was preferable to ethnic conflicts and that a bipolar world assured greater stability than that which had existed in the first half of the century. By the 1960s Czechoslovakia allegedly lost its interwar 'sex appeal' as a model democracy while Poland appeared as the 'einziges lebendiges Land' in the socialist camp.[101]

An attempt at an analysis of stereotypes during this period and their impact on the West's attitude toward the liberated East Central Europe after 1989 would transcend the limits of this presentation. Thus, only a few remarks will be offered. As a sign of change one could undoubtedly point to the growth of institutes on Eastern Europe, particularly in the United States, and the increase in the number of specialists in this area. Whether this, however, meant an increased knowledge of Eastern European affairs among the faculty and students, and contributed to a popularization of the region in general is another matter. An examination of postwar university textbooks in European history confirms the assumption that Eastern Europe is still very much a neglected field.[102] The region would gain wider attention and achieve headlines at moments of crisis: the Polish and Hungarian events of 1956, the Prague Spring, and the rise and fall of Solidarity. Similarly, the election of a Polish pope enhanced interest in Poland.

Let us limit ourselves here by way of example to the views of a single American observer. In her book on the nations of Europe which included the region, the journalist Flora Lewis presented an overview which necessarily involved stereotypes.[103] Already the titles of individual chapters reflected them. That on Poland read 'the malady is geography', on Czechoslovakia 'a sullen quiet', on Hungary 'the most amusing barracks'. The Poles, as the author remarked, were 'closer to their stereotype than most, deliberately it seems, cultivating their sense of what it means to be a Pole.' It included 'disaster, fear, stubborn perseverance, willful rejection of a reality which can be neither accepted nor changed,' the church which 'is the symbol of the nation,' and of course 'defiance (which) became a particularly Polish trait'.[104]

The people of Czechoslovakia were 'much better prepared for independent nationhood and more accustomed to cooperation', having had a 'model of stability, democracy and balance'. Even if not always perfect, they were 'more stolid, cautious and practical than other Slavs, without the streak of wild passion, gaiety and cruelty', or in other words, having a 'sense of measure'. They also had a 'tradition of sympathy for Russia'.[105] According to the author, the Hungarians were 'considered an extremely moody people' characterized by 'extravagant courtesy' and nostalgia for the old monarchy. Their 'intense nationalism never ebbed', but they learned how to adjust

superficially, having the 'old tradition' of those 'who salaamed before Turkish sultans and secretly sought Western support against them'.[106]

Political jokes and sayings about Eastern Europe perpetuated the prevalent images. During the 1956 upheaval the Poles, it was said, behaved like the Czechs, and the Hungarians like the Poles. The Hungarians in the János Kádár era were 'socialists in the morning and capitalists in the afternoon'. Poland was like a radish, red outside and white inside. The jokes were one of the weapons of the dissenters and opponents, and these two groups became also in a sense stereotyped into images of the entire nations. The high point of this process may have been reached by Solidarity. The spiritual élan of the East – ex Oriente lux – contrasted with the materialistic and tired outlook of the West.[107]

Have all these stereotypes ill-prepared the West for dealing with the new situation that arose after 1989? Did the old stereotype of perennial war in the Balkans or of the Balkan Powder Keg justify Western inaction in the face of the tragedy of Yugoslavia? Have the stereotypes about East Central European instability played a role in the reluctance to include Poland, Hungary, and the Czech and Slovak republics in NATO?

The few illustrations chosen here point to some tentative conclusions. First of all, there can be little doubt about the ignorance of East European matters in the West which has not appreciably diminished in spite of the emergence of groups of well qualified regional experts. While this is understandable in the case of insular Britain whose contacts with East Central Europe had been minimal, one can observe it also in the United States– the big immigration notwithstanding – and in France, despite her traditional links to Poland and East Central Europe. Second, the images, especially in the case of Poland, have been more negative than positive. The Polish stereotype dwells on historical inability to achieve political success, a tendency toward anarchy, lack of realism and consistency. It involves the 'feudal' image and anti-Semitism. Sympathy for the 'poor and unhappy' Poland has been essentially fatalistic, condemning the country to perpetual hardship. Taken together with the notion of Poland as a source of trouble, it served to justify policies of disinterest in Warsaw or of appeasement of its mighty neighbors. Such redeeming features as patriotism, bravery and friendship toward France received emphasis when Polish cooperation appeared important.

The more favorable image of Czechoslovakia seems to have been to a large extent due to personalities – Masaryk, to a lesser degree Benes, and nowadays Václav Hável – pictured as embodiments of democracy. The stereotype of the hard-working and reasonable Czech appeared of lesser significance, and hardly affected Western policies at the time of Munich or of the Soviet intervention in 1968. There has been an obvious link between the political outlook (or party affiliation) and attitudes toward East Central Europe. One can notice it for instance in the case of British and French conservatives' image of Hungary and the Hungarians which is generally more favorable than that of the Left.

Once again, these sweeping assertions are obviously little more than tentative observations. The role of images or stereotypes in the interconnecting world of power politics, economic interests and the realm of ideas requires an intensive, in-depth study. If the few samples provided here and the reflections that accompany them could whet one's appetite and shed some light on this complex problem, they will have fulfilled their purpose.

References

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2. George and Achiles Tehodorson (eds.), *The Modern Dictionary of Sociology*. New York, 1969, p. 420.
3. A. Kapiszewski, *Stereotyp Amerykanów polskiego pochodzenia*. Wroclaw, 1978, p. 27.
4. See *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. 1968, p. 259.
5. Wojciech Wrzesinski, *Sasiad czy wrog*. Wroclaw, 1992, pp. 7-8, 14.
6. The problems as Lippmann sees them are immense: 'we have to picture more space than we can see with our eyes, and more time than we can feel, but we have to describe and judge more people, more actions, more things than we can ever count or vividly imagine. We have to summarize and generalize. We have to pick out samples, and treat them as typical'. Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, p. 148
7. The assassination of King Alexander and Queen Draga in 1903 confirmed that view. See Raymond Postgate and Aylmer Vallance, *Those Foreigners*. London, 1937, p. 227.
8. See Jacques Bainville, *La Russie et la barrière de l'Est*. Paris, 1937, pp. 222-223.
9. For a good survey see Wieslaw Sladkowski, *Opinia publiczna we Francji wobec sprawy polskiej w latach 1914-1918*. Wroclaw, 1918), also Bruno Drweski, 'La Pologne dans l'opinion française. Quelques orientations', in Centre d'Etudes des Civilisations de l'Europe Centrale et du Sud-Est, *Colloque sur les rapports entre la France et les Polonais de 1878 à 1914*. Paris, 1957, pp. 7-25. Hereafter cited as *Colloque*. Also Stefan Meller, 'Woczach obcego', *Plus Minus* 130, 5-6 June 1993.
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12. Ernest Lavisse, *L'Histoire de Prusse*. Paris, 1896, p. 98.
13. Antoine Marès, 'La vision française de l'Europe Centrale, d'un prisme à l'autre, du XIXe au XXe siècle', in *L'Europe Centrale, Réalité, Mythe, Enjeu XVIIIe – XXe siècles*. Varsovie, 1991, p. 378.
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15. Louis Léger, *Panslavisme et l'intéret français*, p. 332, cited in *Colloque*, p. 118.
16. See *Colloque*, pp. 12, 14-16, 19-21.
17. Marès, 'Vision', p. 389.
18. Cited in Sladkowski, *Opinia*, pp. 93, 95.
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23. Cited in Ernst Birke, *Frankreich und Ostmitteleuropa im 19. Jahrhundert*. Köln, 1960, p. 476.

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25. Ibid.
26. Daniel Stone (ed.) *The Polish Memoir of William John Rose*. Toronto, 1975, p. 75.
27. Cited in Christopher and Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe*. London, 1981, p. 242.
28. Kenneth J. Calder, *Britain and the Origins of the New Europe 1914-1918*. Cambridge, 1976, p. 214.
29. Bainville, *Russie*, p. 186.
30. See Seton-Watson, *The Making*, p. 158; Calder, *Britain*, pp. 101, 115, and 142; David Lloyd George, *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*. London, 1938, II, p. 309.
31. Cited in Calder, *Britain*, pp. 197-198.
32. 'Polish politicians', he wrote, 'in general incline towards being unbalanced and their politics are frequently tortuous and dangerous.' Cited in Calder, *Britain*, p. 89. Even his friend James Headlam-Morley criticized him for this attitude. See Agnes Headlam-Morley, Russell Bryant and Anna M. Cienciala (eds.), *Sir James Headlam-Morley: A Memoir of the Paris Peace Conference 1919*. London, 1972, pp. XXX, 20, 36.
33. Cited in Howard, *Theatre*, II, p. 330 and in Lloyd George, *Truth*, p. 310. Lewis Namier called Paderewski 'a fantastic liar' with 'brazen cheek'. Cited in Headlam-Morley, *Memoir*, p.70. Lloyd George's alleged remark that to award Upper Silesia to Poland was equivalent to giving a clock to a monkey enjoyed wide circulation.
34. Respectively, Lloyd George, *Truth*, II, pp. 308, 3; E. Malcolm Carroll, *Soviet Communism and Western Public Opinion 1919-1920*. Chapel Hill, 1965, p. 56, and Piotr S. Wandycz, *France and her Eastern Allies 1919-1925*. Minneapolis, 1962, p. 37.
35. Quoted in Lloyd George, *Truth*, I, p. 693.
36. Cited in Stephen Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets, vol.II: 1919-1931*. London, 1972, pp. 138, 181.
37. A good deal of material is in Headlam-Morley, *Memoir*; also Henry Morgenthau, *All in a Lifetime*. New York, 1922.
38. *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. London, 1919, p. 272.
39. Respectively, Lloyd George, *Truth*, p. 697; Headlam-Morley, *Memoir*, p. 37; Howard, *Theatre*, II, p. 261; Stone, *Polish Memoir*, p. 98; Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart, *Happy Odyssey*. London, 1955, pp. 112 and 95.
40. Keith Middlemas (ed.), *Thomas Jones, Whitehall Diary*. London, 1969-70, I, p. 51.
41. Seton-Watson to his wife, June 13, 1919 in Seton-Watson, *The Making*, p. 373.
42. See the treatment in books by George B. Adams, Ferdinand Schevill, James H. Robertson and Charles A. Beard discussed in Piotr S. Wandycz, *The United States and Poland*. Cambridge, Mass., 1980, p. 93. For an excellent general survey see Keith Sutherland, 'America views Poland: Perspectives from the Final Partition to the Rebirth of the Polish Nation', *Antemurale*, XX (1976): 37-50.
43. Cited in Wandycz, *United States*, p. 103.
44. Cited by Kay Lundgreen-Nielsen, 'Woodrow Wilson and the Rebirth of Poland',

in Arthur S. Link (ed.), *Woodrow Wilson and a Revolutionary World 1913-1921*. Chapel Hill, 1982, p. 113. See also Wandycz, *United States*, pp. 417-419.

45. Lloyd George, *Truth*, pp. 311-312. The belief that Paderewski decisively influenced Wilson can be illustrated by an alleged remark of a senator to the pianist: 'I suppose Mr. Paderewski, that every time you play to the President on that fascinating instrument of yours (making a gesture with his arm as if he were fiddling) you get the promise of another Province for Poland', Howard, *Theatre*, II, p. 323.
46. Lloyd George, *Truth*, pp. 313-314.
47. Thomas Garrigue Masaryk, *The Making of a State*. New York, 1927, p. 83.
48. Cited in Ferdinand Peroutka, *Budování státu*. Prague, 1934-36, I, p. 224.
49. Lloyd George, *Truth*, p. 942.
50. Harold I. Nelson, *Land and Power: British and Allied Policy on Germany's Frontiers 1916-19*. Toronto, 1963, p. 374 .
51. Clemenceau, *Grandeur*, p. 147.
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53. Respectively, Jules Cambon and Emaneuel Peretti de La Rocca cited in Wandycz, *France*, p. 24.
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58. Respectively Lord Bryce, Col. Josiah Wedgwood, Capt. W. Elliot, Auberon Herbert, Lord Curzon cited in *The Hungarian Question in the British Parliament*. London, 1933, pp. 18, 126, 165, 182, 196.
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67. Noël, *Polonia*, p. 72, compare 13.
68. Ibid, p. 34
69. Ibid., pp. 50, 59-60. Noël thought that the Polish language had no native term to express the action of continuity which was indicative of the Poles' lack of stamina. Ibid., p. 52.
70. Respectively, Wladimir d'Ormesson, 'Ce que j'ai vu en Europe Centrale', *Revue Hebdomadaire*, (August 1922): 398, and Jules Laroche, *La Pologne de Pilsudski*. Paris, 1953, pp. 85, 87. My attention to the d'Ormesson articles was drawn by Maarten Pereboom.
71. See Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances 1926-36*. Princeton, 1988, pp. 233, 459. Compare Paul Claudel's letter in Józef Laptos, *Dyplomaci II*

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72. Respectively Laroche, *Pologne*, p. 39 and citation in Wandycz, *Twilight*, p. 460. See also Laptos, *Francuska opinia publiczna wobec spraw polskich w latach 1919-1925*. Wroclaw, 1983.
73. Howard, *Theatre*, II, p. 394.
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75. Seton-Watson, *The Making*, p. 431.
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