

# Teaching American Lessons to Romanian Students, A Memoir: 1990-1991—Part II

Louis Petrich

*The first part of this article was published in the February issue of the St. Croix Review. Louis Petrich has now left Romania and gone to teach at the American University of Kyrgyzstan, former republic of the Soviet Union. Dr. Petrich is a professor of American Studies. An abbreviated version of this memoir appears in the book, from Margin to Center, Iasi University Publishing House (Romania.)*

**T**ocqueville is not squeamish about indicating that it will take the passing away of an entire people and the creation of a new people before republicanism can appear where previously (as in the case of Romania) there were no signs of it. Patience of this kind, which waits yearningly, as Walt Whitman says, for sweet death to overcome a stricken nation and to fertilize the land with corpses, is a hard lesson, to be sure, and I would be at a loss to teach it without some kind of compensation to offer these “transitional generations,” as they go the way of the Indians.

Compensation, as Ralph Waldo Emerson teaches, is a fundamental law of the moral and spiritual universe: for every loss there is a gain, and for every gain there is a loss. Or, as our myths and parables teach us, he who gains the whole world is most in danger of losing his own soul, while he who is most burdened, like Atlas supporting the heavens, or most weary of life, like Hercules toiling at his labors, is dearest to the gods. The compensation to the poor, to those suffering from a sense of waste, comes from a higher realm, provided that they keep themselves aware, by study of the appropriate objects, of the kind of riches, immune to time, available for their betterment.

Consider, for a moment, Tocqueville’s observation that the American pioneers, trying to better their pasts, typically carried with them four items into the wilderness—an ax, a newspaper, a Bible, and Shakespeare’s plays. Why these four items? The ax symbolizes hard work leading to private ownership, modest prosperity, and fierce independence; the newspaper symbolizes incessant association in political and civil activities of all kinds, a habit for which Americans are justly famous; the Bible symbolizes the stability of morals and fundamental truths, on the basis of which the most radical of political and economic dreams could be converted into reality without threat of collapse; and Shakespeare, the standard-bearer of English (if not of Western) civilization, which was transplanted to North America chiefly (and ironically) by the theater-hating Puritans, symbolizes the most precious parts of Anglo-American civilization: local rule, utilitarian piety, and universal enlight-

enment. Now consider the Romanian people. Having long been influenced, much for the worse, by the experience of autocracy, sometimes ruthless, they are now undergoing perils of a kind of wilderness in which not external nature but human nature has to be cultivated and civilized. For such a people, perhaps it is not the ax of the new economic science of capitalism or the newspapers which embody the new political science of republicanism that contribute most to the formation of civilized human beings and citizens. Rather, the Bible and Shakespeare's plays (containing, not incidentally, much political and economic wisdom of their own) deserve priority, for they insinuate themselves into the soul more directly than do the laws of economics or politics, and their effects are more profound. This may sound like the typical bias of a professor of humanities, yet distinguished social scientists are also arguing today for the priority of culture. In his book, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, Francis Fukuyama demonstrates that the level of trust in a society or nation is the key variable in determining its capacity to compete in the modern world. And trust, he maintains, is more the creation of a shared moral-cultural system, than of a political-economic system. Samuel Huntington also argues for the priority of culture. His book, *The Clash of Civilizations*, makes the case that humanity's cultural divides (defined primarily by religion) will keep history going, despite the presumed universal victory of democratic capitalism.

Let us recall for a moment that Thoreau made economics the subject of the first chapter of *Walden* not because it was his most important concern, but in order to get it permanently out of his way by solving its problems once and for all at the beginning. For he had far more important things to attend to than the acquiring of money or property. Thoreau makes us smile sadly and wonder (as Tocqueville did) at the intense, go-getter, civic-mindedness of Americans, forever caught up in the hectic business of chapter one: making a living. "Slow down and cultivate your souls, in youth as in age, not your possessions," Thoreau proclaims, Jesus-like, "for what else really profits a man?" Tocqueville, on the other hand, though a Platonist at heart, intent on the study of America to arrive at "the form" of democracy (as compensation for the failures of its embodiment in France), always remained concerned with how to reconcile the spiritual goods of Christianity with the material benefits of democracy. Americans, he thought, by proving this reconciliation to be possible, had pointed the way to much of the world. Tocqueville recognizes, as Thoreau never did, what is beautiful about democracy, not only in the realm of Platonic ideas, but in the American experience. Throughout all the drab conformity and potential tyranny of equality in America, Tocqueville saw a compensating beauty and nobility. They were not to be found in America's objects of art or in the deeds of her citizens (one had better look to European aristocracies for those, Tocqueville says), but in the magnificent spectacle of an egalitarian society living in liberty, amidst plenty, in peace, and under God.

The second lesson, therefore, that my Romanian students should discover as they study America with Tocqueville's help, is that culture must come before politics and economics. For in order that democracy and capitalism may bring forth their anticipated fruits, the soil in which they must take root, namely the human

soul, has to be watered with works of truth and beauty that lift it above the despair provoked by the painful realization of human misery and nothingness. Tocqueville felt the waste and burden of living in the wreckage of a democratic revolution, whose benefits would (maybe) belong (for a while) to future generations. He wrote *Democracy in America* as compensation, to possess that better future in his soul. Likewise, I rely heavily on the book to help give possession of this future, as represented by America, to those who will not have the opportunity to inhabit either.

The structure of Tocqueville's book, like its length, contains another important lesson for Romanians in the theory and practice of democracy. As my students try to follow and connect all the different lines of argument, radiating from the central idea of equality and containing the same key terms in different contexts, they acquire the same habit of mind, which so impressed Tocqueville, as that of American citizens. They feel themselves surrounded by many courses of thought, as Americans feel surrounded by many courses of action, to all of which they feel equal, and in all of which they are involved simultaneously.

A Romanian civil engineer, visiting New York City in 1994, said to me that walking the streets of the city was like undergoing military training, except that one is preparing not for the chances of war but for the equally demanding opportunities of peace. (The popularity of the bipartisan movement in America today, in favor of a smaller national government and stronger local governments, provides an acknowledgment that the American people have become mentally, as well as monetarily, overtaxed by the complications of their ingenious federal system.)

To understand any one idea, such as "self-interest rightly understood" (a novelty to Romanians trained by applications of the idea, "communal interest wrongly understood"), it is necessary that my students absorb Tocqueville's whole book. To make that task as compelling as it is daunting, I remind them that to succeed in his private calling the American citizen must engage in that architectural science which takes into account the whole of human life, namely politics. The citizen is political because he possesses "self-interest rightly understood," and he acquires the right kind of self-interest from his involvement in the science of right and wrong, namely politics. Thus the end encompasses the beginning, though it is hard to say which is which.

Tocqueville, too, is always returning to the beginning of the argument. Consider how curious it is that in a number of places he announces that we have to ask ourselves what it is we chiefly want from society and government. Life as a democratic citizen is like that: one is always returning to the fundamental questions, and the more complicated life becomes, the more one has to return to the first things, if only to prevent oneself from giving up altogether under the pressure of accumulated difficulties.

"It is frightening," says Tocqueville, "to see how much diverse knowledge and discernment [the Constitution of the United States] assumes on the part of the governed." The citizens must use "the lights of their reason every day" (p. 164), not only to understand the written constitutions of their state and nation, but to keep informed of the changes in each brought about by ongoing judicial interpretations.

For in America, as Tocqueville says, every social and political question eventually becomes a legal question. Such mental capacities are a lot to expect from people who prefer to concentrate upon their personal business (and for good reason—there is much money to be made or lost in America), and whose opinions are constantly being provided by the free press, which offers to do the work of political reasoning for them. As the vehicle of majority opinion—or of elite minority opinion, which, having captured the institutions of culture, masquerades as majority opinion—the free press is irresistible to the masses as a convenient substitute for thought. Yet even citizens who strive to keep their government as simple as possible will still have to know about many things outside their expertise in order to rule themselves well. An approximation of that requirement, for someone who has never lived in a free society, may be had by the effort to hold all seven hundred pages of *Democracy in America* in one's head at once. And even this effort is less than what it takes to live free in today's more complicated world.

A third lesson my students learn from America is therefore this: democratic citizenship, in theory and practice, is an intellectually heroic endeavor. Freedom looks chaotic because there is much movement in many directions simultaneously, but the discipline of being free consists in comprehending the relations of all these movements to one another and to a central point equality—the destiny that Tocqueville says Providence has in store for us all. The mentioning of Providence tends to calm my students' anxieties, for as Christians they believe that Providence will be good to them. But providential equality, in Tocqueville's sense, is not necessarily good. Therefore, I emphasize that to succeed in my class, as in America, it is necessary, as Lenin said, to, "study, study, study."

Even if my students, in imitation of American citizens, study continually, it is still probable that the intellectual requirements to master the subject of democratic citizenship will be too much for them. Even Tocqueville thinks so. But his hatred of tyranny in any form is stronger than his despair about human reason, and this makes him insist, against his own aristocratic beliefs, that ordinary men and women must assume the burdens of self-rule and learn from their many mistakes what they could not discern through reason. For the alternative to the trials and errors of self-rule is not a return to the undemocratic conditions of the past, but subjection to a central authority with fewer restraints on its power than ever before. Thus did Tocqueville predict the unprecedented terrors inflicted on men and women by the egalitarian tyrannies of the twentieth century.

It comes naturally to people living on the periphery of power not to take the above challenge to a new kind of heroism very seriously. After all, peripheral people, Romanians included, are not used to exercising any influence over the course of events. On the contrary, they have demonstrated to me the habit of thinking that theirs is the privilege as passive subjects to make fun of those who would direct themselves as the principal players in the drama of history. Thus do Americans often meet with aloof smiles from people in peripheral countries, whose experience on the political stage has usually been as the allowed fool. (Ceausescu's poor table manners in the presence of the Queen of England is a nice example.) I cannot count how many times my Romanian students have smiled or

exchanged whispers with one another, while I try to teach them serious things that may do them good to know. It is necessary to make Romanians get serious about citizenship. To this end, I try to instruct my students as to why we Americans, as Tocqueville also observed, are such amusingly serious people in the conduct of our affairs.

One of the remarkable things about America is that the tendency to grow big by encompassing more people and territories, destined to become equal to their predecessors as citizens or states, was recognized as a necessity at the start of the Republic and pursued with confidence during much of its history. Jefferson's "Empire of Liberty," Monroe's doctrine, Manifest Destiny, the preservation of the Union, Roosevelt's Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, making the world safe for democracy, the United Nations, NATO—all these American initiatives and ideas demonstrate that Americans have always thought and acted on a very large scale. There is something marvelous in the fact that Washington's unequipped, often unpaid army of farmer-volunteers, who took on the best equipped professional army and navy in the world, called itself, in 1775, "the Continental Army," while the Congress of traitor/patriots (time would tell which appellation was correct) called itself the "Continental Congress." The early Americans somehow understood that to be serious about their republican intentions required an audacious vision of their destiny. The republics of antiquity and of the renaissance believed that smallness and homogeneity were essential to the survival of their liberties. The Americans, on the other hand, justified in theory and created in fact a large and diverse republic, whose very existence had been thought to be impossible. Tocqueville sees in this accomplishment a model for the future of Europe:

For a democratic republic to survive without trouble in a European nation, it would be necessary for republics to be established in all the others at the same time. (p. 224)

(Trotsky said the same thing about socialism.) This idea is the basis for the European Union. Upon hearing this, the students who used to smile at my American presumptuousness begin to smile instead at the recognition of something. Where Europe is heading, where Romania wishes to go, America has already been.

But how will big and small nations come together politically, as similarly constituted republics, and economically, as free market traders, without becoming an undifferentiated mass? The student who is serious about maintaining the cultural integrity of Romania now finds herself in potential conflict with that person, namely me, who is serious about the spread of republican citizenship and prosperity. Once again, in the spirit of Tocqueville, I must ask my students a fundamental question: "What do you really want from your government?" Their answers predictably contain incompatible things, such as "being protected and provided for" and "being allowed to be free." So I ask them the question that Tocqueville constantly raises: do the advantages of democratic government (rule by the many for the sake of the many, respect for the rule of law and for human

rights, and public spiritedness) outweigh the advantages of aristocratic government (rule by the best for the sake of the best, respect for tradition, and absorption of the many in private affairs)? The students tend to answer rather automatically that democracy is more advantageous. So I remind them that Tocqueville, though melancholy at the passing of aristocracy (as many of them are troubled by the loss of a regime of security), maintains that the question—"which regime is more advantageous?"—cannot be answered. Nevertheless, it is not futile to ask the question because the destiny of men to become equal may be fulfilled under conditions of freedom or servitude. For the sake of freedom, Tocqueville awakens the aristocratic tendencies no longer able to attach themselves to an aristocratic regime, yet still capable of guiding egalitarian men and women towards freedom. These tendencies, called into practice by what is required to comprehend his lessons, include respect for precedent (like that of the Indians), appreciation for formal structures (including the book's own), and deference to expertise (particularly that of the Americans he most admires, the Puritans and Founding Fathers). In fact, these aristocratic tendencies make possible the rule of law, without which freedom becomes mere anarchy followed by abysmal tyranny.

I can now state lesson number four of America, as I would to my students.

I know that you are serious about democratic citizenship when you fear it poses a threat to your culture, and you stop smiling at me, as if I were visiting you from another planet, but do not frown. You ask questions that take you outside the narrow boundaries of this faculty, this city, and this country. You pursue keen interests in politics, economics, history, science, literature, art, and religion, having realized that the acquisition of the English language, while having nothing serious to say, is the sign of a useless citizen and a badly educated person.

The kind of education I am advocating, commonly called "liberal" because it is liberating, is hardly to be found in Romanian higher education in its true sense. My teaching of American studies at Alexandru I. Cuza University is a pioneering attempt to provide this kind of education.

I have now discussed four of America's lessons, apprehended with the help of Tocqueville, and made applicable to Romanian students on their difficult journey to self-government: (1) maintain a sublime patience during this period of transition, which by juxtaposing past and future heightens awareness of the waste of human potential; (2) take consolation from what is true and beautiful in the enduring creations of culture; (3) strive for heroic activity of mind in liberation from narrowness and subjection to authority; and (4) distinguish what is serious from what is not and pursue the former as you would pursue happiness. Tocqueville teaches these lessons by making us experience them in the effort to understand his thought. One more lesson remains to be learned, or I should say felt, by my students, before they can be counted upon to play their parts as citizens. This is the lesson of fear.

In the months following the executions of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu

(December 25, 1989), a group of popular American television comedians performed a skit that captured the spirit of fear that Tocqueville maintains as a current throughout his book. Imagine these comedians impersonating downtrodden, shivering Romanians gathered around the coffin of Nicolae Ceausescu to talk about the revolution. One of them turns to another and says, "Poor Ceausescu, he wasn't such a bad tyrant." After more shivering another Romanian says, "Poor Ceausescu, he was a good dictator." Unrelieved in their misery, they continue to mumble "Poor Ceausescu," until one of them summons the nerve to ask, "Do you think—maybe he's still alive?" After a second of consideration, in unified motion they all pull revolvers out from their coats and fire into the coffin until their barrels are empty. "Poor Ceausescu," they begin again.

It is difficult to arouse this fear in students who, with each passing year, have less to remember of the totalitarian past to make them afraid. It is also difficult to find this fear in operation among the educators sent by Western nations to help promote reforms in Eastern Europe. The visiting economists, seeming to forget that theirs has been designated "the dismal science," are particularly responsible for the preponderance of hope over fear by relying on the promise of delayed gratification. By way of contrast, the Puritans, who believed that they were probably among God's elect, nevertheless knew the necessity of maintaining fear in proportion to confidence. The beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord, as the Bible they knew so well proclaims. This fear is also the starting point in the education of the democratic citizen. It was certainly the beginning of my education in this subject.

When I first arrived in Romania in 1990, I could not believe my eyes at the degree of squalor and desperation that existed on the continent of Europe. After all, given the classical education I had received, Europe to me was synonymous with civilization. But as soon as I disembarked from my plane at Otopeni airport in Bucharest to see Romanian soldiers approach me from out of the darkness, their conspicuous automatic weapons pointed only lately towards the ground, to ask me for American cigarettes, I felt fear, not for my own person, but for civilization itself.

The things I witnessed during that first year in Romania demonstrated to me that in a short period of time, officially sponsored barbarism could wipe away the gains of hundreds of years of human effort. Since then I have gotten rather used to conditions in Romania, just as the wild dogs that roam the streets have gotten used to my foreign gait, so that my fears have given way in part to hope, in part to resignation. I know from experience the reflexive shrugging of shoulders, the relief of erupting into curses and ridicule in private, and the little acts of revenge taken in petty corruption. I am sure that my teaching suffers on account of the perverse accommodations to life one makes over time in such a damaged and dirty country, and no doubt it is a wise policy of most Western organizations not to permit their educators and reformers to remain in Romania, beset by temptations to corruption, for more than a few years. I sometimes want to go further east to witness again how bad things can get, and to feel the fear that makes one put aside private and petty concerns in order to take up great public causes. Yet perhaps this purpose can be accomplished by taking a mental journey, as we have been doing all along.

“What is there for Americans like me, and fellow travelers like you, to be afraid of today and more so tomorrow?” I ask my Romanian students. They are not sure what Americans and their allies should have to fear, now that America is the world’s sole superpower. “The tyranny of the future,” I advise them, “more fearful than the tyranny of the past, comes into view once you reach the promised land, or it reaches you.” Tocqueville saw, at the beginning of the democratic experiment in America, a capacity for tyranny that Neil Postman has described in its present stage of development and that Aldous Huxley depicted in full measure as mankind’s future (*Brave New World*). The tyranny of the future that all three writers warn us against will not be based on pain, but on pleasure; will not exercise thought control, but will instill thoughtlessness; will not lead to deprivation, but to plenitude to the point of distraction, trivialization, and boredom. The tyranny of the future will not prescribe a distorted history, but no history at all, only a future of technologically driven, as measured by comfort, convenience, and amusement. The tyranny of the future is worse because no one will recognize it as tyranny. There will be no heroes to fight against the tyrant, because people in the brave new world will believe that they are happy, having forgotten what happiness is.

It is worth noting that the Puritans, who thought of themselves as the now chosen people, took to heart the warning of God to Moses, that the Israelites would face more evil in a land of plenty than they did while wandering in the desert. The spirit of revivalism in America in both religion and politics owes its recurrence through history to the attempt to preserve the purity of the desert and wilderness, so to speak, in the face of temptations born of plenty. The film *Citizen Kane*, consistently voted the best American film ever made, is about the sacrifice of the ideals of citizenship and public service at the altar of self-aggrandizement.

The above ingredients of tyranny are developing nicely in America today, for they arise out of tendencies in democracy itself. (As I witness American military installations being converted into amusement parks, such as Chicago’s Navy Pier, and as I read about American soldiers and sailors spending inordinate amounts of time learning how not to offend women, I cannot help thinking that Americans have lost the true sense of fear.) Tocqueville, however, wanted Europeans to attach their hopes, more so than their fears, to America. These hopes were to be made realistic by the four lessons previously discussed. He pointed to a different country to inspire realistic and useful fear—Russia. His comparison of the destiny of these two nations provided a prescient look into the future.

America and Russia, he writes, each advancing towards the same goal (equality) by different means and starting points, will divide the world between them.

The American fights against natural obstacles; the Russian is at grips with men. The former combats the wilderness and barbarism; the latter, civilization with all its arms. America’s conquests are made with the plowshare, Russia’s with the sword. To attain their aims, the former relies on personal interest and gives free scope to the unguided strength and common sense of individuals. The latter in a sense concentrates the whole

power of society in one man. One has freedom as the principal means of action; the other has servitude. Their point of departure is different and their paths diverse; nevertheless, each seems called by some secret design of Providence one day to hold in its hands the destinies of half the world. (p. 413)

The question Tocqueville puts to his European audience could not be more clear: which kind of equality do you prefer—the American version or the Russian? The challenge to Americans is also unmistakable: a formidable enemy looms in the future; therefore, grow big and strong, but beware that your size and power do not undermine from within the same freedoms that are needed to protect from external enemies.

For the time being, Russia is no longer the great enemy for Western nations to fear. Even my students in Iasi have forgotten that they live a mere twenty kilometers from what was once the mighty Soviet Union—when I arrived in Iasi in 1990, it was thrilling to think that I could jog to the border and stare into the great enemy's actual territory. I felt myself to be on the front line of a Cold War that was about to end in victory for my side.

Their consciousness is now being determined by objects of desire originating in America, yet permeating the sights and sounds of their everyday lives. The new McDonalds in Iasi even has a McDrive, in anticipation of the need Romanians one day will have to hurry, and of the roads, cars, and traffic controls they will one day possess of a quality to permit them to hurry safely and effectively. To counteract the Huxleyian influence of such colorful and tasty American products, worldwide in scope, I try to instigate fear in my students by directing their attention to another of Tocqueville's predictions, having to do, again, with the priority of culture over politics and economics in determining the course of history.

With complete faith and certainty, Tocqueville predicted that America would grow to occupy all the continent, while maintaining for many centuries its unity of culture under the original Anglo-American model. (p. 412) The multiculturalists, backed by the feminists, vehemently deny this unity. They say that America is not one, but many cultures, having different points of departure, languages, religions, habits, morals, ideas, and modes of thought. Let us assume for the moment that they are right. What follows?

Perhaps without the strength that comes from unity, and without the existence of the Russian threat to encourage that unity, America will not be able to hold the destiny of the world in its hands. So that destiny will again be up for grabs among the friends and enemies of democracy. There is much to fear, as there always has been, in the prospect of more history, yet today this fear may be said to depend upon the failure of America to remain the strongly unified arbiter of the world's destiny.

The defenders of multiculturalism commonly argue that there is wonderful strength in diversity, that the study of America should be grounded in its diversity, and that prosperity flows from the cultivation of diversity. The image of America as a federation of diverse nations is now being taught to her former enemies who once had robotically learned that America was a hegemonic menace. I am not sure

that the two views do not amount to the same thing. I have noticed the word “diversity” (in English) on posters in Iasi (every other word being in Romanian) advertising cultural events. It thus comes as a surprise for my students to hear an American teacher argue against multiculturalism as an internalization of the Russian threat and a hegemonic menace in disguise. For what Tocqueville said of the Russians, I offer to them as a description of the multiculturalists: they combat Western civilization with coercion (known as “political correctness”); they eschew common sense as the exercise of white male power, and they scorn individual freedom and self-reliance as the disguised tools of oppression. They use the powers of state and society to support group identity, which functions as a kind of life-giving motherland, for the sake of which they are willing to sacrifice democracy (understood fundamentally as rule of the majority). The Russian spirit of anti-individualism, anti-civilization, anti-progress, anti-freedom, and anti-common sense is now making its bid for the soul of America and the future of mankind under the banner of multiculturalism—if I am wrong about multiculturalism, at least I hope to have contributed some thoughts on the subject that by diverging from the mainstream, add to diversity. The great enemy lies within. The object of fear and the object of hope have become identified with the same country, the United States of America.

To think of multicultural America as the new Russia, to be feared, is a bit staggering, particularly to Romanians, who are used to viewing these two countries as opposite poles, but I can reinforce my point by appealing to the experience of my students as readers of Tocqueville’s book *The Union*, Tocqueville says of America, “is an ideal nation which exists, so to say, only in men’s minds and whose extent and limits can only be discerned by the understanding.” (p. 164) The danger to the American Union is therefore the same danger that confronts students as readers: not to comprehend the union of parts. Since America came into existence as the manifestation of certain ideas and converts subjects into citizens through the common apprehension of the truth of these ideas, the way to destroy America as a nation of citizens is to destroy the coherence and intelligibility of the ideas—to deconstruct them, if you will—and to substitute for rational deliberation irrational discourses whose ends are power. This is precisely what the multiculturalists and their allies are trying to do. Thus it makes sense that the war to define America is a “Culture War,” whose generals are literary critics and whose weapons are books, containing not truth but the means of domination.

The responses of my students to the specific battles of America’s Culture War lend support to Tocqueville’s observation that the foreigner does not know whether to pity Americans for taking such things (as political correctness) seriously, or to envy their capacity (absent graver problems) to take such things seriously. Mostly they envy Americans for their opportunity to discover (or invent) and to fight ever more subtle forms of oppression. But by reading David Mamet’s play, *Oleanna*, depicting three meetings between a male professor of education in his forties and a female student of twenty whom he initially tries to help, they are disabused of the belief that American political correctness, in this case of the feminist kind, is not to be taken very seriously. For opposition to its dictates can quickly lead to the ruin

of a man's career. By the end of the play, an intended repository of civilized values—the university—has been turned into an arena for the mad grab for power by a new race of barbarians.

My Romanian students wonder what has happened to America to make a play like *Oleanna* so apt and necessary. I explain to them that what has happened in America to produce this distressing play, has also produced in me the choice to teach in their country—and so here we have come full circle. (Recall that their wonder at my choice to teach in Romania instigated this discussion.) But what has happened to America, that makes me have to pray for her from abroad? As I see it, the will to power (understood as the effort to delegitimize any authority outside the assertive self) has overcome the will to civil freedom (understood as the voluntary submission to legitimate authority). The two authorities I have in mind, consistent with the etymology of the word, are the authors of important books and the Founding Fathers of the American nation. These authorities have been, as a matter of historical fact, overwhelmingly male. That is why the will to power in America expresses itself today, in my experience, at least, chiefly as a war between the sexes, in which women have learned to apply certain ideas of men to debunk the authority of male authors and fathers. They do so for the sake of equality and increasingly for the love of power.

“How wonderful is the position of the New World,” proclaims Tocqueville, “where man has as yet no enemies but himself to be happy and to be free, it is enough to will it to be so.” (p. 170)

This thought is Shakespearean in its potential for either comedy or tragedy. One cannot help recalling the words of Miranda upon viewing members of the opposite sex for the first time in her life in *The Tempest*: “How beauteous mankind is. Oh brave new world that has such people in it.” “Tis new to thee,” her father, Prospero, said, and adds, knowing the logic potential inherent in her young love of man. In fact she has already begun to quarrel with her husband-to-be over a game of chess. Here are intimations of the relations between the sexes captured by T. S. Eliot in *The Wasteland* which is our land.

The self that wills its own destiny has to be both asserted and conquered if that destiny is to be one of happiness and freedom in a civil society. That is the lesson of Tocqueville's *America* in a nutshell. The key ingredient in this formula for success, according to Tocqueville, was the unequal position in society wisely chosen by the American women of the time. Women provided the indispensable example of how to assert and conquer the self in the same deliberate act. By choosing to pursue their happiness within the home, they provided a template of self-interest rightly understood, against which men measured the true patterns of their own self-interest: strenuous competition at work in male society, followed by comfort, peace, and pleasure at home in the company of wife and children. I am aware that the brief summary I have provided here of a complicated argument about the “differential quality” of men and women in Tocqueville's *America* will leave many readers provoked and unsatisfied. But I trust that there will be opportunities to do justice to these ideas.

How the times and models have changed! The lesson that America would teach Tocqueville today might lead him to wonder, as I do, at the position of the Old World, where man has (as yet) no competitor and accuser in woman, and no need to find refuge or distraction abroad from the unmanly strife of gender politics at home.

I am afraid that after all the above has been discussed, it will sound unremarkable to my students that democracy depends for its success on the good character and practical wisdom of its citizens. But things simple to state are not simple to understand or to put into practice. Such is also the case with the admonitions: “Fear the power to rule yourselves, as you would fear any power,” and “Have hope that the pursuit of happiness is a reasonable undertaking in this unhappy world.” Under the inspirations of fear and hope, which attach themselves today most readily to Americans, Romanians are learning to become political actors. Their participation in the greatest of all human dramas, that of liberty, has at last begun.   Ω

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