



FRIENDSHIPS  
MARTA PETRUSEWICZ

---

Marta Petruszewicz emigrated from her native Poland in 1969 after the wave of political repressions, and has studied and worked in Italy, France and the United States. She is currently Professor of Modern European History at the City University of New York and at the Università della Calabria, Italy. She is the author of *Latifundium: Moral Economy and Material Life in a 19th-Century Periphery* (1996), awarded the Sila Prize for the best scholarly book; *Un sogno irlandese: la storia di Constance Markiewicz comandante dell'IRA (1868–1927)* (1998) and *Come il Meridione divenne una Questione* (1998) and the editor of *Passaggi di frontiera: conversazione con Albert O. Hirschman* (1994) translated in several languages. At the Wissenschaftskolleg she has been working on a comparative history of the European peripheries (Ireland, Norway, Poland and Two Sicilies) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. – Address: Dept. of History, CUNY: Hunter College, 695 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021, USA.

It might have been an error to look at earlier editions of the end-of-year reports, as they made me realize how far from unique our class' experience was. Like our predecessors, we wrote fewer pages than we had planned, we frantically attended dozens of musical events in Berlin, we thrived in Grunewald's green areas, we put on weight, and we were thrilled by the intellectual understanding between hard scientists and human/social ones. This was my experience too. What was it in addition to that?

I arrived in Berlin with a firm plan: 1) to conceptualize an already over-researched book and write a few chapters; 2) to learn German; 3) to stop smoking; 4) and to figure out where I want to live and work. I stopped smoking and then went back again, my German remains

pitiful, and I still don't know whether to choose rural Calabria or the metropolitan New York. Yet, I don't think that I have failed.

The book I was working on at Wiko is complicated. *Ex-centric Europe: Visions and Practices of Harmonious Progress in the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Peripheries* advances a sweeping thesis on the overwhelming land-centered structure and culture of Europe in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century and of the particular role that land-oriented elites played at its peripheries. At the same time, it proposes a new "circular" methodology of comparative history, by which one country's *emic* becomes another's *etic*, and the historian can combine an insider's with an outsider's point of view.

I have succeeded, during this year, in working out the organization of the argument and the structure of the book and in dividing it into chapters, subchapters and paragraphs. I was helped in this by discussions especially with two Wiko colleagues, the biologist Wayne Maddison and the historian Harry Liebersohn. It was extremely useful to present parts of my work to historians and comparative historians at various universities in Germany, the only country I know where comparative history is actually practiced. In these confrontations, the German case started to assume a much larger role in my argument, not only as a chance location of some of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century's most important agricultural schools and academies and theoretical treatises – as it figured in my project before I came to Berlin – but as the very center of agrarian power and ideology. Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus made me reread *Wilhelm Meister* with this optic. The discussion that followed my *Dienstagsskolloquium* emphasized that the same was true in other central areas of Europe, and in other fields aside from economics, arts and literature, such as law. As a result, my thesis did not change but sharpened – what is particular of the peripheries is not the land-based project of harmonious development *per se* and the vision of the "natural course of things" (I still wait for the biologist Paul Schmid-Hempel to explain why Adam Smith's concept of "natural" was wrong), but the fact that such a project was conceived by peripheral elites as the master road to national and political sovereignty. Thus, I have finally befriended the argument.

Then, there was for me the impact of Germany itself, or rather, of Berlin. Until this year, I had never really been to Germany, aside from three very brief conference trips. It has never been a conscious decision to avoid Germany, of course – I have always had German friends in various countries and some of my Jewish Polish friends who emigrated like me in 1968–69 settled in this country. Still, I did feel a bit of apprehension – how will a Polish Jew, a daughter of survivors, live among the Germans? At the beginning, I was constantly

conscious of the age of the people I saw on the streets, in trains and buses, and every elderly man or woman made me wonder what they were sixty years before. Slowly, however, Berlin succeeded in reconciling me with Germany. This city was so lively and yet so calm and silent, full of young people, so tolerant of variety of behaviors, so effortlessly orderly with no police in sight, so green and unpretentious. Although I do not advocate the policy of guilt, I must confess that I appreciated it, as lived by people like Martin Stritt or Eva von Kügelgen. I live in New York, a city that I love, but I don't think that I would choose to live in the US. In the same way now, I feel that I could happily live in Berlin. I still don't know about Germany. I remember my friend Albert Hirschman telling me how, at the Wissenschaftskolleg, he started speaking German again, fifty plus years after his exile in 1933. *Mutatis mutandis*, the Wiko has done the same for me. I am only sorry that I cannot talk it over with Albert any longer. Like him, I have befriended Berlin.

I have made many friends in Berlin. I have established exchanges and started collaborations with a number of colleagues, and I even began thinking of a "German" project that will finally force me to learn this impossible language. Berlin was a cure, and Wiko was the doctor who administered it. Thank you to both.

Then there was the human interaction. By its parental care and protection, Wiko slightly infantilizes the Fellows. This is not a reproach, quite the contrary – we all feel so harassed and tired that a year of kindergarten is like a return to paradise lost. At least, it was for me. I like the Wiko rituals, all of them. I love the care *pani* Katarzyna Speder extends to all Fellows, with a hot soup always ready for the sick or the grumpy. I am extremely grateful that Marianne Buck virtually took over my research on the normative iconography of progress and performed miracles. I cherish the memory (yes, it is memory already!) of the magic moments – the expressive face of Pierre-Michel Menger at the *Dienstagskolloquia* that so clearly showed his approvals or disagreements; the late Thursday night conversations with Sunil Khilnani and Kate Boo in the fumes of Wiko's excellent wine; the organic-trash creative crisis; shared cigarettes; the long night conversations with Tomasz Kizny, my Villa Walther neighbor; outings to operas with their special rituals celebrated by Thomas Bauer; the in-house concerts, especially with the music of Toshio Hosokawa and Helmut Lachenmann. And the children, the real ones, exploring the mysteries of Villa Walther and the surroundings and shouting happily in a mixture of languages. Or the clinking sound outside my office in the Neubau that could announce the arrival either of Coco von Vancouver, the 41<sup>st</sup> Fellow, with his metal tags, or of Martin Stritt with his collection of keys. These and many others are stories of my friends.

Yeats wrote somewhere “Friendship is the only home I have ever had.” I have made many good friends at Wiko and through Wiko, and I thank you for this.