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A Wanderer on Land and Sea

The Life of Egor Petrovich Kovalevsky

David Schimmelpenninck

A lively spirit invincible,
Always true to himself and everywhere,
A lively flame, often without smoke,
Burning in suffocating surroundings . . .
Unabashedly championing truth,
He battled vulgarity all life long.

—Fedor Tiutchev

As obscure today in Russia as he is abroad, Egor Petrovich Kovalevsky was well known to his 19th-century contemporaries.1 Explorer, diplomat, and author—his collected works total five volumes—Kovalevsky

1 Unless noted otherwise, translations in this chapter are my own.

even merited an epitaph by the poet Fedor Tiutchev. While it was his travel accounts that made him famous, he also played an important role in tsarist foreign affairs at a particularly sensitive time. Meanwhile, as an official with progressive views who was equally at home in the company of senior statesmen and as in that of radical writers, Kovalevsky’s views provide an interesting insight in the world view of Russia’s educated public during the reigns of Emperors Nicholas I (1825–55) and Alexander II (1855–81).

Egor Kovalevsky entered the world in 1811 (or 1809, according to some sources) as the youngest member of a large gentry family of modest means in Iaroshevka, a village near Kharkov in northeastern Ukraine. As his name suggests, Kovalevsky’s ancestors were Russified Poles who had settled in the area in the 1650s, just as Ukraine’s Cossack ruler pledged submission to the Russian tsar. After an upbringing typical of his caste, in 1825 Egor enrolled in Kharkov’s new university, which his uncle, Vasili Karazin, had founded 20 years earlier. Kovalevsky enrolled in the Faculty of Philology, although he was particularly interested in geography and also took many courses in the sciences.

A contemporary, the literary critic Pavel Annenkov, points out that Kovalevsky’s generation was the first in Russia for which a university education was practically obligatory for a civil service career.2 The decade after the Napoleonic Wars was also a time of considerable intellectual turmoil among Russian students, who were well acquainted with the ideas that had led to revolution in France a little over 20 years earlier. Indeed, toward the end of 1825 a group of militant guards officers, the Decembrists, tried to seize power in the wake of Emperor Alexander I’s death. While the attempted coup was quickly put down and the archconservative Nicholas I acceded to the throne, radical thought continued to percolate among the empire’s educated youth.3 Egor Kovalevsky would not prove to be entirely immune to such notions.

Like most ambitious graduates in Imperial Russia, upon completing his university education in 1829, Kovalevsky moved to St. Petersburg to

2 Annenkov, Kovalevsky, 2–3.
seek a career. He quickly found it in the government’s Mining and Salt Department, which also employed his older brother Evgraf. Egor took to his job and eagerly broadened his knowledge of geology by auditing courses at the Mining Cadet Corps and working at its museum. When Evgraf was promoted to head of the mining works in Western Siberia’s Altai Mountains the following year, Egor joined him there as his office manager.

The young mining engineer did not stay bound to his desk. He participated in many surveys of the region’s mineral resources. By 1831, Kovalevsky was already leading expeditions to find gold in the northern Altai, and over the next few years, he began exploiting four deposits of the precious metal. Four years later, he again accompanied his brother, this time to the Urals, an ancient mountain range that had already been mined for well over a century. When in 1836 his department was absorbed into the army, Kovalevsky was given the rank of captain. In addition to prospecting for gold, iron ore, and other metals, he also helped modernize steel production. Meanwhile, he did not shy away from criticizing social conditions by arguing that using serf labor in the Urals’ metallurgical works was inefficient.4

Kovalevsky had already began publishing in the Gornyi zhurnal (Mining journal) in the Altai. In addition to making important contributions to geology, the articles also brought him to the attention of his superiors back in the capital. They no doubt played a role in an important assignment that would entirely change the trajectory of his future.

Hemmed in by the Habsburg and Ottoman empires on the Adriatic, Montenegro’s Orthodox Slavs looked to their mighty Russian coreligionists for help in maintaining their precarious independence. The nation’s hereditary vladika (prince-bishop)5 was no stranger to St. Petersburg. On one visit in 1837, Petar II Njegoš, then the vladika, added a special request to his usual appeals for economic support. According to legend, his realm’s mountains had been mined for gold in Roman times. Perhaps the Russian tsar might send one of his specialists to relocate the source. The choice naturally fell on the ambitious young

5 Since Orthodox bishops are not allowed to marry, succession went from uncle to nephew.
A mining engineer who had already made his name by helping develop Siberia’s deposits of the metal.

Captain Kovalevsky set off for Montenegro in spring 1837. Since the isolated bishopric was only regularly accessible by sea, from the Austrian port of Trieste, the journey entailed a stop in Vienna, where Kovalevsky met the Russian ambassador to the Habsburg court, Dmitrii Tatishchev. When the captain arrived in Montenegro’s capital, Cetinje, Vladika Petar laid on a lavish welcome for his Russian guest. Crowds cheered and warriors fired a loud salute—a gesture typically reserved for heads of state.

Kovalevsky duly spent the summer months conducting a thorough geological survey of the little land. There was very little gold, although the mountains did have deposits of iron ore, manganese, lead, and copper. Near Podgorica, Kovalevsky even found the ruins of Doclea (the Roman emperor Diocletian’s birthplace), where he carried out some archaeological digs. Much to his disappointment, looters had emptied the town’s treasury long ago.

Toward the end of his stay, Kovalevsky found himself in an unusual predicament. Habsburg troops had just invaded, and the vladika turned to him for help. Kovalevsky was hardly eager to become involved in an international incident and protested that he was a mining engineer; his epaulettes certainly were not those of an officer in the combat arms. Nevertheless, Petar’s appeals to his sense of Slavic solidarity convinced the reluctant subaltern to join the beleaguered warriors in the mountains for, as his nephew put it, “a Romantic Byronic adventure.”

Although badly outnumbered, the small Montenegrin force managed to beat the Austrian interlopers. In the subsequent negotiations, the commander of the defeated troops would only accept the signature

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of a Russian officer on the peace treaty. After some hesitation, Kovalevsky complied, even affixing his family seal to the document.

The news that a mere subaltern had negotiated an international agreement on behalf of the Russian government caused a furor in the Viennese press. Meanwhile, the Austrian ambassador in St. Petersburg lodged a formal protest, since Russia had signed a treaty with Austria five years earlier pledging to maintain the status quo in the Balkans. Tsar Nicholas was not amused, and he stripped Kovalevsky of his Russian nationality.

Now in Italy, Kovalevsky turned to a Russian diplomat (and future foreign minister), Prince Aleksandr Gorchakov, for advice. The prince suggested that he write a long letter _en bon français_ to Ambassador Tatishchev to explain himself. Fortunately, it had the desired effect. When it finally reached the tsar, he noted in the margin, “Le Capitaine Kovalesky a agi en vrai russe.” All was forgiven. He was allowed to return to Russia, and Nicholas even invited him for a small reception at Anichkov Palace along with his foreign minister, Count Karl Nesselrode, to thank him for his services. Years later, when he was a senior diplomat, Kovalevsky kept a pair of pistols with silver settings from Petar inscribed “To Captain Kovalevsky from the people of Montenegro, for the campaign” in his office at the Choristers’ Bridge.

The writer Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin suggests that Kovalevsky’s Montenegrin escapade was the most important event of his life, for it marked the beginning of a series of more extensive travels on three continents over the next 15 years. The next journey came about as the result of a request by the emir of Bukhara, Nasrullah Khan. In January 1839, the emir’s envoy presented the foreign minister with a letter requesting “an expert in precious stones.” Nesselrode could hardly ignore the request. At the time, Bukhara was one of the small independent

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states separating Russia from Britain's possessions in India that had become objects of fierce contention between the two imperial powers in their Great Game for primacy in Central Asia. Here was a golden opportunity to strengthen Russia's influence in the emirate. With little hesitation, Kovalevsky was entrusted with the delicate mission. The foreign ministry gave him detailed instructions. Not only did it ask him to carry out a geological survey, but Kovalevsky was also to study the possibilities for exports and, if possible, free Russian slaves.

Kovalevsky set out from Orenburg on October 30, accompanied by Staff Captain A. R. Gerngross and some miners. It was a hazardous expedition. Nomads loyal to the khan of Khiva had been attacking Russian caravans on the steppes they would be traversing with alarming frequency. Meanwhile, Orenburg's military governor, Adjutant General Count Vasilii Perovskii, was launching a punitive expedition to the khanate. Within a fortnight of crossing into what is now Kazakhstan, the small party found itself held captive by a group of hostile tribesmen. Not only would they likely be robbed of all their possessions, but they also faced the distinct possibility of being sold into slavery. But when a sandstorm intervened on the night on November 22, Kovalevsky and his comrades made good their escape. For two and a half days they rode, covering some 300 kilometers until they reached a tsarist outpost at Ak-Bulak.

Kovalevsky's tribulations were not over. At the end of December, some 3,000 Kyrgyz surrounded the position. Although about half of the 300-man garrison was sick, the Russians withstood the siege until they were relieved. Within a few weeks, Kovalevsky was back in Orenburg. He had little time to rest, however; in March 1840, he set out for Bukhara again, this time by a different route. Kovalevsky had better luck with his second attempt. Together with another article in the _Gornyi zhurnal_, the voyage yielded the first volume of his travelogue, _Stranstvovatel' po sushe i moriam_ (A wanderer on land and sea).
Sometime in the early 1840s, Kovalevsky also traveled to Xinjiang, Afghanistan, and Kashmir. However, aside from a few chapters in the second volume of *Stranstvovatel’ po sushe i moriam*, he left few records of these peregrinations.\(^\text{15}\) We do know more about his second trip to the Balkans, which he undertook in 1843 and 1844 on behalf of a gold-mining company in St. Petersburg.\(^\text{16}\) This new journey took him through the Carpathian Mountains to the lower Danube. Much like his earlier journey to Montenegro, Kovalevsky’s sympathies for its Slavic population, then still under Ottoman rule, were evident: “The Slavs ceaselessly fought against their [Turkish] enemies; it was the war of gladiators. They were defeated everywhere. But they were never slain. When the gladiator was worn out, he fell. But it was only to trick his enemy. At the earliest opportunity, he would rise again, if not with new forces, at least with the same courage.”\(^\text{17}\)

The books Kovalevsky wrote about his trips were popular among Russian readers and garnered positive reviews. In his critique of the first two volumes of *Stranstvovatel’ po sushe i moriam*, the literary critic Vissarion Belinskii wrote, “Every page grabs your attention right away, and in three or four quick strokes, [the author] portrays the customs and character of the people he met,” adding that the stories “remind one of Alexandre Dumas’s travel accounts.”\(^\text{18}\)

The newly founded Imperial Russian Geographical Society also took note of the intrepid wanderer, electing him to membership in 1847, the third year of its existence. While ostensibly a private organization, its honorary president was one of the emperor’s sons, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich, and many of its members were senior military officers. It was not uncommon for the Geographical Society to join with the army’s general staff to sponsor expeditions to areas of strategic interest, such as the empire’s Asian borderlands. At times, its missions

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 2:26–29.

\(^{16}\) Kovalevsky, “Sobranie sochinenii.”

\(^{17}\) Ibid.

therefore served the dual masters of geographical science and military intelligence.\textsuperscript{19}

Kovalevsky came to play an important role in the Geographical Society. He served as secretary to its president for eight years, from 1857 to 1865, and upon retiring from this position, he was rewarded by being voted an honorary member. At the same time, as director of the foreign ministry’s Asian Department, Kovalevsky also helped plan several expeditions to Central Asia.

Kovalevsky’s ties to the Geographical Society proved useful the same year he joined it, when he was asked to provide his gold-mining expertise to Egypt’s viceroy, Mohammed Ali Pasha. Still nominally a vassal to the Ottoman sultan, Mohammed Ali ruled virtually independently as Egypt’s self-declared khedive. He was also an energetic reformer who did much to modernize his fiefdom’s economy and army. However, because he was suspicious of British and French ambitions in the Near East, the khedive preferred to turn to more disinterested powers for their advice. For this reason, when Mohammed Ali sought to develop gold mines on the lower Nile River, it was only natural for him to turn to another power, especially one that had expertise in extracting the precious metal.

It did not take much to convince Kovalevsky to agree to the khedive’s request. He had long wanted to travel to Africa. Twice—in 1843 and again in 1846—he had asked the foreign ministry for permission to undertake a trip on the continent, but was turned down on both occasions.\textsuperscript{20} As with his earlier expeditions, Kovalevsky had much more in mind than geology. One of the most controversial questions among geographers at the time was finding the source of the Nile, Africa’s longest river, a quest that also intrigued him. As the first European in modern times who would travel so deeply into its watershed, he also hoped to make discoveries about the continent’s fauna and flora. Together with the Geographical Society, Kovalevsky drew up a detailed plan for the expedition.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{19} David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, “Reforming Military Intelligence,” in Reforming the Tsar’s Army, ed. David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye and Bruce W. Menning (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 143–44.

\textsuperscript{20} Vilenkin, \textit{Stranstvovatel’}, 32.

Unlike in Montenegro 10 years earlier, Kovalevsky succeeded in his primary goal. After sightseeing in Alexandria and Cairo as well as an obligatory trip to the pyramids, in early February 1848, the expedition reached Khartoum, where the Nile splits into two: the White Nile and Blue Nile. Since Mohammed Ali had only added Sudan to his domains some 25 years earlier, Kovalevsky was now entering largely unmapped terrain. He paid particular attention to the basin of the Tumat River, a tributary of the Blue Nile on the Ethiopian border. It was here that Kovalevsky discovered deposits of gold as well as ironstone.

Kovalevsky’s Soviet biographers were not being disingenuous when they portrayed him as having progressive views. In his description of “the Land of the Negroes” (southern Sudan), he indignantly disagrees with the notion of some Europeans that Africans are racially inferior:

There are some who still, even now, . . . put the negro on the lowest rung of mankind, the one that serves as an intermediate step between men and apes . . . . overwhelmed with self-respect and pride, are willing altogether to throw the negro off the ladder atop which they have determined their own place. Generally speaking, this ranking of human beings is no prerogative of man, nor is it compatible with the idea of brotherhood bequeathed to man by the words of the Gospels; it does nothing but demonstrate the relentless egotism and complacent fallacy of those who believe themselves to be the privileged caste of mankind.

The notion that they are less intelligent that the white man was entirely wrong, Kovalevsky maintained: “The negro, even in his savage state, not being alien to any human ideas, shall sooner be reasoned with than a Belorussian in our land or a French peasant living far from the high road and the city.”

Such ideas would not have raised any hackles in St. Petersburg at the time. During the 19th century, attitudes toward blacks among educated Russians tended to be less racist than in the West. But tsarist censors

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were far less tolerant of any critiques of their own social order. As Kovalevsky contemplated a group of shackled slaves his Arab host in Doul had asked to dance for his benefit, he likened their lot to serfs back home, “Yet what amusements! What a life! And there are so many, especially in our land, in boundless Russia, who are doomed to such a life.”

When in 1849 Kovalevsky published these words in his account of the trip, *A Journey to Inner Africa*, Dmitrii Buturlin’s notorious committee for censorship informed the emperor that the book contained “inadmissible outbursts.” For a second time, Kovalevsky was in disgrace with the autocracy. Nicholas angrily ordered that he be given “the sternest reprimand for these senseless and impertinent outbursts, locked up in a guard room for eight days, and henceforth be put under the strictest supervision.”

Carrying out the tsar’s command proved impractical, since Kovalevsky was already making his way to Beijing with the 13th Ecclesiastical Mission for another lengthy journey. By the time he returned the following year, Nicholas’ anger had abated. The tsar now limited his punishment to asking the explorer to sign a document promising to be more careful in the future. At the same time, Nicholas decorated Kovalevsky with the Order of St. Anne, 2nd degree, for the successful completion of his Egyptian mission.

Aside from the censors, *A Journey to Inner Africa* proved a success among its readers. Osip Senkovskii, whose acid pen could be devastating, was fulsome in his praise: “When you read [Kovalevsky’s] descriptions, you forget that you live in St. Petersburg, on the marvelous Neva’s banks; no, it seems that you are in fact Mehemet Ali’s guest. On every page, you intensely feel that you are in Africa, safely on a camel’s back, overcome by unbearable heat and menaced by the *khamsin* . . . No one who writes about Africa can better acquaint you with this region as clearly and as palpably as Mr. Kovalevsky.”

Academician Karl von Baer, a distinguished scientist who had helped found the

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24 Osip Ivanovich Senkovskii, “Puteshestvie Vo Vnutrenniuiu Afriku,” *Biblioteka dlia chteniia* 95 (1849): 87. A *khamsin* is a dry, hot, sandy wind blowing from the south, common to North Africa and Arabia.
Geographical Society, was equally complimentary: “The author writes neither like a tourist nor like a geographer. He entertains his reader, but it is edifying entertainment.”

Unlike his previous assignments, Kovalevsky had been sent to the Middle Kingdom on a purely diplomatic assignment. The Treaty of Kiakhta in 1727 had regularized trade with China on the East Siberian border, but there was no analogous agreement to the west. It was up to Kovalevsky, by now a colonel, to negotiate one. Since he would be traveling overland through largely uncharted Inner Asian terrain, the Geographical Society also took great interest in the voyage. Von Baer gave Kovalevsky detailed instructions about collecting plant and animal specimens along the way.

The Ecclesiastical Mission the colonel accompanied was a venerable institution. Formally established by the Treaty of Kiakhta, its ostensible purpose was to minister to the souls of a small group of Cossacks who had entered into the service of the Qing emperor at the end of the 17th century. Roughly every decade, the Russian Orthodox Church would send some clergy to preach among their coreligionists as well as a few seminarians who studied Chinese. Unofficially, the mission also played an important diplomatic role for St. Petersburg at a time when the Qing disdained formal diplomatic relations with any other nation.

Led by Archimandrite Palladii (Kafarov), the mission traveled overland from Kiakhta in East Siberia via Mongolia, arriving in the Chinese capital at the end of September 1849. Kovalevsky was unable to conclude a new commercial agreement with the Qing, and he spent about seven months there largely studying Chinese science and buying books for the Russian Academy of Sciences. However, the colonel did manage to convince his hosts to allow Russian merchants to travel from Siberia by a more convenient route.

Kovalevsky had better luck in 1851, when he was sent to East Turkestan (now Xinjiang) to resume the talks he had begun the previous year in Beijing. After more grueling negotiations, on July 25, he finally convinced I Shan, the region’s military governor, to sign the Treaty of Kulja. The pact’s most important provisions opened Kulja (now Yining)

25 Quoted in Vilenkin, Stranstvovatel’, 44.
and Chuguchak (Tacheng) to Russian trade and allowed the foreign ministry to set up consulates in both towns. The results were almost immediately felt. Over the next three years, the value of trade between Russia and East Turkestan quadrupled.26

For his trouble, the emperor granted Kovalevsky an annual pension of 600 rubles. The colonel’s travels to the Far East also resulted in another popular travel account, Puteshestvie v Kitai (A journey to China).27 Most important, his successful negotiations with the notoriously difficult Qing cemented Kovalevsky’s reputation as an expert on Asia.28

The beleaguered Slavs of Southeastern Europe were still Kovalevsky’s first love. In the fall of 1853, at a time of growing tensions with the Sublime Porte, Foreign Minister Nesselrode sent the colonel back to the Balkans to study the possibility that their Christian population might support Russia in a war. Like many Pan-Slavs of his day, Kovalevsky firmly believed that it was his nation’s historical mission to free the Slavs from the “heathen Turk.” Should it come to a clash with the Ottomans, he hoped to convince the Montenegrins to take up arms along with the Serbians and Herzegovinians, join the tsar’s army on the Danube, and liberate Bulgaria. His ultimate goal was a federation of Balkan nations united by blood and faith and governed by a parliament in either Constantinople or Sofia.29

On the pretext of delivering financial aid, Kovalevsky made his way to Cetinje in November. By this time, war had already broken out, and he soon found himself on the staff of Adjutant General Prince Mikhail Gorchakov in the Danubian campaign. After Turkey’s French and British allies landed on Crimea, Gorchakov’s troops were redeployed on the peninsula, where many of them participated in the defense of Sevastopol. Kovalevsky took part in the siege until illness forced him to return to St. Petersburg in September 1854. This adventure eventually yielded

26 William Frederick Mayers, Treaties between the Empire of China and Foreign Powers (Shanghai: North-China Herald, 1877), 97–99; B. P. Gurevich, Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia v Tsentral’noi Azii v XVII-pervoi polovine XIX v (Moscow: Nauka, 1979), 279–83.
yet another book, *Voina s Turtsiei i razryv s zapadnymi derzhavami v 1853 i 1854 godakh* (The war with Turkey and the rupture with the Western powers in 1853 and 1854). 30

Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War the following year had profound consequences, as its humiliation laid bare the empire’s many shortcomings. Meanwhile, Nicholas’s death in February 1855 saw the accession of his son, Alexander II. The new sovereign had a distinctly different political outlook, and he set out on a series of major transformations to rejuvenate his realm, including the abolition of serfdom. Collectively known as the “Great Reforms,” they focused entirely on the domestic order.

The success of Alexander’s ambitions at home hinged on avoiding any more complications abroad. His new foreign minister, Prince Alexandr Gorchakov, fully shared his master’s desire to remain at peace. Over the coming 20 years, the prince would steadfastly counsel moderation at the Choristers’ Bridge in a policy that came to be known as “recueillement” (reflection). 31

Prince Gorchakov had clearly taken a liking to the young subaltern he had advised back in Italy almost 20 years earlier, for shortly after Alexander named him his foreign minister in 1856, the prince tapped Kovalevsky to head his Asian Department. Established in 1819, this section had a broad geographical mandate that basically extended to the entire extra-European world (and even included the Balkans). 32

Appointing Kovalevsky to the post proved to be astute. Major General Mikhail Veniukov, a military geographer with considerable expertise in Asia, wrote that “there was no better manager of Russia’s Eastern politics than Egor Kovalevsky during the foreign ministry’s entire existence.” 33

30 Egor Petrovich Kovalevsky, *Voina s Turtsiei i razryv s zapadnymi derzhavami v 1853 i 1854 godakh* (n.p., 1868).
31 From the prince’s famous remark, “La Russie en boude pas, mais elle se receuille” (Russia is not sulking, it is merely giving itself to reflection). Barbara Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1964), 134.
32 As Kovalevsky’s nephew put it, “Although [the department] is called Asian, it is also African, American, Australian, Slavic, Greek, etc.” P. Kovalevsky, “Vstrechi na zhiznen-nom puti,” 387. A thorough study of its operations in these years is in Ritchie, “Asiatic Department.”
33 Quoted in N. S. Kiniapina, M. M. Bliev, and V. V. Degoev, *Kavkaz i Sredniaia Azia vo tmeshnii politiki Rossi vtoria polovina XVIII-80e gody XIX v* (Moscow: Izd-vo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1984), 258.
The new director understood that restoring Russia’s damaged prestige in the East was a top priority. Given his Pan-Slav leanings, he continued to pay particular attention to the Balkans. In Kovalevsky’s opinion, the lot of the Slavs under Ottoman rule was nothing short of “slavery that would have been shameful even in the Middle Ages,”34 and he worked hard to support them within the constraints of Gorchakov’s cautious diplomacy.

One headache was Bulgaria, where some nationalists were beginning to turn to the West rather than Russia to support their efforts for emancipation from the Turks. To combat its influence, Kovalevsky arranged scholarships for Bulgarian youth and set up the Slavic Benevolent Committee, which promoted public support for Russia’s Slavic brethren. At times, his zeal alarmed the foreign minister, who suggested that he refrain from forwarding consular reports about the plight of the Balkan Slavs to the emperor lest they distress him unduly.35

Kovalevsky also endeavored to advance Russia’s interests further east. In Central Asia, where his country was still actively involved in the Great Game with Britain, the director’s feelings about the right move were clear—strike Britain in India, “then the English will moderate their voice.”36 While he understood that his chief strongly opposed any such adventures, Kovalevsky did sponsor three expeditions through the Geographical Society (where he was now the president’s secretary) to sway the region’s khans and emirs to his side as well as to gather intelligence.

Despite their occasional differences, Gorchakov and Kovalevsky remained on friendly terms and were not averse to socializing together.37 By all accounts the emperor also valued his services. When General Nikolai Murav’ev, under Kovalevsky’s watch, annexed 600,000 square kilometers of Chinese territory to East Siberia by the Treaty of Aigun

35 Viktoriia Maksimovna Khevrolina, Rossiiskii Diplomat Graf Nikolai Ivanovich Ignatiev (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii, 2004), 103.
36 Khitrova, “Diplomaticheskaia deiatel’nost’,” 132.
in 1858, Alexander rewarded Kovalevsky with 3,300 hectares of land in the Government of the Samara.\textsuperscript{38} However, Kovalevsky’s career did not remain immune from the vicissitudes of politics. The student disturbances of 1861 that resulted in his brother Evgraf’s dismissal as minister of education also led to Egor’s removal from his post. To ease the pain, the tsar made the former director a senator with a seat on the State Council for foreign affairs.

In the last decade of his life Kovalevsky increasingly devoted himself to literature. He had tried his hand at drama and poetry early on. Already at the age of 21, shortly after he had begun his career in mining, Kovalevsky published a play about a 15\textsuperscript{th}-century rebel against Muscovite autocracy, \textit{Marfa-Posadnitsa}. Inspired by his work in the Altai, that year also saw a book of his verse, \textit{Dumy o Sibiri (Thoughts about Siberia)}.\textsuperscript{39} Deciding that he might be better at prose, during the following decade Kovalevsky went on to write short stories and a novel, \textit{Peterburg dnem i nochiu} (St. Petersburg by day and night), often under a pseudonym. Many of the former were published in Senkovskii’s thick journal \textit{Biblioteka dlia chteniia}, although censors held up the novel because of its critical portrayal of poverty in the Russian capital.\textsuperscript{40}

By the 1860s, Kovalevsky limited himself to historical works, such as his history of the Crimean War and a biography, \textit{Graf Bliudov i ego vremia} (Count Bludov and his times), which focused on reaction during the latter years of Tsar Alexander I’s reign.\textsuperscript{41} Yet while no longer writing prose, he remained active in St. Petersburg’s literary circles and actively promoted other writers. Fyodor Dostoyevsky fondly recalled the senator’s encouraging words about his new novel \textit{Crime and Punishment}.\textsuperscript{42} And he also knew many other authors, ranging from Nikolai Chernyshevskii and Nikolai Nekrasov to Fedor Tiutchev, Count Lev Tolstoi,

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{38} Annenkov, \textit{Kovalevsky}, 17.
\item\textsuperscript{39} Egor Petrovich Kovalevsky, \textit{Marfa-Posadnitsa, ili Slavianskie zheny} (St. Petersburg: V tip Plushara, 1832); Kovalevsky, \textit{Dumy o Sibiri} (St. Petersburg: V tipografii Plushara, 1832).
\item\textsuperscript{40} The novel did appear in German translation: Egor Petrovich Kovalevsky, \textit{Petersburg Am Tage Und Bei Nacht}, trans. Philipp Löwenstein (Stuttgart: Carl Spindler, 1847).
\item\textsuperscript{41} Egor Petrovich Kovalevsky, \textit{Graf Bliudov i ego vremia} (St. Petersburg, 1866).
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and Ivan Turgenev. One indication of their respect was Kovalevsky’s election in 1859 as president of a new charitable organization, the Society for Aid to Writers and Scholars.

When Kovalevsky died in 1868, the obituaries were full of praise and affection. In a lengthy eulogy to the Geographical Society, Pavel Annenkov spoke of Kovalevsky’s “severe, somewhat stern, and apparently cold appearance which nevertheless poorly masked the unquenchable ardor of his spirit.” But his entry in the Russian Biographical Dictionary puts it best:

Never closing himself off in bureaucratic formalities and keeping a lively interest in the urgent social questions of the day, Kovalevsky always used his influence and his government position to support everything that was sensible, even if it had no relevance to his primary responsibilities.

References


43 Some of Turgenev’s letters to Kovalevsky were reproduced in I. S. Turgenev, “Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev v ego pis’ma kh k Egory Petr. Kovalevskomu,” Russkaia Starina 42 (May 1884): 397–402.
45 Annenkov, Kovalevsky, 20.
46 Russkii biograficheskii slovar’, vol. 9, s.v. “Kovalevsky, Egor Petrovich.”


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