Ernst Moritz Arndt, Excerpts from *Germania and Europe* (1803)

Abstract

Born and raised on the island of Rügen, then part of Sweden, the poet, writer, and nationalist publicist Ernst Moritz Arndt (1769–1860) studied history and theology in Jena and Greifswald. In Jena, he fell under the influence of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, whose anti-French sentiments he shared. In 1801, Arndt was appointed to a teaching position at the university in Greifswald. When the French army invaded in 1806, he fled to Sweden, where he remained for three years. It was during his time in Greifswald that Arndt wrote *Germania and Europe* (1803), which is excerpted below. The selected passages show that, like Herder, Arndt regarded language and culture as the basis of national identity. Arndt's concerns with political, geographic, and linguistic boundaries would eventually find moving and lyrical expression in "The German Fatherland," his famous patriotic anthem of 1813. In addition to Herder's influence, the present text also reflects Fichte's concerns with cultural purity, particularly at the end of the excerpt, where Arndt comes out against the confluence [*Zusammenfließen*] of cultures and peoples, which he feels can only lead to diffluence [*Zerfließen*] or dissolution. Also noteworthy is Arndt's criticism of the "power-hungry German princes." In 1820, seventeen years after the publication of this text, Arndt was dismissed from a professional post in Bonn for having criticized the German princes during the period of restoration.

Source

[…] Let us take Germany as a unified entity, which it could have become, like France and Great Britain, but which it was not meant to be; what are its natural boundaries? In the south, the Alps and the northern corner of the Adriatic Sea; geographically and linguistically, nearly all of Switzerland would fall within these boundaries; toward the west, the sea of the French and Batavian Netherlands; this boundary has already been violated since the sixteenth century; Germany can lay claim to the North Sea, because nearly the entire south of Germany, on account of its location, must be drawn thither by the Rhine to harvest riches and culture; in the north, it has its proper boundary in the Eider and the Baltic Sea; and in the east, the current political boundary is also the geographic one, which is fortunate since it is also the linguistic one for the most part. The fatherland would also have to have these boundaries as a unified entity; presently, the boundaries of this unity, insofar as they exist, are merely political; for the territorial rule of our polyarchy extends to the sea as well, to the great disadvantage of the territories themselves. It is perhaps just as costly [i.e. in terms of tolls] for the Bohemian and the Saxon to sail the Oder or the Elbe as it would be for them to sail the Tajo and the Po as foreigners.

I need not go on at length about this polyarchy; everyone knows that it is the shame and the enduring misfortune of the fatherland; many fear that it may one day cause its complete subjugation. What are the consequences of this polyarchy? I will list only a few.

Germany can thank this polyarchy, just as Italy can thank hers, for the fact that it has been the theater of all wars for three-and-a-half centuries; wars that are often waged with its own blood and at its own expense. Have not virtually all the nations of Europe taken turns trampling Germany in wars every ten, twenty, thirty years? And has another country – with the exception of Italy and, in the last hundred years, Poland – suffered an equally harsh fate? Aside from the Scottish quarrels, England has hardly seen any foreign enemy soldiers on its soil for the past three centuries; for nearly a hundred years no foreign nation has set foot in Russia; the same is true of Spain and France, Sweden and Denmark; aside from the

borders, they know virtually nothing of what a hostile foreign army brings with it.

But it is not only foreigners who have battered the fatherland, and do so to this day; it was the power-hungry ambition of our princes that called in these foreigners, usually to ravage the land, and taught the Germans to fight them as well as their fellow countrymen. That is how it went, and how it goes every day. The German has lost the first earthly feelings of a state; needless to say, these feelings are neither noble nor beautiful in and of themselves, but they are the foundation of everything noble and beautiful. A nation that has a hundred lords can never be happy or great, because it lacks the consciousness of strength, the love of a great totality, [the love] of self-sacrifice for this totality. It lacks the idea of community and of the fatherland; the lasting, greatest idea for a people. […]

I have said more than once what I think about the universality of peoples [*Völker*], and how ill-pleased I am by what others hope and dream for from a universal empire and from a union of all peoples accompanied by progressive humanization and ennoblement. I hate any type of confluence on earth, because it will turn into diffluence, that is, into the political and moral death of the various nations. […]

Source: Ernst Moritz Arndt, *Germanien und Europa*. Altona, 1803, 410ff. and 423f; reprinted in Peter Longerich, ed., *Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland, Dokumente zur Frage der deutschen Einheit 1800 bis 1990*. Munich and Zurich: Piper Verlag, 1990, pp. 41–42.

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