

Wilhelmine of Sagan and Frederic Lamb

1815

„My dear wicked love“: letters of Catherine Wilhelmine, Duchess of Sagan to Frederick James Lamb, 1814 – 1815.

Catherine Wilhelmine, Duchess of Sagan (1781 – 1839) is best known to all generations of Czech readers as „the Duchess“ from the 19th century classic Czech novel *The Grandmother* by Božena Němcová.

Outside Bohemia, the Duchess is better known as the mistress and correspondent of the Austrian statesman Prince Clemens von Metternich. Although several biographies of the Duchess have been published little is known so far about her relationship with the English diplomat Frederick James Lamb, Baron Beauvale and 3rd Viscount Melbourne (1782 – 1853). In his youth a protégé of the Prince of Wales, Frederick Lamb ended his career in the coveted post of the British Ambassador to the Austrian Court. His papers were deposited in the British Library and made available to researchers at the end of the 1970s (Add. 60399 – 60483). Among the wealth of this material are two volumes of letters and notes sent to Frederick Lamb by Wilhelmine of Sagan from 1814 to 1815 when he was in Vienna as a Secretary to the British Legation during the Congress of Vienna.

This article aims at bringing the correspondence to the attention of researchers. The letters reveal the passionate nature of the relationship between the Duchess and the young diplomat, a relationship that ended with great unhappiness for the Duchess and left Frederick Lamb probably equally affected.

To illustrate the nature of the material selected short passages from the Duchess's letters are included and translated into Czech from the original English or French. The bulk of the correspondence is a series of twenty-one letters sent from Vienna to London after Lamb's departure for England in March 1815. Written daily, these long letters are a rich source of material on Wilhelmine's intimate life as well as observations of this politically highly astute woman on contemporary events and social background during the time of the Congress of the Allies against Napoleon. She was the official Austrian hostess of the Congress and her salon was the meeting place of the main protagonists of the Congress including Tsar Alexander I, Talleyrand, Metternich, Wellington and others.

Wilhelmine of Sagan's biographers were not in a position to make use of the Beauvale papers and the life of Lord Beauvale has so far not attracted the attention of researchers despite his intriguing personality, close connection with Prince Regent and his circle, and an interesting life lived in the otherwise well researched Melbourne family. The article looks therefore at his later life including his lifelong friendship with his one time rival in love Prince Metternich, his marriage at the age of sixty to a young daughter of the Prussian Ambassador as well as the possibility of a renewal of his relationship with the Duchess of Sagan later in their lives.

Wilhelmine de Sagan, by Grassi (1799)



Frederick Lamb, by Partridge (1846)

