EUROPEAN CROSSINGS: VILNIUS ENCOUNTERS

by

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ABSTRACT

"European Crossings: Vilnius Encounters" explores the relationship between the changing geopolitical and territorial locations of Vilnius and various linguistically and culturally contradictory biographical experiences of the place. Historically, the city's geo-narrative location within Europe has been determined and shaped through a representational fusion of mutating political, religious, ideological and national hierarchies of East Central Europe. The multiple identities of the city are best captured by the linguistically and often temporally alternating names of the place: Vilnius in Lithuanian, Wilno in Polish, Vilna in Russian and French, Vilne in Yiddish, Wilna in German, etc. Each place-name situates the city within a specific historical and/or linguistic milieu that in return stipulates a particular representational function, narrative location and memorial site of the place within the map of Europe. On the other hand, Vilnius's corporeal and imaginary topographies have often been styled according to the shifting geopolitical visions and cultural articulations of the idea of Europe. Therefore, the thesis has a twofold objective: firstly, it attempts to situate various representations of Vilnius within the changing geopolitical terrain of Europe, and secondly, it examines different socio-cultural and political meanings of Europe within the evolving historical landscape of the city.

Overall, the thesis focuses on several foreign visualisations of the city's geo-narrative location within Europe ranging from eighteenth century scientific and aesthetic surveys of the place to confrontational nineteenth and twentieth century imperial and national strategic evaluations of the city. These various mappings of Vilnius are framed within broader cultural, political, scientific, economic, ideological and military circumstances of Europe. Consequently, the analytical focus of the thesis alternates between imaginary, private and intimate impressions of the city and corporeal, public and official expressions of the place. Through such contrasting analyses, Vilnius emerges as a site of cultural multiplicity and geographical indeterminacy -- an in-between and transient place which delineates a geopolitically specific location through an allegorically framed mobility between East and West, Asia and Europe, civility and barbarism, the Baroque and the Modern, the particular and the universal, and, above all, corporeal spatial experiences and imaginary geographical encounters.
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Prologue

The map
pinned on the wall,
a name underlined,
the undiscovered city,
the roads to it
charted.

“Precaution” (Johannes Bobrowski)

The East-West border is always wandering,
sometimes eastwards, sometimes west,
and we do not know exactly where it is just now:
in Gaugamela, in the Urals, or maybe in ourselves,
so that one ear, one eye, one nostril, one hand, one foot,
one lung and one testicle or one ovary
is on the one, another on the other side. Only the heart,
only the heart is always on one side:
if we are looking northwards, in the West;
if we are looking southwards, in the East;
and the mouth doesn’t know on behalf of which or both
it has to speak.

“The East-West Border” (Jaan Kaplinski)
INTRODUCTION

Whoever pronounces the word *center* implies another word, *periphery*, and a relationship between the two, either centrifugal or centripetal. Also, a center implies crossing lines, vertical and horizontal. These few elementary notions about space should be present in our mind when we deal with the geography and history of Europe taken as a whole, and particularly of so-called Eastern Europe. Perhaps coming from an area which for a long time has been considered the Eastern marches of Rome-centered Christendom makes one more sensitive to shifting points of gravity, symbolized by the very fluidity of such terms as *the West and the East.* (Czeslaw Milosz)

My work is the outcome of extensive wanderings through Vilnius, a city of mutating historical identities and changing geopolitical location. Yet while I mostly traveled to Vilnius, I was simultaneously gleaning different geographical concepts and socio-cultural articulations of Europe. As a result of this spatially and intellectually intertwined investigation, the representation of Vilnius in relation to the unstable ideological and geopolitical shapes of Europe became the main theme of my thesis.

Tomas Venclova, a Lithuanian poet and American academic, once stated that Vilnius is not a singular entity because the city possesses many different linguistic geographies, national histories and cultural identities. The city is a compound of Jewish *Vilne*, Polish *Wilno*, Russian *Vilna*, German *Wilna*, Byelorussian *Vilno* and Lithuanian *Vilnius*. These urban worlds might share the same topographical and even architectural terrain, but they inscribe strikingly different collective and individual experiences on the local landscape and on ‘national’ memories of the place. The histories and geographies of these linguistically diverse experiences do overlap, and on some occasions even get fused, but the collective meanings and private interpretations of these experiences inevitably pull the cityscape into different geographical and historical directions. Each national experience follows its own temporal chronology which produces a unique map of the place, thus segmenting local urban terrain into contradictory and often antagonistic narrative pathways. In a sense, the cityscape of Vilnius always entails some elements of foreignness.

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and incompleteness, because no single (linguistic, ideological and/or geopolitical) representation of the city can encompass the full spectrum of local multiplicity.

Initially, my goal was to parallel, compare and, if possible, to synchronize different national articulations of the city. As a historical and human geographer, I wanted to map out the cityscape of multilingual and multicultural interactions by finding the specific narrative threads that cross the polygonal linguistic and ideological boundaries of the place. In short, I was searching for the specific narrative theme that could function as a representational nexus for a multi-polar geography of the place. For this purpose, I read through a whole array of official and personal narratives, but with each new linguistic or ideological urban excursion, I was driven towards a different geographical trajectory. My research site dispersed in front of my eyes and instead of coming to the urban point of representational intersections, I found myself exiting the city through its different narrative gates.

Somewhere in the middle of my research, I came to realize that what I was reading and encountering was not so much disparate interpretations of Vilnius, but centrifugal local descriptions of Europe. The reason I could not find the central historical theme within all these urban narratives was because I was following different cartographical imprints of Europe. Every collective and even personal narrative seemed to locate the city within its own highly individualized map of Europe, and each of my investigative exits from Vilnius was an encounter with a different idea, experience and visualization of Europe. Subsequently, the spatial focus of my investigation shifted from a search for the narrative nexus of the multilingual and plural Vilnius to questions concerning the geopolitical and representational perimeters of the historically and geographically changing notion of Europe.

This analytical alteration modified the spatial course of my research, but it did not change the narrative focus of my explorations. Vilnius, with its multilayered history and geography, remained the epicentre of my investigation. However, instead of trying to delineate divergent local representations of the place within the changing political and national maps of the city, I started to look for the narrative traces of various European ideological and cultural collisions. Such an analytical shift required new narrative voices and representational views, which could capture internal (local) transformations through the prism of external (European) geographical changes. In other words, I needed to find a narrative nexus of the idea of Europe within the map of Vilnius.
The search for Europe in Vilnius led me to the literary records of different foreign encounters with the city. By following the pathways of these encounters, that is, by situating various non-local (German, English, French, Danish, Russian and other foreign) biographies within the city, I changed the direction of my investigation. Instead of leaving Vilnius by mapping out separate trajectories of the nationally, linguistically and ideologically dispersed local narratives of the city, I entered the place from different geographical points and historical angles of Europe. Still, since almost every foreign arrival and non-local narrative is marked by the sense of inevitable departure, the feeling of Vilnius as a site of representational dispersions remains strong. However, this reversal of the ‘investigative flow’ inevitably changed the expositional terrain of the city: from a native, familiar and mundane place, Vilnius was turned into a foreign, strange and even exotic locale. Still, I believe that some characteristics of indigenous comprehensions of the city survived this transposition simply because my initial analytical goal and personal knowledge of the place positioned me, so to speak, on the native side of the representational mirror.

In addition, many, but not all, of these visitors came to Vilnius on the heels of war and territorial rearrangements of the region: a sense of a geopolitical conflict, national dislocation and local disruption permeates many of the city’s encounters. So even if the city itself often appears as a historically immobile or pictographically frozen site, these non-local narratives of the place are largely shaped by the experience of the proceeding and/or impending spatial (and in some cases, biographical) changes. The representational result of such narratives views is the construction of what I call a shifting geography of the city. As the foreign travelers move in and out of Vilnius following various European military, ideological and cultural vectors of power -- from west to east and east to west (say, from Paris to Saint Petersburg or Moscow and Berlin) -- the seemingly ‘unknown’ Vilnius moves alongside the more familiar metropolitan trajectories of Europe. Consequently, depending on the representational traditions and cultural views of metropolitan and imperial centres of Europe, Vilnius is being constantly repositioned on the imaginary maps of Europe. Hence, in Vilnius, a geographical direction eastwards usually metamorphoses into a passage to Russia, the Orient or even Asia -- the representational opposites of (western) Europe. For instance, in 1916, Richard Dehmel, a German military officer of Jewish origins who was stationed in Lithuania during the World War I German occupation of the country, remarked that “Russia truly begins only in Wilna, a city of hundred churches and
bawdyhouses, even if the Lithuanian and Polish spirit dominates in the city.\textsuperscript{3} Similarly, but in direct representational opposition, many Russian visitors, especially during the tsarist rule of Vilnius (between 1795 and 1915) were surprised to find the town to appear so strikingly un-Russian. In the eyes of many passing Russians, Vilna, with its peculiar fusion of medieval urban topography, architectural Baroque flamboyancy and very strongly expressed Jewish religious and cultural traditionalism, looked if not decidedly western European, then certainly anti-Russian.

Such a contradictory juxtaposition of geo-cultural opposites in Vilnius was not necessarily a matter of a geographical fantasy. Positioned in-between various religious, imperial and national spheres of interest, Vilnius for most of its recorded existence has been a geopolitically and culturally contested site. In the modern age, the ongoing regional struggle for the control of the city, most tragically expressed by the massive expulsion and annihilation of the city’s residents during the two world wars, usually coalesced with the military and ideological contests over the political destiny of Europe. In Vilnius, the German/Nazi and Russian/Soviet geopolitical confrontation inevitably incited and consequently was paralleled by the long lasting animosities and conflicts among different local ethnic communities. On geopolitical maps of wartime Europe, Vilnius was usually marked as a strategically important place situated at the contested margins of the dominant imperial powers. In contrast, on the Lithuanian, Polish, and Jewish, and to a much lesser extent, Byelorussian and Russian national maps of the region, Vilnius acquired an axial position that delineated the core cultural symbols and historical meanings of the nation. In short, depending on geo-narrative perspective, Vilnius could be imagined as either a central or peripheral location on the map of Europe.

In a way, this centre/periphery geographical duality of Vilnius reflects the twisting path of my research: I started searching for the representational central point of the nationally, that is, locally, framed narratives of Vilnius, but ended up at discovering the city as a shifting and mutating site located at the peripheries of imperial and metropolitan Europe. Yet, despite this perceptual change, I never fully replace the idea of Vilnius as being the centre of a spatial narrative with the notion of the city being a marginal site on the map of Europe. The search for the ‘central’ national or regional meaning of Vilnius

informed my understanding of its ‘peripheral’ status in Europe, and throughout my entire work, I tried to associate rather than to distance the two ‘geo-narrative’ locations of the city.

However, this analytical correlation of the two opposing views of Vilnius ultimately reframed my methodological considerations, for I concentrated on finding (foreign) representations of the place that could situate Vilnius within Europe through the narration of some pivotal historical and/or biographical moments. Such a methodological approach both limited and expanded my sources. On one hand, it practically eliminated the possibility of looking at literary representations of the city, simply because there are very few fictional narratives of Vilnius written by foreigners. On the other hand, it allowed me to bring in a whole range of non-fictional impressions of the place, since most visitors put down their views on Vilnius in personal letters, diaries, travel notes, memoirs, journalistic impressions, military reports, ethnographic or historical studies, bureaucratic commentaries and tour guides. My study of Vilnius is based on such texts; but then again, many of the authors of these texts had certain artistic, literary and/or scientific inclinations and ambitions, which make them highly inventive and novel representations of the place. A vast majority of the chosen texts occupies a wide literary niche between fictional and informative literature, and they usually combine a highly personalized narrative of the place with a commentary on the general political, social, cultural, economic, academic and/or military situation in Europe. These texts encompass a great variety of spatial representations, from ‘objectified’ scientific analysis to intensely ‘emotional’ readings of the place.

In addition, Vilnius is not even always the main focus of these narratives, because many authors encountered the city as a biographically passing, spatially fleeting and/or socially and linguistically unfamiliar site. Arguably, many (but not all) foreign reflections on Vilnius are marked by a genuine lack of knowledge and understanding of the place; some of them express an open indifference to and disinterest in the historical and contemporary cultural and linguistic landscapes of the city. Still, for a variety of biographical and socio-political reasons, the transient and occasionally ‘unfocused’ nature of these foreign inscriptions of Vilnius are often situated within narratives that carry significant personal and/or social meanings. In other words, while left in a distant representational background, the city nevertheless is periodically inserted within a broader story line or wider map of Europe. For this reason, Vilnius regularly appears within these
historical panoramas and geographical charts of Europe as a site of crucial narrative transition marked by a moment of personal and/or communal crisis.

This usually unintentional but critical placing of Vilnius creates if not a sense of familiarity with the place then a certain degree of intimate affiliation. In such instances, in the words of an accidental (German) wartime ‘tourist’ of Wilna during the First World War, the city appears on the map-image of Europe as a chameleonic location which suspends the accustomed distinctions between homeland and foreign-land. The narrative zone that separates the known from strange could be as vast as an ocean in-between the continents or as narrow as a political boundary separating two neighboring states; yet regardless of its spatial extent, this real and/or imagined area between homeland and foreign-land denotes a process of an alchemical conversion where familiar transforms into alien. In this light, I see Vilnius as a site of narrative translation (or translocation) where the customary geopolitical and/or cultural projections of Europe transmute into a strange terrain of local idiosyncrasies.

SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This simultaneous sense of distance/proximity, strange/familiar, and crucial/trivial of many recorded Vilnius encounters necessitated its own specific theoretical approach. The stylistic, linguistic and genre variety of the literary sources created a challenge of comparative analysis. My ultimate goal, however, was never to compare contradictory views and experiences of the place, but rather to illuminate different projections of Europe within the changing geopolitical location and socio-cultural condition of Vilnius. I wanted to map out the familiar, recognizable parameters of Europe within the unfamiliar and often confusing local terrain. Accordingly, each entry into Vilnius, that is, each part of my thesis, is a glimpse at a new narrative conjunction that links a unique European milieu with a specific historical epoch of Vilnius. In a way, through such connections, I was hoping to establish a narrative link between a specific idea of Europe as a recognizable and decipherable geographical body to a representational perception of Vilnius as a spatially incongruous place.

Two mutually supportive theoretical concepts provided an analytical background for making such connections visible: the first one is the geographical notion of frontier; the second one is the narrative (literary) idea of threshold. Both concepts signify transition and
transformation, but where the frontier points to the spatially experienced sense of
conversion, the threshold denotes the temporal parameters of change. Yet it would be
wrong to limit the concept of the frontier to its spatial dimensions and reduce the meaning
of threshold to the function of narrative time. Both concepts involve the fusion of time and
space: frontier is foremost a geographical consequence of a specific history and the
representational power of a threshold depends on the spatial exposition of temporal
(narrative) disjunction. The frontier, so to speak, is a historical location, whereas the
threshold is a spatial moment.

In post-colonial studies, the formation of modern frontiers is closely related to the
geographical and cultural global expansionism of European imperial powers. The spatial
frontier is an embodiment both of the extension and limit of metropolitan control;
consequently, colonial “frontiers were created as imperial discourse sought to define and
invent the entities it shaped from its conquests. The numerous ruler-straight frontiers of
imperial maps indicate how colonial cartography existed as much to invent as to record
actual features and distinctions between various places and peoples.” These geographical
frontiers were usually (but not always) located far away from the metropolitan cores of the
imperial states. Yet the existence of the frontier was instrumental in defining the familiar
notion of a metropolitan home-land: “The frontier or boundary that limited the space as
defined was a crucial feature in imagining the imperial self, and in creating and defining...
those others through which that ‘Self could achieve definition and value. That which lies
‘beyond the pale’... is often defined literally as the other, the dark, the savage and the
wild.”

In summary, the imperial frontier -- if not geographically, then certainly
psychologically -- created a transitional space demarcated by the zone of separation
between the familiar ‘Self’ and the unknown and often threatening ‘Other.’ Thus,
as well as literal frontier, the discourse of the empire was metaphorically
concerned to delineate boundaries and frontiers, inventing categories for which
the spatial was always and only a loose image for a perceived or desired racial,
cultural and gendered divide. ...The idea of a frontier civilization implies a
civilization where rules of law and social graces wither as man reverts to a state
of nature. The frontier then becomes a place of savagery.

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4 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., 108-109.
The geographical notion of the frontier, of course, is not limited to the imperial and/or colonial histories of the world and the idea of the frontier as a space that delineates the division between ‘civilization’ and ‘savagery’ permeates all ethnocentric views of the universe. Historically, Vilnius’s frontier location within Europe is usually determined by the city’s contested religious beginnings. From the earliest recorded beginnings in 1323, Vilnius was positioned at the borderlines of ‘civilized’ Christian Europe. Vilnius entered the historical (Christian) annals of Europe as a capital city of Lithuania, which at the time was the only (and last) diplomatically recognized pagan state in Europe. Geographically and ideologically squeezed in-between the two competing streams of Christianity -- Roman Catholicism and Greek/Byzantine Orthodoxy -- the pagan-ruled city quickly became a site of antagonistic religious missionary contests. This frontier sense of Vilnius can be best illustrated by the fact that since the defeat of the crusader’s states in the Eastern Mediterranean in the thirteenth century, the conquest of pagan Lithuania became the primary military and religious object of the surviving crusading orders of Catholic Europe.7

The Lithuanian noble elite finally accepted Catholicism at the turn of the fifteenth century, but in the eyes of many foreign Catholic commentators, Lithuania remained a ‘semi-pagan,’ that is, ‘semi-civilized,’ country.8 In addition, a vast non-Lithuanian majority of the inhabitants of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were Orthodox Christians, and for the next several centuries, the theological and political tensions between Catholic and Orthodox Christianity greatly influenced the geopolitical location of Vilnius. The geo-religious landscape fragmented further during the Reformation period, when Vilnius became one of the few places in Europe where three Christian doctrines directly competed with each other for regional cultural and political influence. Moreover, by that time, the town had already had a well-established Jewish community; in addition, it also contained a large suburb inhabited by Muslim Tartars. The cultural cross-pollination and social tensions found within this religiously diverse and sometimes quite antagonistic local

7 In a way, the two-century long crusades against the ‘heathen’ Lithuanians, together with the *reconquista* policies in the Iberian peninsula, provided a historical and theological ‘bridge’ between the medieval geo-ideological expansionism of Catholic Europe and the Renaissance era European colonial imperialism.

8 The historiographic tradition to portray Lithuania as a ‘semi-pagan’ country stems from the Polish historical narratives of Jan Długosz (1415-1480), but even in modern age, many scholars and travelers commented on the deeply ingrained pagan traditions within the collective ‘mindset’ of Lithuanians.
universe contributed to the city's reputation as being a 'spiritually' contested location. Hence, various struggles for the geopolitical control of Vilnius have often been articulated through the discourses and policies of religious conversions. In this light, Vilnius was understood to be not so much a political but eschatological frontier -- a corporeal place that demarcates the sacrosanct contours of a particular Europe civilization.

The imperial and to some extent colonial sense of frontier came to Vilnius with the advent of the territorial consolidation of European imperial states in the eighteenth century when Poland and Lithuania fell prey to the geopolitical interests of the 'enlightened' monarchies of Russia, Prussia and Austria. The borderline location of Vilnius has progressively metamorphosed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when the city's history, population and cultural topography became more and more fragmented in accordance to the national and ideological splits of pan-European politics. In the last century alone, Vilnius was occupied and ruled by a dozen different military and civilian regimes. At the same time, the city experienced one of the most dramatic and tragic ethnic and linguistic conversions in Europe. At the end of the Second World War, due to mass killings, deportations, exile and 'repatriations', Vilnius lost close to ninety percent of its pre-war population: within a single decade, it was transformed from a largely Polish-Jewish town into a predominantly Lithuanian-Russian city. In conclusion, for centuries, Vilnius has been a demographically, culturally and geopolitically 'transient' place where local identities and geographical boundaries of Europe were simultaneously hardened and dissolved.

Perhaps, the city's European location is best captured by the German geopolitical concept of Zwischeneuropa or the 'in-between Europe.' The ambiguous term Zwischeneuropa was minted after World War I, and it usually "refers to those spaces...from the Baltic and Adriatic, which lie between the respective power penumbras of Germany and Russia." As a spatial category, "Zwischeneuropa has been used in a number of different ways, but one powerful implication is that the existing state structures of this region are somewhat tentative and provisional, and that the process of political -- and political-geographical -- formation here has never been completed." The geographical

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9 Mark Bassin, "Between realism and the 'New Right': geopolitics in Germany in the 1990s," in Transaction of the Institute of British Geographers 28, no. 3 (2003), 359.
10 Ibid.
idea of the ‘in-between Europe’, as Mark Bassin rightfully points out, was created and used
to justify the interventionist (German) policies in the region during the interwar period,
but in the post-Soviet era, it found its equivalent in the Russian geopolitical concept of the
‘near-abroad’ which implicitly delineates the old map of the Soviet Union or tsarist Russia
on the new territorial arrangement of Europe. Yet if the German idea of the ‘in-between
Europe’ describes the space of a geopolitically ‘transient’ and historically ‘transitional’
region, then the Russian idea of the ‘near-abroad Europe’ denotes the space of
propinquity, and lasting political and cultural dependencies. So while both geo-terms are
expressions of certain (post)imperial geopolitical views, but in combination, they capture,
in Sander Gilman’s words, “a sense of the frontier as a space of contestation rather than as
a border between constructed identities.”

This geopolitically constructed realm of the ‘in-between’ and ‘near-abroad’ Europe
also suspends the centre/periphery dichotomy by framing the specific geographical region
within the opposing poles of political, cultural and military powers. If the centre is defined
by the degree of power concentration and the periphery is defined by the extent of power
domination, then the geography of the frontier is marked by contest and compromise. The
frontier, according to Gilman, is usually a land “where separate polities converged and
competed, and where distinct cultures collide and occasionally coincided,” thus making it a
space where through contest and compromise, “the complex interaction of the definitions
of the self and Other are able to be constructed.” As a result of these interactions, the
frontier does not only point to the area that separates two or more opposing identities, but
also delineates “a structure of communal fantasy” which provides “a model of imagining
oneself in the world.”

Gilman’s projection of the ‘imaginary’ notion of the frontier onto psychological and
linguistic terrain inserts the geopolitical dynamics of contest, assimilation and resistance
into the space of narrations. In a sense, the frontier is both a concrete, geographical
territory marked by a military contest and political border construction, and a narrative
terrain defined by the dynamic interaction of different languages, idiolects and discourses.
Thus the frontier is predominately a narrative -- imaginary and representational -- space

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11 Sander L. Gilman, “Introduction: the frontier as a model for Jewish history” in Jewries
at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict, eds. Sander L Gilman and Milton Shain
(Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 14.
12 Ibid., 13.
that is nonetheless marked by corporeal, topographical inscriptions of contests and assimilation:

It is the notion of violation and transcendence of boundaries that is inherent in such construction of the frontier. No frontier exists unless this notion of violation is present. Thus the notion of the frontier is that it seems to be inscribed on the land but it is actually a narrative tradition superimposed on a landscape. It is defined by the very notion of violation and this notion can be read as positive or negative. It is a means of organizing the world, rather than the world itself. It creates the markers even if the markers rely on phenomena of the world. Thus language is a constant marker for the frontier. Some at the frontier are understood to speak a language perceived as crude and deceptive; it is the language which marks difference. But it can be equally true that those at the frontier are imagined to speak a tongue understood as complex and revealing. The language of the Other is not the language of the self.¹⁴

Gilman reinterprets the geographical notion of the frontier by focusing on the historical and linguistic formation of the (diasporic) Jewish identity. I found such reading of the frontier appropriate to the representational topoi of Vilnius not only because the city historically has been positioned at the geographical peripheries of the competing imperial, ideological and national centres of Europe, but also because it was one of the key cultural, religious and political centres of Jewish Europe. During modern times, Vilne/Vilnius was largely a Jewish town: at the turn of the twentieth century, more than half of the town’s population was Jewish. Vilne was at the centre of a specific geo-cultural realm that was defined not by any concrete political boundaries, but by the cultural and political vitality of the Yiddish language. This ‘linguistic’ territory was geopolitically segmented first by the imperial and later by the nation-state boundaries of Europe, but its demographic core was the Pale of Jewish Settlement that was established by the tsarist administration at the end of the eighteenth century within the boundaries of the absorbed provinces of Poland-Lithuania. And through Yiddishland, Vilne was known as Heimshtot (our town), Vaem be Israel (the metropolis of Israel) and Yerushalaym di Lita (Jerusalem of Lithuania); in other words, Vilne assumed the role of, if not a political then a spiritual, centre of the Ashkenazi Jewish diaspora.¹⁵

Many western European and Russian visitors to Vilnius, whose contacts with the Polish-Lithuanian Jews were limited, were perplexed and even fascinated by the dynamic Jewish life of the city. However, the active Jewish presence in the city was often interpreted

¹⁴ Ibid., 21.
by many foreign and local non-Jews as a sign of the city’s cultural and geographical distance from both, western Europe and Russia. While most westerners found the city to be ‘Russian’ and the Russians periodically commented on the ‘Jesuit’, that is the Roman Catholic, nature of the city, both groups of travelers located Jewish Vilne outside this bipolar division of Europe. The Jews were almost always seen as ‘eternal wanderers’ or ‘uprooted strangers’ who ‘fell off’ of the imperial and/or national maps of Europe.

Gilman’s proposed reading of the frontier helps to correlate the two inscriptions of Vilnius as both the centre of Jewish identity and periphery of imperial Europe by providing a model for inscribing geopolitical realities onto the narrative cartography of place. The city can exist simultaneously as the centre and periphery, but the dissonance, or for that matter, the unison of such existence can be detected only by recognizing the city as a frontier site. The ‘theoretical’ entrance into the frontier, as Gilman points out, is primarily achieved through negotiation between different voices, languages and representations of place. However, such theoretical negotiation requires finding a narrative ‘middle ground’ through which different views could be exposed, assessed and contrasted. In short, one has to locate a narrative theme that links the geopolitical and sociolinguistic ideas of the frontier to the representational expositions of the place.

The literary notion of threshold comes close to the representational and geopolitical meaning of the frontier. As a narrative tool, threshold marks a transitory, intermediary moment, which usually marks a dramatic transformation of a story line. Theoretically conceived by Mikhail Bakhtin, the threshold is a crucial element of a representational fusion of narrative time and space. In Bakhtin’s opinion, in Dostoevsky’s novels, for instance, the threshold is a narrative point where the “crisis events” such as “the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man” occur. 16 As a result, the threshold appears “as if its has no duration and falls out of the normal course of biographical time.”17

Bakhtin’s idea of the threshold is intricately linked to his concept of chronotope which in the scholar’s words, expresses the representational “inseparability of space and

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17 Ibid.
time” where “time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movement of time, plot and history.” As a rule, a “chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes the narrative.”

Bakhtin identifies a great variety of artistic chronotopes, yet he considers the chronotope of threshold to be one of the most significant narrative inventions of modern literary imagination. Nonetheless, Bakhtin fails to elaborate on the representational idea and narrative functionality of the threshold, which he laconically summarizes as a moment of “crisis and break in a life.” Still, he seems to imply that there is an irreconcilable difference between the historical or biographical experiences of a ‘break in life’ and their artistic representations captured by the figurative usage of threshold: “The word ‘threshold’ itself,” declared Bakhtin “already has a metaphorical meaning in everyday usage (together with its literal meaning), and is connected with the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life (or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, a fear of stepping over the threshold). In literature, the chronotope of the threshold is always metaphorical and symbolic, sometimes openly but more often implicitly.”

Consequently, Bakhtin, following Dostoevsky’s examples, locates the ‘metaphorical’ threshold not so much within the psyches and/or bodies of literary characters, but within the exterior sites that imply or provoke the unexpected exposition of hidden inner worlds. So in narrative terms, the chronotope of threshold is defined by “a transition from private enclosed space to public, open spaces, in which the inner forces its way out into the outer.” The threshold, so to speak, fixes a moment of biographical (inner) crisis to the sites of spatial transition. Such representational fixation, according Renata Lachmann, can potentially make “the threshold appear as a porta triumphalis that promises purification and metamorphosis. The connotation of ‘passageway’ also comes to mind here.”

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18 Ibid., 84.
19 Ibid., 250.
20 Ibid., 248. Bakhtin’s italics.
21 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
In her study on memory and literature, Lachmann situates the Bakhtinian formula of the literary threshold within the Benjaminian historical analysis of modernity, which also brings the idea of threshold closer to the geo-historical notion of the frontier:

'The threshold [Schwelle] should be separated quite sharply from the boundary. A threshold is like a zone. Change, transition and tides lie in the words ‘swell’ [shwellen]. This definition provided by Walter Benjamin makes it clear that what distinguishes the threshold is not just the ‘intermediate’ aspects through which it could be understood, not its bridging function that produces a congruence between an anterior and a posterior state. Instead, the threshold or ‘swelling’ is the exceptional state, the ‘other world’ — other, that is, in relation to the regularly encoded world — in which space and time ‘swell.’ The fact that the threshold or liminal element can be neither measured nor localized suspends our familiar parameters — as does its potential openness to everything, in its destruction of past and future; as does that aspect of the threshold that could be described as a fluid breaking or splitting with extremist tendencies.”

In my view, Lachmann’s reconceptualization of the literary threshold offers a unifying concept under which it is possible to group the stylistically diverse and artistically unequal foreign narratives of Vilnius. Most of these narratives are framed through a prism of historical and/or biographical crisis during which the idea of ‘a break in life’ loses its metaphorical qualities and becomes an integral part of the experience of the place. Vilnius rarely, if ever, is the main focus of these narratives, but because the narrated moments of personal and/or collective falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions or indecisions that change life occur in Vilnius, the city, arguably, acquires certain threshold qualities.

“The function of the threshold chronotope,” also notes Lachmann, “can be described within a field that is marked, on one hand, by a suspension of semiotic orders and, on the other, by the traces of their collision -- a conflict rehearsed by the threshold.” Accordingly, I see Vilnius as a topographical field onto which the geopolitical frontiers of Europe are inscribed through a highly individualized exposition of a (personal) inner-world conflict. Hence, in order to locate the shifting position of Vilnius within a specific narrative map of Europe, I have ventured into the emotional, psychological and aesthetic realms of the creators of these urban expositions.

I strongly believe that the mapping of Europe within the landscape of Vilnius starts with the name of the place. Vilnius has many linguistic incarnations, each denoting not just

24 Ibid., 165-164.
25 Ibid., 164.
ethnic affiliation of the city, but also pointing to a specific geopolitical and historical condition of the place. The geographical and narrative setting of the Lithuanian Vilnius, for instance, is not the same as the spatial and imaginary location of Jewish Vilne or Polish Wilno; and the German Wilna epitomizes a quite different spatio-temporal order than say the Russian Vilna. In a way, each name of the city is a specific chronotope, a linguistic entrance into a different exposition of Europe. Hence, throughout my work, I use a variety of different spellings of the name of the city. In general, I follow the spellings found in the original texts and documents that more or less correspond with the linguistic and/or ‘national’ origins of the authors of the narrative sources. In addition, I use a peculiar ‘national’ name of the city when I desire to outline or describe a specific linguistic and cultural milieu of the city; so, when I write about the Jewish world of the city, for instance, I use Vilne, the Yiddish name of the place.

I also attempt to correlate the administrative belonging of the place to its ‘official’ name during a specific historical period; so during the tsarist period, for instance, the city was officially referred as Vilna, but during the period of the World War I German occupation, the Russian Vilna was replaced with the German Wilna. In short, I use the name of the city as a denominator of a specific regional cultural, linguistic, religious, ideological and geopolitical orientation rather than simply an indication of the city’s cartographic location. Accordingly, I always attempt to correspond other place-names, such as the names of local topographical features, streets and architectural monuments with the linguistic title of the city. However, when I describe a ‘neutral’ history and geography of the place, or at moments of analytical doubt, I use with a certain degree of hesitation and reluctance the contemporary (that is, Lithuanian) forms of local place-names.

This place-name diversity inescapably creates a narrative confusion since it constantly swings from one linguistic denominator to another. Nonetheless, I think that this profusion of local place-names both embodies and captures the essence of Vilnius’s threshold narrative and frontier geographical location. The changing name of the city is itself a sign of the frontier, which is, as Gilman reminds us, above all a psychological space of linguistic crossings, interactions and conflicts. Entering the frontier stipulates translation and translocation, and “such linguistic and cultural interaction and conflict take place within the psyches of those crossing the frontier. It is the notion of violation and
transcendence of boundaries that is inherent to such construction of the frontier.” Of course, as Lachmann indicated, the transgression of borders and boundary swelling is also a marker of the threshold. The analysis of the frontier-threshold then inevitably requires a multiple linguistic articulation: ‘Language as the medium and the stuff of dynamic interaction needs to be seen from both sides -- the speakers of different languages, idiolects, and discourses come together and therefore all sets of texts become imperative in understanding the contact between and among groups.’

I start my investigation of Vilnius’s representational place within Europe with an analysis of a ‘scientific encounter’ of a renowned German naturalist, Georg Forster, with the semi-mythological land of Sarmatia. Forster arrived in Wilna -- an urban province of Sarmatia -- in 1784 during the period of the intellectual and scientific peak of the European Enlightenment. Hence, my study starts at the historical moment which in the words of Larry Wolff brought “modern reorientation of the continent [Europe] which produced Western Europe and Eastern Europe.” In other words, I open my analytical journey through Vilnius with the historical era during which the geography of Europe acquired its modern era spatial and cultural polarity. The discursive powers of this bi-polar vision of Europe have had a gripping effect on the geopolitical destiny and representational coloring of Vilnius. The imagined ‘geographical boundary’ between eastern and western parts of the continent did not necessarily run through Vilnius (in most cases, the city has been firmly located on the eastern side of Europe), but the continental division nonetheless instigated the discursive segmentation of the city into two seemingly incompatible ‘spatial’ components: the Occidental and Oriental.

I conclude my study with the analysis of a self-discovery journey of Alfred Döblin, an avant-garde German writer of Jewish origins who visited Wilno in 1923. Döblin came to the city during the post-war decade when European societies were experiencing a

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27 Ibid.
29 The most recent representational incarnation of this spatial polarity is illustrated by the contemporary (post-Soviet) tourist and business promotion of Vilnius as ‘a bridge between the East and West.’
“profound sense of spiritual crisis”\textsuperscript{30} which manifested itself not so much in the search for “new value systems as decrying the old.”\textsuperscript{31} Arguably, this historical period can be considered to be the beginning of the modern (geopolitical) era based on the political supremacy of the nation-state. The geopolitical idea of a (bourgeois) nation-state, however, has been challenged by the Marxist theory and practice of universal class warfare implemented and promoted by the Soviet regime. As Döblin discovered during his brief visit, post-imperial Wilno was literally located at the spatial frontier separating the two emerging geo-ideological universes: a nation-state Europe and the ‘universalizing’ Soviet world. At that time, the boundary between these two different ideological universes ran east of the city, but in 1939-1940, once Vilnius became a part the Soviet Union, this border shifted westwards.

In a way, the chapters on Forster (Chapter 2) and Döblin (Chapter 6) create a temporal arch which frames the ‘imperial’ history of Vilnius during the so-called long nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{32} Therefore, I connect these two journeys-chapters through a series of ‘imperial’ mappings of Vilnius. In Chapter 3, I traverse Vilna through the memoirs of the participants and witnesses of the 1812 Napoleonic invasion of Russia during which the city became a key strategic and representational (symbolic) site of one of the largest military campaigns in the history of Europe. In Chapter 4, I look at the imperial Russian dispositions regarding the geo-narrative location of Vilna within the tsarist empire; and in Chapter 5, I follow the footsteps German military and narrative ‘adventures’ in wartime Wilna. I begin my study, however, with a prologue which attempts to situate Vilnius on the pre-Enlightenment map of Europe.

Polish poet and Nobel prize winner, Czeslaw Milosz (a native of Wilno) laconically summarized the bureaucratized European ‘location’ of the city during the interwar decades: “Wilno: around two hundred thousand inhabitants plus tons of memoranda, notes, and stenographs in the League of Nations archives.”\textsuperscript{33} While my work does not


\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 260.

\textsuperscript{32} Vilnius became a part of the Russian empire in 1795 and remained in the possession of Russia until the WWI German occupation of Lithuania in 1915.

concentrate on the post-WWI struggles over the political control of the city, I want rephrase Milosz’s quote for the purpose of my study: Vilnius: a century of contrasting European encounters plus a handful of geographical notes, travel journals, diaries, guidebooks, letters and memoirs.
CHAPTER ONE
SARMATIA

VILNIUS IN EUROPE

Between a spiegare (to explain, expound, unfold) and a piegare (to fold, wrap and crease), emerges the spiegamento (the explication, the spread, the unfolding). Contrary to the fixed point of the rationalist a priori sought by Descartes lies the mutable point of view found in the body, where to explain is to unfold a complexity and to trace the in-finite in the folds, creases and envelopments of the world; in the finitude of our physical frame, time and place, in the world of our possibilities.¹

The established geographical centre of Europe is located at 54 degrees, 54 minutes latitude and 25 degrees, 19 minutes longitude. At this Cartesian point, the straight lines stretching from the four extremes of Europe -- Spitsbergen Island in the north, the Canary Islands in the south, the Azores in the west and the Urals in east -- crisscross at the unremarkable mound called Bernotai, situated near the small Lithuanian village of Purnuškės. The village is located some twenty-five kilometers north of the old-town core of Vilnius; so, at least from a geographical perspective, this proximity of the city to the mound makes the Lithuanian capital the most ‘centrally placed’ town in Europe.

Vilnius appeared for the first time in the annals of Europe almost seven hundred years ago. Bernotai, on the other hand, appeared on the geographical terrain of Europe only in 1989. After lengthy computations, the scientists at the French National Geographical Institute pointed to this particular point on the map of Lithuania as being the centre of Europe. The French computations unintentionally coincided with the geopolitical shifts in Europe provoked by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the Cold War divisions of the continent. Initially, the French scientific unearthing of the centre of Europe was overshadowed by the revolutionary political and social changes that followed the re-establishment of the Lithuanian independence in 1990. Consequently, for almost fifteen years, the centre of Europe had remained largely a forgotten topographical spot marked by a simple, barely visible metal plate. However, its symbolic visibility was greatly increased on the day of Lithuania’s accession into the European Union: on May 1, 2004, a white granite column crowned with a wreath of stars (the symbol of the European

Union) was ceremoniously erected on the site. Ironically, this monumental validation of the continental centrality restated the peripheral geographical location of Vilnius within the newly reconstituted political map of Europe. The freshly demarcated and fortified boundary of the European Union runs some thirty kilometers east from the capital of Lithuania, thus situating the centre of the continent at the territorial margins of the geopolitical project of European integration.

Of course, Europe in effect is not a continent, but a part of a much larger geographical entity, Eurasia. Moreover, the French enclosure of Madeira and Canary archipelago -- which are technically speaking are parts of Africa -- within the cartographic contours of Europe has more to do with the historical and political (and colonial) orientation of Europe than with a geotectonic logic of global continental divisions. If “Europe,” as Bernard-Henri Levy puts it, “is not a place, but an idea,” then its central point of gravity is defined not so much through mathematical, Cartesian calculations, but through discursive boundaries that give a specific meaning and discursive functionality to this idea. In this philosophical light, the presumed central location of Vilnius could be seen as an allegorical rather than spatial embodiment of the idea.

The metaphor and name of Europe has its origins in ancient Greek mythology, but the idea of Europe as a concrete geographical unit places its origins in the cartographical visualization of the Christian realm of the Renaissance period. In the sixteenth century, the name of Europe began to appear regularly on the title pages of various maps and atlas collections. At the same time, through various artistic representations of Greek myths, the idea and representational character of Europe also entered the aesthetic and cultural terrain of the period. John Hall, in his elegant study of Renaissance Europe, described this parallel evolution of cartographical imagination and aesthetic practices as an intellectual passage: “From myth and map, chorography, history and survey, Europe passed into the mind.” By the 1600s, the symbolic meaning of Europe became inseparable from its

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2 For more on the formation of the geographical idea of Europe, see Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wagih, The Myth of Continents (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
geographical body: surrounded and safeguarded by waters on three sides, Europe gradually dissolved into the vast landmass of Asia.

The Renaissance representations of Europe often fused the mythological incarnation of Europe exemplified by a female body with its cartographic imprint. This artistic amalgamation of allegory and cartography produced an anthropomorphized geography of Europe where a map takes shape of a human (female) body. One of the most striking examples of such a map-allegory was created in 1588 by the German/Flemish historian and cartographer Franz Hogenberg who, according to the narrative traditions of the period, pictured Europe (the daughter of the king of Tyre) being carried away by a bull (Jupiter). In a novel artistic fashion, Hogenberg drapes Europe’s body with a map of Europe, instead of following a more traditional representational format of making the map an integral part of Europe’s body or dress. In a sense, Hogenberg’s image is a collage of two independent (allegorical and cartographic) visualizations of Europe. This visual separation of the map from the body however results in a higher degree of cartographic accuracy (Figure 1.1).

On this folding cartographic drapery of Europe, Vilnius (or Vilna) appears as one of the most noticeable and identifiable, if not central, geographical locations. This visual centrality of Vilna is achieved through a combination of artistic design and cartographic functionality. Vilna is located just below the central axis of the image, a cartographic area that marks the geographical (Asian?) edge of Europe, which is conveniently left undisturbed by the body shape of the allegorical Europe. In addition, the area surrounding the city is demarcated with much less geographical information than other parts of Europe. Paradoxically, this cartographic bareness, in combination with the peripheral geographical location of the city, produces the highlighted visibility of Vilna. So where the important urban centres of Europe, such as London, Paris, Rome and Vienna, are completely lost amidst the intense theatrical and cartographic gestures of Europe, Vilna is turned into a compositional nexus of the entire collage. Released from the mythological and ideological constraints of symbolic representation, the city, so to speak, grounds the allegorical Europe within the spatial reality of the continent. So if the metaphorical significance of Europe depends on the anthropomorphic spreading of her body, then the geographical integrity of Europe seems to rely on the cartographical accuracy of Vilna’s location.

In this particular image, which follows the Habsburg tradition of representing the Iberian Peninsula as the ‘crowned head’ of Europe, the clearly indicated location of Vilna is used as a cartographically accurate opposition to the personified portrait of Spain.
In general, the early maps of Europe did not show bias towards the western parts of the continent. The maps, according Hale, "devoid of indications of political frontiers ... were not devised to be read politically. And the busy even spread of town names did not suggest that western had any greater weight of economic vitality than eastern Europe. This even-handed appearance of uniformity owed something to cartographer's *horror vacui*, but also to their places of work and the networks of correspondents and regional map-makers radiating from them." Most maps were produced in the northwestern parts of Europe with intense commercial, religious and political connections with the Baltic Sea region. As a result of these networks, neither "cartographers nor traders thought of Europe as compromising an ‘advanced’ Mediterranean and a ‘backward’ Baltic, or a politically and economically sophisticated Atlantic West and a marginally relevant East."  

Vilnius, as the capital city of one of the largest political entities in Europe, was recognized as ‘cartographically’ equal to any important urban centre of western and southern Europe. Undoubtedly, Vilnius's cartographic visibility was also sharpened by the relative representational ‘emptiness’ of Lithuania: there were fewer towns in Lithuania than in other parts of Europe, and, except for vast forests and swamps, there were no significant topographical elements -- mountains, large rivers and lakes, etc. -- to be mapped out. Indeed, the cartographers of the early Renaissance period often exaggerated the topographical features of Lithuania: the rolling, undulating landscape around Vilnius, for instance, was portrayed in a similar fashion to the mountainous regions of the Carpathians or Pyrenees and the swampy areas of the Lithuanian-Byelorussian lowlands frequently appeared as immense lakes.

However, the genuine cartographic prominence of Lithuania on various maps of Europe was also an indication of the ‘geopolitical’ significance of the country. In (western) Europe, the united state of Poland-Lithuania became widely recognized as “a steadfast fortress ... against the Turks and Crimean Tatars ... [and] against those other westward-pressing ‘barbarians’, the peoples of Russia, from the Muscovite heartlands around the

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8 Ibid.
capital to the semi-independent Cossacks of the South.” At the time, in the words of Hale, the Muscovite state and the rest of Russia was “left in the wings of the cartographic Theatrum” of Europe. But the frontier location of Lithuania initiated the creation of one of the most advanced and elaborate maps of the late early Baroque era and it “was the interest stimulated by this European role that promoted the production of such masterpieces of devoted cartography as Mikolaj Radziwill’s Duchy of Lithuania of 1613.” So in part, Vilnius’s Renaissance era ‘geographical’ visibility was an expression of Lithuania’s borderland location: the city’s magnified presence was directly linked to the cartographic conception of the idea of Europe.

Notwithstanding this visibility, the exact ‘geographical’ -- that is national and/or political -- identity of Vilnius was still a matter of cartographic speculations. The earliest known mapping of Vilnius was made in 1513 on a chart entitled “Tabula moderna Sarmatia.” According to the cartographic legend of the map, this ‘modern’ chart of Sarmatia was a revised replica of an earlier map of Sarmatia made by a German cartographer Nicolus Cusanus (1401-1464) and printed in Strasburg in 1491 with the title of “Sarmatia terra in Europa.” Both maps of Sarmatia, however, were published as a part of the updated versions of the ‘classical’ work of Ptolemy’s Geographia. The ‘original’ Ptolemy map of Sarmatia specified only natural and ‘ancient’ ethnographic features of the region -- it delineated rivers, seas, mountains and local ‘barbarian’ tribes. In contrast, Cusanus’s version clearly outlined ‘modern’ contours of Sarmatia by mapping out the recognizable countries of Hungary, Poland, Russia, Prussia and Wallachia -- the geographical equivalent of the contemporary region that falls under a broad category of east-central Europe. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania too appears for the first (known) time on the 1491 copy of Sarmatia; yet its capital was identified only by an unnamed urban symbol, thus making the city a geographically anonymous entity. Clearly, the 1513 copy attempts to rectify the cartographic anonymity of Lithuania by sprinkling its territory with several named towns. Ironically, the cartographers were seemingly so enthusiastic in populating Lithuania with numerous cities and castles that they recorded Vilnius twice on the same map (Figure 1.2).

11 Ibid., 27.
12 Ibid., 24.
13 See in Danguolė Gudienė, ed. Lithuania on the Map (Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 1999.)
Figure 1.2: Tabula moderna Sarmatia Europae... by N. Cusanus, 1513 (detail). Source: Danguolė Gudienė, ed. Lithuania on the Map (Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 1999), 24-25.
The first record correctly identifies the Lithuanian capital as a town of Wilno by situating it at the confluence of the two (unnamed) rivers. The second record incorrectly marks the city as Bilde located south of the original Wilno. The name Bilde, which has no known historical equivalent, seems to be a corrupt version of the place-name Wilde, which was occasionally used to identify Vilnius in several German language descriptions of Lithuania in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.\(^{14}\) However, the German usage of Wilde as a name for Vilnius (as in die statt Wilde, fur die Wilde, zur Wilde) stems from the fourteenth century chronicles of the Teutonic Order, a crusading monastic organization whose primary ideological and geopolitical prerogatives were the conquest and Christianization of pagan Lithuanians.

Place-name misnomers were not unusual in the earlier European chronicles (or for that matter in the colonial records of European empires), and in the frontier-like environment of Lithuania, the vernacular names were liable to a great variety of misspellings and linguistic alterations.\(^{15}\) Yet, the orthographic affinity of Wilde to Wilna (or Vilnius) has probably more to do with the ideological, and in this case, geo-religious struggle over the control of Lithuania than with the linguistic misappropriation of local spatial knowledge. The German word Wilde has very specific meanings and connotations: *der/die Wilde* means savage or wild. The vast forested territory depopulated due to endless warfare between the Christians and pagans that separated Vilnius from the Orders's possessions in Prussia was simply referred in German as *die Wildnis* — the wilderness.\(^{16}\)

The crusaders called annual military expeditions into Lithuania a *Reise*, an excursion into the 'wild' frontier of the Christian world.\(^{17}\) The town of Wilde then was an anachronistic

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\(^{15}\) For more on the fourteenth century crusader’s descriptions of Lithuania, see Juozas Jurginis and Algirdas Šidlauskas, eds., *Kraštas ir žmonės: Lietuvos geografiniai ir etnografiniai aprašymai* (XIV-XIX a.) (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1983.)


\(^{17}\) Chaucer captured the European scope of the crusader’s *Reise* against pagan Lithuanians in the passage of *Canterbury Tales* depicting the adventures of the Knight, who: “Full often time he had abroad bygone/Above all nations, to Prussia./In Lithuania had he reysed and in Russia/No Christian man of his degree more often.” Quoted in James Charles Roy, *The
extension of this wilderness, a place of (pagan) savagery located outside the Christian (especially northern German) civilization that was to a large degree defined by the religious and commercial networks of urban Europe.

Arguably, the name Wilde was most likely accommodated by the German chroniclers in order to highlight the cultural ‘deficiency’ of the Lithuanian state because this misnomer implies a lack of spatial and religious separation between the civic and natural realms of the Lithuanian pagan society. The pagan rituals practiced by the Lithuanians were based on the worship of natural phenomena, and according to numerous historical records and archeological evidence the most important pagan shrine that was located at the centre of Vilnius was surrounded by a sanctified oak grove. It is not surprising then that once the Lithuanian elite accepted Christianity in 1387, the first ‘spiritual’ act of the Catholic missionaries was the ceremonious cutting down of this sacred grove.

The representational schism of Vilnius on the ‘modern’ map of Sarmatia was most likely only a ‘cartographic’ echo of the recorded pagan past of the city; within a short period of time, Bilde, or for that matter Wilde, vanished from the Renaissance face of Europe. Sarmatia, on the other hand, lingered on the cultural charts of Europe for some centuries to come. Indeed, the Baroque era elaboration of spatial and artistic imagination substantiated Sarmatia with a remarkable sense of cultural, political and social reality. Nevertheless, the perception of Vilnius as an urban frontier of the Lithuanian (or European) wilderness survived the test of time and even in the modern era, many people have still commented on the reciprocal spatial ‘intimacy’ between the town and the surrounding nature. Jan Bulhak (1876-1950), the most celebrated photographic recorder of twentieth century Wilno, for instance, summarized the topographical layout of the city with a single statement: “A deep hollow with two rivers and forty temples, almost all covered over by hills and flooded by a sea of greenery -- this is a typical description of Wilno.”

THE CONTOURS OF SARMATIA

Renaissance space is static, its walls and vaults are planal — they form space. Renaissance unity is achieved through a cumulative addition of clearly defined similar static elements, while Baroque unity is achieved through the subordination of individual elements to invigorate the whole. Baroque space is independent and alive — it flows and leads to dramatic culminations.19

A complex of historical, artistic, political, and social characteristics came together to form the Sarmatian civilization of Poland-Lithuania of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. "Sarmatian" refers to the historical myth created by Renaissance scholars who claimed that Polish-Lithuanian nobles descended from a third-century warrior people who lived on the steppes north of the Black Sea. According to this myth, Sarmatian national practices evolved into the political system of Polish-Lithuanian noble democracy with its civil liberties for nobles, elected kingship, and parliamentary near-supremacy protected by the liberum veto. ...The deep conviction of noble superiority reflected the gulf between the so-called Sarmatian conquerors and the rest of the population. ...A network of customs acted as a daily reminder of the Sarmatian civilization's distinctiveness. Many practices stemmed from the expressiveness of the pan-European Baroque, but they developed unique forms in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in part because of its extensive contact with Russian and Ottoman civilization. In addition, the Baroque persisted longer in Sarmatian Poland-Lithuania than further west.20

Sarmatia was foremost a province of Baroque mannerism, a spatial paradox suspended somewhere in-between a cartographic illusion and geographical reality. Because the country's boundaries and shape were constantly shifting on various cartographic imprints of Europe, Sarmatia's exact geographical location was never reliably mapped out, and in contrast to other European lands, Sarmatia was defined not so much by its physical, political or national boundaries, but through its spatial multiplicities. In fact, on many maps of the Renaissance and Baroque era Europe, Sarmatia was the only European country which had its 'geographical doppelgänger' in Asia, Sarmatia Asiatica. (In this sense, Sarmatia was the earlier cartographical embodiment of the modern idea of Eurasia.) The geographical division between the Sarmatia Europea and its Asian counterpart was based primarily on the religious orientation of the respected parts of the country: the

European part of Sarmatia was controlled by Christian rulers; the Asian side was
dominated by Muslims. Hence, the ‘greater Sarmatia’ was a land of divided religious
loyalties, cultural identities and continental belongings. A vast geographical ‘grey zone’ --
the ‘inner’ Sarmatian frontier -- separated the two parts of land.

The cartographic origins of Sarmatia could be traced back to the geographical and
historical works of ancient Greeks and Romans. Reputedly, Ptolemy situated the barbarian
tribe of Sarmatians somewhere in the steppes between the Azov and Caspian Seas.
(Eventually, this territory became associated with the Asian Sarmatia.) Yet Herodotus and
other commentators moved the semi-nomadic Sarmatians westwards to the area of the
Black Sea and the lower basin of the Dnepr River. Some time later, the tribe was moved
further to the north to the region where the vast southern steppes and plains of Eurasia
meet the northern forest and marchlands of the Baltic Sea littoral. According to Tacitus,
this was an unexplored land located somewhere near the “Suabian Sea” (most likely, the
Baltic Sea) where “our knowledge of the world ends.”21 Centuries later, some time in the
early part of the fifteenth century, this still barely mapped out land of the southeastern
coast of the Baltic Sea was resurrected as ‘Sarmatia terra in Europe’. The sea itself acquired
a Sarmatian identity and was often identified on the maps of Europe as Mare Sarmaticum.
The area of European Sarmatia roughly corresponded with the territory inhabited by the
Baltic peoples, some of the last pagan peoples in Europe. Undoubtedly, the historical
reputation of the region as the land inhabited by semi-pagan peoples strengthened the
Renaissance cartographers’ case of locating the land of ancient ‘barbaric’ Sarmatians on
the Baltic Sea. The problem was that this relative small region was already divided into
several countries: Prussia, Lithuania (and Samogitia), Livonia and Poland and there was
simply no space for the ‘ancient’ Sarmatians to dwell in-between these clearly demarcated
political entities.

By the mid-sixteenth century, the representation of Ptolemy’s Sarmatia on
contemporary maps of Europe seemed to encounter a ‘cartographic crisis.’ Not unlike its
tribal forefathers who roamed in-between known and unknown realms of ancient world,
‘modern’ Sarmatia was a nomadic and obviously enigmatic entity. The country’s
geographical location had no fixed or continuous cartographic presence: it periodically

21 Quoted in Norman Davies, God’s Playground: A History of Poland, vol.1 (New York:
Columbia University Press, 1982), 45.
appeared on the maps of Europe only to vanish again. (Sarmatia's cartographic problem was in large an indication of the Renaissance era attempt to bring the geographical and ethnographical information found in ancient texts and maps into the contemporary spatial purview.) The cartographic idea of Sarmatia nonetheless was saved and strengthened by the emergence of Sarmatism, a peculiar socio-cultural milieu that found a fertile ground among the Polish-Lithuanian nobility of the sixteenth century.

Like most elite societies of Europe, the elite of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth -- one of the largest countries in Europe at the time that stretched from the Baltic to the Black Seas -- was marked by a heightened theatricality of public and private lives. Yet in the Commonwealth, the Renaissance love for theater and spectacle found its expression in the eccentric marriage of European antiquity with the geographical and cultural diversity of the vast country. Hence, the local theatrical rituals "exhibited typical Polish traits despite being founded on a common European practice which derived from ancient Greek and Roman tradition, later enriched by Roman Catholic liturgy and the ceremonies displayed in the courts of feudal monarchs throughout medieval Europe, as well as by some Oriental influences."22 It was through these lavish public and private representational fusions that Sarmatia passed from the "cartographic Theatrum"23 of the Renaissance mind into the socio-political stage of the Baroque age.

Sarmatism resulted from a creative fusion of an elite form of regional patriotism with the scholarly rediscovery of the ancient Greek and Roman maps and geographical texts. Accordingly, Sarmatism symbiotically united the contemporary political and social desires of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility with general (western) European cultural and intellectual trends. Through this political-intellectual union, Sarmatism literally connected the geopolitical landscape of pre-Baroque Europe to classical geography:

[Sarmatism] had its roots in the sixteenth-century Polish culture, it flourished especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Sarmatism was a unique variation of what might be called Renaissance national self-definition. In the Renaissance spirit of a return to sources, the peoples of Europe searched for or created their own (mythic) origins. Sarmatism expressed for the Poles the idea that like other European nations they too had their origins in the peoples discussed by the authors of antiquity, but their ancestors were even older than some of those claimed by many other Europeans. For the Poles identified

themselves geographically with the eastern region of the continent, and hence with its people (who of course had been described in antiquity at best in a vague and quasi-mythical way), the Sarmatians, who had been mentioned for example by the Greek historian Herodotus. They thought their ancestors had come from the Black Sea region, and taken over the territories between the Vistula and the Dnieper rivers.\textsuperscript{24}

Sarmatism was also in part an outcome of a peculiar relationship between the geographical nexus of Baroque culture and the geopolitical centrality of Poland-Lithuania. Baroque emerged in the south of Europe: Rome was its capital. But within a few decades, this new artistic style captured most of Europe. In the north-central parts of Europe, the geographical dispersion of Baroque sensualities followed the jagged military movements of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), which endlessly pushed massive armies across their national frontiers and contributed to the unparalleled demographical catastrophe of the region. Some parts of the continent lost more than half of their population.\textsuperscript{25} In Poland-Lithuania, however, the Thirty Years War was followed by what later historians called the Deluge (1648-1667), a period marked by a cycle of massive foreign invasions, from the Swedes to Chmielnicki's Cossacks and from the Ottomans to Muscovites. Both demographically and geopolitically, the Commonwealth never truly recovered from this upswing of war and mass death.

The Baroque aesthetic synthesis of splendor and ruin, best exemplified in the celebratory and/or rhetorical elaborations of funerary processions and architecture, provided the most reasonable answer to the seemingly senseless succession of plundering armies, for amidst this commonplace routine of victories and defeats, liberations and conquests, and life and death, the perceptual distance between beauty and decay was completely erased. Numerous foreign glories brought national catastrophes to Lithuania, but the military destruction of the country was often followed by the impulsive rebuilding of its urban relics. Churches were the first to be rebuilt, since they could serve both as monumental tokens of thanksgiving and elaborate spaces for holding crypts and tombs of the local elite. In both instances often in parallel, a transitory moment was captured through an architectural spectacle. Most churches in Lithuania, and especially Vilnius, were built during the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries in the variously interpreted

\textsuperscript{25} On the demographical effect of the Thirty Years War, hunger and diseases, see Thomas Munck, \textit{Seventeenth Century Europe: 1598-1700} (London: Macmillan, 1990), 81-108.
Baroque style, and while there are some other historical reasons for this temporal and aesthetic concentration of regional ecclesiastical architecture, war and destruction were paradoxically the leading causes behind this massive boom in church construction.  

Under such local circumstances, the cultural orientation of Baroque towards the centre of the Catholic world, Rome, proved to be quite popular in Poland-Lithuania, which, since the fall of Constantinople in the fifteenth century, acquired the title of the antemurale christianitatis, the bulwark of Christendom. The idea of the Commonwealth as being a defending fortress of Europe had been a normative representational form for some time:

In 1573, in Paris, when a Triumphal Arch was raised in honour of Henry Valois’s election to the Polish throne, the inscription read: POLONIAE TOTIUS EUROPAE ADVERSUS BARBARORUM NATIONUM ... FIRMISSIMO PROPUGNACULLO (To Poland, Most Steadfast Fortress for the whole of Europe against the barbarian peoples). Thirty years later, Sully preparing his Grand Design for the regeneration of European unity, described Poland as the ‘boulevard et rampart’.  

At the same time as the European maritime powers were more aggressively venturing into the further reaches of the ocean, Europe’s eastern flank was persistently invaded on land by non-Christian (or non-western European and ‘foreign’) forces, such as the Ottomans, Muscovites, Cossacks, etc. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the Commonwealth was already a ruined fortress: it could never defend its own borders, not to mention the imaginary or geopolitically constructed boundaries of Europe. Hence the country’s offensive strength more and more depended on its aesthetic orientations rather than its military potentials.

In the post-Trentine Europe, especially after the success of the counter-reformation forces in east-central Europe after the Thirty Years War, the ruling elite of Poland-Lithuania firmly allied itself with Rome and other centres of Catholic civilization -- Spain, Austria and especially France. The expressive and often overconfident Baroque of counter-reformational Catholicism became the country’s insignia, its aesthetic sign of ‘geopolitical’ belonging and religious loyalty. However, the aesthetic adherence to the principle of Roman Baroque positioned the Commonwealth -- especially its Lithuanian part, which was almost fully encircled by Protestant and Russian Orthodox lands -- on the geographical and intellectual periphery. The country once again became a frontier territory, a far-flung

27 Davies, God’s Playground, 159.
appendix of the Catholic world. In this sense, the cultural and religious conditions of Lithuania resembled the situation in the Spanish, Portuguese and French overseas colonies where Baroque aesthetics were initially imposed or introduced through extensive Catholic missionary, mostly Jesuit, activities.  

Roman Mannerism, which largely was brought to Poland-Lithuania through the rapidly expanding network of Jesuit seminaries, collegiums, schools and monasteries at the end of the seventeenth century, firstly familiarized the local elite and to a lesser extent other (lower) social classes with the rhetorical rather than architectural or artistic gestures of the early Baroque. Nonetheless, mass preaching, church sermons and public (theatrical) presentations in various biblical and secular scenes (a cultural novelty in the region) were soon followed by monumental alteration of the architectural landscape. The first Baroque churches were commissioned by two active missionary and pedagogical organizations: the Jesuit Order and the newly created Uniate (Greek Catholic) Church. (The Uniate Church was established in 1604 in the Lithuanian (Byelorussian) town of Brest.) And with the help of extensive funding and social patronage of the local elite, the Roman artistic style was quickly acclimatized to the harsher ‘Sarmatian’ climes.

While the Polish-Lithuanian ruling and religious elite accepted Baroque as a cultural hallmark of their European (Catholic) identity, the region continued to be strongly influenced and shaped by other traditions that came from an extremely diverse spectrum of geographical, historical and religious universes, such as Byzantium, Muscovy, the Cossack lands of the Ukraine, Tartar Crimea, the Ottoman empire, Hungary and Transylvania, the Protestant states of northern Europe, and Ashkenazi Judaism. Hence, from the beginning of its stylistic appearance, Baroque in Lithuania acquired strong instructive and moral tendencies: it meant both to lure and reform the diverse and, in the eyes of the Catholic Church, straying local population. Still, while Baroque aesthetics were initially an offensive incursion into local ethno-religious terrain, they soon became a

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defensive structure, an artistic rampart that reassured the Commonwealth’s honorary status within Catholic Europe.

Despite the somewhat doctrinal imposition of Baroque, local interpretations of this ‘foreign’ style managed quite successfully to mold most of the diverse cultural and religious expressions of the region into an expressive artistic lexicon. Yet, more importantly, by the time Baroque became an accepted artistic mode across Europe, its Polish-Lithuanian vernacular became a hallmark of Sarmatism. Hence, Sarmatia, at least among its foreign, that is western European, visitors, evoked a simultaneous feeling of familiarity and strangeness. The country exhibited familiar architectural structures and artistic sensibilities, but it also displayed exotic, foreign elements. This amalgamated cultural nature of Sarmatia or Sarmatism could not go unnoticed by western European, especially Protestant German, commentators who initiated a discourse about the presumably ambiguous spatial location of the Commonwealth. The sixteenth century was marked by a surge in the number of German language (academic and popular) publications concerning the geographical, and hence cultural, character of Sarmatia. This rather specific discourse could be summarized by a rhetorical question that was often implicitly posed by pundits and travelers alike: “Sarmatia Europiana oder Sarmatia Asiana?”

As a cultural expression, Sarmatism reached its heights at the end of the seventeenth century; more precisely, it corresponded with the glorious delivery of Vienna from the Turkish siege by the Polish-Lithuanian forces in 1683. Yet, for the Commonwealth, the political spoils of the victory were short lived, because the country’s prestige in Europe had been already seriously damaged by a series of military defeats and debilitating social, economic and natural disasters. Thus, paradoxically, after one of the most significant victories in the centuries long struggle of the European Christian states with the Ottomans, having “lost all hope of salvation, Polish society turned in on itself and, bewitched by the imaginary ideals of ‘Old Sarmatia’, began to lose sight of elementary realities.”

Subsequently, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, during the so-called Saxon era (1679-1763), when the Commonwealth was ruled by two foreign monarchs (the electors of

31 Davies, God’s Playground, 367.
Saxony), Sarmatism acquired its explicit qualities of nostalgic inwardness and sentimental isolationism.

The unforeseeable result of this deceitful seclusion -- after all, the country continued to be occupied and plundered by various foreign (Swedish, Russian, Saxon, etc.) armies -- was the creation of a cultural and architectural opulence unmatched in the history of the Commonwealth. While the "economy stagnated" and "towns shrank [...] the opera and theatre flourished. The parks, the architecture, and the music were superb. All the arts found ample patronage." Yet, below this aristocratic cosmopolitan affluence and geopolitical indifference, there were some aesthetic attempts to reconcile the ruinous state of the country with the notorious provincial traditionalism of local nobility. As a result, "Polish Sarmatism, the characteristic style of the Saxon era, wallowed in the sentimentality of the Republic’s alleged glories and achievements, and is generally thought to have little literary or artistic merit. Allied to the fashion for oriental dress and decoration, it reinforced the conservative tendencies of the Szlachta [the nobility] and the belief in the superiority of their 'Golden Freedom' and their noble culture."

By the time of enlightenment absolutism -- the middle of the eighteenth century -- Sarmatism turned into a twofold structure. On the surface, it displayed eccentric features of crafty Rococo splendor and vitality, but underneath this visual grandeur, there was a somewhat melancholic awareness of inevitable loss and decay. Indeed, the catastrophic outlook on the world and the anxious awaiting of an immanent collapse became the two ironic cultural talismans that kept Sarmatia alive. Sarmatism was not so much about mobility, but about stability, and at the time when there was nothing secure in Poland-Lithuania, the idea of Sarmatia (just like the notion of Arcadia) provided an experience of earthly permanence. In a truly Baroque fashion, Sarmatism seemed to honor the repetitive constancy of change during which birth and death, restoration and decay, and memory and oblivion are united in a blissful moment of passion.

Looking back from the contemporary perspective of the cultural and/or political irrelevance of Sarmatism, it is easy to forget that this semi-mythical milieu was an

32 Ibid., 508.
expression of a very strong 'national' identity united through some social bonds and territorial loyalties. Sarmatia, despite its fluid historical and vaporous geographical nature, was not a vacuous space: it was filled with an unfolding array of people, objects and gestures that visibly demarcated its cultural and even political dimensions. But while Sarmatism mapped this lost country through specific aesthetic characteristics, the spatial boundaries of Sarmatia have been shrouded in mythological obscurity.

Ptolemy was the 'cartographic' godfather of Sarmatia, and because of his reputation, the country was often outlined in various maps of Europe. Yet, despite this early cartographic introduction, Sarmatia was not an essential element of the Baroque mapping of the world. In comparison with other European geographical entities, such as France, Spain, England, Scandinavia and even Germany, Italy, Turkey and Russia, Sarmatia made only occasional appearances on the cartographic and/or illustrative representations of the continent. Furthermore, its exact location was never clearly defined: sometimes, it appeared somewhere between the Holy Roman Empire, Russian (Muscovite), and Ottoman domains, and sometimes, it was bounded only by the Baltic and Black Seas. On some rare occasions, it was more clearly identified with the political boundaries of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Yet even though Sarmatia habitually eluded maps, its history, its military glories and cultural accomplishments were often praised in (local) Latin and/or Polish literature.

Foreign experts, unenthusiastic about the country's achievements, studied Sarmatia for different reasons. It became a subject of investigation for some of the most illustrious devotees of the Enlightenment. Voltaire in his work on Charles XII, the Swedish king who, in 1709, literally lost his Baltic empire in a battle over the control of Sarmatia, tried to shine the light on spatial and historical incongruities that for centuries had plagued the country. On the other hand, Rousseau, in his study of Poland, attempted to rescue Sarmatia from its impending geopolitical demise by celebrating the political values and military courage of its principal inhabitants -- the Polish-Lithuanian nobility.34

Although the original Sarmatians, like the Goths, Vandals and Huns, had left the space of Europe a long time ago, their blood and heritage were thought to have created a distinct social-cultural milieu of the Polish szlachta (nobility). Accordingly, one could find

34 For more on the difference between Voltaire and Rousseau's views on the historical outlook and future prospects of the Polish-Lithuanian 'Sarmatism', see Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe.
Sarmatian manners and traditions only among this most powerful social and political estate of Poland-Lithuania. The szlachta wore specific Sarmatian garments\textsuperscript{35}, followed unique Sarmatian social and religious practices, and even suffered from bizarre local medical pathology, explicitly identified in Latin as plica Polonica. Like Sarmatia, this disease, which afflicted all classes of people, was not bounded with any political boundaries, and was noticeably encountered not only in Poland, but also “Hungary, Tartary, and several adjacent nations.”\textsuperscript{36} Moreover, its ‘genetic’ origins were often traced from “the Scythian style of Polish barbering.”\textsuperscript{37} Still, because Sarmatia existed only as an historical expression or vague cartographic gesture -- its materiality was expressed through political symbols, cultural signs and social habits rather than through any national and linguistic borders. Consequently, while the country possessed a visible culture, it didn’t have its own (Sarmatian, or for that matter, Scythian) language or a capital city. It was nomadic and fixed at the same time. This roaming land, so to speak, mutated and rambled along the social and ‘national’ genesis of the Sarmatian people: from the culturally inarticulate and ‘forgotten’ tribal territory (there were no visible -- for instance, architectural or literary-- relics left from the ‘original’ Sarmatians), it almost spontaneously evolved into a noticeable and active socio-cultural phenomenon.

This indeterminate geo/cultural location of Sarmatia naturally provoked contradictory responses. As a rule, most nominal residents of Sarmatia, that is the members of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility, intuitively knew the geographical extent and ethnographic limits of their country. Some of them presumably could even trace their family ancestry from several identifiable ancient Sarmatian clans. Of course, it was based on an illusionary genealogy, but in terms of its narrative constructions, it was no different than any of the other imaginary genealogies of European elite families. Furthermore, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Polish and Lithuanian szlachta very clearly

\textsuperscript{35} For more information on the Sarmatian style, see Marija Matusakaite, Apranga XVI-XVIII a. Lietuvoje (Vilnius: Aidai, 2003), 95-222; also Gražina Marija Martinaitienė, “At the crossings of western and eastern cultures: the contush sashes” in Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės barokas: formos, įtakos, kryptys, Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis 21 (2001), 167-175.

\textsuperscript{36} Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe, 30.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid. Scythians, who in ancient times inhabited the same territory as the elusive Sarmatians, were also sometimes seen as the prehistorical ancestors of the Polish nobility. In fact, among some western European and even local commentators the terms Scythians and Sarmatians were occasionally used as synonyms or, more often, as geographically and historically related ‘national’ categories.
understood their own ‘national’ exclusivity which was primarily framed through the set of practically unrestricted social and political rights, known collectively as the “Golden Freedom” of the nobility. These rights, explicitly outlined in every social contract between a newly elected ruler of the Commonwealth and the local nobility, set the szlachta apart from the nobility of all neighboring states, be it Prussia, Russia, Austria or the Ottoman empire. However, these privileges included such personal liberties and communal duties -- the most important of them being the right of resistance to any centralizing authority and the principle of government by consent -- that to many foreigners, especially the “observers in the age of Enlightenment, Polish attitudes were reminiscent of those savage medieval barons.”

Although in principle Polish-Lithuanian nobles had a right, which later became almost a duty, to rebel against oppressive institutions and mechanisms of the state, such as heavy taxation, monarchical absolutism or religious intolerance, in practice, these rights led to a certain degree of political chaos and social confusion. Despite its collective appeal, the “Golden Freedom” often served individual needs, and there was little of either political consent or social solidarity among the nobles of the Commonwealth. There was, so to speak, no visible national unity among the elite of Poland-Lithuania.

In addition, the supreme and unchallenged political position of the nobility perpetuated oppressive social structures that in the eyes of foreigners kept most of the local population in a permanent state of enslavement. A noble man (and on some occasion a noble woman) was an absolute ruler over his domain and a master over his children, servants and very often numerous serfs. Almost every noble household existed as a miniature absolutist court (some of them, however, involved hundreds of people) that often led to social despotism and nepotism. In this sense, the enlightened western European travelers saw very little difference between the socio-cultural practices of the Polish szlachta, Russian boyars or Ottoman pashas. In the Commonwealth, feudal practices seemingly coexisted side-by-side with modern western European social inventions, and the royal court in Warsaw -- the capital of Poland-Lithuania -- as much as the imperial court in Saint Petersburg or seraglio in Constantinople evoked a kaleidoscopic view of past centuries and other continents. (Even the Viennese court for some Frenchmen or

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38 Davies, God’s Playground, 371.
Englishmen appeared as a theatrical tableau of half-Oriental and half-European costumes and peoples.)

In 1784, the French count de Segur, for instance, narrated the road from Berlin to Warsaw as an ethnographical journey in time where “everything makes one think one has been moved back ten centuries, and that one finds oneself amid hordes of Huns, Scythians, Veneti, Slavs, and Sarmatians.” The count experienced Warsaw as a place being located “at the extremity of the world” where a passing observer was greeted with a “sort of palace of which one half shined with noble elegance while the other was only a mass of debris and ruins, the sad remains of a fire.” A few months later, Segur described Saint Petersburg in a similar fashion. The Russian imperial capital was a spatial mélange that “strikes the spirit with a double astonishment; there are united the age of barbarism and that of civilization, the tenth and the eighteenth centuries, the manners of Asia and those of Europe, coarse Scythians and polished Europeans, a brilliant, proud nobility, and a people plunged in servitude.” Here again, but perhaps more strikingly than in Poland, appears “before your eyes those Scythians, Dacians, Roxolans, Goths, once the terror of the Roman world. All these demi-savage figures that one has seen in Rome on the bas-relief of Trajan’s column seem to be reborn and become animated before your gaze.” And in southern edges of the expanding Russian empire, somewhere in the region of the lower Dnieper River -- the assumed original homeland of ancient Sarmatians -- on his way from Saint Petersburg to the Crimea, which was just recently won by the tsarina from the Ottomans, Segur again encountered a parade of centuries and peoples. “It was,” recalled the count “like a magic theatre where there seemed to be combined and confused antiquity and modern times, civilization and barbarism, finally the most piquant contrast of the most diverse and contrary manners, figures, and costumes.”

In the eyes of western European cartographers and travelers, this vast territory that stretched south from the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea to the northern coastline of the Black Sea and east from the Vistula and Danube Rivers all the way to the Volga and

39 See Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe, 114.
40 Louis-Phillipe comte de Séguir, Mémoires, souvenirs, et anecdotes, par le comte de Séguir, vol.1, as quoted in Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe, 19.
41 Ibid., 20.
42 Ibid., 22.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 130.
beyond it was often identified as Sarmatia. The region encompassed several (expanding and/or shrinking) political bodies. But while unclear and changing national borders added to the general feeling of geographical confusion, the most bewildering aspect of Sarmatia was its temporal disharmony. Sarmatia appeared as both a contemporary and ancient space, and in this sense, it was a paradoxical place of continuous discontinuity, a land of indecisive (historical) erasures and imprecise (modern) inscriptions. In short, it was a palimpsest.

Ancient Sarmatia was understood to be a country inhabited by the warrior Sarmatian people -- the anthropological nemesis of the civilized peoples (the Greeks, Persians, Carthaginians, and especially, Romans, etc.) who, like a good dozen other nomadic tribes, searched for a 'perfect' homeland. Despite some unspecific evidences of their existence, even the most knowledgeable seventeenth-eighteenth European geographers and historians could not trace a direct genealogical link between the Sarmatians and Polish nobility. Hence, most intellectuals of the time preferred to refer to the Sarmatian practices, habits, fashions, diseases, government and culture -- or Sarmatism -- rather than to a specific group of Sarmatian people. Obviously, the Sarmatian social, cultural and physical practices could not exist without the people who practiced them, that is, without the Polish-Lithuanian nobility. Yet rarely was the 'national' identity of the Polish nobles exclusively equated with ancient Sarmatians. In this sense, Sarmatian identity delineated much greater geographical and ethnographic possibilities which could not be simply encompassed by the Polish-speaking nobility, and western European commentaries invariably banded Hungarians, Cossacks, Tartars, Russians and many other ethno-linguistic groups of eastern Europe under Sarmatian standards. In other words, like Scythians, Khazars or Mongols, Sarmatians were defined by their enigmatic cultural, linguistic and racial impenetrability.

The Polish and Lithuanian nobilities also envisioned Sarmatia as palimpsest, only in their case, the stress was on the narrative -- that is, genealogical and cryptographic -- continuity of the Sarmatian tribe. In both cases, the palimpsestic image of Sarmatia, of course, fit very well within an elaborate, manifold and theatrical Baroque imagination which freely mixed ancient epics, biblical motifs, exotic sites, fantastic motifs and contemporary European political events into an unfolding spatial drama. Still, despite the geographical proximity and potential visual/aesthetic possibilities, for the most part, the
Sarmatian theme remained peripheral to the descriptive sensibilities of (western) European Baroque culture. And not unlike in ancient Greek or Roman maps, the proponents of the French, Italian, Spanish, English or German Baroque culture located Sarmatia at its narrative margins. As a ‘geographical’ artistic topic, Sarmatia never acquired a broad public popularity: it could never compete with the more ‘dramatic’ images of the Americas, China, the Ottoman world or even Russia. So, for instance, there are no known Baroque operas including Sarmatian motifs and there are no famous plays about Sarmatia or its inhabitants.

However, the geographical margins of the Commonwealth were extremely important sources of Sarmatism. Since the sixteenth century:

Extensive contact with the Turkish Empire lent visual and artistic distinctiveness to Polish-Lithuanian nobles who collected and utilized opulent Turkish caftans, carpets, and jewel-inlaid weapons. Some shaved their heads, leaving only a Turkish-style scalp lock. Noble manners were effusive. A lesser noble showed his subordination to a magnate or other patron by kissing his hands, chest, stomach, knees, or feet. Some occasions demanded prostration on the floor. A superior might hug the head of a favored subordinate at his departure; children kissed their parent’s feet when leaving or returning home, or when asking important favors such as permission to marry. Sons knelt on one knee before either parent; daughters knelt on both knees. Sarmatians cried in public to express grief or joy. For example, King Jan Kazimierz cried at the news of a military victory until ‘tears as big as peas poured down his cheeks,’ according to the memoirist Jan Pasek. Deputies wore swords in parliament and demonstrated their approval by throwing their hats in the air or their opposition by literally cutting up proposed legislation. The Roman Catholic Church fostered emotive customs, sometimes borrowed from the Orthodox Church, such as sighing, crying, and groaning at the mention of Christ and the Virgin Mary, or even at a pious phrase. During Mass, participants beat their face, forehead, cheeks, and chest, and banged their heads against the earth when the celebrant held the host aloft. Flagellation was a Good Friday custom followed by both greater and lesser nobles. Other ascetic practices included prostration, standing in cruciform position for long periods, and attending Mass in full armor.45

These daily rituals, official ceremonies, habitual gestures and oratorical diatribes kept the Sarmatian nation of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility separate not only from other surrounding nations, such as Saxons, Prussians, Swedes and Russians, but also kept them apart from the vast majority of the country’s inhabitants, the peasants and townspeople. And while other lower social classes might have attempted to acculturate some features of Sarmatism, Sarmatia essentially belonged to the nobility.

45 Stone, The Polish-Lithuanian State, 213.
Arguably, Sarmatism was a modern phenomenon for its national distinctiveness heavily relied on a cultural uniformity of an imagined coherence of a diverse ethno-social community. The nobility comprised about ten percent of the total population of Poland-Lithuania -- and it was probably the largest and most privileged noble class in Europe. (In most western European countries, the nobility consisted of fewer than five percent of the population.) On the other hand, the nobility of the Commonwealth was neither culturally, linguistically and/or economically homogenous: it comprised families of Polish, Lithuanian, Ruthenian, Russian, Tartar, German and some other, foreign, origins. It also included adherents of Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Uniate and even Muslim religions. Among the nobles, there were people of various financial means, from exceptionally wealthy magnates to the extremely poor landless szlachta. Despite these differences, the noble families were all united under a public spectrum of political equality and social brotherhood. Sarmatism not only framed this diverse body through specific political practices, but also served as a cultural thread that connected this extensive and dispersed social body. During various historical periods, for instance, Sarmatism was as popular among the Protestant German nobles of Royal Prussia as it was among the Orthodox nobles of White Ruthenia. In short, Sarmatism provided a cultural, aesthetic scaffolding that, at least for some time, allowed the Commonwealth to function as a coherent political and even ethnological reality.  

Obviously, the everyday practice of Sarmatism celebrated and empowered the local nobility. It also acquired very strong messianic tendencies. The Polish-Lithuanian nobles were absolutely convinced that they lived in the best society in the world and they attributed this achievement to the Sarmatian origins of their Commonwealth. It was widely believed that Sarmatia reached its golden age in the sixteenth century, at the time of the Lublin Union which in 1569 created the confederate republic of the Polish and Lithuanian nobilities. Hence, in many ways, the nobility’s “resistance to reform came from love of liberty and xenophobia.” As a result of these anarchical and chauvinistic affinities, Sarmatism came under increased pressure from the enlightened proponents of ‘cosmopolitan’ universalism who widely ridiculed and fought against any signs of provincial inwardness and self-content.

In the eyes of many western European historians, travelers and philosophers, politically Sarmatism was expressed in the notoriously dysfunctional freedom of Polish

46 See Vaišvilaitė, Baroko pradžia Lietuvoje, 16-18.
nobility, which more than once led to administrative decentralization and political chaos. This combination of two socially incongruous elements -- stagnation and anarchy -- made Poland-Lithuania look like an ungovernable frontier country. For this reason, the idea of Sarmatia usually invoked a violent and volatile place. Paradoxically, the image of Poland-Lithuania was bruised not so much by its internal violence (there was plenty of it in all parts of Europe), but by its hazardous or ‘terminal’ geographical location: numerous European armies and dynastic fortunes were lost in Sarmatia. On the other hand, the country, especially its northern, eastern and southern borderlands, came to be seen as a prized religious and/or dynastic trophy that could assure a significant ideological prestige and/or geopolitical hegemony over Europe. Hence, the Swedish Vasas, Turkish Ottomans, Austrian Habsburgs, French Bourbons, Russian Romanovs, Prussian Hohenzollerns and other less significant princely families were all fighting for political control of Sarmatia.

Furthermore, while it was widely acknowledged that Sarmatia implied a spatial and cultural frontier, it was not clear what lands, whose territories and histories it (dis)connected. In fact, looking at some of the seventeenth century cartographic imprints of Sarmatia on the maps of Europe one can get the impression that this vast country was an entirely separate geographical entity, an undersized land-locked continent with its own unique ethnographical universe. Therefore, instead of imagining Sarmatia as a frontier-land that separates different societies, it was equally possible to see the country as a unique civilization exhibiting signs of cultural and natural completeness. Before the ‘precise’ cartographic articulation of Europe, Sarmatian distinctiveness posed no geographical problems, but at the beginning of the eighteenth century when the boundaries of Europe were stretched to the Ural and Caucasus Mountains, Sarmatia literally became positioned at the centre of the continent.

Ironically, this cartographic centrality of Sarmatia, in many ways, pointed to the country’s geopolitical and intellectual deficiencies, for it ‘geographically’ delineated the region’s confusing spatiality. At the dawn of rationalized geography and linear historiography, Sarmatia could neither be included within the boundaries of ‘enlightened’ (north-western) Europe nor within the confines of the rapidly ‘westernized’ eastern part of the continent ruled by Catherine II, the ‘enlightened’ absolutist monarch of the Russian empire. Within such geo-social opposition, the Baroque localism of Sarmatia quickly became outmoded, and the social and cultural uncertainties of Sarmatia turned into an aesthetic and political embarrassment. From its towering superiority of ancient geography
Sarmatia was quickly downgraded to the status of a contemporary spatial anomaly. In the end, because of its association with the socially anarchical, politically expiring and culturally declining Polish-Lithuanian state, Sarmatia acquired extremely negative socio-political values and geographical meanings. Indeed, Sarmatia became a self-explanatory caricature that illustrated the illogical historical condition of the region. Voltaire for one permanently condemned Poland to the geographically absurd stage of a nonsensical “Gothico-Slavonic-Romano-Sarmatian government.”

The solution to this comical condition was found in a simple geographical coup d’état -- the irrational Sarmatia had to be literally dismembered, or detached from other logical European entities. In other words, it ought to leave the enlightened province of Europe and return to its mythological obscurity. In some ways, the triple partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth among Russia, Prussia and Austria (1772, 1793 and 1795) was not only justified as a geopolitical necessity, but also as an ethical and even philosophical step: the partitions were seen as the final erasure of the embarrassing Sarmatian legacy from the Enlightened map of Europe (Figure 1.3).

Without Poland-Lithuania, Europe lost the cultural and political ‘guardian’ of Sarmatia, and subsequently, this semi-real land of Baroque chorographical imagination lapsed into oblivion. The unwanted old-fashioned geographical crease of Europe was flattened out and the cartographic ambiguity of the piegare was replaced by the geopolitical confidence of the spiegare. Sarmatia’s cartographical (but not necessarily narrative) death at the turn of the nineteenth century paralleled the swift erasure of Rococo ideals and sensualities from the aesthetic maps of Europe. The country simply expired as a style or manner.

Baroque in many way combines “strangeness and novelty, contradiction, revolt, astonishment, bizarreness, grandeur: these are the notions that lie somewhere between an approximate concept of style and an attempt at a general description of a historical epoch, the state, politics, and all the collective and individual reality of a particular period in European history.”\(^{49}\) Demise and decay, of course, are integral parts of Baroque spiegamento for they introduce into the world a sense of endless unfolding -- every life

\(^{48}\) Quoted in Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe. 263.
fatally ends in death, yet the world does not end with death. The disintegration and
decomposition of reality do not imply simplicity and emptiness of the universe, and the
collapse of existing order does not provoke the establishment of a new system. In Baroque,
the ruin is a sign of resurrection and the corpse becomes a symbol of eternity. Accordingly,
the spiegamento is not about evolution or development, but about the exposure of the
infinite world. Through spiegamento, reality opens out as a sequence of passages which
constantly reframes visible into invisible.

It is not surprising then that by the time of the philosophical formulation of the
enlightened theory of a progressive future, the notion of Baroque spiegamento became
associated with the devalued alchemical knowledge of the world. Once the idea of changing
the physical world into a scientifically defined utopia became the dominant philosophical
and creative theme, the artistic desire of transforming reality into phantasmagoria became
ludicrous. Furthermore,

[the] Enlightenment mentality, as manifested in its analysis and criticism of the
arts, society, and religion, made it possible to separate what in the Baroque had
been perceived as united: art, society, morality, mores, in brief, the baroque
assumption of the conjunction of reality and appearance. The enlightened mind
penetrated appearances to reveal the fiction of baroque society, and so drew
distinctions between art and luxury, taste and fashion, morality and aesthetics,
subject and object. If for Shakespeare all the world was a stage, for Fontenelle
the universe was a stage to create illusions which the enlightened mind saw as
such because it knew how the stage machinery operated to produce those
illusions. A society built on the concept of art gave way to one constructed on
concepts derived from natural sciences.50

Among the international proponents of human progress, the apparent irrationalism
and defeatism of Sarmatism was seen as a cultural symptom of historical deviation and
political atrophy. In the end, its outmoded Baroque sensualities were no longer an aesthetic
matter, but a social and economic problem. Subsequently, Sarmatia, with its poorly
outlined geographical borders, was completely debased until, sometime around the turn of
the nineteenth century, it was reduced to a mere symbol of a national (Polish) stereotype.
And with the demise of Sarmatism the political folds and cultural creases of Europe were
flattened out, and the geographical ambiguity of the continent was finally resolved by
splitting it into two ‘logical’ sections: the ‘progressive’ West and ‘regressive’ East.

50 Remy G. Saisselin, The Enlightenment against Baroque: Economics and Aesthetics of the
When the term Baroque was first introduced in the middle of the eighteenth century in France, it carried extremely negative, if not derogatory, meanings. The *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1740) defined Baroque as something “irregular, bizarre, [and] uneven.” Therefore, once the neo-classical views and scientific (logical) ideas about the universe became more dominant among the intellectual and political elites of Europe in the second part of the eighteenth century, the unchartable Sarmatia became an unwanted socio-cultural and political phantom: a phantasmagoric relic of silly historical theories and ridiculous ethnographic amusements. As a chorographic invention of Baroque vision, Sarmatia was not clearly bounded by either time or space -- it was an unfolding spatial phenomenon. So while the country was assumed to possess a deep-seated civilization that entailed a whole stratum of cultural layers, it was certainly lacking concrete physical borders or well-delineated history. Sarmatia was porous, multiform and mobile, but it was also autonomous, free and original. The land of Sarmatia seemed to embody the highest spatial achievement of Baroque imagination: “the oscillation of parabola and ellipse.” Yet, for a rational and practical mind of the late Enlightenment period, it was easy to dismiss Sarmatia as a non-entity because its geographical presence had never been fully determined. At the time of renewed classicism and the imposition of a new imperial order in Europe, the notion of geographical autonomy and spatial unpredictability became obsolete and Sarmatia was buried alongside the politically dissolved Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Its unresolved mysteries or puzzling originalities, so to speak, were erased through a rational but often violent rearrangement of the historical chronologies and geographical charts of Europe.

Still, Sarmatia was not an easy province to forget, especially in Vilnius, the capital city of the political, social and cultural partner of the Polish kingdom, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Here, the oratorical Baroque gestures of Sarmatism were rather successfully assimilated into the new geopolitical and ideological realities of the post-Enlightenment Europe. In 1805, ten years after the partition of Poland-Lithuania, for instance, Paulus Tarenghi, a Catholic priest and professor of Latin literature at the *Imperiali Vilnensis Lyceo* (University of Vilnius), glorified the Russian imperial ‘patronage’ of the city and its university by invoking the ghost of Casimir Sarbievii, the most celebrated local and Roman

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Baroque poet and literary theoretician, who, in the first part of the sixteenth century, had received the title of poet laureate from the pope:

Manes Horati Sarmatici leves  
Altum seculro tollite verticem  
Vilnaeque fas vobis Lycei  
Cernere sit meliora fata.

Sed jam poetae vocibus exciti  
Manes resurgunt Sarbivii sacrum  
Templum stupentes quod Minervae  
Sarmaticaee dat habere genti

Custos Alexander, Pater, Arbiter  
Tutela praesens, et decus Imperi,  
Quo majus haud ullum teutur  
Attonito vagus orbis ore.

Mecumque gentis Sarmaticaee poli est  
Quidquid serenis arcibus additum,  
Dicum Alexandri triumphos,  
Dum geminant tibi, Vilna, plausus.

("Libri I ode XXXVII Ad manes Casimir Sarbievii")

Tarenghi commemorates the nationally subdued and politically expired Sarmatian spirit as a welcoming change. However, the poet-orator does not renounce Sarmatism -- on the contrary, he praises its most glorious son, poet Sarbievii. As a result of this ghostly evocation, Tarenghi establishes a positive link between the phantom, shadowy, unreal and immaterial existence of Sarmatia and the solid and effective Russian imperial rule of Lithuania. Alexander, the emperor of Russia, does not salvage the physical integrity of Sarmatia; instead, he upholds the intellectual honor of Vilnius. The old Sarmatia is dead, but from its cultural relics reemerges a new enlightened spirit of the imperial order.

53 Rise the Horatio of Sarmatia, the eminent bodiless soul from your grave; you will be allowed to see the joyous fate of the Lyceum. The ghost of the summoned poet Sarbivii rises from the grave and wonders at the Temple of Minerva that the Sarmatian tribe had just received from Alexander, father, arbitrator, protector and the pride of the Empire, the country that is the greatest in the entire world. All the Sarmatians in heaven who are now with me in the illustrious palace swear to Alexander's triumph and all Vilna greets him with ovals.

It is not known how the emperor responded to this rather flimsy poetic geo-cultural inversion. However, one of the closest personal and political confidants of the young tsar, Polish aristocrat Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, who also served as the imperial curator of the newly reorganized University of Vilnius/Wilno, clearly disliked the poetic resurrection of the Sarmatian ideology. In a letter to the rector of the University, Bishop Hieronim Stroynowski, he expressed his displeasure about the Latin lyrics of the Italian poet: "Fr Tarenghi's sonnet, composed for the Emperor, I have forwarded to His Excellency the Minister of Education. In this connection, however, I am prompted to think that our professors who possess varying aptitudes for creative literature might well turn their pens to an activity other than writing odes and sonnets, especially since in these latest writings Fr Tarenghi displays little in the way of talent and good taste." So as Sarmatia became an archaic, foreign concept in the post-enlightened milieu, even its metaphorical, ghostly presence within the imperial courts of Europe was considered to be a sign of a vulgar provincial taste.

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Figure 1.3. *A royal feast*, a caricature of the imperial partition of Poland-Lithuania. Author unknown, c. 1800. In the caricature, the Russian empress Catherine II, her minister N. Panin, the Austrian emperor Joseph II, and the Prussian king Friedrich II are portrayed beside the J. Kanter map of the Poland. **Source:** Danguolė Gudienė, ed. *Lithuania on the Map* (Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 1999), 71.
The landscape of Vilnius is not the curved landscape of Central Europe, but something quite different – unbridled and free, primeval and wild. (Jan Bulhak, c.1930)

Vilnius is a Baroque city. However, the Baroque generally requires space, distance, perspective; cities were already laid out along modern lines in that epoch. The Vilnius Baroque is a Baroque against a medieval background. The network of little streets is medieval: everything is crooked, crowded, entangled; above this labyrinth rise the mighty cupolas and towers of a totally different century. Nothing appears here in its totality: parts of churches, slanting walls, silhouettes sliced in half loom up around a corner; amid damp and dirty corridors the magnificent white bell tower of St. John’s suddenly shoots into the sky, or a small classical square opens up. The history and human relations of the city are equally tangled. (Venclova, 1979)

A basic feature of Vilnius is the play on various levels and at various elevations. The town is on hills and the architecture makes use of this position. The rhythmic play of architectural forms makes the rise not only one behind the other but also one above the other…the different heights of pieces of architecture fill the variety of their forms. This variety is greatly enhanced by contrasting directions...facades make up light, dignified planes that look as if they have grown up against each other, hiding behind each other’s backs. Such chords of vertical planes ring from one end to the other of the town. (M. Vorobjovas, 1940)

56 Venclova in Milosz, Beginning with My Streets, 38.
57 Mikalojus Vorobjovas as quoted in Markevičienė, “Genius Loci of Vilnius,” 118.
Figure 1.4: Vilna in Sarmatia. Map of central Europe by S. Münster from his Cosmographia Universalis, 1572. Source: Danguolė Gudienė, ed. Lithuania on the Map (Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 1999), 26.
Although a monarchical marriage united the Kingdom of Poland and Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1386, only with the signing of the Lublin Union in 1569 did the two states became permanently joined in a confederate structure of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Polish and Lithuanian nobilities originated from very different political, linguistic and religious backgrounds. The Polish nobility was more ethnically homogeneous and its members possessed many more political rights that their Lithuanian counterparts. In contrast, the Lithuanian nobility comprised a wide range of feudal vassals of the Grand Duke and among its members were included the families of the (formally pagan) Lithuanian knights, the Greek Orthodox Ruthenian boyars, some Russian patricians and a handful of Tartar khans. This union of the two different nations -- the two dissimilar nobilities -- however, existed with various degrees of political success until the final dissolution of the Commonwealth in 1795.

The official state language of the Lithuanian grand duchy was Ruthenian (a precursor of the modern day Byelorussian and Ukrainian languages), but, by the time of the union with Poland, many local nobles had probably already mastered some form of Polish. Overall, the linguistic situation in the grand duchy was perplexing; the majority of its population most likely used some form of Slavic (Ruthenian) language, except for the socially but not culturally domineering Lithuanian minority. There were also three major Christian religious communities in the dukedom: the Catholic, Greek Orthodox and various Protestant (Lutheran, Calvinist, Arian, etc.) congregations. In 1596, to this tripartite division of the Christian population, a fourth element was added -- the Uniate Church which attempted to resolve the dogmatic and liturgical schism between the Greek and Latin churches. In addition, there was also a large community of Ashkenazi Jews who practiced the rabbinical form of Judaism and a smaller community of Karaites who followed the Babylonian version of the same religion.

While most of the Lithuanian Jewry came from western Europe via Poland and spoke Yiddish, the Karaites who were brought to Lithuania by the grand dukes in the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries from their Crimean homeland spoke a Turkic language and

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used the Arabic alphabet for the Hebrew scriptures. (The Karaites were most likely the progenitors of the Khazars, the semi-nomadic people who accepted Judaism in the ninth century.) Some parts of the Lithuanian realm, especially around its capital city, were also settled by the Muslim Tartars who were also invited from the Crimea to settle in Lithuania. (In addition, the Lithuanian territory that was allocated to Poland by the Lublin Union -- the southern Ukraine -- was inhabited by the Orthodox Cossacks.)

At the end of the Renaissance period, Lithuania, which before the Lublin Union was comprised of the territories of (contemporary) Lithuania, Belarus and the Ukraine, extending from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, was probably one of the largest and one of the most diverse political entities in Europe. In the north, the grand duchy neighboured the strongholds of Lutheranism: Sweden and Prussia. In the east, the dukedom’s frontier reached deep into the Russian Orthodox principality of Smolensk, and in the south, before the Lublin Union, Lithuania shared a boundary within the Muslim Crimean Khanate. (Under the Lublin Union agreement, Poland acquired the southern parts of Lithuania, which mostly included the territory of the contemporary Ukraine.) The country also encompassed many European geographical divisions, since it politically bounded the forested and marshy Baltic Sea region with the steppe-lands of the northern coast of the Black Sea. In addition, Lithuania’s recent pagan history (the Lithuania elite officially renounced paganism only in 1387 and some parts of the country were only baptized in the fifteenth century) provided an intriguing narrative terrain for fusing mythological tales of the ancient Greek and Rome with local geography and genealogy.

The capital of the grand duchy, Vilnius, although being situated at the northern edge of this vast country, encircled most of the geographical and historical diversity of the region. In the immediate environs of the city, the diverse communities of Christians, Jews, Karaites and Muslims lived in a close proximity to each other, and, because of trade, political and religious networks, this interdenominational cityscape also became the meeting ground for a whole array of languages: Lithuanian, Slavic (Polish, Ruthenian, Russian, Old (Church) Slavonic), Latin, German, Yiddish, Hebrew and Turkic.

Under the agreement of the Lublin Union, the heterogeneous Lithuanian nobility, whose rights were previously circumvented by its feudal duties to the grand duke, acquired the same political and social privileges as its Polish counterpart. According to the constitution of the Commonwealth, the two branches of the nobility established a fraternal
relationship based on equality and mutual support. Yet, in reality, the Lithuanian nobility, especially its upper crust -- a few dozen exceptionally wealthy and/or princely families -- was determined to keep a separate (Lithuanian) identity as a marker of its genealogical distinction. (Nominally speaking, there was no aristocracy in Poland and the law of the Commonwealth explicitly prohibited the royal granting of aristocratic titles.) Predictably, at the centre of this genealogical reassertion of a peculiar regional-social identity was the issue of an ancestral cultural heritage. While a vast majority of the Lithuanian nobility happily accepted the Sarmatism of the Polish nobility as a ‘standardized’ cultural marker of its social superiority, a number of the most powerful Lithuanian aristocratic families chose to resist the ‘Sarmatisation’ of their ancestry. Instead of tracing their family origins to the nomadic homeland of the Sarmatians, they looked to ancient patrician Rome as their ancestral patrimony.

In the sixteenth century, as a result of this heraldic and socio-political resistance, the upper nobility of Lithuania constructed elaborate personal genealogies that originated their family roots and social privileges from several mythological patricians of Rome, who had presumably migrated from their Mediterranea home to the northern shores of the known world and settled on the river banks of the Nemunas (Niemen or Memel) and Neris (Wilja or Vilia). Following the universal traditions of ascribing the origins of place-names to some legendary events and/or persons, the Lithuanian noble families charted their Roman genealogy by Latinizing their surnames and local toponymy. Hence, Vilnius was soon ‘discovered’ to be situated on the seven hills that correspond with the topographical features of Rome. The city also acquired its own Tusculanum estate, a northern relic of a magnificent ancient Roman villa mentioned in the classical Latin literature and widely known as Cicero’s Villa. In a similar fashion to the Romanization of the local world, one of the most splendid Baroque structures in the city -- the Saint Peter and Paul Church (1668-1676) -- was commissioned by Michael Casimir Pac, the governor of Vilnius and Hetman of the Grand Duchy, who dedicated the church to Peace (or *Pace* in Latin). Pac himself was buried under the threshold of the church covered by a nameless tombstone with a blunt inscription: *Hic iacet peccator* (A sinner rests here). But, in a typically Baroque way, his earthly post-mortem humility was meant to blossom into eschatological vanity, because Pac “found a way of perpetuating his name in another inscription above the balcony: *Regina*

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Paris fundo nos in pace (Queen of Peace, gives us courage in peace). It is a Baroque conceit: the words “Queen of Peace” can be interpreted as “Queen of Pac.” The coat-of-arms of the Pac family is set up above the entry.”62 Needless to say, Casimir Pac was deeply convinced of his family’s ancient Roman origins.

Moreover, the legendary origins of Vilnius were also interpreted in light of increased Latinization of local genealogical and topographical landscape and the founding myth of Vilnius became the most definite mark of the city’s Roman traces:

The year 1232 is considered the date of foundation of the city as a national capital, and Grand Duke Gediminas is considered its founder. That is the history, but more important is the myth; for Gediminas decided to build a city after the interpretation of his dream, in which he saw an iron wolf sitting on one of the hills of the future city and howling with the voice of a hundred wolves: the pagan high priest explained that the fame of the city which he was to found as his capital would spread as far as the voice of the miraculous wolf would reach. Interestingly, this myth (most likely Indo-European, perhaps a variation of the myth of the founding of Rome) was later accepted by the Christian nobility and then repeated in all chronicles and histories which followed.63

The Roman mythological ancestry was recalled not just for social and/or political reasons, but also for very specific cultural motivations. Since most of the Lithuanian nobility had no strong religious or historical affiliations with western Europe, it was often dismissed by its Polish brethren as being less culturally refined, politically loyal or militarily disciplined. From the Polish perspective, their regional and religious loyalties were suspected to be unreliable and even treacherous. In addition, during the pagan Lithuanian conversion to Christianity at the turn of the fifteenth century, many Lithuanian noble families were nominally adopted -- that is, given a coat of arms -- by several Polish noble clans. So, by tracing their ancestry to mythological Latin figures or by attributing Roman origins to their possessions, the Lithuanian nobles were able to ‘emancipate’ themselves from the ‘domestic’ genealogical hierarchy. More importantly, by allying themselves with the concrete historical and geographical site, Rome, rather than to the abstract and elusive tribe of Sarmatians, the Lithuanian upper nobility appeared to embody the best military and cultural traditions of Europe. Arguably, as much as Sarmitism was an expression of early form of (Polish) nationalism, Romanism was one of the first expressions of a (territorial) Lithuanian patriotism. Because the Latin origins of

63 Saulius Žukas, Lithuania: Past, Culture, Present (Vilnius: baltos lankos, 1999), 110.
the Lithuanian nobility were tied to a single Roman family-clan, this mythical genealogy also created a sense of historical unity and ‘national’ purity among the diverse local nobility.

The myth was supported by the idea of the linguistic affinity between the Latin/Italian and Lithuanian languages and the similarities between ancient Roman and pagan Lithuanian religions. *Lituania*, the Latin name of Lithuania, was traced from *l’Italia* and the name of Vilnius was originated from the name of a Roman warrior, *Villus* or *Villa*, who presumably led his clan from the Apennine peninsula to the southeastern littoral of the Baltic Sea. This legend was probably initiated or first recorded by the influential fifteenth century Polish chronicler, Jan Długosz (1415-1480) who nonetheless interpreted it in a historically negative light. Paradoxically, for Długosz, the Roman origins of Lithuanians were markers of their atavistic resistance to Christianity and their tribal loyalty to their unelected aristocratic rulers. (In Poland, the concept of a republic of nobility was already in place; in contrast, at that time, Lithuanian nobles had very few political, or for that matter, social rights, since their class privileges depended on their feudal obligations to the ruler.) Długosz’ views made a lasting impact on the Polish views on Lithuania, and in subsequent centuries, Lithuanian chroniclers attempted to rectify the detrimental side of the Roman myth. One of the Lithuanian historical writers was Mykolas Lietuvis (*Michalo Lituanus*), who in his Latin language tractate, *De moribus Tartarorum, Lituorum et Moschorum* [*The customs of Tartary, Lithuania and Muscovy*], first published in 1615 in the city of Basel, advocated a return of the Lithuanian nobility to their Roman origins. Mykolas Lietuvis, who was employed by one of the most illustrious Lithuanian aristocratic families, the Radvilos (Radziwills), argued for the ‘restoration’ of Latin language usage among the ruling elite of Lithuania. (The legal, official language of the grand duchy, at the time, was *Ruski*, the so-called Ruthenian (Slavic) chancellery language, while Polish became more and more socially accepted by the Lithuanian nobility after the Lublin Union.) Hence, he described the Latin genesis of the Lithuanian nobility as a genealogical counter-narrative to the increased cultural Polonization and, arguably, linguistic Slavonization of Lithuania.

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However, the Roman traditionalism of the Lithuanian nobility did not necessarily oppose the customs of Sarmatism, simply because a vast majority of the local nobility lacked financial resources and social means for the representational elaboration of the Latin genealogies. Romanism was reserved only for the upper crust of the nobility and only about a dozen families belonging to the magnate class were actively involved in the propagation of the Latin myth. In contrast, Sarmatism with its stress on everyday practices, domestic comforts and socio-political freedoms of the entire nobility had a much more widespread appeal to most Lithuanian nobles:

Following the Union of Lublin, the [Sarmatian] myth was gradually altered to embrace the non-Polish nobility in the Commonwealth. Any nobleman in the Commonwealth who defended the political liberties and privileges of his class was considered a Sarmatian. Out of this myth, or point of view, there arose a doctrine which, by the end of the sixteenth century, was an apologia for the political and social status quo: the Commonwealth’s class inequality were not merely a reality, but the “inevitable’ and rightful product of historical evolution since ancient times. Sarmatism became, in essence, the 'historical' documentation for the existence of the nobility and its political authority.66

In addition, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth “was, above all, a ‘Republic of the Gentry’ -- Polish, Lithuanian, Belorussian, and Ruthenian -- in which that large social class, amounting to over eight percent of the population enjoyed many political and economic rights in theory and practice.”67 Consequently, in Lithuania, especially among the ranks of the lesser and impoverished nobility, Sarmatism, because of its acculturating qualities, became strongly associated with the mixed Lithuanian-Ruthenian-Polish-Tartar identity of the country. Thus, while the Roman mythology found its way in a few culturally refined courts of Lithuanian princes, Sarmatism became a norm of a provincial manor life.

The evolution of cultural and social practices of Sarmatism coincided with a rapid personal and political assimilation of the Polish and Lithuanian nobilities. Hence, Sarmatism, so to speak, ‘organically’ annexed Lithuania by accommodating its cultural diversity. Although initially there might have been some resistance towards the intrusion of Sarmatism into Lithuania, at the time of the political death of the Commonwealth, the

67 Ibid., 210.
Sarmatian traditions were undeniably accepted as the most profound expressions of a stubborn Lithuanian localism.\(^{68}\)

While Sarmatism prospered in rural surroundings where the members of the lesser nobility lived, the Roman genealogy of the upper Lithuanian ‘aristocracy’ required urban space. If Sarmatism was about a cultural inclusion, then Romanism was about social exclusion and it could only become visible through elaborate productions of mass spectacle. It required the forms and expression of monumental architecture, theatrical performance and grand oratorical gestures. Sarmatism relied on an everyday participation of its advocates, but Romanism depended on a large audience. \(^{69}\)

The calculated ‘rediscovery’ of forgotten Roman ancestors was perpetuated mostly in Latin language literature, such as poetry and socio-historical treaties commissioned or supported by the Lithuanian magnates. It was a unique (regional) phenomenon, but its architectural manifestations, while differing little from the general aesthetic Baroque-ization of north-central Europe, which followed the artistic trends of Rome, also acquired specific local artistic expressions. Baroque came to Lithuania in three ‘geo-ideological’ forms. The influential Calvinist and Reformist families followed the aesthetic trends of the Protestant countries -- the Netherlands, England, Sweden and Prussia. The Protestant Baroque emphasized artistic sobriety and moral superiority. It displayed financial wealth and social power in an exhibitionary manner: a magnate’s palace had a large library and a cabinet of curiosities \((Kunstkammer)\) containing large quantities of books, maps, globes, western European pictures, Chinese silk prints, Persian miniatures and Russian icons as its ‘cultural’ epicentre. \(^{70}\) The Protestant families also supported large-scale publishing activities (the first Polish language Bible, for instance, was printed in the Lithuanian town of Brest, in 1563; it later became a vernacular standard for the Polish Catholic Bible.) With the cultural ascendancy of the French-influenced royal court in Warsaw, especially from

\(^{68}\) Vasiliauskas, “Antika ir Sarmatizmas,” 30-31.

\(^{69}\) For instance, one of the best aesthetic and functional examples of local Sarmatism was the manufacturing of richly ornate sashes in the (Ruthenian) town of Slutsk. These colourful sashes, famous across Poland-Lithuania, combined elaborate Ottoman designs with the simplicity of the local textile industry. They were an essential part of the ‘Oriental’ Sarmatian male dress and served as a fashionable statement of social and economic distinction for the nobility.

\(^{70}\) Vaišvilaitė, *Baroko pradžia Lietuvoje*, 16.
the time of king Jan Sobieski (1674-1696) until the reign of the last king of Poland, Stanislaw-August Poniatowski (1764-1795), French Baroque and Rococo trends also became more prominent among the Lithuanian magnates who often followed the fashions and manners of the court. Jan Sobieski, the 'liberator' of Vienna from the Ottomans oriented his court towards the French aristocratic culture, but the French influence was certainly increased by the intermarriage between the absolutist royal families of France and the elected monarchical families of Poland-Lithuania: Louis XV's wife was Maria Leczczynska, daughter of the deposed Polish king, Stanislaw Leszczynski (ruled from 1704-1710), who later settled in Lorraine, and Louis XV's son, Louis-Ferdinand married Marie-Joseph de Saxe, daughter of the Polish king, Augustus III (ruled 1733-1764).

However, most Lithuanian nobles tended to oppose the monarchical or palace culture that was heavily influenced by the successive royal courts of Versailles and Dresden, and instead of following the aesthetic trends of France or for that matter, Saxony, the Catholic magnates chose Rome as the centre of their cultural milieu. And with the ideological victory of the Counter-Reformation -- by the middle of the seventeenth century, the Protestant and Greek Orthodox nobles lost most of their political privileges and social power -- Italian Baroque, or at least its local interpretations, became an aesthetic norm in Lithuania. Of course, the localized Roman mythology added a certain biographical (genealogical) twist to the Lithuanian understanding and experience of Baroque, so this aesthetic style could be simultaneously celebrated as a communal and genealogical relationship to Rome.

To this Lithuanian cross-pollination of European Baroque aesthetics, a new local trend was added. The Uniate Church, which was established at the religious Union of Brest in 1604, explicitly fused Greek Orthodox liturgy with the Catholic dogma. It was officially known as "Greek-Catholic Confession of the Slavonic Rite." Baroque became the accepted and most celebrated cultural and architectural expression of the Uniate Church, because it articulated a novel and highly contested approach to the question of religious identity and political loyalty. Byzantium and Old Slavonic liturgy were the geographical and textual reference points for the Uniates, but their contemporary ideological orientation depended on the edicts and bullas issued by Catholic popes in Rome. Therefore, the local, that is, Sarmatian, form of Baroque, with its expressive fusion of different 'geographical'

71 Davies, God's Playground, 174.
styles and religious rituals, perfectly suited the aesthetic needs of the Uniate Church. Since Baroque aesthetics, for different reasons, appealed to every Christian denomination in Lithuania, it evolved as a multi-faced phenomenon: enveloping several competing religious and socio-cultural traditions. The patriotically inclined and ‘Romanized’ Lithuanian (Protestant) magnates and the ‘Sarmatian’ Ruthenian Orthodox nobility equally accepted Baroque as their ‘natural’ cultural style.  

Furthermore, through the Uniate Church, and hence through Vilnius, Mohylew, Kiew and other ecclesiastical centres of the Uniates, Baroque sensibilities seeped into the Russian Orthodox Church traditions in Muscovy. The Russian Baroque of the late seventeenth century -- early eighteenth century in part resulted from the antagonistic relationship between the Commonwealth and the state of Moscow. Polish-Lithuanian armies plundered Moscow in 1610 and again in 1618: they brought back to the Commonwealth many Orthodox Church relics and icons. Conversely, between 1655-1661, Muscovite forces ransacked Lithuania, including its capital, Vilnius. Russian military commanders ordered a desecration of many Catholic and Uniate churches, but arguably, in Vilnius, the members of the Muscovite nobility and Russian Orthodox elite, for the first time, encountered Baroque aesthetics in its all architectural splendor. In 1655, in Vilnius, the Russian tsar Alexei Mihailovich declared himself the grand duke of Lithuania, and the Muscovite administration stayed in the city for another six years. And while it is not clear how the Russian military and civilian stay in Vilnius influenced the cultural mindset of Moscow’s elite, it is well established that Baroque came to Russia through the “scene of constant wars and international diplomatic maneuverings, and of massive, virulent conflict between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, these frontiers were also, far more than anywhere else, the very corridors through which the new influences of the Western world flooded into Russia.”

Undeniably, Lithuania of the seventeenth century served as one of the key Baroque gateways into Russia.

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72 Vaišvilaitė, Baroko pradžia Lietuvoje, 18.
Figure 1.5: Vilnius Baroque. Frontispiece for the Eulogy to the Tyszkievicz family by D. Petzeld, 1649. Sources: Vladas Drėma, Dingės Vilnius/Lost Vilnius (Vilnius: Vaga, 1991), 57.
Figure 1.6: Vilnius’s ‘Roman’ Sarmatism. Portrait of Leo Sapiha (1557-1633), a patron of education and science, builder of Saint Michael Church in Vilnius (late 16th-17th century). Source: Danguolė Gudienė, ed. Vilnius in the Publications of Jan Kazimierz Wilczynski, Exhibition catalog (Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 2000), 103.
Vilnius was one of the most striking examples of the reverberating geographical spread of Baroque, especially its Roman, that is Catholic, version. The new style in the city was institutionalized by the Jesuit Order, which was invited to Lithuania to expand the rapidly shrinking Catholic church influence in 1569. The next year, the Jesuits opened their Collegium and in 1579, it was reformed into an Academy, thus creating the foundation of the University of Vilnius. Throughout the sixteenth century, Protestantism, especially its more radical streams, grouped together under the banner of Arians (Antitrinitarians, Unitarianism, Anabaptists, Theists, etc.), flourished in Lithuania. 75 Vilnius was, of course, if not a theological then certainly a ‘geographical’ and social centre of the extremely diverse Lithuanian Protestant community that was protected and supported by the most powerful noble families of the region. Overall, there was a phenomenal religious fluidity in Lithuania, as noble families and urban residents constantly changed their denominational allegiance (the serf-peasants, more or less, followed the theological lead of their masters.) Local Catholic and (Greek) Orthodox churches were definitely under threat, but religious tolerance, proclaimed by the Sejm and backed by the elected rulers of the Commonwealth, persisted for most of the sixteenth century. Religious tolerance extended to the linguistic pluralism of Vilnius: in 1553, Sigismund Augustus, the grand duke of Lithuania and king of Poland, ordered all municipal decrees to be publicly proclaimed in three languages -- Polish, Ruthenian and Lithuanian. The growing Jewish community of Vilnius also benefited from the general ‘liberalism’ of the era. In 1552, the Jews received various trade privileges from the grand duke and in 1573 a (new) Great Synagogue of Vilna was built.

The Jesuits of course were not content with the religious laxity and theological fluidity of Lithuania, and their arrival in its capital signaled a dramatic change not just in spiritual or social matters of the country, but also in the architectural outcomes of Vilnius cityscape. The Jesuit Order saw itself as a missionary organization: its first spiritual goal was to the salvation of non-Christians, non-believers or dissidents; its second, more politically oriented goal was the strengthening of Catholic church control over the local ruling elite. Hence, the Jesuits were most active in the ‘frontier’ regions: religiously contested territories, European overseas colonies and distant foreign domains. Lithuania,

although being neither a colony nor, for that matter, a completely unknown 'exotic' land (such as India, China and Japan) perfectly fitted the 'geo-theological' challenges of the Jesuit missionary evangelism. Here, the Jesuits confronted three main spiritual oppositions: the Protestantism, Greek Orthodoxy and paganism that persistently lingered among the rural Lithuanian population. (When in 1579, the pope sent a delegation to Samogitia, a region in western Lithuanian, to investigate local religious conditions, it was discovered that a large section of the Samogitians had never seen a Catholic priest in their lives, never went to the church and could neither recall what constitutes the Holy Trinity nor remember the name of the Lord. Instead, the local populace still worshiped snakes and various pagan deities.)

Hence, upon arrival to Lithuania, the Jesuits immediately established a three-front campaign that meant firstly a complete eradication of local 'heathen' practices, secondly, a weakening of the social and political power of the Protestants and, thirdly, attaching the followers of the Greek Orthodox church to the sphere of interests of the Roman papacy. The largely medieval cityscape of Vilnius became a contested terrain of this triangular frontline (which often broke into more angular confrontations, since the Jews and even Muslims were also seen as obstinate foes to Catholicism) -- it was turned into a battlefield where architectural and theatrical spectacles were used as effective and, sometimes, violent weapons for Catholic proselytizing.

The arrival of the Jesuit Baroque style in Vilnius was preceded by the destruction of several (Renaissance) buildings and religious sites that visibly delineated the local influence and prosperity of the Protestant and Jewish communities. In 1581, the Jesuits organized the first public Protestant book burning in the churchyard of the Academy. In 1591, a mob, inspired by sermons delivered by the students of the Jesuit Academy set ablaze the church, school and hospital run by the Evangelical-Reformists (Lithuanian Calvinists). The burning was followed by the desecration of the Protestant cemetery. Dead bodies were dug out and profanely displayed -- for instance, the corpses of fathers were placed in copulating positions together with the bodies of their daughters.

Next year, the residents of the city smashed up the Great Synagogue. In 1610, the Jesuits initiated the destruction of the press house of Holy Spirit Brotherhood, a monastic order of the (non-Uniate) Orthodox church;

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77 While local Protestants often openly and publicly insulted Catholic sacraments and iconography, no Catholic church or its interior was damaged during the Reformation movement in Vilnius.
all its publications were also burned. The following year, Catholic pilgrims led by the Jesuits set on fire Protestant institutions: synod, library and homes of ministers. From then on, as the Jesuits gained support of the ruling Vasa dynasty and the main Lithuanian magnate families, religious violence in the city escalated. The Jesuits finally triumphed in 1640 when, during a Catholic riot, the Calvinist college and church were torn down, never to be reopened again in the city. (A new Calvinist church and two Protestant cemeteries were set up outside the city walls.) While the city was not occupied by any external forces, Vilnius nonetheless resembled a war-torn city, because in addition to the religious violence, there were constant armed fights among the magnates and spontaneous fires routinely swept through the city.

Vilnius at the time was still more or less a medieval town, because the Renaissance style made only sporadic inroads into its architectural urban landscape and a few sixteenth century palaces and churches were severely damaged during the seventeenth century upheavals. The first known map of Vilnius, published in Cologne in 1581 by G. van Bruynen in his Orbium praecipuarum totius mundi (Atlas of World Cities), pictures the city as a spreading agglomeration of one-to-two storied, mostly wooden, buildings. There are very few churches or palaces visible on this pictorial map. The early 1600s etchings of the panoramic view of the city create a completely different impression of Vilnius: the town is full of magnificent church spires and well-built houses. Perhaps this perceptual discrepancy was result of two geographically, and hence, ideologically different points of view. The atlas was created for a large European audience, and its creators and cartographers probably never visited Vilnius: the image of the city was based on unreliable stories collected from various foreign travelers. The panoramic engravings, on the other hand, were commissioned by the Radvilas (Radziwill) family and they certainly meant to celebrate Vilnius as the residential seat of this illustrious noble Lithuanian family. Hence, in both cases, narrative exaggeration -- deliberate or accidental -- was probably a significant part of the mapping process. However, historical records show that in 1645, Vilnius, excluding its suburbs, had only “233 brick and 163 wooden houses” owned by the citizens, “53 brick houses” owned by nobles, and 49 (brick and wooden) Jewish houses.

78 For the history of the cartography and iconography of Vilnius, see Vladas Drėma, Dingęs Vilnius (Vilnius: Vaga, 1991), 28-80.
It is unknown how many people lived in Vilnius at this time, but the number of its residents, especially if one includes servants and serfs in noble households, members of various monastic orders, students and soldiers, probably reached the fifty thousand mark. The 'national' composition of the ruling urban elite (that is elected municipal officials) of the late part of the seventeenth century (1662-1702) still points to the multinational character of the city's residents: Poles comprised roughly fifty per cent, Ruthenians thirty percent, Germans eight per cent, Italians four per cent plus some minorities of Lithuanian and Hungarian origin. Of course, the general population was even more diverse, since the Jews, Tartars or lower class Lithuanians and foreigners could not participate in the municipal government, and the members of religious orders or noble households also were excluded from the ranks of urban citizens. Furthermore, even after the Jesuit counter-reformation victory, the urban elite remained religiously divided: of course, Catholics dominated urban politics, but only marginally, since they comprised about sixty percent of the elected officials, the second were Uniates -- about thirty percent; then Protestant and Orthodox, each comprising about three percent of the elite. (After 1666, Protestants and Orthodox were banned from holding a municipal office.)

The Jesuits introduced Baroque to the fiery and contested urban ground of Vilnius as both a missionary and reconstructive measure. Because of devastating fires, religious animosities, social upheavals and geopolitical turmoil, the cityscape of the Lithuanian capital was constantly changing. There were not enough Catholic churches in the city, and most of them belonged to the old fashioned, medieval religious orders, the Bernadines, Dominicans and Franciscans. In 1604, the Jesuits started to build the first Baroque church in Vilnius -- appropriately it was model on the 'mother church' of the Jesuits, the II Gesu Church in Rome. Yet the Lithuanian version of this Baroque masterpiece was meant to honor a local character, the fifteenth century Polish-Lithuanian prince Casimir Jagielonian, who, thanks to the Jesuits, was canonized in Rome by the pope the same year. The canonization of Casimir was celebrated in Vilnius with an elaborate three-day spectacle ending with the laying and blessing of the corner stone for Saint Casimir Church. The large stone, which can be seen on the façade wall of the church, was supposedly brought by a strenuous procession of more than seven hundred residents of the city from

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the surrounding hills of Vilnius. This was a construction-spectacle unparalleled in the history of the town: it deliberately simulated (ancient) Roman traditions of mass-scale architecture, but it also resembled the missionary Catholic practices that occurred in a colonial, especially pan-American, setting. (Only the construction of Vilnius Cathedral at the end of the fourteenth century at the site of a destroyed pagan Lithuanian temple could be compared with this Baroque spectacle.)

This architectural event was meant to celebrate the social ascendancy of Catholicism by literally inserting an imposing Baroque edifice on the medieval urban patchwork of Vilnius. The novel façade and interior of the church re-ordered and re-centred the local religious and aesthetic world: from the beginning of the seventeenth century, the town, despite its poly-religious traditions, was increasingly visualized as the cornerstone of Roman Catholicism in northern and eastern Europe. The Lithuanian territories beyond Vilnius were the religious frontiers of Catholic Europe, but Vilnius itself was turned into a Catholic citadel of countless Baroque churches and monasteries. The construction of the Saint Casimir Church was finished in 1618, and "the feast of [Saint] Casimir was inscribed in the universal calendar in 1621 and in 1636 he was declared heavenly patron of Lithuania and his remains were transferred ceremoniously to the royal chapel of [Saint] Casimir in Vilnius Cathedral. In 1651 Bishop Tiskevicius arranged a memorial of the transference of the princely saint's relics and dedicated an octave of the feast (eight days of celebration.) The cult of Saint Casimir as patron saint of Lithuania spread quickly throughout the Grand Duchy and into Poland, too." The Saint Casimir's Chapel in the Gothic, semi-Renaissance Cathedral was of course also built in the most splendid Baroque style.

The outline of the life and death story of Saint Casimir perfectly fit the theatrical sensibility of the Baroque era: he grew up surrounded by royal splendor, but died like a vagrant on a cold March morning in front of the closed doors of the Cathedral; he was raised to become a warrior, but chose to live a life of pious seclusion; he refused to marry a foreign princess and devoted his life to God; in life, he was the sickly offspring of a long-lived father and semi-pagan grandfather, but after his death, according to a church report, his body failed to decompose and he forever, so to speak, remained young. The story of

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81 Venclova, Vilnius, 141.
Saint Casimir was simple enough to be understood by everyone and the Jesuits never missed an opportunity to recount to the masses the ‘holy deeds’ of the young prince either in sermons, paintings or theatrical performances. Soon, it became an integral part of the Lithuanian popular imagination and with the Jesuits promoted cult of Saint Casimir, Baroque style certainly entered the architectural vocabulary of Lithuania. Hence, this ‘foreign’ imported cultural tradition quickly evolved into a specific local vernacular that was immediately multiplied all over the country under the label of Vilnius’s (Baroque) style. The city was certainly at the mythological and cultural margins of Rome. Yet it became the focus point of a unique regional artistic experiment, which -- not unlike in Rome -- actively and consistently reworked various forms of European aesthetic traditions by creating its own cultural vernacular.

The Jesuits also brought a tradition of theatrical processions to Vilnius’s architectural landscape. In 1614, ten years after the Saint Casimir Church inaugural celebration, “popular Vilnius preacher Walenty Bartoszewski already ... mentioned, that Vilnius is famous for its processions” filled with pomp, allegorical figures and elaborate ceremonies. From the middle of the seventeenth century, Vilnius processions became even more dramatic in their content and more spectacular in their execution, for the “great processions ...draw an universal panorama of the Sacred and Human history, from the motive of the creation of mankind, and then, through the scenes of Bible, early Christian history -- until the actual events of the world and local history.” These processions shaped the architectural ‘flow’ – the aesthetic development -- of Vilnius Baroque: it became less representational, but more processional and demonstrative. As a result, the “architectural volumes of Saint Theresa, Saint Casimir, and other churches have very specific orientation towards the trace of processions, being like wings of their drama. ...In the same manner... the composition of the Gate of the Basilian Monastery ...[is] to create the side-scenes for the procession.” The ‘processional’ Baroque of Vilnius also perfectly reflected

83 The actual title of Vilnius’s Baroque style was a much later invention created by local art historians; but the Baroque architectural standard established in various Lithuanian provinces definitely came out of the artistic mimicry of Roman architectural gems by Vilnius’ builders.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
‘Sarmatian’ cultural sensibilities, which cherished participatory spectacles (pilgrimages, religious ceremonies, social happenings and family events) even more than various representational displays (court rituals or theatrical and operatic performances).

Still, although Vilnius had a clear political and religious dominance in the region, its cultural strength vis-à-vis the country-bound ‘Sarmatian lifestyle’ is clear. The city was not the hub of Sarmatism; but neither did it aggressively oppose the peculiar Sarmatian social and cultural traditions. Furthermore, although the cultural sensibilities of the Lithuanian nobility were greatly influenced by the fashionable trends of Vilnius, the majority of the city’s population in ‘ethnic’ terms was probably neither Polish nor Lithuanian. Most Lithuanian magnates owned palaces in the city, during the Baroque-Rococo era, but the town lacked a functioning royal (ducal) court. It was, in many ways, an abandoned capital city, especially after the meetings of the Polish-Lithuanian Diet [Sejm] moved to Grodno in the eighteenth century. As a result, its Baroque never evolved along the representational lines of the courtly cities, such as Vienna, Versailles (and Paris), Dresden, and even Warsaw or Saint Petersburg. Nor did the city possess a powerful and wealthy ecclesiastical court, such as was the case in Rome or Würzburg. Its cultural influence over the region was probably much less overwhelming than of many other Baroque centres of Europe.

On the other hand, Vilnius ‘absorbed’ many Sarmatian peculiarities: Baroque Catholic aesthetic sensualism, Greek-Russian Orthodox religious practices, Protestant spiritual pragmatism and Turkish/Ottoman fashions, for instance, freely intermingled within the confines of the city. And since Sarmatism was based on a flexible fusion of the Catholic, Orthodox and Ottoman cultures, the provincial yet rather cosmopolitan Vilnius became one of its most elaborate urban stages. So arguably, Vilnius was a site where Sarmatism reached both its urban frontier and cultural heart.

By allowing a free interplay of various styles and traditions, Sarmatism celebrated the cultural traditions of the frontier, but its practitioners had rarely seen or experienced it as a borderland phenomenon. In the eyes of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility, the Sarmatian fusion of various European cultural, political and social extremities was based on specific historical eventualities, rather than a peculiar geographical location of the country. In fact, they probably did not even understand Sarmatism as being a fused cultural form, in a modern sense of the word. For Lithuanian nobles, the Sarmatian qualities and sensibilities evoked the most essential experiences and pivotal meanings of their Christian universe.
And for most, the aesthetic and ideological centre of this localized Christian view was Vilnius (Figure 1.6).

As a frontier outpost of Catholicism, Greek Orthodoxy, Protestantism, Judaism and even Islam, Vilnius was perfectly positioned to accommodate the cross-European qualities of the Baroque era. Visually, linguistically and culturally, the city combined the diverse geographical elements of Europe. Within its specific surroundings, these elements were not just fused, but very often were juxtaposed; so the different parts of Europe could be encountered through a direct aesthetic or ethnographic comparison. Here, the strangeness and novelty were often woven within a seemingly coherent local socio-cultural fabric, which, in the eyes of many western European visitors, nonetheless embodied the contradictory threads of the Sarmatian world.

On the other side, the city's ethnic, linguistic and social 'foreignness' was seen by many local practitioners of Sarmatism as a threat to their paternalistic and patriarchal values. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Sarmatian (countryside) way of life was probably less ornate and uncertain than the culturally more sophisticated, though still provincial, urban life of Vilnius. However, the everyday life of a manor was defined by a clear sense of political authority, social hierarchy and cultural supremacy: a landed noble was a master of his own manor, land and the people who lived on its property (usually the serfs whom he personally owned). Within this small universe, his senses of justice and aesthetics ruled supreme. In contrast, Vilnius, although periodically subservient to the economic and social needs of the nobility (especially during the time of the local parliamentary assemblies) was outside the immediate political, social and cultural authority of the nobility. The city was in large municipally controlled by antagonistic townspeople (about eighty percent of the municipal official elite were local townspeople), Jews, rich Lithuanian magnates and various religious monastic orders. Architecturally too, Vilnius was a space open to wealthy benefactors who were relentless in funding the construction of various (Baroque) churches and monasteries as spiritual gestures of their earthly powers. As a result, many of the Baroque temples of Vilnius served as gigantic mausoleums for the magnate families. Furthermore, urban life in general was seen by local nobles, especially the poorer ones who constituted the vast majority of the Lithuanian nobility, as being dishonest, capricious and hypocritical. Therefore, the heterogeneous city

87 Ragauskas, *Vilniaus miesto valdantysis elitas*, 449.
simply could not embrace plain and direct 'ancient' values of the Sarmatian rural simplicity. So, while the city posed a relatively mild challenge to the countrywide supremacy of Sarmatism, it nonetheless hesitantly demarcated the limits of the Sarmatian world.

Still, it would be wrong to lose Vilnius completely within the realm of Sarmatia, because according to the poetic and aesthetic Catholic (and Protestant) discourses, it was always symbolically and physically allied with the city of Rome. Vilnius had its seven hills, rich patrician patrons, and, most importantly, the city was unmistakably Baroque. Even its Great Synagogue built in the middle of the seventeenth century exhibited Baroque features. Thus, although physically the city was surrounded by the Sarmatian civilization, its metaphorical strength, rhetorical symbolism and aesthetic qualities -- and its mythological and historic (mis)fortunes --- heavily depended on its proximity to Rome. The eighteenth century Latin poem, entitled “Septicollis Litvaniae caput Palaemonarium urbium Vilna....” (“The seven-hill capital of Lithuania, Palemon’s city of Vilna...”) captures the representational significance of this Roman connection:

Redde Palaemoniae Urbi et Sacris Divorum aedibus
Basilicum Constantinianae Basilicae nitorem,
eo aetatem prolissa felicitate et gloria provehe
donec ut Augustus Romanam,
ita sub Augusto Sarmatiae
relinquas Litvanam
Marmoream Septicollem. 88

In summary, it is important to remember that by no means was Latinized Vilnius an eccentric enclave of ancient Rome -- an aesthetic and cultural colony of the Italian culture - - in the frontier regions of Europe. Visually and socially, the city was comfortably Sarmatian, that is, it was a Lithuanian-Polish town. And it would be possible to argue that Vilnius, with its interdenominational Baroque spirit, more than any urban place in Lithuania, embodied the cultural and architectural essence of Sarmatism. Yet, in the end, the city failed to fully integrate into Sarmatian civilization. Perhaps Vilnius was linguistically too irregular, culturally too heterogeneous and socially too uneven to be completely absorbed into Sarmatia. In short, the city might have been too Baroque even for

88 “Return to the city of Palaemon and its sacred temples/the royal grandeur of the Basilica of Constantine/ Give eternal happiness and glory to this age/by blessing this marble city/built by Augustus of Sarmatia/ on seven hills/ like Augustus built Rome.” 1723 Septicolis Litvaniae, Anonymous in Gratulatio Vilnae, 381. Author’s translation.
one of the most Baroque cultural inventions of European socio-cultural imagination. However, the ambiguous metaphorical location of the city -- its Sarmatian/Roman, pagan/Christian or local/foreign origins -- was actually never scrutinized, simply because for most of the Baroque era, Vilnius was an obviously declining city.

The rise and collapse of the ‘Roman’ Vilnius could function as an allegory for the Sarmatian Baroque. In general, Baroque cities expanded horizontally by creating new urban expanses and vistas. Baroque spectacular space was meant to last, and to impress and rewrite the relationship between the celestial and earthly powers:

In the history of European cities, the year 1600 is something of an artificial cut-off point: the city being a perpetual ‘palimpsest’, the general history of urbanism always runs up against the challenge of the particular and the long duration.

Moreover, two of the most specific components of the sixteenth century: the invention of the regular, ordered square surrounding the statue of the sovereign — of which Michaelangelo’s Piazza del Campidoglio is the prototype — and the multiplication of establishments of new regular orders of the Counter-Reformation which came to disrupt the urban landscapes of Catholic Europe.\(^{89}\)

Vilnius, however, was different — its Baroque space expanded vertically rather than horizontally, and like a smoke from a sacrificial fire, it tried to appease rather than compete with the heavens. Arguably, the city never acquired a truly Baroque topography, simply because it never expanded beyond its medieval perimeters or changed its randomly evolved street network. Vilnius Baroque was not a planned phenomenon -- it was a reconstructive or cosmetic gesture for it camouflaged the decay of the city. The old, medieval Vilnius became Baroque literally because it was “devastated by fires: on July 1\(^{st}\) 1610 the castle, the Cathedral, 17 Catholic and 3 Evangelical churches, the university and almost 5,000 houses were destroyed by fire. True, in the end this proved to be an advantage for the city: excellent monuments of early Baroque, such as the Churches of St. Casimir and St. Theresa, were built, the Church of St. Michael was completed, and a chapel in the Cathedral holding the remains of the Lithuanian patron saint St. Casimir was set up after the fire. The Vilnius silhouette turned Baroque with vibrant domes and towers.”\(^{90}\)

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\(^{90}\) Venclova, *Vilnius*, 33
This urban glory did not last long: Vilnius was sacked by the Muscovite army during its six year (1655-1661) occupation of the city. A truce was signed with Russia in 1667, but war and terror never truly left Lithuania. In 1702, a Swedish army looted Vilnius; in 1705, a Russian army led by Peter I occupied the town -- it was soon followed by a Saxon force. In 1710, plague killed about thirty five thousand inhabitants of the town (certainly more than half of the population) and in 1720, a violent rebellion of the lower classes swept through the city. Devastating fires occurred regularly: in 1715, 1737 (three-quarters of the city was affected by the fire), 1741, 1748 and 1749. Economically and politically, the city could never fully recover from this accelerating march of social and natural disasters and while most cities in northern Europe grew up in the first part of the eighteenth century, Vilnius was rapidly shrinking in terms of its population, economic wealth, and regional influence.

Still, this was also a period when the so-called Vilnius Baroque matured and more splendid churches than ever were commissioned and built in the city by rich Lithuanian magnates who drew their wealth from their vast rural estates. As a result of this architectural proliferation, at the end of the eighteenth century, in a city of no more than forty thousand inhabitants, there were thirty two Catholic churches with fifteen monasteries, five Uniate churches with three monasteries, and one (Russian) Orthodox, one Lutheran and one Calvinist church.

Hence, despite these cataclysmic events, or perhaps because of them, Baroque survived in Vilnius longer than possibly anywhere else in Europe. In most parts of Europe, especially its metropolitan intellectual capitals -- Paris, London, Vienna and Saint Petersburg -- Baroque went out of fashion with the rapid spread of Enlightenment rationality: "The year 1750 ... corresponds to a more dividing line.... If the urbanism of the Enlightenment continued to play with the alignments of streets, regular public squares and the poetics of the façade, the rethinking of the classical antiquity urbanism, the new role played by public opinion, and the differentiation of public buildings all clearly mark the advent of a new phase." In Vilnius, however, Baroque reversed the clock of European urban evolution, and rather than moving the townscape towards the Neo-Classical sense of

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spatial order, it reordered it back to its medieval origins.\textsuperscript{94} In general, Vilnius Baroque was built on ruins; yet, it never attempted to change the medieval map of the city. Hence, there are no straight axes, symmetrical squares or framed street vistas - characteristic of Baroque cities -- in Vilnius.

By the 1770s, however, the “architects in Lithuania developed their own original forms, that can also be regarded as an extraordinary extension of the baroque or rococo traditions.”\textsuperscript{95} Indeed, it seems that at the height of enlightened rationalism, Vilnius was still enjoying its elaborate way of Baroque existence which idiosyncratically mapped out its path to political and demographical wreckage:

The juxtaposition of the twisting irrationally medieval streets, Renaissance Castle and other buildings – with new Baroque sites made a kind of unique synthesis in the framework of the inner medieval city of Vilnius. This added a new shade for Baroque art in Vilnius – the interrelation between the irrationalism of medieval planning and the irrationalism of Baroque vertical spatial energy created a new sensibility of artistic space. This organic conjunction of two types of irrationality – in horizontal (medieval) and vertical (Baroque) dimensions make Vilnius one of the most infinite and enigmatic cities, and here the medieval and Baroque conjunction reached a high scale of artistic expression.\textsuperscript{96}

Of course, the local persistence of Baroque was also an illusion, because Vilnius, along with the rest of Poland-Lithuania, was not immune from the intellectual, aesthetic and political changes of the time. The splendid autumn of Vilnius’s Baroque was most likely just an elegant gesture of the city’s delayed provincial aesthetic development, a gracious farewell to its phantom golden age.

Local Baroque longevity could not go unnoticed by enlightened visitors whose ideas about the world and art were already framed by modern methods of scientific observations and the enlightenment values of a secular judgment. “The new secular empyrean world” that emerged from the uneven Baroque universe “was the realm of aesthetic art, and what had once been decried as luxury was therein transfigured into the icons of a secular transcendence, as the signs of human destiny.”\textsuperscript{97} From this modern perspective of social progress and rational empiricism, the belated Baroque of Vilnius could only appear as a

\textsuperscript{94} See Vaišvilaitė, \textit{Baroko pradžia Lietuvoje}.
\textsuperscript{95} Kaufmann, \textit{Court, Cloister and City}, 421.
\textsuperscript{96} Doukhan, “Baroque city: the conception of time and space,” 270.
predicament of a gloomy future, a symptom of a geographical regression, a sign of human failure.
CHAPTER TWO
SARMATIAN EXILE: GEORG FOSTER IN WILNA

THE PATH TO SARMATIA

The voyage [Forster] had undertaken as a young man had indeed determined the
course of his intellectual life in that it had so literally impressed on him the
difficulties of seeing the new and unexpected. Traversing and linking so many
new human spaces in a relatively short time, it had confronted him physically
and intellectually with a confusing, overwhelming wealth of cultural variety. To
the repeated enigmas of arrival, shore after shore, islands after islands, he could
not but respond in ways which could guide and accelerate the life-long process
of growing up, of self-transformation.¹

Georg Forster achieved his fame in the scientific, intellectual and aristocratic courts
of the enlightened Europe with the publication of his book, A Voyage Round the World. In
1772, at the age of seventeen, Forster had accompanied his father, a renowned German-
English botanist, Johann Reinhold Forster, on board the Resolution during the second of
Captain Cook’s expeditions to the South Seas. The entrance of the Endeavour into the
Pacific Ocean during Cook’s first journey in 1769 has been often interpreted as one of the
most decisive moments in making geography a modern European science. However,
although the first Cook expedition delivered significant geographical ‘discoveries,’ such as
the delineation of the coastlines of eastern Australia and New Zealand, its main purpose
was to observe the celestial transit of the planet Venus. Accordingly, the geographical and
natural findings that were made during the first voyage were, so to speak, byproducts of
various astronomical and navigational investigations of the region. In addition, all the
naturalists on board the Endeavour, except Joseph Banks, had died during the expedition,
thus significantly clouding the scientific achievements of the journey. It contrast, the second
expedition, organized only a year after Cook’s return to England from his first voyage,
had, in addition to some navigational and geopolitical concerns, explicit geographical and
anthropological objectives. Based on the experiences of the previous trip, the new

¹ Dagmar Barnouw, “Eraugnis: Georg Forster on the difficulties of diversity” in Impure
Reason: Dialectic of Enlightenment in Germany, ed. Daniel Wilson and Robert C. Holub
(Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 337.
expedition was also much more carefully planned; consequently, the mortality rate of the crew during this three-year journey was extremely low.  

The primary goal of the second trip into the South Pacific was to “search after a southern continent within the bounds of the temperate zone.” But alongside this cartographic exploration came the requirement from the Admiralty to collect data regarding natural phenomena of the newly charted islands and “to observe the Genius, Temper, Disposition, and Number of the Natives or Inhabitants.” In the end, the second expedition, from a scientific, navigational and medical point of view, was an unmatched success in the history of scientific navigation. It was during this trip that the sciences and arts of geography, anthropology, climatology, botany, zoology, ethnography and the basic principles of health care management became intricately tied up through parallel and continuous empirical observations and comparison of a whole array of natural, cultural, social and physiological phenomena. In other words, it was one of the first geographical adventures that intentionally had chosen to become a model for the future modern scientific explorations of the universe.

After Joseph Banks, the chief scientist and benefactor of the first expedition, declined to join Cook on his second trip, Johann Reinhold Forster and his son Georg -- “gentlemen skilled in natural history and drawing” -- were hired by the Admiralty as his replacement. The father-son team arrived in England only in 1766, after the father’s financial and academic disaster in the bureaucratic corridors of imperial Saint Petersburg. Johann R. Forster was born in 1729 in the Polish town of Dirchau (Tczew) which strategically bridged the Vistula River a few kilometers south of Danzig, the wealthy Baltic Sea port. Forster’s family, however, were descendants of the Scottish and English (Reformed) Protestants who came to Poland sometime in the 1640s, but were quickly Germanized in the German-speaking environment of the Danzig region. In 1751, Johann

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5 Joseph Banks, as quoted in Hoare, “Introduction,” 52.
Forster became a Reformed pastor in the village of Nassenhuben (three miles south-east of Danzig) where in 1754, his first son, Johann Georg Adam was born.⁶

The elder Forster was more interested in science than in preaching, and he was eager to leave his small parish for more intellectually challenging and financially more rewarding employment. In 1765, he accepted a government position in Russia and left his pastoral responsibilities, and wife and five children in Poland. The minister-turned-bureaucrat, however, took his eldest son, Georg with him. Forster’s responsibilities in Russia, on behalf of the tsarist administration, were to examine the economic and agricultural conditions of the remote German settlements in the southern steppes of the Volga region. A few years prior, several thousand Protestant Germans were invited by the Russian empress Catherine II to settle and colonize vast Russian steppe lands that historically had been the grazing grounds for various nomadic peoples. Despite favorable tax exemption incentives and extensive land grants, the agricultural and social conditions in the region were extremely poor, and Forster was hired to investigate the causes of the economic struggles encountered by the newly arrived German colonists. His research however was expected “to refute certain injurious rumours, which have been mischievously spread abroad [in Germany]... concerning the colonists.”

After spending several months in the Volga region, Forster, in spite of the propagandistic goals of his investigation, produced a report that detailed the causes of the dismal living conditions of the colonists, which he solely blamed on the bureaucratic deficiencies of the local Russian administration. In short, instead of disproving the damaging rumors, he actually accentuated them with some factual data and informed analysis. Not surprisingly, after submitting his report to the imperial court in Saint Petersburg, Forster was immediately released from his duties without the expected high payment.⁸ In October of 1766, financially ruined and socially discredited Forster and his son Georg arrived in London in a search of a new career and life. In the following years, through his relentless scientific studies of natural world and various translation works,

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⁶ For the biographical details of the Forster family, see Klaus Harpprecht, Georg Forster oder Die Liebe zu Welt: Eine Biographie (Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1987); also Alois Prinz, Das Paradies ist nirgendswo: Die Lebensgeschichte des Georg Forster (Basel: Beltz & Gelberg, 1997).
⁸ On Rheinhold Forster’s disappointments in Russia, see Ulrich Enzensberger, Georg Forster: Ein Leben in Scherben (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn Verlag, 1996), 16-22.
Forster gradually acquired a reputation of being “a natural-born scientist,” and based on this reputation, he was appointed the chief “Botanist” on board the Resolution.

In contrast to his father, Georg Foster was ‘groomed’ to become a natural scientist. In fact, according to Forster senior, it was Georg’s passionate interests in natural phenomena that led him to exchange his interests in “‘history and ancient geography’ for ‘the study of nature, particularly botany.’” Nonetheless, because Forster’s family was always short of money, Georg had very little formal education. Still, he acquired a diverse knowledge of different natural and social worlds from the extensive reading of various scientific books, travel narratives and, most importantly, from assisting his father in numerous research projects. In addition, Georg Forster, who in his teens was already fluent in German, English, French, and possibly Russian (he was also familiar with Latin and most likely knew some Polish), helped his father to translate many geographical and botanical texts. At twelve, he already published his own first work of translation, *A chronological abridgement of Russian history: translated from the original Russian. Written by Michael Lomonosov; and continued to the present time by the translator (J.G.A Forster).* Thus, by the time of Cook’s second expedition, at the age of seventeen, Georg Forster already had something of a scholarly reputation. However, he was hired to accompany his father not so much for his linguistic or scientific abilities, but for his drawing skills. At that time, the ability to draw fast, accurately and gracefully a whole assortment of objects -- exotic landscapes, native peoples, zoological and botanical samples -- was one of the most valuable assets for a successful career in natural sciences. In fact, Reinhold Forster was most likely appointed to be the chief ‘Botanist’ of the Resolution, because, according to the Admiralty’s internal correspondence, he was “as well qualified [as Banks], and more so in one particular, as he carries his son with him who is very able designer, and will of course be extremely useful in that part of the business.”

During the trip, the scientific crew of the Resolution explored diverse and dissimilar natural and human worlds of the South Pacific: New Zealand, Tahiti, Tonga, New Hebrides, New Caledonia, Easter and Society Islands. In addition the expedition made brief stops at Madeira, Cape Verde Islands, Cape of Good Hope in South Africa and Tierra del Fuego at the extreme southern end of the South American continent. Georg Forster reached adulthood during this lengthy voyage which lasted for three years and

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9 Ibid., 12.
10 As quoted in Hoare, “Introduction,” 49.
circumnavigated the globe. In a sense, the South Sea became his ‘Alma Mater,’ and it was there where he fully matured as a leading ‘scientific explorer-artist-writer’ of Europe.  

While his father took on the duty to collect anthropological and ethnographic material, Georg was given the responsibility to catalogue the natural phenomena of the Pacific islands. However, because the theoretical separation of the natural world from its social counterpart, especially in the context of the non-European surrounding and the limited resources of the expedition, was never very productive or useful, the works of both scientists entwined. The short report sent to England two months before the arrival of the Resolution highlights the interconnectedness of the ‘interdisciplinary’ character of the exploration. The report notes the discoveries of “260 new Plants, 200 new Animals [found] - - 71’10’ farthest S\textsuperscript{th} -- no continent -- Many Islands, some 80 Leagues long -- The Bola Bola savage an [in] -- corrigible Blockheads -- Glorious Voyage -- No man lost by sickness.”

Through these intertwined processes of personal (and European) geographical discoveries, direct observations of unfamiliar and exotic human societies, systematic comparison of the climatic, topographical and anthropological differences of the globe, and methodological classifications of the collected geographical and ethnographical materials, Forster learned about the challenging natural and social diversities of the universe.

Georg Forster’s participation in Cook’s expedition delineated his future academic career. After its successful conclusion, he ‘naturally’ became a professional naturalist. More crucially, the voyage around the world charted his international reputation as an extremely gifted young travel writer. Reinhold Johan Forster kept an extensive diary detailing everyday events, scientific discoveries and anthropological encounters that occurred during the long journey. However, in 1775, when the Resolution returned to England, the elder Forster, because of the signed agreement with the Admiralty concerning the printing rights of the research material, was prevented from publishing his personal account of the voyage. On the other hand, Georg Forster, a minor at the time, was not bound by any legal restraint, and in March of 1777, just two months before the release of Captain Cook’s official account of the expedition, he published a detailed narrative of the

11 For more about the formation of Forster’s scientific and aesthetic views during the Cook’s expedition, see Gerhard Steiner, Georg Forster (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977), 11-24; Harpprecht, Georg Forster oder Die Liebe zur Welt, 77-193; and especially Pinz, Das Paradies ist nirgendwo, 63-123.

12 As quoted in Hoare, “Introduction,” 58.
journey. The book was entitled, *A Voyage Round the World*, and it was published under the name of Georg Forster.

The two volume and 1,200-page manuscript was based on the journal of the father, yet, undoubtedly, the entire text of the book was written by Georg who had a much more refined control of the English language than his father. In the following year, Georg translated the book into German and published it in Berlin; the German rendition of the account went through another edition in 1784. While the original English version of the book did not compete very successfully with James Cook’s more extravagantly published version of the voyage, “in the German translation, however, the *Voyage* did make Georg Forster’s reputation in Germany, and the fame he attained as the author of this book determined his fortunes in Germany for years.”

Young Forster understood that one of his duties during the expedition was to compile “a philosophical history of the voyage, free from prejudice and vulgar error, where human nature should be represented without any adherence to fallacious system, and upon the principles of general philanthropy....” The botanical, zoological and anthropological materials collected and recorded by the Forsters were being “published separately, mostly under Johan Reinhold’s name, starting with the *Characteres generum plantarum* in 1776.” Accordingly, from the beginning, Forster’s book was not meant to be a dispassionate scientific record, but a narrative work of art. Instead of being a didactic scientific document, the *Voyage* was envisioned and written as an intellectual journey that could stimulate a sensual awareness and aesthetic appreciation of the ‘discovered’ worlds. Driven by the “philosophical observations” of the scientist-narrator, the linear and detailed description of the South Seas expedition is charted as a guide “through the labyrinth of human knowledge.” “This was the idea,” remarked Forster in the preface of his book, “with which I embarked on the late voyage round the world, and agreeable to which I have collected materials for the present publication, as far as the time, my situation and abilities, would permit. I have always endeavoured in this narrative to connect the ideas arising from different occurrences, in order, if possible, to throw more light upon the nature of the

15 Thomas and Berghof, “Introduction,” xl.
17 Ibid., 9.
human mind, and to lift the soul into that exalted station, from which the extensive view must ‘justify the ways of God to man.’”

In other words, the long voyage-narrative through the South Pacific was meant to expose both the exterior and interior -- that is, the physical and spiritual -- universes of the Creator. However, in the rational spirit of the Enlightenment, the reader-traveler reaches this ecstatic revelation about the universal truths concerning the God’s creation not through the mysteries of faith, but through the logics of scientific exposure. The universe and its Creator reveal themselves through a dioramic view of unknown geographical destinations, and through this constantly moving hegemonic gaze the ‘inner rationality’ of the narrator-creator-reader becomes visible.

Surprisingly, despite this rather pretentious narrative objective -- which, in the end, could be simply attributed to the rhetorical necessities of the time -- the young and inexperienced traveler-narrator assumed a role of an imperfect guide. Forster openly admits his perceptual and emotional limitations: “I have sometimes obeyed the powerful dictates of my heart, and given voice to my feelings; for, as I do not pretend to be free from the weakness common to my fellow creatures, it was necessary for every reader to know the colour of the glass through which I looked.” For Forster, however, his individualized and emotive gaze testifies to his authentic and independent evaluation of the expedition and its scientific achievements. “Accustomed to look on all the various tribes of men,” continues the young explorer “as entitled to an equal share of my good will, and conscious, at the same time, I have endeavoured to make my remarks with a retrospect to our general improvement; and neither attachment nor aversion to particular nations have influenced my praise or censure.”

Arguably, Forster’s rhetorical ‘openness’ regarding his lack of personal ‘national’ loyalties was a marketing tool, for his narrative of the South Pacific was in competition with the soon to be released ‘British’ account of the expedition written by captain Cook himself. In addition, his book had also to compete with the recently published ‘French’ report of the region written by Bougainville. (Incidentally, the Forsters translated Bougainville’s book from French into English in 1772.) In the search for a wider readership, it was important for Forster to distance himself from these two popular

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 10.
chronicles of the South Seas. So, in defense of his ‘neutral’ point of view, Forster states that “the same objects may have been seen in different points of view, and that the same fact may often have given rise to different ideas. ...In short, the different branches of science which we have studied, our turns of mind, our heads and hearts have made a difference in our sensations, reflections, and expressions.”

Forster’s subjectivity also highlights his methodological approach to the collection of scientific data and geographical knowledge. During the expedition, he certainly “acquired a sharp awareness of the great importance and the difficulties of observation and documentation.” As a result, “he had grasped,” as Dagmar Barnouw put it: “the importance of the hermeneutic circle as circulus methodicus.” This methodological view became “inescapable with regard to the limitations of the observer’s objectivity and essential in terms of the accessibility to him of the object. The very selectiveness of the observer’s perspective, the ‘colored glass,’ enables and drives observation.” In the end, in competition “with Cook’s official account, Forster emphasizes his own authorship by drawing attention to its ‘questionable’ documentary authority. As the author of what was promptly to become a classic of European travel literature, he claims the authority of his experience both for the intended accuracy of his account and its peculiar limitations, namely the observer’s complexly acculturated perception.” In other words, Forster wrote a scholarly ambitious and narratively challenging work that uses the hermeneutic traditions of representation in order to advance the universalizing views of the explorer.

Cook’s voyage, of course, was driven by the relentless search and endless investigation of the unknown, unusual and exotic. In general, even considering its carefully prepared itinerary, it was an unpredictable and hazardous affair. Because of the changing and variable climatic conditions and patchy cartographic knowledge of the South Pacific, the voyage did not follow a strict temporal pattern or certain spatial linearity. The

22 Forster, A Voyage Round the World, 7-8.
24 Ibid., 325.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
Resolution drifted from one shore to another, encountering a great variety of human societies during its nomadic explorations. Violence among the crew, or between the crew and the native peoples, usually provoked by the former, was random. In a sense, the entire journey was like an unpredictable odyssey during which good fortunes could rapidly turn into tragedies. (In the second year of the journey, the Resolution lost sight of its companion ship, the Adventure. And Captain Cook himself was killed in Hawaii during his third expedition.)

The ever-changing geographical and anthropological terrain, and above all, the extremely capricious nature of the encounter between Europeans and islanders -- sometimes voluptuous and sexually intense, sometimes repulsive and socially disappointing -- often had an illusionary, if not phantasmagoric, effect on the crew. Furthermore, during a long sea journey, any coastline usually materializes as a dreamscape. For Forster, after four months on high sea, the rough and perilous shores of New Zealand initially appeared as a delightfully familiar and picturesque setting:

The view of rude sceneries in the style of Rosa, of antediluvian forests which cloathed the rock, and of numerous rills of water, which every where rolled down the steep declivity, altogether conspired to complete our joy; and so apt is mankind, after a long absence from land, to be prejudiced in favour of the wildest shore, that we looked upon the country at that time, as one of the most beautiful which nature unassisted by art could produce. Such are the general ideas of travellers and voyagers long exhausted by distress; and with such warmth of imagination they have viewed the rude cliffs of Juan Fernandez, and the impenetrable forests of Tinian.27

For the scientist-aesthete, however, this dramatic and poetic landscape soon metamorphosed into a vast zoological and botanical theatre-laboratory, for “[on] our part,” continues Forster “we perceived a new store of animal and vegetable bodies, and among them hardly any that were perfectly similar to the known species, and several not analogous to the known genera. With these therefore we hoped to be wholly employed during our stay, in spite of the approach of autumn, which seemed to threaten the vegetable creation.”28

Since Forster could not use original drawings and engravings in his book, he strengthened his scientific observations with easily available literary resources. In order to highlight the topographical and climatic contrasts among various islands, Forster typically

27 Forster, A Voyage Round the World, 80.
28 Ibid.
invokes various images from the European representational and literary traditions. Hence, he often opens a new chapter of his book -- which usually introduces a new archipelago and/or a next stopover of the Resolution -- with a quote from a classical Latin text that ostensibly captures the geographical and pictorial 'essence' of the place. For instance, the island of Tahiti, which has already acquired a reputation of being the earthly paradise, is introduced by a verse from Virgil, Aeneid: "They came to a land of joy, the green pleasances and happy seats of Blissful Groves." 29 Virgil's quote is immediately followed by Forster's description of the arrival of the Resolution to the island: "It was one of those beautiful mornings which the poets of all nations have attempted to describe, when we saw the isle of O-Taheitee, within two miles before us." 30 In contrast, at the end of the voyage, the island of Tierra del Fuego is introduced by Seneca's poetic description of Corsica: "Savage island, shut in by broken rocks: /rough and desolate with abandoned places. / Shadowy springs. Joyful without birth. / No plant grows from this accursed soil." 31 The melancholic image of Seneca is soon paralleled with Forster's own gloomy portrayal of the inhospitable land: "The part of the world which was now in sight had a very unfavorable aspect. About three o'clock in the morning we ran along it, and found it for the greatest part hid in a thick gaze." 32 By inserting literary quotes, Forster linked classical representational traditions to contemporary scientific descriptions. He consciously employed familiar cultural similes and accepted poetic topoi in order to situate distant and exotic islands within a recognizable -- Eurocentric and classical -- map of the world. So, his detailed narrative of the scientific voyage, in part, recapitulates the legendary routes of ancient odysseys. 33

Forster was fully aware that his narrative usage of various artistic allusions and literary references would create a powerful sensual correspondence between his journey and his sentimental audience. He attempted to manipulate the emotional responses of his readers, but he was also equally concerned about the representational realism and scientific accuracy of his report. Hence, his bellestric embellishments are often mirrored

29 Ibid., 143.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 618.
32 Ibid., 619.
33 Similarly, in pictorial representations, the indigenous peoples were often portrayed according to the aesthetic canons of the 'classical' composition; so a picture depicting a family of New Zealanders, for instance, resembles a familiar group of ancient Greeks.
by more prosaic geographical and anthropological descriptions of the encountered places and peoples. Accordingly, the first aesthetic impression of an approaching shoreline, for instance, often serves as a narrative prelude to the ethnographic and anthropological portrait of the islanders. As a result, the pleasant and plentiful environment of Tahiti serves as the setting for the graceful people who “had mild features, and a pleasing countenance; they were about our size, of pale mahogany brown, had fine black hair and eyes ... [among] them were several females, pretty enough to attract the attention of Europeans, who had not seen their own country-women for twelve long months past.”  

In contrast, the destitute island of Tierra del Fuego is a home for a small group of the natives whose pictorial “assemblage of their features formed the most loathsome picture of misery and wretchedness to which human nature can possibly be reduced. ... The women were nearly formed as the men, though somewhat less in stature; their features were no less uncouth and ugly, and their dress exactly the same.”

The difference between the inhabitants of Tahiti and Tierra del Fuego had also sociological and psychological components. The Tahitians welcomed the Europeans, and through barter, friendship, deception and indecent sexual offers, they tried to acquire various European objects. Furthermore, as Foster remarked, they “admired the whiteness of our bodies and frequently pushed aside our clothes from the breast, as if to convince themselves that we were made like them.” For Forster, this physiological curiosity and intense adoration of the European goods and customs displayed by the Tahitians were visible social manifestations of their complex and hierarchical society with a highly developed aesthetic sensibility. Nonetheless, the unchecked desire to own (European) luxury items had a dual socio-cultural meaning: while it situates the Tahitians as equal trade-partners to the Europeans, it also subjugates them to a potential economic exploitation and cultural acculturation. Their curiosity and openness positions them above the rest of the peoples of the South Seas — such as Maori of New Zealand who kept a social and spatial distance from the white intruders — yet, their uncontrollable passions clearly situate them below the more refined Europeans.

34 Forster, A Voyage Round the World, 144.
35 Ibid., 628.
37 Forster, A Voyage Round the World, 145.
That Tahitians were presented as culturally ‘inferior’ to Europeans might not
surprise Forster’s German or English readers. But by situating the Tahitians, so to speak,
between their more ‘primitive’ neighbours and the Europeans, Forster alludes to their
social evolutionary capabilities. In the eyes of the naturalist, Tahitian society is not
stagnating, and through controlled exposure to the superior culture, it can rapidly evolve
and move forward. The Tahitian society, in Forster’s words, already bears “some distant
relation to those of the feudal systems of Europe,”38 and, potentially, its social evolution will
possibly replicate the historical development of the contemporary European societies. On
the other hand, softened by “the climate and the customs of the country,” Tahitian
‘feudalism’ is not plagued by extreme economic inequalities. With the coming of European
luxuries, however, the inequalities will increase and “[at] last the common people will
perceive these grievances, and the causes which produced them; and a proper sense of the
general rights of mankind awaking in them, will bring a revolution. This is the natural
circle of human affairs; at the present there is fortunately no room to suppose, that such a
change will take a place for a long series of years to come.”39

At the end of his stay in Tahiti, Forster becomes clearly disturbed about the
evolutionary prospects of local society, and faced with the possibility of the “terrific shape
of destruction” unleashed by the “power of Europe,”40 he is forced to radically evaluate his
own scientific position vis-à-vis the ‘ideal’ world of the Tahitians: “If the knowledge of a
few individuals can only be acquired at such a price as the happiness of nations, it were
better for the discoverers, and the discovered, that the South Sea had still remained
unknown to Europe and its restless inhabitants.”41

The crew of the Resolution visited the Society Isles (Tahiti, Huahine and Raiatea)
twice and, in total, stayed there for about three months; so Forster became quite familiar
with its inhabitants. For the entire crew, these three months of the pleasing social and
sexual interactions with the locals, bestowed with plenty of food and entertainment, was the
most enjoyable period of the entire voyage. Forster’s personal admiration of the Tahitians
is sharply contrasted with his despising of the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego, whom
Forster, following Bougainville, calls ‘Pecherai.’

38 Ibid., 199.
39 Ibid., 200.
40 Ibid., 194.
41 Ibid., 200.
The Resolution barely spent three days on the Tierra del Fuego -- the Christmas week of 1774 -- and Forster had only one morning to 'examine' a small group of 'Pecherai' that consisted of about twenty five "persons, including children, who, contrary to the custom of all the nations in the South Seas, were very silent on their approach to the ship, and went along side, hardly pronounced any other word than peseray." 42 Forster immediately assumed that the encountered families of the 'Pecherai' were "miserable out cast of some neighbouring tribe, which enjoys a more comfortable life." 43 Yet this social hypothesis and the briefness of the encounter did not change his opinion about the 'low level' of the civilization among the natives of the island. The silent and sombre 'Pecherai,' many of whom according to Forster were obviously in poor health "seemed totally insensible of the superiority of our [European] situation, and did not once, with a single gesture, express their admiration of the ship, and its many great and remarkable objects. I cannot figure to myself a more unhappy human being, than one who seems to be so far deprived of reason...." 44

In addition to their indifference to the Europeans, the Pecherai offended Forster aesthetically: they smelled bad, looked sick, were poorly clothed and ate rotten food. Most significantly, in contrast to Tahitians, they possessed no spark of imagination, a prerequisite for a cultural evolution and future acculturation. Instead of the expected awe or wonder, there was "nothing but that vacant stare which is the characteristics of the most consummate stupidity." 45 Faced with what he assumed to be a spiritual void of the Pecherai's lives, Forster forms his answer to Rousseau's empathic vision of the noble savage: "If ever the pre-eminence of a civilized world over the savage could have been reasonably disputed, we might, from the bare contemplation of these miserable people, draw the most striking conclusions in favor of our superior happiness." 46 In the end -- and the encounter with the Pecherai marked the end of the South Seas exploration -- Forster reflectively moves away from his sympathetic views of the 'less civilized' local societies towards the more self-confident opinion about the unchallenged European universal superiority.

42Ibid., 627.
43Ibid., 632.
44Ibid., 633.
46Ibid., 631.
The great racial and cultural diversity of the examined people, nonetheless, required some ordering, and Forster concludes his 1,200 page "philosophical history of the voyage" with a brief synopsis of the scientific findings that rather hastily but determinedly outlines the geographical hierarchy of all humanity. For the scientist, the South Pacific functioned as some kind of an anthropological garden where various colors and shades of humanity could be rearranged in a universally accepted code system. So by narrating, classifying and ordering the peoples of the exotic worlds, he invites the enlightened European reader to discover the familiar world of Europe:

At other seasons we explored the Pacific Ocean between the tropics, and in the temperate zone; and there furnished geographers with new islands, naturalists with new plants and birds, and, above all, the friends of mankind with various modifications of human nature. In one extreme we saw, and not without compassion, the dull, hungry, deformed savages of Tierra del Fuego, incapable of guarding against the severities of their wretched climate, and having their mental faculties reduced to that miserable situation which places them next to brutes. In the other, the happier tribes of the Society Islands, beautifully formed, placed in a delightful climate, which supplies all their wants; sensible of the advantages of a well-ordered society, affectionate towards each other, and accustomed to gratify their senses, even till they lead to excesses. From the contemplation of these different characters, the advantages, the blessings which civilization and revealed religion have diffused over our part of the globe, will become more and more obvious to the impartial enquirer. He will acknowledge, with a thankful heart, that incomprehensible goodness which was given him a distinguished superiority over so many of his fellow-creatures, who follow the impulse of their senses, without knowing the nature or name of virtue; without being able to form that great idea of general order, which could alone convey to them a just conception of the Creator. Upon the whole nothing appears more evident, than that the additions to the stock of human knowledge which have been made during this voyage, however considerable they may be when put in competition with what was known before, are of small moment when compared with the immense variety of unknown objects which, even in our present confined situation, are still with our reach, and which, for ages to come, will probably open new and expansive fields, where the human soul will have room to expatiate, and display its faculties with superior lustre.\(^\text{47}\)

Still, in Forster's opinion, the small and isolated island societies in the South Seas do not only mirror the (pre-modern) cultural paradigms of Europe, but also point to the geographical limits of European knowledge. Therefore, he ambiguously concludes his 'naturalist' epic of the voyage with the verse of Petrarch: "You see both poles at the same

\(^{47}\text{Ibid., 684-85.}\)
time, the planets and their oblique course across the heavens; and you see how short is our view.”

This extraordinary ability to recognize simultaneously the geographical scope of the world and conceptual limits of the mind shaped Forster’s memories of his journey, and in the end, “the route of the second voyage ... appeared to Forster like an event in a dream, magical.” However, if for Forster himself, the expedition invoked dream-like recollections, then for most of his highly impressionistic and sensation-seeking readers, the entire voyage must have induced a fairy-tale imagination. Conversely, the memorable narrative of the exotic world opened for Forster the doors to the extravagant and fickle salon-universe of the refined and aristocratic society of Europe. For a brief moment, he became a living sensation at the royal courts of Vienna and Warsaw, and was politely accepted at the intellectual soirées of the enlightened society of Weimar led by Goethe.

Despite (or because of) the book’s high narrative qualities and its popular appeal, many scientists of the time criticized Forster’s work for being too lax regarding the geographical, botanical, zoological and ethnographic facts. To many, Forster’s belletristic account of Cook’s scientific expedition was deemed to be too impressionistic, peppered with too many “sentimental effusions” and subjective intrusions. Yet these complaints seemed to come from the scholars who valued the encyclopedic knowledge and Forster quickly rebuked their objections with his usual sense of sarcasm:

So you don’t find any facts recorded, which were not touched upon by Cook, and which nevertheless could contribute to the history of man, arts and sciences? Now, now! — Sentimental effusions in the right place should be quite tolerable. Do not eliminate sentimentalism [Empfindsamkeit] altogether ...otherwise frosty virtue will soon freeze completely, and then no virtuous man ought to go the public who does not carry a dandelion, bear’s-foot, or even an elephant’s proboscis.

In contrast to the scientists of the older generation who were trained in a strict rationalist tradition, the emerging future scholars and literati of the nineteenth century were delighted by Forster’s sensual and individualized account of the exotic world. Forster was certainly influenced by the most recent German and English literary developments,

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48 Ibid., 685 (translation p. 830).
50 Thomas and Berghoof, “Introduction,” xi.
51 Georg Forster, Georg Forster Antwort an die Göttingischen Recensenten, as quoted in Thomas and Berghof, “Introduction,” xl.
and his work, in many ways, reflects the emerging Romantic aesthetic sensibility, which set up the particular and unique above the ordinary and familiar. More than a half century later, at the end of the Romantic era, Alexander von Humboldt, in his *Cosmos* (1845), credited Forster for introducing into geographical writing the "descriptive powers [Darstellungsvermögen] of the observer, the enlivening of the element descriptive of nature, and the multiplication of views."\(^{52}\) Forster's narrative, according to Humboldt, challenged the prevailing traditions of the scientific objectivity by infusing natural sciences with highly individualized aesthetic values: "Everything which can impart individuality and vividness to the view of an exotic truth of nature [Naturwahrheit] is found united in his works."\(^{53}\)

In a unique way Forster's description of the South Pacific breaches the gap between the two opposing narrative traditions: the scientific, rational assessments of natural and social realities and the emotional, evocative visualizations of place. His "Voyage connects in most interesting ways Enlightenment interests in nature with the aesthetic, social, and political concerns we have come retrospectively to associate with Romanticism, but which in Forster's case have been called "Storm and Stress" or "pre-Romanticism."\(^{54}\) His life in many ways also crosses two distinct intellectual and cultural milieus and his sensual treatment of the South Seas gave impetus to the imaginary and physical colonization of the exotic Pacific 'paradise.' Many famous German literati of the time, such as "Johan Heinrich Voss (the translator of Homer), Klopstock, Stolberg and Matthias Claudius, who all signed up to join a proposed writers' colony in Tahiti, thus responded to Forster's reception of their own works, in the mirror held up by his travelogue."\(^{55}\)

The popularity of this book made young Forster instantly the leading expert on travel literature, geography and natural history and, in spite of having no credible academic education, he quickly advanced within the scholarly circuit of German-speaking Europe. In 1778, Forster received a teaching position at the Carolinum, a small college in the town of Kassel. Two years later, the elder Forster became a professor at the University of Halle, one of the leading academies in Germany. However, Georg Forster was not satisfied with his minor academic status in Kassel and eventually, like his father, he was hoping to establish himself comfortably at some prestigious German university. Yet,

\(^{53}\) Ibid.
\(^{54}\) Thomas and Berghof, "Introduction," xxxix.
\(^{55}\) Ibid., xli.
because his book had a reputation of being a literary rather than scientific sensation, no university in Germany was willing to offer him a position. Unexpectedly, in the fall of 1783, Forster received an invitation from the university in Wilna, and seeing no prospects in Germany, he decided to leave Kassel and settled down in Lithuania.

**THE ROAD TO WILNA**

The goal towards which we strive is the unrestricted reign of reason accompanied by the unweakened capacity for feeling. This union is the great, but as yet still unsolved problem of humaneness [Humanität]. (Georg Forster)56

In a letter from Wilna in 1786 Forster wrote:

Here, where the science is covered by the silence of the night, where the scientific achievements are not rewarded even by an simple honorary prize, where the most renowned and celebrated people are only those who own the most serfs or gamble the most money — here, a foreigner, because of the apathy of his compatriots, gradually starts to feel abandoned by a better part of the civilized society.... The local society is marked by sluggishness, constant postponements and indifference to anything virtuous; here, a traveler will encounter the tolerance and masking of the elementary wrongdoings... persistence of habitual moralizing nonsense, lack of modern forms of education, and, at times, a remorseless contempt for learning; in addition, the country is gripped by a senseless patriotism, irrational governing structure and sickly state constitution. Here, French opulence conjugates with Sarmatian bestiality, and in order to survive and stay vigorous and mentally alert, one has to become static, remorseless and turn his eyes from all this [absurdity]. ...In Wilna, there is not a single bookstore, and in Warsaw — there are one or two bankrupt book dealers who trade only in indecent novels; in all of Poland, to be called German is the most degrading curse, and the education of the highest nobility is in the hands of corrupt French barbers and [female] modistes.57

In the spring of 1784, twenty-nine year old Georg Adam Forster finally left provincial Kassel for the capital of Lithuania, where, in the following fall, he was expected to take a chair of natural history at the local university. Wilna is located roughly about 1200 kilometers northeast from Kassel and at the end of the eighteenth century, with good weather conditions, this distance could be leisurely covered in a matter of a few weeks.

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56 Forster, as quoted in Saine, Georg Forster, 66.
Forster’s trip, however, lasted almost six months. The reason for such an unhurried journey was Forster’s desire to tour Germany and Austria. Although he was born in a German-speaking environment and considered German to be his mother tongue, Forster’s geographical exposure to the German lands was rather limited. Before moving to Kassel in 1778, the young scientist spent most of his youth in England and the South Pacific. In Forster’s mind, Germany was certainly not Terra Incognita, but before fulfilling his eight-year teaching contract at the University of Wilna, he desired to familiarize himself with the important scientific and industrial sites of his semi-native land. So, in May, Forster found himself in Leipzig, where the traditional Easter book fair was in full swing; and, in June, he visited the two mining towns of Saxony, Zellerfeld and Freiberg, where he hastily tried to familiarize himself with the latest mining technologies. (One of the research responsibilities taken by Forster at the University of Wilna was the investigation into the industrial potentials of the natural resources of Lithuania and his brief stopover in the Saxon mining towns had research field-trip characteristics.)

However, Forster also viewed the tour of Germany as an opportunity to revive his fame among the social and academic elites of the German states. Hence, he decided to spend the rest of the summer in Vienna, the imperial capital of the Habsburg domain, the epicentre of the German world. Here, the young professor became an immediate seasonal sensation. In spite of the debilitating summer heat that considerably slowed down the social season of the Viennese aristocratic society, Forster was endlessly rushed from one salon to another where he graciously volunteered to entertain his hosts and their guests with his tales about the exotic nature and barbarian peoples of the South Seas. For the first time in his life, Forster was treated almost as equal by one of the most sophisticated and richest aristocratic circles of Europe. 58 He greatly enjoyed the courteous attention he received from the highest Viennese nobility, even if it led to exhaustion. “I am having a hard time of it,” sardonically lamented Forster to his fiancée, Therese Heyne, “in order to be all things to all men, as I set out to do, I have to be on my feet or ride in my carriage from one door to the next all day. There is no end to the invitations to distinguished houses. I have already dined four times at Prince Kaunitz.” 59

58 Forster’s brief visit of Vienna is covered in detailed in Pinz, “Wiener Lebenslust” in his Das Paradies ist nirgendwo, 159-173.
59 Forster, as quoted in Saine, Georg Forster, 37. Kaunitz was for several decades the chancellor of the state under the Habsburg monarchs, Maria Theresa and Joseph II.
Many of the socialites of Vienna had actually read or heard about Forster's book and were interested in hearing more intimate and piquant (unpublishable) stories about the exotic islands. The favorite topic of salon discussions, of course, was Tahiti, which -- thanks to Forster and Bougainville's accounts -- had already gained a reputation of being an eroticized Eden. But while Forster was invigorating the minds (and fantasies) of Viennese high society with his lucid descriptions of the distant and unattainable paradise, he also discovered his personalized earthly ideal. After spending a few weeks among the aristocratic courtiers and intellectual circles of Vienna, Forster quickly fell in love with the carefree and cosmopolitan life of the city. "True happiness is, according to my present opinion: to enjoy everything that is allowed, that is that does not injure myself or others. ...For a heart such as mine...Vienna is a Paradise," wishfully announced the naturalist.60

In a misguided expectation of receiving a serious job offer from local academic or imperial institutions, he delayed leaving Vienna to the last minute. (In Vienna, he received, but declined, an offer from Ofen (Pest) University in Hungary.) Regrettably, because of his teaching obligations in Wilna, Forster was obliged to leave this dream-city with its elegant salons, refined dinner parties, cozy coffee houses and attentive audience. Upon hearing of his inevitable departure, everyone in the Habsburg court, according to Forster's diary and letters, was sincerely hoping and wishing for his quick return: "all my friends, and even Kaunitz, have encouraged me to hope that I can come back here when I leave Poland. Even the Emperor said to me: 'I think I will see you again soon in Vienna, because you won't be able to stand it long among the Poles.'"61 Many of his aristocratic acquaintances promised to keep in touch with him or inform him about various job possibilities in Austria; yet, despite his best intentions, within a few months of his arrival to Wilna, Forster's correspondence with Vienna dwindled to a few polite letters per year.

Charmed by Vienna, which, in Forster's own words, was "beautifully adorned by nature and [emperor] Joseph"62, and flattered by the Viennese society, Georg Forster interpreted the courteous farewell words of the Holy Roman emperor to be his good luck premonition. In reality, despite his lasting admiration of Joseph II and the enlightened administrative policies of the Habsburgs, he never came back to Vienna, nor did he ever

60 Ibid., 36.
61 Ibid., 163.
receive any job offers in the Habsburg domain.\textsuperscript{63} Still, at least in part, the emperor's prediction came true, because Forster remained "among the Poles" for only three years, instead of the expected eight years.

Forster took the job at the recently reformed ex-Jesuit academy of Wilna because he was eager to run away from Kassel where he taught the course in natural history at the Carolinum. For financial and professional reasons, the job at the Carolinum proved to be extremely unsatisfying, and if he wanted to advance his academic career he was not in a position to refuse the lucrative offer from Wilna, simply because it was the only offer he had received. At the time, the university in Wilna was not among the leading European academies, but due to the educational reforms implemented in Poland-Lithuania its scholarly prestige had increased significantly. The material foundation of the university was the Jesuit Academy established in Wilna in 1579 in order to promote Catholic counter-Reformation ideology. After the papal closure of the Jesuit Order in 1773, the academy was taken under the direct patronage of the state and was run by the newly created Educational Commission of Lithuania. In 1781 the restructured academy became the supreme school of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which supervised the entire educational system of the country. (This was an extremely novel administrative and pedagogical invention, since it was one of the first attempts to centralize the entire educational structure of a large European state.) In spite of the fundamental administrative reforms, the university was poorly funded, and most of its faculty consisted of its former professors, the secularized ex-Jesuit monks. Consequently, the new educational curriculum of the university differed very little from the old one, which was largely based on outmoded Catholic religious and social dogmas. Hence, in order to increase the university's international prestige and to advertise its secularized and enlightened façade, the Educational Commission, headed by bishop Poniatowski -- the brother of the king of Poland -- was actively seeking to lure various European academic celebrities to Wilna.\textsuperscript{64}

Georg Foster was approached by the Commission not so much for his scientific works, but for his widely recognized name. In fact, the position was first offered to his

\textsuperscript{63} In 1787, Forster dedicated his German translation of the journals of Cook's third voyage to Joseph II, the Holy Roman Emperor. Yet he died a mortal enemy of the empire.

\textsuperscript{64} For more on the period of the reformation of the University see Jonas Kubilius et al., eds., \textit{Vilniaus Universiteto Istorija, 1579-1803} (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1976), 223-279.
father who had a much wider academic reputation. The elder Forster declined the offer and skillfully proposed his son to the position. The Commission agreed to employ Forster’s son, but did not lower the scientific and professional standards: Georg Forster was required to receive a doctoral degree within the first year of his arrival to Wilna where besides his teaching responsibilities he was expected to set up a botanical garden based on local flora, establish an agronomy program at the university and investigate the possible industrial and mining potentials of Lithuania. These were heavy demands and unfortunately, in all fields, both methodologically and intellectually, Forster was rather badly equipped to deal with his academic responsibilities. He knew very little about the nature of Lithuania, contemporary husbandry practices or methods of industrial development.

Forster was motivated to go Wilna more by his personal spiritual metamorphosis than by his desire to participate in the scientific rejuvenation of Lithuania. In Kassel, following the social trend of the times, Forster became heavily involved in Masonic circles and joined the Rosicrucian Order. Besides some various social engagements and abstract commitments to the ideas of universal brotherhood and equality, the lower members of the Order were bluntly told “to study hermetic magic and perform alchemical experiments.” While initially these kinds of activities amused him, Forster quickly became bored and irritated by the senseless secrecy, mysticism and revelry of the Masonic society. By joining the Rosicrucians, he probably expected some sort of social and financial rewards; instead he found himself getting further into debt by spending most of his already poorly managed salary on silly social engagements. Soon after joining the local lodge, he decided to leave the Order.

Yet for Forster, leaving the Masonic society was not an easy decision, because despite its ridiculous ‘scientific’ foundation and intellectual immaturity, the Order seemed to possess some sway over the social life of Kassel and Germany. (The king of Prussia was thought to be a member of the Order). Forster probably believed that even a private refutation of the Order would seriously damage his chances to succeed in the academic circles of Germany. Leaving the Rosicrucians openly would probably put to end to his social life. So when he received the offer from Wilna, which he believed to be outside the German Masonic influence, it came as a welcome change, providing a reasonable excuse

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for Forster to leave Kassel and the Order. Forster immediately turned this twist of fate into a personal revelation: “Recently a revolution has occurred in my thinking, which as I hope, will contribute greatly to my satisfaction in the future. ...Now I hope that I will finally become a man in my principles and in my adherence to them.” At least from a distance, Wilna transformed Forster from the reckless illusionist into a rational moralist.

This transformation, in Forster’s mind, was incomplete without a considerable alteration of his domestic life. In distant Wilna, he needed a partner who could manage his household and provide emotional support. In short, he needed a wife; so before he left to Wilna he became engaged to Therese Heyne, the daughter of his friend and colleague from the University of Göttingen, professor of classical philology Christian Gottlob Heyne.

It is evident from Georg’s letters to his friends that his engagement to Therese was not based on love, but was initiated by a mutual respect. Georg was not a very good-looking man, and for his age he was in poor health. Three years at sea had an extreme effect on his physical condition: he lost most of his teeth due to scurvy and suffered constantly from various indigestion problems and recurring infections. Therese, who was considered to be a beautiful and exceptionally well-educated young woman, responded to Forster’s intellect and kindness, rather than his looks or financial prospects. She was keenly interested in literature and science, and knew very well about the economic difficulties of an academic life. But most importantly, Therese Heyne was willing to follow Forster to Wilna and help him to become a well-established and widely respected scientist. Forster was simultaneously delighted by Therese’s intellectual abilities and relieved by her abilities to run a frugal household. In response to her ‘sacrifice,’ Forster felt obliged to make Therese happy by never excluding her from his scientific or her literary interests. As a consequence of this mutual understanding, Therese became one of his closest intellectual confidants. Since the marriage was postponed for a year until Forster firmly settled down in Wilna, Georg and Therese became intimate correspondents, and most of Forster’s first impressions and descriptions of Poland-Lithuania are captured in his numerous letters to his fiancée.

66 Forster’s relationship with the Rosicrusians is covered in Gerhard Steiner, Freimaurer und Rosenkreuzer -- Georg Forsters Weg durch Geheimbünde (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1985).
67 Forster, as quoted in Saine, Georg Forster, 34.
It is not clear what Forster knew about Wilna and its university before his trip to Lithuania. It is fair to assume, however, that he was somewhat familiar with the natural and social terrain of the country. Forster after all was born in Poland and, nominally speaking, could still be a Polish subject. While the area around Danzig had been incorporated into the Prussian kingdom during the first partition of Poland in 1772, the area around Forster’s birthplace, Nassenhuben, remained in Polish possession as a detached enclave until the second partition of the country in 1793. Polish and German cultures intermixed relatively unconstrained in the lower Vistula region, and Forster -- although he grew up in a German-speaking household -- was certainly exposed to the Polish language. Forster did not consider himself to be a Polish ‘national’, but, because of his family origins, he did not see Poland or Lithuania as a distant country or a mystifying cultural realm.

Historically, there had been a significant presence of German-speaking population in Poland-Lithuania, especially among its urban inhabitants and some parts of the nobility. Moreover, for more than a half century (1697-1763), the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was in a monarchical personal union with the German state of Saxony. In addition, with the 1772 division of the Commonwealth, a large number of the Polish-speaking population came under direct Prussian or Austrian rule (Figure 2.1). However, the relationship between the Germans and Poles, especially after the partition of the Commonwealth, took the course of escalating mutual animosity and revenge. As opposed to Britain and, especially, France, where Rousseau in his writings was celebrating and honoring the patriotic and republican spirit of the ‘brave Poles,’ there was very little sympathy in Germany for the geopolitical mishaps of the disintegrating Polish-Lithuanian state. Most enlightened Germans -- from kings to church leaders and from scientists to poets -- thought the neighboring noble republic was a political and social anomaly. Furthermore, the country was conceived to be an aesthetically and visually unpleasant place: a space that negated the emerging German sense of classical harmony and order. Goethe, who in 1790 made a week-long trip to Krakow, laconically recapped the prevailing German view of Poland: “In these eight days I have seen much that is remarkable, even if it has been for the most part only remarkably negative.”68 Forster was most likely influenced by the dominant German perception of Poland, and he certainly did not subscribe to Rousseau’s idealized

68 Goethe, as quoted in Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe, 333.
vision of Polish patriotism and bravery (in general, Forster was quite hostile to Rousseau's philosophy); nor did he seem to echo the prevailing sympathetic sentiments concerning the Polish political struggle against its aggressive neighbors which were embraced among British intellectuals. On the other hand, before his departure to Wilna, there is no suggestion that Forster had a hostile or bigoted attitude towards Poland-Lithuania. In general, he was excited about the financial and professional opportunities of his Wilna position and he went to Lithuania with noticeable enthusiasm. Still, his somewhat positive outlook towards his prospects in Wilna probably did not arise from his great respect or fondness of the Polish culture, but was an emotional response to his deep dislike of his personal and professional situation in Kassel. Forster went to Wilna with a dual, and perhaps even confused, comprehension of the place: his elevated personal expectations were fused with a more general German depreciation of everything Polish.

Unlike for his voyage to the South Seas, Forster was not very well prepared for his trip to Wilna. Before he boarded the Resolution, the young scientist had read several accounts of different voyages into the South Pacific. His own narrative of the trip, in many ways, is written against this (minimal but growing) literary background. In contrast, his more personal reflections of Poland -- a short diary and about two hundred letters -- were written in a certain narrative vacuum. Forster rarely, if ever, mentions any literary sources concerning the natural or social life of Poland and Lithuania. In most instances, he exclusively relies on his own perceptual powers and descriptive inventiveness. This does not mean that Forster disengages with the customary German representation and imaginations of Poland-Lithuania; on the contrary, he always attempts to either redefine or embellish the prevailing German social and cultural perceptions of the neighboring country. In other words, if Forster's account of the South Pacific is narrated against the tales of other travelers, then, his reflections of Wilna are formed parallel to the popular German comprehension of the place.

Of course, as an experienced (global) traveler, Forster effectively manages to mask the commonplace and domestic German understandings of Lithuania with his own scientific erudition and aesthetic sentimentality. The result of this narrative masquerade is a brisk, unsentimental mapping of Wilna through a double lens: on one level, Forster employs the familiar cultural similes, such as savagery, barbarism, crudeness or despotism that were commonly encountered in the eighteenth century German (and western European) social discourses about eastern Europe; on the other hand, he uses specific
geographical designations, such as Austria (Vienna), Holland, England, France, New Zealand, Tahiti and Terra del Fuego that could be only understood in the context of his personal global travels. This highly personalized metaphorical palette allows Forster to color Wilna in a geographically and historically unsettling way. The city’s historical place constantly moves along the temporal order that connects the barbarian past of western Europe with its civilized present. On the other hand, its geographical location repeatedly swings along the spatial longitude that bonds the civilized regions of Europe to the ‘savage’ parts of the world. Surprisingly, this picture of Wilna provides rationally ‘imaginative’ geographical and historical coordinates to the otherwise perplexing and ill-defined Baroque phenomenon known as Sarmatism.
Figure 2.1: *Poland-Lithuania after the first partition in 1772*. From the atlas, *Atlante storico, politico e statistico della Polonia*, 1832. *Source*: Danguolė Gudienė, ed., *Lithuania on the Map*, exhibition catalog (Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 1999), 70.
Forster’s ‘discovery’ of Sarmatia started with a brief, but cordial royal introduction to Wilna, which was soon rectified by a much more authoritarian imperial warning about the fallacies of Poland. According to his letters, Forster was initiated to Wilna during his research ‘field trip’ in Saxony. In the mining town of Freiberg, he was unexpectedly greeted by prince Stanislaw Poniatowski (junior), a nephew of the king of Poland, who, without any hesitation “described Lithuanians in most positive ways.” While the prince acknowledged social and economic problems of the country, which primarily resulted from having “too many heads with too many opinions,” he also made some positive remarks about “the Enlightenment [Aufklärung] in Poland.” The prince cautioned Forster about the slow progress of modern scientific ideas in the Commonwealth, but he simultaneously assured the scientist about the excellent position of Wilna within the Polish Enlightenment. In addition, he described the city as being “the most pleasant place in Poland and the city’s university having a much better reputation that the University of Krakow.” (At the time, there were only two universities in the Commonwealth.)

These positive (Polish) reassurances were immediately dispelled in Vienna, where Poland and its cultural attempts to embrace the Enlightenment were neither supported nor noticed. In his diary, and later in some of his letters, Forster records his brief conversation with the Holy Roman Emperor, Joseph II, who openly detested Stanislaw Poniatowski, the elected king of Poland-Lithuania. The reported conversation primarily concerned Forster’s academic position in Wilna and it followed a strictly outlined format of imperial court etiquette: the emperor asked ‘challenging’ questions, while Forster tried to provide ‘objective’ answers. Yet despite its dreary character, the dialogue between the two unequal social partners exposed the tension between Forster’s professional expectations of and general German preconceptions of Poland. The authoritarian imperial examination, as it was reported in one of the first letters sent by Forster from Wilna dispelled all Forster’s

69 Georg Foster to Samuel Thomas Sömmering, 2 July 1784, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 114. German physiologist and anatomist Sömmering (1755-1830) was one of the closests Forster’s friends; on their friendship, see Franz Dumont, “Das Seelenbündis”: Die Freundschaft zwischen Georg Forster und Samuel Thomas Soemmerring” in Der Weltumsegler und seine Freunde: Georg Forster als gesellschaftlicher Schriftsteller der Goethezeit, ed. Detlef Rasmussen (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1988), 70-100.
70 Ibid., 113.
71 Ibid., 114.
illusions about his success in Wilna. In general, the constant shift between idealism and
cynicism is probably one of the most noticeable psychological traits of Forster. Indeed, in
private, Forster repeatedly referred to his ‘uneven’ character as the most troubling
psychological problem of his life:

The emperor penetrated me with his inquiring eyes. ... ‘Are you going to
Poland?’ — ‘Yes, your majesty, I am going to Wilna.’ — ‘Is there a University?’ —
‘Yes, your majesty.’ — ‘I don’t think you will survive in Poland. What do you
intend to do there?’ — ‘Teach natural science. — ‘I think instead of teaching them
[Poles] science, they first need to be taught an alphabet. ...I know Poles... and
believe me, if you want to achieve something in your life, you won’t be able to do
it among them. You participated in some great sea expedition, didn’t you?’ —
‘Yes, your majesty.’ ...— ‘This time, you will not have to endure an exhausting
sea voyage, as you did during your trip to Tahiti; you will travel to Poland by
land.’ — ‘I would be also extremely pleased, if, in Poland, I could find a gentle
nation [people], like the one in Tahiti!’ — ‘it won’t happen; the Poles are stubborn
and stupid.’ — ‘Evidently, these two vices often go together. Still, in Poland, I will
try to do my best.’ — ‘It would be best for you if you knew how to leave that
country the same way you got there.’

Austria and Poland were neighbouring countries, but the border between the two
states were pushed further north by the first (1772) division of the Commonwealth. Forster
entered the Polish Kingdom at Krakow and from there he took the straight road to Wilna
via Warsaw, Bialystock and Grodno. At the end of the eighteenth century, it was a
relatively well known and much traveled road, and the emperor’s remark concerning
Forster’s mode of transportation (the land journey vs. sea travel) was perhaps more than
just a mere expression of his detailed geographical knowledge of the region. It meant to
allude to the sea-like experience of traveling through Poland and Lithuania. The
continental difference between what was perceived to be the orderly German territories
and chaotic Poland was demarcated not so much by any specific topographical features,
but through contrasting travel sensations.

One of the foreign travelers who captured the perceptual and emotional difference
between Poland and western Europe was the French count, Louis-Phillipe de Segur, an
envoy extraordinaire of Louis XVI to the court of Catherine in Saint Petersburg. Segur
crossed Poland and Lithuania in the fall of 1784, only one or two months after Forster
reached Wilna. Segur was traveling from Berlin, so the paths of the two travelers
crisscrossed in Warsaw. Incidentally, the French count was the same age as the German

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professor, but in contrast to Forster, Segur was an extremely wealthy aristocrat, and since he traveled on one of the most prestigious European diplomatic missions, he could enjoy all the comforts and privileges that his high social status offered to him. Segur owned his own carriage and, as a guest of various Polish-Lithuanian magnates, he usually boarded at the best accommodations of the country. Forster, on the other hand, depended on the coaches provided by the inadequate state-run postal system and his accommodations and comforts relied on the social generosity of a few noble patrons. In addition, Segur crossed Lithuania at the start of winter, so he could enjoy the ride through the countryside by sleigh, a more comfortable and, for many western Europeans, more exotic mode of transportation. Nevertheless, a misfortune caught up with the French count “somewhere between Bialystok and Riga” (in the vicinity of Vilnius?), where, because of a heavy snowstorm, he was forced to leave behind his luggage. He never recovered his belongings, and several months later, he received a report stating that everything he had owned “was lost in fire” somewhere in the middle of frozen Lithuania.73

Perhaps the loss of his possessions greatly influenced the count’s experience and memory of Lithuania, but the feeling of loss engulfed Segur immediately upon his crossing of the border between Prussia and Poland:

In traversing the eastern part of the estates of the king of Prussia, it seems that one leaves the theatre where there reigns a nature embellished by the efforts of art and a perfect civilization. The eye is already saddened by arid sands, by vast forest. But when one enters Poland, one believes one has left Europe entirely, and the gaze is struck by a new spectacle: an immense country almost totally covered with fir trees always green, but always sad, interrupted at long intervals by some cultivated plains, like islands scattered on the ocean; a poor population, enslaved, dirty villages; cottages little different from savage huts; everything makes one think one has moved back ten centuries, and that one finds oneself amid hordes of Huns, Scyntians, Veneti, Slavs, and Sarmatians.”74

Segur’s memoirs were written decades after his trip and published only in 1824, and one cannot but suspect that his reflection of the eastern part of the European continent was greatly shaped by the French catastrophe during Napoleon’s 1812 march to Russia. It was amid these unexplainable hordes of ‘barbarians,’ this frontier-like mêlée of the centuries, that the modern French lost their European empire. Segur did not participate in the Napoleonic campaign, but his son took an important part in it and wrote an extremely

73 Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe, 21.
74 Louis-Phillipe de Ségor, Mémoires, souvenirs, et anecdotes, par le comte de Ségor, vol.1, as quoted in Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe, 19.
influential account of it almost immediately after the French defeat. Segur wrote his memories in the socio-cultural milieu where Russia and Lithuania had suddenly acquired an extremely sinister and tragic nature. In 1812, the melancholic countryside that Segur had crossed in 1784 became the graveyard of the Napoleonic Europe, a vast ocean of death from where only the lucky managed to return.

Still Segur had his personal experience of sea traveling, since before his diplomatic assignment to Saint Petersburg, he spent some time in North America. His characterization of Poland as the ocean with some scattered islands also resonates with the accounts of some contemporaries. In general, traveling through Poland-Lithuania was considered to be a boring and isolating affair, like a sea voyage. William Coxe, a well-versed Englishman traversed the country on his way to Russia during his unusual 1778 Grand Tour of Europe. (Coxe was a tutor-companion to a young English aristocrat). His travel itinerary literally preceded Forster’s trip. Coxe pointed out the monotony and repetitiveness of the road, which in its lack of any visual stimulation resembled an uneventful sea voyage: “I never saw a road so barren of interesting scenes as that from Cracow to Warsaw. There is not a single object throughout the whole tract which can for a moment draw the attention of the most inquisitive traveler.”

In Lithuania, the sense of being inescapably surrounded by natural forces was increased by the poor quality of the road that cut through the forest without any noticeable sense of direction. The travelers had to navigate through treacherous passages of the ‘melancholic’ woods: “The roads in this country are quite neglected, being scarcely superior to by-paths winding through the thick forest without the least degree of artificial direction: they are frequently so narrow as scarcely to admit a carriage; and are continually so obstructed by stumps and roots of trees, and in many parts so exceedingly sandy, that eight small horses could scarcely drag us along.” The small ‘islet’ or narrow ‘shorelines’ of this green forest were not that impressive -- there the travelers were immediately assaulted by the natives: “We left off early from Biallistock: for some way we traversed forest; afterwards the country became more open, abounding with corn and pasture; the towns and villages were long and straggling; all the houses and even the churches are of wood; crowds of beggars surrounded our carriage whenever we stopped;

76 Ibid., 226.
Jews made their appearance without end.\textsuperscript{77} The larger ‘islands’ -- the towns of Lithuania -- also offer very little of interest. “Grodno” recalls Coxe “is a large town and straggling place, but contains no more than 3000 Christians, excluding the persons employed in the manufactories, and 1000 Jews. It has greatly the appearance of a town in decline: containing a mixture of wretched hovels, falling houses, and ruined palaces, with magnificent gateways, remains of its ancient magnificence. A few habitations in good repair made the contrast more striking.”\textsuperscript{78}

In general, traveling through Poland-Lithuania even for wealthy people was a discomforting affair. Practically everyone was upset by the total lack of privacy and forced intimacy between the foreigners and the local world. Almost all travelers commented on spending cold or wet nights in the open, sleeping in barns or staying in wretched peasant dwellings; and everyone complained about the attacking hordes of vicious mosquitoes, bed bugs, lice, and the lack of ‘decent’ food. In these conditions, one could always dream about the sheltering loneliness of the sea.

Despite the ghostly apparition of the menacing ‘ancient barbarians’ witnessed by Segur, most travelers responded to the more immediate and urgent spectacle of the country. In the Commonwealth, the traveler’s day-to-day communication with the passing local world was circumvented by their direct contacts with Jews, who managed the entire mercantile and ‘travel’ business of the country. In contrast to western European countries, most inns, taverns, shops, petty trade, stagecoach posts, horse and carriage trade in Poland were owned or run by Jews. Since almost every travel necessity was provided by local Jews, for many gentile travelers, a journey through Poland invoked a double sense of alienation: it might be surprising to travel through to a foreign, unknown country, but it was completely baffling to depend exclusively on the locally marginalized and often despised religious minority of the land. This was especially noticeable in Lithuania, where, according to William Coxe, the “Jews made their appearance without end.”\textsuperscript{79} Hence, for the arriving western European, Lithuania was foremost a land of the Jews:

In our route through Lithuania we could not avoid being struck with the swarms of Jews, who, though very numerous in every part of Poland, seem to have fixed their head-quarters in this duchy. If you ask for an interpreter, they bring you a Jew; if you come to an inn, the landlord is a Jew, if you want post-horse, a Jew procures them and a Jew drives them; if you wish to purchase, a Jew is your

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 211.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 214.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 226.
agent: and this is the only country in Europe where Jews cultivate the ground: in passing through Lithuania, we frequently saw them engaged in sowing, reaping, mowing, and other works of husbandry.\textsuperscript{80}

Coxe, nonetheless, like many other travelers, quickly became familiar with the Jewish ‘spectacle’ of Lithuania. In fact, the initially mysterious and even annoying Jews soon became the ‘old friends’ of the otherwise lonely and isolated traveler:

We found themselves in the middle of a large barn or shed, at the further end of which we descried two large pines, branches and all, in full blaze upon an hearth without a chimney: round it several figures, in full black robes and with long beards, were employed in stirring a large cauldron suspended over the flame. A belief in witchcraft, or a little superstition, might easily have represented this party as a group of magicians engaged in celebrating some mystic rites; but upon nearer inspection, we recognized in them our old friends the Jews preparing their and our evening repast.\textsuperscript{81}

In contrast to Segur and Coxe whose boredom was punctuated with the sporadic moments of bemusement or phantasmagorical imagination, Forster responded to Poland with a great sense of regret. The naturalist of course could not distance himself from the local reality by escaping into the fantasy world. After all, he knew that Lithuania was going to be his home for some time and one could not live in the theater of ancient spectacles or folk-tale performances for too long. Hence, during a rare moment of complete seclusion, lost somewhere in between the endless forests and the ‘savage’ inhabitants of this foreign land, he internalized his estrangement from the country by tying his private grief to personal humility: “It was the dilapidation, the filthiness in the moral and physical sense, the half-wildness \textit{[Halbwildheit]} and half-civilization \textit{[Halbkultur]} of the people, the sight of the sandy land everywhere covered with black woods, which went beyond any conception I could have formed. I wept in a lonely hour for myself -- and then, as I gradually came to myself, for the so deeply sunken people.”\textsuperscript{82}

This was an impulsive and fleeting revelation and it did not transform Forster’s views or opinions about the country. Yet it ignited his life-long passion for social justice and a generalized longing for human happiness: his emotions were not to be wasted on a sentimental self-pity, but should be reserved for rational compassion for the unfortunate inhabitants of the land. Still, this self-discovery did not lead to any future revelations,

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 230-31.
\textsuperscript{82} Georg Forster to Frierich Heinrich Jacobi, 17 December 1784, \textit{Georg Forsters Werke} 14, 248-249.
simply because the encountered people and the countryside created a numbing or desensitizing effect. Indirectly, Poland reminded him of hostile Tierra del Fuego or unfriendly New Zealand, and like many other travelers, Forster eventually failed to show compassion for the “deeply sunken” masses, and he quickly adopted the ‘barbarian’ methods of social control. He repeatedly noted that the bad treatment of domestic servants, for instance, was provoked by their excessive “drunkenness, laziness, gluttony, etc.”83 And at least on one occasion, without any hesitation, he himself used physical force to wake up his drunken coachmen.84

In the end, Forster immediately dismisses his emotional weakness and psychological predisposition towards the oppressed masses as an inappropriate response for the rationally minded and enlightened individual. The road to Wilna is not going to be his road to Damascus, and after his emotional breakdown, Forster quickly moves to a more dispassionate, and ‘objective’ observation of the country. “This was another moment of the foolishness on my side,” remarked Forster to his friend Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, an influential sensualist German philosopher, “but finally, I am fully recovered to recognize my inane behavior. Today, even if there is not a single thing here worthy of a rational justification, the different customs, lifestyle, language, fashion and governing practices -- in short, everything visible that at first so much revolted me simply because I was in a gloomy frame of mind -- does not bother me at all. After all, where on the earth can an objective observer not find deficiencies and imperfections!”85

Despite its briefness and sentimentality, Forster’s emotional breakdown exposed the frames of his ‘rational’ view of the country. It is not clear if Forster came up with his metaphorical assessment of Poland-Lithuanian as a land suspended in-between unripe Nature (Halbwildheit) and immature Culture (Halbkultur) at the moment of his gloomy mood or if it came up as a narrative result of his retrospective assessment of that threshold event. One thing is clear: Forster was extremely satisfied with this ingenious simile, which in his opinion perfectly captured the geographical and anthropological ambiguity of the place. He turned the metaphor into the country’s calling card -- and he always introduced

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83 Georg Forster to Therese Heyne, 18 November 1784, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 206.
84 The incident is reported in Forster’s diary, see Georgas Forsteris, Georgo Fosterio laiškai iš Vilniaus, ed. Jonas Kubilius (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1988), 406.
85 Foster to Jacobi, 17 December 1784, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 249.
Poland-Lithuania to his correspondents as a territorial amalgamation of the *Halbwildheit* with *Halbkultur*.

This metaphorical evaluation of the country became the dominant descriptive palette through which Forster’s entire experience of Wilna was channeled to his numerous friends, acquaintances and colleagues in Germany. All of his forthcoming narrative conclusions, cultural assessments and scientific (botanical, zoological and geographical) observations of Lithuania are shaped by this novel spatial topoi, which united his knowledge of nature with his interests in anthropology. Once the narrative novelty of the metaphor waned, Forster replaced it with more precise ‘scientific’ spatial definitions of Lithuania. But as a rule, these new geographical qualifications of the country stemmed from or were defined by this original response to the country. The literal meanings of the *Halbwildheit* and *Halbkultur* were ambiguous enough to satisfy the vague curiosity of the diverse range of Forster’s correspondents: professional naturalists, philosophers, linguists, publishers, doctors, writers, aristocratic ladies of the imperial Viennese court and his well-versed fiancée. Everyone seemed to understand what he meant by this narrative allusion, because this newly coined nominal title of the neighboring country articulated the deficiencies and idiosyncrasies of Poland by locating it within the clearly defined if somewhat abstract opposition between Nature and Culture.

Poland-Lithuania was neither outside nor inside the (European) culture; nor were its natural resources as rewarding as those of western Europe or abundant and untapped like those in North America or Siberia. The country was neither fully developed-civilized nor completely wild-primitive: it was something in between, something that defied all the familiar categories. Forster’s definition of Poland-Lithuania was echoed in Segur’s summary of the country as “an inconceivable mélange of ancient centuries and modern centuries, of monarchical spirit and republican spirit, of feudal pride and equality, of poverty and riches.” Yet, Forster gave to Lithuania (and Poland) a more universalizing definition that simultaneously summed up its local peculiarities and its global position. Poland-Lithuania was located within the scaling vectors of universal social development and natural evolution, and it both cases it stood at the middle point of the trajectory.

Forster replaces the temporally contradictory and somewhat illogical definition of Poland as the “mélange” of centuries with a much more evolutionary categorization of its

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cultural landscape. By specifying the local world as "half-cultured", the German naturalist situated it within the rudimentary global chart of a progressive human development. Paradoxically, on this universalizing terrain of cultural development, which encompasses and bands together global geography and European history, Poland-Lithuania is situated at the axial centre of the world. The country’s culture, so to speak, mediates between the 'uncivilized' and 'civilized' societies -- it serves as a spatial connector between the European and non-European parts of the globe. At the same time, it fleshes out -- that is, makes visible -- the barbarian roots of European civilization. However, this 'central' geographical position does not provoke Forster’s ethnographic curiosity. For Forster, who was accustomed to the dramatic topographical changes and always expected to discover something new in the world, the ‘mediocre’ spatial and temporal position of Lithuania spelled out aesthetic dullness and mental apathy.

Essentially, by inventing this new descriptive summary of Poland, Forster inscribes the idea of underdevelopment, which ties the inefficient utilization of nature to the inadequate level of social development, on the map of Europe. Forster’s metaphor was unique for his time, but it was not created outside the specific intellectual context of Enlightenment thinking, since it “was Eastern Europe’s ambiguous location within Europe but not fully European, that called for such notions as backwardness and development to mediate between the poles of civilization and barbarism.”87 Forster only added his naturalist’s touch to the otherwise common notion of Poland-Lithuanian as a quasi-European country.

87 Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe, 9.
Figure 2.2: Jewish merchants in Vilnius area. Lithograph by L. Bichebois, based on earlier prints and published in 1848. Source: Danguolė Gudienė, ed., Vilnius in the Publications of Jan Kazimierz Wilczynski, exhibition catalog (Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 2000), 31.
SARMATIAN NATURE

As a natural scientist, Forster usually responded to any aspect of the natural world with a sense of intrigue, adoration, awe and/or curiosity. At the end of the eighteenth century, Lithuania had gained a reputation as one of the few places in Europe where the forest was still preserved in its primeval uncultivated condition. Moreover, the dense and vast woods were inhabited by a great variety of animals and birds which had all but disappeared from most of (western) Europe. Most of the natural world of Lithuania was still not scientifically studied and classified, and increasingly, European zoologists and botanists started to look at the country’s forest as the source of great discoveries that could potentially rival the biological findings of more distant temperate places, such as North America and Siberia. Forster was fully aware of this botanical and zoological reputation of the country and, in part, he was hired by the Educational Commission of the grand duchy to complete a scientific catalogue of Lithuania’s natural world. Since most of the local animal and plant families were not yet mapped out, the possibility of discovering new species around Wilna was greater than in many parts of Europe. Realistically speaking, Forster could successfully utilize the untapped resources of local wildlife for his own professional advance; and metaphorically speaking, Forster’s path to European scientific glory could cut through the dark melancholic forest of Lithuania.

Forster was not the first foreigner to be hired to study the Lithuanian wilderness. The chair of the historiae naturalis at the reformed University of Wilna was established in 1781. Its founder and first professor of natural history was Jack Emmanuel Gilibert (1741-1814), a French botanist, who not only established a rudimentary botanical garden in the city and relatively extensive natural history library, but also started to work on an extensive work about the plants of Lithuania: Flora Lithuanica inchoate... published in Vilnae in 1781-82. Forster was replacing Gilibert who, after several years of living in Wilna, was returning to France. There is no indication that Forster before his trip to Wilna had any direct contacts with Gilibert or that he made any inquiries about his work. But in Leipzig, on his way to Lithuania, he overheard complimentary remarks about the

88 For the early history of the natural science teaching at the University of Vilnius, see A. Griška, Gamtos filosofija senajame Vilniaus Universitete (Vilnius: Mintis, 1982).
89 Česlovas Kudaba, “Žymus XVIII a. gamtininkas Georgas Fosteris” in Georgo Fosterio laiškai iš Vilniaus, 15.
Frenchman’s work in Lithuania from some German scientists. Gilibert, in their opinion, “was an exceptionally talented man, whose knowledge of botany and mineralogy was supreme and who, in contrast to most of his countrymen, did not exhibit any signs of French superficiality and immature (scientific) knowledge.”

Worse, Gilibert’s fundamental two-volume botanical work, which he found in one of the private libraries of Leipzig, spelled professional demise for Forster. “This [the publication] is a bad omen for me,” remarked Forster to his close friend, Samuel Thomas Sömmering, a German anatomist and physiologists.

Not only did Forster anxiously leaf through Gilibert’s Flora Lithuanica, but he also crossed through the natural terrain that had been extensively studied by the Frenchman. Forster’s way to Wilna took him through the well-traveled postal road that connected Venice via Vienna to the capital of Lithuania. This road was set up in 1562, and the trip from Vienna usually took several days, but Forster, according to the custom of the time, was obliged to visit several manors of local magnates en route. One of them, near Bialystock, belonged to Izabella Branicka, known as Madame Cracovie, the sister of the Polish king and the widow of the Royal Hetman and Castellan of Krakow. Several years earlier, Coxe, on his Grand Tour of Poland and Russia, also stayed at the manor, where he met Gilibert. Coxe, who was not a naturalist or scientist, was obviously impressed by both the professionalism of the Frenchman and his field of study -- the nature of Lithuania. He described the scientific achievements of Gilibert as a compliment to the natural richness of the country:

We carried a letter of recommendation to Mr. Gillibert, a French naturalist of great learning and abilities, who has the superintendence of the college and physic garden.... The physic garden, which did not exist in 1776, made when I passed through the town [Grodno] in 1778, a very respectable appearance; which was entirely owing to Mr. Gillibert’s attention and care. It contained 1500 exotics, amongst which were several delicate American plants sown in the open air, and which thrived remarkably in this climate. Mr. Gillibert told me, that he had discovered 200 species of plants in Lithuania, which were only thought indigenous in Siberia, Tartary, and Sweden; and that in the whole duchy he had observed 980 species, exclusive of the sorts common to most countries in Europe.

Mr. Gillibert had lately formed a small collection, chiefly consisting of the productions of Lithuania ...he professes to begin his publication upon that subject with a Flora Lithuanica; which will be successively followed by an account of the mineralogy, insects, quadrupeds, and birds. A great length of time

90 Forster to Sömmering, 14 May 1784, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 60.
91 Ibid.
and perseverance is required before it is completed; but there is nothing which assiduity and attention will not effect.

The animals roving in the boundless forests of Lithuania are the bear, the wolf, the elk, the wild-ox, the lynx, the beaver, the gluton, the wild-cat, etc. 92

Forster, on the other hand, was less enthusiastic about Gilibert’s accomplishments, and once he arrived to Wilna, he reported that the French naturalist left everything in “a mess, except the herbarium, which is truly bountiful.” 93 Under a closer inspection, Forster found out that the university botanical garden in Wilna was nothing more than a kitchen garden squeezed in one of the dark courtyards of the city, and the reportedly rich university library lacked the most basic texts on nature and geography of the world. Furthermore, he complained about the outmoded forms of the scientific analysis and confusing methodology of Gilibert’s botanical classification system, and he repeatedly referred to his predecessor’s poor moral qualities and ethical values, which he attributed, no doubt, to his French origins. In a letter to Joseph Banks, he described Gilibert as a frenchman [sic] who is gone off ...after having much abused the confidence, which the king and several ministers had placed in him... this person, seems to have gone a very wrong way to work in his studies of natural history; never was such a disorder seen as I found in the little spot of ground, which has hitherto been called the botanical Garden, and the same carelessness or flightiness is equally evident in the collection he has left, in the arrangements of books, methods of cutting books into pieces, and placing the parts in a particular order according to his fancy, and lastly, in a work which he has begun here under the title of Flora Lithuanica, containing his descriptions of plants, disposed after Ludwig’s system, preceded by a Chloris, or Catalogue according to the Linnaen System. The descriptions in general are very poorly drawn up; and in very bad latin [sic]; and the determinations of the species is often faulty. This work is besides very imperfect, for I have already found several pretty common plants such as Holcus odoratus, Asarum europaeum, Elvela coccinea pp. which are omitted in it. 94

Confronted with such a chaotic situation, Forster felt that he had to start everything anew. This unexpected -- at the same gratifying -- revelation, however, did little to raise Forster’s research expectations. He showed very little interest in correcting Gilibert’s mistakes. Ironically, complaining about the inaccessibility of Wilna’s countryside or the lack of professional respect, Forster rarely made field trips into the undisturbed local woods, meadows and river valleys. On a few occasions he went to the city outskirts to

92 Coxe, Travels in Poland, Russia, Sweden and Denmark, 215 --16.
93 Georg Forster to Johann Reinhold Forster, 22 November 1784, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 213.
94 Georg Forster to Joseph Bank, 22 May 1785, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 335.
admire the haunting summer tranquility of Lithuanian nature, but he never started his major academic project -- a detailed research of Lithuania's natural wealth.

For Forster, Lithuania remained a country, where "there is little chance of making great discoveries in the natural history: the hills are mere sediments of sand, clay, and fragments once washed off from solid mountains; of course, no minerals can be expected, except for a very late formation. ... In the Zoological part I imagine there will not be much of novelty, unless it should happen, that a few nondescript insects might be picked up." Arguably, Forster's melancholic and unenthusiastic look at the Lithuanian natural world was probably a reflection of his frustrating response to the professional commitments he had made to the Educational Commission to catalogue local nature. Forster was simply not intrigued by the northeastern part of Europe and throughout his short academic career in Wilna, his mind remained intractably attached to the global, universal issues, such as to empirical studies of European exploration and colonization of the South Pacific or theoretical discourses concerning human racial differences. In this intellectual context, Lithuania, with its peculiar but not exotic nature, was a scholastic sidetrack -- a financially rewarding but scientifically unnecessary distraction from his life-long commitment to the questions of global patterns and universal truths.

Although Forster often acknowledged having a partial vision and incomplete understanding of Lithuania, he still continued to devalue the country's botanical and zoological significance in Europe. In a bizarre way, by downplaying the high scientific expectations misguided by the academic 'scoundrel' Gilibert, he was able to create an image of Lithuanian nature as a geographical alter-ego of the French scientific tradition. In Forster's view, Lithuania possessed a bleak and chaotic landscape which, like the scientific and philosophical traditions of France, managed to seduce the naïve observer with its superficially ornamented façade. Forster, who always espoused the empirical traditions of English scientific thought, knew better: Lithuania, despite its relatively unknown natural world, was too 'immature' and unexciting for its European 'geographical' pageant. Hence, he expressed his guarded position vis-à-vis the local nature in a letter to Joseph Banks, where he subtly and diplomatically described his best attempts to render Lithuania in a reasonable and organized fashion: "It may be many years before anybody will think of traveling to Vilno, in order to gain instructions by sight of the

95 Ibid., 335-336.
curiosities which our cabinet contains. Being somewhat more at ease, however, in regard to my domestic situation, I mean to work assiduously in the line which is allotted to me, and I am only now and then afflicted with the thought of being removed about a thousand miles further from old England, than I was at Cassel." In the end, nothing scientifically or scholarly significant came out of Forster's encounter with Lithuanian nature, and in spite of his noble intentions "a man has but a poor time of it, in this wild uncivilized country."  

SARMATIAN SOCIETY

If Forster's professional life was poorly served by the half-wilderness of Lithuania, then his social life was also badly supported by the half-civilized life of local society. Because of his unique social position -- the simultaneously assumed role of a social insider/outsider (local/foreigner) -- Forster was inevitably drawn into the socio-cultural terrain of Poland-Lithuania. Forster however was probably even less interested in the 'Polish' civilization than he was interested in the Lithuanian natural geography. Furthermore, he was as badly equipped to deal with and comprehend the local social and cultural landscape as to scientifically classify and organize the country's natural world. He spoke no Polish, was not born into nobility (a strong social bond in the Commonwealth) and did not practice the Catholic faith. True, his Polish birthplace origins gave him a certain advantage but, considering the widespread anti-German sentiment of the country (especially after the first division of Poland-Lithuania), his dubious 'national' identity must have been a source of irritation to some Poles.

Still, upon his arrival in Lithuania, Forster was immediately greeted with the utmost respect and grace. The crowning event of the year, in fact one of the most important political events of the decade, was the assembly of the Sejm (Parliament) in Grodno, where according to Forster, "in this small town, more like a village, the entire Polish and Lithuanian nobility, at least its nucleus was assembled." The Sejm, which met irregularly to discuss and legislate important internal and external matters, such as the declaration of war, taxation, social and religious reforms and, on the death of the king, the

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96 Ibid., 336.
97 Ibid.
98 Forster to Therese Heyne, 18 November 1784, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 205.
election of a new monarch, was usually an event of great proportions. During the Sejm, which could last anything from a few weeks to few years, thousands of nobles with their entourage amassed in the city -- either in Warsaw (Poland) or Grodno (Lithuania) -- and there was no better place and time to observe the great diversity of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility than at the time of this legislative event.

Forster was personally invited by the Polish king to witness the workings of the Sejm, one of the oldest democratic institutions in Europe, but despite its political significance and social spectacle, Forster found it to be extremely boring. Perhaps his linguistic inability to understand the procedures and debates of the Sejm contributed to his dislike of the event; or more likely, he was simply irritated by the lack of comforts in Grodno. During the Sejm, the population of the city could easily increase several times and finding decent accommodation and food was a difficult and costly affair. Although Forster was taken under the personal care of the vice-chancellor of Lithuania, Joachim Chreptowicz, who was also one of the curators of the University, he felt out of place in this mélange of rich magnates and petty nobles.

In physical and social terms, Grodno was not Vienna, and even the occasional dinners with the Polish-Lithuanian monarch and his extensive family could not reduce Forster’s sense of alienation and foreignness. Yet, astonishingly, in Grodno, Forster unexpectedly met Karl Heinrich Otto, the prince of Nassau and the admiral of the Russian navy who, with de Bougainville, had traveled to the South Pacific. “We talked about Tahiti and South Seas,” remarked Forster, “and the Polish king, who walked by, noticed us and joined our conversation.”

Forster was extremely modest about this extraordinary coincidence, as if the conversation between the two European visitors of Tahiti (joined by the monarch) was an ordinary act, a casual tête-à-tête among a few long-time acquaintances. (At the time, besides some sailors, there were probably no more than a couple of dozen educated Europeans who had visited the islands. In addition, in the light of Joseph II’s patronizing attitude towards Forster, one can not but notice the ceremonial casualness, sociability and curiosity of Stanislaw Poniatowski, the king of Poland.) So, in spite of Forster’s lamentation about the “deplorable accommodations” and the “ocean of

99 Georg Forster to Johann Reinhold Forster, 22 November 1784, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 212.
mud” on the streets of Grodno, his first ‘urban’ encounter in Lithuania (Grodno was a Lithuanian border town) ensued in a socially dynamic and entertaining fashion.\(^{100}\)

Moreover, in Grodno, Forster, for the first time, had an opportunity to mingle with local nobility. He summarized his experiences to Therese: “I am slowly beginning to acquaint myself with the customs of this original nation; the initial shock is gone and I can observe things without any bitterness...[and] despite some deficiencies in the liberal Constitution of this kingdom, I am extremely delighted to see that freedom is enjoyed here by every noble Pole.”\(^{101}\) After this brief ‘methodological’ introduction, Forster continues with a more detailed profile of the ‘Polish’ anthropological features:

Everywhere you see solid, well-built men and their facial expressions have something honorable and candid about them; but there is also plenty of wildness and brutality in them. Long clothes are tolerable, even if they don’t look beautiful, but shaved heads – as much as it is hygienic and comfortable – look terrible; hence, this practice makes many beautiful men ugly. Despite their reputation of being attractive, women don’t look very pretty; for sure, their skin is white and their figures are lean, and some individual features are delicate, but they are rarely very beautiful – usually, because of their mouths. I am joking, but I think that harsh [Polish] language deforms their lips. Of course, not a single local individual agrees with my observations, especially about the relationship between the shape of their mouths and their language. Astonishingly, they extremely cherish their own language. In contrast, noble women are well-mannered, polite and gentle, and, in some ways are very well-versed, at least in the French literature, because in Poland, everyone who has some education speaks French.\(^{102}\)

Forster’s closer intimate anthropological observations follow the same dualist representational pattern as his more spontaneous, impressionistic, views of local landscape. In Grodno -- that is, at the Sejm, the most traditional political, if not, cultural, event of the country -- wildness and abnormality freely mix with refinement and familiarity. The informal anthropological investigation of the (noble) Polish society, however, reveals a more precise (European) cultural condition of the Commonwealth. The country’s extensive nobility, like most educated European societies of the time, was heavily influenced by the French culture and language. Although Forster was fluent in French, he saw Polish affection towards France as a regrettable and irritating state of affairs. Instead of making

\(^{100}\) Ibid.

\(^{101}\) Forster to Therese Heyne, 12 November 1784, *Georg Forsters Werke* 14, 205.

\(^{102}\) Ibid., 205-206.
the country more cultured and worldly, the influence of France produced a surrogate local version of western European civilization.¹⁰³

Almost immediately, Forster noticed that the blind love of everything French was sharply contrasted with a deep-seated hostility towards everything German. "In Poland," declared Forster to his friend in Braunshweig, "to call somebody a German -- is the worst insult, and the education of the upper nobility is entirely in the hands of degenerate French barbers and modists."¹⁰⁴ However, he failed to identify one of the primary reasons of local resistance to German (cultural, linguistic and political) influences -- that is, the expansionist policies of Prussia and Austria that were directly responsible for the 1772 partial partition of the Commonwealth. In any case, because of a long tradition of political, cultural and religious alliance between the Commonwealth and France, in Wilna, the French (and Italians) were always much more welcome foreigners than the Germans. Hence, the growing contingency of German-speaking faculty at the University -- a linguistic sign of its professional 'modernization' -- was greatly resisted by many local (often ex-Jesuit) professors.

It is unclear if Forster became an intellectual and social target of local national and linguistic resentment towards the Germans, but he consciously chose to interact intimately only with a few German-born or German-speaking colleagues. However, there were more ethnocentric reasons for Forster's similarity to his German compatriots. In spite of his political universalism and social cosmopolitism, Forster was quick to divide Europe according to domestic household practices. "Speaking about cleanliness," casually remarked Forster in one of his complaining letters to his German father-in-law, "we talk about England and Holland; here, everything clean is German."¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, complaining about the unreliability of local (Polish or Lithuanian?) servants, Forster was determined to bring expensive domestic staff -- a male servant and female cook -- from Germany. Clearly, in Wilna, his adherence to German 'values' was a response to the perceived physical and aesthetic 'disorder' of the country and by surrounding himself with

¹⁰³ Forster shared many stereotypical views of his time and milieu regarding the 'psychological' specifics of different nations, but he also was trying to design his own, 'scientific' classification system of various nations; see, for instance, Ludwig Uhlig, Georg Forster: Einheit und Mannigfaltigkeit in seiner geistigen Welt (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1965).
¹⁰⁴ Georg Forster to Joachim Heinrich Campe, 9 July 1786, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 503.
¹⁰⁵ Georg Forster to Christian Gottlob Heyne, 16 December 1784, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 247.
the familiar German domestic environment, Forster was cautiously trying to isolate his family from the negative influences of the native society.

Forster’s strong opposition to local transgressions was based on some explicit philosophical values and moral judgments. As much as he opposed the ‘uncivilized’ manners of the Poles and Lithuanians, he was equally mistrustful of the ‘civilized’ social refinement of the French. Considering Forster’s future loyalty to the revolutionary ideals of the French and his scorn for the ‘passive’ German responses to them, his open dislike of the French might come as a surprise. Forster, like many German and English promoters (or, for that matter, opponents) of Enlightenment ideas, often blamed the excessive social libertarianism and moral laxity on the corrupt influences of the French (courtly) culture and hypocritical attitudes of the Catholic church. In addition, the widespread popularity of French literature, especially its more licentious strand, was also considered to have a negative pedagogical effect. The local dominance of the French book trade, for example, greatly irritated Forster, since he saw very little intellectual or academic value in it. Therefore, he personally preferred to order books from the annual book fair in Leipzig or his German suppliers rather than from the local booksellers.

Furthermore, Forster, despite his artistic sensibilities, seemed to be indifferent to theatre, opera, ballet or even music. And while these cultural spheres (except ballet) were still considered to be more or less an Italian domain, they often reached provincial Wilna because of their popularity at the aristocratic courts of France or the Franchophile courts of Russia. (Many Italian and French artists, actors and musicians traveled to Saint Petersburg via Poland-Lithuania with Wilna being one of the ‘commercial’ stopovers on their route to Russia.) Forster understood this cultural and intellectual authority of the French as a passing historical moment and he had little patience for what he broadly calls the didactic encyclopedism of French philosophy. “To this day,” observed Forster, “the Polish aristocracy follows the French spirit, that is, they look at everything in the encyclopedic, superficial fashion. There are a few honest people who began to understand their own misconceptions, but it would be the greatest achievement if one could spread this understanding widely. Sadly, this disease [French influence] is still at the tricky stage when the patient [Poles] still thinks that he is healthy and resists taking any medication.”

106 Foster to Jacobi, 17 December 1784, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 249.
In their unquestionable allegiance to French culture and a Francophone understanding of the world, Forster thought the noble Poles were not just being morally corrupted but were also becoming less enlightened people. In the eyes of the cosmopolitan German, the Francophile Poles were mediocre and despoiled people not only because of their cultural inwardness, but also because of their misdirected Europeanism. Forster did not simply despise French intellectual traditions, but he was extremely cynical about their social and aesthetic ability to acculturate (or educate) the less ‘civilized’ societies. In contrast to the moral strength of the (Protestant) German and inductive principles of the British scientific energies, French culture seduced ‘primitive’ nations with pointless intellectual elaborations and corporeal stimulations. In short, it degenerated rather than advanced historical social development.

There is no doubt that Forster’s metaphorical allusion to Polish intellectual decay implies a more specific medical and moral degeneration of the whole society. In the countries east of France, syphilis was often given the name of the ‘French disease.’ Already in the South Pacific, Forster was greatly disturbed by the corruptive habits that Europeans (in his opinion, exclusively the French and Spaniards) had brought into the native societies. These corruptive influences consisted of the demoralizing coupling of unrestrained materialism and syphilis. In both cases (Lithuania and Tahiti), Forster saw the authority of the French ‘refinement’ as an attack on the body and mind of the aboriginal inhabitants that gradually led to a fatal outcome.

The result of this excessive Francophilism was clearly visible in Wilna, where it kept the outmoded Baroque disorder alive. Less than a month after his arrival in the city, Forster sent a note to Theresa that meant to prepare her for the ‘cultural shock’ provoked by his encounter with the family’s future home. In a snapshot, Forster outlines the Baroque contours of the city: “In Wilna, she [Therese] will find the once populous city has rapidly declined: abandoned buildings and heaps of garbage are everywhere. Here, she will see even more deteriorated people who are simply oblivious to their tragic condition; and here, she will finally witness the nightmarish consequences of the coupling of the half-cultured nation with half-feral vices.”


Figure 2.5: The great courtyard of the University by F. Smugliewicz, 1786. Source: Vladas Drėma, Dingės Vilnius (Vilnius: Vaga, 1991), 223.

Figure 2.6: Vilnius environs by A. Žemaitis, 1848. Source: Vladas Drėma, Dingės Vilnius (Vilnius: Vaga, 1991), 386.
Forster usually responded to Wilna's spatial disorder and cultural deficiencies with a puritanical condemnation of everything opulent and entertaining. In the best aesthetic traditions of Enlightenment philosophy, he professed to know the difference between art and luxury, education and entertainment, and essential needs and superfluous desires. Forster saw the frivolous social life of Wilna as a waste of his valuable time and mind, and he judged it accordingly. He condemned people's 'amoral' behavior, such as illicit amorous relationships, gossips, arrogance, drunkenness, etc. -- the unavoidable side-effects of the provincial social life of Wilna. Because he was neither a religious nor pious man, he did not go to church and was never absorbed with 'spiritual' matters. He believed in religious freedom, but was extremely doctrinal in his scorn for the Catholic faith. Consequently, his letters read like a litany of reprimands and accusations about almost everyone and everything in Wilna: the Catholic clergy and pious Jews, the university's (ex-Jesuit) faculty, its foreign professors and inexperienced students, rich magnates and poor nobility, independent wealthy widows and flirtatious wives, indifferent doctors and ignorant patients, greedy merchants and drunken coachmen, lazy servants and ailing wet-nurses, overzealous hunters and docile peasants, sluggish mail service and expensive food, capricious local weather and unproductive soil, but foremost, he complained about the unpronounceable Polish language.

In general, as a devoted egalitarian, Forster was offended by the social and economic inequalities of the local society that kept the serfs, a vast majority of the population, in a permanent state of extreme poverty and oppression. Still, his plebeian or bourgeois loyalties did not prevent him from enjoying the comforts and pleasures of the patrician lifestyle. Because of his teaching position at the university, Forster received a 'civil' ennoblement; that is, he obtained most of the social privileges of a local nobleman. (Forster did not become a noble, but, except for his professional university duties, he had no other social and/or political obligations towards the Polish-Lithuanian state or any other municipal authorities.) Although Forster tried to downplay his somewhat elevated social status, he nonchalantly admitted to his father (and to Therese) some 'positive' aspects of being a member of the privileged class. "Alone, titles and caste system," concluded the professor, "are the most deplorable things in the world, but if they can be used as tools to
help to alleviate personal burdens, or give me a better chance to improve the fortune of humanity, then, I am not against receiving such privileges.”

In Wilna, however, Forster used his ‘noble’ status mostly in order to get access to the social life of the country’s high society. In the first nine months of his stay in the city (that is when he was still living alone), he seemed never to miss an opportunity to attend dinner parties at the houses of the local nobility. (In all fairness, Forster was trying to save money and attending these usually boring dinners was one way to be frugal.) Although Forster was extremely scornful of the Catholic clergy, he made a habit of dining at the palace of the bishop of Wilna, duke Masalski. The duke had two palaces in the city -- the official bishop’s palace (winter residence) at the centre of the town, and a newly build neoclassical palace (summer residence) outside the city. According to Forster, the bishop was an obsessive gambler and despite or because of his opulent lifestyle, he was a financially broken man. In the stereotypically aristocratic fashion, the elaborate dinner parties at his palace were camouflaging the economic and political ruin of Sarmatia. Incidentally, during the 1794 insurrection, bishop Masalski, along with other hated representatives of the corrupt ‘ancient’ regime, was lynched by an angry crowd of revolutionary Warsaw citizens.

Forster, nonetheless, was mostly surprised not by the ostentatious lifestyle of the ruinous nobles, but by their seemingly genuine generosity, frankness and even a certain tolerance found among local elite. Yet again, he concluded that these social gestures were symptoms of their underdeveloped sense of European civilization: “People’s generosity here, like in all uncultured countries, is overwhelming; people socialize here without any gene [modesty] and even their appearance is less restrained than in other places. Here, tolerance rules absolute! The French literature is well known, but not comprehensively.”

Foster’s reservation about the ‘uncultured hospitality’ of the Lithuanian nobility was based on his twofold-- moral and sexual -- social judgment, and he responded to the apparent social laxity of the city’s noble residents as both a social critic and puritanical moralist. While in Tahiti, Forster was rather pleased and intrigued, if not delighted, by the local social and sexual permissiveness; in Wilna, however, he felt threatened by the sexual, moral and social laxity. Forster of course understood that the generosity of the nobility did

108 Georg Forster to Johann Reinhold Forster, 22 November 1784, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 211.
109 Forster to Therese Heyne, 24 December 1784, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 269.
no go much beyond its own (privileged) class and it certainly did not extend all the way to their serfs. Even if he felt no personal attachment to the peasants or poor urban inhabitants, this selective social ‘openness’ agitated Forster. Admittedly, Forster was welcomed to the small circle of Wilna elite because he was accepted as somebody who could quickly become acculturated into the Lithuanian social hierarchy.

The young professor was fully aware that his apparent acceptance into the noble society of Wilna was based on his socio-cultural closeness to it. Forster was greatly distressed by such a course of events because he saw the ‘pitiful’ results of local acculturation. One of his German colleagues and neighbours was professor of medicine, Josua Langmeyer, who had come to Wilna years previously from Vienna. Initially, Forster was fond of Langmeyer, and on many occasions he credited him for saving his life; but he was puzzled and often annoyed by the doctor’s unquestionable acceptance of ‘Sarmatian’ ways of life. In the end, he started to pity the doctor and his simpleminded ‘low-class’ Austrian wife for their tolerance and acceptance of Wilna. Forster, on the other hand, decided to use all his inner strength to prevent himself from becoming a ‘naturalized’ citizen of Wilna.

Forster expressed this fear about being assimilated into local world not to his family or (German) colleagues, but to his Viennese aristocratic patroness, countess Maria Wilhelmina von Thun. (The social nature of the relationship between the von Thun family and Forster is not clear, but he spent some time at the countess’s Viennese salon entertaining her three daughters with stories about the South Seas expedition. It is very likely that Forster was expecting to get a job offer from an academic institution in Austria through her social connections.) In one of his first letters written in French to the countess, he vividly describes the ‘psychological hazards’ posed by the corporeal closeness to the local world:

The Poles behave in such a way that I cannot doubt my physical existence among them; oh yes, I am constantly reminded that I am still here, in this miserable world that is, in this country of jumbled sad forests, always surrounded by cruel, half-civilized and half-wild people. It would be so much better if they were completely wild, like our friends on the other side of the globe! In this country, I must say goodbye to my imagination; here, I am not dreaming about the earthly paradise, fairies or good spirits, those guardians of humanity!
saw the Promised Land, but could not stay there — only in this, my fate is similar to the fate of the Jewish messiah.\textsuperscript{10}

It would be easy to dismiss Forster's melodramatic and flattering letter written to the important Viennese benefactor as a belletristic exercise had it not invoked the same geographical comparisons and cultural juxtapositions appearing in many of his letters. Forster's sentimental portrayal of his emotional torment and physical discomfort was of course driven by his desire (or need) to compliment his wealthy and influential patroness. Accordingly, the elaborate description of his 'hazardous' life in Wilna was meant to highlight the cultural authority, public elegance and private graciousness of the Viennese aristocracy. Yet, indirectly, Forster's 'miserable existence' demarcates the largely invisible (and, recently, moved) geopolitical boundary between the 'civilized' German lands and the 'half-cultured' Poland-Lithuania. In a way, Forster hints at the problematic spatial nature of the political border that divides Germans from Poles, and separates Vienna from Wilna. This political boundary was inscribed not so much through geographical, historical or even ethnographic differences, but through the aesthetic and emotional incompatibilities of the two 'civilizations.' Forster was afraid of gaining a reputation in the German-speaking lands of having been acculturated into the 'half-savage' world. Hence, it was extremely important for him to picture his distance from the Polish civilization through aesthetic and metaphorical allusions.

However, there is no doubt that Forster's remark concerning his heightened sense of "physical existence" among the Poles had some sexualized overtones. Forster noted to his fiancée that he was not impressed by the physical appearance of local women. Still, according to his letters addressed to his close friends, in Wilna, he had several opportunities to get involved in amorous games with local women. In general, he seemed to be uncomfortable with the sexual overtones of local social life:

\begin{quote}
Nowhere are people more sensual than here where nobody is interested in anything else except in the discovery of their physical pleasures. The only pleasure I can have here is sensual: if I want to socialize with women, I have to flirt endlessly with them; sometimes I even have to fondle them ... because they all want to be stimulated in a carnal way. This sensualism is fully sanctioned by
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} Forster to von Thun, 24 November 1784, \textit{Georg Forsters Werke 14}, 215-216. In the context of Forster's letter, the "Promised Land" is not the South Pacific paradise, but the aristocratic Vienna, and the 'fairies and good spirits' are the female members of the von Thun family.
the society. Here, you can publicly kiss a maiden's bosom without arousing a scandal\(^{111}\)

In the end, Forster was challenged in Lithuania not so much by the physical proximity of the native world, but his own over-sexualized role in the society. By the standards of his time, Forster was probably more prudish in sexual matters than most of the Lithuanian nobility and he was obviously somewhat scandalized by these overtly sexualized desires and behavioral norms of local nobles. There is very little information about his sexual life in his letters, but these letters need to be read with caution, since they were collected, censored and published decades later after Forster’s death by his (estranged) wife who was certainly keen to improve his (and her own) tarnished image in post-Napoleonic Germany. (To this day, there is no way of knowing what Therese omitted from these letters, because most of the originals have been lost.) George Forster never openly condemned the sexual desires and practices of the Polish-Lithuanian women and, on some occasions, he showed a great respect for the social independence of local noble women. His opinion about the institution of marriage was also quite progressive -- while he was seeking domestic help and companionship from his wife, he fully accepted his marriage as an association of equal partners. In fact, Forster, if not in public, then certainly in private, advocated an intellectual equality of the two sexes. He greatly respected Therese’s mind and very often expressed an admiration of her intellectual sharpness and social skills. Once she arrived in Wilna, Therese immediately became his closest scholarly associate. She discussed with him his scientific projects and read his philosophical writings, and it was through her (and, in part, because of her) that Forster kept close contact with the families of Goethe and Herder. In 1786 when their first daughter, Therese (named after the mother), was born in Wilna, Forster was deeply offended by the reserved and apologetic congratulations he had received from his colleagues and acquaintances. He felt that the baby girl was not worse than a boy, and he was determined to give his full love, attention and the best education to little Therese. (Still, in a traditional domestic arrangement, he thought that until the children start learning reading and writing, the father could have only a minor role in their lives.)

So, what bothered Forster in Wilna was not so much the sensual freedom or the presumed sexual gender parity often found among local elite, but the sexualized

\(^{111}\) Forster to Sömmerring, 3 February, 1785, *Georg Forsters Werke* 14, 271.
elaboration and frivolous coquettishness of gender relationships. This was another indication of the inadequate cultural ‘overdevelopment’ of the Poles -- a pointless, regressive outcome of excessive Europeanization (or Franco-ization) of the local society which had attempted to mask ‘primitive’ sexual desires. Forster was also suffering because he was forced to participate in this elaborate form of social pantomime that through cultural mimicry obscures the geographical and historical boundaries between the civilized and savage worlds. Worse, he was manipulated into becoming a speechless mime, a poorly trained actor whose role was to convince the natives of their cultural and social superiority. For somebody who valued reason and moral obligations, this involuntary subjugation must have been a torture and Forster was not eager to accept this form of collaboration. But he could not defend himself openly, simply because he did not possess the right skills. In order for him to act properly or react responsibly, it was vital for him to know the local colloquial, which, in Wilna, meant he needed to speak Polish.

Forster’s attitude towards the Polish language is a good indication of his rapidly deteriorating respect for the Polish-Lithuanian society. His entire Wilna experience -- almost three years of his life -- was shaped by his surprising inability to learn Polish. When Forster took up the chair of natural of history, the University of Wilna was already in the process of transition from the traditional Latin language based schooling to a modern educational system that was based on the wider usage of the local vernacular. One of the professional requirements for Forster was to teach some of his lectures in Polish as soon as he was able to do so. Meanwhile, he had to read all of his courses in Latin, even if he had very poor understanding of it.

Although initially Forster was somewhat surprised by the emotional attachment to the native (Polish) language expressed by the local nobility, he accepted this as a matter of fact. (There is no indication from Forster’s writings that he was aware of the regional or class differences in the usage of local vernacular. For instance, he never mentioned either the Lithuanian or Byelorussian languages.) Once he entered Poland, Forster took this task to learn Polish quite seriously and according to his letters, during his two-month travel through the country, he managed to pick up some elementary Polish vocabulary. He was proud of his linguistic achievements and he claimed to receive numerous compliments from the locals regarding his perfect pronunciation of difficult Polish words and names. Forster attributed his ability to learn foreign languages to his early exposure to different tongues.
(Once, he claimed that he learned the basic Tahitian in a matter of a few days!) Yet, as soon as he had settled down in Wilna and started a more serious study of Polish, he began to express his frustration with the language. He blamed his failure on the idiosyncrasies of the Polish language and culture, rather than his own scholarly aptitude. Polish language, declared Forster,

is probably not that difficult to learn, only the pronunciation is very hard because so many consonants are put together. For me, the Polish pronunciation is easy, and the Poles say — I mastered it perfectly; but I am born in Poland, near Danzig, and I think that during the first ten years of my life I had been predisposed to the Polish sound just by consuming local food and breathing local air. But for most foreigners, it is an extremely difficult language to learn.... Still, I can not memorize new words, because this language is not analogous to any other languages in Europe.112

Forster possibly deliberately misrepresented the European uniqueness of the Polish language, because it is hard to believe that he did not know the morphological similarities among the various Slavic languages. Forster in his early teen years spent some time in Russia, where he learned the country’s language. Indeed, he even translated a Russian work -- a substantial academic text on the history of the country -- into English. Considering his familiarity with at least one Slavic language, his claim about the European exceptionality of Polish sounds too preposterous, unless it was meant to highlight a certain geo-cultural uniqueness of the Commonwealth. At the time, Polish -- except for Russian -- was the only Slavic language used as the official language of a European state. Since Russia was commonly excluded from the geo-cultural map of Europe, it made Poland-Lithuania a linguistic anomaly in a world dominated by the official Romance and Germanic tongues.

Although Forster was not able to find a European equivalent for the Polish language, he immediately founds its global antipode. The “harsh language of the Poles,” remarks the experienced traveler, “gathered all the consonants that are missing from the language of the lovely Tahitians. If we exchange the Polish consonants with the Tahitian vowels, then, both sides could be the winners.”113 In other words, if the unpronounceable Polish language, so to speak, is de-Europeanized, then, there is a possibility of it becoming a manageable tongue. In this case, the ‘gentle’ simplicity of Tahitians can have a modifying effect on the ‘dissonant’ Polish mentality. But while the scientist recognized the

112 Forster to Therese Heyne, 15 February 1785, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 281.
113 Georg Forster to Friedrich Justin Bertuch, 23 December 1784, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 255.
impossibility of such a transaction, this witty juxtaposition of the two opposing phonetic systems, nonetheless, defines the ‘proper’ place of the Polish culture. The Polish speakers live inside Europe, but their language situates them outside the realm of the Europe civilization.

Within months of beginning his academic duties, Forster became extremely frustrated by his inability to speak Polish. His initial bemusements about the phonetic intricacies of local vernacular quickly turned into ethnological anxieties. In three years he never managed to learn Polish and he continued to teach all his courses in Latin and lead his social life in French and German. For Forster, teaching in Latin was an extremely difficult and unrewarding affair since he never truly mastered the language. He spent hours preparing for his lectures; yet in the end, most of his students failed to understand him. (The knowledge of Latin among the students was also poor.) As a result, Forster deeply disliked his teaching duties and often expressed doubts about his professional future in academia.  

Simultaneously, Forster became frustrated by his inability to understand the intricate political and diverse cultural life of the host country. He rightfully attributed his local ‘blindness’ to his inability to communicate in Polish. Yet, within a few months, his desire to enter and master the local world through its language developed into a sheer hatred of everything Polish. After the first year in Wilna, Forster brought in German-speaking servants so, as he noted, he was not to be misunderstood, disrespected and/or cheated by the poorly trained local servants. In the second year of his stay in the city, he proudly declared that the knowledge of Polish had in fact a negative effect on the development of the cultured (European) mind. Following this conviction, he became determined to prevent his daughter from learning or even hearing any Polish: “I hope that my daughter won’t need a knowledge of the Polish language, unless we will stay here for seven years. But even if her tongue becomes more flexible, it would not outweigh the potential harm that her Polish conversations with various ignorant natives, local priests and other fools, will produce. If she has an aptitude, she can start learning French at the age of six or seven, but I don’t want to force her linguistic development.”

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114 In his letters, Forster makes numerous comments about the difficulties and frustrations of teaching in Latin.
115 Forster to Sömmering, 8 October 1786, *Georg Forsters Werke* 14, 561.
Surprisingly, in Wilna, linguistically isolated Forster turned his attention from the natural studies of the region to the socio-economic analysis of Poland-Lithuania. Admittedly, the naturalist had very little interest in a detailed ‘study’ of the country and his assessment of local conditions was quite simple. “It would take an entire volume to describe what in the German borderlands is ingeniously called the polnische Wirtschaft [Polish economy],” laconically concluded Forster.116 The traditional (German) metaphor of the “Polish economy” described a disorganized -- and not necessarily Polish -- household. It was an idiomatic expression that indicated domestic confusion and/or disintegration. The “Polish economy” could mean anything from an untidy burgher house, insolvent aristocratic manor, disobedient peasant household or an unkempt inn. But by making it “a byword for backwardness,” Forster had given to it “a macroeconomic significance” which in Germany some decades and centuries later became associated with the economic ‘underdevelopment’ syndrome.117 Moreover, by simply translating the regional German (Prussian or Silesian) idiom into a specific European socio-economic category, he expanded its geographical and national scope. From a vernacular expression it became a scientific and geopolitical category.

Forster based his scientific ‘analysis’ of Polish economic life on his private financial troubles and domestic worries. Before the arrival of Therese, Forster had practically no ‘domestic life’ since he was boarding with the family of his neighbour, doctor Langmeyer. Once he got married, he set up to run his newly formed household according to the best traditions of a frugal bourgeoisie German home: no expensive dinners, frivolous entertainments and unnecessary luxuries. The main responsibility for implementing this ‘new’ economic policy fell on Forster’s wife. But even for practical and resourceful Therese, this was not an easy task, because uncontrollable external forces constantly threatened the family’s ‘economic effectiveness’. Domestic life in Wilna was vulnerable to all the swings of the mercantile economy, and the geographical remoteness of the city could not lessen the impact of the price fluctuations of basic commodities that were sweeping Europe in the 1780s. Indeed, the city’s peripheral condition and the unresolved geopolitical status of Poland-Lithuania only increased the economic volatility. The commodity prices in Wilna reacted sharply to regional political uncertainties -- wars, regime changes and territorial divisions -- but they were also affected by more distant European agricultural

117 Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe, 337.
misfortunes. In general, imported western European goods, such as wine and furniture were extremely expensive in Lithuania. On the other hand, many locally available goods, such as wood and game, were extremely cheap, and Forster could even afford to buy a (Siberian) mink coat, a luxury item in western Europe.

Because of his extensive correspondence with many German, Dutch, French and English cities, Forster was fully aware that local prices for the basic food items and other consumer goods were determined by the changing needs of the expanding and fluctuating European markets. Forster understood that the capital of Lithuania, in his own words, was not located “somewhere beyond Japan or Kamchatka”118 but was intricately connected within the large European trade networks. For instance, in 1786 he predicted the skyrocketing of the cost of wheat everywhere on the continent because a bad harvest hit Poland and Lithuania. Forster nonetheless was outraged by a complete lack of any price regulatory system in the city, and he linked the uncontrolled price fluctuation directly to the weak and/or greedy municipal authorities. At the time, the economy of Wilna was still controlled by various guilds and mercantile associations, but the politically weakened though still autonomous municipal administration was under pressure to introduce a more competitive economic regime that incidentally would have profited rich noble magnates of the region. Another local group that potentially could have benefited economically from a more pro-capitalist system of production and trade were local Jews who, as a rule, were barred from many guilds and professions, but who had close economic relationships with the magnates. 119

The break up of the ‘traditional’ forms of the economic system and the increased capitalization of local markets was proceeding with variable speed and success all over Europe. But in Wilna, according to Forster, it unfortunately opened greater opportunities for economic lawlessness, dishonest commercial practices and political corruption. Furthermore, in Forster’s opinion, it violated the old time European tradition of a separation between the non-exploitative ‘Christian’ and usurious ‘Jewish’ commercial habits. For Forster, this commercial transgression became the most visible symptom of the Polish economy.

118 Georg Foster to Johann Karl Phillip Spener, 10 April, 1786, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 464.
119 On the commercial and cultural life of Vilnius at the end of the eighteenth century, see J. Jurginis et al, Vilniaus miesto istorija (Vilnius: Mintis, 1968), 185-194.
According to Forster, the local ‘fusion’ of the Christian and Jewish financial interests had an unexpected outcome: instead of enlarging the Jewish commercial presence in the city, it widened the economic influence of what he described as ‘Jewish values’ within the city. On the surface, Forster had to recognize that “everything here costs so much because Wilna is not a big commercial centre, and because good governance and public order -- in general, unknown things in Poland and Lithuania -- do not exist here.”

Yet, more specifically, speculative mercantile practices, in his opinion, resulted from the “local Christian merchants being more greedy than the Hebrews.” So, for instance, while “there are some merchants who bring elegant furniture for the local aristocracy from all over Europe, even from England, these Jew-like Christians demand such unchristian [unchristlich] rates and they endlessly tyrannize the buyers so that any purchase becomes an outrageously pricey and annoying affair.”

And again, during the 1787 European agricultural commodity crisis, he nervously pointed to the precarious situation of Wilna where “everything became so much more expensive that our existence is literally suspended between fear and hope: we survive only thanks to the city’s magistrate which is fully controlled by the Christians of the Jewish virtues.”

By attributing the city’s and his personal economic troubles to the locally predominant “Jewish virtues,” Forster reinstates the traditional form of Christian anti-Semitism that draws the commercial ‘ethical’ line between the two religious. But by pointing out the ‘transmittable’ nature of the ‘Jewish’ values, he captures the fears of modern anti-Semitism which is built on social anxiety regarding racial pollution and cultural contamination. So, in a way, Forster’s observation on Wilna’s commercial life marries two types of anti-Semitism. On one hand, Forster, following the prevailing tradition, clearly segregates the city’s population into two distinct statistical categories: “A hundred years ago, Wilna had 80 000 inhabitants, but, today, if one includes 12 000 Jews -- only 20 000.”

On the other hand, he sees the entire city as a fluid (economic) terrain where the commercial fusion of the two religions gives birth to an unlikely social creature -- a “Jew-like Christian.” Arguably, from Forster’s perspective, the main feature of the ‘Polish economy’ was not so much mercantile chaos and financial speculations, but the

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121 Forster to Sömmerring, 12-13 December, 1784, *Georg Forsters Werke* 14, 236.
hazardous commercial erasure of the customary religious-racial segregation of western Europe.

It is unlikely that Forster, who was a strong believer in universal values and arduous defender of religious tolerance, was cautiously trying to reconfigure the traditional anti-Semitic vocabulary into its new modern mold. In Wilna, Forster’s everyday life, indeed his personal enlightenment, heavily depended on his good standing with local Jews. Most of his letters, requested books, personal items and various scientific objects (engravings, instruments, botanical samples, stuffed moose head, etc.) were shipped to and from Germany via the extensive European trade network of the local Jewish merchants. In general, Forster, perhaps for good reasons, mistrusted the semi-official postal system. The Jewish agents, on the other hand, provided not only the cheapest ‘postal’ service, but also offered the fastest and safest way of transporting expensive or perishable goods, such as manuscripts, plant seeds and furniture.

Despite the high proportion of the Jewish population (about sixty percent of the city’s residents) and his extensive ‘commercial’ relations with Jewish traders, Forster kept a noticeable distance from the local Jewish world. Wilna was a small city, and its Jewish quarter was located in the middle of the town, some few hundred metres from the university and Forster’s house on the Castle Street. It was inevitable that he crossed the Jewish section and/or encountered Jewish religious and communal rituals on a daily basis. Yet he left no ethnographic description of the Jewish life in Lithuania. It is clear, however, that Forster saw the Jews as extremely religious and superstitious people, and it is possible that for him or his German correspondents, there was nothing exotic about the ‘anachronistic’ lifestyle of local Jews. In short, he found nothing to discuss or analyze about them.

Ironically, one of the few people Forster came to respect in Wilna was a Jewish doctor with whom he shared the discovery of the writings of Moses Mendelssohn, a German-Jewish philosopher. Forster was probably recommended to read Mendelssohn by one of his German friends, but he could not find a single copy of the philosopher’s book in Wilna until he was introduced to the (unnamed) Jewish doctor who owned a small library. (Besides some servants and strangers, the doctor is the only anonymous individual mentioned by Forster. The reason behind this deliberate personal ‘secrecy’ is a matter of debate: was Forster ashamed of this friendship with the Jew or did he not want to compromise the doctor? If so, then why?) The Jewish doctor lent his copy of
Mendelssohn’s book to Forster, and subsequently, the professor joined a small philosophical salon at the doctor’s family house. The enjoyable domestic life of the Jewish doctor made a great impression on the German naturalist. The fully emancipated doctor and his learned wife had proved that even in Wilna, amidst the superstitious and ignorant natives, it was possible to lead the enlightened and orderly life:

I am reading Mendelssohn’s *Morgenstunden* [*Morgenstunden oder Vorlesungen über das Dasein Gottes*], a book that I borrowed from a local Jewish doctor, a bright man who completely shed the superstitious beliefs of his Jewish compatriots about the vengeful and terrifying God to whom the unfortunate followers of Moses have been praying for centuries. Thank God, the society here is extremely tolerant; recently, I had a chance to dine at the doctor’s house with some four other professors without any fear of being scolded by some local bigots. Even his wife is a very intelligent woman and their household is full of concord: the house is so clean — a very rare phenomenon among the Jews — that it can simply compete with any good home in Holland.125

There is a hint in Forster’s review of this Jewish household that he upheld it to be a model for his own domestic happiness.

But what surprised Forster was not just the doctor’s exceptional intelligence and his sterile home, but the relaxed local social attitude that allowed a free mingling and intellectual association of the Jewish family with the (Christian) scholarly elite. This tolerance was an indication of a much broader acknowledgement of the Jewish numerical majority by the rest of the urban population. In contrast to most western European countries, all social, economic and ethnic groups of Lithuania came into personal contact with the Jews. On his way to Wilna, for instance, in one of the humble inns, Forster was astonished to find a jolly Catholic priest drinking vodka with an old Jewish postmaster. Forster was immediately ‘forced’ to join the party and listen to the litany of loud denunciations of every form of earthly authority, from the Holy Roman emperor to the Polish king and from the bishop of Wilna to the local abbot. It took more than a day for Forster to recover from this impromptu sermon by the two drunkards.126

Forster disliked and disapproved of Mendelssohn’s philosophy, and it is not clear if his acquaintance with the Jewish doctor turned into a more permanent friendship. It is also not clear if Forster learned, or even wanted to find out more about the Jewish traditions. Yet the unrecorded or perhaps unnoticed Lithuanian Jewry certainly made some impact on Forster’s aesthetic sensibility. Forster believed that because of the biblical connection

126 See Forster’s diary in Georgas Forsteris, *Georgo Fosterio laiškai iš Vilniaus*, 415.
between Judaism and Christianity, the ‘Jewish aesthetics’ inevitably shaped the artistic
traditions of Europe. Influenced by contemporary German art criticism, Forster
counteracted the ‘Jewish’ imagination with the aesthetic sensibilities of ancient Greece. In
1790, while traveling with Alexander von Humboldt through the region of the Lower
Rhine, Forster formulated his critique of Christian visual imagery. The outcome of the trip
was a book entitled Ansichten vom Niederrhein -- a collection of geographical, historical,
social and aesthetic sketches (views) of the region. In one of the essays of the book, “Art
and the Age,” which describes the architectural and artistic monuments encountered by
the two geographers along their compressed ‘grand tour,’ Forster made a strong criticism
of the painting by the teacher of Rubens, Otto Venius, The Resurrection of Lazarus. The
painting, in Forster’s opinion, was not successful because “Christ, the chief figure...is
badly done, as usual; he is cold, Jewish, dull.” Forster clarified the definition of this
aesthetic ‘Jewish” coldness in a letter to Therese: “The painters are almost always unable
to capture this creature [Christ] which is half god, half man, for it is no more to be found in
the imagination than in Nature. The pure Greek ideal is far too sublime or, rather, too far
removed from any national characteristic, to depict a Jew, and the least mixture of the
Jewish in this divine form besmirches it beyond salvation.” So, in western Europe,
Forster saw the post-classical representational fusion of Christian values with specific
Jewish (anthropological) qualities as an aesthetic failure. Conversely, in Wilna, he found
the ‘Jewish values’ fused with Christian characters to be an economic failure.

SARMATIAN COLOURS

During the 1790s trip along the Rhine River, Forster created his specific
representational approach to the narration of place that according to his companion,
Alexander von Humboldt, “marks the beginning of a new era of scientific journeys, which
had as their purpose comparative geography and anthropology.” This new form of
scientific journey encompassed the unifying view of the place that connects its landscape to

127 Foster as quoted in Saine, Georg Forster, 108.
128 Ibid.
129 Alexander von Humboldt, Kosmos. Entwurfeiner physischen Weltbeschreibung, quoted
in Saine, Georg Forster, 103.
its climatic features, demography, cultures, art, political system, economy, history, etc. and captured Foster’s desire to investigate and describe space in its totality. Forster’s textual impressions of the voyage became “a model of what a modern travel book could become.”\textsuperscript{130} The goal of this synthesizing view was to create a sense of order amidst general geographical and anthropological disarray by outlining universal similarities and differences within a single locale.

Forster believed that “all creation is chaotic, and Chaos, with its elements locked in struggle, gives rise to horror and dismay. When, on the other hand, the new creation appears in its quiet splendor, we no longer think of the darkness and its storms.”\textsuperscript{131} In a way, the world could only become meaningful through a correct form of representation or vision of place. The difficulty of course lies in finding the right frame and angle that would create the appearance of “the quiet splendour.” Forster also advocated a confrontational and emotional response to the world: “We should not embrace only the creatures of reason to the exclusion of the direct impressions of living Nature which we perceived with a spontaneity of feeling which lies outside the boundaries of the intelligible. The creatures of reason never lack intelligibility, since they are our own creation, but they are always deficient in force, reality, substance, and life.”\textsuperscript{132} In describing the work of art, for instance, Forster relies on his emotional rather than logical perception: “In my opinion one accomplishes his goal better by telling what one felt and thought in the presence of a work or art, that is, how it affected one, and what kind of effect it had, than by describing it at length.... Through this reproduction of feelings we can get an inkling- not of how the work of art was really constituted -- but at any rate, of how rich or poor it had to be in order to give expression to one force or another....”\textsuperscript{133}

Lithuania posed an awkward representational challenge to Forster, not because it was, in his own words, “an unfortunate country ruled by fierce anarchy,”\textsuperscript{134} but because he could not find the right emotional response to it. In other words, he could not find a view that could properly frame or order the encountered chaos. “I know that [in western Europe],” remarks Forster, “there are also some disturbances, but, at least, there is a clear law and solid order: private property is sacred and science evolves despite the political

\textsuperscript{130} Saine, \textit{Georg Forster}, 102.
\textsuperscript{131} Forster as quoted in Saine, \textit{Georg Forster}, 65.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 67-68.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{134} Georg Forster to Petrus Camper, 7 May, 1787, \textit{Georg Forsters Werke 14}, 677.
uncertainty. Here -- everything is the opposite. ... Therefore, I must judge here everything coldly, because, in order to describe the levels of corruption that this nation had voluntarily sunk to thanks to its own barbarism and ignorance -- which, as a rule, are spiced up with the French extravagance and vice -- you need entirely different colours and metaphors."

Consequently, Forster was constantly searching for that perfect descriptive stroke that could magically transform the chaotic scene of Lithuania into an orderly picture. In this aesthetic representational search, Forster heavily relied on his geographical knowledge of the world and in order to distance himself from Lithuania, he went back to the spatial images that he had formed in the South Seas. Of course, for the sensualist-naturalist, Lithuania with its impoverished and melancholic landscape where “the soil is so bad that the forest consists mostly of fir trees” and the unpleasant climate makes “winter and bad weather to last from the beginning of September to the middle or even late April,”

136 could not compete with Tahiti. But neither did the surroundings around Wilna remind Forster of the bleak and destitute coast of the Terra del Fuego. “The geographical situation of Wilna” repeatedly pointed out Forster “is comfortable and pleasant; and as far as I know, the city is located in the most beautiful part in Poland, but it means very little, because the rest of Poland is practically all flat.”

137 But finally, after two years of this representational anxiety, Forster found the right colours and metaphors to outline the country’s rightful position with the universe:

You would find ample material to laugh at this mishmash (Mischmasch) of Sarmatian or almost New Zealander crudeness and French super-refinement...or perhaps not; for one laughs only about people whose fault it is that they are laughable; not over those who through forms of government, rearing (such should education be called here), example, priests, despotism of mighty neighbors, and an army of French vagabonds and Italian good-for-nothings, become spoiled already from youth, and have no prospect for future betterment before them. The actual people, I mean those millions of cattle in human form, who are here utterly excluded from all privileges of mankind...the people is at present through long-habitual slavery truly sunken to a degree of bestiality and insensibility, of indescribable laziness and totally stupid ignorance, from which perhaps even in a century it could not climb to the same level as other European rabbles.

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135 Ibid., 677-680.
134 Forster to Sömmerring, 26 March, 1787, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 654.
137 Forster to Therese Heyne, 18 November, 1784, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 207.
138 Georg Forster to Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, 18 June, 1786, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 491-492. (English translation from Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe, 338.)
Just two decades before Forster’s arrival in Wilna, the Jesuit priest Marcin Poczubutt, an astronomer at the University of Vilnius, during his observation of a lunar eclipse, determined the geographical coordination of the city: it was located approximately at 54 degree and 54 minutes of Northern latitude and 25 degree and 19 minutes of Eastern longitude. Forster might not have known the exact cartographic position of Wilna, but framing Poland-Lithuania between barbarian New Zealand -- the geographical equivalent of the mythological Sarmatia -- and decadent aristocratic France, Forster paints Wilna as an unfortunate place suspended between two global oppositions. The irony of this in-between location is that it embodies the ‘middle point’ of universal history and geography. Within the global map, Wilna becomes a threshold site where the detrimental influences of European civilization reflect the negative impacts of ‘savage’ underdevelopment. Still, Forster found very little interest in this peculiar location of the city.

At the beginning of his elongated journey to Wilna, Forster started to write a diary. Before he arrived in Grodno, that is, until he reached Lithuania, his diary served as a personal notebook where he recorded factual details regarding the trip: interesting geographical information, financial accounts, social meetings, book purchases, etc. The narrative tone of the diary suddenly changed in Lithuania where it became extremely impressionistic, emotional and descriptive. It is not clear why Forster shifted from the informative format to the much more elaborate belles-lettres style. Perhaps he was hoping to write an essay or a book about Lithuania, something similar to the account of his voyage around the globe. Or maybe he simply wanted to sharpen his intellect and descriptive skills that became numb during the long and boring trip. Still, regardless of his intentions, the approach to Wilna seemed to stimulate Forster’s emotions and imagination. He became much more attentive and responsive to the changing landscape, people and mundane events. Yet, once he glimpsed Wilna for the first time, it became clear to him that the city marked the end of his journey:

Thursday, November 18 [1784] I leave at 5 a.m. from a very poor Jewish inn and arrive at 9 a.m. (4 miles) to Gostki or Swetnik at another Jewish run post station, where I change my clothes and continue the trip to Wilna (3 miles), where I arrive at one o’clock. One mile before Wilna, the environment near the Wilia River becomes very beautiful: steep sandy hills and chalk cliffs crowned with splendid forest greenery. The location of Wilna is unexpectedly wondrous; once you come closer to the city, the view from the surrounding hills into the valley, where this entire great city graced with so many towers is located, is truly impeccable and magnificent. Inside the city – narrow dirty streets and numerous ruins – still,
among them one can encounter one or two impressive buildings. *Finis viaeque chartaeque.*

Once Forster arrived in Wilna, he became infatuated with the idea of an escape from this chameleonic place of distant refinement and nearby decay “Wilna,” immediately declared the naturalist in a voice of a relentless explorer or military campaigner, “is certainly not a place where I can stay forever!” After a few months of the exceptionally harsh winter -- it was still freezing and snowing in April, and by mid-May, the local “flora was still without signs of life” -- the enigmatic words of the Holy Roman emperor about the way out from Wilna acquired a new meaning. For Forster, Wilna turned into a frozen prison, and the only way out was to find a path that could lead him to a climatically more agreeable land or a more invigorating cultural terrain. So he interpreted the emperor’s suggestion literally, that is, geographically, and instead of planning his return trip to European civilization, he started to fantasize about his escape from it. He thought he must disappear farther into the east or the south and go to Asia or the Middle East.

Impulsively, he decided to leave his position at the university and, in disguise, run away to Constantinople. In this geographical and historical meeting point of Asia and Europe, Forster was hoping to find social glories and financial rewards he felt he was being denied in Lithuania or Germany. More intriguingly, Forster, who had never studied medicine, but always wanted to become a doctor, was scheming to set up a medical practice in the Ottoman empire. This farcical plotting most likely resulted from the naturalist’s psychological and emotional reaction to his disappointing situation in Wilna, but the spatial ‘mishmash’ of Lithuania probably helped him to find the proper geographical ‘escape route’ from his personal misery. As a rule, Sarmatia, especially among western European travelers, induced an imaginary, if not a delirious, sense of the world, and it was often imagined to be a portal to the Orient.

Poor health and lack of funds, rather than his teaching commitments and professional rationale ‘cured’ Forster’s nomadic impulses. Admittedly, Wilna was not such a dreadful place, especially after the arrival of Therese. While “the city is in a terribly deplorable state,” remarked Forster to his friends, “still, meo judicio, it looks much better.

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141 Forster to Sömmering, 1 April, 1785, *Georg Forsters Werke 14*, 331.
than Cracow and, overwhelmingly, surpasses Grodno.”

In the second year (1785-86) the Forster’s family life in Lithuania seemed to reach a certain financial and emotional, if not psychological, equilibrium. After his summer vacation in Germany, Forster confessed that Wilna was a far greater city than most provincial German towns (in particular, Kassel). Moreover, considering his rather minor academic reputation, Forster’s salary and professional status in Lithuania were much higher and more rewarding than they would have been in Germany. As usual, he was complaining about everything around him (except his family), but he seemed to manage quite successfully to distance himself from the local world through his professional interests that rarely had anything to do with Lithuania.

“After all,” once wrote Forster to his father in law in Göttingen, “Wilna is probably the best place in the world where I can be left in peace, and patiently can thoroughly study a number of interesting subjects; this fact eases my otherwise terrible condition.” And in the letter sent to Johann Gottfried Herder in Weimar in the summer of 1786, he summarized his role in Wilno as a missionary of the Enlightenment: “Nonetheless, I achieved here more than I could have achieved anywhere else in the world; I see myself as planting a seed of hope.”

Herder, who came to Weimar as an intellectual accomplice of Goethe, had just finished his teaching duties in Mitau in the duchy of Courland that was still an integral political entity of the Commonwealth; so Forster felt that more than anyone else he could understand his feeling of isolation, remorse and hope. But what united Herder and Forster was not so much their nonparallel private experiences of Poland-Lithuania, but their scientific vision of humanity. At that time, Herder was working on the critique of Kant’s theories about the origins of human racial differences. Kant advocated the theory of human dispersal, because he believed that “it was logical to assume that all mankind had

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142 Forster to Sömmering, 12 December, 1784, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 232.
143 Forster to Christian Gottlob Heyne, 10 August, 1786, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 521.
144 Georg Forster to Johann Gottfried Herder, 21 July, 1786, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 513.
145 For more on the intellectual camaraderie between Forster and Herder see Hans Henning, “‘Vortrefflicher Mann’ und ‘bester Freund’ Herders Begegnung mit Georg Forster” in Der Weltumsegler und seine Freunde: Georg Forster als gesellschaftlicher Schriftsteller der Goethezeit, ed. Detlef Rasmussen (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1988), 21-58. In contrast to Forster, Herder however was much more intrigued by the native peoples -- the Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians - of the region; see, for instance, Alfonsas Šešplaukis, J.G. Herderis ir baltų tautos (Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 1995).
descended from one original couple, Adam and Eve, so to speak.” Herder, in large
 supported by Forster’s observations made during his voyage around the world, proposed a
 more scientific and rational approach to the racial differences. Instead of Kant’s notion
 that the racial variety is created by some superior and divine power, Herder propagated
 the idea of a natural evolutionary process of racial diversity. Forster wrote from Wilna two
 essays for the prestigious German journal *Teutscher Merkur* in support of Herder’s ideas.
 He even went further than Herder in his ridicule of Kant and attacked the old
 philosopher’s ‘divine’ approach to the question of human racial diversity. In Forster’s
 opinion, it was far more logical to assume that different human races originated on their
 own alongside, and in correspondence to, different natural environments. And in contrast
 to Herder, Forster was even “willing to contradict the explicit ‘evidence’ of Genesis, which
 was at the time still the unquestionable authority on the descent of man.”

Herder and Forster also shared the same desire of deepening human knowledge by
 expanding it into ‘uncultivated’ (scientific and geographical) regions. But banished into the
 world of the harsh, dull and scientifically poor natural environment of Lithuania and
 surrounded by ignorant, crude Sarmatians -- those “Polish masters and servants [who] are
 pigs by nature” -- Forster felt obliged to concentrate on his own progress. Self-education
 became his Wilna motto: “I have a perfect right,” Forster wrote to Herder, “without
 blaming myself, to be exclusively preoccupied with my own enlightenment.”

One of the material outcomes of this self-enlightenment was the German translation
 of the journals of Cook’s third voyage, which Forster dedicated to Joseph II. In his preface
 to the translation, Forster strongly advocated the establishment of a British colony in
 Australia: “The forty or fifty people who now roam in the area where the colony is
 supposed to be should easily be able to find another place which is just as convenient for
 their purposes! And who knows what beneficial influence the example of the European
 settlers themselves can have on these uncultured, but certainly not barbaric, aborigines.”

In contrast, irritated by the indigenous Sarmatian customs, Forster, in his letters proposed
 a less ‘benevolent’ approach towards the people of Wilna. Instead of displacement, Forster

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147 Ibid., 47.
148 Forster to Sömmering, 12 December, 1784, *Georg Forsters Werke* 14, 236.
advocated indifference: "It is unnecessary to treat Poles with any sense of generosity, for
they themselves have none of it."\footnote{Forster to Sömmering, 28 March, 1787, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 657.}

In the end, Georg Forster felt he was being cheated by Lithuania. Emperor Joseph
was right - they make easy promises in Poland-Lithuania. The glorious capital of Lithuania
turned out to be a pitiful provincial town and its social life centred on the endless card-
game parties attended by the ignorant Catholic clergy and uncultured nobility. The local
university did not have enough money to support Forster's scientific projects, and because
of the mutual linguistic incompatibilities, Forster had many problems with his students.
Above all, the natural local environment, despite its picturesque qualities, did not offer
anything valuable to the natural sciences. All the exotic animals, including bison, auroch,
lynx and bear, were either extinct or driven deep into the inaccessible woods and swamps,
and the poor sandy soil could not support a diverse plant life. Above all, the cultivation of
hope in this barren country was too much work for Forster, and while he tried to expand
his personal intellectual horizons, he did very little to bring the local environment into the
European scientific purview.

Decades later, Therese Huber (Forster) née Heyne, Georg's 'angel guardian' in
Sarmatia, noted that Foster's misery -- his Wilna estrangement -- was caused by the self-
imposed intellectual segregation and deliberate professional sabotage, rather than by any
specific geographical or social circumstances:

They didn't keep their word [in Poland]...but now, after more than forty years
have gone by, I believe that, in a certain sense, Forster, too, didn't keep his word,
and I am surprised that Heyne [her father], at the time, did not give him a piece of
advice for which [I] had neither the experience nor the insight. Forster waited for
the fulfillment of the promises made to him, so that he could accomplish
something great, whereas he would have improved his position substantially if
he had accomplished the little that was possible with the small means available
to him, and had kept insisting, at the same time, on the fulfillment of their
promises to him. ...Forster's instructions [regarding the botanical garden]
stressed 'native plants which could be useful'; if Forster had filled the available
space with such plants, ...if he had made this arrangement look like a solid piece
of scientific work, he would have aroused expectations in the Lithuanian public
and proved how insufficient the space and the funds had been up to that point,
and would not have had the depressing feeling of complete inactivity in his
job.\footnote{Therese Forster, Johann Georg Forster's Briefwechsel, as quoted in Saine, Georg Forster, 43.}
By putting his private interests before public good, Foster remakes his self-imposed isolation in Lithuania into an honorable condition. Wilna was turned into a place of inner-exile, or as Forster put it, “his Pontus,” an exile point for disgraced ancient Roman intellectual and political opponents of the Roman empire. Soon, Forster clarified the ambiguous meaning of ‘Pontus’ by invoking more specific geographical coordinates of his exile. In the letter to Herder, he refers to Wilna as “Ulubris Sarmaticis.” Ulubrae was a far-off, inaccessible town in the Pontine swamps and it came to be known as a prototype of an isolated existence. Latin poet Horace, however, in one of his Epistles mentions Ulubrae as a place where the first Roman emperor Augustus (Octavius Caesar) spent his adolescence before he was adopted by his great uncle Julius Caesar as his successor and taken back to Rome. Forster was hoping for his own savior, somebody who could rescue him from his exile.

On the imperial Roman map of the world, both locations, Ulubrae and Sarmatia, indicated marginal spaces. Ulubrae marks the place of uneventful loneliness and tranquility, but it also signals hope and possibility of escape. Sarmatia, on the other hand, maps out the frontier-like insecurity and anxiety, but it also demarcates the lines of possible spatial divisions. By metaphorically combining the two imaginary sites, Forster highlights his contradictory emotional condition that swings from domestic calmness to professional restlessness. At the same time, the metaphor curiously describes the confusing location of Wilna, which, at the end of the eighteenth century, was culturally and intellectually a ‘static’ place that nonetheless embodied the chaos, insecurities and also potential benefits of the divisible region. Therese Forster summarized this somewhat encouraging feeling of the Ulubris Sarmaticis in a much more prosaic way than her husband ever had. “Our climate is severe,” wrote Therese at the same time when Forster was hoping for a rescue from his Pontus, “the environment is harsh and infertile; food, in general, is cheap, but nobody keeps a fixed price. The nation is feral and local people do not belong to humanity. But enough about them; I pity them, yet I would rather be a loyal subject of Russia, Austria or Prussia when the next partition of the country will start again.”

Therese’s wish to join the subjects of the three hostile neighboring monarchies came true much faster than anyone could predict. For all three years, Forster was desperately

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154 Teresa Forster to Spener, 19 February, 1786, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 793.
and vainly soliciting a position in the German countries placing all his hope into the hands of his monarchical idol emperor Joseph II. But the rescue from his ‘Pontus’ came unexpectedly from the opposite direction, Russia. In the summer of 1787, Forster was approached by the Russian ambassador in Poland-Lithuania with a ‘secret’ job offer. The ambassador sent a certain Captain Mulowsky to Wilna who delivered to Forster an irresistible escape route from Wilna. The Russian Admiralty was planning a journey around the globe which, among other things, included an extensive scientific investigation of the Pacific Ocean coastline in Asia and North America. Forster was recommended to the post of the chief scientist of the voyage, with a promise of unconstrained research freedom and substantial financial reward. Forster was thrilled by this opportunity to go “beyond Japan and Kamchatka,” and immediately notified Herder about his prospective rescue from Sarmatia:

My dearest and beloved friend! ...You are probably aware that thanks to the Deus ex machina, I am released from my Wilna Pontus [Wilnaschen Pontus] and as a Russian subject I am going again on the South Sea expedition. ...During this trip, we will probably follow the course of Cook’s voyage, but also try to learn more about Japan. We will visit the inhabitants of New Zealand and Sandwich Islands and the coast of North America above California, but won’t go north of the 60 parallel. Maybe we will visit the Chinese coast; the journey should last four years and during this period we could go anywhere we like. Thus, orient your questions [concerning human race] according to the course of our journey.

There was, however, a major obstacle in Forster’s plan -- the University Senate was not willing to release him from his academic and financial obligations. According to his contract with the Educational Commission of Lithuania, Forster still had five years of teaching and research work left in Wilna. In addition, Forster was given by the Educational Commission a huge advance payment and the breach of the contract would mean hefty financial losses for him. Thankfully, Forster found a new patroness in Russian empress Catherine II, who through her ex-lover, Polish king Stanislaw Poniatowski, quickly arranged Forster’s discharge from his academic duties. The Russian ambassador also picked up all debts incurred by Forster in Wilna.

The Forsters left Wilna at the end of the summer of 1787. Therese with their daughter went to her parent’s house in Göttingen and Forster, following the footsteps of his

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earlier expedition, went to London to begin scientific preparations for the trip. Meanwhile, a new war between Turkey and Russia broke out and the expedition was postponed indefinitely. In London, Forster was asked to reassume his teaching position at the University in Wilna, but unburdened from his financial obligations, he refused to go back to 'the exile.' Notwithstanding, he was enchanted by the fact that he was still needed in the backwoods of Sarmatia and in a letter to Swiss philosopher and writer Zimmermann expresses his vengefully triumphant mood:

My happiness increases every day because I get so many letters from Poland. Since the expedition around the world had been cancelled, I am requested to go back to Wilna. I am wanted at the local university and I am asked to submit my conditions of employment. I must admit, this is not just pleasing — it is the hour of my triumph, the only one victory that should make any honest and determined individual satisfied. Before, I was scorned because I was leaving; now, they are eager to reward my diligence by inviting me back in the most honoratory manner. This request doubles my satisfaction, since there is no need for me to go back. Once in a lifetime, there could be Wilna, but never twice. I believed I followed in my duties responsibly and everyone was content with me; but I was not gratified with the situation. I should have been content with my time spent there... a bachelor might have been satisfied with it, but the married man has to worry about the happiness of his wife and the education of the child. Still, it makes me joyous to know that my chair is still empty and the University can not find anyone more suitable than me.  

After Wilna, the Forsters settled in Mainz, another European stronghold of Catholicism and reactionary social politics. This time, however, instead of being exiled to the 'backwoods' of Europe, Forster ended up in the German provincial town positioned at the main commercial and intellectual crossroads of Europe. It is not clear what long-lasting impressions Forster retained from his three-year experience of Wilna, but, until the end of his life, in accordance with his German and Protestant upbringing, he assumed Poland-Lithuania to be a political, anthropological and social anomaly. In fact, in his opinion, no other country in Europe — except Catholic Spain — was less civilized than the old-fashioned Polish-Lithuanian republic of the nobles.

According to Friedrich Schlegel, one of Forster’s contemporary critics, "Forster ... demonstrated his universal receptivity and education by combining French elegance and popular form of presentation and English utility with German depth of feeling and spirit.

156 Georg Forster to Johann Georg von Zimmermann, 4 May, 1788, Georg Forsters Werke 15, 151.
He had thoroughly assimilated these foreign virtues. In his writings, everything is of a piece and has a German coloration. Moreover, Schlegel praised Forster as one of the most German social writers of the time. "To analyze Forster's writings completely," remarked Schlegel in 1797, "would mean to develop the concept of a socially-oriented writer who is superb in his way. And in the cosmopolitan view it is such men, whose destiny it is to stimulate, develop, and reunite all the important capabilities of mankind, who deserve the most honored place." Forster's numerous letters from Wilna might not have been the best examples of his most 'social' writings, but they bear witness to his German-coloured 'cosmopolitan' narrative tones that paint the world and 'mankind', in Schlegel's words, with a profound sense of "true morality." In other words, it is possible to argue that Forster's letters represent the German Enlightenment version of morality plays.

Since Forster did not leave any public, academic or polemic writings concerning the natural and social geography of Poland or Lithuania, his chaotic letter-form impressions of Wilna are the only texts which point to his attitude about the country. Most of his letters of course were not intended for public consumption and were written to various people for a great variety of reasons; as a result of his unsystematic and fleeting views of the place, it is difficult to outline the precise rationale behind Forster's ultimate rejection of Poland-Lithuania. In most instances, his portrayal of Wilna is constructed through the interplay of various factual details and social caricatures based on the deliberate fusion of 'objective' information and its subjective evaluations. Forster, like most of his enlightened correspondents, valued a culturally refined sense of humour, and as much as his letters meant to inform, they also meant to entertain. Moreover, they also meant to induce a sense of pity and moral superiority.

Before his departure from Wilna, in a letter to Thomas Pennant, an English naturalist and close friend of his father, Forster described his stay in Lithuania as a personal moral struggle, a threshold chapter in the scientist's life:

The boy and the youth, whom you have known and kindly encouraged, ripening to the age and the settled reflecting temper of the man, and weighing men and occurrences in a more equal balance of experience and comparison, which teaches him to set a higher value on excellence as he finds it more uncommon, must naturally desire to pay the tribute of esteem, of thanks, and of affection, where it is justly due. Severed as it were, from the rest of mankind, for the two

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158 Ibid., 12.
159 Ibid., 11.
legged creatures of these miserable regions scarce lay claim to the common sentiments of humanity, I may be said to enjoy life only in as far as I know, that there are persons at a distance, who wish me well, and suffer me to live in their memories. ...If I were not married, I should lead the saddest life imaginable, amongst the unlettered people of this country; it is the ample share of domestick [sic] enjoyment, which alone can make amends for the want of every other social advantage, and of innumerable conveniences of life, from which I am here as effectually debarred, as if I lived in New Zealand. I could apply the complaint of Ovid to my situation Non hic Librium per quas inviter, alargae, Copla. Nullus in hac terra, ...cuiuc intelecturis auribus utar, adest. ...The sensible Traveler never fails gathering instructions, and of making observations on the state of human kind in general, which while they may sometimes afflict, always serve to reconcile him to his lot, when he compares the happiness of England to that of other countries.\textsuperscript{160}

In a letter to his best friend, Samuel Thomas Sömmering, Forster described his life in Wilna as that of the maggot that is ready to emerge from its cocoon and spread its wings.\textsuperscript{161}

In the preface to A Voyage Round the World, Forster invites his readers to respond to his sensualized narrative of geographical discoveries with an open mind; hence, it is fair to read his personal Wilna letters as narrative samples of a specific geographical knowledge that is based not so much on scientific logic as on emotional rationale. Forster’s personal response to Wilna was framed by two opposing but not necessarily contradictory sentiments of personal disappointment and anticipation for the future. The mixture of the two created a sense of anxiety, which, in the end, contributed to Forster’s alarming feeling of displacement. Much of what Forster said (or for that matter what he did not say) about various botanical, zoological, geographical, anthropological and political conditions of Lithuania was determined by his unyielding resolution to stay outside of its social, cultural and even natural worlds. The downgrading and often scandalous descriptions of Poland-Lithuania were results of Forster’s desire to highlight his psychological and emotional dilemma in the face of possible social and cultural acculturation into the local world. In a sense, Forster’s extensive correspondence with ‘civilized’ parts of Europe meant to guard him from such prospects.

Undeniably, the letters offer a ‘distorted’ vision of Wilna, simply because they are written to evoke a sympathetic and encouraging response to Forster’s ‘misfortune.’ Thus,

\textsuperscript{160} Georg Forster to Thomas Pennant, 5 March, 1787, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 643-647.

\textsuperscript{161} Forster to Sömmering, 3 February, 1785, Georg Forsters Werke 14, 271.

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on their own, they can barely stand as ‘geographical’ materials since they delineate the city through a prism of an extremely subjective experience of the place. On the other hand, these letters present an opportunity to read uncensored and spontaneous evaluations of the place that were often expressed without a strong sense of self-restraint and/or public moderation. As a result, they expose Wilna not through ‘impartial’ scholarly observations, but through an alchemical, narrative, fusion of local conditions, ‘scientific’ methods of investigation, personal experience and various emotional circumstances. Consequently, what emerges from these letters is not so much a geographical and/or anthropological picture of the place, but a narrative of a specific spatial knowledge of the place where the lack of a scientific methodology is compensated for by a profusion of social anecdotes and domestic gossip. In a way, Forster’s private account of Lithuania is a geographical opening into the enlightened mind of the scientists-social critique where rationalism and empiricism freely mix with sentimentalism and imagination, and where descriptive realism intertwines with emotional idealism.

It would be easy to dismiss Forster’s extremely detrimental description of Wilna as a narrative outcome of his depressed mood and general discontent. After all, Forster was not very enthusiastic about any town in continental Europe except Vienna. Still, his resentful feelings against Lithuania were corroborated by prevailing anti-Polish sentiments of his many German contemporaries. Hence, most likely, Foster’s concise and rather unsystematic (private) reflections on Wilna emerged from the narrative combination of his own curiosity about and commitment to the place and the limiting representational tools of German Enlightenment philosophy and aesthetics. In contrast to some of his more illustrious and perhaps more romantically inclined acquaintances, such as Goethe and Herder, Forster was not seduced by the folkloric richness (songs and tales of the peasantry), mythological and historical narratives, or natural landscape (eg. primeval forest) of the non-Germanic world. In Lithuania, instead of the intriguing ethnographic details, he only saw oppressed peasants, Catholic ignorance, somber woods and urban decay. Still, Forster was not entirely an anti-Romantic or anti-sentimental figure, and was not immune to the emotional-aesthetic condition which soon came to be known as the Tränenseligkeit (literally “love of tears”). But his sorrow for the oppressed people of Lithuania never translated into grief for Sarmatia and he never shed any tears for the

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162 For more on Tränenseligkeit see Robert Waissenberger ed., Vienna in the Biedermeier Era, 1815-1848 (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 86.
'Sarmatians.' In this sense, Forster exemplified the enlightened, one can say even modern, outlook on the world. He looked at the future and there was no room for Sarmatia on his evolutionary map of the universe.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Wilna was slowly recovering from two centuries of devastation, but in comparison to many other (capital) cities and commercial centres of Europe, Wilna, despite the architectural profusion of Baroque, was a destitute place. Lithuania, once a powerful duchy, was reduced to internal and external dependency. It increasingly became a semi-autonomous political and cultural annex to Poland and for the last century it had been virtually governed by the Russian monarchs through their intrusive ambassadors or military generals. Still, at the time of Forster's arrival to Wilna, Poland-Lithuania, led by some of its ruling families, was going through some significant intellectual and cultural changes that introduced many secularized enlightenment ideas and neoclassical aesthetic tastes into the upper levels of the society. The reformed Jesuit College in Wilna was one of the results and tools of these changes; but one of the most provocative 'achievements' of this cultural shift was the partial social discrediting of the Sarmatian myth. The renunciation of the Sarmatian doctrine was in part initiated by Stanislaw Augustus, the elected king of Poland-Lithuania. Forster, rarely, if ever, mentioned the local attempts to dispel the cultural or geopolitical 'curses' of Sarmatism.

Forster's descriptive 'truthfulness' of Lithuania, then, rests on his extremely personalized and emotionally charged experience of the country. His confidential evaluation of the city is a reflection of his sentimental and aesthetic views, rather than some specific scientific or ethnographic observations. The fact that Forster, in his descriptions of Lithuania, repeatedly used specific methodological practices of contrast, classification and systematization and heavily relied on his academic knowledge of the world indicates his intentions to portray the place in the 'objective', that is 'cold' and unbiased manner. Certainly, for Forster, like for many of his educated and sophisticated contemporaries, 'scientific' geographical knowledge was not something incompatible with the 'subjective' spatial sensations. In the pre-Romantic era, a thorough comprehension of the universe was based on the rudimentary acknowledgments of natural evolution, social progress and historical progress, which, in the end, were modeled on an idea of an epic and aesthetic totality. The best example of such a narrative approach is Goethe's Faust, where new imaginary forms are created by the representational means that come from the past, as 'in
bricolage: old materials, and new treatment." In *Faust*, according to Franko Moretti, the narrative “result is an ambiguous register, halfway between Fair and archaeology; between satirical reduction and scholarly seriousness. What is more important here: the ‘objective’ meaning of the classical figure, fixed by tradition -- or their ‘subjective’ reinterpretation, mediated through the modern hero? ‘Are these now dreams,’ Faust wonders beside the Peneus, ‘or memories.’ ”

While it would be too preposterous to claim Forster to be a ‘Faustian figure,’ his life and views probably embodied some of the characteristics that could be identified as the precursors of modern individuality. Forster’s individuality, like those of the ‘modern hero’ was shaped by his personal estrangement from the surrounding social and natural environment. At all times and in all places -- Poland, Lithuania, Russia, England, South Pacific, Germany or France (again, except perhaps Vienna) -- Forster always saw himself as outsider. In other words, he always entered local worlds like a stranger, or, like Faust, who “always arrives with Mephistopheles from another epoch, bearing with him some brilliant inventions with which he upsets the normal course of things, so that he is then needed once again to re-establish order.”

Forster did not have Mephistopheles, unless his princely patrons could be regarded as such, but his participation in both Cook’s expedition and eventually the French Revolution, certainly include some extraordinary experiences of change and transformation. And while Forster did not possess any extreme human powers, he nonetheless displayed some rhetorical tools that always allowed him to dissociate himself from the narrated place, be it the islands of the South Seas or Sarmatia. He kept a distance from the represented places, so he could enter them or reconfigure them as he wished. This writing method does not entrap the narrator-spectator within a specific site, but permits him to search for new descriptive horizons and narrative plots without leaving the scene. So, the old representational clichés always appear as new global discoveries.

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164 Ibid.
165 Ibid., 43.
Georg Adam Forster died in Paris during the worst months of the Terror, but by staying away from the political and social intrigues of the revolution, he managed to evade the "great shame of the Revolution...the guillotine." On January 10, 1794, at thirty-nine, he succumbed to pneumonia, a sickness, which without doubt was magnified by his generally poor health -- a chronic condition that had plagued him since his return from the voyage around the globe some eighteen years prior. Forster embraced the Revolution and its claims to universal human emancipation, but he was terrified and felt abandoned by revolutionary Paris. He died in complete social isolation in one of the Parisian "quarters of the revolutionaries" in the boarding house for the "patriots of Holland" on Rue des Moulins. Forsaken by his estranged wife and his own father, ostracized by most of his (German) compatriots and largely forgotten by his (French) revolutionary comrades, Forster died in despair in his "safe harbor of resignation." Even humanist Goethe, who befriended Forster some years earlier and who greatly valued his inquisitive mind, expressed only a reserved sympathy about his untimely death in Paris. "Then poor Forster," lamented the famous writer in a letter to Sömmering, "had to pay for his mistakes with his life after all, even if he did escape a violent death! I pitied him sincerely."

Forster's road to revolutionary Paris started in Mainz, where, in 1792, during the French occupation of the city, he became the leading member of the local Jacobin Club. Before the French invasion of the Rhineland region, Forster worked for four years as a librarian at the impoverished and conservative local (Catholic) university, but with the coming of the revolutionary army and the removal of the feudal rule of the local bishop-elector, he quickly established himself as an indispensable administrator in the provisional government of Mainz. Forster greeted the French as unselfish liberators who emancipated the Rhineland from the centuries old feudal oppression and religious bigotry. In a spontaneous rush to prove his loyalty to the revolutionary ideals, Forster hastily accepted French citizenship, thus, politically and nationally distancing himself from most of his

166 Forster, as quoted in Saine, *Georg Forster*, 145.
167 Steiner, *Georg Forster*, 93.
168 Forster, as quoted in Saine, *Georg Forster*, 147.
German compatriots. This ‘national metamorphosis’ was the cause of his twofold social and political isolation.\textsuperscript{170}

A vast majority of local German inhabitants was extremely cautious or even hostile towards the French and did not share Forster’s revolutionary fervor; but, neither did the occupying French army or the revolutionary government in Paris fully trust the ‘liberated’ German Rhinelanders. Furthermore, as soon the French occupied the region, they institutionalized a harsh regime of a military and economic exploitation of its resources. Under such conspicuous social and political circumstances, Forster’s support of the occupying army, his radical Jacobin credentials, and, above all, his hotheaded embrace of the French ‘national identity’ were interpreted by many of his German friends, acquaintances and colleagues as treason. Forster, on the other hand, in his usual way, reacted to the accusations of Mainzers (and other Germans) of his ‘national’ disloyalty with a scornful condemnation of the entire German populace. The inhabitants of Mainz, complained Forster, possess “no spark of will-power and resolution, no vigour, no energy, no knowledge, no education, no feeling, no affection.”\textsuperscript{171} Because of their reluctance to grasp the historical significance of the revolutionary moment, the Rhinelanders had volunteered to stay away from the Enlightenment. In short, they had chosen to remain outside the changing world.

In the winter of 1793, Forster was duly elected to the National Convention of the Rhineland. (The elections were a ‘democratic’ farce, since local people were simply coerced to vote for the right, pro-French candidates.) Two months later, the newly elected representatives came to Paris -- the epicentre of the revolutionary Europe -- to attend the French National Convention. On behalf of the people of the Rhineland, the delegation was petitioning for the incorporation of the region into the French Republic. The request of the Rhineland Convention was immediately accepted and Forster became an official representative of a newly created département of the French Republic. In reality, the département he was elected to represent quickly became an administrative fiction, since in July of the same year, under the pressure of the anti-revolutionary German coalition

\textsuperscript{170} On Forster’s role in the Jacobin government of Mainz see Stephan Padberg, “Georg Forster’s Position im Mainzer Jacobinismus” in Georg Forster in seiner Epoche, ed. Gerhart Pickerodt (Berlin: Argument-Verlag, 1982).

forces, the French army withdrew from Mainz. With this French military misfortune, the short political carrier of Forster came to end. Once his delegate’s seat was left without the departement, he quickly became useless to the revolutionary government.

In political terms, as a French national, he was entitled to all the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. However, because of his German origins, Forster never managed to gain the full trust of any of the fighting revolutionary factions, and he soon withdrew from the all-consuming political life of Paris. In addition to his political misadventures, his wife, Therese Forster née Heyne had run away with their two daughters to Switzerland with her lover, L.F. Huber, one of the closest friends of the family. Meanwhile, an insultingly small reward of a hundred ducats was put on his head in Mainz, and even his own father, Johann Reinhold Forster, who was still holding a chair of natural sciences at the University of Halle, denounced him as a strayed son of Germany. As a result, Forster’s political isolation was solidified by a sense of an intimate, domestic betrayal. “I am calm, but I am burned out,” was how Forster laconically summarized his emotional and physiological state in Paris to his estranged wife at the end of the summer of 1793.\(^\text{172}\)

In his insecure Parisian refuge, confronted with revolutionary violence, political unpredictability, economic chaos and French xenophobia, Forster became an unwilling spectator of the rapid erosion of the idealist aspirations of the Revolution.\(^\text{173}\) In Paris, instead of rational enlightenment and human progress, Forster found political brutality and the degeneration of basic human values. The year 1793 marked the beginning of a massive persecution of large numbers of the ‘enemies of the Republic,’ and some of Forster’s acquaintances -- his fellow delegates from Mainz -- were publicly guillotined. Soon he became a suspect too. The terror deeply traumatized him, and, in his letter to Therese, he expressed the senselessness of the situation:

You wish that I would write the history of this time, which is so full of horrors? I can’t do it! – Oh, since I know there is no virtue in the Revolution, it disgusts me. It was possible for me, far removed from all idealistic dreaming, to labor toward the goal with other imperfect human beings, to fall down along the way and get up again; but to go with devils, and heartless devils, such as are here, it seems to me a sin against humanity, against holy Mother Earth, and against the light of

\(^{172}\) Forster, as quoted in Saine, \textit{Georg Forster}, 147.
\(^{173}\) Forster’s metamorphosis from an active participant in the Revolution to a wearisome witness of it is covered in detailed in Gerhart Pickerodt, “Forster in Frankreich 1793: Die Krise der Revolution und die Krise des revolutionären Individuums” in \textit{Georg Forster in seiner Epoche}, 93-116.
the sun.... To find only selfishness and passions where one had awaited greatness...who can endure that?  

For Forster, revolutionary terror was not a theoretical or abstract event; it was a physical act that literally destroyed the precarious balance between the human and natural worlds. The senseless terror of Parisian squares and streets went beyond human society, for it attacked the laws of Nature, which, despite their harshness and randomness, always advance growth and rejuvenation. The unpredictable violence of the guillotine, on the other hand, promoted only mistrust and death. In his mind, the revolutionary terror was also an attack on the Enlightenment, and he felt confused.

However, in his public writings, Forster adopts a strikingly more optimistic tone. Still, at the beginning of the terror, he celebrates the Revolution as a sacred French mission to advance the global scope of progress. In his last essay, *Parisische Umrisse (Parisian Sketches)*, written in the fall of 1793, Forster finds the revolutionary spontaneity of the Parisians -- the mass behavior that was in large responsible for the violence -- to be a ‘historically’ messianic act. “We [French],” declared Forster in German, “have sacrificed ourselves for our whole race, or what is the same, we have let ourselves be sacrificed. At least we hope that our battle, our superhuman struggle, and our genuine martyrdom will benefit other nations.”  

Guided by the messianic principles of progress, the Revolution becomes a ‘supernatural’ phenomenon. The unleashed violence purges humanity from the evils of cultural and political corruption. It is a cleansing act, a rejuvenation of the human race through fire: “With every day the impression becomes clear to my soul that without our revolution there was no hope of salvation from egotism and selfishness which was spreading more powerfully. ....Where would one find greatness of thought, enthusiasm of feeling, inspiring sense for beauty, where would one find self-denial, sacrifice, independence of spirit? With the concepts of ‘having,’ ‘getting,’ ‘possessing,’ ‘enjoying,’ the circle of ideas locks a chain around man which pins down to dust and earth.”  

Without the ever-expanding Revolution, humanity will remain trapped within the corruptive constraints of the nature that for most of the history of civilization drags the human spirit to the primitive level of the most basic elements.

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175 Ibid., 153.
176 Ibid., 152.
The great disparity between Forster's private and public views regarding the Revolution is not just a reflection of the ideological tension between the sentimental and practical views of the events. Nor could it be fully attributed to Foster's fear of the revolutionary censorship and persecution; after all, private letters were regularly seized and used to incriminate the 'enemies of the revolution.' The friction between personal anxiety and enthusiastic public confidence highlights the philosophical and analytical gap between local events and universal meanings. Forster outlined his theories concerning the relationship between local and universal in his 1791 essays, appropriately entitled, "On Local and Universal Development" ['Über lokale und allgemeine Bildung']. He strongly believed in the uniqueness of the local, but he also saw universal laws within the local:

Everywhere man has become what it is possible for him to become in the face of local conditions. Climate, the situation of his settlements, the height of mountains and the direction of rivers, the character of the soil, the multiplicity and characteristics of the plants and animals have given him an advantage on the one side and limited him on the other, and have had a reciprocal effect on his physical shape as well as his moral behavior. Thus in place has he become everything that was possible, although everywhere he has become something different. ... The dispersal of the people over the surface of the earth occurred before their cultural development, and for that reason it happened that of so many, sometimes contradictory, capabilities, every one was developed somewhere under favorable conditions to its highest degree and put to use.177

Forster does not put Europe above the rest of the world -- nor does he explicitly imply that European civilization is superior -- but he certainly arranges the global relationship between local and universal is such a way that it leaves no chance to believe otherwise. Subsequently, he strongly believed that the "purely local, the special, the characteristic features had to disappear in general, if the prejudices of one-sidedness were to be overcome. Universality has taken the place of the particular European character, and we are well on the way toward becoming an idealized people, abstracted from the whole of mankind, which by means of knowledge and, I would like to add, by virtue of its aesthetic as well as its moral perfection, can be called representative of the whole species." 178

According to one of his contemporaries, Forster always "proceeds from the particular, but he understands how to proceed quickly to the general, and everywhere he relates the individual phenomena to the infinite."179 Hence, in Forster's mind, if the Revolution fails

177 Ibid., 63.
178 Ibid., 64
179 Schlegel, as quoted in Saine, Georg Forster, 10.
because of the military and political pressures from its enemies, universal human progress will be delayed, but if it fails because of its internal violence, the entire human race will be doomed.

However, Forster’s belief in the universal reach of the Revolution paradoxically destroyed his trust in the Enlightenment. The torturous months of ideological orthodoxy and political inquisition, which coincided with the last months of Forster’s life, numbed Forster’s rational mind; worse yet, it paralyzed his emotions. He became distant and insensible — he lost the feeling of compassion, the emotion that initially drove him to the intellectual circles of the proponents of the Enlightenment. “My heart no longer suffers for the world,” declared Forster to his wife, “for the world is not worth that much. My heart suffers only for those who deserve that it suffer for them.”  

A few months of terror transformed Forster from the unyielding propagandist of progress and European civilization into a misanthropist oracle. Accordingly, he believed that nothing could be spared from the revolutionary hurricane that swept through Paris and soon would engulf Europe if not the whole world. “What curse rests on this land!” remarked Forster in one of his private letters, “perhaps on the whole of humanity. What kind of horrors does it still have to endure! And if it ever survives to see again the light of day, what more will it be than feathers and tinsel?”  

After the storm, the universe will become a vacuous shell of the Enlightenment.

The entire adult life of Georg Adam Forster is framed by two disconnected events — Cook’s voyages and French Revolution. Both events have become interpreted as formative moments in modern European geography and history. Cook’s scientific exploration, so to speak, ‘modernized’ nature, for it promoted a novel approach to the geography of the world based on a systematic comparison of various natural and anthropological features. His journey in the Pacific Ocean was perhaps the first attempt to render the unfamiliar, distant and exotic parts of the world through a complex scientific method of spatial investigation. Accordingly, the expeditions signaled “the formation of geography as a modern [European] empirical science,” but this scientific translation of the encountered

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180 Forster, as quoted in Saine, Georg Forster, 146.
181 Ibid., 146.
diversity also captured and narrated the world in “a profoundly Eurocentric” manner.\textsuperscript{182} The expeditions helped to create the modern framework of the knowledge circulations that brought individual, incoherent and disconnected geographical facts to the intellectual centres of Europe where they were processed and systematized for the benefit of future (European) exploration and exploitation of the world. Through this fusion of narrative Eurocentricim and rationalized methods of observation, classification and comparison, “the seminal conjunction between the figurative and the empirical was consolidated in a geographical imagination that constituted ‘the subject of Europe’ in a new and exceedingly profound configuration.”\textsuperscript{183} In other words, Cook’s voyages set up the scientific base for the Europe-bound geographical system of the globe.

The French Revolution, on the other hand, proposed a radical alteration of universal history by banking the happiness and future of humanity on extremely localized events in Paris. The messianic message coming from France, according to Mirabeau, “has reduced the art of living to the simple notions of liberty and equality” which “will undoubtedly conquer the whole of Europe for Truth, Moderation and Justice ...”\textsuperscript{184} This self-conscious universalism was marked by the revolutionary crono-centricism, the introduction of a new calendar in the fall of 1793 which meant to fulfill “a universal prophecy: the coming of the Age of Reason.”\textsuperscript{185} Yet, despite these high expectations, the revolutionary drive of France “plunged Europe into the most profound and protracted crisis which it had ever known. It consumed an entire generation in its tumults, its wars, its disturbing innovations. From the epicentre in Paris, it sent shock waves into the furthest recesses of the Continent.”\textsuperscript{186}

Although there is no direct connection between Cook’s methodical exploration of the Pacific Ocean and the revolutionary confusion of Europe, there is, retrospectively speaking, a philosophical link between the geographical (scientific) systematization of the world and the social and political upheavals of the 1790s. In both instances, as Forster tried to convey, there was an apparent friction between the rational and emotional responses to the encountered places and experienced events. Forster tried to breach this friction by

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{182} Derek Gregory, \textit{Explorations in Critical Human Geography} (Heidelberg: University of Heidelberg, 1998), 10.
\item \textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 13.
\item \textsuperscript{184} Norman Davies, \textit{Europe: a History} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 675.
\item \textsuperscript{185} Simon Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory} (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 248.
\item \textsuperscript{186} Davies, \textit{Europe: a History}, 677.
\end{enumerate}
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invoking a sense of universal humanness. In one of his essays, written just as he left Wilna, Forster summarized the principal struggle of modern existence: “The goal towards which we strive is the unrestricted reign of reason accompanied by the unweakened capacity for feeling. This union is the great, but as yet still unsolved problem of humaneness [Humanität].”\textsuperscript{187} Ironically, Forster most acutely came to experience this lack of humanness -- the friction between reason and emotions -- not during his youthful voyage to the South Seas or even the terrifying months of the Terror, but during his sojourn in Wilna, one of last Baroque outposts of Europe.

It is hard to know if Forster shared his emotional reaction regarding the universal prospects of the Revolution with any of his Parisian colleagues. At the end of his life, Forster could not trust anyone around him and ironically the only people who visited and nursed Forster during his illness were some distant acquaintances, such as the Polish economist Piotr Maleszewski, whom he came to know during his three-year residence in Lithuania. Like Forster, they were academics who embraced Jacobinian ideas and subsequently became political refugees evicted from their homelands by the rapidly changing geopolitical events of Europe.\textsuperscript{188} Revolutionary Paris became their place of exile.

Forster’s stay and death in Paris coincided with the beginning of the revolutionary rebellion in Poland and Lithuania. A year earlier, in 1793, Russia and Prussia proceeded with the second partition of Poland-Lithuania. The partition was provoked by the 1791 Polish liberal constitution which was to large extent modeled on the 1789 French declaration of the “Rights of Man.” During the 1792 Russian invasion of Poland-Lithuania, Vilnius was occupied by the tsarist army. (On April 24, 1794, the Lithuanian capital was liberated by some local rebels, who immediately established a Lithuanian revolutionary committee. The Russian army, however, besieged the city until the rebels capitulated some four months later. The defeat of the rebellion led to the final partition of the Commonwealth in 1795, thus, making Vilnius a Russian provincial town.) However, in contrast to his Polish colleagues in Paris, Forster, who was fully preoccupied with the universal reach of the revolutionary war, seemed to show very little interest in the political

\textsuperscript{187} Forster, as quoted in Saine, \textit{Georg Forster}, 66.
\textsuperscript{188} J. Kilius, “G. Forsterio kelias į revoliuciją” in Georgas Forsteris, \textit{Georgo Forsterio laiškai}, 32.
events in Lithuania where less than ten years prior, he arguably spent some of his professionally most successful and domestically happiest years of his life.
CHAPTER THREE
THE THRESHOLD OF EUROPE

IMPERIAL VILNA

Where barbarous hordes of Scythian mountain roam,
Truth, Mercy, Freedom, yet shall find a home...
Oh, bloodiest picture in the book of Time,
Sarmatia fell, unwept, without a crime.

("Poland", Thomas Campbell)

The ‘fall’ of Sarmatia corresponded with the emergence of the European modern age and the revolutionary beginning of the so-called long nineteenth century. The second partition of Poland-Lithuania occurred in 1793, twenty-one years after the first one, and it resulted in the 1794 Polish-Lithuanian uprising led by Tadeusz Kosciuszko, one of the leaders of the American War of Independence. The insurrection followed the pattern of the French Revolution by promising social, political and religious freedoms. Although Vilnius at the time was occupied by the Russian army, local insurrectionists liberated the city on April 24th. It remained one of the key centres of the insurrection for almost four months, until on August 24th, it was reoccupied by the tsarist forces. The next year, according to the agreement of the final partition of the Commonwealth, Vilnius and most of Lithuania was incorporated into the Russian empire. The total population of the grand duchy at the time was about four and half million people; but the wars and occupations had again reduced its capital to the level of European insignificance. The census held in 1795 by the Russian “authorities found in Vilnius as few as 17,690 inhabitants, among them 2,471 noblemen, 568 Catholic priests and 107 priests of other confessions, 238 teachers and professors, and 860 craftsmen in 38 guilds.” Despite its diminished population, Vilnius, or Vilna in Russian, became the third largest city in the Russian empire after Saint Petersburg and Moscow. The local religious diversity also gave the city an architectural aura of a cosmopolis: “There were 32 Catholic churches, 15 monasteries, 5 Uniate churches with 3

3 Venclova, Vilnius, p. 37. The 1795 census failed to give statistics on the residents of non-Christian confessions.
monasteries, one Russian Orthodox, one Lutheran and one Reformers’ temple, and 10
noblemen’s palaces.”

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Vilnius stood in between the political
traditions of self-government of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility and the European imperial
ambitions of the Russian monarchy. The political dismembering of Poland-Lithuania was
an act of brutal violation of the territorial integrity of one of the oldest political federations
of Europe, but it was not an extraordinary event. In the post-Enlightenment era, that is, at
the time of the revolution and expansionism of France and other European powers, the
questions of national integrity, political independence, dynastic traditions, social stability,
regional loyalty, linguistic unity and/or religious affiliation were often disregarded by the
key imperial forces of Europe as inconsequential. The European continent along with the
rest of the world was meant to be re-ordered. During a period of some twenty years (1792-
1815), various European kingdoms, empires, duchies, republics, confederations, free-cities,
autonomous provinces and departments were dismantled and created with an unparalleled
speed. The old country names (Poland) were dissolved, ancient ones (Etrutia, Helvetia,
Illyria, Batavia) remembered and new ones (Cisalpine Republic, Confederation of the
Rhine) coined. Neither the cartographers, historians, military commanders, and diplomats
of the period nor the lay people of the renamed, reformed and reconfigured countries could
keep up with the rapidly changing map of Europe or the unpredictable dynastic and
political loyalties of the rulers. The only ‘national’ markers that meant something were the
colours of military uniforms: Württembergers wore green, Prussians blue, Poles and
French red, etc. In this light, the disintegration of Poland-Lithuania was exceptional only
because of its prolonged and locally opposed progression. The entire process of making
Lithuania an integral part of Russia, for instance, took almost one hundred years -- it
started with the first partition in 1772 and ended with the Polish-Lithuanian uprising of
1863. The final annihilation of the Commonwealth involved several national uprisings,
social revolutions and foreign (re)occupations. And even after the last military suppression,
the notion of Polish or Lithuanian independence never faded away. In contrast, the
thousand year-old German (Holy Roman) Empire was dissolved in August 1806 by a single
(and last) imperial decree.

4 Ibid.
As a state, Lithuania ceased to exist in 1795, when Russian authorities abolished the citizenship, titles and administrative function of the grand duchy, which subsequently was divided into several gubernias, the administrative units of the Russian empire. In 1812, the new Russian dependency of the city was briefly challenged by one of the most ambitious geopolitical schemes of modern history -- the unification of Europe under the supremacy of imperial France. During the fateful summer-winter months (June-December), the city unexpectedly became the political, military and social nexus of the pan-European power struggle. Arguably, the Napoleonic wars brought to Lithuania a modern sense of the spatial interrelationship between the global pretensions of Europe and local political, economic and social objections. In the usual war situation, both armies treated Lithuania as a vast reservoir of various resources -- manpower, food provisions, horses, shelter, luxury goods, etc. -- but they also played with the political and economic ambitions of the Lithuanian nobility. Both sides promised political autonomy or full independence for Lithuania, yet neither of the two imperial powers was serious enough to consider their own vague promises. However, most of the constitutional customs and social privileges of nobility remained intact until 1840 when the tsarist administration replaced the old Lithuanian Statute (Code of Law) with the Russian imperial laws. In the same year, the tsar (Nicholas I) stripped the name of Lithuania from the official titles of the (Lithuanian) Vilna and Grodno gubernias. From then on, Lithuania and Vilna were drawn with increasing force into the Russian social, political and cultural domain.5

Before the arrival of the railway in the early part of the 1860s, there had been two roads from (western) Europe to Vilnius: the southerly road connecting the city through Poland with south-central Europe and the westerly road linking it with East Prussia and the Baltic Sea coast. Before reaching the capital of Vilnius, the southerly highway, which also serves as the connector with the easterly parts of Europe, shoots through the rolling terrain of Vilnius’s surroundings until it abruptly ends at the narrow gateway, known as

Ostra Brama in Polish (or Aušros Vartai in modern Lithuanian). The arched gateway, which for centuries was a section of the protective city wall, is enshrined with a miracle-working icon of the Virgin (Mother of Mercy). Since late 1600s, a painting of the Madonna almost fully gilded in a silver armory of wrought roses, tulips, narcissi and carnations, has adored a small Baroque chapel above the city gate. As a ‘Sarmatian’ symbol of Christian supremacy over the Islamic world, this ornately encrusted painting is placed atop a colossal silver half-moon; the entire chapel is bejeweled with thousands of silver votives — testaments to the miraculous power of the image. In 1829, the reconstructed Baroque chapel gained some Neo-Classical exterior features: it was “decorated with pilasters of the Doric order, a relief work of the Eye of Providence on the tympanum and a Latin inscription: Mater Misericordiae, sub Tuum Praesidium confugimus (Mother of Mercy, we pray for your protection.)”

6 This shrine has been one of the most esteemed symbols and sites of Christian Vilnius and no traveler who entered the city through the Ostra Brama could have escaped its sacrosanct status — at any time of day, the gate is surrounded by numerous devotees and pilgrims.

Since the demolition of the city walls at the turn of the nineteenth century, the gate had lost its defensive character, but its role as the safe-guardian of the city’s ‘identity’ was strengthened. For centuries, the ecclesiastical and national origins of the painting have been a matter of fierce debate and conflict. The followers of both the Catholic and Greek (Russian) Orthodox churches have claimed to be the rightful authors and owners of the icon, and both Poles and Lithuanians worshiped the image of the Virgin as the celestial queen-protector of their respected nations. Traditionally, there was always somebody who guarded the sacredness of the image by demanding an adequate response to it, and arguably, this officially sanctified urban entrance had offered very little confidentiality for incoming travelers because it had always necessitated a certain public gesture of respect. A religious Catholic or Greek Orthodox person might have responded to it with a great reverence; but a non-Christian or non-believer might have found the confrontation with the self-appointed guardians of the gate — overzealous pilgrims or young pranksters — to be a dogmatically if not a physically threatening affair. As a rule, in order to avoid various

6 Venclova, Vilnius, 153.
incidents of anti-Semitic provocation, the Jews tried to circumvent the gate altogether. In short, the gate with the holy image might had a specific function of protecting the city from various calamities and intruders, but it also forced all the passers-by to reveal their identities and sympathies.

The western approach to Vilnius was protected by natural rather than religious phenomena. Some ten kilometers away from the centre of the city, several western roads converged at the top of a forested hill near the curving Neris (Wilia) River. The hills above the river are called Paneriai (Ponary or Ponari), and from here, a single road slopes down into the river valley towards the city. The descending road offers a distant view of the city, which often appears like a mirage of a red-roof sea with the shooting islands of baroque spires and domes. (Forster seemed to arrive in Wilna from the flanks of these hills.) The hilly, sandy and forested terrain, however, posed some physical challenges. Often the road, especially in autumn and winter, would become extremely slippery and turn into an impassable muddle of dirt and ice. In addition, while the forest and hills of Paneriai naturally protected the city from the westerly wind and military intruders, it also sheltered many outlaws and wolves. In other words, the road through Paneriai was known for its notorious natural hazards and human dangers, but it was also surrounded by some romanticized aura of local mystery. Throughout modern history, however, the hills acquired a much more concrete sinister reputation. On these hills, the military discipline and imperial honour of the Napoleonic Grande Armée assembled for the 1812 invasion of Russia completely disintegrated. Some decades later, one of the bloodiest battles between the tsarist army and the Polish-Lithuanian insurrectionists was fought on the same site. And a century later, during the Nazi occupation of the city (1941-1944), about one hundred thousand people (mostly local Jews) were murdered in the Paneriai forest (Ponary in Yiddish), making it the graveyard of Jewish Vilne.
Figure 3.1: Ostra Brama Gate, a title page from Album Wilenskie. Lithograph by the Moulins (Paris), 1850. Source: Danguole Gudienė, ed., Vilnius in the Publications of Jan Kazimierz Wilczynski, exhibition catalog (Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 2000), 7.
Figure 3.2: Ostra Brama Gate Street. Lithograph by L. Bichebois, 1847. Source: Danguolė Gudienė, ed., Vilnius in the Publications of Jan Kazimierz Wilczynski, exhibition catalog (Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 2000), 54.
Figure 3.3: The great courtyard of the University, c. 1830. Lithograph by Ph. Benois, 1850. 
In 1803, the old university was reorganized into the Imperial University of Vilna – one of the four higher education schools of the Russian empire; on the reformation of the Faculties of Medicine and Natural Sciences, see Kubilius et al., eds. *Vilniaus Universiteto istorija, 1803-1940* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1977), 52-69.
Overall, this was an extremely generous offer, yet the Franks hesitated for a while to move to the unknown country during the time of war and political insecurity. Still, because of the increasingly aggressive and expansionist military tactics of Napoleonic France, Austria probably looked less safe than Russia. Furthermore, once the contracts were signed, the Russian authorities were not willing to postpone the employment and the entire family was obliged to hastily depart the capital of the Habsburgs.

The Frank’s caravan — in contrast to the lonely trip of Forster — traveled in relative comfort and despite some of the usual annoyances and inconveniences of traveling, the entire trip proceeded as an enjoyable, if rather too lengthy, family excursion. Furthermore, although the dual household of the Franks was going to settle in an unknown city, they were not moving into completely new domestic surroundings. Before their departure, the Franks shipped most of their furniture, including a clavichord for Kristina Frank, and their extensive library to Vilna. So, in a way, the Franks were not moving away from home, but moving their home away from the geopolitical nuisances and insecurities of Vienna. The Franks were fully aware of the Polish mistrust if not hatred of the German-speaking Austrians, who after all were one of the culprits of the serious geopolitical crime that erased Poland-Lithuania from the map of Europe. The Franks obviously did not want to agitate and irritate local Polish society, and they were serious enough to make some extensive investigations about the political and cultural conditions in Lithuania. Hence, the family hired Polish-speaking servants from Galicia so there would be no linguistic, social or economic misunderstandings in Vilna. Nonetheless, while they exhibited some cautionary optimism about their reception in Vilna by the local Polish-speaking society, they were more enthusiastic about the expediency and efficiency of the Russian bureaucracy in helping them to plan the family’s life in Vilna. Both doctors realized that their professional and economic success in Vilna heavily depended on their cordial relationship with the Russian monarchy and local tsarist authorities, and they went to Vilna if not as patriots of the Russian state, then at least as the loyal subjects of Alexander I, the young Russian emperor.

Although Russia, ruled since 1801 by Alexander, was still considered to be a distant and somewhat ‘barbaric’ state, its geopolitical European presence was felt more intensely with every passing year. After the conclusive geographical dissection of the Commonwealth, the Russian frontier came much closer to the Austrian capital. In fact,
after the 1772 division of Poland-Lithuania, for the first time in history, the Habsburg lands came into direct contact with the Romanov domain and after 1795, the entire frontier between Russia and Austria crossed through most of the former Polish territories. The Frank family made little excursions around the new Polish possessions of Austria: a few days in Krakow with an excursion to Wieliczka salt mines and a few days rest in Lublin. They planned to cross the frontier at the end of September at the point where the three states (Prussia, Russia and Austria) that divided the Commonwealth met along the Bug River in the vicinity of Brest-Litovsk, near the former boundary that separated Lithuania from Poland. (The Franks took a less direct road to Vilna, because they wanted to avoid Warsaw and Bialystok which were at the time in Prussian possession.)

Despite their general excitement, the entrance to Russia (and Lithuania) was a less dramatic event than the family had anticipated. Indeed, the whole affair had a feeling of déjà vu: “In Tiraspol,” remembered Josef Frank, “we said goodbye to the Austrian Kingdom. After crossing the Bug River, we came to Brest-Litovsk; the Cossacks very politely opened for us the gates of the Russian empire. I had seen these bearded Cossacks sometime years ago, when the Russian army led by Suvorov was stationed near Vienna [in 1799], and their strange appearance did not surprise me a bit. I also realized very quickly that these Cossacks were not fierce; in truth, they were more reasonable than most of the Russian custom officials.”

Still, in spite of the familiarity and tolerance of the Cossacks, Russia -- or, at this point still, the idea of Russia -- mesmerized Jozef Frank. But in contrast to many western European travelers, the young doctor was not much awestruck by the inhospitable climate, vast geographical expanses or degrading social system of the Russian empire, but by its peculiar form of spatial measurements: “As soon as we entered Russia, we were very surprised by the neatly painted green poles that marked every passing verst and accurately noted the distances between the border and the two capitals. Because seven verst roughly equals one German mile, we found it strange that the biggest empire in the world uses the smallest units of geographical measurement.”

The road from Brest-Litovsk to Vilna, however, was poorly kept and lacked most elementary road services, such as inns and post stations, and the trip across Lithuania was

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10 Ibid., 44.
slow and tiresome. The freshly demarcated signs of the Russian cartographic system could not mask the poor quality of the Lithuanian roads. And as usual, even in early fall, the road-trip to Vilna had already summoned the austerity and coldness of the northern frontiers of the European civilization:

We moved as fast as we could through these sandy Lithuanian roads. The endless forest we crossed through had some sense of majesty. But the frosty fields that opened up in-between these woods looked as if winter had already arrived. The northerly wind too came as its early reminder. We drove day and night without finding any shelter to sleep. ...We had to stop at Jedlina, one post station before Vilna. We spent another miserable night there similar to the previous one that we spent in Zhirmunai; except, we all went to sleep with empty stomachs, because there was simply no food available in the village — not even bread. The hunger soured our glorious arrival in Vilna, which we entered on October 4, 1804, at ten thirty in the morning.\textsuperscript{11}

The Franks' entrance to Vilna might not have been a spectacular or glorious event, but the city offered a surprisingly panoramic setting. With its colorful population and its semi-Oriental (Sarmatian?) appearance, for the sophisticated Viennese, the city looked like a perfect \textit{opera buffa} stage:

The Lithuanian capital had more than 35 000 residents; among them there were about 22 000 Catholics, 600 Greeks [Orthodox], 500 Lutherans, 100 Reformats, 11 000 Jews and 60 Mohametans. The local aristocracy, university professors and burghers were mostly Catholics. Among the Greeks, one could find government officials, merchants and Russian peasants. The Lutherans and Reformats (mostly Germans) were involved in arts, crafts and trade. The Jews comprised a separate community. The history of this nation is lost in time, but according to Monsieur Tadeusz Czaski, the Jews came to western Poland from Germany but to the eastern part of the country [Lithuania], they came from the region of the Caspian Sea. Other experts also count the Karaltes as Jews, even if they do not speak German. In Vilna, the German-origin [Ashkenazi] Jews greatly differ from the Jews in Germany: here, they dressed like Don Basilio from the "Barber of Seville." And Jewish women wear exclusively Oriental fashions, but their garment — expensive or cheap —is almost always dirty.\textsuperscript{12}

Despite some radical cityscape alterations commenced under the Russian rule -- the removal of the dysfunctional city wall and the ruined palace of the dukes, the completion of the neo-classical Town Hall and construction of the new (neo-classical) Cathedral -- Vilna still lacked an organized neo-classical perspective. The entire city was grubby and it reminded Frank of a huge disorganized village rather than a former capital city:

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 44-45.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 49.
Vilna looked chaotic—many palaces were surrounded by hovels. The excellent Italian style Town Hall building stood on a vast pleasant square completely filled with ugly market huts. The streets leading to the majestic Cathedral were unpaved and full of garbage, and during rain, they immediately became swamps. Although there were plenty of brick buildings, most houses were built of wood. The city beneath the Castle Hill that stretched along the confluence of the two rivers was extremely dirty. Pigs were running everywhere and outside the city, one could see and smell enormous piles of animal manure. The suburbs were literally sinking in sand and dirt. The natural beauty of the surrounding landscape could not mask these nuisances.\footnote{Ibid.}

\textit{Vilna} was clearly not Vienna, but Jozef Frank lived comfortably in the city until 1823, when he left Lithuania because of the oppressive political and national situation rather than the discomforts of the place. In the summer of 1805, after instigating some teaching reforms at the Department of Medicine, his father, Dr. Peter Frank with his two daughters left \textit{Vilna} for Saint Petersburg where he was asked to take up a court position as a one of the personal doctors of the extended imperial family. Jozef Frank remained working at the university and took his father’s position and responsibilities. Soon, he became the Head of the Department of Medicine. In addition to the teaching duties, he quickly established a very successful private practice, which lasted for almost twenty years.

Frank recounted his professional and social life in \textit{Vilna} in his memoirs written in the early 1840s, some twenty years later after he left the city, in his comfortable retirement on Lake Como. Overall, his extensive memoirs cover his father’s and his own medical practices that spanned about seventy years from the 1760s to the late 1830s. Because of their extensive cross-European practice, these recollections sum up in detail the changes and variations of European medical practice at a time when medicine was increasingly becoming concerned with the questions of the socialization of diseases. No longer were the doctors treating only individual ailing bodies, but they were attempting to diagnose communal (national, racial, social, geographical and cultural) causes of various illness. In a way, the doctors were becoming social critics and/or advocates of change. The Franks were uniquely positioned to diagnose both the individual and collective natures of disease, because of their broad and diverse medical practice that crossed several countries and included different populations. In addition, they had extensive personal connections with the rulers of several European countries, state administrators and medical establishments that allowed them to influence and shape the course of medical science and practice. Jozef

\footnote{Ibid.}
Frank was a sociable individual and because of his intimate awareness and absorbing experiences of the changing cultural and political landscapes of Europe, his scientifically ‘objective’ view of the world and humanity was tempered by his passionate ‘subjective’ involvement in everyday life. In the end, Frank wrote a six-volume (more than 3500 pages) manuscript that chronicles and parallels the family’s European saga with the evolution of the medical sciences.

The result of his retrospective fusion of European history and family biography with extensive medical knowledge and cultural erudition was a narrative creation of an extremely intimate portrait of Vilna. In Frank’s memoirs, various dramatic historical moments, dynastic fates and army movements intersect with miniscule social events and daily routines of his adopted hometown. Through hundreds of pages of memories, Vilna materializes as a self-contained provincial world that nonetheless is completely exposed to the geopolitical dramas of European history.

After Frank’s death in 1842, the memoirs were prepared for publication in 1848 in Leipzig by Christina Frank, but the revolutionary events of the same year prevented from being printed. In 1855, the manuscript resurfaced in Vilna, and a few long excerpts from it were published in Warsaw in a Polish language journal in 1863. Subsequently, the slightly changed two volumes of memoirs covering the Lithuanian period of the Forster’s life were published in Vilna in 1913. The original manuscript volumes were translated and published in Lithuanian only in 2001.

Frank’s retrospective vision of Vilna exposes a keen awareness of the intense interconnectedness of various European spaces, and he literally situates the city within the changing international networks of political news, war rumours, social gossip, cultural trends and medical breakthroughs. Frank divides his memoirs by years, but because he narrates two biographies at once (his father’s and his own), and since most of the time they did not live in the same place, he creates a bipolar panorama of local European events. In short, the memories of Vilna always alternate with the gathered recollections of other European cities, such as Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Freiburg and especially Vienna. Frank’s extensive memoir is based largely on collected pieces of correspondence with his father, other family members, friends, acquaintances, colleagues, royalty and state bureaucrats, so the domestic and professional lives of the Frank household are always crisscrossed with external events. For instance, the year of 1812-1813 is narrated from two memory sites -- Vilna and Vienna -- and the dramatic and tragic events of the Russian
campaign are covered from the perspective of two home fronts that connect the French military disaster in Lithuania with the political and social aggravation in Austria. This alternation of narrative place creates a kaleidoscopic rather than panoramic view of wartime Europe, and the historical position and geopolitical importance of Vilna shifts according to the changes of geographical retrospection. In effect, Frank manages to reposition Vilna along the constantly changing cartographic terrain of Europe: sometimes, the city resurfaces at the centre of the historical European events; sometimes, it emerges as a colourful local background for the cross-continental imperial struggles; and sometimes, it moves to the provincial insignificance of daily routine and everyday concerns. Thus, unlike Forster, who experienced and narrated Wilna as an exile, a geographically and historically ‘irrational’ and insignificant site, Frank described the city as a dynamic chronotopic, that is temporally and spatially coherent, place where European events, characters and destinies come into a dialogical relationship. In a way, Frank pictures the city in a novelistic way, for he describes it through multiple sources: his own experiences, letters, recollections, and the words and memories of other people.

Frank considered himself to be an Austrian rather than German, but wrote his memoirs in French. The reasons behind this personal linguistic translocation are unclear; perhaps the doctor wanted to reach a larger European audience and to include the readers in Russia and Poland. In the 1840s, the French language was still dominating European intellectual and social life, and most educated Poles and Russians were much more proficient in French than in German. It would be reasonable to assume that while Frank was in part addressing the Vilna-related audience, and he was also attempting to insert Lithuania into the chronicle of European medical, political and cultural history.

Frank truly felt he was simultaneously a citizen of Europe and Vilna. He was born in 1771 into the family of a respected Viennese doctor of Rhineland origins. (Johan Peter Frank considered his ‘homeland’ to be in Baden or Württemberg rather than Austria.) Jozef first studied at the University in Göttingen and later in Pavia, and he spent most of his youth in Italy, where he met his Italian wife. The most productive part of Frank’s life passed in the primarily Polish speaking Vilna, where he lived as a Russian subject. After Lithuania, the Franks lived in Germany and in the Austrian parts of northern Italy. In addition, he travelled extensively and spent some time in France. Frank’s first language
was German, but he was also fluent in Italian and French; of course, because of his profession, he knew Latin too. In Vilna, he also mastered Polish and Russian.

The Franks, like the Forsters, did not belong to the nobility and their pan-European lineage had nothing to do with the European aristocratic cosmopolitism. The two families belonged to the internationalized professional and education elite, which was nurtured by the growing but still rather narrow network of international European academia. While the disciplinary and professional divisions had somewhat deepened since the Baroque era and the numbers of professionals increased substantially during the Enlightenment period, European academia at the turn of the nineteenth century still remained a small and rather self-enclosed universe.

George Forster was a contemporary of Johann Peter Frank and it was possible that the two had met in Vienna or Göttingen, where at some point in his life Frank also taught medicine and was a colleague of Forster’s father-in-law, professor Heyne. In any case, Forster was fully aware of J.P. Frank’s scientific reputation, and in Vilna, he even tried to study some of his medical works during the moment of desperation when he was scheming to become a doctor. Conversely, the Franks also knew about Forster and his ‘unsuccessful’ professional experience in Lithuania and his political fate in revolutionary Paris.

Perhaps because of his higher economic and social status, Jozef Frank who was Catholic, albeit not a devout one, was much more politically conservative than Forster. The Franks were members of a respected and vital profession, uniquely positioned between the state and scholarly academia. Doctors, in general, were highly paid experts, and, in contrast to surgeons or barbers, they were not seen as plain servicemen. Most medical doctors gained their social and class privileges because of their private practices, whereas other academics had to rely exclusively on their scholarly reputation. Still, the financial wellbeing, professional development and social privileges of many doctors were linked to the favours offered to them by the monarchs, aristocracy and nobility. Increasingly though, they were also becoming employed by state, military and/or municipal institutions.

Medical professionals could also be above politics and social change, for they were concerned with the present state of an individual or communal human body rather than the future possibilities of human society. In addition, doctors could survive and even thrive under a great variety of political systems, be it autocratic despotism, enlightened monarchy or democratic republicanism. As a result, doctors were probably one of the most geographically and socially mobile professions of the era. For instance, a cousin of Jozef
Frank, who was also a doctor, successfully served the court of the Ottoman pasha of Albania, the Napoleonic French army, a principality ruled by one of the members of the Bonaparte family and a post-restoration (Habsburg) Italian dukedom. And Frank senior was consulted by many royal households of Europe. In general, especially with the rapidly changing social and political landscape of Europe, very few scientists, naturalists or philosophers could compete successfully with medical doctors for social prestige and financial rewards. Forster, during his stay in Lithuania, became extremely envious of the ‘privileged’ position and financially rewarding situation of many foreign local doctors, whom he described as a league of ‘French vagabonds and Italian good-for-nothings.’

Of course, following the social categorizations of the time, Forster also included actors, artists, painters, architects, composers and musicians in this league of useless ‘professional nomads.’ Jozef Frank, on the other hand, wholeheartedly accepted the ‘vagabond’ existence of the doctor’s life, and he was certainly not ashamed to be included among the more bohemian crowd of European wanderers. Through his wife, Frank became attached to the musical and theatrical milieu and the Franks’ home, both in Vienna and Vilna, was always open to people from the artistic world. Indeed, in 1813, the Franks cared for and nurtured back to life many Italian and French doctors and artists who ended up in Vilna after the catastrophic collapse of the Napoleonic march to Moscow.

Still, in spite of his open-mindedness, Frank was more conformist than Forster in his judgments of local social inequality or the practice of serfdom. If Forster, to some extent, was a social egalitarian and even republican, then Frank was a social conservative and liberal monarchist. Frank was not on the side of the French Revolution, nor was he impressed by the military success of Napoleon and his desire to forever change the political and social landscape of Europe. On the other hand, the Austrian doctor was not a keen supporter of the autocratic system of rule and he left Vilna specifically because of the increased repressions of the tsarist administration. Frank of course was writing his memoirs during a reactionary period of European history, when the cult of Napoleon, at least outside France, was considered to be a somewhat shameful affair, and his reflections on the revolutionary fervour and sweeping changes of the early 1800s were shaped by the officially conservative (post-1815) interpretations of the period. Nonetheless, he was also narrating his memories against the backdrop of the rebellious and Romantic visualizations of history and world of the 1830-1840s. The politics and culture of defiance were especially strong in Poland and Lithuania during and after the 1830-31 insurrectionary war against
tsarist rule, which led to a complete political subordination of the two countries to the
Russian autocracy. In a way, Frank’s memories of Vilna vindicate the Russian rule and
administration of Lithuania at the time when it was quite popular (and often deservedly so)
to describe the tsarist regime as one of the most reactionary and brutal in all of Europe. To
the end, Frank seemed to stay loyal to the Russian and Austrian monarchies, despite their
obviously uncompromising national and social politics. But then again, from the
perspective of the post-1831 repressions, the somewhat benevolent rule of Lithuania by
Alexander I must have looked like a ‘golden age’ of national harmony, cultural triumph
and social tranquillity.

Frank’s loyalty to the Russian and Austrian imperial houses and his friendly
attachment to the local Russian administration should have made him an unwelcome
foreigner in Vilna. Most of the Lithuanian nobility and some of the pro-Polish faculty of the
university were, if not openly then certainly silently, opposed to Russian rule. The Franks
family intimately socialized with the highest ranking Russian administrators and officers of
Vilna and the doctor’s unquestioning fidelity and service to the Russian imperial needs
must have been annoying to many of his colleagues and some of his patients. Yet the
Franks, no doubt due to their tactful and graceful social skills, quickly had become friends
with the leading Lithuanian noble families that later fought against the Russians in the
1812 war. In fact, even after 1812, the Frank family remained close friends with some of
the staunchest local supporters of Napoleon, such as the Tyzenhauz family, who had chosen
an impoverished life in French exile over a comfortable (Lithuanian) magnate life under
Russian rule. Moreover, in contrast to the Forsters, Jozef and Christina Frank never
expressed any displeasure with either the Polish culture or the Lithuanian nobility and they
remained extremely open to the local social and domestic influences. 14

Perhaps the best indication of the Franks’ commitment to the local world was their
conscious decision to learn Polish and Russian. Of course, for Jozef Frank the knowledge of
local vernacular was a professional and financial necessity. But the family’s respect for
local linguistic norms and the cultural practices of Vilna went beyond simple pragmatism.

14 The Franks were warmly remembered by many residents of Vilna, including those who
opposed the Russian rule; see, for instance the memoirs of Stanislaw Moravski, who was a
student of Frank at the university, Stanislovas Moravskis, Keleri mano jaunystes metai
Vilniuje: atsiskyrelio prisiminimai (1818-1825), translated from Polish by Reda Griškaite
(Vilnuus: Vaga, 1994); also the memoirs of Gabrjela Puzynina z Guntherow, W Wilnie
The Franks adopted an abandoned baby whom they found at the door of their Vilna house just before the Christmas of 1809. The couple did not have their own children, so the orphaned boy truly became their son and heir to the family's professional prestige. (Frank had to deny local rumors that the boy was his illegitimate son.) The doctor took his adopted son, Victor, to visit the elder Frank in Vienna, where, for a short period, he became a playmate to Napoleon II, the son of the deposed Napoleon and the grandson of Franz I, the emperor of Austria. Yet, even after this brief brush with the imperial court, the Franks insisted on Victor learning Polish and he sent the child to the Jesuit school in Polotzk, some few hundred kilometers east of Vilna. Victor quickly became fluent in several languages, but Frank did not see this as anything extraordinary, considering the multilingual environment of Lithuania and the widely accepted practice among local nobility to encourage the learning of various languages at a very young age -- "between the ages of two and four, when children are most susceptible" to them.15 Indeed, Frank even made the multilingual abilities of the Lithuanian noble children an example to other nations that resist the knowledge of foreign languages. Frank saw Victor as the personification of the unique Lithuanian-European identity and his lonely death in 1819 in the Jesuit school, far away from home, was probably one of the greatest psychological factors of the growing estrangement of the Frank family from Lithuania. After 1819, the doctor and his wife appeared to have lost much of their interest in Vilna, as if their life in the city had already reached its climax.

As a fashionable doctor and respected university professor, Frank had many professional and academic opportunities to leave provincial Vilna for a more prosperous and invigorating life in any western European or Russian capital city. But once Frank opened his medical practice in 1805, he instantly became one of the most popular doctors in the city and its vast hinterland. His popularity, in part, was caused by his social and professional openness: he treated patients of all local nationalities and classes; supervised the clinical work of several hospitals that were still administered by the religious monastic orders and primarily served the urban poor; and made visits to the homes of local Jews and the rural manors of the nobility. Most patients were willing to trust his opinion and novel medical advice, although none of them seemed to rely solely on his advice and were

15 Frankas, Atsimimai apie Vilnių, 420.
often seeking a second opinion either from another doctor or local healer. Even in provincial Vilna, the competition among the medical professionals was high and Frank soon acquired many disgruntled competitors, who often were his colleagues from the university. In addition, Frank was competing with traditional medical beliefs and practices that were usually administrated by village healers and midwives. Thus, in spite of his professional popularity (or because of it) he quickly gained a few professional rivals.

In addition, Frank was flirtatious and sexually seductive, and through the years, he was possibly pursuing numerous intimate relationships with local women. As with his professional prestige, his amorous social reputation was a mixed blessing. The social norms and sexual etiquettes of the Lithuanian nobility had not changed much since Forster’s time and, in general, there was no strong objection to Frank’s amorous adventures from the local elite that primarily consisted of a few dozen families of Catholic local nobles, Russian officers and cosmopolitan bourgeoisie. Frank, like many of his contemporaries, was not entirely discreet about his non-marital relationships, and the occasional urban scandals caused by his amorous escapades did not disturb him. He was often amused by the gossip and social innuendoes that were provoked by his acts. Still, his sexual liberty had some unpleasant social side effects: he was rumored to have an illegitimate child and on one occasion, his ex-lover tried to kill him by throwing a stone into the window of his bedroom; fortunately, as he cheerily reported decades later, nobody was injured.

The local reputation and popularity of Frank’s house, however, rested not so much on the doctor’s professionalism, sociability or amorous life, but on the good nature and unique musical skills of his wife. Christina was a professional opera singer but stopped performing once she married Jozef. Nonetheless, she continued to entertain Vilna’s high society with impromptu recitals and occasional concerts. The husband and wife were a perfect social duet, since Christina often organized and performed at various charitable events that were organized to raise funds for local medical and sanitary needs. The provincial cultural life of Vilna had its limits -- for one, the municipal theatre had a leaky roof and in winter (at the height of the social season), the building was so cold that it reminded Forster of an unheated prison. Most European performers were heading to Saint Petersburg and only visited Vilna because of its intermediary location between western Europe and Russia. Only a few singers, actors or musical troupes stayed long enough to become a long lasting cultural event. Therefore, for almost two decades, Christina’s talent and her operatic preferences dictated the musical repertoire and taste of Vilna’s society. In
many ways, the young Austrian-Italian couple perfectly filled the social and cultural gaps of Vilna's society, and soon after their arrival, their gracious house located at the confluence of Castle and Great Streets -- the main thoroughfare of the city -- became the epicentre of the city elite's life. (Subsequently, this renovated seventeenth-century building came to be known as Frank's House and today it houses the French Embassy.)  

Jozef and Christina Frank's family quickly acculturated into the disintegrating 'Sarmatian' social landscape of Vilna, but they also managed to balance their political allegiances to the Russian state, social and professional responsibilities to the multilingual city and personal commitments to western Europe cultural trends. In a strange way, the downgraded capital of Lithuania was a perfect place to exhibit such diverse loyalties. The Franks arrived at Vilna at a relatively young age and, since the beginning of the nineteenth century was one of the most intellectually dynamic periods in the history of the city, the family and the town, so to speak, matured together. While the Franks were not key participants in or even advocates of the cultural rejuvenation of local Polish life, the family nonetheless played a significant role in opening the city to the aesthetic and scientific (mostly medical) trends of Europe. In short, the Frank family perfectly mediated between the provincial socio-intellectual needs of the multi-ethnic local society and the European metropolitan cultural and political transitions.

Still, it was his commitment to medical science that made Frank so attached to his new home. In comparison to the volatile and warring parts of Europe, Frank's economic and financial situation in Lithuania was relatively secure. He had a steady state income and growing professional prestige, and most importantly, his social and financial situation in Vilna allowed him to avoid being dragged into the military conflicts. This was not a small achievement, considering that doctors and surgeons were the most essential and highly demanded professionals during the long wars of the Napoleonic era. Frank cherished his cozy domesticity and, in contrast to some of his colleagues, felt neither the aspiration nor obligation to be involved in the military escapades. Up to a point, the peripheral Vilna offered a limited sense of financial, professional and personal security, and the Franks, who knew very well about the tragedies of war, seemed to be truly grateful for their Lithuanian refuge. According to Frank's memoirs, life in Vilna was not so bad, especially during the years of the Napoleonic continental blockade after the 1807 Tilsit treaty between France

16 For more on the history of the Franks house, see Antanas Rimvydas Čaplinskas, Valdovų kelias: Didžioji gatvė (Vilnius: Charibdė, 2002), 289-299.
and Russia when the food supply all around Europe became scarce. The lack of luxury goods was compensated for by the abundance of inexpensive good quality local commodities:

Vilna did not lack food, especially in winter when the frozen roads made the transportation of goods easy. Beef, veal and pork were of the highest quality and twice cheaper than in Vienna. There was enough of good poultry too, especially nicely fattened chicken. The local market was usually full of game and fish. Common people consumed mostly potatoes, cabbage and beets, and only rich tables served asparagus, Brussels sprouts and artichokes. Bread and beer were simply excellent; however, wine was very expensive and had to be brought from Riga. 17

Still, even after the Napoleonic wars and the death of Victor, Frank’s commitment to Vilna remained strong and the couple started to look for a retirement property in the picturesque environs of the city. Only in 1823, when he became extremely disgruntled by the rapidly deteriorating political and academic environment, did Frank decide to leave Vilna.

The personal and biographical attachment of the Franks to Vilna certainly framed their view and opinion about the place. Naturally, Vilna, a predominantly Catholic and Baroque city was much closer to the aesthetic, cultural and social spirit of the Franks than to the Protestant and Enlightened worldview of the Forster family. Frank was comfortable with the multicultural and multilingual environment of Vilna and he did not feel (or never complained about) being threatened by the ‘Sarmatian mishmash.’ He also never felt isolated from the rest of Europe. Indeed on many occasions, especially before the defeat of Napoleon, Frank felt that Vilna stood if not at the centre of Europe, then at least, on the main nexus of the changing geopolitical map of Europe. Undoubtedly Vilna, in Frank’s opinion, was rescued from its ‘geographical’ obscurity by the Russian empire which brought a youthful sense of modernity into the Sarmatian region. In Russia under Alexander I, noted Frank during the conservative 1830s, “changes occurred all the time. Young empires, like Russia, essentially differ from old monarchies: new administrative methods are always tested, and because of this, every year is unlike the previous one. In Russia, everything changes all the time, and perhaps the only stable thing is the instability itself. The society moves from one system to another. A new order replaces the old one.” 18

17 Frankas, Atsimimai apie Vilnių, 49.
18 Ibid., 46.
In other words, the Russian empire, at least in terms of administrative experimentation, was as revolutionary as Napoleonic Europe. Vilna was located at the European frontier of the ‘young’ Russian state and it was also the capital of a disintegrated political entity, so the changes there must have been felt more acutely than in many other parts of the empire.

Frank welcomed changes, especially if they were not brought upon by social revolution or brutal military occupation, but by benevolent monarchs or progressive aristocracy. The Imperial University of Vilna was literally a byproduct of imperial experimentation; indeed it was probably one of the most noticeable examples of the beneficial changes. Under the auspices of Polish-Lithuanian prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski (1770-1861), the Curator of the Lithuanian School District from 1803 until 1822, who was also a personal confidant and chief adviser on foreign affairs to the tsar, the under-funded university was transformed into the most modern educational institution of the Russian empire and the Polish-Lithuanian lands. During the two decades of Czartoryski’s educational and geopolitical supervision, “which spanned the turmoil of Napoleon’s collapse and the post-Napoleonic settlement, Wilno carried the torch of Polish culture, salvaging many of the ideals of the old Educational Commission and sowing the seed for the most brilliant intellectual harvest of the century.” 19 It was the national and political paradoxes of the constantly changing and innovating Russian imperial system that made the capital of Lithuania the cultural heart of the divided Polish nation.

In 1830-31 Czartoryski became the President of the rebel National Government in Warsaw and after the defeat of the uprising, he fled Poland and became a political émigré in Paris. His relationship to Russia, in strange ways, mirrors the changing location of Vilna within the Russian empire. Czartoryski was “Loyalist, Conciliator, Insurrectionary and Émigré” but he proved himself a great patriot, a distinguished servant of the Polish cause.” 20 Frank was personally invited by Czartoryski to come to Vilna and he left the city almost immediately after the prince’s dismissal from the post of the curator. The doctor’s academic ranking and perhaps even his social position in Vilna were directly linked to Czartoryski’s status at the imperial court of Russia. Once the prince lost his influence in Saint Petersburg, Frank was pressured to chose between his loyalties to the Russian empire and the Polish-dominated Vilna. As a result Frank who never wanted to become a rebel,

19 Davies, Heart of Europe: the Past in Poland’s Present, 173.
20 Ibid., 173-74.
except perhaps in the scientific medical matters, went into voluntarily ‘exile’ back to his Austrian homeland.

Despite the imperial changes, there were many Sarmatian ‘relics’ left in Lithuania and Vilna retained its traditional ‘tolerance’ and old-fashioned informality of the pre-Russian days. Frank, like Forster, was surprised by the lack of the religious formality and modern discipline of urban life, but where the German naturalist found them to be expressions of moral corruption, backwardness and lack of civility, the Austrian doctor noted them as a semi-comical expression of local provincialism:

In Vilna, we found more monks and nuns that in Vienna. ...Apart from the Cathedral, Saint Casimir and Saint John Churches (which belonged to the University), all other churches were owned by the monasteries. It was impossible to attend the popular masses at the Dominican Church, especially on Sunday when people were constantly coming in and out, endlessly wandering around the church, greeting and kissing acquaintances and friends, and gossiping aloud. There were also Greek, Lutheran, Reformat churches, a Jewish synagogue and a mosque in the city.

In general, the Catholics did not celebrate Sabbath, since it was a market day – for only on Sundays could peasants sell their produce. In contrast, the Jews strictly observed their Sabbath and other holidays, and, on those days, they would never engage in any trade, even if you offered them all treasures in the world. The [Muslim] Tatars rigorously celebrated Fridays.

I was very much impressed by the concord, and even brotherhood, found among various local confessions. During the official dinner in honor of the emperor’s [Alexander I] birthday that was hosted at the governor-general’s palace, I found Catholic bishop, Greek archimandrite, Lutheran pastor and Reform minister sitting at the same table and pleasantly engaging in conversation.  

Frank was not oblivious to the socio-economic tensions and political corruptions in Vilna, but unlike Forster, he did not try to fuse or confuse the lines that separated different ethnic and religious communities. When the Frank family arrived in Vilna, remembers the doctor, the city “had plenty of fancy shops, mostly owned by Germans who led opulent lifestyles and soon all went bankrupt. With time, the German owners could not compete with the Jewish merchants, who live frugally and were satisfied with small profits, so they could charge much lower prices for the same goods.”  The most challenging competition for the Jewish merchants was the protectionist Russian state and its corrupt officials. “We should not forget,” adds Frank, “that the wives of the high-ranking Russian officials took

21 Frank, Atsiminimai apie Vilnių, 49-52.
22 Ibid., 50.
anything they wanted from the Jewish stores without even thinking of paying for the requisitioned items. The merchants could not complain to the authorities, because if they were caught with contraband goods, they could not have relied on protection from the officials."

Frank, in striking contrast to Forster, immediately attempted to dispel some of the mysteries of the 'Sarmatian' world. His profession, of course, uniquely positioned him vis-à-vis the rest of society -- no other person could have more intimate knowledge of living and health conditions than a doctor. Sooner or later, practically every household opened its doors to Frank. It is not clear how many patients Frank had in Lithuania, but considering his energetic private and hospital practice, in addition to his professional and social curiosity and the unwavering commitment to the advancement of medical sciences, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that he came into intimate contact with hundreds if not thousands of residents of the city. He knew their bodies and the diseases that afflicted them, and he was aware how most of them lived and died. But he also came across private secrets, family stories and communal dilemmas of local people.

One of the diseases of Sarmatia that Frank had to tackle was a medical condition known in western Europe as *plica Polonica*, which was first recorded and analyzed by an eighteenth century Swiss physician, long a resident of Poland. His treatise in French summarized the disease as:

'an acrid viscous humour penetrating into the hair, which is tubular,' and 'then either from its sides or extremities, and cloths the whole together, either in separate folds, or in one undistinguished mass.' The symptoms included 'itchings, swellings, eruptions, ulcers, intermitting fevers, pains in the head, languor, lowness of spirits, rheumatism, gout, and sometimes even convulsions, palsy, and madness.' When the hair absorbs the pathogen, and clots, the symptoms subside, but when the head is then shaved, there is a relapse of symptoms until new hair grows to clot again. 'This disorder is thought hereditary; and is proved to be contagious when in a virulent state.'

In the eighteenth century, the 'disease' was noticed not only by doctors but also by some casual travelers, such as William Coxe, who described in detail as a peculiar health condition that it was known only in eastern Europe: 'Plica Polonica: it receives that denomination because it is confined as peculiar to Poland; although it is not unfrequented

23 Ibid.
in Hungary, Tartary, and several other adjacent nations, and instances of it are occasionally to be found in other countries.”

Coxe also identified three causes of this ailment:

The first cause is the nature of the Polish air, which is rendered insalubrious by numerous woods and morasses; and occasionally derives an uncommon keenest even in the midst of summer from the position of the Carpathian mountains; for the southern and south-eastern winds, which usually convey warmth in other countries, are in this chilled in the passage over snowy mountains. The second is the unwholesome water.... The third cause is the gross inattention of the natives to cleanliness....

Frank was curious about this medical condition that had puzzled so many western Europeans, but he was also more skeptical than his predecessors about its pathological condition and he initiated a limited investigation of the disease. Surprisingly, despite being equated with Poland, Frank could not find that many cases of the ailment around Vilna. It seemed that *plica Polonica*, at least in Lithuania, was a passing illness. After some period of fruitless research, Frank finally found and examined a few patients that were afflicted with the condition. He gave a definite diagnosis of the condition: it was neither hereditary, contagious, nor was it caused by any specific local climatic, sanitary and hygienic conditions; it was simply a misguided traditional local remedy to fight neurological disorders.

After dispelling the myth of *plica Polonica*, Frank shifted his attention to a more challenging medical investigation. Instead of looking at individual pathological cases, Frank set out to uncover and map out a collective and/or communal anatomy and pathology of Vilna residents. In order to do so, he followed the traditional (religious) division of the urban population into two clearly segregated groups, the Christians and Jews and his investigative gaze ‘logically’ moved towards the more ‘exotic’ of the two:

As soon as I arrived in Vilna, Jews started coming to me, because they always pay a visit to a newly arrived foreigner. ...The medical practice among the Jews was very profitable, but the financial rewards could not outweigh the unpleasantness of the practice. However, I have a much higher goal. I wanted to study the habits and lifestyle of this mysterious nation. Local Jews should not be mistaken for the Jews from other parts of Europe where they look more or less like the Christian population. The Polish Jews have nothing to do with them. So I told myself: if so many doctors have to brave long sea journeys in order to study various diseases in distant and exotic lands, then I must not be afraid of lesser dangers posed by treating Vilna Jews. Consequently, I was ready to face the

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25 Coxe, *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden and Denmark*, 234.
26 Ibid., 235-36.
dilapidated courtyards full of garbage, hazardous stairways, crummy and dirty apartments and bad air. Furthermore, I was prepared to expose myself to the dangers of catching lice.

At first I could barely understand their Jewish language, since they spiced up the German language with many Polish and Hebrew words. ...In contrast, the Polish Jews understood me perfectly, but I quickly got irritated by having to repeat the same things all the time. ...After a while, I realized that I needed to tell them everything in detail: how to drink medicine and how to follow a special diet. It worked and I started to use this method of explanation for all my [Jewish and non-Jewish] patients.

...I have to admit that the Polish Jews take very good care of their patients — everything is provided for them. However, the Jews have to take care of themselves, because they live their lives fighting various diseases. According to doctors Friedlander and Tainer who wrote medical monographs about the diseases of the Polish Jews, the feeble constitution of the Jews is a result of their lifestyle. From the earliest childhood, the Jews are forced to study intensely the so-called religious scriptures, which essentially are some sort of rabbinical nonsense. They marry very young, at the age when the northern [European] children are still in puberty. And we should also remember their inadequate diet, which consists mostly of herring and onions; their screeching religious ceremonies in stuffy synagogues; and the practice among their women to wash themselves with cold water after menstruation and intercourse. On top of it, there is zealous fasting, rigidly observed by many Jews. Also, we can not forget the illegal trafficking of goods, which makes the Jewish life so stressful and results in so much heart disease; in addition, there is the cruel attitude of other local inhabitants, police and army towards them; and unsanitary conditions. But, I won't annoy the reader with a long list detailing their unhealthy lifestyle. Nonetheless, I should say that the people of this nation have preserved a peculiar, almost Oriental, complexion, which makes them more resistant to certain medical pathologies. The course of chronic diseases, for instance, is much more typical among the Jews than among the peoples of other nations who need more medical attention and professional care. In general, the Polish Jews exemplify many medical hypotheses of Hypocrite, especially his observations about the course of the crisis. The medical treatment of the Jews would have been more scientifically interesting and professionally beneficial had they allowed post-mortem autopsy. Yet, the ancient Jews happily accepted the embalmment of their dead.²⁷

Frank looked at the Jews as a subject of novel examination and by doing so, he shifted the medical focus from a simple ‘geographical’ towards much more complex ethnographical and ‘genetic’ modes of investigation. Frank did not produce any substantial work on Jewish clinical conditions, but his attempt to record and systematize Jewish ‘diseases’ and their causes was one of the first efforts to ‘racialize’ medical pathologies. In Frank’s opinion, the Lithuanian Jews were both different and the same as everyone else. They had peculiar dispositions and led a detrimental lifestyle, yet they were model patients

²⁷ Frankas, Atsiminimai apie Vilnių, 65-68.
and offered exemplary care of their sick. They exhibited the “Oriental” resistance to certain diseases; at the same time, they typified the clinical examples of classical European medical knowledge.

Vilna’s Jewish Quarter was only a few courtyards away from Frank’s house, but it was as remote, scientifically unknown and even forbidding as distant lands. However, as it turned out, Frank’s ‘sacrificial’ adventures into the Jewish world of Vilna possibly had more to do with his genuine social (and possibly sexual) interest than with his desire to advance medical sciences. He was more curious about the ‘Oriental’ stimulations and fantasies of the Jewish universe than by its medical conditions. (This is why Frank probably failed to finish a more detailed study on Jewish ‘pathologies.’) Consequently, Frank turned his inquiring gaze to the ‘Oriental’ features of the Jewish body, which, not surprisingly, he found most revealing in the exposed grace of a Jewish woman.

At the beginning of his medical practice, Frank met a beautiful young Jewess whose husband was his patient. He became intimately attached to this woman:

One of my patients, merchant Simpson, was ill with rheumatism and showed some epileptic symptoms. He did not care about the Jewish superstitions and allowed his pretty wife to dress in the French fashion, but he told her to cover her hair in the Jewish tradition. She kept a carriage and was free to make social visits; she could even flirt a bit with other men. This kind of liberty made the merchant a pariah within the Jewish community, and when he died, the Kahal (the Jewish communal authority) advised against his corpse being buried in the Jewish cemetery. The Jewish poor were ready to desecrate his body and Madame Simpson panicked; fortunately, everything ended only in tears. She respected me unquestionably, and one time, she uncovered her head in front of me. This was a gesture of extreme intimacy and I admired it more than any other act of gratitude. How smart are the Oriental women, I told to myself, that they only appear in public wrapped from head to toe in shawls?

By the time of Frank’s arrival in Vilna, western European ideas about the Orient acquired new connotations: it ceased to function simply as a political or religious threat to the European civilization and it became an emblem of conquest. The Orient was not just to be conquered, but unveiled, seduced and exposed: it became a place or vision of promise and power. The European colonial expansion into Asia, especially the Indian subcontinent, was certainly behind this change, but the full consolidation of military mastery with the aesthetic sense of scientific and cultural superiority occurred during Napoleon’s failed invasion of Egypt in 1798.

28 Ibid., 110-111.
Napoleon’s military expedition to Egypt was the outcome of a triple desire to capture a piece of the Orient, to show French military power and cultural superiority, and to threaten the British dominance over colonized Asia. Above all, Napoleon envisioned the occupation of Egypt as step towards the conquest of India. The defeat and collapse of the Grande Armée in Egypt did not erase dreams of the Orient from Napoleon’s mind. But it took him more than a decade to prepare for another grand expedition into the Orient. Only this time, the road to India led not through Egypt but through Russia, which also required the conquest of Vilna.

In 1804, a few months after Frank’s arrival in Vilna, Napoleon assumed the title of the Emperor of the French. In 1807, at the height of his military triumph, Napoleon signed a peace treaty with Alexander in Tilsit, an East Prussian town on the Niemen (Nemunas or Memel) River. The peace treaty strengthened the Continental System and established the Grand Duchy of Warsaw from the territorial remains of the greatly reduced Prussian kingdom. While Vilna was not a part of the Grand Duchy, the imperial resurrection of the Polish state nevertheless reverberated among the Lithuanian nobility as a promise of an independent future. In a way, the Lithuanian and Polish nobles exchanged their local Sarmatian pride for the continental patriotism of French-dominated Europe.²⁹

Peace between France and Russia prevailed for some time, but its conditions were deeply resented by both monarchs; so almost immediately both sides started to prepare for a new conflict and in 1812, the countries were ready for war. The future prospects and loyalties of divided Poland-Lithuania were at the centre of the war, and initially “Napoleon called the war of 1812 his ‘Polish War’, and in crossing the frontier of the Russian Empire the Grande Armée was in fact restoring the historic border of Poland and Lithuania, annulled in 1795.”³⁰ Yet when the war reached Vilna, nobody could foresee the shattering impact that it was to deliver onto the human landscape of Europe. Arguably, for Vilna, the year of 1812 was the year when the predicaments of the modern age had fully crystallized. For a brief moment, when the military axes of European geopolitics collided on the historical lands of Lithuania, Vilna was unintentionally transformed into the corporeal symbol of modern victory and tragedy. In 1812, two opposing forces of Europe -- the

²⁹ On the diverging imperial loyalties and the ‘nationality’ crisis among the Lithuanian nobility of the period, see Halina Beresnevičiūtė-Nasalova, Lojalumų krizė: Lietuvos bajory politinės sąmonės transformacija, 1795-1831 (Vilnius: Vaga, 2001).
³⁰ Davies, Heart of Europe, 142.
Napoleonic and Russian empires -- swept through the city in search of their geopolitical imperial glories. It left the city with ten thousand dying Europeans, mostly sick and wounded soldiers of the Grande Armée, who subsequently perished in the city. From 1812 until the beginning of the conquests and massacres of the twentieth century, that is, for more than hundred years, Vilna stayed within the historical annals and many biographical stories of Europe as a place where triumph and desolation faced each in all its human nakedness. This was the site where the line between human life and death demarcated the boundaries of Europe.

For the Franks, the year of 1812 also brought some significant, although less radical changes. The family left Vilna in May of 1812, before the start of the military campaign. For years, Frank planned to spend a summer vacation in Vienna and their departure from Vilna coincidentally paralleled the renewal of the threat of war over Europe. So when the Franks left Vilna, they felt as if they were evacuating or fleeing the city. They tried to take with them as much as possible to Vienna, but it was too risky to burden themselves with heavy carriages and huge amounts of gold and money. Hence, they scattered and hid all their immobile treasures: heavy pieces of furniture went to the houses of friends and colleagues; smaller items, such as books, were put into storage at the university; documents and valuables were sealed in secret niches of the Saint John's Church; gold and money were cleverly hidden in the house.

The war also disrupted Frank's medical research and practice, and altered the social life of the family. Life in Vienna during the war was safe and even cozy, but a misfortune struck Therese Frank. In Baden, a popular resort town near Vienna, in front of the Austrian imperial family and the entire diplomatic corps, madam Frank lost her voice during a charitable presentation of Mozart's "Le nozze di Figaro" conducted by Sallieri. Christina was singing the leading soprano role of Susanna and in the middle of the performance her voice suddenly quivered and went silent. She recovered her voice, but not her singing abilities, and after this unfortunate event, she could never perform again.

For more on the geopolitical location of Lithuania and Vilnius during the Naopoleonic wars, see Bronius Dundulis, Lietuva Europos Politikoje, 1795-1815 (Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos institutas, 1998).
Figure 3.4: A plan of the old city of Vilnius, adapted by Vladas Drėma from K. Gunert map of Vilnius, 1808. Source: Vladas Drėma, Dingės Vilnius (Vilnius: Vaga, 1991), 43.
Figure 3.5: Vilnius Cathedral by J. Peszka, 1808. Source: Vladas Dréma, Dinges Vilnius (Vilnius: Vaga, 1991), 62.
Figure 3.6: Panorama of Vilnius from the University’s botanical garden by J. Peszka, 1808. Source: Vladas Drėma, Dingės Vilnius (Vilnius: Vaga, 1991), 334.
Despite calling for the restoration of the territorial integrity of the dismembered Commonwealth, Napoleon envisioned his attack on Russia as the opening chapter of a new Oriental campaign. Napoleon was seeking more than just to humiliate the tsar; by defeating the Russian empire, he was scheming to debase the British grip over the Indian subcontinent. Not unlike the late 1790s, when Egypt and Palestine stood between France and India, in the early 1810s Russia was envisioned as standing between the forcefully united Napoleonic Europe and the Orient. In this perplexing geopolitical scheme of the French conquest of the Orient, Vilna, the first ‘Russian’ and/or ‘European’ frontier city, appeared to the imperial eye as a geographical portal to Asia. Consequently, when in early spring Napoleon left Paris for Leipzig where the Grande Armée and the rulers of the ‘new’ Europe had been assembled on imperial orders, he took with himself the newest and most detailed maps of Lithuania and Russia. But just in case, he also ordered the imperial chief topographer and one of his most intimate cartographic ‘playmates’ Colonel Bacler d’Albe to bring along some maps of India.

Napoleon possessed an impressive cartographic memory and in general, he showed a great interest and concern about the geographical details and topographical peculiarities of the territory that fell under his schemes of military and political subjugation. However, for some unexplainable reasons, he showed an extremely illusory geographical understanding of Russia and Lithuania. He could never articulate the strategic outcomes of the war against Russia to his military staff and was extremely vague about the tactics too. He simply ordered the largest army ever assembled -- some six hundred thousand

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32 In addition, the 1812 Napoleonic Russian Campaign strategically coincided with the 1812 War in North America; so the invasion of Russia was a part of an inter-continental war against the globalized British colonial domination. For more on the geo-political connection of the two wars, see Vincas Trumpa, Napoleonas. Baltija. Amerika. (Chicago: AM & M Publications, 1973).

33 In general, the French military seemed to have a very poor geographical understanding and cartographical knowledge of Lithuania. Still before the beginning of the Russian campaign, Napoleon familiarized himself with the works of C. Malte-Brun, a French geographer who in 1807 published a geo-historical study on Poland entitled Tableau de la Pologne ancienne et modern, which also covered Lithuania, see Virgilijus Pugačiauskas, Napoleono administracija Lietuvoje (Vilnius: Vaga, 1998), 20-37. On the general history of the relationship between French geographical studies and Napoleonic state, see Anne Marie Claire Godlewka, Geography Unbound: French Geographic Science from Cassini to Humboldt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 149-190.
troops -- to the Russian frontier. According to French general Narbonne, when asked about the reasons for going into the risky war or reminded about the tactical military and supply delivery difficulties posed by enormous Russian distances, Napoleon usually answered in the narrative tone of geographical-imperial grandeur and historical-epic proportions:

Very well, then! Let destiny be accomplished, and Russia be crushed under my hatred of England! At the head of four hundred thousand men, paid and equipped on a hitherto unexampled scale, with reserves on our flanks, with a Lithuanian corps of the same blood as some of the population we’ll be passing through, I don’t fear this long road fringed with deserts. After all...this long road is the road to India. Alexander the Great set out to reach the Ganges from a distance no less greater than from Moscow. Imagine Moscow taken — Russia crushed — the Tsar reconciled or dead in some palace conspiracy — a new and dependent throne, perhaps. And tell me whether we a great army of Frenchmen and auxiliaries from Tiflis would have to do more than touch the Ganges with a French sword for the whole scaffolding of Britain’s mercantile greatness to collapse. It’d be a gigantic expedition, I admit; but possible in the nineteenth century. At a blow, France will have conquered the independence of the West and the freedom of the seas.34

The war with Alexander of Russia was not about Poland, Lithuania or even Russia, it was a war for the global ‘freedom’ of the French-led modern European civilization.35 Still, before ‘the independence of the West,’ the French army and its auxiliaries needed to cross the Niemen River, a rather shallow and unassuming Lithuanian river that separated the Russian empire from ‘united’ Europe. The Niemen was to become Napoleon’s Rubicon: once he crossed it, the fate of Europe and the French empire was sealed. A mammoth military swarm was ‘secretly’ gathered on the left bank of the meandering Niemen River for the summer solstice expedition into the Orient. This was an extremely cosmopolitan assemblage of peoples and tongues, because practically every European state was forced or volunteered to join the expedition. For a brief moment -- one or two weeks -- the Lithuanian shores of the Niemen River became a flattened out Babel Tower of Europe:

From right, to left, or from south to north, the army was drawn up along the Niemen. At the extreme right, coming from Galicia, Prince Schwartzenberg with thirty-four thousand Austrians; on their left, coming from Warsaw and moving towards Białystok and Grodno, the king of Westphalia at the head of seventy-nine thousand two hundred Westphallans, Saxons, and Poles; the farther to the

35 For a more detail socio-political account of the 1812 Russian Campaign, see Curtis Cate, The War of the Two Emperors (New York: Random House, 1989); for more military accounts, see George Nafziger, Napoleon’s Invasion of Russia (Novato: Presidio Press, 1988).
left, the Viceroy of Italy who had effected the junction of his seventy-nine thousand three hundred Bavarians, Italians, and French near Marienpol; next, the Emperor with two hundred thousand men commanded by Murat, the Prince of Eckmuehl and the Dukes of Danzig, Istria, Reggio, and Elchingen. These troops had marched from Thorn, Marienwerder, and Elbling; and on June 23 were gathered in one compact body near Nogarisky, about a league above Kovno.

Everything was ready. From Guadalquivir and the shores of Calabria to the banks of the Vistula, six hundred and seventy thousand men (of whom four hundred and eighty thousand were already present), six companies of engineers, one siege train, several thousand wagons of provisions, innumerable droves of cattle, one thousand three hundred and seventy-two pieces of canon, and thousands of artillery and hospital wagons, had been mustered and were now stationed a short distance from the Russian river.36

Count Phillipe-Paul de Segur, who described this impressive convention of Napoleonic Europe on the Niemen River in his 1824 memoirs of the Russian campaign, was practically following the traveling path of his father, count Louis-Phillipe de Segur, the French (Bourbon) ambassador to the court of Catherine II, who crossed Lithuania on his diplomatic journey to Saint Petersburg in 1784. In contrast to most of the military aristocracy of Napoleonic France, the count was a ‘revolutionary’ offspring of the one of the most prominent aristocratic families in France -- his grandfather was the marshal of France and minister of war under Louis XVI. Despite his family’s attachment to the ancient regime, immediately after the French Revolution, at nineteen, the young count enlisted in the French army and participated in most campaigns lead by Napoleon. Segur, who served as the Quartermaster-General in the 1812 expedition, probably knew from his father’s recollections about Russia the difficulties of crossing this vast country more than most of his French compatriots. Still, he adored the emperor, and like most French officers, he was seduced by the semi-mythical orientation of the Napoleonic modern gaze:

The Russian frontier stretched before us. Through the gloom our eager eyes strained to see into this glorious promised land. We imagined we heard the joyful shouts of the Lithuanians at the approach of their deliverers. In our mind’s eye we saw the river lined with their imploring hands. Here we had nothing, there, everything would be lavished on us. The people would flock to supply all our needs: we should be surrounded by love and gratitude. ...Day would shortly appear, bringing it warmth and illusions. ...Day did appear! And it revealed to us only barren stretches of sand and dismal black woods. Then our disappointed eyes turned back upon ourselves, and we felt pride and hope swell again in us at the impressive sight of our assembled army.37

37 Ibid., 18.
Segur’s epic yet somewhat melancholic rendition of the night before the invasion was echoed by lieutenant Heinrich August Vossler, who served in the army of the grand duke of Württemberg, one of the most loyal monarchs of Napoleonic Europe. However, where Segur, in his distant reminiscences of the war, saw the shining grandeur of the overwhelming military force, Vossler already noticed the signs of wartime ruin and human deprivation that the glorious army had left behind in its ‘liberating’ march across some parts of Poland and Lithuania. Vossler, who kept a diary of the campaign, immediately took the devastating onslaught on the ‘friendly’ countryside to be a bad omen for the future: “On 22nd and 23rd June a veritable torrents of troops at last rolled forward across the immense plain to the very banks of the river, which formed the frontier with Russia, and there awaited the order to cross. For days past the French army had left a swath of pillage and destruction in its wake as it moved through friendly territory. Heaven only knew what it would do on enemy soil!”

But then again from the panoptical imperial heights, the already visible debris of the war -- the trampled fields and sacked villages -- was camouflaged by the gilded splendor of the mighty armory and the enthusiasm of the troops. Baron Louis-Francois Lejeune, the future painter of the Napoleonic battlefields, witnessed the beginning of the war from the hilltop where Napoleon set up his observation point. This was, in the artist’s words:

the most extraordinary, the most pompous, the most inspiring spectacle imaginable -- of all sights the one which, by exaggerating the extent of his power, both material and moral, is most capable of inebriating the conqueror. Under our gaze, around the culminating point we occupied, were seven reigning princes, King Murat prancing about in his theatrical costume at the head of the cavalry, all Europe’s most handsome men in parade uniforms, and all its finest horses. In the distance the massed battalions covered the plain with their sparkling bayonets and emulated the blazing sun, whose flashing mirage was reflected in the river waters and in lakes ruffled by a light breeze. The salutes of thousands of trumpets and drums -- the enthusiastic shouts acclaming the Emperor whenever he appeared -- so much devotion and discipline, shortly to set in motion this multitude whose immensity lost itself on the horizon where its weapons twinkled like so many stars -- all this exalted everyone’s confidence in the chief who was leading us.”

39 Louis-Francois Lejeune, Mémories du Général Lejeune, as quoted in Austin, 1812: the March to Moscow, 44.
Everything was ready for the massive move of humanity -- the countryside was plundered, the bayonets were shined, and the emperor, with his royal entourage, had finished the inspection of the troops -- and at night, the first sentries were sent across the Lithuanian river:

To their great surprise they were able to set foot on Russian soil without meeting any resistance. They found peace there; they had left war on their side. All was calm on this foreign soil which had been painted to them in such threatening colours. However, a single Cossack officer commanding a night patrol soon appeared. He was alone, and seemed to think he was in the midst of peace, wholly unaware that all Europe in arms was at hand. He asked the intruders who they were. ‘Frenchmen,’ they told him. ‘What do you want?’ he questioned further. ‘And why have you come to Russia?’ One of the sappers answered bluntly, ‘To make war on you! To take Vilna and set Poland free’

Finally, the opening into the Orient was cut and half a million of Europeans set up to march on Vilna. Of course, the land (and people) they were coming to liberate -- or to conquer -- were no different from those they were coming from, for the Niemen River wanders through the Lithuanian countryside until it reaches the East Prussian frontier: on both sides of the river, the people speak the same languages, expressed the same religious beliefs, and had the same expectations and hopes. Never in the history of Lithuania (that is, until the political ‘death’ of the country in 1795), had the river functioned as a political boundary and never had it served as a separation line that divides two contrasting civilizations or two disparate universes.

In spite of the general feeling of euphoria and the uncontested landing on the Russia territory, the march to free Vilna faced some unpredictable obstacles. Firstly, just before crossing the river, Napoleon’s horse suddenly tripped and the emperor, in front of thousands of troops, disgracefully fell on the sandy Lithuanian soil. Immediately, according to Segur, a “voice exclaimed: ‘This is an ill omen. A Roman would turn back!’ it is not known whether it was Napoleon himself or one of his retinue who uttered these words.”

The emperor of course was a revolutionary -- modern -- hero, and while he was fond of Roman imperial pomp and mythology, he did not believe in ancient superstition. This minor mishap could not prevent him from the execution of his geopolitical coup d’etat. And as a proof of his determination, he crossed the Niemen twice on the same day: first time, he traversed it early in the morning in his military ‘disguise’ as a battling French soldier, and

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40 Segur, *Napoleon’s Russian Campaign*, 17.
41 Ibid.
second time, in his ceremonial camouflage dressed in the Polish hussar uniform. However, the emperor could not tame the weather and by afternoon, the “glorious morning” turned into “a violent thunderstorm” that lasted for two days and nights.42

At first, the thunder was mistakenly identified as a distant rumble of the Russian cannon fire. But, as Segur pointed out, “the only enemy we encountered that day or on the following days was the heavens” that swiftly exchange the exhausting, Arabian desert-like, heat with arctic torrent:

In a short time, the sky had grown black, the wind had risen, bringing to our ears the sinister crash of thunder. The threatening sky, this land without visible shelter, threw a gloom over our spirits. ...This thunderstorm was as grandiose as our undertaking. For several hours the clouds grew thicker and blacker over the entire army. From one end to the other, for fifty leagues around, the troops were everywhere endangered by the lightning and overwhelmed by the downpour. Roads and fields were flooded. The unbearable heat changed suddenly to disagreeable cold.43

This sudden change in weather induced enormous animal losses and loss of provisions, and even some of the first human casualties of the war were reputedly attributed to the soldiers’ exposure to the elements. The storm, however, could not protect the first ‘liberated’ Lithuanian town, Kovno, located on the confluence of the Niemen and Vilia Rivers. It was already partially destroyed by the evacuating Russian forces and in a matter of a few hours was completely pillaged by the French; so when Lieutenant Carl von Martens disembarked on the other shore of the river, just a day after the start of the campaign, the town was already turned into a wasteland: “Camp fires were still smoking in the market place, the furniture had been taken out of the houses and the windows shattered. At most a Jew was seen to be here and there. One glance was enough. Kovno was a totally plundered town.”44

Most veterans of the Napoleonic campaigns of course were not shocked by the ensuing pillage of the ‘freed’ territory; what troubled most soldiers was the unpredictability of the Lithuanian climate. The Grande Armée was ready to fight the enemy forces, but it was not prepared to deal with the ‘unreasonable’ Lithuanian summer weather, which was simply too extreme to be equated with anything experienced in western

42 Vosler, With Napoleon in Russia in 1812, 46.
43 Segur, Napoleon’s Russian Campaign, 19-20.
44 Carl von Martens, Dänkwürdigkeiten aus dem Leben eines alten Offiziers, as quoted in Austin, 1812: the March to Moscow, 57.
Europe. And because of the extreme weather conditions, Vossler’s cavalry division, even without having to battle their way to Vilna, was already losing ground:

Before crossing the Niemen, we had been thoroughly parched by the persistent oppressive heat. Thereafter we endured three days of continuous and torrential rain followed by alternating periods of unbearable heat and downpours the like of which I had never experienced. To sum up, our situation was this: we were embarked on a strenuous campaign entailing frequent forced marches along abominable roads, either smothered in sand or knee-deep in mud and frequently pitted by precipitous gulleys, under skies alternately unbearably hot or pouring forth freezing rain.\(^45\)

The landscape was visibly marked by this climatic incompatibility: rye and barley, for instance, like grass in a savannah, grew extremely high, but at midsummer, they were still months away from ripening. In terms of military strategic terms, the unripe fields of Lithuania promised hunger and slow movement, for they deprived the soldiers and horses of immediate sources of food. Tactically, however, the disorderly weather made the short and undefended road to Vilna -- just over one hundred kilometers -- a treacherous passageway. One step beyond the road and the marching soldiers and cavalry found themselves sinking in the deceitful mud ravines and marshy fields of the countryside.

At least Vossler’s division was slowly moving forward; in contrast, the elite Imperial Guard completely lost sight of the road to Vilna and got stuck just outside Kovno. Sergeant Bourgogne, who was a veteran of the Guard and had participated in all the Napoleonic campaigns since 1805, bravely accepted the challenges of the weather. Still, he became immobilized by the invisible challenges of the terrain:

Masses of clouds gathered over our heads, and broke. The thunder and the wind lasted for more than two hours, and in a few minutes our fires were put out, our shelter torn away, our piled arms thrown down. We were lost, and did not know which way to turn. I ran to take a shelter in the direction of the village where the General was lodged, but I had only the lightning to guide me -- suddenly, in one of the flashes, I thought I saw a road (it was unfortunately a canal, swollen by the rain to the level of the ground). Expecting to find solid earth under my feet, I plunged in and sank.\(^46\)

It was convenient for everyone to blame the weather and treacherous terrain for slowing down the expected rapid advancement of the army and creating a general sense of disorientation. However, some of the local (Polish) advisers to the military headquarters of the Grande Armée noticed a disturbing pattern of a complete lack of cartographic

\(^{45}\) Vossler, With Napoleon in Russia in 1812, 50-51.

\(^{46}\) Bourgogne, Memoir of Sergeant Bourgogne (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940 [1896]), 16.
preparation for the invasion. To a large degree, the chaotic march on Vilna was a symptom of French geographical ignorance of the region and in spite of the extensive employment of the best cartographers and the love of maps exhibited by Napoleon, the Grande Armée was poorly equipped to move through the rather unchallenging Lithuanian terrain. In general, the French maps of Lithuania that were specially printed on large and unwieldy paper sheets before the start of the campaign were either outdated, poorly designed or inappropriately scaled. Even worse, the French orthographic transcriptions of the Lithuanian place-names were so defective that the spatial communication of the army with the local population was simply made impossible. The natives could not understand the foreign -- that is, mostly French or Franco-oriented -- pronunciations of the names of their own hamlets, villages, towns and manors and, thus, they could not give to the troops even the most basic directions. At the imperial headquarters, Polish count Roman Soltyk immediately realized that “the geographical notion of the Muscovite empire entertained in Napoleon’s office were about as imperfect as could be, and likewise of its topography. At all hours Napoleon kept interrogating the Polish General Soholnicki about such matters. On my offering to rectify the place names’ orthography, I was ordered to write them in on the map, so that Napoleon could have a better idea of his whereabouts.”

While the Polish count could rectify the cartographic and orthographic mistakes on Napoleon’s personal maps, the rest of the army leaders had to rely on their own ingenuity. In general, there was a severe shortage of maps and even the highest-ranking military commanders had to rely on nebulous geographical instructions and marching orders. It also did not help that the retreating Russian army removed all the milestones from the roads: nobody seemed to know how far Vilna was or which direction the army should go. Only one thing was for sure -- the Grande Armée must move eastwards. In the first days of the campaign, “while still en route for Vilna, General Compans had realized the sketchy nature of the campaign map. ‘Everyday’, he’d written home to his young bride, ‘I am becoming aware of the inadequacy of the maps we have; so I’ve bought a compass to guide me. Although I’m not used to this instrument I’m not unhopeful that it’ll enable me to find}

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48 Roman Soltyk, Napoleon en 1812. Mémoires Historiques et militaires sur la Campagne de Russie, as quoted in Paul Britten Austin, 1812: the March on Moscow, 98.
St. Petersburg or Moscow.' But before the six hundred thousand strong army could reach one of the two Russian capitals, it still had to find Vilna.

Meanwhile, the tsarist administration and local population in Vilna was also preparing for the war. Two Russian armies were gathered within the region of Vilna: one, led by General Barclay, was located north of the city and the other, led by Bagration, was situated south, near the city of Grodno. The headquarters of the entire Russian military operation was placed in Vilna, and was led by the emperor himself. In fact, with the arrival of Alexander in Vilna at the beginning of June, the Russian imperial court (except for its ‘ladies quarters’) moved to the town. The emperor set up his temporary and heavily militarized court in the middle of the city, at the former palace of the bishop, which, at the time, functioned as the official residence of the Russian governor-general of Lithuania. The preparations for the war included some military drills and inspections; but for most of the imperial court, it mainly consisted of endless parades, processions, pageants, visitations, salon-parties, dinners, theater performances, musical concerts, and most importantly, extravagant balls.

The local Lithuanian-Polish elite was taking the burden of arranging and hosting most of the social activities of the Russian imperial court in a cautionary expectation of being rewarded by the tsar with territorial autonomy. In order to counterbalance Napoleon’s propagandist promises of the restoration of Poland-Lithuania, Alexander was flirting with the idea of reestablishing an autonomous Grand Duchy of Lithuania that could be tied to Russia through a personal monarchical union. The Lithuanian noble elite was probably more pro-French than pro-Russian, but what swayed many local nobles towards Russian rule was the social conservatism of the tsarist regime. In 1807, the Napoleonic Codex was introduced in the territory of the newly formed Grand Duchy of Warsaw (which included a small part of Lithuania). This led to the emancipation of the serfs in the Grand Duchy and the nominal equalization of social privileges. In other words, for most local nobles, the limited political and national freedom promised by Napoleon also meant significant economic and social losses. Faced with such a dilemma, a vast majority of the landowners in Lithuania, including the ones who resided in Vilna, opted to follow the military fortunes of the warring parties and wait for the definite victor. It is not clear what

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* Austin, *1812: the March on Moscow*, 98.
views and expectations were held by the upper and lower bourgeoisie, urban poor, peasants and Jewish community. The Napoleonic Continental Blockade altered traditional trade routes and severely damaged the local economy. (English traders were the main buyers of Lithuanian grain and wood products, the most profitable local export commodities.) The local Catholic Church, however, was anti-Napoleon and its gripping influence over the Lithuanian social and cultural landscape probably helped to persuade most Christian inhabitants of Lithuania to stay away from the European ‘liberators.’

Napoleon expected a battle over Vilna, but Alexander left the town swiftly after hearing the news of the beginning of the invasion. Almost immediately after his departure, Russian officials, troops and local loyalists also evacuated Vilna. The Russian army did not defend the city and the capital of Lithuania was opened for the arrival Grande Armée. Local nobility and most of the urban bourgeoisie were spasmodically preparing to welcome the new conquerors-liberators: some were desperately trying to hide all valuables, some were scheming for quick financial profits and others were hoping to increase their social status by providing boarding and entertainment to the most illustrious of the conquerors -- the Napoleonic royalty, aristocracy, marshals, generals and diplomats of Europe.

On June 28, a week after the crossing the Niemen, the Polish Lancers entered Vilna and were greeted with a ‘Sarmatian’ display of patriotism. “Our entry,” remembers one of the participants of the event, “was a triumph. Streets and public places were full of people. All the windows were adorned with wildly enthusiastic ladies. Valuable carpets hung on the façades of several buildings.” Segur echoes the same sentiment: people of the streets were “embracing and congratulating each other. Old men appeared again in their former costume, with its memories of honour and independence. They weep with joy at the sight of the national banners being followed by innumerable crowds.” Napoleon, however, had very little patience for the unorchestrated urban spectacle of gratitude and he was more interested in the military and topographical conditions of the town. Still, the French emperor wanted to find out more about the political mood of the public, and even before entering the city, he quickly dispatched some emissaries to fetch the rector of the university, Jan Sniadecky, an aged professor of astronomy and meteorology. Napoleon

52 Soltyn, as quoted in Austin, 1812: the March to Moscow, 71.
53 Segur, as quoted in Austin, 1812: the March to Moscow, 71.
made a large donation to the University of Vilna in 1810, and Sniadecky assured the
emperor of Vilna's support of the French. Next day, the rector was made a member of the
provisional government of Lithuania.

Still, the local population displayed a passive welcome that verged on indifference or
fear over the news of the arrival of Napoleon. According to general Caulaincourt (a former
French ambassador in Russia), upon reaching the environs of the city early in the morning:

The Emperor passed through Vilna without making himself known. The town
seemed to be deserted. Not a face showed at a single window, not a sign of
enthusiasm or even curiosity. Everything was gloomy. Passing straight to the
town, he inspected the burnt Vilia bridge, the terrain beyond the city and the
magazines the enemy had set fire to and which were still burning. Hastening on
the repairs to the bridges, he gave orders for defensive outworks, and then
returned and went to the palaces.54

When Napoleon set up his Imperial Headquarters in the palace of the Russian governor-
general, and his arrival was made public, there was still no jubilation in the town. 'The
Emperor,' noted Caulaincourt, 'was struck by this. Entering his study, he remarked: 'The
Poles hereabouts aren't like the ones in Warsaw. They're cooler than Poles and much more
reticent.' 55 The Lithuanian nobility was clearly divided between the pro-French and pro-
Russian factions -- the city's population was enthusiastically welcoming the arrival of the
Polish compatriots, but was much more reserved about the massive invasion of the French-
led European army.

Napoleon took the same rooms in the palace that just two days earlier had occupied
by Alexander. One court replaced the other with phenomenal speed: a few days prior,
Vilna was the war capital of Russia; now, it was the 'first city' of imperial Europe. Despite
the enormous strategic success, Napoleon was not satisfied with the tactical outcomes of the
French occupation of the city. Napoleon wanted to humiliate Alexander and simultaneously
carve the road to the Orient. He expected to begin this epic march with a decisive battle,
something on the scale of Austerlitz or Jena, that would leave no doubt of his military and
geopolitical genius. The Russian retreat annoyed him greatly, for it deprived him of the
epic sense of the historical and geopolitical significance of the campaign. Vilna, 'the window
to the Orient,' was taken, but between Europe and India, there was still standing the

54 Armand de Caulaincourt, Mémoires du Général de Caulaincourt, Duc de Vizence,
Grand Ecuyer de l'Empereur, as quoted in Austin, 1812: the March to Moscow, 73.
55 Ibid.
undefeated Russian empire. So when Napoleon received a letter from Alexander proposing the negotiation of a peace agreement under the condition of immediate withdraw of the Grande Armée behind the Niemen, Napoleon, according to Caulaincourt became enraged:

Alexander's laughing at me. ...Does he imagine I've come to Vilna to negotiate treaties? I've come to finish off the barbarian colossus of the North, once and for all. They must be thrust back into their snow and ice, and that for a quarter of a century at least they won't be able interfere with civilized Europe. The sword is drawn. The Tsar sees his army has been cut in two. He wants to come to terms. The acquisition of Finland has turned his head. If he must have victims, let him defeat the Persians; but don't let him meddle in Europe's affairs. My manoeuvres have disconcerted the Russians. Before a month has passed they'll be on their knees to me.  

In Vilna, furious Napoleon quickly divided the world into the two unequal parts -- the civilized, moderate and territorially compact West and the barbarian, climatically harsh and geographically unbalanced (from Finland to Persia) East. Vilna's location within this razor-sharp division was unclear, for Napoleon was hoping to use Lithuania as a territorial bargaining chip in his negotiations with Alexander. However, for most incoming Europeans, the city offered the first rough contours of the mysterious and strange 'Oriental' topography of the East. On his arrival in the city, Captain Francois Dumonceau, for instance, near the Ostra Brama gate immediately notices "a kind of cloister with a chapel. Its bell tower was a parti-coloured striped ball, the first bizarre Russian bell tower we'd see. Its walls were placarded all over with lengthy proclamations in Russian we'd have liked to decipher." A fairy-tale Orient setting even took over the French army's headquarters, located next to the palace, where Carabinier-Sergeant Bertrand (serving under Murat, the king of Naples) came across:

two townsman and two other persons in turbans seated around a well-lit table, on which was a good dinner. Valets dressed in the Emperor's livery were waiting on them. Stupefied, I didn't know whether to advance or retreat. But not yet knowing how to beat a retreat, I go in, raising my hand to my shako. 'What do you want?' says one of my turbans. 'A corner where I can get some rest. But I see this isn't the place, excuse me.' -- 'If there's only you,' replies the turban whom I'd recognized as Roustam, the Emperor's mameluke, 'come in. Your division has been in the advance guard all day. You must be dead beat.' Amazed at my lucky windfall, I valiantly plant my fork in a chicken wing, followed by an iced ham, the whole washed down with the finest vintages. The second turban, Murat's mameluke, orders up a square-shaped bottle wrapped in straw, and we

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56 Caulaincourt, as quoted in Austin, 1812: the March to Moscow, 77.
57 François Dumonceau, Mémoires du Général Comte François Dumonceau, as quoted in Austin, 1812: the March to Moscow, 73.
drink the healths of the Emperor, of his worthy spouse, of the Prince Imperial, of King Murat.  

While the ‘mamelukes’ turned to be the servicemen of the French and Neapolitan armies and they came to Vilna with the rest of the Grande Armée, their ‘marvellous’ hospitality signalled for the sergeant the ‘Oriental’ direction of the campaign. In Vilna, the already exhausted and rain-drenched soldiers found some of the promised comforts of the East, and when the trumpets called them back to chase the Russians, Bertrand’s regiment responded with weariness and lethargy. “And when, towards midnight the time came to leave, it still lacked over a hundred men and two officers.”

Vilna quickly lost its initial social ‘iciness’ and greeted many aristocratic and socially high-ranking ‘liberators’ with the acceptable and familiar forms of European entertainment. The ambassadors of Austria, Prussia and United States of America, which just recently had declared war on Britain and invaded its North American (Canadian) colonies, arrived in the city soon after Napoleon, and the imperial court resumed its expeditionary lifestyle. For duke Fezensac, for instance, there was nothing burdensome about his ‘military’ duties in Vilna: “assemblies, balls, concerts succeeded one another uninterruptedly. Present at these celebrations, we could hardly recognize the capital of a country ravaged by two enemy armies, and whose inhabitants were reduced to misery and despair; and if the Lithuanians themselves seemed sometimes to remember this, it was in order to say that no sacrifice was too great for Poles when it came to the reestablishment of their country.”

For many other officers, the enlivened public spaces and social life of the city also offered some voyeuristic escapes from the boredom of the war. At the ball, Captain Fantin des Odoards recalls having “a better opportunity of judging the fair sex of Vilna, of whose charms I’d formed a favourable opinion at the religious service. This time I was filled with quite another sort of admiration when I saw them animated by dancing, pleasure and patriotism and noticed how white and rounded were the objects rising and falling under the national colours during the gentle embraces of the waltz.”

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58 Vincent Bertrand, Mémoires du capitaine Vincent Bertrand, as quoted in Austin, 1812: the March to Moscow, 77.
59 Bertrand, as quoted in Austin, 1812: the March to Moscow, 78.
The less lucky subordinates -- the hundred thousand soldiers -- who were neither miraculously showered by ‘Oriental’ luxuries nor could enjoy the ‘civilized’ pleasures of the local elite, had still to adapt to the incongruous weather, hazardous landscape and distressing poverty of the Lithuanian countryside. Sergeant Coignet with his unit was stationed in one of the villages outside Vilna:

The rain was coming down in bucketsful, accompanied by a glacial cold which we felt the more keenly for its following immediately on the overwhelming heat. Soon the soil of the garden, churned up and drowning in waters, was nothing but a vast swamp of mud. We stood knee-deep in it, having neither straw to lie down on nor any shelter, and without wood to light a fire. And then, to cap it all, came a terrible hurricane. Finding it equally hard to stand up or lie down, we squatted dozing on our mantles in the mud; and awoke only to find the rain still pouring down and the hurricane growing steadily more furious. Chimneys and tiles were coming down all around us. ...Arms and equipment were lying in the mud. Our dismal fires had gone out. Our horses were shivering at least as violently as ourselves. Several succumbed during the night or else died next day, destroyed by cold and misery.62

For Vossler, Vilna too offered little of pleasure, hope or fantasy. “I would have liked to spend some time in Vilna,” remembered the Württemberger, “but with my wagons it was neither expedient nor safe to do so, nor would it have served any practical purpose, for no provisions were to be had from the frightened inhabitants even for good money.”63 Most of the food supplies had been already requisitioned by the Russian army and there was still a month or two away from the harvest time. Still, Vossler did not fail to identify the roots of the Lithuanian poverty in the ‘Polish economy,’ which he had already detected in the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, where the Polish nobles

stayed poor, though memories of past riches lingered. Whether from a natural bent towards extravagance fostered by education abroad, or because they have never suffered real want, the habit of prudent thrift was alien to their nature. Run-down estates and a constant shortage of cash were inevitable consequences. ...There is no middle class in Poland. As for the peasant, they are the slaves of their noble masters and are reared like cattle. ...Born and bred a slave, the peasant’s wants and aspirations are on the level of the beasts he tends. ...The habit of thieving which is so deeply ingrained in most common Poles (and of which every traveller would do well to beware) is motivated not so much by greed as by the irresistible craving for liquor.64

Surrounded by extravagant and cruel Polish-speaking nobles and frightened, non-cooperative local peasants, the Grande Armée heavily relied on the ingenuity and efficiency

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62 Jean-Roch Coignet, Cahiers, as quoted in Austin, 1812: the March to Moscow, 74-75.
63 Vossler, With Napoleon in Russia in 1812, 52.
64 Ibid., 40-41.
of the Jewish traders, inn-owners and artisans. The Jewish assistance, however, was often extracted through violent means of brutal force, terror and predatory sexual behaviour. So, when cash rich Sergeant Bourgogne and his comrades from the Imperial Corps made a brief stopover during their long march to the city of Vitebsk -- the last ‘Lithuanian’ town on the Dvina/Duna River which more or less served as the frontier between the (former) Lithuanian grand duchy and Muscovy -- they decided to celebrate their victory by harassing their hesitant Jewish hosts:

This was the 28th [of July]. ... I was quartered with a Jew, who had a pretty wife and two charming daughters with lovely oval faces. In this house I found a little vat for making beer, some barley, and a hand-mill for grinding, but no hops. I gave the Jew twelve francs to get me some, and for fear he might not return we kept Rachel his wife and his two daughters as hostages. However, twenty-four hours after his departure Jacob the Jew returned with hops. In our company was a brewer, a Fleming, who made us five barrels of excellent beer.65

The capture of Vitebsk signified the nominal conquest of Lithuania, but the Grande Armée still had not faced a decisive battle nor did it have a clear sense of the geographical direction and length of the campaign. Segur retrospectively saw this moment as a threshold event, a point when imperial indecision turned into a decisive act of the war:

With the liberation of Lithuania the objective of the conflict had been attained, yet it seemed that the war had hardly begun. Places alone had been overcome, and not men. The Russian army was still intact, and its two flanks, separated by the ardour of an initial attack, had just been reunited. We were in the finest season of the year. Such was the situation when Napoleon decided to halt on the banks of the Dnieper and the Duna – a decision which he thought irrevocable. He was better able to deceive others concerning his intentions since he was deceiving himself.66

Unable to make a decision, Napoleon initially decided to winter in Lithuania and commanded the clean up of Vitebsk by making the city the possible winter capital of Europe: “he ordered the guard to tear down some stone houses which spoiled the appearance of the palace square, and to clear away the rubbish. He gave thought to winter pleasures. Actors would be brought from Paris to Vitebsk, and since this city was empty of civilians, feminine spectators might be drawn to it from Warsaw and Vilna.”67

The climate, however, posed the most serious challenge to winter pleasures, for as Segur recalls, “such is the Russian climate: the weather is always extreme, intemperate. It

65 Bourgogne, Memoir of Sergeant Bourgogne, 19.
66 Segur, Napoleon’s Russian Campaign, 29-30.
67 Ibid., 30.
either parches or floods, burns or freezes the earth and its inhabitants -- a treacherous climate, whose heat weakened our bodies as if to soften them for the cold which was soon to attack them."

Napoleon of course was ‘concerned’ about the promised glory of his soldiers: could he let them freeze and starve through winter without experiencing an epic battle and the promised conquest of the East? Could they just die from cold and exhaustion without letting his military genius advance the historical and territorial progress of Europe? Finally, the “boredom of six long months of winter on the banks of those rivers had appeared to him then as the worst of enemies.”

Troubled with such thoughts, the emperor finally made a conclusive decision and on the 10th of August, he gave the orders to advance. On the 13th, he left Vitebsk where he had stayed for only two weeks. In his diary, Vossler responded to the order to cross the Dnieper and Dvina Rivers in grave mood -- there was nobody to liberate in front of them:

Now our move into enemy territory proper filled me with nothing but sombre forebodings. But we were an army hundreds of thousands strong, comrades in arms all in the flower of manhood, and many still rejoiced as they crossed the fateful [Dvina] river. On the far bank an ominous silence awaited them. Dense and menacing forests met the eye in every direction. The rare villages were deserted. Not a sign of human life anywhere. The fate of this huge army to which I belonged oppressed my profoundly.

Vosler’s gloomy picture of Russia was echoed in the letters of Henri Beyle, better known as the (future) writer Stendhal, who joined the campaign as an imperial courier. Beyle, in a similar fashion to Forster’s emotional response upon his entrance into Poland-Lithuania a generation earlier, experienced the geographical entrance into Russia as a step towards personal aesthetic and moral degradation: “My own happiness at being here is not great. How a man changes! My old thirst for new sights has been entirely quenched. ...Would you believe it that, without any vexation that affects me more than anybody else, and without any personal sorrow, I am sometimes on the point of bursting with tears? In this ocean of barbarity there is not a sound that finds an echo in my soul! Everything is coarse, dirty, both physically and morally stinking.” Stendhal, who at the time was still deeply loyal to the Napoleonic regime, seemed to react to the surrounding Russian countryside through his personal intellectual loneliness. His retraction from the local surrounding was in part a

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68 Ibid., 31.
69 Ibid., 205.
70 Vossler, With Napoleon in Russia in 1812, 52.
71 Stendhal, To the Happy Few: Selected Letters of Stendhal (New York: Grove Press, 1952), 139.
response to both his geographical distance from western European -- in Beyle's case, the personally fetishized northern Italian, Milanese -- cultural milieu and his discomforting proximity to the unsophisticated military lifestyle. Ironically, he found an escape in a cartographic dream: 'Every time I saw Milan and Italy, everything I see repels me with its crudity. ...I imagine that my soul inhabits -- that soul which composes works, listens to Cimarosa and is in love with Angela, amidst a beautiful climate -- I imagine these heights as delicious hills. Far from these hills, down in the plain, are fetid marshes -- and here I am plunged, and nothing in the world except the sight of a map can remind my of my hills."

On September 14, after capturing several Russian cities and the devastating battle of Borodino (September 7), the Grand Armée entered the abandoned and burned down environs of Moscow. Despite obvious devastation, the splendid panoramic view of the Russian capital that had opened up from the western hills provoked most enigmatic emotions among the conquerors. Everyone reported on the spatial ambiguity and pictorial seductiveness of the city. The poorly educated but widely campaigned Sergeant Bourgogne remembers the first sight of Moscow as something out of the corporeal reality. It was the promised city, the porta triumphalis that promises purification and metamorphosis:

It was a beautiful summer's day; the sun was reflected on all the domes, spires, and gilded palaces. Many capitals I have seen -- such as Paris, Berlin, Warsaw, Vienna, and Madrid -- had only produced an ordinary impression on me. But this was quite different; the effect was to me -- in fact, to everyone -- magical. At that sight troubles, dangers, fatigue, privations were all forgotten, and the pleasure of entering Moscow absorbed all our minds. To take up good quarters for the winter, and to make conquest of another nature -- such is the French soldier's character: from war to love, and from love to war! While we were gazing at the city, the order was given to appear in full uniform."73

For the soldiers, the conquered Moscow was indeed the centre of the universe -- a nexus point where the imperial dreams were fused with individual desires and personal fantasies. Initially, the sophisticated and intellectual count Segur was also mesmerized by the sight of the subjugated Moscow, but through his retrospective, almost photographic, tourist gaze, he managed to articulate the aesthetic, literally, historic and geographic origins of this magical spectacle:

The Russian capital, rightly called by the poets City of Golden Domes, was a vast and fantastic jumble of some two hundred and ninety-five churches and fifteen

72 Ibid. Angela is Signora Pietagrua, an opera singer at La Scala in Milan.
73 Bourgogne, Memoir of Sergeant Bourgogne, 27.
hundred palaces with their gardens and dependencies. These great brick mansions and their grounds, interspersed with attractive wooden houses and even thatched cottages, were scattered over several square miles on hilly ground. They were grouped around a lofty, triangular fortress with double walls over a mile in circumference, the first of which enclosed several palaces and churches and some rock-strewn open spaces; the second, an immense bazaar, or merchant city, where the riches of the four corners of the earth formed a brilliant display.

All these buildings, shops as well as palaces, were roofed with sheet iron, burnished or painted. The churches, with their flat roofs and numerous steeples and tower topped by golden cupolas bearing aloft crosses set over crescents, epitomized the history of this people: here was Asia with its religion, at first victorious, then vanquished, and after that the crescent of Mohammed, with the cross of Christ triumphant over all.

A single ray of sunshine set this superb city glowing with a thousand variegated colours. At the sight of it the enchanted traveller stopped short in wonder, reminded of the marvels with which the Eastern poets had amused his childhood. When he passed through the gates his astonishment was heightened by a nearer view. He noted that the nobles had adopted the customs, the manners, and different languages of modern Europe, along with the easy elegance of its clothing. He beheld with surprise the luxury and Asiatic form of the dress of the merchants, the Greek costumes and long beards of the common people. He was struck with a similar diversity in the buildings; yet everything was tinged with a definite local colour – harsh, severe, as befitting Muscovy.  

Beyle was too impressed by the pictorial elegance of Moscow, but he became most emotional and enthusiastic facing the phantasmagorical scene of the huge urban fire swallowing up all those architectural and ethnographical riches of the city. The sight of burning Moscow reminded him of an ancient and/or ‘Oriental’ ritual of spiritual catharsis:

We emerged from the city, which was lit by the finest conflagration the world has ever seen: it formed a huge pyramid which, like prayers of the faithful, had its base on the earth and its peak in heaven. Above this atmosphere of flame and smoke there was bright moonlight. It was an imposing spectacle; but in order to enjoy it one would have had to be alone, or with intelligent people. What has spoilt the Russian campaign for me is the fact that I have taken part in it in the company of people who would have caused the Coliseo and the sea of Naples to dwindle.  

After the devastating fires, on October 18 Napoleon decided to leave the looted and almost completely burned down Moscow and retreat to more comfortable winter quarters somewhere in Lithuania or the Ukraine. Next morning the army of some hundred ten thousand soldiers were ordered to march in the direction of the Russian town of Kaluga. Sergeant Bourgogne’s Imperial Corps were among this mobile human machinery that was

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74 Segur, *Napoleon’s Russian Campaign*, 93-94.
75 Stendhal, *To the Happy Few*, 144.
still relentlessly wandering towards the politically elusive and geographically unfixed goal. It seemed that the peoples of Europe were again on the move as if the nineteenth century were a modern repetition of their nomadic past:

We set out in the afternoon, packing some liquor from our store on Mother Dubois’s [cantinière] cart, as well as our large silver bowl; it was almost dark when we got outside the town. We found ourselves amongst a great number of carts and wagons, driven by men of every nationality, three or four in a line, and stretching for the length of a league. We heard all round us French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and other languages, for there were Muscovite peasants among them, and a great number of Jews. This crowd of people, with their varied costumes and languages, the canteen masters with their wives and crying children, hurried forward in the most unheard of noise, tumult and disorder. Some had got their carts all smashed, and in consequence yelled and swore enough to drive one mad. This was the convoy of the whole army and we had a great deal of trouble in getting past it. We marched by the Kalonga [sic] road (we were then in Asia)... Most of the carts were already shattered, and others could not move, the wheels sinking deep in the sandy road. We could hear screams in French, oaths in German, entreaties to the Almighty in Italian, and to the Holy Virgin in Spanish and Portuguese. After getting past this babel we were forced to wait for the left of the column.\footnote{Bourgogne, \textit{Memoir of Sergeant Bourgogne}, 67.}

Within this mishmash of languages and nations, and despite the disorganized and slow retreat, some of the high-ranking officers were prepared to spend winter in the relatively comfortable isolation of the ‘Sarmatian half-wilderness.’ General Pion de Loches, in addition to the plentiful food provisions that came free from the ‘Oriental’ bazaars of Moscow and consisted of no less than 300 bottles of wine, 30 bottles of rum and brandy, 20 pounds of tea and coffee, 50 pounds of sugar, 4 pounds of chocolate, was also carrying in his wagon “a case containing a rather fine edition of Voltaire and Rousseau; Clerc and Levesque’s \textit{History of Russia}; Molière’s plays, the works of Piron; Montesqieu’s \textit{L’Esprit des Lois} and several other works such as Raynal’s \textit{Philosophical History}, bound in white calf and gilded on the spine.” To his intellectualized loot, the general added several pounds of candles and some of the warmest and “one of the most beautiful furs” that could have been obtained in Moscow.\footnote{Antoine-Augustin Pion de Loches, \textit{Me Campagnes, (1804-1814)}, as quoted in Paul Britten Austin, \textit{1812: the Great Retreat} (London: Greenhill, 1996), 25-26.}

The loot of elite soldiers consisted mostly of the randomly stolen or found items, and it was perhaps not as sophisticated and cultured as those of the generals, but it could still bring pleasurable memories of the Orient. Somewhere on the Kaluga road, out of boredom...
and weariness, Sergeant Bourgogne decided to itemize and catalogue his Moscow ‘souvenirs’:

I spent time in making an examination of my knapsack, which seemed too heavy. I found several pounds of sugar, some rice, some biscuit, half a bottle of liqueur, a woman’s Chinese silk dress, embroidered in gold and silver, several gold and silver ornaments, and amongst them a little bit of the cross of Ivan the Great (I forgot to say that in the middle of the large cross Ivan the Great was a small one of solid gold about a foot long) – at least, a piece of outer covering of silver gilt, given me by a man in the company who had helped in taking it down. Beside these, I had my uniform, a woman’s large riding-cloak (hazel colour, lined with green velvet; as I could not guess how it was worn, I imagined its late owner to be more than six feet high): then two silver pictures in relief, a foot long and eight inches high; one of them represented the Judgement of Paris on Mount Ida, the other showed Neptune on a chariot formed by a shell and drawn by seahorses, all in the finest workmanship. I had, besides, several lockets and a Russian Prince’s spittoon set with brilliants. These things were intended for presents, and had been found in cellars where the house burnt down. No wonder the knapsack was so weighty! To lighten it, therefore, I left out my white trousers, feeling pretty certain I should not want them again just yet.  

Moscow might have been magical and rich, and had supplied a heavy load of loot, but Sergeant Bourgogne was still dreaming about more distant and exotic lands. Once he had seen, conquered and divided the treasures of Moscow with his compatriots, he was not ready to return to the ‘liberated’ frontiers of Europe where he was for sure expected to go back to the boring everyday routine and military discipline. Still, the chaotic and burdensome retreat towards some unknown destination offered some sense of personal freedom and even spurred some imagination. Hence, the veteran sergeant finally shed his military uniform, the last vestige of his official status, and joined the elongated caravan that once had been known as the greatest army of nineteenth century:

I wore over my shirt a yellow silk waistcoat, wadded inside, which I had made myself out of a woman’s skirt; above that a large cape lined up with ermine, and a large pouch hung on my side, underneath the cape, by a silver cord. This was full of various things – amongst them, a crucifix in gold and silver and a little Chinese porcelain vase. …Then there were my powder-flask, my fire-arms, and sixteen cartridges in my cartridge-case. Add to all this a fair amount of health, good spirits, and the hope of presenting my respect to the Mongol, Chinese and Indian ladies I hoped to meet, and you will have a very good idea of the élite sergeant of the Imperial Guard.  

The dreamy, Don Juanesque mood of this amorous soldier did not last long, because the army-caravan was constantly attacked by the regular Russian forces, Cossacks and

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78 Bourgogne, Memoir of Sergeant Bourgogne, 67-68.
79 Ibid., 68.
partisans. These attacks forced the army to turn away from the Kaluga road and retreat via the already deluged road back to Vilna, but instead of increasing the discipline and morale of the Grande Armée, this unanticipated change of the direction caused even more chaos. This massive but disorganized movement backwards started at the end of October near the town of Mozhaisk, where Vossler and comrades from the Württemberg army were ordered to join it. Vossler, who had not been in Moscow with the occupying troops (he was stationed in Mozhaisk), had very little sympathy for the retreating heroes of the campaign, and he was extremely shocked by the apparent lack of the discipline:

They had all been in Moscow where they had spent their time looting and whence they brought with them whatever they could carry. We were amazed at their appearance. Many carried no weapons, others were armed after a fashion, but their muskets were either unserviceable or they had run out of ammunition. These men were no longer soldiers but marauders and camp-followers, utterly undisciplined, bedizened occasionally with odd pieces of equipment but mostly burdened with bales of wool, linen, silk of every colour and description, with men's and women's furs from sable to sheepskin, hats and caps of every shape and size, fashionable boots and shoes, kitchen ware of copper, brass and iron, cutlery of silver and tin, pewter plates and dishes, glasses, goblets, scissors, needles, thread, waxed twine, and so on and forth; in short, with every kind of object which the well-equipped peacetime traveller, on horseback or on foot, whether gentleman, journeyman, merchant, artist or whatever, could possibly require. ...This was the spectacle which the first trickle of the retreating army presented. Their number swelled rapidly from day to day. With this motley crew who had joined our detachment for their own and their booty's greater safety we continued on our way. All discipline had broken down.80

Within this diverse community of the soldiers-turned-robbers, all national, linguistic and religious boundaries disappeared, as if on the road to Vilna, Europe liquefied into one giant nameless river that rapidly but diminishingly rushed back to its geographical sources.

"The confusion of nationalities," wrote Vossler in his diary, "paralleled that of service. Apart from Frenchmen there were Spaniards, Portuguese, Germans, Poles, Dalmatians, Illyrians etc, etc. The march became increasingly arduous, provisions increasingly scarce."81 Then, suddenly, everything changes and this rushing human river solidifies: "Until 7th November, the skies had remained clear and blue, and the winds no rougher than they are in Germany at this time of year. But on the 8th winter suddenly set in. A piercing northeasterly gale brought blizzards and a snap of frost which turned so bitter

80 Vossler, With Napoleon in Russia in 1812, 89.
81 Ibid. 72.
that by next day the cold had become all but unbearable."\textsuperscript{82} The disorganized spectacle of the ‘Oriental’ loot immediately turned into a deceptive carnival: “Now the bundles of looted clothing were unwrapped and our column began to resemble a masquerade.”\textsuperscript{83} At this point, there were still about eight hundred kilometres left to Vilna, the first reliable outpost of Europe.

When he reached the Dwina and Dnieper, Napoleon became lost, and, in Segur’s words, as “the Lithuanian forest into which he was about to plunge were unfamiliar to him, he called a council of the officers who had just crossed them on their way to join him.”\textsuperscript{84} The emperor was advised to go to Borisov on the Beresina River where the army could cross “the Lithuanian swamps over a series of wooden bridges.”\textsuperscript{85} Three weeks later, exhausted by sickness, hunger, cold and constant Russian harassments, the army reached the Berezina River. This was not the army in masquerade anymore, but in Segur’s opinion, a ghost of the Grande Armée where “disorder, most contagious of all diseases, spread among them, for it would seem that order is an exertion against nature.”\textsuperscript{86} The generals “were paying no attention to anyone but themselves, intent on saving either their poor possessions or their persons, marching among the soldiers who took no notice of them, to whom they gave no orders and from whom they could no longer expect anything, all ties between them being broken and all difference of rank effaced by a common misery.”\textsuperscript{87} Under such conditions, only a madman could still follow the orders. On the bank of the river, Bourgogne met a man “attired in \textit{full uniform}. I asked him what that was for, and he only laughed at me. The poor fellow was ill; that laugh was the laugh of death, as he succumbed during the night.”\textsuperscript{88}

Yet, Segur still noticed the subdued elements of the imperial charade. From time to time, the emperor reached out to some of the French soldiers, “sure of being respected as long as there existed any respect for glory and realising that he belonged to us as much as we belonged to him, as his fame was a sort of national property.”\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 90.
\textsuperscript{84} Segur, \textit{Napoleon’s Russian Campaign}, 205.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 227.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 226.
\textsuperscript{88} Bourgogne, \textit{Memoir of Sergeant Bourgogne}, 201.
\textsuperscript{89} Segur, \textit{Napoleon’s Russian Campaign}, 227.
The broad but not long Berezina River cuts White Russia (Belarus) in half and it ambiguously separates the eastern, primarily Orthodox part of the old Grand Duchy of Lithuania from its predominantly Catholic and Uniate western and central parts. Although the river never functioned as an identifiable political, ethnic or even religious boundary, its north-south flow, nonetheless, more or less corresponds with the noticeable climatic change of the region. On the eastern side of the Berezina, the average November temperature holds around the freezing mark, but on its western side, the average temperature gradually moves above zero. So, the river topographically delineates the climatic transition from the milder maritime weather of the eastern Baltic littoral to the more continental conditions of Russia. At the end of November, the Berezina River was still not completely frozen, but the water was extremely cold and already extensively covered with many ice floes. Consequently, it was possible to cross it only by bridge and two were hastily built by the army engineers.

The crossing started on November 28th and it was planned to last for two days. The bridges, however, were constantly collapsing under the heavy weight of the rushing crowds and heavily loaded wagons. At some point, the Russian battery on the left bank of the river opened fire. Chaos and immense panic overtook the retreating army -- thousands plunged and perished in the freezing waters or were trampled by their comrades. A day later, the bridges burned down and the disaster had reached its outmost limit. An immense quantity of wagons, three heavy guns, several thousand men, and some women and a few children were abandoned on the enemy's side of the river. ...Some plunged into the water and tried to swim; others trusted themselves to the drifting cakes of ice. Still others rushed straight into the flames on the bridge which crumbled under their feet. Burned and frozen at the same time, they died from two opposite forms of torture, and their bodies soon piled up with the ice and beat against the trestles of the bridge.90

Half of the retreating army perished during the crossing -- it transformed the miserable ghost of Europe into an indifferent "medley of Frenchmen, Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, Croats, Germans, Poles, Romans, Italians, and even Prussians."91 This was an epic transition and like the crossing of the Nieman or the conquest of Moscow, it demanded a panoramic view or an eschatological vision that could juxtapose the tragedy of Europe with the victory of Asia:

90 Ibid., 243.
91 Bourgogne, Memoir of Sergeant Bourgogne, 203.
A clever painter...could have made a beautiful picture! He'd have painted a still-life [une nature morte]. Trees laden with hoar frost, snow and icicles. In the background, between white-powdered conifers, would be seen perfidious Bashkirs, waiting keenly for a favourable moment to throw themselves on their prey. The river itself would play the chief role and, at a pinch, could represent Acheron, the river of Hades in the fable. The damned on the left bank. The elect on the right.  

Those who crossed the Berezina “embraced and congratulated each other as if it were the Rhine they had crossed, still 400 leagues off.” After the Berezina, Napoleon had decided not to waste more time in Lithuania and in disguise fled to Paris. For the rest of the ten thousand ‘elected’ survivors, including the uncountable number of deserters that could have easily outnumbered the still ‘enlisted’ soldiers, Vilna was their destination of hope. The city was rumoured to be stocked with piles of food, provisions and ammunition. It even received some fresh troops from Europe. Its population was also remembered as being quite cordial and even supportive of the Napoleonic cause. Yet Vilna was still some few hundred kilometres away, and the individual survival of the soldiers literally depended on their social, linguistic and economic abilities to solicit help from the local population. They could not anymore demand or even bargain for food, shelter or guidance; the greatly dishonoured, sick, cold and emotionally numb human relics of the Grande Armée could only plead for some assistance. The loot from Moscow was either abandoned, lost or traded away: Bourgogne’s expensive souvenirs, for instance, were exchanged for a glass of brandy, piece of bread, slice of horsemeat or minimal information on the safety of the road to Vilna.

In most instances, the soldiers relied on Jewish assistance, since most of the other local inhabitants -- especially peasants -- were completely terrified of the marauding army. On the other hand, especially before the Beresina, the retreating army was perhaps less afraid of the regular Russian forces than of the hostile and frightened population. According to Vossler, the “Christians, less adept at trade [than the Jews] but more venturesome, mostly roamed the countryside, taking revenge on their wretched enemies by robbing and murdering the stragglers among them.” Still, in spite of the ruling mistrust between the locals and intruders, somewhere on his way to Vilna, Sergeant Bourgogne

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94 Vossler, *With Napoleon in Russia in 1812*, 79.
found a poor manor, whose Polish-speaking owners received him with a greatly appreciated paternal welcome and motherly hospitality.

With every day, the road to Vilna was becoming more treacherous. Cold and hunger were the main killers, but fires proved to be as hazardous as the freeze. Those who even for a brief moment left the human circle gathered around the fire “were usually found dead in the morning. Their corpses, frozen solid to the ground, were plundered by those that followed after, and used as seats at fires re-kindled with the chopped remains of their carts. Some, dragging themselves to a fire and craving for warmth, put their limbs right into the embers and perished, half-roasted and half frozen to death.” The tortures of the icy hell were equalled by those of hunger, and in combination, the pain of the two contributed to the complete loss of a personal identity and geographical direction: “All human compassion vanished, each thought and cared only for himself and was damned by his comrades. ...All, without exception, had suffered some impairment, at least temporary, of their mental powers, which often manifested itself in a sort of dumb lethargy. The troops called it ‘the Moscov Dumps.’” According to Segur: “Sixty thousand men had crossed that river [the Berezina], and twenty thousand recruits had since joined them. Of these eighty thousand men, fully a half had perished -- and the majority in the last four days, between Molodeczno and Vilna!”

The endless icy road, unbearable cold and general disorientation induced by hunger, high fever and emotional deadness made the two week journey to Vilna a phantasmagorical passage through the semi-familiar landscape that had undergone rapid topological and imaginative transformations. Even the inadequate maps became obsolete, since the roads were erased from the landscape by snow; vision also became unreliable, for one could not even notice the encroachment of death. For feverish Bourgogne, the “roads were like battlefields, there were so many dead bodies; but as the snow fell all the time, the horror of the sight was softened. We had lost all sense of pity, besides; we were insensible even to our own sufferings, let alone those of others.” Only some vague personal recollections of Vilna, that were increasingly dissolving into hallucinations, guided the soldiers towards their homes in Europe.

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95 Ibid., 92.
96 Ibid., 93.
97 Segur, *Napoleon’s Russian Campaign*, 261.
Sergeant Bourgogne, who was extremely ill at the time, reached the environs of Vilna in a state of delirium. Nothing shocked or surprised him anymore: “On December 8, it was late when we started, but the cold was so intense that the men set fire to the house to warm themselves. All the houses containing unfortunate soldiers, many of whom had not the strength to save themselves, perished in the flames.” 99 By a stroke of luck, Bourgogne survived the fire and lethargically moved on. The next day, the sergeant reached a large suburban village, which he recognized “for the same we had stayed at five months before, in going from Wilna to Moscow.” 100 The memory of the place revitalized Bourgogne and he finally “plucked up a little courage” and made a “superhuman” effort to reach the city in the expectation of finding some food, hospitality and pity. He started walking with some other soldiers:

This terrible cold was more than I had ever felt before. I was almost fainting, and we seemed to walk through an atmosphere of ice. ...I could hardly breathe: my nose felt frozen; my lips were glued together; my eyes streamed, dazzled by the snow. ...In all the buildings we passed were unfortunate men not able to get any farther, and waiting there to die.

Now we could see the spires and roofs of Wilna. I tried to hurry on to get there amongst the first, but the old Chasseurs of the Guard prevented me. They blocked up the road in such manner that no one could pass them without marching in order. These veterans, with ice hanging to their beards and moustaches, marched on, controlling their own sufferings to keep order in the ranks; but this order it was impossible to maintain. Once in the outskirts of the town, everything was in confusion. At the door of a house I saw one of my old friends of the Grenadiers lying dead. They had arrived an hour before us. 101

The reason for this attempt to impose order amidst the death, suffering and chaos had less to do with military strategy than with the illusionary idea of the European imperial discipline and social hierarchy. The military administrators of Vilna were unaware or were kept in the dark about the complete disintegration of the army, and once the first exhausted soldiers started to arrive in late November, they assumed them to be some kind of army renegades. There were enough provisions in Vilna to feed a much larger army than the encroaching remnants of the Grande Armée, but the distribution process was caught up by the senseless bureaucratic network of military instructions and orders. The accommodation of food and lodgings were divided according to the army divisions and each soldier and officer, depending on his rank, was to receive a voucher that entitled him

99 Ibid., 219.
100 Ibid., 220.
101 Ibid., 220-21.
to the appropriate housing. But the Grande Armée did not exist anymore and there were no more divisions or units left; instead of the army, there were only frozen individuals whose identities and military ranks could not be established or confirmed. This collision of the enforced disciplining and individual desperation led to more death and in front of Segur’s eyes “for ten long hours, with the thermometer at sixteen or seventeen below zero [-27 or -28 degrees of Centigrade], thousands of soldiers who fancied they had finally reached safety fell dead, either frozen or smothered in the crowd, as had happened...before the bridge over the Berezina. ...These administrators, it must be said were not aware of the desperate situation of the army; and for several hours they let our unfortunate companions die of hunger in sight of those great heaps of provisions, which the enemy was to seize on the morrow.”102 Those who survived this bureaucratic massacre were mostly oblivious of their whereabouts: “‘At 2.30 pm.’ Jean-Marc Bussy notes, his feet soaked and frost-bitten ‘we enter a big town full of unfortunates like ourselves. We’re told it’s Vilna.’”103

After Napoleon left Moscow, it was widely believed that he was going to winter in Vilna. During the summer and early fall of 1812, the city assumed a role of the intermediate place between the self-crowned imperial capital of Europe, Paris, and its shifting eastern military frontiers. All social, administrative and political communiqué between France (and Europe) and the travelling ‘palace’ of Napoleon and the Grande Armée went through the city. The diplomatic corps of the ‘united’ Europe was also stationed here and all the information concerning the campaign seeped through Vilna. The old capital of Lithuania, so to speak, functioned as the key site of the imperial censorship that kept the two worlds of the empire, its domestic terrain and war fields, apart. Up until the last day before the Russian final assault on Vilna, French bureaucrats continued to send the most optimistic news to Paris. In general, Europe was blind to the disaster.104

But if Vilna separated the two worlds, it also connected them. For five months, the constant flow of letters, imperial communiqués, secret directives, bureaucratic instructions, military bulletins, in addition to numerous diplomatic, administrative and cultural

102 Segur, *Napoleon’s Russian Campaign*, 262.
104 For more on the political, social and cultural life during the French administration of Vilna, see Virgilijus Pugačiauskas, *Napoleonas ir Vilnius: karinio gyvenimo kasdienybės bruožai* (Vilnius: Arlila, 2004).
visitations, made Vilna the gathering place of the empire. Napoleon briefly described Vilna to Marie Louise in one of his incoming letters as a “fine city of 40,000 souls,” which can accommodate the “vast stocks of food and other supplies assembled at Danzig and Königsberg [that could] be brought up by barge along the Vilia [River].” And it was through Vilna, that the relics of domestic life -- occasional letters, news reports and even some relatives -- managed to reach the campaigning officers and soldiers. However, the wartime communication between the centre of the empire and the ‘Sarmatian’ periphery did not go smoothly. Beyle, who was sent from Paris to Vilna to deliver mail to the emperor (including a letter from empress Marie Louise) at the beginning of the campaign, outlined the impending difficulties of the journey to his sister:

My itinerary to Vilna is as follows: I shall travel fast, with a courier in advance, as far as Königsberg. But at this point the sweet effects of pillage begin to make themselves evident, and are doubly so at Kovno: it is said that in the region of this town one can go fifty leagues without finding a living creature. ...In these ravaged wildernesses travel is very difficult, especially with a poor little Viennese calash that will be crushed beneath a thousand packages: every single person has had the idea of entrusting me with one.

After the ‘liberation’ in June, the cannons of the war quickly became a distant affair in Vilna. But the war was felt through the ever-growing presence of wounded and sick soldiers and by the visible presence of some family members (mostly women) of injured officers, who came from all over Europe to nurse their relatives. Of course, such a luxury could be attained only by the families of new and old imperial aristocracy and the men of this class usually served as high-ranking officers; but there were also probably a large number of nurses, many of whom were wives, lovers, mothers and sisters of the soldiers who, for various reasons, chose to follow the army and, because of the severe shortage of nursing staff, were allowed to stay in Vilna. In addition, most of those injured of Polish-Lithuanian origins were sheltered in the houses of their relatives, friends or acquaintances. The fusion of war and domesticity, strangely enough, created a sense of almost sublime normalcy and even excitement in the city. For once, Vilna was a (nursing) home and diplomatic centre of the empire. A young wife of the imperial marshal, duke Oudinot, came to the city in October to nurse her wounded husband. Her first impressions of the town -- viewed from the Ponary Hills -- were marked by her desire to nurture her husband in the ‘inhospitable’ country. But she still was impressed by Vilna’s grandeur: “Nothing

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105 Austin, 1812: the March to Moscow, 76.
106 Stendhal, To the Happy Few, 136.
resembles the view as one surveys Vilna from the hills all around.... Although the Vilia vainly wends its way through a countryside it seems unable to fertilize, a multitude of domes and church towers rise brilliantly above the thirty-six convents."  

Politically, the city was also raised up from the level of Russian provincialism to imperial frontier outpost and it was quickly integrated within the geopolitical and representational sphere of the French empire. Vilna became the capital city of French controlled Lithuania (however, its geopolitical destiny had not been determined), ruled by General Baron von Hogendorp (the governor of Vilna province) and General Baron Roch-Godart (governor of Vilna city), but administered by the Lithuanian Provisional Council which consisted mostly of members of the local nobility, but also included the rector of the university, Sniadecki.

As an integral part of a French-dominated Europe, and despite some worrying news from Russia, Vilna put up a festive spectacle on December 2, the eighth anniversary of the coronation of Napoleon. The celebration included “a 21-gun salute at 8 a.m.; as many shots again while the Te Deum was being sung in the cathedral, and again the salute at 4 p.m.” In the evening, there was a ball at the governor’s palace. “As usual,” noted a French participant of the celebration “it opened with a polonaise, which is nothing but a promenade. ...It’s the custom for all officers to go to the ball booted and spurred and wearing stable trousers. The women present spoke French, as they all generally do at Vilna.”

Uneasiness if not panic finally settled in among the inhabitants on December 6, when it was discovered that Napoleon on his flight to Paris circumvented Vilna. However, he thought to give orders for Murat and Berthier to stay “in that capital a full week, long enough to rally the army, and give it sufficient courage and strength to continue the retreat in a little less deplorable condition.” Beyle arrived in Vilna a few days ahead of the remaining army and was lucky enough to find a shelter at the Frank’s house, which having no owners present in the city was turned by the French into an ‘upscale’ military hostel. In the relatively comfortable surrounding of the Frank’s home, Beyle’s ‘fighting spirit’ rose to an unreasonably high level. And with a deep sense of irony, he even managed to convey his

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107 Marie Charlotte Oudinot, Récites de guerre et de Foyer, as quoted in Austin, 1812: the March to Moscow, 70.
108 Austin, 1812: the Great Retreat, 367.
109 Porphyre Jacquemont, as quoted in Austin, 1812: the Great Retreat, 368.
110 Segur, Napoleon’s Russian Campaign, 253.
determination to survive in a brief note to his sister written on December 7 in one of the
rooms of the Frank’s apartments: “I am in good health, my dearest. I often thought of you
on the long march from Moscow, which took fifty days. I have lost everything, and have
only the clothes I am wearing. What is much better is that I am thin. I have had much
physical hardship, and no spiritual pleasure, but all that is done with, and I am ready to
start again in the service of His Majesty.”

In Vilna, Beyle could easily compare his ‘fortune’ with the plight of many others:
the city had a large number of dying soldiers, since it served as the main infirmary depot.
Already in November, the Polish officer Bangowski noted in his diary that “Vilna presents
the most lamentable appearance. ...Streets encumbered with wounded, dead and dying,
ravaged by the plaque [sic]. No room in the churches, in the hospitals. No means even of
removing horse carcasses. And ever more convoys of wounded turning up all the while
from Moscow! Everyone’s doing what he can to get by, without compassion from anyone
else.” The spectral encroach of more dying terrified the population, and panic swept
across the town at the first rumour of the approaching death march. Those who could leave
immediately disappeared from the city -- the rest barricaded themselves at their homes and
anxiously waited for the deluge. “Already on the first day,” testified a French officer
stationed in the city, “the shops, the inns and cafes, unable to accommodate the quantity of
purchasers, were closed from the first day. The inhabitants, who feared our avidity would
soon led to a famine, took to hiding their provisions.”

The Ostra Brama Gate of Vilna became the site of another catastrophe. “Many
fugitives reached Vilna as early as 6th December,” noted Vossler, “and in the two days that
followed the influx was such that it had needed only a river ahead and the Russians behind
to reproduce at the gates of the city the scenes of the Berezina crossing. Indeed on the 9th
[the day when Bourgogne walked into the city] there were re-enacted when the Russian
spearhead reached the gates simultaneously with our rearguard and entered Vilna with
them, pillaging and murdering as they went.” According to an eyewitness, a
Frenchwoman who came to the city to nurse her son, the panicky horde at the gate was
pressing “forward, the crowd seemed to fancy they’d reached the Promised Land. It was

111 Stendhal, To the Happy Few, 152.
112 Bangowski, as quoted in Austin, 1812: the Great Retreat, 367.
113 Fezensac, The Russian Campaign, 1812, 109.
114 Vossler, With Napoleon in Russia in 1812, 84.
there almost all the French from Moscow perished. Fighting cold and hunger, they couldn’t get into the town.”  

A Dumonceau remembers clambering over this death stricken mob: “pushing, shoving, hemmed in on all sides, horrified at having to get over it and at each step risking being overthrown by the quiverings, the convulsive spasms of the victims we were trampling underfoot.”  

Ironically, Vilna was not a fortified city -- the remnants of its protective walls and most gates were removed by the Russian administration at the turn of the nineteenth century -- so, anyone could get very easily into the city by using numerous side roads, winding alleys and backyard pathways.

Inside the city, the conditions were somewhat better, but chaos and lawlessness ruled. Since a clear military command structure had dissolved and there was no visible separation between various army corps, divisions, brigades and regiments, the unbalanced distribution of food created more anxiety and anger. Once the retreating army entered “Vilna,” recalls Baron Roch-Gotard, “become a real labyrinth, you simply didn’t know where you were.”  

Vosler, who probably came to the city ahead of the main army, managed to navigate through this labyrinth with a relative ease: he obtained comfortable billets in houses where the owners were still living and where there was no shortage of food. Indeed, for a few days, officers from Württemberg gathered “at the Lichtenstein café” where they spent their newly received advances paid from the “Württemberg war chest” on some comforting food (Figure 3.7).  

Many fugitives, in Segur’s words, because of “the pity of the Lithuanians, and the avarice of the Jews” were allowed to stay in inhabited houses. “Then it was a touching thing to witness the wonder of those poor fellows on finding themselves once again in an occupied house. A loaf of leavened bread seemed to them most delicious of foods; and what unutterable pleasure did they take in eating it seated at a table. ...They seemed to have returned from the ends of the earth, so thoroughly had the violence and endless succession of hardship alienated them from their old ways of living, so terrible was the abyss from which they were emerging.”  

Yet most did not even have a chance to glimpse, not to mention taste, the civilization they used to call domestic

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115 Louise Fussil, Souvenirs d’une Femme sur la retraite de Russie, as quoted in Austin, 1812: the Great Retreat, 377.
116 Dumonceau, as quoted in Austin, 1812: the Great Retreat, 376.
117 Roch-Godart, Mémoirs du general-baron, Roch Godart, 1795-1812, as quoted in Austin, 1812: the Great Retreat, 367.
118 Vossler, With Napoleon in Russia in 1812, 87.
119 Segur, Napoleon’s Russian Campaign, 262.
normality. Duke Fezensac remembers in Vilna seeing “everywhere ...a rich and populous city, and through this city wandering our ragged, starving soldiers. Some paid gold for the meanest food; others sought a piece of bread from the charity of the inhabitants. The latter looked with horror upon the remains of that army, once so formidable, which had excited their admiration five months later”\textsuperscript{120}

On cold December days and nights, the army was reduced “to a kind of mob, more like a legion of convicts or hideous hobgoblins than troops,” which roamed around the frightened city.\textsuperscript{121} Despite being invaded by thousands of ghostlike wanderers and their desperate cries and moans, Dumonceau found the streets of the city to be “comparatively deserted; calm reigned, the dwellings were shut up from top to bottom, as in a town taken by assault.”\textsuperscript{122} Many of the unfortunate ones -- wounded, sick, mad or simply exhausted -- were gathering around the Baroque churches and monasteries which had been converted into barracks and hospitals. Yet in these places they could find neither shelter nor brief relief of their agony since all of them “were turned away, though not by the living, for death reigned supreme here. A few of the doomed inmates were still breathing: they complained that for a long, long time they had been without beds, even without straw, and almost totally without attention. The yards, the corridors, and all the wards, filed with piles of corpses, were nothing more than charnel houses.”\textsuperscript{123}

In a matter of hours, a violent hate of Napoleon and everything associated with him erupted among the surviving soldiers and very soon, the relics of the military honor and pillage of the Grande Armée went into the flames. The enormous imperial carriages loaded with the personal loot of Napoleon were being refused the passage from Vilna by the revolting or indifferent elite gendarmes, coachmen, postillions and stable-masters. In the evening of December 9th, a spontaneous decision was made to burn most of the emperor’s booty in the courtyard of the palace:

Here were buried or destroyed all the trophies that he took from Moscow and of which ‘he’d previously ordered drawings to be made’ so that he could ‘remake them in Paris.’ Included among them, Bacler d’Albe [the chief topographer] had seen ‘the flags taken from the Turks during the last hundred years, old weapons, and a Madonna.’ Doubtless also the cross of solid gold ‘about 10 inches high’

\textsuperscript{120} Fezensac, \textit{The Russian Campaign}, 1812, 108.
\textsuperscript{121} Nicholas Louis Planat de la Faye, \textit{Vie de Planat de la Faye}, as quoted in Austin, \textit{1812: the Great Retreat}, 380.
\textsuperscript{122} Dumonceau, as quoted in Austin, \textit{1812: the Great Retreat}, 380.
\textsuperscript{123} Segur, Napoleon’s Russian Campaign, 262.
which had been found inside the great silver-plated Cross of Ivan when it had been pulled down from the cathedral in the Kremlin.  

During the same night, countess Choiseul-Gouffier watched another, nearby fuming spectacle of the imperial disgrace: “the Emperor’s carriages being burnt in the university courtyard opposite the palace, as well as a heap of other things -- tents, camp beds, etc., etc. One young academician wanted to buy a magnificent gold mathematical case, bearing the imperial arms, off a sentry. But the soldier just poked the case into the flames with tip of his bayonet.” Soon, the entire city was blazing with fires, raising the spectre of recent glories: “The men” noted the countess “were lighting fires in the streets to keep themselves warm. A thousand men were to be seen spread out among the flames and leaping sparks. The Town Hall still bore some festive decoration. Looked at through the clouds of smoke rising to the sky, Napoleon’s cipher seemed to be covered by a veil.”  

For those few soldiers who where less preoccupied with the annihilation of the symbols of the empire, the cold night offered more rewarding adventures. On the outskirts of the city, Sergeant Bourgogne met his long time lost road companion Colonel Picart, an escort in the Imperial equipage convoy and veteran of the Egyptian expedition, whom he had met outside Moscow at the beginning of the retreat. Picart invited the sergeant to stay with him at a Jewish inn where he was promised warm food and a bench to sleep on:  

I asked Picart how it happened that he was on such friendly terms with the Jew, as I noticed they treated him as a member of the family. He said that he had passed himself off as the son of a Jewess, and that during the fortnight we had spent in town in July he had attended their synagogue with them, and in consequence of this he had always got some schnapps to drink and some nuts to crack.  

I had not laughed for long enough, but I burst out into a roar at this, until the blood poured down my lips [they were chapped from cold]. Picart went on with his funny stories, until suddenly we heard a rattle of artillery, and our host came hurriedly in. He looked dazed, and could not speak. At last he said that he had seen some Bavarian soldiers, followed by Cossacks, enter by the same gate at which we had come in.  

Whatever Picart was just masquerading as a Jew, or, more likely, had some Jewish roots is a matter of speculation. Yet other French soldiers too found the Lithuanian Jews extremely helpful at the moments of greatest distress: “When no one could supply any  

124 Austin, 1812: the Great Retreat, 384.  
125 Choiseul-Gouffier, as quoted in Austin, 1812: the Great Retreat, 384.  
126 Ibid., 383.  
127 Bourgogne, Memoir of Sergeant Bourgogne, 222-223.
more bread or sugar, or coffee, or tea, etc., they brought us spiced bread. Better still, they could even un-nest -- God knows where from -- means of transport, horse, sledges, when there were none to be had anywhere. Thanks to them some hundred of officers managed to escape from Russia's frozen plains. But 'le monsieur had to have money', even a lot of money, because they were robbers beyond all expression.'

Of course, most soldiers and officers showed some prejudice against the Jews, but even the shrewdly anti-Semitic Bourgogne could not but respond with a sense of gratitude to the kindness he had received at the Jewish home in Vilna: "I shall never forget the curious effect an inhabited house had on me. It seemed to me years since I had seen one. ...The Jew told me that the men who had arrived first in the morning had devoured everything. He advised us not to leave his house, even to sleep there, and that he would undertake to get us everything we wanted, also to prevent others from coming in. Taking his advice, I settled to rest on a bench near the stove." A few hours later, his rest was rudely disturbed by the sounds of the Russian attack and Bourgogne with his comrade had to flee again. But he left Vilna with a sense of humility that was no doubt brought on by his brief experience of the somewhat relaxing warm at the assaulted Jewish home: "When I got outside the town, I could not help thinking of the state of our army: five months before it entered the Lithuanian capital, proud and rejoicing; now it went out, fugitive and miserable.'

During that night, Murat, whom Napoleon left as the commander of the army, was too desperately preparing to flee Vilna. Faced with the possibility of the unequal battle with the Russian forces led by Kutuzov, the king of Naples chose a less heroic option. The capital of Lithuania was not to be defended, because it was not worthy of his personal sacrifice. The frozen, provincial Vilna -- a capital city of some expired feudal dukedom, or worse, some ‘Sarmatian’ republic -- was not going to be the site of his downfall. Murat cut all the suggestions of the defense of the city with a single memorable phrase: "I’m not going to be taken here in this piss-pot.'

Of course, the retreat or flight was easier to drum than to organize. The Cossacks were attacking various suburbs and nobody knew if Vilna had been already encircled by the Russian forces. Count Segur tried to contemplate the escape routes. He was as confused

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128 In Austin, 1812: the Great Retreat, 384-85.
129 Bourgogne, Memoir of Sergeant Bourgogne, 222.
130 Ibid., 230.
131 Jean Rapp, Mémoires écrits par lui-même et publiés par sa famille, as quoted Austin, 1812: the Great Retreat, p. 382.
as everyone else, though it quickly became clear to him that he should only rely on his personal ingenuity rather than on any specific orders:

At Vilna, as in Moscow, Napoleon had not had any official order given for retreat. He wanted our rout to be unannounced, wanted it to make itself known, to take our allies and their monarchs by surprise, so that we might avail ourselves of their confusion and get safely through the territory before the people were disposed to join with the Russians to overpower us. That is why everybody in Vilna — Lithuanians, foreigners, the prime minister himself — had been deceived. They did not believe in our defeat till they saw it, and the almost superstitious faith in Europe in the infallibility of Napoleon’s genius gave him advantage over his enemies. But this same confidence had lulled his friends with false security, for in Vilna, as in Moscow, none of them had made any preparations for any actions whatever.132

Most soldiers, however, simply lost faith in anything, and could not go any further. They deliberately or unconsciously ignored meaningless orders. Segur believes that the lure of Vilna was a work of some geographical demons that had annihilated rational thinking and entrapped the poor souls within its hypnotic terrain:

If we had been able to hold twenty-four hours longer in Vilna, many lives would have been saved. That deadly city cost us nearly twenty thousand men, including three hundred officers and seven generals. The majority were stricken by winter rather than by the Russians, thought the latter reaped the benefits. Others, physically sound in appearance, were at the end of their resistance. After having had the courage to overcome so many hardships, they lost heart in sight of port, only four days’ march away. They had reached a civilized city at last, and rather than set forth into the wilderness again, they chose to stay and trust to Fortune. In their case she was cruel!133

Those who managed to wake up, and had energy to move or were still fearful of the Cossack revenge were immediately thrown back into the winter hell. The streets were already full of fresh corpses, in fact, “thousands of corpses, completely naked, many of them bearing marks of dagger blows. But it certainly wasn’t the Poles who’d committed these crimes,” figured out captain François, for, “they showed us great attachment. It was Platov’s Cossacks who’d assassinated the sick and wounded whom the inhabitants, terrified of these brigands, had driven out of their houses.”134 Nobody knew which direction to run, but everyone envisioned his (or, in rare case, her) next destination: the Niemen. The

132 Segur, *Napoleon’s Russian Campaign*, 265.
133 Ibid., 264.
familiar name, Kovno, appears on everyone’s lips and the panicked mass of people moved towards the western road.

On the outskirts of the city, on the Ponary Hills, a brutal battle, or rather, carnage ensued. The Cossacks are here too; they seemed to be everywhere - like death -- but nobody can discern them or deter them. During the confusion, the soldiers started to devour the last relics of the Napoleonic loot. Suddenly, the boundary between the two foes disappeared, as greed possessed every soul and madness took over every body. For Segur, the frozen slopes of the Ponary became the Nemesis site of the Empire:

In our conquering march eastwards this wooden knoll had seemed to our hussars little more than a slight irregularity in the earth’s surface from the top of which the entire plain of Vilna could be seen, and the strength of the enemy estimated. In truth, its steep but short slope had hardly been noticed. In a regular retreat it would have been an excellent position for turning around and checking the enemy; but in a chaotic flight, where everything that could be of use became a hindrance, when in blind haste we turned everything against ourselves, this hill and defile were an insurmountable obstacle, a wall of ice against which our best efforts were broken. It stripped us of everything – supplies, treasury, booty and wounded men. This misfortune was serious enough to stand above all our long succession of disasters; for it was here that the little money, honour, discipline, and strength remaining to us were irrevocably lost.

When, after fifteen hours of fruitless struggle, the drivers and soldiers forming the escort saw Murat and the column of fugitives go past them on the hillside; when they saw Ney himself withdrawing with the three thousand men remaining to De Wrede and Loison; when they turned around and saw the hill behind them littered with wagons and guns shattered and overturned, men and horses on the ground, dying on top of each other -- then they no longer thought of saving anything, but only of forestalling the avidity of the foe by pillaging themselves.

The bursting of a wagon carrying loot from Moscow acted as a signal. Everybody fell upon the others' wagons, broke them open, and seized the most valuable objects. The soldiers of the rear-guard coming upon this confusion, threw down their arms and loaded themselves with the plunder. So furiously intent were they on this that they failed to heed the whistling bullets or shrieks of the Cossacks who were pursuing them. It is said that the Cossacks mingled with them without being noticed. For a few minutes Europeans and Tartars, friends and foes, were united in a common lust for gain. Frenchmen and Russians were seen side by side, all war forgotten, plundering the same wagon. Ten millions francs in gold and silver rapidly disappeared!

But along with these horrors, acts of noble devotion were noticed. There were men that day who forsook everything to carry off the wounded on their backs; others, unable to get their half-frozen companions out of the struggle, perished in defending them from the brutality of their fellow soldiers and the blows of the enemy.

...The catastrophe at Ponari was all the more shameful as it could have been easily foreseen, and even more easily avoided; for it was possible to pass around the hill on either side.

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135 Segur, Napoleon's Russian Campaign, 266-267.
The battle of Ponary was certainly not a decisive struggle for the survival of the French empire, but for many, it signified the death of ‘civilization’. From the top of the hill, duke Fezensac made a last glance at Vilna. Because of smoke, he could not find the contours of the city, but right beneath him he saw “a strange spectacle” of “men covered in gold and yet dying of hunger” with “scattered in the snow of Russia all the luxurious commodities of Paris.”

The crossing of the Niemen at Kovno on December 13 was an anti-climatic event. From more than half a million Europeans who crossed it in June, less than ten percent reached the river. Segur managed to reflect on those promising days of the summer: “Here were the same valley down which had poured those three long columns of dragoons and heavy cavalry, three streams of steel and brass, flashing in the hot sunlight. But now, men, weapons, eagles, horses, sunlight, even the frontier river they had crossed in such ardour and hope -- everything had disappeared. The Niemen was just a long mass of ice piled up and welded together by the breath of winter.”

The first ‘truly’ European land -- East Prussia - greeted the relics of the Grande Armée with an unusually cold public reception and warm weather. The streaming river of war that became frozen somewhere in the distant forests and marches of Lithuania liquefied again, as if the winter thaw of the Baltic Sea melted down the continental shield of Napoleonic Europe. But the thaw brought no relief from the physical suffering or military disgrace of the Frenchmen. Still, count Segur alongside some few thousand saw themselves as the victims of cruel Nature, not the routed relics of imperial civilization:

We were soon forced to drag our abasement through Koenigsberg. The Grand Army that for twenty years had been marching triumphantly through the capitals of Europe was reappearing for the first time in full flight, mutilated, disarmed, in one of the cities it had most humiliated by its glory. The inhabitants ran out as we went by to count our wounds, to evaluate their hopes of liberation by the extent of our misfortune; and we had to satiate their greedy eyes with the sight of our misery, bear insults of their hopes, parading our failure before their odious merrymaking and marching under the crushing weight of disaster. ...But the poor vestige of the Grand Army did not sink beneath the burden. This shadow managed somehow to make an imposing show, to preserve its air of sovereignty. Though defeated by the elements, we paraded before man our victorious dominating formations.

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136 Fezensac, *The Russian Campaign, 1812*, 112.
137 Segur, *Napoleon’s Russian Campaign*, 270.
The Germans, inspired either by fear or sluggishness, received us submissively. Their hatred was confined to a show of cold indifference, and as they rarely act of themselves, they were obliged to minister to our distress while awaiting some signal. Then winter, that had followed us as far as Koenigsberg, suddenly deserted us, and in one night the thermometer went up forty degrees! This sudden change was fatal to us. A great many soldiers and officers, whom the tension of the atmosphere had kept going by a sort of continual irritation, gave up and went to pieces all at once. ...Every day, every hour we were dismayed to hear of some fresh loss.  

While the cold continued to hold its spelling grip over Vilna, the morbid spectacle of the European defeat was covered with the amusements of Russian victory. General Robert Wilson, a British military attaché to the tsarist court, arrived in Vilna on December 17, 1812, a few days after the city had fallen back to the Russian forces. He spent Christmas and New Year there, and his diary encapsulates the shocking emptiness of the imperial conversion of Vilna:

December 17th, Vilna

...I passed a very agreeable day, and this morning came to Wilna along a road covered with human carcases, frozen in the contortions of expiring agonies. The entrance of the town was literally choked with dead bodies of men and horses, tumbrils, guns, carts, &c., and the streets were filled with traineaus carrying off the dead that still crowded the way. Painters and sculptors would be benefited by the specimens. Accustomed as I am to scenes of carnage and distress, it is a repeated picture that I loathe the more that I see of it. For the last two months I have seen very nearly as many dead and dying as living beings. The enemy have a disease internally, occasioned by eating horse-flesh without bread and salt, that carries off nine-tenths even of those who survive the field and epidemic sickness. Change of diet causes almost instant death, unless very carefully regulated. I have seen comparatively hale men, after a little food, lie down, doze, and die in half an hour. The dead, however, are to be envied. With frost to twenty-eight and thirty degrees, naked bodies and infirm health offer but subjects for terrible torments: imagination cannot conceive the reality. One incident I must, however, note. Yesterday I saw four men grouped together, hands and legs frozen, minds yet vigorous, and dogs tearing their feet.

... I arrived at Wilna just as the Marshal [Kutuzov] was going to dine. From the plains of misery I passed to the banquet. After the dinner I found my quarters -- a magnificent summer palace, but a winter ice-house; no fireplace, and only one stove, so that there are eighteen degrees of frost in the room in which I am obliged to sit and rest at night. Here I heard of Lord Tyrconnel's being sick in the house of an English professor in the university of Wilna. I immediately went to

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138 Ibid., 274.
see him and found that he had been very ill, but was recovering. [Earl of Tyrconnel was an attaché at the Saint Petersburg British embassy, but joined the Russian army in the adventurous pursuit of Napoleon.]

...This evening I went to the play and was almost frozen. As it was a state occasion I was obliged to remain till the conclusion, but my teeth chattered again and when I rose to go I could scarcely use my limbs. There was not one lady in the house, which added to the wretchedness.

I now come to my quarters and although sitting close to the stove my feet are as ice, and my hand can scarcely hold the pen. I have, however, much to write, and must write the greater part of this night again to be ready for the courier. It is a critical moment and want of energy may be very injurious yet to Russia.

December 26th, Wilna

On the 20th died George, Earl of Tyrconnel, aged twenty-five years. ...Lord Tyrconnel had a vigour of mind which was polished with so much urbanity, that the exertion of it never alarmed the pride of others. ...On the 22nd the corpse was carried to the grave, escorted by two companies of the Imperial Guards, and interred with every honour that could be shown. I was, of course, chief mourner. The scene was solemn, and the tones of the music were irresistibly affecting. The human mind is strangely organized; existing misery is seldom participated with deep sympathy, but fanciful woe melts the obduracy of habit and philosophy.

“It is a strange world!” Adam is reported to have said when he entered into it; and so the last man will say.

...In the evening the Emperor [Alexander] glided into the town. The next morning there was a great levee. The Emperor made a speech, thanked the officers for their services, and reproved the University for its disloyalty. His majesty also alluded to the future, and encouraged the hope of a continued campaign to the Vistula.

Yesterday was the Emperor’s birthday. Parade, a confidential conference with the Emperor, mess, and twenty-degrees of frost, were the incidents of the morning. The Marshal gave a great state dinner to the Emperor afterwards, on the occasion of his receiving the Order of St. George of the First Class.

“It is a strange world” quoth Adam again; and so will his posterity again say. Glory for me has lost all her charms. I shall become a Timon from contempt of the world’s puppets. Happy are they who know not the arcane of the mechanism that conducts the world’s affairs. Happy are they who never reason on causes or effects. 139

The Christmas thaw and the prospects of spring reminded Wilson of the corporeal effects of the war and death on Wilna. More than anything else, the city needed a reasonable (medical) management of affairs: “Sickness had made very serious progress in the city. In

fifteen days nine thousand prisoners have died, and in one eighteen hours seven hundred. The mortality has extended of course to the inhabitants. The physicians have ordered straw to be burnt before every house, but the pestilential atmosphere is not to be corrected by such lenitives; and as if fate resolved to spread the contagion to the outmost, there has been a thaw for the last twenty-four hours.”¹⁴⁰ The countless monastery hospitals turned into urban Baroque cavities of rotting human flesh and death:

The hospital of St. Basil presented the most awful and hideous sight: seven thousand five hundred bodies were piled like pigs of lead over one another in the corridors; carcasses were strewn about in every part; and all the broken windows and walls were stuffed with feet, hands, trunks and heads to fit the apertures, and keep out the air from the yet living. The putrefaction of the thawing flesh, where the parts touched and the process of decomposition was in action, emitted the most cadaverous smell.¹⁴¹

Most of the dead soldiers of the Grande Armée, however, were ‘exiled’ from the town, where they patiently waited for the right moment to make their final lethal assault on the city: “In the spring Wilna must be a complete charnel-house. All the carcasses which were removed from the streets and hospitals are laid at a short distance from town in great masses; and then such parts as the wolves have not devoured during the winter will throw pestiferous miasmata back upon the city, which, from its position, is always shrouded in vapour.”¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 96.
¹⁴¹ Ibid., 97.
¹⁴² Ibid., 96.
Figure 3.8: Retreat of the French Army in 1812: Town Hall Square in Vilna. Lithograph by V. Adam and L. Bichebois, 1846 (adapted from a painting of J. Damel). Source: Danguolė Gudienė, ed., Vilnius in the Publications of Jan Kazimierz Wilczynski, exhibition catalog (Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 2000), 15.
VILNA IN PEACE

Jozef and Christina Franks spent more than a year in Vienna -- they left Vilna in May of 1812 and returned to the city only in late summer of 1813, a few weeks before the beginning of the new academic year, when the war moved back to the places close to its western European ‘origins’ and Austria conveniently withdrew from the Napoleonic coalition. In Vienna, the couple escaped many hardships of the war, but Frank could not contribute much of his professional knowledge in treating the wounded soldiers and sick residents of Vilna. When on August 11, they arrived to Vilna, they found their large apartment visibly damaged but not destroyed. The next day, on the day when Austria officially declared war on Napoleon, the Franks, their adopted son and their few servants, moved back into their old Vilna home. Soon, they were also able to retrieve almost all of their hidden treasures, dispersed furniture and scattered books, documents, and other professional and personal items. The life of the family seemed to return to its comforting familiarity of the prewar years and the Franks continued to enjoy their high social and professional status within Russian-dominated Vilna. Hence, somewhat ironically, Frank describes the family’s return to their Lithuanian home as “a triumphal return to Vilna.”\(^{143}\)

Apparently, everyone in town was rushing to see and greet the couple, as if their arrival truly signified the end of the hostilities.

Frank’s knowledge and experience of the Napoleonic occupation of Vilna was indirect -- formed mostly through his extensive correspondence with a few residents of the town during the war and their disturbing post-war memories. Nonetheless, in his 1840s memoirs, he was willing to overestimate the importance and accuracy of his personal reflections about the events that took place in Vilna during the Napoleonic retreat. The doctor believed that his narrative autobiographical marriage of Vilna with the grand meta-narrative of the Napoleonic Europe was a “stepping stone for everything that has been written on this subject.”\(^{144}\) Still, he could not personally articulate the extent and details of the disaster and had to rely on the panoramic account of the events. Thus, he chose the painting of a little known painter (J. Damel) as the source of his literary memory:

Upon my return to Vilna, all inhabitants of the city were telling me about the most indescribable spectacle – the retreat of the Napoleonic army through the streets

\(^{143}\) Frankas, Atsiminimai apie Vilnių, 415.  
\(^{144}\) Ibid., 381.
of Vilna. A young artist made a painting of this tragic masquerade. I call it a 'masquerade' because it is difficult to recognize the soldiers under their grotesque costumes and covering shrouds. One of the soldiers instead of the helmet sports a lady's velvet hat with a black satin ribbon. ...Everyone's face is marked by the expression of hopelessness. Professor Groddek [a German professor of antique philology] saw in this unprecedented collapse of the Napoleonic army some peculiar features of the French and Gallic national character. They celebrate victory with an outburst of vulgar jubilation, but they completely break down after a defeat and from grief they usually lose their mind. Professor Cappelli noted that long ago, his compatriot Machiavelli had already compared the victorious French to lions and the defeated ones — to hares. 145

When the Franks reached Vilna, the tragic spectacle was over; nonetheless, the doctor was told that in the winter months,

there were more than 40 000 unburied corpses in Vilna and its suburbs: most of the dead wore some kind of military uniforms, they were solidly frozen and stayed in the same position and place of the moment of their death — but occasionally, young pranksters arranged them differently. Naturally, as soon as the weather became warmer, this enormous amount of corpses posed a great danger of the hazardous outbreak of various infectious diseases. The authorities ordered a mass burial ... and the corpses were buried in long ditches, previously dug up by the French for defensive reasons: Inciderunt itaque in fossam quam sibi ipsi fecerunt. 146

Luckily, the expected epidemic outbreak did not materialize, and while many buildings of the city were temporarily turned into charnel houses during the winter, by the time of the spring thaw, most of the dead were swiftly buried in numerous undisclosed locations around the city. The whole burial operation was supervised by Frank's colleague, doctor Becu, and by the time the Franks arrived to Vilna, the city appeared to be thoroughly cleansed from dead bodies. The population of Vilna was miraculously saved, in large, because of the efficient response of the Russian authorities to the incredible sanitary challenges and, to a smaller degree, because many residents fled the city and were slow to return. By mid-summer, life in Vilna, at least on the surface, returned to its 'normal' pace and to his surprise, the Frank found the city to be in better shape than before the war. The new Russian governor of Vilna, general Korsakov even “ordered a clean up of the suburbs from piled dung, created promenades, planted trees and repainted the houses and churches.” 147 Furthermore, the summer weather promised a great harvest and the prices of

145 Ibid., 416-17. The painting was made into a lithograph and throughout the nineteenth century, it was widely reproduced in Vilna and abroad, see Figure 3.8.
146 Ibid., 398.
147 Ibid., 419.
produce dropped down to the pre-war level. From all the towns of Lithuania witnessed by the Franks on their way home, Vilna seemed to be the one least damaged.

Frank’s life during his evacuation year in Vienna had posed its own challenges -- he was initially suspected of being a Russian spy. Frank took up a responsibility to recruit Austrian doctors and surgeons for the service in Russia, and according to him, he found plenty of willing recruits. The police of Vienna, however, were not happy about it and warned the doctor that during the war, his responsibilities to the Russian empire were criminal offences. In addition, within the first month of the war, the family quickly established private communique with Lithuania and was practically the only household in Vienna that received the more balanced news from the war zone. The doctor continued his extensive correspondence with Vilna throughout the fall, and was able to reestablish it almost immediately after the Russian takeover of the city.

From the fall of 1812 to spring of 1813, the information in Vienna about the collapse of the Grande Armée and the Russian advance was at the best very sketchy. The government, still unwilling to relinquish its support of Napoleon, kept the public uninformed, but the horror stories of the retreat of the Napoleonic army kept seeping through the porous frontiers. The public, especially what Frank called, “the café sisterhood” society [Caffe-Schwestern] was hoping for the eradication of the Napoleonic order of Europe, which seriously infringed on the consumption patterns and imperial ambitions of the upper Viennese society. (Because of the continental blockade, coffee in Vienna was distributed only with a doctor’s prescription; hence, according to Frank, the hate of Napoleon from the ‘café sisterhood’ society.)

There were tens of thousands of Austrians, in addition to much higher numbers of Italians and Croats (former or current subjects of the Habsburgs) who had not returned from Russia. Many families were searching for missing relatives and because of the Franks’ intimate connections with Lithuania, their small salon in Vienna became the unofficial centre of the personal search campaign. Soon, Frank started to receive many inquiring letters from all over Europe pleading him to help to locate hundreds of missing officers of the Grande Armée, and when in the summer, the doctor was recalled back to his University duties, he went to Vilna with a new mission to find out more about them.

When Frank left Vilna, his double loyalty to the Russian empire and the University of Vilna became somewhat compromised by his ‘national’ origins and connections. As an
Austrian in the Russian service, Frank’s peculiar position in Vilna during the war would have created threatening reactions from both sides, the Russian and Napoleonic armies. Austria was an ally of France, but Frank was a titular subject of Russia: had he refused to serve the tsar, he might have lost all his professional, financial and social privileges, but if he had refused to serve Napoleon, he might have been interned as an enemy subject. The fact that he worked at the university with split loyalties only complicated the matter. He could have evacuated with the Russian court from Vilna, as some of the pro-Russian professors did, but then he would have been seen as a traitor by the mostly pro-Polish (and pro-French) faculty. The year spent in Vienna under the protection of his influential father literally saved him from this personal ‘geopolitical’ dilemma; although he came back to Vilna from his Viennese ‘exile’ without being ‘politically’ tarnished, he had to protect his ‘neutrality’ with the deeply divided city.

Although a general amnesty was given by the tsar to all of those who served in the Napoleonic army or the French controlled administration of Lithuania, a deep mistrust and animosity between the pro-Russian and pro-French supporters was still ripping the town apart. The university became the epicentre of this unspoken hostility: many students joined the Grande Armée and subsequently perished during the retreat, but the ideas of Lithuanian-Polish independence had only been sharpened by the short-lived occupation of the country by the French. A vast majority of the professorship also welcomed Napoleon as the liberator of Lithuania and enthusiastically discarded their oath of personal loyalty to the Russian tsar, Alexander. Only a small number of the faculty left Vilna with the Russian army and later come back to Lithuania.

In spite of the wholehearted support of the Grande Armée, the university was not spared from the pillage and devastation. During the French-led occupation, university buildings were turned into barracks, hospitals or surgery wards, and practically all of its scientific equipment and academic inventory was looted and/or destroyed. (There were rumors in town that hungry soldiers drank and ate all of the preserved — alcohol soaked — anatomical preparations that were stored at the university’s clinic which before the war had been led by Frank.) The Russian authorities blamed the collaborating faculty members, including rector Sniadecki, for the damages. Frank, on the other hand, remained untouched by any accusations. Although Frank, in his memoirs, was courteous enough to

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vindicate Sniadecki from all blame, the old rector was forced to resign. The university needed a neutral arbitrator who could satisfy the tsarist regime and local pro-Polish feelings, and the ‘neutral’ Austrian doctor became the ideal candidate for the position of rector. Frank was hesitant to take the offer, and in the end, he decided that “it was much safer to remain in his current position and preserve independence” than to thrust himself into unknown political and national turmoil.\(^{49}\) Still, he remained loyal to the tsarist regime and interpreted the Russian victory in the 1812 war as the beginning of the erosion of Polish influence in Lithuania. From 1814, he started to learn Russian; at the same time, he was asking his father to find him a position in Habsburg-dominated Italy.

While Frank tried to stay away from the local academic national politics, he became involved in solving some of the domestic consequences of the European war. Although Vilna was completely cleansed from the dead of the Grande Armée, there were still many refugees (mostly foreign residents of Moscow who fled the city with the Grande Armée) and prisoners of war left in the city. Among these survivors of the campaign, Frank found his brother-in-law (sister’s husband), colonel Peternelli from Baden who, because of his family connections to the Franks, was allowed to stay in the city. (Most prisoners of the war were sent to the interior regions of Russia and only high-ranking officers or sick were allowed to stay in Vilna.) In addition, Frank also found some of his colleagues, acquaintances and even former students from Austria, France, Savoy, Tyrol, Lombardy, Westphalia, Bohemia, Tuscany and Naples -- all of them participants in the tragic campaign. Madam Frank too discovered among the refugees her former colleague and friend, famous Italian opera singer Tarquini who was brought to Moscow to entertain Napoleon. Everyone needed some help and support: shelter, food, money, guarantees and references. For the hospitable and cosmopolitan Franks, these responsibilities seemed to bring some personal satisfaction for they enhanced the European prestige of the family and amplified their ‘cosmopolitan’ qualities in Vilna.

More troubling and difficult for Frank was to answer the requests to the families who through him were searching for the missing relatives. It was not an easy task, since there were no death records kept during the war -- only survivors could testify of someone’s fate:

> Not everyone knew that, during the war, I left Vilna. My father [in Vienna] had received countless letters from French, Dutch, German and, especially, Italian

\(^{49}\) Frankas, *Atsiminimai apie Vilnių*, 422.
families pleading with me to find out about the fate of their relatives among the prisoners of war in Russia; in the case of death, I was asked to provide a death certificate necessary in order to resolve the issues of inheritance and other domestic concerns. In Vienna, I had too received such requests. With the help of Monsieur Horn [the head supervisor of POW in Lithuania], I tried to do my best. However, I could only find data on very few individuals. In general, people died unaccounted for: many froze to death on the road, were burned in military camps or drowned in the rivers; some died from hunger near their fatigued horses, because they did not have energy to feed them; and some were killed by Russian peasants and Polish Jews. ‘Can you give me information about those who died in the hospitals of Vilna,’ I asked monsieur Horn. ‘Of course, but I can only provide data regarding the ones who died after the establishment of order. Before then, there was no possibility to register the dead’ was his answer.  

Frank could do very little, but the mounting pile of unanswered family requests reminded him of the geographical and biographical extent of the Napoleonic campaign. The imperial entourage of the Napoleonic court might have left Vilna, and France itself was rapidly becoming a defeated military force and defunct political power, but in the form of these unhappy letters and his futile efforts to locate the bodies, destinies, memories or sightings of hundreds of Europeans, the ghostly remainders of the French empire were still making occasional desperate visits to Vilna.

Of course, the war also greatly affected the well-being of the civilian population and in such cases, Frank, because of his professional responsibilities and scientific curiosity could be more useful. Predictably, the war and its chaotic aftermath substantially spiked the number of infectious diseases, which as Frank pointed out were quickly spreading across all social classes of Lithuania. He immediately started to investigate the geographical and social trajectories of various infectious diseases. To his surprise, he discovered an extremely high occurrence rate of lice infestation among his patients. Moreover he noticed that many of his patients, especially the upper class women, were in denial of their infectious status, since it was widely assumed that lice infection is a sanitary problem that exclusively attacks only the poor and/or military. Frank tried to dismantle this myth by claiming that during war, the ‘normal’ social hierarchies of peacetime become irrelevant. The usual separation between the poor and upper classes was simply erased by the widely accepted practice of billeting armies in any available house and the increased mobility of the population. War, in his opinion, created an infectious link between different social

\[\text{Ibid., 418.}\]
classes and households. This was perhaps another indication of Frank’s modernized medical outlook that attempted to grasp, analyze and treat certain medical pathologies and conditions through a prism of social, anthropological and political interconnections.

There were two more links between the war and medical conditions found by Frank among his patients in Vilna. Firstly, Frank pointed out that there was a direct correlation between cardiovascular disorders and the war, which he immediately attributed to the emotional stress and physical discomfort caused by the exigencies and brutalities of military actions. And secondly, he tried to establish a relationship between various neurological conditions -- insanity, amnesia, severe depression, atrophy, schizophrenia and sommation -- and the experience and/or witness of wartime violence. In particular, Frank seemed to be interested in the selective memory loss found among some of his patients, the previously unanalyzed psychological condition that today could be described as post-traumatic stress disorder. He recorded several cases of such mental trauma caused by the murder of a family member, destruction of home or even the loss of hope for the restoration of Polish-Lithuanian independence.

Frank was most proud not of his extensive international obligations and medical observations, but of his ability to disperse some of the local social prejudice directed against the refugees of the Grande Armée’s retreat from Moscow. Among the hundreds of civilian survivors of the retreat who stayed in Vilna, there was a certain Charlotte Kops née Devi, an intriguing young woman, whose ‘national’ origins and social status was shrouded in mystery. According to Frank, Madam Kops was an extremely beautiful and well-educated English woman who, some years before 1812, married a Polish merchant in Moscow. Nobody knew why Madam Kops came to Russia, but possibly she initially served as a governess. During the French occupation of Moscow, the merchant was appointed a city counselor and the couple was forced to retreat with the Grande Armée. Madam Kops was credited for the survival of the couple during the retreat, but again, it was not clear how she managed to shield herself and her husband from certain death. The couple safely reached Vilna, but on the Ponary Hill, they were attacked by the Cossacks and in the extreme cold, almost naked, they were forced to come back to the city. Despite the husband’s collaboration with the French, the Russian authorities allowed the couple to stay in Vilna where they managed to set up a small smithy.

Charlotte Kops, because of her beauty, however, was immediately noticed by the upper class spectators and soon became the fixture of various disgraceful gossip and
voyeuristic adventures. Her status as an unknown fugitive and her ambiguous national (and social) origins -- the assumed English background, which might have served as a cover up story to protect the family from Russian reprisals, prevented Madam Kops from fully integrating into the socially hierarchically rigid world of Vilna. So instead of joining the diversionary postwar gaiety of the city, she became a curious spectacle. She was constantly harassed by amorous and sexually suggestive male comments, but local upper class women were especially mean to her, for, according to Frank, they repeatedly “went to look at her in hordes and through binoculars analyzed her features. ‘She is very pretty,’ one lady would say. ‘Too bad that her manners are so English,’ would answer the other.”

Jozef Frank was intrigued and, perhaps, even seduced by madam Kops, and the story of the courageous survival during the Napoleonic retreat exonerated her in his eyes. He became her social patron and possibly a lover; but instead of ‘secretly’ going to see her in the shop, he made the dramatic social statement of being often seen with her in the public. Moreover, he invited her to his home and introduced her to the members of the social elite of Vilna. For a moment, his public openness towards Madam Kops scandalized the city. However, this was the precise reaction that the Austrian doctor was trying to provoke, since he wanted to distance himself from the post-war insularity of Vilna. If Frank cherished his private trust and ‘secret’ association with Mrs. Simpson, the widow of the Jewish merchant as his ‘Oriental’ talisman, then he also treasured his public affair with Madam Kops as his ‘European’ souvenir. Simpson was a native of Lithuania, but, because of her ‘Eastern’ origins, she was esteemed in private; Kops on the other hand was a ‘European’ stranger and she could be candidly displayed in public. In an odd way, Frank’s relationships to these two very different women frame his memories of Vilna: the city is remembered as both an intimately confidential and publicly open affair.

For ten years after his return from Vienna, Frank was contemplating leaving Vilna. He felt attached to the city and its people, but did not want to choose between his loyalty to the Russian regime and the local resentment towards it. He only decided to abandon Vilna in the summer of 1823, when the tsarist police ‘uncovered’ the anti-Russian conspiracy at the University. The fear of revolution and/or national (Polish-Lithuanian) revolt gripped the tsarist administration: the rector of the University was detained and the mutinous students were sent to prison. Frank recognized that these arrests meant the end of the

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151 Ibid., 419.
‘Sarmatian concord’ and he knew that Vilna under the absolute rule of the empire was going to be a hostile place to live. Still, he recalls the decision to return to Vienna as one of the most painful moments of his life:

The hardest was to say goodbye to my patients, friends and the city, where I encountered so much good. ...I will always remember the people of Vilna fondly and I never regretted that I had spent the best years of my life in this generous country. I could have certainly gained more professional glory had I been teaching in one of the international centres of Europe, where foreign visitors are not a rarity. But in Vilna, like nowhere else in Europe, I had so many opportunities to practice my knowledge. It would make my heart bleed, if the Lithuanians think that I only lived in Vilna for the sake of money which later I could spend somewhere else. I would have happily retired in Lithuania had I not been experiencing a tremendous grief in the last year. I knew that sooner or later a storm would sweep through the University.\textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 577-78.
Many people have passed through Lithuania without knowing it or giving it a thought. The big railway lines which connect the capitals of Russia and Germany cut right through Gediminas’s [the ducal founder of Vilna] heritage, right through the land where the Lithuanian peasants still reside. Seated in the comfortable trains, men and women view indifferently the somewhat monotonous country with its wide acres of waving corn, with its undulating woodlands of birch and maple, oak and fir. One rushes past low wooden homesteads, and the train stops at stations with peculiar names, Schillen, Pilkallen, Gumbinnen, Eydtkuhnen, names which are meant to be German and yet sound so foreign; but it is only these names which interfere with the idea that one is traveling in Germany. Everything in the train is German, the passengers, the guards, the printed regulations; the railway stations look like those of Rhineland and Hanover, there is the same red capped “Vorstand”, the same high-shouldered primness in the barmaid, the same waiters in the same “aldeutsche” dining room. Then one reaches the frontier, one sees for the last time the black, white and red flag, the spiked helmet and German order — across the line and you are in Russia. Passports must be shown, and one sees placards in those angular letters which rather annoy one because one does not understand them. Dark blue gendarmes with red braiding parade the deserted platform. Then the custom house officers arrive, carriages are changed, one gets Russian cows and hears the Russian tongue, as one might expect having arrived in Russia — and the train steams on its way. Again stations which for the uninitiated might pass for Russian, but which to the Russians themselves have a foreign ring: Gielgudiski, Vilkoviski, Pilviski and so on. In the carriages, Russian, German and perhaps Polish are to be heard. Gendarmes and black bloused soldiers with round caps, bells, long boots and grey mantles flung loosely over the shoulders are to be seen at each station and as a most peculiar type, novel to us Westerners, the celebrated Polish Jew, his loosely knit figure in his shabby clothes with his bent hands, and unkempt beard, this aggregate of ugliness, who at first sight seems to explain everything — his character, his mode of living and his Pariah existence. Half a day and half a night has passed during which one has slept or lazily gazed at the flat country, listened to the wheels thundering across the river bridges, or rattling through pine forest. One may have noticed with some interest a group of long legged Cossacks with flat caps and thick necks who have pulled up on their small ugly horses near the railway line, they are so like what one has read about that one can’t help feeling a little amused. Or one may have noticed clumsy wooden carriages harnessed to three fat horses which eagerly paw the ground and snort in answer to the driver’s chatter; they have come from the neighboring manor house to meet the squire on his return from his trip abroad. Here and there gilded or green shaped bulb-shaped domes are quickly passed and at last
The railway arrived in Lithuania only at the beginning of the 1860s -- relatively late compared to other parts of Europe. But its appearance on the Lithuanian landscape coincided with two other significant events: the emancipation of the serfs in the Russian empire in 1861 and the 1863-1864 Polish-Lithuanian military insurrection against tsarist rule. In combination, these three events irrevocably altered the economic, political and cultural topography of the region. The railways of course opened the possibility of much faster travel and the abolition of serfdom provided a limited experience of social and economic freedom. On the other hand, the tsarist suppression of the insurrection resulted in the establishment of extreme forms of national and political confinement. Hundreds of insurrectionists were killed and thousands were exiled to Siberia. After the revolt, the public use of the Polish language in Lithuania was made illegal and the Latin alphabet of the Lithuanian language was outlawed and replaced with the Cyrillic one. The rights of the Polish speaking Lithuanian nobility were severely restricted and most Catholic monasteries and churches were closed down. At least on the surface, Lithuania was meant to become another typical Russian province.  

**Vilna** was the nexus point of this regional transformation. The railway network connected the city with three major commercial and political centres: Saint Petersburg, the imperial capital of the Russian empire; Warsaw, the downgraded capital of Poland; and Königsberg, the historical capital of East Prussia. For some time, all rail passengers travelling from Germany to Russia had to disembark and change trains in Vilna, thus, making the city an ‘unintentional’ tourist attraction. The railway, however, completely transformed the visual and physical experience of arrival or departure into the city. The surrounding hills and a long tunnel concealed the panoramic view of Vilna and the train

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2. For more on the socio-economical and political transformation of Lithuania during the second part of the nineteenth century, see Aleksandravičius and Kulakauskas, *Carų valdžioje: Lietuva XIX amžiuje*. On the social impact of the 1863 insurrection, see Anatolii Smirnov, *Vostaniie 1863 goda v Litve i Belarusii* (Moskva: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1963).
station was built outside the old town core. Consequently, one could literally pass through Vilna in a railway car without having a glimpse of its vertical Baroque spatiality, or having a sense of its medieval street network. In most places the railway advanced tourism, but in Vilna it only brought passengers; perhaps that was why, despite its perfect geographical location in-between the imperial capitals of Germany and Russia, the city never evolved into a deliberate tourist stopover. Most foreign travellers were eager to avoid Vilna. The railway, so to speak, ‘flattened’ the complex architectonics of the city, and instead of a panoramic view, it offered only a dull, uneventful and even depressing spectacle of provincial urban life.

There were of course more substantial political and ideological reasons for the spatial ‘anonymity’ of Vilna. From the perspective of the Russian administration, Lithuania, not unlike Sarmatia several decades earlier, was a ‘lost’ or ‘expired’ country. Its name was erased from the maps of the empire and its inhabitants -- Lithuanians, Jews, Poles and White Russians (Byelorussians) -- were usually treated by the tsarist authorities with hostility or, at best, indifference. Lithuania was a European semi-colony of the Russian empire, and its anonymous status as the Severo-zapadnyi krai (North-Western) territory of Russia attempted to conceal its subjugated condition. “‘Lithuania’” in the words of Age Meyer Benedictsen, a rare nineteenth century foreign visitor to the country, “has been forced into the background, a long way off the highroad of life. The inhabitants of this country may be likened to an army which has been beaten over and over again in a fight against a foe of overwhelming force, and has been compelled to give up to the enemy every fortification, every stronghold, which has been split up, and hounded down, but which all the same persists in carrying on a little war of self-preservation behind every hedge and from every house.”

In Vilna, the railway, so to speak, advanced the tsarist colonial vision of the region: the town, along with Lithuania, was pushed into the darkened background of imperial Russia.

In 1865, a year after the suppression of the revolt, British travellers on their way to Saint Petersburg were advised by the Murray travel guide to make only a brief stopover in

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5 Benedictsen, Lithuania, 143.
Vilna. The city, as much as the rest of Lithuania, was still a disconcerting, unresolved site of Europe:

The political vicissitudes to which these provinces [Lithuania] have been subjected and the mixed nature of their population afford a fertile and disastrous source of disagreement between the Russians and the Poles. By the former they are regarded and governed as Russians, subjects sometimes to Poland, but now incorporated by conquest and treaties of partition; while the Polish element, composed of the aristocracy, landed gentry, and educated classes generally maintain that the N. W. provinces are Polish, and as such, are entitled to a national administration. The Imperial Government ignores the claim and denies that the Poles, subjects of the Emperor, entitled to certain political privileges by the Treaty of Vienna, are the Poles of the N.W. provinces. The claim is, however, unfortunately asserted at every available opportunity. The insurrection of 1831 in the kingdom of Poland was one of those opportunities; the revolution of 1862 at Warsaw was the latest.⁶

Still, despite political unpredictability and antagonistic ethnic diversity, Russian-ruled Vilna, according to the guidebook, retained some of its melancholically picturesque qualities:

Wilna, 441 m. from St. P[etersburg]. Pop. 58,000. Chief town of the ancient independent Duchy of Lithuania...lies in a hollow at the foot of several hills which rose to some height on the E.S., and W. The Vilia river runs out at the northern extremity of the hollow, and winding through deep and intricate ravines, clothed with foliage of the fir, the birch, and the lime, presents a most picturesque and smiling panorama, little keeping with the stern deeds of retribution which have made Wilna so famous. ...The churches will repay a visit. They possess considerable architectural merit, and among their monuments will be found those of several families whose names are familiar to all readers of Polish history. The University, established in 1803, was suppressed in 1832. Wilna was occupied by the French army on the 28th June. It had been evacuated by the Russians during the night. The Emperor Napoleon occupied in the Episcopal Palace the rooms which the Emperor Alexander had left the previous day. Sir Robert Wilson’s Memoirs give interesting details about Wilna. Tyrconnel lies buried here.

Hotel de l’Europe recommended.⁷

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⁶ Handbook for Travellers in Russia, Poland and Finland (London: John Murray, 1867), 50-51.
⁷ Ibid.
Figure 4.1: Greetings from Vilna. Russian postcard from c. 1900. Source: Piotr Popinski and Robert Hirsch, Dawne Wilno na pocztówce (Gdansk: Wydawnictwo Holm, 1998), 4.
THE FOURFOLD DIVISION OF VILNA

In the early part of the 1890s, at the height of imperialist Europe, Age Meyer Benedictsen, a young Danish writer-traveller and ethnographer, departed on an unusual mission to discover peoples without homelands. He decided to venture to places “unknown and ignored by the world at large” where for some centuries small ethno-linguistic groups of people have dwelled on (or in-between) the margins of domineering imperial borders. His curiosity, however, had a more pragmatic side, for Benedictsen, a citizen of a small but clearly defined European nation-state, wanted to put on trial the theory of the so-called modern ‘national awakening.’ Accordingly, the Danish ethnographer was not interested in the social, economic and racial consolidation of the nationalist policies of the imperial super-powers, such as Germany, Russia, France and Great Britain, but was keen to explore the political and cultural counter-effects of such policies. He was searching for the peoples who despite imperial domination were eager to reassert their right to a national existence. In short, Benedictsen decided to study the lifestyle and mentality of oppressed and/or underprivileged national minorities. And for this purpose he had chosen to dwell amongst those who have no national independence and whose lands on the map bear the colour of one of the great ruling powers. I wished to hear and see for myself, whether their boundaries in reality were as effaced and smoothed out, whether discontent only existed in lyric fancies, or was only economic, social. I wished to hear and see whether national sentiment in reality means so little, something so outward and accidental that it can be cast off as a garment, whether national movements are only artificially maintained by a still independent mother country, or the restless minds, or those seeking their own advantage and in their vanity stirring up worthless and in many cases harmful feelings.

Benedictsen was one of the earliest western European ethnographers to study various political, social and cultural aspects of ‘minority nationalism.’ His Danish origins probably had something to do with his support for anti-imperialist nationalism, for throughout the nineteenth century, Denmark had repeatedly resisted the economic and military pressures of its imperial neighbors: Britain, Russia and above all, Germany. Benedictsen understood nationalism to be more than just a cultural and political phenomena, he saw it as an anti-imperial movement. He was quite skeptical about the

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8 Benedictsen, Lithuania, 12.
9 Ibid., 3.
homogeneity of European capitalism that, in his own words, made it “impossible to decide, whether the shop window one is admiring is located in London, Copenhagen, Budapest, Rome or Moscow.” Hence his search for the homelands of suppressed national minorities was another attempt to restore or reaffirm the heterogeneity of the world, which under imperialist rule was only used to contain the economic, racial and linguistic inequality among the different peoples of the world.

The Danish traveller actually assumed a responsibility for bringing ‘forgotten’ and oppressed nations into the modern world. His search for the forgotten people had some ideological and geopolitical connotations for it underlined the geographical possibility of a de-colonized Europe. In this sense, he was not a romantic who could be easily swayed by metaphorical and epic powers of nationalist movements, for he understood the pragmatic dilemmas and social aspects of nationalism. But neither was he a materialist, or for that matter a Marxist socialist, who could only see the economic and/or class issues within the struggles of the oppressed peoples against the imperialist system. In his assessment of nationalism, he tried to combine both the so-called spiritual and material aspects of ‘nation building.’

In his search for peoples without a state, Benedictsen did not have to leave his native Baltic Sea region. He only needed to look eastwards to find a geographical “spot where the voracious eagles in the arms of the two mightiest military Powers of Europe salute each other, the boundary marks of both countries are planted in the soil of an alien people; the land is neither German nor Russian; neither the German nor the Russian language has right of citizenship there -- this land is Lithuania.” Consequently, he decided to journey into this land and arranged his field trip and study according to the political divisions of the country. He started his trip in East Prussia, where a small Lithuanian minority lived on both sides of the Memel (Nemunas or Niemen) River in the Kleine Litauen (Lithuania Minor) and Memeland districts of the Prussian kingdom. From there, he continued his journey to the Russian empire, where the majority of Lithuanians lived in the North-Western region (Severo-zapadnyi krai) of Russia. He finished his trip in Vilna, the administrative centre of this Russian region that so menacingly loomed in the nineteenth-century history of European warfare.

10 Ibid., 5.
11 Ibid., 17.
Benedictsen draws a clear distinction between the two forms of imperial rule -- the German and the Russian ways and methods of political control and cultural domination. For him, the Lithuanians, like many other peoples of the region, are pulled apart by two opposing modes of oppression. On the German side, there is a material 'cultural' coercion and on the Russian side there is a politically 'spiritual' tyranny:

[On] German soil one feels that it is subject to certain laws and limits, that it respects certain human claims and in any case allows the suppressed ones to air their grievances.

In Russia it is not so. The Russians have learnt from the Germans that a country is not conquered because it has been made to pay taxes, but that it is a question of taking possession of every soul, transform every conquered individual into a citizen in a new community. Russia however does not own that instrument of power which is invested in German kultur and German mental superiority; the Russian State therefore employs the instrument of power at her disposal.

On Russian soil freedom of speech is prohibited and freedom of conscience is not acknowledged: in medieval fashion they regard a common faith as the best protection for the State. When a subject is duly inscribed in the books of the state church, he is looked upon as a full blown citizen.¹²

Moreover, in Russia, where modern European practices of statistical racial and national segregation were in their infancy (the first all-imperial census took place in 1897), “all statistics in this connection are of comparatively little value as people according to oriental fashion are scheduled according to religion; the Protestant Lithuanians are scheduled together with the Germans, the Greek Catholic with the Russians and the Roman Catholic are banded together with the Poles.”¹³

Accordingly, Benedictsen’s study, in his own words, had some eccentric qualities and perceptual challenges, for he was trying to find something that was invisible to the naked or untrained eye: “Diogenes is supposed once to have been looking for men, lantern in hand, without being able to find any. The present writer almost felt the same thing in order to find the Lithuanians the first time he visited their country in 1895.”¹⁴ Challenged by the visual ‘obscurity’ of the Lithuanians, the ethnographer decided firstly to identify and map out their living space.

Benedictsen, like most proponents of national movements, saw language as an archaic ‘living space’ that determined the communal -- historical and geographical --

¹² Ibid., 192.
¹³ Ibid., 143.
¹⁴ Ibid., 14.
strength and continuity of a given national group. Language, or rather linguistic diversity, was always in confrontation with imperial modernity, simply because the ruler of the empire always sought to eliminate the living space of a subjugated people by first making them feel ‘foreign’ within their own linguistic surrounding. In this sense, imperial civilization always led to the destruction of the linguistic identity of the oppressed national minority. Benedictsen was not against modern forms of life (indeed, he constantly argued for the pedagogical modernization of the subjugated peoples), but he certainly stood against the linguistic monopoly of imperial civilization: “One will not accept civilization as the great common goal, which is to gather us all in a uniform, settled life, no, civilization must only be the common capital, in the hoarding of which we are all engaged and of which we all enjoy the interest, each nation to live its own life inside the boundary set by its language, for it is in their language that nations have their stronghold.” As a result, Benedictsen started to map out Lithuania as a linguistically rather than a historically defined space.

This was a novel approach to the geopolitical dilemmas of the region, because it separated the historical territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the ‘ethnic’ space inhabited by the Lithuanian-speaking people. Ducal Lithuania, even after a century of Russian rule was a heterogeneous – ‘Sarmatian’ and ‘Baroque’ – space. It had been always an ethnically, religiously and racially divided country. Arguably, these divisions contributed to the creation of a specific sense of local ‘mishmash’ that allowed a certain degree of ‘national’ and linguistic fluidity. In other words, the ‘old’ Lithuania was a relatively large and diverse land permanently marked by various linguistic and religious differences. In contrast, the ‘new’ ethnic, ‘linguistic’ Lithuania was a politically segregated but extremely compact territory with no space for ethnic identity fusions or linguistic confusions. Vilna was at the geographical margins of ‘ethnic’ Lithuania, but it was here where the new divisions of the country became most visible.

The extent of Benedictsen’s knowledge of the Lithuanian language, history and culture is unclear, but he definitely saw himself as the most ardent proponent of the Lithuanian nationhood and statehood. Benedictsen published in Danish his Lithuanian

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15 Ibid., 6.
16 On the linguistic and cultural divisions of Vilnius at the turn of the twentieth century, see Alma Lapinskienė, ed., Vilniaus kultūrinis gyvenimas, 1900-1940 (Vilnius: Lietuvių Literatūros ir Tautosakos Institutas, 1998), 11-120.
travelogue, *Lithuania: a study of the past and present of the Lithuanian people*, in 1894. In 1918, the book was republished in Copenhagen, but this time in English and with a subtitle, *The Awakening of a Nation*. On February 16, 1918, a few months before the publication of the English version, under the auspices of the German military administration, the Lithuanian Taryba in Vilnius (a national council comprised of selected representatives) had proclaimed the political independence of Lithuania. The English version of the book, according to the author was chosen by the “leading men of the Lithuanian people...to convey to the world outside Scandinavia some information about and evoke, is to be hoped, some sympathy for this long forgotten people.” Subsequently, Benedictsen’s book became an important propaganda tool in assuring the international recognition of Lithuanian independence at the Paris Conference of 1919.

In order to detect the differences within the monotony of the passing Lithuanian countryside, Benedictsen consciously avoided travelling by railway. So unlike most travellers of the time, he crossed the frontier between the German and Russian empires -- the “little modest stream, the Sesupe” that “is so narrow that one can easily hold conversation with the other side, it is so shallow that one can wade across to the neighbouring foreign shore, but it is a division firm and effective”-- on a carriage. His rejection of modern travel conveniences was rewarded by the frontier-like adventure that immediately exposed the fourfold divisions of the country. On the imperial borderlands of Europe, Benedictsen encountered the four national ‘characters’ of ‘modern’ Lithuania -- the Russians, Poles, Lithuanians and Jews:

One cannot help noticing the fourfold division as soon as one has passed the Russian frontier.

There is always something impressive, something grand on entering the realms of Russia immaterial as to where one crosses its border. It is no doubt only the knowledge that one has set foot on such a tremendous country which causes that sensation.

It was an August evening at sunset and in showery weather that, seated in a small vehicle I passed over the lowered iron chain which, stretched across a high road, separating Prussia from the Russian empire. On both sides of the road was a small birch forest and open places had been cut between the white stems where poles indicated the further direction of the frontier. It was only with great difficulty that I was allowed to pass the frontier, I, my passport, and my luggage were most carefully examined and found to be so suspicious that only a letter to the Governor-General of Vilna saved me; if I had not had that letter in my

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18 Ibid., 17.
pocket I should not have been able to proceed any further that day. It seemed as if it would be such an easy thing to turn a little off the road and drive through the birches and between the poles, but the bullets of the soldiers had to be considered; in any case one would require a wily and well paid Jew to circumvent this iron chain.

I did however get into Russia that evening; we first drove through a forest of firs with pools like small lakes into which the wheels sank over the axles. Then we came to a wide plain and I felt as if I could scent Russia. In the distance a Cossack was having a struggle with his horse, it reared on its hind legs and winced at every lash of the whip. The angry rider was evidently making for us, but we put on a spurt, my Jew and I. "Where the d— are you going" he spouted in Russian, "whom are you driving"? Pushing his horse he came towards us and I soon felt the hot breath of his horse in my face. ‘What do those boxes contain?’ The Jew was at no loss for an answer: ‘He is very fine gentleman, are you mad to make such a fuss. He is going straight to the Governor-General of Vilna, he has a letter from the King in his own Country. Ho, ho, there are fine things in his boxes, everything is all right.’ The Jew gave me a nudge to give the Cossack a few kopecks.

He took them and disappeared making a wide curve across the plain and I saw him as a dark silhouette still struggling with his rebellious horse. ‘Nic’ wahr mee’ Herr das hab’ I’ chut chemacht. Jetz cheben se mer en wenich meir!’ my Jew laughed. This was Russia just inside the frontier. We drove past a castle surrounded by a huge forest, formerly a mighty Polish Pan ruled there, now this castle is owned by the family of a Russian general, one of those who distinguished themselves in the Polish wars. The Pole had been smoked out. A small village lies close to the road, the lights in the low timbered houses have been put out, and no human beings are to be seen. It was only at the crossways that I noticed an old greyclad peasant: "Labas vakaras! Padek Dieve." The Lithuanian language! The church bells too could have told me that I was in a Roman Catholic country, had I known what the three long strokes after the prayer bell signified.19

Lithuania -- as it was seen and encountered by Benedictsen -- was a land primarily inhabited by the ‘invisible’ Lithuanian peasants that were ruled by the inept ‘barbarian’ Russians. The countryside was sporadically dotted with melancholic relics of the ‘vanishing’ Polish nobility, and all this social and ethnic mélange was somehow tied together into a single geographic unit by the impenetrable pathways of the ‘wandering’ local Jews.

During the slow expedition between the German frontier and Vilna -- some two hundred kilometers apart -- Benedictsen summarizes the ‘geopolitical’ location of Russian-ruled Lithuania:

If anyone wishes to point to the spot on the map of Europe where struggles and misery during the last generations have caused the bitterest tears to flow and spent the most precious blood, he would not be wrong in placing his finger on the

19 Ibid., 178-179.
land around Vilna and Kovno, Russian Lithuania. It is here the fight has been raging, man against man, between Russia and Poland, first war with armies and soldiers, cannons and battles and afterwards, when the whole defence of Poland only consisted in the strength and resistance of individuals, war between the desperate rebels and the armies of the wrathful rulers, a bloody game of ‘brigand and soldier’ through the forest behind each hedge, and in the endless bogs.

It was here Muravief, the trusted agent of the Czar, suppressed and punished so that the gallows were never empty month after month....And how these people have suffered! How many strong wills have not been crushed, how many hopes have not been blighted, what costly sacrifices have not been made.... Lithuania has been a fortress of the Polish nation and it has been defended as long as there was an arm to hold a weapon.20

While Lithuania was the battlefield between the Polish and Russian interests, during this century-old struggle, the interests of the Lithuanians had always been ignored:

It is misfortune of the Lithuanian people in the first instance that both Russians and Poles have entirely overlooked the fact of their having a national existence. For Poles ‘Litwa’ is one half of the legitimate Polish kingdom; for the Russians ‘Litva’ is the old White-Russian Grand Duchy with language and history in common with all the other Russians. The nation is Russian, for centuries suppressed nationally and religiously by the little Polish kings, now again reunited with the great progenitor, and it is a holy duty for Russia to aid and raise up this cowed peasant people. In this country the hatred between Russians and Poles has attained its greatest height, the hatred which rests on a deep mutual misunderstanding.

Nothing was said and nothing was written about the Lithuanian people, the dwellers in Gediminas’s heritage in Russia or in Poland. The world was silent about Lithuania, as she was about herself in her desolate little corner of the world. Everything turned upon the settlement of power between the Russians and the Poles.21

For the Poles, Lithuania harbors the most sentimental cultural values: “To Vilna and Kovno the name of Mickiewicz belongs, he was born in Lithuania the country he lauds in his most beautiful poem ‘Pan Tadeusz’, a whole host of celebrated names in the literature of Poland belong to Lithuania, and this country, this much beloved country should now be lost to Poland!”22 For the Russian administration, Lithuania is foremost a frontier territory that not only guards the entrance to Russia, but also exemplifies the messianic mission of the Russian empire. The tsarist regime in Lithuania “wish for the annihilation of everything Polish. Aye, it is no longer a question of power it is a matter of honour, a national question for the Russian people to bear Lithuania bodily and spiritually

20 Ibid., 170-171.
21 Ibid., 180.
22 Ibid., 182.
away from the embrace of Poland.”

In Benedictsen’s view, the modern tragedy of Lithuania is framed by the collision of Polish cultural colonialism and Russian imperialistic messianism.

The Lithuanians, the indigenous peoples of the land, stay distant from this modern conflict. Indeed, the Lithuanian peasantry dwells in a remote “Oriental” (Indo-European) world that spiritually and historically has been removed from contemporary European civilization. Within the linguistic world of the Lithuanians “one feels as if the mythical fragrance of India and Persia hovers over the legends of Lithuania. The Lithuanian people in this show their primitive relation to the Brahma and Zoroaster worshippers of Asia more clearly than other European people.”

Moreover, Benedictsen sees Lithuanians as one of the first victims of European civilization—a nation whose history (and, in part, whose land) was robbed by the aggressive forces of imperialist Europe:

The history of the Lithuanian people can be likened to the famous star of Tycho Brahe which unseen for ages suddenly appeared in the heavens, become more and more radiant and again entirely disappeared leaving no trace. The history proper of the people of Lithuania ends where the history of most nations begins, for the factor which for almost all the nations of the present time in Europe signifies consolidation, organized power, and the advance of civilization—that factor, the introduction of Christianity, became in Lithuania a strangulating shroud over every endeavour and forward movement. The victory of Christianity became more than a misfortune for the people, it meant their fall, aye in some degree their annihilation. … The whole history of the Lithuanian people is centred in the ‘fight against Christianity.’

A singular picture of this time was formerly to be seen in Vilna, the capital of the country; for every year from the erection of its heathen temple to its downfall, a stone was inserted in the wall of the temple commemorating the year; for bad years the stones were made in the form of a cross, for the advance of Christianity was the cause of its misfortune.

With Christianity, Europe came to Lithuania and with the Catholic church came the Polish influence over the Lithuanians. Even at the turn of the twentieth century, as Benedictsen argues a “great mass of the people do not realize what an enemy they have in the Polish upper class, nor the mental pressure and lack of responsibility under which the Lithuanian mind suffers on that account. Things Polish have gradually gained and are still gaining upon things Lithuanian, especially the small towns of the country; it is impossible in such places to lead what may be called an intelligent Lithuanian life, everything which is

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23 Ibid., 180.
24 Ibid., 44.
25 Ibid., 122-123.
not Jewish becomes Polonised. The language of the church in the district of Vilna in the parts where the Lithuanian and White Russian nation join reveals a strange confusion; Polish parishes are scattered amongst the Lithuanian.26 The Lithuanian resistance against Russification, on the other hand, is based on their customary mistrust of everything foreign and their ‘primitive’ communal traditionalism. So it “would be quite a mistake,” believes Benedictsen “to look upon the Lithuanian resistance against the Russian rule as a conscious fight against some evil, the people entirely lack capability and conception for this. It is much rather involuntary fear of the unknown, an entire distrust of the enemy. The Lithuanians have shunned the Russians.”27

While searching for the Lithuanians, Benedictsen, surprisingly, ‘discovered’ the Jews. If the Lithuanians were the invisible and forgotten people who nonetheless lived in their own country, then the Jews, in Benedictsen’s view, were the visible ‘outsiders’ of Lithuania. The Jews remain strangers in all geographical entities -- Lithuania, Russia, Poland or Europe:

But there is yet another Lithuania, although ‘another Lithuania’ is rather an inadequate word; there is another people in Lithuania who only live there on sufferance, and because they have no other place to turn to. I refer to the Jews of Lithuania. Neither by soul nor by body do they belong to Lithuania – but all the same they dwell here, live, slave, and die here, for they must walk the earth, and kinship, employment or poverty chain them to the place where they first saw the light. They live hundreds or thousands huddled together in small miserable wooden townlets all over the country. They let the great haggle and fight for power, laugh equally at the victor and the vanquished, only strive to carry on their wretched existence under changing conditions, bowed down in foul weather, slowly straightening their backs in fine. They are india rubber or stone on the surface, but inwardly they are human beings, living souls more free perhaps than their oppressors, they have no political ideas nor parties from whom they have to cringe – they have only their God and their loved ones.28

The opposition between Lithuanians and Jews in Benedictsen’s account of Lithuania is striking. Both ethnic groups are passive victims of imperial oppression, but where the Lithuanians secretly retained their mysterious “Asian” qualities, the Jews unsuccessfully have attempted to shed their “Oriental” features. The first group chose or

26 Ibid., 211.
27 Ibid., 204.
28 Ibid., 173-174.
was forced to stay away from modern Europe. The other was forced to embrace it, which resulted in a bad racial masquerade:

The peculiarity of their garments has disappeared, the government having forbidden the Jews to use any outward signs of their race. The men are not allowed to wear their ‘peysi’ curls at the ear, and the married women must not shave their heads and wear the huge wigs, brown and red, which are still to be seen in Galicia.

The Jews have then resorted to a kind of garment which faintly reminds one of the long caftan of the Oriental, but it is only a poor shabby half-European imitation. One at once recognises the Jew by his dress in spite of its not greatly differing from the ordinary European.\(^29\)

Furthermore, in Benedictsen’s mind, the Lithuanians embody the spirit of passive resistance, and they live in a peaceful rural surrounding which harmoniously sanitizes and even beautifies their poverty. In contrast, the Jews live in cramped townships where “there is not a trace of any desire for beauty, no idea of even the most modest cleaning or order.”\(^30\)

This “human nest” survives, continues Benedictsen, where “pigs and fowl root and rummage in the earth and make it highly unpleasant to the nasal organs. The streets are dirty and muddy or the dust is flying about -- here and there a board has been placed across the worst of the pools, everything looks as if it were only a temporary makeshift.”\(^31\)

In this chaotic, half-rural and half-urban, locale the nomadic Jewish restlessness finds its ‘natural’ outlet, so “in spite of all this ugliness which offends, there is all the same over the scene a busy kind of hurry, a striking contrast to what one sees in the quiet Lithuanian villages around. There is always, in any case apparently, a certain feverish activity over these Jews, although they very likely have nothing whatever to do... it is interesting and rather amusing to visit such a little buzzing human nest.”\(^32\)

In the end, if the Lithuanian society charmed the western traveller with its ‘Asiatic’ oral traditions, then a Jewish town could intrigue the same traveller with its bazaar-like spectacle of communal life.

Benedictsen’s anti-Semitism is a sinister side of his affection for the Lithuanians, and the two feelings -- dislike mixed with bewilderment and friendliness blended with respect -- are simultaneously projected on to the social and economic landscape of Lithuania. The Jews, despite their camouflaged idleness, are undoubtedly the most economically and communally self-sufficient people of Lithuania. In fact, more than any

\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 215.
\(^{30}\) Ibid., 214.
\(^{31}\) Ibid., 215.
\(^{32}\) Ibid., 215-16.
other social class or communal group they represent and move forward the fledgling capitalist modernity of Lithuania. And paradoxically, the ‘Oriental’ or biblical traditionalism of the Lithuanian Jews firmly frames the entire business cycle of the region: “The Jewish hold on Lithuania is so powerful,” noticed the ethnographer, “that the business life has to be arranged according to the Jewish calendar. Steamers run less frequently on the Jewish sabbath and their other holy days; on Saturday the streets... look as they do on Sundays with us, nothing can be bought on the Jewish holy days and therefore the Christian population must keep count of them.”

Yet, because of this invigorating grip over the local economy, “they have become a very serious nuisance, a nuisance of which it will be very difficult to get rid, because the people are really under their sway, they simply cannot do without the Jews. To suddenly remove the Jewish population would cause utter confusion and trouble in the whole of the people.” In other words, if there were no Jews in Lithuania, the entire asymmetrical fourfold division of the country would have been upset, and the (ethnic) Lithuanian society would find itself completely engulfed by the two unequal colonizing forces, Polish Catholicism and Russian autocracy.

It would be wrong to equate the social oppression of the Jews with the national oppression of the Lithuanians, for the former personalizes a racist form of inequality, while the latter epitomizes a linguistic and religious disenfranchisement. The question of race and the manipulation of language of course represent the two propaganda tools of modern politics: ‘racial impurity’ was seen as a danger to the physical survival of a modern (European) civilization, where linguistic divergence was understood to be a threat to the socio-economic hierarchy and political stability of modern society. Moreover, religious and linguistic affiliations were approached as social phenomena, and as such, they could be erased or manipulated through education, social oppression and/or cultural privileges. But race was interpreted as a ‘natural’ phenomenon and no political or cultural force could remove the ‘undesirable’ racial features. Hence, linguistic homogeneity, at the least in the imperial and/or national context, was a welcomed historical outcome; on the other hand, racial assimilation was interpreted as an extremely hazardous and even ‘unnatural’ result of human social development. So while the Lithuanians could be relatively easily assimilated into the Polish or Russian nations, had they shed their language and ‘primitive’

33 Ibid., 217.
34 Ibid., 214.
traditions, no Jewish person could be fully accepted into the ethnically defined societies of Poland and Russia without a serious concern over the danger to ‘racial’ purity of the nation.\[^{35}\]

For Benedictsen, the fourfold division of Lithuania crystallizes in the compact urban environment of Vilna. Here, the cruel, corrupt and inefficient Russian domination becomes visible in the form of a cultural-linguistic terror. The elitist nostalgia for the disintegrating Polish (noble) supremacy turns into a cherished national value of the new urban bourgeoisie. The ‘homeless’ ‘nomadic’ Jews congregates into an urban tableau of ‘physiological’ topology. And the language of the marginalized Lithuanian peasants resurfaces as markers of local toponymy:

This country and these peoples are now ruled by the Russians, not exactly by the Russian people, not by a long way in fact, but by the Russian Government officers, with their helpers, the police, the gendarmes, and the Cossacks. Nor was it likely that the few thousand Polish noblemen could reign here forever, they were but pioneers, and when the main force was done for, the defiant ones were shot individually, and the new power which was more hardfisted took the reins.

Vilna illustrates to this very day in a striking manner this fourfold divided country. In the old castle where in former times the Grand Duke of Lithuania reigned, the Russian central administration, the Governor General of the whole Lithuanian land now hold his sway. On all the clumsy yellow stucco buildings, on barracks, on the main post-office, on the police stations and on the colleges of the town, shines the black-gilded spread-eagle, the Muscovite coat-of-arms. Russian police and gendarmes patrol the streets, every sign board and every placard are in Russian, every street bears a Russian name, everything Polish has been carefully scraped off. But if one looks beyond the uniform in the upper classes it is not difficult to discover that they are not all Russians.

There was a time when it was prohibited, simply prohibited to speak Polish in Vilna; now it is permitted, except at all gatherings, and in fact much Polish is spoken. All these grave straight men and women with the bright eyes are Polish; they posses that ‘wzdiek’ (charm and grace) which does not belong to the

Russian women. Polish is the language of the drawing rooms in the town, over
the sofa may be seen the portrait of the Polish poet-king Adam Mickiewicz, in the
bookcase are to be found all the great names in Polish literature, and in marble
or plaster Kosciuszko looks down from his appointed place. In almost every
house one could find the same sentiments and hope.

It was the fortress of the Polish spirit in the East, now it had been leveled to
the ground, but the Poles still cling to the place hoping for the renewal of former
days.

And holiest of the holy the image of God’s own Mother shines from the
exalted station over ‘the pointed gate’ in Vilna. This wonderworking image is the
pride and the comfort of Vilna and all its Roman Catholic people. Surrounded by
a halo of burning wax candles, this exquisite image from its rich frame looks
down upon countless devotees. Whenever one passes the narrow street which
ends in ‘the pointed gate’ above which the chapel of the image has been built,
one sees cripples, and beggars on their knees praying and making the sign of
the cross, and everyone must uncover their head when passing through this
holy place.

But the busy crowds in Vilna who trade and throng the streets, who hurry and
slave are the Jews, for Vilna more than anything is the town of the Jews. One
meets them at once at the railway station, as servants from small dirty hotels, as
flat-catchers to pounce upon the runway; they act as cabdrivers, and nearly all
the street urchins seem to be Jewish. Here one sees the unadulterated type of
the Polish Jew, from the boy with his half keen half impudent expression, and
the girl with a much too big nose, the sparkling eyes, and the challenging mouth,
to the stooping toiler, whose appearance seems but to indicate the one thing:
‘Geschäft machen’! irrespective of his being a porter, a driver or a hawker; and
winds up with the grand old man of which no people in the world can boast a
finer and more handsome type that can the Jews, the patriarchal old man with
his flowing white hair and beard, his gentle serious eyes and his serene gait. It is
strange that these nervous hawkers can end thus. It is a living repudiation of the
ugly verdict pronounced by the enemies of the Jews that the souls of the Jews
have been transformed into grasping hands.

The fourth people in Vilna, the Lithuanians themselves are not only met as the
peasants en route, as the vadmal garbed silent one at the market, and not often
even there, for the White Russian peasants have made their way right into Vilna,
and have long ago ousted the Lithuanians from the land. Things Lithuanian in
Vilna are like the water mark in a gay coloured postage stamp. The name of the
town is Lithuanian, the suburbs still have Lithuanian names, Antokoln and
Boksta, ‘On the Mountain’ and ‘The Tower’. The ruins of the stronghold of
Gediminas and the Temple of Fire rise high above the roofs of the town, desolate
and neglected, a symbol of the condition of his people.36

The initial goal of Benedictsen’s field trip to Lithuania was a search for the
‘forgotten’ Lithuanians, but his ethnographic investigation inevitably involved some
anthropological -- that is, racial -- exploration of the region. It was this fusion of the
cultural, political and economic geography of the nation with the racial topography of the
region that produced his diagrammatic image of Lithuania. Within the semiotic square-like

36 Benedictsen, Lithuania, 174-177.
view of the country, the Lithuanians represent a model society, the Poles function as a negative opposition to them, the Russians assume a role of a threatening 'secondary' opposition to the ideal Lithuanian society (it also operates as an opposition to the Polish society, but it does not annul the negative influence of the 'first' opposition) and the Jewish community signifies a tertiary opposition of the contradiction. In short, not unlike many other commentators, Benedictsen sees and interprets the Lithuanian Jewish community as a biblical, pre-modern and inexplicable assemblage of homeless people whose spatial loyalties and geographical commitment clearly situates them outside the three oppositional entities (the Lithuanians, Poles and Russians) of the country.

Their 'regretful' fate nonetheless is worthy of pity, for like for all vagrant people, or for that matter all displaced people, their unfortunate 'homelessness' camouflages their basic survival instincts:

The Jews have been in Lithuania from the earliest time of which we have any reliable record, but they have neither been willing nor able to assimilate with the natives of the country. Their great numbers, their prejudices, their religious fanaticism, and their ancient exceptional legislation have tended to consolidate their position as an altogether alien element in the country. The many centuries have rather estranged them from the native race than united them with the latter, they do not speak the language of the country among themselves, but use their own Hebrew-German dialect, they do not dress like the rest of the people; although they have been forbidden to use their old peculiar dress, they manage by their dress to look different from other people. They have neither friends nor enemies nor interests in common with the people. The policy of the Jews has in the main been opportunistic, and it has been so of necessity; they have never been willing to make real friends for fear thereby of making enemies. They have carefully scented from which quarter they for the time being might expect to meet with the greatest protection, and they have never dared to rely on living in security; they have probably not taken the interest in living there that they would have done had they felt they were living in a country of their own. Lithuania has been the place where the Jews have had the simplest and most sincere belief in the Messiah. Nowhere have they been more prepared to receive the Redeemer than in this out of the way corner, where the surroundings have allowed them to preserve all the memories, their traditions and customs in all their mystic dimness. To this very day the Lithuanian Jews say with the same confidence as centuries ago: 'He comes assuredly and He comes soon.'

One should view the Lithuanian Jew in the light of this firm belief, or in any case the hereditary propensities which bottom in this belief, in order to attempt to understand him, for only then can one forgive his whole mode of life; something great can even be discerned in this people, who otherwise involuntarily impress one unfavourably.

The Lithuanian Jews feel themselves as strangers, half homeless amongst a people who shun them, their whole existence is one continuous endeavour to keep a position of balance in the easiest way, to find the necessary bread, striving in their own shifty way to attain as much power as possible, and it does
not concern the Jewish conception much whether this power be for good or evil of the country in which they live. Humble and wretched as the Jew often appears to be, the pride of race still dwells within him. What does he care for the roughness and contempt of the infidels, he only gives away when he is obliged to, his mental pride does not suffer under it. ...Dirty, mean, and greedy from a superficial point of view, the Jew still possesses the gold of the soul which can glitter at the proper time, and if one approaches him without any stupid prejudice one can see what is good in him, then the best human qualities, sympathy and helpfulness become apparent.

This two sided state of affairs is the cause of that false position under which the Jews sigh in Lithuania, and there are many amongst them who have lost sight of the goal, being engrossed by the means of how to attain it. 37

JERUSALEM OF THE NORTH

Among the Jews, Vilne has been known as the Yerushalaim d’Lita (Jerusalem of Lithuania). According to Jewish legend, Napoleon was the first to give Vilne the name of Jerusalem. During his brief stay in the city at the time of the Russian campaign, Napoleon was reportedly so impressed by the numerical strength and religious pietism of local Jewish community visibly expressed by the abundance of Jewish houses of praying, that he exclaimed the city to be the Jerusalem of the North. 38 Napoleon encountered (and, for a brief period of time, conquered) the original city of Jerusalem during the failed 1798-1799 (Egyptian) campaign, and in a strange way, the Jerusalem of Lithuania also lay on the French emperor’s path to his unsuccessful conquest of the Orient.

Yet for most Jews, the title Yerushalaim d’Lita was not so much associated with Napoleon as with the religious Talmudic traditions of the Lithuanian Jewry. Vilne was the place where the biblical traditions and ancient customs of Judaism transcended into Jewish modernity. From the religious and secular Jewish perspective, Vilne gained the title of Jerusalem of the North because of the scholarly reputation of Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman (1720-1797), more widely known as the Gaon of Vilne. In the eyes and minds of the Ashkenazi Jews, Gaon Eliyahu embodied the ideal of the Jewish existence in exile. Even in the twentieth century, the Gaon’s exemplary influence over the Jews of Lithuania was

37 Ibid., 212-214.
unsurpassed and in 1943, Israel Cohen, a historian of Vilne, summarized his legacy as a centuries long story of unparalleled communal respect and devotion:

In range of knowledge, profundity of learning, he towered not only above all his contemporaries but also above all rabbinic scholars of five centuries before: and he has not been surpassed or even approached since. He was a remarkable phenomenon, intellectually and spiritually, whose commanding position was based not upon any official dignity, which he never desired and never held, but upon his unchallenged supremacy as an exponent of the Torah and the Talmud. Even if Vilna had never produced any other Jewish scholar or writer, the fame of the Gaon alone would have conferred upon it eternal luster. His name is uttered to this day, by all who have a glimmer of his greatness, with a feeling of the deepest reverence.\(^{39}\)

In 1778, the Gaon had unsuccessfully tried to travel to Jerusalem, and subsequently there were more than 500 of his followers who settled in Palestine. For the religious, especially scholarly, Jews, travelling to Jerusalem was a final act of life -- one went to die there and be buried alongside the prophets, so when the Judgement Day comes one could be close to the righteous ones and, hence, be a bit closer to God. Modern and secularized Jewish emigration to Palestine had a different objective: one went to Palestine to re-inhabit the land, that is, one went to Jerusalem to live and establish family roots there.\(^{40}\)

During the Russian rule of Lithuania, Vilne was one of the European centres of the religious and secular Zionist movements, and the Jews of Vilne went to Palestine for both political and spiritual reasons. Of course, during the same period, many more Jews left the city for North America, western Europe and other Russian or Polish cities, and more often the lure of Palestine was eclipsed by economic necessities, political conditions, family needs and personal desires. Thus, at that time, Vilne had, relatively speaking, limited connections with Palestine, and to most local Jews, Jerusalem was visualized and experienced as a promise of home: a warm and familiar Rosh Hashonah greeting of the final return to the venerated city. Yet this does not necessarily mean that the metaphoric consecration of Vilne as the Jerusalem of Lithuania was a result of some superfluous or wishful communal thinking. By the turn of the twentieth century, Vilne was home to one of the most diverse and active Jewish communities in the world, and if the city was not a demographical or economic heart of the European Jewish diaspora, then it certainly functioned as one of the

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 211.
key centres of Jewish modernity. Vilne, in the words of Benjamin Harshav, was the city where the ‘modern Jewish revolution’ had occurred:

The nickname “Jerusalem of Lithuania” was based on this fortress of Jewish learning and the printing of the whole Babylonian Talmud in Vilna. Yet apparently it was the secular movement, which in Vilna perceived itself as heir to the religious tradition, that invented and promoted this name. In 1859, a Hebrew book by the Maskil (enlightened writer) and scholar Rashi Fin (Samuel Joseph Fuenn) was published, describing the history of Vilna and its Jewish community. The book was called Kiryah Ne’emanah (Faithful City), describing Vilna in biblical terms used for Jerusalem. Had the name “Jerusalem of Lithuania” existed, Fin would have used it. It is, rather, the opposite: from the name of the book, the nickname was derived. The Vilna Yiddishist and secular movements, as well as modern Hebrew poetry, adopted the name, proud to continue the tradition of the Vilna Gaon.

...Like Jena and Weimar, Cambridge and Oxford, Vilna was a small town, a cultural center serving an immense hinterland. The ties between Vilna and the network of small towns were very close, people travelled back and forth, the city served as a kind of ‘shopping center’ and cultural focus for the whole area, and many small towns fulfilled important roles as well: famous yeshivas were located in small towns such as Volozhin, Mir, Ponevezh; a major Hasidic sect, Chabad, that emerged in eastern Lithuania, had its capital in Lubavitch, a town of 1,667 Jews. Indeed, most Vilna writers and intellectuals were born elsewhere. On the other hand, many young people from small towns came to the capital to study in its Rabbinical Seminary or in its Hebrew and Yiddish Teacher’s Colleges, then to go back to a small town or emigrate to Palestine or the West.

Hence, when a city of merely 60,000 Jews felt that it was a major center of a worldwide culture, it was because of its cultural institutions and millions of Eastern European Jews they served and represented.41

Yet there was another metaphorical ‘relic’ of Jerusalem in the capital of Lithuania. In the 1660s, Vilnius’s Catholic bishop set up the pathway of the Calvary “imitating the Road of Christ’s Passion in Jerusalem.... It was an expression of gratitude to God for the liberation of he country from the Muscovites. ...After the wooden chapels burned down, 19 brick Baroque chapels, 7 wooden and one brick gates and a bridge across the Baltupis rivulet renamed by the biblical name of Cedron were constructed in the 18th cent.”42

Subsequently, the small suburb next to the Calvary acquired the name of Jerusalem, which is still used to this day. Needless to say, during the tsarist religious and linguistic persecution of the nineteenth century, Vilnius’s Calvary became the key religious site of the Polish and Lithuanian national resistance. The Cavalry was a Baroque processional site,

42 Venclova, Vilnius, 196.
and it belonged to the extensive and elaborate Catholic 'theatrical' geography of the city. Every year, it attracted tens of thousands, and on some occasions, perhaps, even hundreds of thousands of Catholic pilgrims from the Lithuanian provinces of the Russian empire. And while the Calvary’s topographical presence and spiritual influence were deliberately marginalized by the tsarist authorities, this Vilnius replica of the Christian topography of Jerusalem loomed large in the urban experience and imagination of the mostly rural Catholic population of Lithuania.

The local recreation of the Calvary was a spatial manifestation of the Catholic counter-Reformation spirit. It was a typical expression of the imaginative Baroque spectacle where mundane local topography was imbued with biblical meanings. It perfectly suited the public display of ephemeral ‘Sarmatian’ values, and by mapping out the spiritual centre of the Christian faith and through active practice of the geography of Jerusalem, Catholic religious aestheticism was hinting at the instability of the corporeal geography of Vilnius. Change was inevitable in the human world and the simulated landscape of Jerusalem meant to teach the pilgrims about the artificiality, superficiality and transience of their living surrounding.

The two ‘Jerusalems’ of Lithuania existed in two parallel worlds: one imprinted Vilne as the modern Jewish home and the other outlined the city as the traditional Catholic place. One was a metaphorical invention and the other was a symbolic gesture. In general, the perimeters of the Yeｒuｓhａｌａｉｍ ｄ’Лｉｔа were ‘invisible’ to the non-Jewish travellers or residents of the city; in contrast, the boundaries of the Catholic ‘Jerusalem’ were clearly demarcated with imposing architectural guardians -- the Baroque churches, chapels and gates.

Throughout the entire period of tsarist rule of Lithuania, the Jewish population of Vilna consistently comprised about a half of the city’s population, and one third of its residents were (mostly Polish) Catholics. Russian-dominated Vilna was thus a predominantly Jewish and Catholic city, and most of its Russian residents consisted of families of the tsarist administration and military officials. But few Russian bureaucrats, especially in the first part of the nineteenth century, stayed in the city long enough to make it a permanent family home. The constantly changing parade of governors of Vilna illustrates the transitory, semi-colonial and military nature of the Russian population. In a hundred and twenty years of tsarist administration, there were almost thirty governors of
Vilna -- all of them generals of the Russian army, who also served in similar capacities in other frontier regions of the empire. Among them there were prince Mikhail Kutuzov (1799-1801 and 1809-1812), a general who was largely responsible for the defeat of Napoleon in Russia, general-lieutenant Leontij Bennigsen (1801-1806), general Alexander Rimski-Korsakov (1806-1809 and 1812-1830), general-adjutant Vladimir Nazimov (1855-1863), general-adjutant Mikhail Muroviev (1863-1865), who became known as the Muroviev the Hangman, and general-adjutant Konstantin von Kaufmann (1865-1866), under whose command the Russian troops finalized the conquest of Central Asia in the 1880s.

Still, it would be wrong to assume that all Russians in nineteenth-century Vilna were imperial ‘colonists’. In general, Vilna was a city of transient population and many of its residents, one way or the other, were immigrants. But where as its Jewish, Polish and Byelorussian inhabitants came from the territory of the Lithuanian grand duchy (that is, they were ‘locals’), many Russians came from outside its historical perimeters. For centuries prior to the tsarist rule Vilna had a relatively significant Russian population, and the presence of the Greek (Russian) Orthodox church in Lithuania stretched back to the legendary beginnings of the city. A shrine or a secluded monastery was always the social and political centre of the fledgling Russian Orthodox community of Vilna. Many wives of (pagan) Lithuanian grand dukes were Greek Orthodox and came from the Russian princely families. One of the first Christian churches of Vilna, sanctified decades before the official Catholic conversion of the country, was established by the wife of a fourteenth century Lithuanian duke. And the first Christian martyrs of Lithuania were three local Greek Orthodox converts who were persecuted by a pagan ruler of the duchy. The close and sometimes intimate connections between Vilna and the Byzantine church, or for that matter, between Lithuania and Moscow, were never severed, and even at the time of the Catholic counter-reformation of the Baroque era, the city continued to function as the westernmost stronghold of Russian Orthodoxy. In short, while for most Russian

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44 On the geopolitical and ideological significance of the three Orthodox church saints of Vilna, see Darius Baronas, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai: gyvenimas ir istorija* (Vilnius: Aidai, 2000).
bureaucrats and travellers Vilna usually implied Jewish and/or Catholic urban identities, it was not exactly an alien or unfamiliar city.

Tsarist rule over Vilna and Lithuania, which nominally started in 1795 and in practice, ended in 1915, can be segmented into several distinct socio-political epochs. In general, imperial Russian history is divided according to the ruling years of the emperors: Paul I (1796-1801), Alexander I (1801-1825), Nicholas I (1825-1855), Alexander II (1855-1881), Alexander II (1881-1894) and Nicholas II (1894-1917). Yet in the lands of Poland-Lithuania, the hundred and twenty years of the Russian domination are punctuated by three insurrectionary wars -- 1812, 1830-1831 and 1863-1864 -- and the 1905 revolution. All these events significantly altered both the political nature of the imperial regime and the social and cultural evolution of the region. Hence, it is customary, from the standpoint of Polish and Lithuanian historiography, to divide the Russian rule of Lithuania into four periods: 1795-1831, 1831-1864, 1864-1905 and 1905-1915.

The period before the 1830-31 insurrection was marked by administrative tolerance of non-confrontational Polish and Lithuanian cultural activities. Overall, many traditional institutions and customs of Lithuania, such as its legal code (the Lithuanian Statute adopted in the sixteenth century), the social privileges of local nobility, and the dominance of the Catholic church, were upheld. But political persecution and national censorship in Vilna increased after the discovery of the Polish 'revolutionary' plot among the students of the university in 1823. (Frank decided to leave Vilna because of these persecutions.)

The university contributed greatly to the Polish and Lithuanian cultural and educational evolution -- its most famous literati students were the Romantic poets Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Slowacki, and its most celebrated scholar was the Polish historian, Joachim Lelewel. After 1812 the university became the key centre of Polish intellectual resistance to tsarist domination over the region. Yet overall, the university's educational goal was to educate a new generation of administrators and experts, such as doctors, geographers and geologists, for the entire Russian empire. Therefore, its pedagogical emphasis was on practical and scientific disciplines, especially the medical and natural sciences. Many professors and students of the university were loyal subjects of the empire, but some became actively involved in clandestine and somewhat subversive intellectual activities. In 1823, after one student wrote a pro-Polish slogan on the blackboard in one of the classrooms, the tsarist authorities started an extensive investigation of the
extracurricular student organizations. The investigation uncovered the existence of secretive Masonic-type organizations among the students and the Russian governor ordered the imprisonment of the suspected 'rebels'. After the completion of the investigation several students were banished to Siberia, some were stripped of their noble status (only nobles could attend the university) and sent to the Russian army as privates (at the time, military service for forced recruits usually lasted for twenty-five years), and many more were ordered to leave the university and subsequently went into exile. One of the arrested activists was the geologist and mineralogist Ignacy Domejko (1801-1889), who ended up in Chile and in 1867 became the rector of Santiago University.\textsuperscript{45}

After 1823 the Russian administration also introduced a new educational curriculum for the schools of Lithuania. The teaching of history and geography, for instance, was ordered to be conducted exclusively in the Russian language, instead of the customary Polish. Since most of the history and geography lessons were concentrated on ancient, mythological and/or exotic times and places, and since modern (regional) history and contemporary (local) geography was not part of the curriculum, the tsarist authorities were not so much trying to eradicate the specific local knowledge of the Polish-Lithuanian historical past and its geography as attempting to situate the recently incorporated Lithuania within the autocratic Russian map of the world. \textsuperscript{46} To put Russian spellings on the names of ancient Greeks and Romans or to frame the Biblical past and European history within the Cyrillic letter-signs was to remove the local Catholic world from its western European traditions.

The university was closed in 1832 by the degree of Nicholas I after the suppression of the military Polish-Lithuanian insurrection. In place of it, the Russian authorities opened the Medical Academy, which was liquidated in 1842 and the Catholic Academy (Serninary), which was transferred to Saint Petersburg in 1844. Most of the institutional resources of the University -- the profossors, library materials and archives -- were transferred to other Russian academies, especially the newly established universities of Kharkov and Kazan.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{45} The Cordillera Domeyko in the central part of the Andes (around Lakes Titicaca and Poopo) is named in his honour, as also the Chilean town of Puerto Domeyko; see Valentin Griškevičius, \textit{Dešimt kelių iš Vilniaus} (Vilnius: Mintis, 1972), 181-194.
\textsuperscript{46} For more on the Russification of the Lithuanian educational system, see Aleksandravičius and Kulakauskas, \textit{Carų valdžioje: Lietuva XIX amžiuje}, 53-106.
\textsuperscript{47} Alvydas Jancevičius, \textit{Vilniaus Universitetai} -- 400 (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1979), 43-66.
The key targets of Russian repressions were the Polish-speaking Lithuanian nobility and the Catholic church. In the official Russian mind, especially after 1812 and 1832, Catholic Lithuania was a hostile territory. While both the Russian and Polish-Lithuanian nobles expressed the same economic and social interests to preserve the institution of serfdom, there was little mutual friendship or even respect between the two nobilities. Certainly, some families of high Russian aristocracy intermarried with the families of Polish-Lithuanian magnates, but overall there was no trust between the ‘Sarmatian’ and Russian nobles. Many Polish-Lithuanian noble families suffered economically and physically from the military defeats of 1794, 1812 and 1831, and they could not forget the brutalities of the tsarist regime. Conversely, too many Russian (noble) officers witnessed the Polish-Lithuanian ‘betrayal’ and ‘deceitfulness’ during the Napoleonic wars. Indeed, the honorary Polish title of szlachta in the context of Russian vernacular and literature became synonymous with (Polish) pretentiousness, dishonesty and vulgarity.48

In the early 1800s there were several hundred thousand Polish and Lithuanian nobles living in the Russian empire. Numerically they outweighed the Orthodox nobility, and the ruling class of the empire could not absorb such a large number of the potentially disloyal and foreign group. Hence, the Russian administration attempted to reduce the number of Lithuanian noble families by either dispossessing them from their properties or by refusing to accept their ancient claims of noble status. Since many Lithuanian nobles possessed no records of their ennoblement, many families, especially from the ranks of the impoverished szlachta, were downgraded to the status of free peasantry or poor urban bourgeoisie.49 This large disenfranchised class was probably one of the most anti-Russian and anti-tsarist social groups in the region. On the other hand, because the members of this downgraded class had no means of economic survival, they heavily depended on the availability of various government positions -- scribes, statisticians, accountants, teachers, surveyors, nurses, veterinarians, painters, inspectors, musicians and censors.

Ideally, the autocratic tsarist administration relied on the institutionalized religious organizations for moral and social support, but in Lithuania the religious loyalties of many

48 For more on the Russian-Polish cultural and political interaction and representational stereotypes, see A.V. Lipatova and I. O. Shaitanov eds., Poliaki i Russkie (Moskva: Indrik, 2000).
49 Aleksandravičius and Kulakauskas, Carų valdžioje: Lietuva XIX amžiuje, 69-78.
of its inhabitants were if not anti-monarchical then certainly anti-Orthodox and anti-Russian. One of the largest religious groups in the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania were Catholics, and while the Catholic church rarely openly challenged the tsarist regime, many priests expressed support for the anti-tsarist insurrectionists. After 1831, as a punishment for the church’s support of the rebellion, the tsarist regime initiated an anti-Catholic campaign in the region: the church’s properties were requisitioned, monasteries closed down, Catholic shrines converted into Orthodox churches or some other governmental buildings, such as archives, military barracks, etc. For many educated Russians, the Jesuits became symbols of Catholic ignorance and hypocrisy, and by denigrating the Catholic church, the Russian autocracy managed to present itself to Russian society as a benevolent force that fought for a modern system of governance in a region corrupted by the Jesuit spirit of Baroque irrationality and ostentation. Thus, ironically, one of the most conservative and absolutist regimes of Europe took upon itself a duty to fight malicious (Polish) clericalism and (Catholic) religious fanaticism. However, the main victim of the tsarist religious oppressions in Lithuania was the Uniate church. In 1839, the Uniate church was liquidated and its few million adherents were forcefully integrated into the Russian Orthodox church. Through this act, the Russian authorities substantially increased the Russian Orthodox numbers in the region and were able to establish a visible numerical and architectural opposition to the Catholic church. Again, Vilna became the ground for the new religious confrontation.

After 1831, the presence of the Russian Orthodox church in Vilna increased dramatically. Two of the most magnificent Baroque structures in the city -- the Catholic Saint Casimir Church which was modelled on the Il Jesu church in Rome and the Holy Trinity Church of the Basilian (Uniate) Monastery, with its most exquisite rococo decorations -- became the key Russian institutions of Vilna. In the 1840s, the Baroque façade and interior of Saint Casimir Church was altered in order to accommodate the specific aesthetic needs of Russian Orthodox iconography. The Basilian monastery was adapted to more peculiar political needs. Its southern block, like many buildings of other defunct monasteries, was turned into a prison where political detainees were kept before their sentence. In 1823-1824, Adam Mickiewicz and Igancy Domejko were held there among other prisoners who were arrested during the crackdown on local student

50 On the denominational and architectural alterations of the Saint Casimir Church, see Čaplinskas, Valdovų kelias, 115-140.
organizations. The prison was immortalized by Mickiewicz in his drama *The Forefathers Eve*: in one of the cells of the former monastery, Conrad, the character in the play "experienced an inner struggle with God and Satan, a spiritual revival and pronounced the Great Improvisation -- one of the most remarkable monologues in the history of world literature."\(^{51}\) The numerous participants of the 1830-1831 uprising were also imprisoned in the cells and from here -- through the Baroque gateway of the monastery -- local revolutionary Szymon Konarski was led to death in 1839.

In the Romantic spatial imagination, a prison cell plays an important role, but the architectural fusion of monastic austerity with modern political punishment proved to be irresistible for the wounded Polish society. Subsequently, the poetic narratives and biographical memories of the Basilian monastery-prison cells became integral parts of the territorially divided Polish cultural imagination: they served as monumental reminders of national oppression. Because of political instability, cultural repression and economic stagnation during most of the nineteenth century, there were few new impressive buildings constructed during the period in Vilnius. Hence, except in the case of some Russian Orthodox churches, architectural historicism and romanticism made very few inroads into the local cityscape. For Poles, this architectural lack was definitely complemented by narrative and representational elements of Romantic literature and visual arts, and from the time of Mickiewicz (1820s), Polish *Wilno* became a symbol of unconquered national culture.

While in general, especially after 1831, the Russian administration had attempted to stamp out or gloss over the visible Catholic and Polish topography of the city, its reaction towards the large Jewish population was more ambiguous. In contrast to most European societies, before the nineteenth century Russian contacts with the Jewish people were limited. Traditionally, very few Jews lived in Muscovy and Russia, and only with the quadruple division of Poland-Lithuania (1772, 1793, 1795 and 1815), did the expanding Russian empire acquire a large number of Ashkenazi Jews. In fact, in 1900, there were more than four and a half million Askhenazi Jews living in Russia -- almost two-thirds of European Jewry. The tsarist administration always treated Jews with great suspicion, and almost immediately after the incorporation of the annexed Commonwealth lands it placed...
restrictions on Jewish migration to other parts of the empire. The territory of the so-called Pale of Settlement roughly coincided with the lands of the former Commonwealth, so most historic Russian towns, with a few noticeable exceptions, and its vast countryside remained beyond the migratory and trade routes of the Polish, Lithuanian and Ukrainian Jewry. Thus, in contrast to the Christian residents of Lithuania and White Russia (Ruthenia), most Russians, especially peasants and small town dwellers, had very little exposure or personal contact with the Jewish people and their religion, tradition and culture.

The large concentration of Jews in the Pale allowed an unparalleled flourishing of Jewish cultural, social and religious life: “It was the Pale together with Galicia and Moldavia that became the heartland of Ashkenazic Jewry. And it is from this part of the Ashkenazic world that some of the most important developments in modern Jewish history arose -- Hassidism, Zionism, and, of course, Yiddish literature and scholarship.”

And the Lithuanian provinces of Russia which fell under the jurisdiction of the Vilna general-governorship had one of the highest levels of Jewish concentration in Europe. According to the first official Russian census of 1897, there were about seven hundred thousand Jews -- or roughly fifteen percent of the total population -- living in the three gubernias that comprised the region.

On many occasions, the tsarist authorities attempted to eliminate the communal autonomy and national distinctions of the Jews. For instance, in 1844, the Kahal, the oldest self-governing body of the Jewish community, and the Jewish population were brought under the (centralized) administrative imperial system. In the same year, Russian-language schools for Jewish children were established throughout the Pale and two state run rabbinical seminaries were set up in Vilna and Zhitomir. However, because of the influence of anti-autocratic and socialist ideas among the students, the seminaries were closed down in the 1870s. In 1851, Jewish males were prohibited from wearing traditional garments and sidelocks (peot), and married Jewish women were ordered to stop shaving their heads.

Vilna possessed a big Jewish quarter located in the middle of the old town, a crowded district that encompassed several streets, lanes and numerous courtyards. This Jewish neighborhood was fully encircled by the massive Baroque domes and spires of Catholic Vilna. The main commercial street of the city, Nemiecka (German) Street, cut through the Jewish quarter and its many commercial establishments were owned by the

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Jews. Still, by the end of the nineteenth century, many more Jews lived outside this medieval old-town 'urban ghetto' -- the poor mostly resided in the outlying wooden suburbs and the richer, middle class and often more assimilated Jews tend to move into modern apartment buildings in the so-called New City district. Most synagogues, including the Great Synagogue, shuls (the city had about one hundred of them), mikvahs and other socio-religious institutions were concentrated in and around the old Jewish neighborhoods and suburbs, but the two Jewish cemeteries, for instance, were located outside them. In other words, the Jewish community and spaces were not confined to one single area of the city and invariably, there was a web of cross-city spatial relationships between various private, communal and/or commercial Jewish places.53

As a rule, the cadence of public life in nineteenth-century Vilna were dictated by the civil and ceremonial calendar of the Russian empire. One of the first changes institutionalized by Catherine II in the newly acquired territories was the replacement of the Gregorian calendar with the Julian (Russian Orthodox) calendar. Hence, the holiday and religious cycles in Vilna acquired a tripartite synchrony. The first cycle was marked by the imperial calendar with its public ceremonies commemorating important state events, such as the arrival of the imperial family or the birthday of the emperor, and the holy days of the Orthodox calendar. It was a requirement for all civil servants, including the academic professors, teachers and students, to attend these official ceremonies. A second semi-official cycle followed the rhythm of the local (Catholic) calendar. As a rule, it included some massive and popular events that combined religious and commercial activities, especially during the Saint Casimir and Saint Peter Days that were marked by traditional markets. However, increasingly, especially immediately after the 1831 and 1863 insurrections, the celebration of Catholic calendar was curtailed by the tsarist authorities: religious processions were not allowed to leave churchyards, sermons were censored and public access to the ceremonies was controlled. In addition, the commemoration of all patriotic Polish-Lithuanian events was forbidden. This administrative control contributed to the creation of the alternative or conspiratorial sense of the holiday cycle -- the officially unacknowledged but publicly known patriotic Polish calendar. Furthermore, at the end of Russian rule, with the introduction of the celebration of May Day, the illegal socialist

53 Cohen, Vilna, 91-113.
‘calendar’ was also added to this clandestine holiday regime. The third temporal order followed the religious Jewish calendar and as a rule, since many commercial establishments were owned and run by the religiously orthodox Jews, Saturday Sabbath was a holy day in Vilna. In summary, the provincial flow of life in Vilna was interposed by a whole array of holidays. In their own significance, the Passover could easily compete with the Catholic or Orthodox Easter for its festive mood and the Yom Kippur paralyzed the city as much the Catholic All Souls Day when, in both cases, thousands of people flocked into cemeteries. Of course, the Jewish holidays and traditional life patterns were never officially recognized — and even the celebration of Catholic holidays was restricted -- but they nevertheless greatly influenced and altered daily routines and annual cycles of Vilna’s public and commercial life.

ALEKSANDR OSTROVSKY

In Vilna, the demonstrations started already in 1861; revolutionary hymns were sung inside the churches and in the open, public spaces — in front of the Mother of God of the Ostra Brama Gate. On August 6, 1861, there was a grand procession with revolutionary banners, nationals flags and symbols of Poland and Lithuania; singing revolutionary hymns, the huge crowd moved towards the outskirts of the city, to the Pohuliananka suburb, in order to greet another procession that, according to the rumors, was coming to Vilna from the direction of Kovno. The local administration ordered the soldiers and Cossacks to seal off the city.... The demonstrators, headed by fanatical young ladies, tried to squeeze through the rows of the soldiers guarding the city. By the way, according to some eyewitnesses, the dames and mademoiselles were using their umbrellas as dangerous weapons: they pointed their sharp ends to the faces of the soldiers and Cossacks. The Cossacks of course lost their patience and took up their rifles — the crowd was finally dispersed. Because of this confusion, there were some casualties; a nobleman, named Krzyzewicz, and an artisan, Velc [Weltz ?] were injured, but both quickly recovered from their wounds. The Polish newspapers abroad announced that there was a great battle in the city, and many people were killed or drowned in the river of Vilya. The Catholic bishop of Vilna, Krasinski, ordered a three-week vigil for the (phantom) victims of this battle. (“To the inauguration of the monument to M.N. Murievov in Vilne”, 1898.)

Figure 4.2: Vilno. Postcard from the 1890s. Source: Aleksandras Kubilas, *Sanctuaries of Vilnius in Old Postcard* (Vilnius: Lithuanian Association of Collectors), 136. Note the 'Russified' Baroque facade of the Saint Nicolas Russian Orthodox Cathedral, former the Saint Casimir Catholic Church.

Figure 4.3: Vilna: the monument to count Muraviev. Postcard from around 1905. Source: Piotr Popinski and Robert Hirsch, *Dawne Wilno na pocztówce* (Gdansk: Wydawnictwo Holm, 1998), 21.
Because of the transient nature of the nineteenth-century Russian population of Vilna, very few Russian residents or travellers left any impressions of the city. In the Russian literary purview, Vilna seemed to become permanently associated with the 1812 war, when many officers and soldiers of the tsarist army were stationed there. The Russian exposure to Vilna intensified after the construction of the railway, when the city became the intermediary locale between Saint Petersburg, the imperial capital of Russia, and western Europe. Inevitably, Russian memories and reflections of Vilna became marked by the sense of geographical mobility: arrival and departure became the key narrative modes of experiencing Russian Vilna.

One of the first Russian railway passengers who in 1862 passed through Vilna on his way to western Europe was the renowned playwright Aleksandr Ostrovsky (1823-1886). At the time of his trip, Ostrovsky was almost forty years old and was already widely recognized as the most successful, if somewhat contentious, drama writer in Russia. He was born in Moscow: a son of a wealthy business lawyer, who received his ennoblement through his second marriage with a Swedish baroness. Hence he grew up in an urban environment, but his education corresponded to that of a wealthy Russian nobleman. He had private tutors and was educated in many classical and contemporary European languages. Because of his father’s professions, Ostrovsky became familiar with the stories of the scandalous corruption of various Moscow business families, which he often used as the basis of his plays. But despite his affluent family background, Ostrovsky was not a rich man. The writer’s father cut him off from the family’s wealth when he refused to abandon his common-law wife.

His best play, The Storm, was published and staged in 1860: it was commissioned by the Russian Marine Ministry but it dealt with the unhappy, oppressive domestic environment of a small Volga town. The unfulfilled love of a woman was the main theme of this provincial tragedy, which ends with the suicide of the main heroine. The Storm was enthusiastically received by the theatre critics and official censors, but his other plays had much more controversial beginnings. The two critical themes of Ostrovsky’s plays were the degrading social conditions of capitalism and women’s unequal position in Russian society. His first play, A Family Affair, was personally censored by the tsar, Nicholas I, for creating an unsympathetic picture of the Russian merchant class. Ostrovsky also became one of the main literary contributors to the liberal-democratic journal, Sovremennik. In the 1850s, as a result of his critical liberalism, he was put under police surveillance and lost his civil
service job. Still, by the mid-1860s, despite some of his ‘controversial’ social topics, Ostrovsky became the leading Russian playwright. His literary and social interests always led him to the criticism of contemporary conditions in Russia, and his whole life he was hoping to establish an independent theatrical community outside the tsarist censorship. In the end, the popularity of his plays was so great that even foreign visitors to Russia were advised to attend his plays in Moscow’s drama theatre. According to the recommendation of the Murray travel guide, even if the visitor “may not understand the dialogue, he may study the manners and customs of the country as depicted on the stage.”

Before his trip to western Europe, Ostrovsky resolved to write a journal detailing his immediate impressions of the passing sites. His first stop was Vilna.

By the spring of 1862, the rebellious and anti-tsarist mood had engulfed Poland and Polish Wilno stood close to revolutionary Warsaw. Mass demonstrations, public anti-Russian outcries and private pro-Polish national sentiments were evident on the streets of Vilna. As a result of these activities, the government had banned all unlicensed public gatherings in the city: Vilna was under siege from two antagonistic sides - the repressive tsarist government and the energizing revolutionary and nationalist mood of local Polish populace. Consequently, when Ostrovsky (with his spouse and a family friend) arrived in the capital of Lithuania during the catholic Holy Week and Jewish Sabbath, he was met by the electrifying spectacle of the rising Polish nationalist spirit and the early spring landscape. His diary captures the city on the brink of the revolt:

April 2/April 14
We left Petersburg on April 2 (Monday) at 3 p.m. ... We decided to stay in Vilna and see local sights

April 3 (15) Lithuania
At 12:30 p.m. we arrived in Vilna. The weather is splendid, not a sight of snow; in Moscow, this sort of weather only occurs in late April. We stayed at the hotel of Zhmurkevich, behind the Ostra Brama gate. From the first sight, the city amazes you in its originality. All of it is built in stone, with narrow, unbelievably

55 Handbook for Travellers in Russia, Poland and Finland, 173.
56 For more on the spread of the rebellion into Lithuania, see Ona Maksimaitienė, Lietuvos sukilėlių kovos 1863-1864 (Vilnius: Mintis, 1969).
57 On the political situation in Vilna/Vilnius in the early 1860s, see J. Jurginis, V. Merkys and A. Tautavičius, Vilniaus miesto istorija: nuo seniuasių laikų iki Spalio revoliucijos, 265-274.
clean streets, high-houses with tiled roofs and everywhere you look, there are majestic churches. We had lunch at Yodke’s; it is a small tavern – just two rooms – and is serviced only by a young lad, the daughter of the owner and the owner himself (a comedian) who constantly reaches for a glass of Madeira. After the lunch, we drove to view the town. Above the city looms a mountain with several peaks; on one of the cone-shaped peaks, there is a tower. These hills and the city present an incredibly and uncommonly beautiful picture. We hired a coach, so we could drive up to the mountain; passed by the church of Saint John, the governor’s house, the Cathedral (went inside), and reached the banks of the flooded Vilya River; at the nearby military barracks we left our coach and started to climb the steep slope of the hill. We very much wanted to look at the city from above and by four o’clock, well rested, we somehow reached the top of the mountain: apparently, the site is guarded by the military bastion and we were rudely commanded to get down without any delay. During our walk down the slope, a sweet student from local gymnasia gathered some early spring flowers (anemones). He gave them to us. Flowers are already blooming here, while the fresh grass is just emerging. We went back to our coach and decided to drive to see the church of Saint Peter and Paul. On the right, there is the Vilya River, and on the left, there are hills covered with pine trees: a perfect place for a summer outing. The exterior of the church is nothing special, but the [Baroque] interior is splendid – all walls and domes are fully plastered. One can rarely encounter such an opulent spectacle.

April 4 (16)
The weather is overcast and cold: we trotted through the city, went to the Bernardine Church (architecturally, the most significant in the city). In addition, we went to the Saint John Church, a huge and magnificent building and full of people. In front of the church, a pretty Polish maiden assumes a duty of the church superintendent, and by thumping her delicate fingers on the plate, she tries to get the attention of the public. In general, there are plenty of beautiful Polish women in Vilna, and on some occasions, one can see even a few good-looking Jewish women. Here, for the first time, I saw the passion of the Catholic piety: men and women on their knees, with prayer books in their hands, in a complete seclusion of prayer; and this piety is seen not only in the churches, but also in the streets, especially, in front of the Ostra Brama Gate. This site is a local shrine – above the gate is the chapel with a miracle-working icon of the Mother of God, an icon of Greek [Orthodox] origins. (Initially, it belonged to the Orthodox, but later, somehow, the Poles acquired it.) At the Bernardine Church we saw a man in prostration, spread like a cross on cold stone floor. All churches are open all day long, and they are full with many praying people, mostly women, who during the Holy Week, look extremely solemn. In contrast, the Jews celebrate their Passover: finely dressed and clean (unlike the regular days), they stroll in the company of their overdressed wives and children. Most Jewish women decorate their headgear in the traditional way; we met very many Jewesses, all dressed in simple, grey blouses who on top of their wigs wear (black) laced veils adorned with colorful ribbons and flowers. We breakfasted at Yodke’s, where I had a very good local fish – Sielawa…. Honestly, Polish servants are very good, meticulous but without being too slavish; the same could be said about local coachmen.

April 5 (17)
Woke up -- snow! We packed and went to the train station; we forever waited for the train; incidentally, delays are quite common with the French, and the criticism and scorn they receive are well deserved. In general, they are rude, and above all, they are scoundrels and charlatans.... Cold and snow. In Verzhblovo - - a European style restaurant-buffet.

Prussia. Eydtikuhnen. Order and accuracy...our train was late and we missed the train to Berlin.\textsuperscript{58}

Ostrovsky -- like most intellectual Russians of the time -- seemed to be scornful of the assumed superiority of western Europeans, but in Vilna he did not try to mask his curiosity about the non-Russian ways of urban life. (Since many of the state railway operations in Russia, especially in their initial stage, were funded by French banks and were run by French companies, it is possible that the track between Vilna and Verzhblovo was one of the French run operations; hence the note about the ‘European style’ station buffet.) The playwright was intrigued by the local display of Catholic piety and the Jewish festive mood which he found both amusing and intriguing. Yet the strenuous piety displayed by local Catholics was more than just a customary expression of religious devotion during Holy Week; it was a public act of elaborate revolutionary and national defiance. Under marshal law, all mass social activities, except religious ceremonies, were banned. And in 1862, the Catholic churches of Vilna became the sites of revolution -- public prayers and solitary manifestations of religious zeal were acts of defiance. Moreover, this was a national revolution that was in many ways instigated and sustained by women, whose active church presence was immediately noticed by Ostrovsky. At this point, the urban revolutionary activities still had an aura of social coquetry and political rebelliousness: women’s dresses adorned with national colours and/or excessive mortuary symbols indicated a national hope and numerous tsarist orders for calm were often ridiculed by spontaneous pageants of fashion-conscious Polish-Lithuanian ladies. This was only one (visible) sight of the revolution, but until it turned into an outright military uprising, which moved the revolutionary activities from cities into the countryside, it was perhaps the most uncontrollable and, hence, depending on the point of view, most threatening or liberating act of national insubordination.

In many ways, Ostrovsky was still able to witness the Polish-Lithuanian revolution a domestic affair -- a festive display of traditional piety mixed with modern chic. (The fact

that the Jewish population of Vilna incidentally ‘joined’ this festivity only strengthened the illusion of the unpolitical, cross-denominational and family-like character of the spring celebration.) Yet the geopolitical realities were different: Lithuania was slipping away from direct imperial control -- open rebellion was in the air -- and for the tsarist regime this was enough to unleash violent forms of suppression. In 1865, the Murray guide for Russia warned its travelling readers about the displeasing social and political panorama of Lithuania: ‘The repressive measures of Gen. Mouravieff [M. N. Muraviev] in 1863 and 1864 were dated from Wilna. Here the leaders of the hopeless insurrection in the provinces were confined, tried, hung and shot. The reduction in the N.W. provinces by deportation to distant parts of the empire is variously estimated at 50,000 to 100,000 souls.’

MIKHAIL MURAVIEV

The arrival of Mikhail Muraviev (1796-1866) in Vilna in May of 1863 marked the end of the era: before his appointment as the administrative and military ruler of Vilna, the region was still more or less regarded by the Russian authorities as the ‘Polish’ and Catholic provinces of the empire. Muraviev, with the support of the tsarist government, made it his task to make Lithuania linguistically and ‘nationally’ a truly Russian province. Hence, he divided everything in the region into two parts: the foreign and illegitimate, that is Polish and Catholic, and native and legal, that is Russian and Orthodox. The other local inhabitants of the region -- its Lithuanian and Byelorussian rural population and even its Jewish town residents -- were seen as the demographical ‘prize’ of the battle between Poland and Russia.

Muraviev was personally familiar with Lithuania and with political radicalism. In his youth, he participated in the 1812 War and was later active in some of the most liberal circles of Russia. His brother was one of the Decembrists, a group of Russian officers who unsuccessfully tried to overthrow Nicholas I in 1825. The future governor-general of Vilna seemed to switch his loyalties at the right time, and by the early 1830s, he was appointed a governor of Grodno gubernia, one of the provinces of Lithuania. He was one of the first

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59 Handbook for Travellers in Russia, Poland and Finland, 51.
60 For more on the official tsarist national policies see Theodore R. Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996).
who suggested the closure of the University in Vilna as a part of a “complete unification of the region with the Russian empire.”

In 1863, however, the strengthening of the ‘organic’ ties between Russia and Lithuania required more than just elimination or radical alteration of educational institutions. It required a complete assimilation of Lithuania and Muraviev was sent to Vilna to realize this. Even for the centralized tsarist administration, Muraviev’s powers in Lithuania were extraordinary. He was the governor-general of Vilna, which included several gubernias, and the supreme military commander of the North-Western provinces. His long-term duty was to root out Polish national sentiments from the Lithuanian resistance, but his immediate responsibility was the ‘pacification’ of the Polish-Lithuanian military resistance. In order to achieve this goal, he was given the exclusive power to suspend any imperial laws and because he deeply mistrusted the local population, the new governor-general came to Vilna with a bureaucratic and military command team entirely assembled in Saint Petersburg by him personally. This was not just an imperial or colonial administration, but an occupational force, supported by a hundred thousand tsarist troops, Russian civilian personnel, Orthodox priests and teachers. One of the first acts of Muraviev’s administrative regime was to prohibit teaching in the Polish language in all (public and private) elementary and secondary schools. Soon, this linguistic prohibition was extended to the entire public sphere -- it was forbidden to speak Polish in public (this ridiculous law could never be fully enforced and it simply faded away). In addition, the local nobility were stripped of their social privileges and basic rights en masse. For example, those nobles who were not exiled or emigrated -- whose properties were simply requisitioned by the state -- were not allowed to sell their properties to a Polish buyer, and they could allocate their possessions only by will to their immediate family members.

Although direct military actions against the rebels took place outside Vilna, the city was itself a battlefield of a different kind. It was mostly a struggle between the tastes of local Catholic women and Muraviev’s sense of imperial order. Just two weeks after his appointment, the new governor-general issued one of the most bizarre decrees in the city’s history. The law explicitly forbade all local women to dress in black and/or wear any

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61 Egidijus Aleksandravičius and Antanas Kulakauskas, Carų valžioje: XIX amžiaus Lietuva, 71.
funerary decorations and jewelry. Even those women whose relatives had passed away
required a special permit from the police to wear black, and then public mourning gestures
could be expressed for no longer than had been established by local traditions. (Of course
many women had relatives killed by the tsarist army during military actions, but proving
that to the Russian police would be self-incrimination.) Punishment for non-compliance
was harsh: “the first strike -- a fine of twenty five rubles; the second strike -- a fine of fifty
rubles; and the third strike -- an arrest and sentence appropriate to the supporters of the
mutiny [which could mean exile].” The goal of this ‘fashion regulation’ was not so much
to punish local (Polish and Lithuanian) women, who often expressed their support for the
rebellion by wearing mourning clothes, but the exposure of local families’ disloyalties to
Russian rule. Any civil servant, for instance, whose “women in the household wear black in
public,” could “immediately lose his job.” Of course, wearing all kinds of patriotic and/or
revolutionary symbols and colors was also considered to be a “criminal manifestation” of
public disobedience.

The dictatorial abolition of fashionable mortuary symbols from the city was meant
to restore the illusion of imperial order. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Polish-Lithuanian
insurrectionists (and Russian soldiers) were dying outside the city, but public and even
private mourning was forbidden by the hardly enforceable administrative decree. But
once the rebellion was crushed at the beginning of 1864, Muraviev felt secure to bring
death back into the city. He personally initiated public hanging of the two most radical
leaders of the rebellion, Zygmunt Sierakowski (Sierakauskas) and Konstantiny Kalinowski
(Kalinauskas or Kalimouski), whose multilingual and multiethnic loyalties to local Polish,
Lithuanian and Beylorussian peoples allowed them to transgress the traditional social
boundaries that usually separated local nobility and the urban population from the
peasantry. (Hence, his nickname, the Hangman.) Some thirty years later, the suppression

63 Muraviev also initiated a strict official censorship of all forms of media, including, as I
mentioned above, a ban on public usage of the Polish language and the Lithuanian Latin
alphabet; for more, see Zita Medišaukienė, Rustyjos Cenzūra Lietuvoje XIX a. viduryje
(Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas, 1998).
64 “Sbornik razporiazhenii grafa Mikhaila Nikolaevicha Muravieva” in Russkaja literature
v Līte XIV-XX v., ed. Pavel Lavrinec, 217.
65 Ibid.
66 There were about 66,000 fighting rebels in Lithuania: 6000 of them were killed in action.
The Russian loses were much smaller - just over 300 soldiers were killed; see
Aleksandravičius and Kulakauskas, Carų valdžioje, 150.
of the rebellion was still officially celebrated by the tsarist authorities as the pacification of a mutinous region:

Rarely a rebellion, as extensive as the one that spread across the six gubernias of the North-Western region with the population of over six million people, was suppressed with so few victims. All former European revolutions and the British colonial insurrections cost many more lives than the revolt in the Russian North-West. The main concern of the imperial Russian government (including Muroviev) was to follow the principles of justice worthy of the responsible Government and only with a few incidents of capital punishment...it was possible to fight the terror that took over the entire region.67

The extinction of the ‘terror’ finally opened the possibility of the modern ‘re-spiritualization’ of the Russian landscape of Vilna.68 The Russian ‘body and soul’ of the city, so to speak, was resurrected through the abolition of the Baroque (or ‘Sarmatian’) topography of the city.69 And for more than a half of the century, Muraviev was officially credited for making Vilna a truly Russian city. In 1898, local authorities honored Muraviev’s memory by erecting a statue of him in front of the Governor-general’s palace (the renewed bishop’s palace). This was the first secular Russian monument in Vilna and although its was constructed too late for the general’s hundredth birthday anniversary, the speeches made during the opening ceremony nonetheless made clear the imperial importance of the governor:

After the suppression of the rebellion, Muraviev stayed in his appointed post, but this time, his goal was a total transformation of the internal, domestic life of the region. A thick layer of Polish dictum, like a deep and heavy snow-blanket, was covering the ancestral, familiar and dear Russian terrain of the region. This foreign mantle was swept away and the land was finally cleansed; the mutinous fire was also extinguished. However, there was still a pressing matter of ensuing the blossoming of the still weak samplings of the Russian life, language, education, morals, customs and the Orthodox Church that finally had taken their roots in this motherly Russian soil. Under the care of the administration, these Russian features, like nature in early spring, instantly sprouted, grew stronger, augmented and, later, fully matured. Finally, with their colossal abundance, they covered this entire precious ancestral Russian land. In those days, it was extremely important to utilize all resources so a Russian individual, the master of

68 See A.N. Muraviev, Russkaia Vilna (S. Peterburg, 1864). A.N. Muraviev was one of the brother’s of the general-governor of Vilna.
69 A good example of the official patriotic Russian vision of Vilna dominated by the ‘reactivated’ presence of local Slavic history and Orthodox topography can be find in A.K. Kirkor, “Gorod Vilno” in Zhivopisnaya Rossiya: Litovskoe i Belorusskoe Polesye, vol. 3 (S.Peterburg: Tipografia M.O. Vol’fa, 1882), 137-162; also V. Vasilevskii, “Ocherk istorii goroda Vilny” in Pamiatniki russkoi stariny v zapadnykh guberniakh, vol. 5-6 (S. Petersbur, 1972).
his own land, could rightfully assume his patriarchal throne. ...Thanks to Muraviev, local Russian life has been enlivened and empowered. Today, the Russian language is heard everywhere and Russian bureaucracy is evident in all corners of the region: the spiritual Russian life is whirling, Orthodox churches are shining, and everybody is delighted. A resolute hope for a bright Russian future has been born.

In Vilna, where Muraviev lived and worked, in this old Russian-Lithuanian capital, from time immemorial, there were always many Orthodox shrines. ... And on October 22, 1864, on the George [Georgievskij] Square, following the idea of the general, a new stone chapel was build in honor of the plious duke Saint Alexander Nevsky. The chapel was consecrated to the "memory of brave soldiers who died in the battles of the suppression of the Polish revolt of 1863.

Without any doubt, in 1863, like Minin and Pozharski, the citizens of Nizhni Novgorod, who saved Russia in 1612, count Muraviev rescued the North-Western region from the foreigners. [Two Russian national heroes who organized a resistance against the Polish-Lithuanian invasion of Moscow; a grand monument was erected to them in the Red Square, in front of the Moscow's Kremlin in 1818.] In Biblical times, in a similar fashion, the Judaic nation was saved from the threats of heathens. ... The entire country of Russia bows to the heroic acts of M.N. Muraviev and his commitment to the North-Western provinces of Russia. Therefore, dear Russian reader, when the joyous day arrives of the inauguration of the monument to count M.N. Muraviev in the city of Vilna, be ready, in body and soul, to rush to this glorious, national Russian celebration. And when you see the monument is being unveiled and you finally see the silhouette of this great Russian statesman, from the bottom of your heart, exclaim your true feelings with a strong hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!

However, the ‘nourishing motherly Russian soil’ of Vilna took some years and even decades to produce any desirable imperial results and even after the removal of the threat of Polish revolt, the city still appeared and was experienced by most Russians as a foreign and even threatening place. Only a Russian Orthodox shrine could protect the Russian traveller from the Catholic and Jewish ‘terror’ of Vilna.

70 "Pamiati grafa Mikhaila Nikolaevicha Muravieva" in Russkaja literature v Litve XIV-XX v., ed. Pavel Lavrinec, 221-224
Figure 4.4: Vilna: Town Hall Square and Vielka Street by Ivan Panov, around 1870. From Picturesque Russia, vol. 3, 1882. Source: Vladas Gasiūnas, Ancient Lithuanian Graphic Arts (Vilnius: Vaga, 1995), 195.
In the late fall of 1866, after a short one-month long courtship, forty-six year old Feodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, proposed to Anna Grigoryevna Snitkina, his twenty-one year old stenographer. At the time, Dostoevsky, according to Anna Grigoryevna, "‘was standing at a crossroads and three paths lay open before him.’ He could go to the East -- Constantinople and Jerusalem -- and remain there, ‘perhaps forever’; he could go abroad to play roulette,’ and ‘immolate himself in the game he found so utterly engrossing’; or he could ‘marry again and seek joy and happiness in family life.’"^71 Anna Grigoryevna happily agreed with the writer’s marriage proposal and the wedding was celebrated in Saint Petersburg in the winter of 1867. Dostoevsky’s first marriage had taken place decades ago in “a miserable little Siberian village, in the most humble and modest circumstances, among people he scarcely knew” during his years of exile. “His second was celebrated amidst the splendors of the Izmailovsky Cathedral, brilliantly illuminated for the occasion and resounding with the voices of a superb chorus, surrounded by his family and closest friends and, at his side, a radiant young bride who adored him as man and artist.”^72 This was probably so far the happiest day in the lives of both newlyweds, a moment when the no longer young and quite bitter writer, and his enthusiastic and energetic wife could dream about the prospects of domestic tranquility and a productive artistic career.

This was especially true for Dostoevsky, who was still supporting his extensive family: his grown up stepson, his sister-in-law and her few children. The domestic relationship between this somewhat awkwardly extended family could be at the best described as hysterically co-dependent. Dostoevsky was crushed by his huge personal financial obligations to his relatives. Besides his own debts, he inherited enormous debt from his late brother, Mikhail, and was constantly assaulted by his relatives with financial requests. Repeated quarrels, accusations, deceptions, intimidations and demands were part of the daily domestic routine of Dostoevsky’s family. As a result, the writer could only write and read at night, and as his young wife soon discovered, it was simply impossible for the newlyweds to spend any time alone. Anna Grigoryevna’s “presence, moreover, was resented as that of an interloper who threatened to undermine the expectations of those

^72 Ibid., 169.
accustomed to live off Dostoevsky's by no means secure or uninterrupted income.” In addition, in the days immediately after the wedding, she also found out that Dostoevsky suffered from a severe form of seizure attacks. It was a terrible sight, remembered Anna Grigoryevna, after her first encounter with the writer's illness: while telling some story, Feodor Mikhailovich became “extremely animated” and then “there was a horrible, inhuman scream, or more precisely, a howl -- and he began to topple forward.”

A few weeks later, Dostoevsky’s family accused Anna Grigoryevna of aggravating the writer's seizure attacks by her unreasonable demands for personal attention and financial desires. The chaotic domestic surroundings became simply unbearable for both newlyweds. In particular, Anna's position in the family “became increasingly burdensome and frustrating; and it was largely because of her dissatisfaction, as well as her determination to save her marriage at all costs -- even at the price of some personal financial sacrifice -- that the Dostoevsky’s decided to go abroad in the spring of 1867.” The trip abroad was also encouraged by Anna’s Swedish mother, whose “view of life,” according to her daughter “was more Western and more cultured; and she feared that the good habits inculcated by my upbringing would vanish thanks to our Russian style of living, with its disorderly hospitality.”

For Anna, this was the first trip abroad, but Feodor Mikhailovich had already visited western Europe and he knew what to expect from the trip. The last time the writer visited Europe was in 1864 after the death of his first wife: he felt miserable there and hated everything that he considered to be European. Usually, Dostoevsky was penniless during his European travels, but he still managed to spend most of his money gambling in the casinos of Wiesbaden and other resort towns where the Russian aristocracy and intelligentsia gathered in great numbers. As a result, he was constantly asking for loans from his fellow compatriots (often other Russian writers, journalists and publishers) and was looking for ways to extend his credit with local businessmen. His desperate pleas worked on some occasions, but he never had enough money to cover all his debts and during his European tours he usually felt aversion and shame for his miserable financial and emotional state.

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73 Ibid., 184.
74 Anna Dostoevskaya, as quoted in Frank, Dostoevsky: the Miraculous Years, 185.
75 Ibid., 184.
76 Anna Dostoevskaya, as quoted in Frank, Dostoevsky: the Miraculous Years, 189.
He earnestly loathed what he considered to be the European laxity of morals, simply because he felt susceptible to its lures: “now I no longer see at all what will become of me,” he once wrote from Wiesbaden to his lover in Paris. But more than anything else, Dostoevsky despised the ‘capitalist’ greed of the local proprietors of hotels, restaurants and casinos who always demanded money from him to cover his incurred debts. The Russian writer felt violated by European (modern) cultural practices and social norms, and he experienced western Europe, especially the economically ‘efficient’ Germany and Switzerland, as something embarrassing and dishonorable. “Oh, if you had any idea how filthy it is to live abroad in one spot,” he angrily told Maikov, one of his oldest friends, ‘if you had any idea of the dishonesty, the meanness, the incredible stupidity and backwardness of the Swiss. Of course the Germans are worse, but these are not far behind! ...But to hell with them! There is no limit at all to how much I hate them.”

Despite Dostoevsky’s hatred of Germany, the family “left for their European ‘vacation’ on April 12/26, 1867, accompanied to the railroad station by Anna Grigoryevna’s relatives as well as by Emilia Feodorovna [sister-in-law], her daughter Katya, and Dostoevsky’s old friend the Milyukovs (Milyukov had come to say good-bye to him in the Peter and Paul Fortress before he left for Siberia, and greeted him at the railroad on his return). Pasha, in a fit of pique, was not among the party; he refused to join in wishing Godspeace and a pleasant voyage to his stepfather and his new bride.” The Dostoevskys were planning to go first to Berlin and then later to move to Dresden, “where they rented three rooms in a private home and apparently intended to settle.” The train trip from Saint Petersburg to Germany required a night stopover in Vilna, where the Russian express train to Warsaw had to be exchanged for a direct Prussian train to Berlin. (The trip to Vilna seemed to involve a short visit to the Pskov region.) Before leaving “Anna Grigoryevna had promised her mother to keep an account of the trip, and she purchased a notebook at the station just before the departure to fulfill that obligation. This shorthand diary, which she kept until the birth of her first child a little over a year later, provides a more extensive and detailed account of the day-to-day events in Dostoesky’s life than we possess for any other period of his existence.”

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77 Feodor Dostoevsky, as quoted in Frank, Dostoevsky: the Miraculous Years, 297-98.
78 Frank, Dostoevsky: the Miraculous Years, 191.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
and quite straitened circumstances in which they lived, the problem of adjusting to Dostoevsky’s continually changing mood, and the difficulties of living in a foreign environment where they did not know a soul and were constantly thrown back on themselves for companionship.”

For most railway travellers from Saint Petersburg to Germany, Vilna was truly the last big ‘Russian’ town; but since it was also the place where one had to change trains, it was the first town ‘preparing’ the travellers, so to speak, for their entrance into western Europe. In short, it was a liminal space. The Dostoevskys were no exception and in all earnest their journey to Europe begins in Vilna. The first entry into the dairy of Anna Grigoryevna covering the family’s twenty-hour visit of Vilna marks their ‘premature’ beginning with Europe:

2 o’clock in the afternoon of April 15 we arrived at Vilna. Very soon, the lackey from Han, the hotel on Bolshaya [Great] Street, picked us up and drove us to the hotel. At the gate of the hotel, we were stopped by an acquaintance of Feodor Michailovich, Mister Barsov. He told us that he lives here, in Vilna, and he will pick us up at six and then show us around the city. In the hotel we had to climb many stairs, because we were showed one room after the other — but all of them were terribly dirty. Fedya wanted to leave until we finally found a good room where we could peacefully settle for the night. The hotel servants were very strange — no matter how long you rang for their service, they never responded. There was something else uncanny about them: two of them were missing the left eye and Fedya thought that in this town, the one-eyed servants might not be out of ordinary, because those with a missing eye were probably less expensive to hire.

We had lunch and went to see the city. It looks quite big but with narrow streets, wooden walkways and tiled red roofs. Today is Easter Saturday, and because of it, the streets are very busy. Especially, there are many Yids with their wives, all covered in yellow and red shawls and laced scarves. The coachmen here are very cheap. We got tired of touring on foot and hired a coach; he drove us around the town almost for nothing. Everybody is in a holiday mood; the streets are full of people carrying various pastry and Easter cakes. The Catholic churches are full of parishioners. We went to say a prayer at the Russian church of Saint Nicolas the Miracle-Worker on Bolshaya Street. After that we briefly went to the Catholic church on Ivanovo Street. Later we saw a cross on the hill and the Viliya River. This is a very rapid river, but not wide; the view from the river bank to the distant mountains, the cross and the cemetery is very beautiful. It must be very nice here in the summer when everything is blooming. We visited the [Nevsky] chapel on Georgevsky [George] square that was recently erected to commemorate the pacification of the Poles; I liked it very much, it is such a beautiful, simple and elegant chapel. At seven p.m. we came back to the hotel, had some tea and went to sleep. All the hotel staff left for church, but before they went out, one of the servants had instructed us to lock ourselves in from the inside. Feodor Michailovich thought this was a perfect

81 Ibid.
scheme to rob us while everybody was away. He started to block all the doors with tables and our luggage. At night, at the quarter to two o'Clock, Fedya had a seizure, a very strong one; it lasted for fifteen minutes. In the morning I woke up at 7 o'Clock and went downstairs to the bakery to buy some Easter cake; the asking price for it was 45 kopecks, but I got it for 35. The Easter cake was very good; we were also served some cottage cheese and two eggs. Fedya and I brightened up. The hotel cost about 8 rubles. When we were ready to leave, some Yid came to our room and asked us to buy something from him. We had forgotten to bring along soap, so I bought from him a piece of egg soap for 15 kopecks. A friend of his offered to us some kind of Polish icon, that, according to his words, cost him 15 rubles, but he was willing to sell us for much cheaper; all the same, we declined to buy it. Before long, our entire room became full of Yids who wanted to help us; everyone was saying farewell and rushed to move our luggage, and, in the end, all of them of course asked for a tip. We were already sitting on the coach and started to move, when suddenly we were besieged by another Yid; he wanted us to sell two amber cigarette holders – we told him to get lost. At the station we waited for a very long time. We bought tickets for the direct train to Berlin, and paid 26 rubles and 35 kopeks each. We were the only passengers in the second-class carriage, so we had plenty of sleep. ... Around eight o'Clock in the morning we arrive at Verzhblovo, where we had our last meal in Russia. ... When we came back to our seats, some official, probably a German, came to our carriage and very rudely asked: “Name?” Fedya got angry and asked if he was a German and wanted to say: “What is your name?” After this incident, we got back our passports and moved on to Eydtkuhnen. The two stations (Verzhblovo and Eydtkuhnen) are separated by a rivulet, which separates Russia from the Prussian domain.\footnote{Anna Dostoevskaya, Dnevnik 1867 goda, ed. S. Zhitomirskaya (Moskva: Nauka, 1993), 4-6.}

This brief and somewhat tragic-comical encounter of the Dostoevskys with Vilna was the result of personal anxieties and the uncontrollable imagination of the writer. Anna Dostoevskaya’s diary served as a personal memento of the daily events, and, probably, was not intended for public consumption; but precisely because of this intimacy, it reveals the couple’s uncensored opinions and attitudes towards the Jewish and Polish inhabitants of the region. Yet it also, perhaps in an overdramatic way, illustrates the general Russian attitude towards Vilna in the years immediately after the 1863-1864 Polish-Lithuanian revolt. The city might have been a part of the Russian empire for some seventy years, but it certainly was still in the hands of foreign and/or antagonistic elements, such as the Poles and Jews. A patriotic and xenophobic Russian, such as Dostoevsky, felt assaulted from all sides: from the commercially savvy Jews to the politically treacherous Catholics. In general, except for some Russian Orthodox shrines, the city, despite its obvious pleasantness provided a hostile spectacle, which in the Dostoevskys’ case was even more sharpened by the celebratory mood of both groups of local residents: the Catholics who
were celebrating the Easter and the Jews honoring the Sabbath. (The Orthodox and Catholic Easter and Jewish Passover usually do not fall on the same week.)

The two local nationalities -- Catholic Poles and Jews -- intimidated the Dostoevskys in different ways. The Jews offended them with their insistent bazaar-like mercantilism, which in a typical anti-Semitic fashion was deemed to be a peculiarly Jewish ('Oriental') feature. As a 'philosophical' writer and religious critic, Dostoevsky espoused a theological condemnation of the Jews. Of course, the Dostoevskys, like many Russians of their class (the lower impoverished nobility) also expressed a negative view of what they perceived to be usurious capitalist practices of Jewish merchants. Thus despite having no direct exposure to the Jews prior to his trip abroad, for Dostoevsky, "‘Jew' and ‘usurer' were synonymous, an established fact that required no substantiation."83 But where his more practical wife was seemingly proud of her bargaining ability, Dostoevsky was keen to insist on 'decorous' and proper business transactions.

Still the Jews were a visible 'nuisance' and could be simply dismissed and dehumanized by employing derogatory labels: in the Dostoevskys's purview, "[the Jew] has even lost its title to his name; he is the "Yid" -- the zhid, zhidak, zhidishka, zhidyonok."84 In contrast, the (Catholic) Poles proved to be much more secretive and therefore a much more dangerous 'enemy' to the Russian spirit. The traditional animosity between the Russian and Polish intelligentsia had existed at least since the eighteenth century, but it became particularly visible during and after the Polish-Lithuanian insurrection. Dostoevsky was obsessed with an idea of the Polish conspiracy to annihilate the Russian empire and the Russian Orthodox soul, and his imagination and narrative ingenuity certainly fueled his anti-Polish mania. The writer was especially traumatized by the recent attempt to assassinate Alexander II, which paradoxically had nothing to do with the Polish-Lithuanian insurrection. On April 4, 1866, the Russian emperor was shot in Saint Petersburg while strolling in the park by a student named Dimitry Karakozov. The emperor was not hurt, but Karakozov was immediately "dragged to Alexander II, who personally took his pistol from him and asked if he were a Pole. It seemed inconceivable to the Tsar that an attempt on his life should be made by anyone but a foreigner; yet Karakozov, who came from a family of small, impoverished landowners and who had been expelled from the university, like Raskolnikov, for failing to pay his fees, replied: ‘Pure

84 Ibid., 56.
Russian.”  

Subsequently, “Count N.M. Muraviev, who had suppressed the Polish rebellion of 1863 with bloody ferocity -- thus acquiring the infamous cognomen of ‘the Hangman of Vilna’ -- was appointed head of the commission to investigate the background of the assassination attempt and given virtually the powers of a dictator.”  

Dostoevsky willingly or out of personal and financial fears -- as a political ex-convict, he was still under police surveillance -- applauded the dictatorial censorship instituted by Muraviev.

Dostoevsky also praised the editorial policy of the archconservative and Slavophile newspaper, Moskovskii Vedomosti (Moscow Gazette), for, in his opinion, delivering objective coverage of the situation. Katkov, the editor of the newspaper had the “conviction that the assassination attempt could only have originated in a Polish plot (even though Karakozov was thoroughly Russian), and his insinuation that a complicity with the Poles existed in the very highest court circles -- an Aesopian reference to the Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich, the Tsar’s brother, who had been Governor-General of Poland before the uprising and was known to have advocated a liberal policy.”

It is no wonder then that just a year after the assassination, Dostoevsky felt so vulnerable and lonely in the ‘mutinous’ city completely surrounded by its ‘deceitful’ inhabitants.

Yet there was another, more personalized reason for Dostoevsky’s anxiety that in many ways reflected the general xenophobic unease of the Russian Slavophiles, who while proclaiming the brotherhood among Slavs always tried to distance themselves from the Poles. Dostoevsky was born in Moscow into an impoverished Russian noble family: his father had served in the Russian army medical service and later became a hospital doctor, but his mother was from a family of wealthy Moscow merchants. More significantly, Dostoevsky family’s roots were intricately connected with the peculiar socio-religious landscape of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The writer’s grandfather was a Uniate archpriest in Polish-ruled Podolia (modern day western Ukraine) and the family claimed to descend from seventeenth-century Lithuanian nobility and was legally entitled to own land and serfs. The family’s ‘patrimonial home’ was in Dostoevo, northeast of Pinsk (modern day southern Belarus), in the region “of the continual strife between conflicting nationalities and creeds (Russian Orthodoxy and Polish Catholicism) and branches of the

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85 Frank, Dostoevsky: the Miraculous Years, 47.
86 Ibid., 48.
87 Ibid., 50.
88 For more on the Lithuanian origins of the Dostoevsky family, see Birutė Masionienė, “F. Dostojevskio kilmės klausimų” in Literatūrinių ryšių pėdsakais (Vilnius: Vaga, 1982), 7-35.
Dostoevsky family fought on both sides. The Orthodox Dostoevskys had belonged to the poor and disadvantaged noble class (the Orthodox nobility in Lithuania in general had fewer civil rights than the Catholics), and “sank into the lowly class of the non-monastic clergy.” The acceptance of the Uniate priesthood by Dostoevsky’s great-grandfather was an ideological compromise that meant to preserve certain social (noble) privileges of the family. The Uniate church which was seen by the tsarist authorities as a Jesuit theological invention to spread papal authority among the Orthodox peasantry was socially marginalized in Russia and the Dostoevsky’s family lost its noble status once the region was incorporated into the tsarist empire. However, Dostoevsky’s father, who like many other upper-class Uniates accepted Russian Orthodoxy, acquired a legal status of noble in the official Russian class system as a reward for his professional (medical) service. The children of Dr. Dostoevsky nonetheless “thought of themselves as belonging to the old gentry-aristocracy rather than the new service created by Peter the Great -- the class to which, in fact, their father had just acceded. But their actual place in society was in flagrant contradiction with this flattering self-image.” In summary, Dostoevsky belonged to the Russified part of the Lithuanian szlachta, and he personally exhibited some of the most enduring ‘Sarmatian’ habits: changeable political and religious loyalties, eccentric Christian piety, love of public spectacle, financial irresponsibility, temptation towards (western) European comforts and entertainment, unbalanced emotional outbursts, insistence on frivolous respect, extreme patriotism, petty patriarchalism, and above all, provincial obstinacy. By the mid-nineteenth century, these ‘Sarmatian’ qualities became fully integrated into the Russian social-cultural visualization of the empire: they became stereotypes or parodies of the Polish szlachta and Catholic clergy. For the Russian Slavophiles, these ‘Sarmatian’ stereotypes also represented the corrupt influence of Europe on the Slavic people.

While Dostoevsky was often critical of the Slavophile ideology, his behaviour in Vilna demonstrates his deep attachment to the idea of the Russian empire. The Dostoevskys traveled to Vilna ‘incognito’ and they seemed to try deliberately to avoid a guided tour of the city, which was quite popular at the time among visiting Russian celebrities. (Barsov, 89 Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: the Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849* (Princeton University Press, 1976), 8. 90 Ibid. 91 Ibid., 9.
when he met the couple at the station, had probably an intention to show them around the city, but the Dostoevskys deliberately missed an appointment with him.) Yet, it is impossible not to detect Dostoevsky’s unspoken desire to find a hospitable, familiar sanctuary in Vilna and to distance or isolate himself from the hazardous, non-Russian, environment in Anna’s chronicle of the day. (Anna Grigoryevna, on the other hand, seemed to be much more inclined to enjoy the festive scenery of the city.) Hence, his almost complete rejection and fear of local festivities was also probably an instinctive rejection of everything Catholic and Polish. In addition, “Dostoevsky’s horrified fascination with the Jesuits, whom he believed capable of any villainy too win power over men’s souls, may perhaps been stimulated by some remark about the creed of his forebears.”

Is it possible that he was conscious of his Uniate heritage and the fact of him being ‘trapped’ in the former stronghold of the Jesuit Order made him excessively pious? Did he fear ‘betraying’ his family’s socio-religious heritage? Did he feel guilty of his geographical deviance, his ‘Sarmatic’ roots? Was his frustrating reaction towards Vilna a symptom of self-hate?

His rather hectic rush to prove his imperial patriotism through devout visits to the Russian and Orthodox sites of Vilna was most likely a sincere religious act. But it was acted out more as an episode of public exoneration than private piousness. His noticeably erratic approach to Vilna, mixed with his genuine sarcasm, was not as imperialistically chauvinist as the official tsarist and Slavophile reactions towards the ‘unruly’ Poles and ‘uncultured’ Jews, but it surely expressed his monarchical, social and religious loyalties and pointed to his strong belief in the divine nature of the Russian autocracy. Moreover, it indirectly hinted at his greatest Russian fears of being trapped within the global schemes of European (in this case, Polish) nationalism and global (in this case, Jewish) capitalism.

Dostoevsky’s severe night-time seizure was possibly provoked by his emotional agitation which often resulted in fits. However, at that time, Dostoevsky fairly often experienced seizures, and Anna’s composed but concerned response is an indication of her familiarity with his medical condition. Still, her description of Dostoevsky’s barricade ‘revolution’ in the inn could be an indication of her sardonic approach to the writer’s anxieties had it not led to his physical meltdown. Hence, it is reasonable to imagine that her controlled alarm over his seizure attack (did she assume that Dostoevsky was going to read her diary?) had something to do with her discomfort about Feodor’s paranoia and their

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92 Joseph Frank, Dostoevsky: the Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849, 8.
loneliness. The Dostoevskys were definitely leaving their Russian home environment for the sake of their family's future happiness, and coincidentally or not, Vilna was the first place where the home, with all its familiar support and/or unpleasant domestic worries, was becoming more or less an inaccessible abstraction.

Vilna was still not a foreign land, but for the Dostoevskys like for many of their compatriots, the city provided very little 'national' or spiritual comfort. It was a place where Russian imperial insecurities, and one could say cultural and/or economic weaknesses, became obvious; and as such it was a geopolitically 'transparent' site. The city posed not so much an external threat to the empire, but an internal hazard to the Russian body and spirit. In other words, it was a domestic nuisance, an offensive but not cataclysmic site marked by a foreign body intrusion rather than an unmitigated foreign occupation. Still, while it offered only the pretence of a secure home, it nonetheless promised a possibility of a spiritual healing. So for many Russians, including the tsarist administrators of the post-1863 period, the 'reoccupation' of Vilna foremost implied a spiritual 'domestication' of its untamed physical character: a truly Russian home in Vilna must start from the building of a shrine.

Accordingly, the augmentation of the Russian spirit in Vilna that had been initiated by Muraviev started with the redecoration of the vertical Baroque spatiality of the city. In 1864-1868, the former Saint Casimir baroque church was transformed by the Russian architect Nikolaj Chagin into the Cathedral of Saint Nicholas -- the main Orthodox shrine of the general-gubernia of Vilna. The Baroque proportions were completely destroyed: "the height of the towers was reduced, they were topped with onion domes, and the interior was reconstructed." The visual diminution of the most Roman Baroque building in the city had a symbolic aesthetic effect -- the former Jesuit temple was transformed into a unmistakably Russian Orthodox shrine. It was within the walls of this malformed shrine where Dostoevsky attempted to escape from the engulfing piety of local (Polish) Catholicism.

However, Muraviev insisted on an even more Russian look to the city and all the other Orthodox shrines that were either built or redecorated after the mid-1860s -- about a dozen of them -- were fashioned according to the 'historical' Russian or Byzantine models. Baroque still dominated the city's skyline, but it was broken up and segmented into

93 Venclova, Vilnius, 142.

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isolated architectural islands by numerous Byzantine domes, Georgian cupolas and Muscovite shatter-coned roofs of the Orthodox temples.

**SYMBOLIC MODERNITY and VILNA**

Feodor Dostoevsky reputedly stated that Russians in Asia were Europeans, but in Europe, they were Asians. Russia’s exclusive, one can say, dual status as both a European and Asian state made its position in both geographical worlds a highly ambiguous matter. From the middle of the nineteenth century, the Russian empire rapidly expanded into the central part of the Asian continent. It was in the Asian, non-Christian parts of the empire where the Russian administration found itself in the role of the modernising European. In the European part of the empire, especially in those territories inhabited by a Catholic populace, Russian imperial rule was seen by many non-Russians as the imposition of ‘Asiatic’ domination over the frontiers of Europe. Russian authorities were determined to change this image of the empire and Vilna became the centre of this peculiar missionary activity that cautiously sought to realign the cultural acts of Russification with the social process of modernization.

Following the spatial fusion of Lithuania and Russia, the North-Western provinces of the empire, with their regional capital, Vilna, were incorporated into ‘European Russia’. But this integration posed some unforeseen challenges, because Vilna, with its visible architectural and chronicled historical connection with the nexus of catholic Europe, Rome, looked more ‘European’ than ‘Russian’. And as such, it could be often seen, especially from an anti-Russian perspective, as superior to most Russian towns. Hence, the administrative modernization of the city required particular nationalistic overtones: it was no longer enough to ‘westernize’ the city, as might have been the case in some Central Asian or Siberian towns, but to ‘civilize’ it by reducing its Polish, and often Jewish, features to mere historical and/or ethnographic background. Indeed, the Polish and Catholic aspects of Vilna were increasingly replaced with what the tsarist loyalists usually described as Russian-Lithuanian spatial features. This inaccurate but not necessarily absurd re-labeling of local characteristics was meant to recall the ghostly landscape of the Lithuanian duchy without its explicitly European (and Latin) connotations. The frivolous mythological or corporeal affiliations of Vilna with Rome were replaced by presumably a much deeper and more substantial spiritual unity with the city of Moscow. Hence, by the
turn of the twentieth century, local Russian guidebooks of the city could firmly assert the Russian linguistic and dynastic possession of Vilna:

Most likely, Vilna only became the capital city of the Lithuanian duchy in 1323, because up until then, the Lithuanian dukes lived first in Kernov, and later in Trokakh. A long time before Gedimin [the historical founder of the city] mentioned the name of the city, a place with similar names to Vilna — Velni, Ville, Vilda and Vilenski — was mentioned in some western European chronicles. Therefore, the legend about the foundation of the city of Vilna, recounted by the Polish chronicler, Stryjkowski, needs to be seen as a pure fiction. .... From the earliest times, the Lithuanian tribe lived in close proximity to the neighbouring Russian tribes and because of it, since the time of its historical foundation, Vilna has always been a half Russian town. The name of the city, most likely, is also Russian in its origin. Clearly, the city got its name from the little river called Vilna — now known as Vileyka — which flows into the river of Viliya, in old times known as Veliya. Already in the fourteenth century, a German chronicler (Vygand from Magdeburg), who described the expedition of the German knights into Samogitia and Lithuania, called Vilna a Russian city (Civitas Ruthenica). It is self-evident that by Gedimin’s rule, the population of Vilna, at least in half, consisted of Russians, whose presence in the court of Lithuanian dukes was even more significant. In addition, any investigator of antiquity can see many similarities between the ruinous walls of the castle of Vilna and the defensive structures in some of the oldest southern Russian cities, such as Kiev and Ovruch. According to many historical evidences, it is possible to determine the precise location where most Russians lived, which today is in part inhabited by non-Russians. The eastern urban district, starting from the contemporary Bolshoy [Great] street and stretching far beyond it into the so-called suburbs of Zareche and Popovchiza was exclusively occupied by Russians. To this day, the southern section of this suburb carries the name, Rossy.  

It was one thing to refocus history geographically and nationally and quite another to alter the linguistic and visual realities of the present. It was much easier to find Russian bodies in the past of Vilna, than to map out the Russian spirit of the contemporary city. The excessive construction of Russian Orthodox churches — disproportionate to the size of the Russian population — and the massive closure of Catholic churches certainly reshaped the cityscape. In addition, two more monuments to ‘local’ Russians kept company to Muraviev: a bust of poet Aleksandr Pushkin and sculpture of empress Catherine II were erected by the local (tsarist) authorities next the catholic cathedral at the beginning of the twentieth century. But this more or less cosmetic urban procedure was envisioned as an aesthetic restoration of Russian history in Lithuania. While it assured the future and eschatological prospects of the Russian spirit, it did not project a modern outlook of the imperial order. The Orthodox churches and tsarist monuments were commemorative

94 F. Dobryanski, Staraja i Novaja Vilna (Vilna: Typografia A.G. Syrkina, 1904), 10-11.
inscriptions of the past, not functional urban imprints of the present. In short, Vilna had to be modernized, so its historical Russian cityscape might find an equivalent in contemporary urban development.

Even by the standards of metropolitan Russian cities, Vilna was lagging in the development of modern urban government and infrastructure. Because of the tsarist mistrust of the local population, self-government was introduced relatively late. Only in 1876 were the towns of Vilna gubernia allowed direct election of council members; and even this form of urban democracy had its limits, since the number of the voting population was limited only to those individuals who, and institutions, such as churches, corporations and organizations which, owned urban properties and paid taxes. In addition the voting structure was hierarchical, so the small ruling upper class (often Russian) got most of the votes. In 1887, only 2805 residents of the city (out of approximately 150,000) had voting rights. The number of the voting population was further reduced by a new municipal reform initiated by Nicholas II in 1892. In Vilna, most non-Russians lost their minimal voting privileges. The more ‘progressive’ urban reform of 1903 somewhat increased the proportion of the population eligible to vote, and the more liberal reforms of the post-1905 era allowed non-Russians to enter municipal politics in much larger numbers. Still, the city council and mayor had no real political or administrative powers, since all questions of urban development and policing were the prerogatives of the Russian regional (gubernia) administration. No road, hospital or sewage system could be built without an approval from the governor-general; and in most cases, the imperial military and police had exclusive rights to veto any decision. The budget of the city was minimal and the municipality was obliged to pay for many administrative responsibilities and institutions of the imperial government, such as the police, military, prison system, etc.\footnote{See J. Jurginis, V. Merkys and A. Tautavičius, \textit{Vilniaus miesto istorija: nuo seniausių laikų iki Spalio revoliucijos}, 275-340.} Corruption was excessive to the point that even the construction of some officially sanctioned and prestigious objects -- for instance, the Russian Orthodox chapel honoring the empress -- never took place due to the ‘evaporation’ of the appropriated funds. Furthermore, Vilna
never acquired an electric tram system, simply because the governor of Vilna was afraid to commit official funds to such a speculative and potentially fraudulent scheme.96

In general, especially from the official point of view, some aspects of modernization of the city invoked fears of local political and national disloyalty. The Jewish, Polish and even Lithuanian entrepreneurial and charitable institutions often used a social argument to modernize the city’s outmoded infrastructure for the promotion of their communal cultural and linguistic rights. In this environment, Jewish hospitals and retirement hospices turned into functional models of national unity; Catholic charities were funding professional schools; and the profits from a local metal factory, that supplied steel and iron for the construction of modern amenities and was owned by a Lithuanian entrepreneur, paid for the cultural ‘awakening’ of the Lithuanian nation. The tsarist administration was fully aware of the ‘national’ competition within the capitalist development of Vilna and was eager to support and promote its own Russian version of modern urban speculation. Yet, increasingly, the Russian guidebooks of Vilna started to evaluate the achievements of the tsarist rule not so much through a national prism, which demanded a restoration of a ‘lawful’ imperial hierarchy, but through a capitalist lens, which required a much more futuristic vision of the place:

Since 1903, Vilna has been illuminated by electric energy generated in the local power plant built that was built near the [Green] bridge on the right bank of the River Vilya just across from the centre of the city. The plant supplies energy for public institutions and private houses. Under direct supervision of the former governor, general V.V. von Wal, who today serves in the Imperial State Council, a correct system of house numbering was finally implemented. This system is based on the example of Saint Petersburg. In addition, issues related to the development of a sewage system, electric power grid, etc. are being discussed in the city.

In terms of elegance and the quality of modern buildings, the best street is the recently constructed Georgievskij Prospect [George Boulevard] that runs from the Cathedral Square towards the Vilya River. Across the river, the prospect [boulevard] heads straight to the newly incorporated dacha suburb of Zverinec, which has been renamed to Aleksandria. ...In the old times, this vast property was owned by the family of Witgenstein, whose last member to live in the Russian Empire was the duchess Hohenlohe, the wife of the current German chancellor. Today, Zverinec, the former hunting ground of local [Lithuanian] dukes, belongs to a private proprietor, V.V. Martinson, who has divided this extensive tract of land with newly laid out straight streets. The parcelled-out

property is being rapidly developed into residential blocks. However, two Russian Orthodox shrines -- the Church of the Mother of God, and the Church of St. Catherine built near the former villa of the general-governor -- were also built here.

So today, Vilna remains a historical curiosity, despite the fact that during its 600 years of existence, many of its historical monuments have been ravaged by various social disturbances, wars and fires. Yet, with every new year, the old Vilna is being more and more outshined by the new Vilna.  

This new (Russian) Vilna was certainly not an imperial metropolis -- nor was it seen as a peripheral cosmopolis -- but according to the officially sanctioned view, it certainly became an essential modern Russian outpost at the western margins of the empire. Still, some of the simplest statistical data told a different story. Vilna might have had a Russian past and for the last hundred years it had been ruled by the tsars, but its religious landscape had remained staunchly unshaken:

Vilna, the former capital of the Lithuanian-Russian State, is one of the oldest towns in the North-Western region of Russia. Currently the city is an administrative and military centre, and, thanks to extensive railway connections, it also serves as a main transport hub along the railway line that connects Saint Petersburg, Warsaw, Kovno, Verzhblov, Libau, Riga, Minsk, Moscow, Brest, Kiev and Odessa.

According to the 1897 census, the population of Vilna was 154,532 inhabitants, excluding military personnel. The population, according to the religious affiliations, groups into: Russian Orthodox – 28,638; Old Believers – 1,318; Catholics – 56,688; Lutherans – 2,235; Jewish – 63,986; Muslim – 842; in addition, other Christians – 28 and non-Christians – 5; and foreign citizens – 792.  

This de-nationalized (religious) data could not conceal the linguistic stability of Vilna: even now, less than twenty per cent of the population was native Russian speaking; the mother-tongue of most of the residents was either Yiddish (about 40%) or Polish (about 35%). A large number of people were probably bilingual or multilingual. From the last decade of the nineteenth century, Vilna’s population grew parallel to the general urban boom of the Russian empire. Within a decade, the city’s population grew to 205,000 and reached the mark of 250,000 just before the start of the Great War. The ethnic and religious proportion, however, changed very little; if nothing else, with political and linguistic liberalization, the Russians were almost certainly losing some social and representational privileges. Most of the growth of Vilna was caused by regional rural-
urban migration and the vast majority of the urban population was poor. An average worker’s income for a man was 21 rubles, for a woman -- 9 rubles and for children and teenagers about 3.5 rubles. A small family needed at least 30 rubles to live above the poverty level.\(^9\) It is not surprising that many working class inhabitants and the impoverished ranks of intelligentsia and even some members of the bourgeoisie were eager to leave the city for the industrial centres of the Russian empire or North America. And the transport links to Saint Petersburg, Riga, Odessa and German port cities (Königsberg, Hamburg, etc.) sped up the process of local out migration as much as the expanding regional railway network accelerated the growth of the city.

This great population mobility did not eradicate the ‘home-like’ feeling of Vilna. For many Poles, Jews, Lithuanians, Byelorussians and other local minorities of the region, the city functioned not just as an entrepot into the metropolitan world, but also as a familiar and habitual repository of national aspirations and personal ambitions. For all these ethnocultural groups, the town was an opening to both worlds, the expanding, jagged and changeable (European, western, imperial, etc.) global spheres and the swelling, intensifying and contradictory regional ‘national-linguistic’ universes. For permanent Russian residents, especially those with ‘weaker’ nationalist loyalties to the autocratic regime, Vilna offered an opportunity to experience the empire as a local diffusion of Russian supremacy by the native multilingual eccentricities. Despite the obvious asymmetrical linguistic and political relationship, or because of it, Vilna of the turn of the twentieth century was a polyphonic place. One could perfectly survive in the city just by speaking and understanding only Russian, but nobody could claim to personify or encompass the entire local history or geography without the acceptance of some form of a hyphenated or conjugated identity. The replacement of the historical ‘Polish-Lithuanian’ identity with the anachronistic ‘Russian-Lithuanian’ in most official chronicles of the city is the best example of such geographical cross-pollination. The public Russian rejection of the Catholic and Jewish traditions of Vilna also meant a geographical exclusion of most of the city’s medieval and Baroque topography. The new and modern Vilna -- the historically and nationally ‘uncompromised’ suburban additions to the Baroque-dominated and primarily Jewish-inhabited old town -- might have dissolved the religious, linguistic and economic contradictions of the region, but it never managed to outdo the magnetic lure of arched

passages, magnificent churches, ancient synagogues and intimate commercial quarters of old Vilna. The aesthetic spirit of the city lingered in its legendary and historical core, and it was not exclusively circumscribed by either the tsarist or Russian Orthodox spatial features. Indeed, the official imperial spaces, such as the square in front of the governor-general’s palace adorned with the statue of Muroviev, were a stone’s throw away from the vast Italianate complex of the (former) university buildings and the bustling lane-courtyard maze of the Jewish quarter. There was simply no escape from the polymerous topography or cultural polyphony of Vilna.

MIKHAIL BAKHTIN

In spite of the ever-present linguistic negation and spatial negotiation, it was possible for some (immigrant) Russians to make Vilna a home environment. Two Russian intellectuals, both born outside Lithuania, philosopher-literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), and painter Mstislav Dobuzhinsky (1875-1957) grew up in Vilna. Bakhtin, who was born in Orel, and early in his childhood moved to Vilna, left no direct recorded impressions of the city. His older brother, Nikolai Bakhtin, however, remembered their childhood and adolescence in Vilna as one of the most invigorating periods in their lives. Some scholars of Bakhtin’s life and work often claim that his school-years experience of Vilna directly contributed to his unique theoretical concepts of heteroglossia and polyglossia, which are closely linked to the linguistic idea of the dialogical relationship between centripetal (imperial) and centrifugal (peripheral) forces. Bakhtin lived in Vilna from 1904 to 1910. After that the family moved to Odessa, another, more prosperous, peripheral cosmopolis of the Russian empire. The native tongue of the Bakhtin family was Russian and there is little to indicate that young Mikhail was directly exposed to local multilingualism. He went to the Russian gymnasium -- located in old Vilna -- in one of the imposing buildings of the former University; so from the beginning, he was exposed to the historical, mysterious and contradictory spaces of the city.

Young Bakhtin, at least from the memories of his brother, seemed to be extremely intrigued by the architectural multiplicity of historical periods and ethnographic complexity of Vilna, but he experienced the local world through the prism of the privileged Russian commercial-bureaucratic elite. His father was a director of the local branch of the imperial bank, and the Bakhtin family definitely belonged to a comfortable milieu of the
provincial upper class. Accordingly, Mikhail shared the numerous advantages and inconveniences of the resented but dominant Russian minority. He attended Russian Orthodox churches and marginally participated (he was only fifteen when he left Vilna) in the social and literary life of local Russian society. Bakhtin’s awareness of contemporary western European and Russian idea-worlds was framed by dynamic -- if sometimes youthfully naive, spontaneously over-enthusiastic and often clandestine -- engagements in various political, religious and literary circles of the young Russian intellectuals of Vilna. On the other hand, his adolescence in Vilna was marked by the 1905 revolution, a dramatic cross-imperial event that released most local languages from the tsarist cultural and political oppression. Hence, in Vilna, Bakhtin could discover the potentials of heteroglossia that assure a dynamic conversational and confrontational exchange between different communal and private domains.

Nonetheless, Bakhtin, through a scholarly retrospective, compares (or situates) the unique conditions of Vilna with the complex ‘Oriental’ socio-linguistic universe of the eastern margins of the ancient Roman empire. But he saw Vilna -- or its antique prototype -- as both a creation and defiance of the imperial system of order:

The Vilnius of Bakhtin’s youth was thus a realized example of heteroglossia, the phenomenon that was to become a cornerstone of his theories. Heteroglossia, or the mingling of different language groups, cultures, and classes, was for Bakhtin the ideal condition, guaranteeing a perpetual linguistic and intellectual revolution which guards against the hegemony of any “single language of truth” or “official language” in a given society, against ossification and stagnation in thought. Indeed, in one of his essays of the 1930s, “The Prehistory of Novelist Discourse,” which maintains that the linguistic pluralism of Hellenic Greece fostered the development of the Greek novel, Bakhtin describes Samosata, the home town of Lucian, in terms that apply equally to Vilnius as he knew it. The local inhabitants of Samosata were Syrians who spoke Aramaic, while the educated elite spoke and wrote in Greek. But Samosata was ruled by the Romans, who had a legion stationed there, and hence Latin was the official language. And since the town was situated on a trade route, many other languages were heard there as well.

Ironically, Mikhail and Nikolai [Bakhtin’s brother] belonged to the group in Vilnius which, although in the minority, represented the “official language.” They went to Russian schools and Russian churches. Moreover, the various cultural and ethnic language groups were largely hostile toward one another at the time, so that there was little of the intermingling which Bakhtin came to admire. At school, both Michail and Nikolai were offered a standard, Russo-centric curriculum, presented in a form of scholastic atmosphere, except that since Greek was not taught there, the brothers hired themselves a tutor to teach them the subject. By then, however, changes were under way that would lead to a radical reordering of the ethnic and linguistic mix of the town and to a greater intermingling of the different religious and ethnic groups.
In Russian intellectual and cultural history the first two decades of the twentieth century were a time of turbulence — the preamble, as it were, to 1917. One after the other were born political, aesthetic, and religious movements which sought to disestablish the status quo or current vogues and replace them with something new and different. Most of these movements were also bent on doing away with bourgeois society or morality, and some were bent on dispensing with the church or overthrowing the state as well. This millenarian excitement percolated through to the First Vilnius Gymnasium.

Nikolai and his friends, at age eleven and twelve, were captivated by the revolutionary fever then abroad. They formed little study circles to discuss Marxist theory and kept secret notebooks into which they copied revolutionary songs. Nikolai recalls “the exciting thing we called the ‘political demonstration.’ At twelve o’clock we began discreetly to infiltrate into the lavatory — the only place in the school which enjoyed the immunity of extraterritoriality since it was not haunted by the staff. When the lavatory was packed with boys, we sang the Internationale and the Warshavyanka [a Polish revolutionary song] and other revolutionary songs. This was the “political demonstration.” Before long, however, the revolutionary ardor cooled and the “political demonstrations” ceased. Now it was no longer Marx and Engels they discussed but Nietzsche, Baudelaire, Wagner, and Leonardo da Vinci. They sang no more revolutionary songs but recited to one another Symbolist poetry and their own imitations of it. [...]

Nikolai was attracted to the Nietzschean strain of the Symbolist movement during the gymnasium years. Reading Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* at the age of eleven was turning point in his life. He was also influenced by Merezhkovsky’s *Death of the Gods*. While still in his teens, Nikolai became the leader and genius of a small and exclusive circle of gymnasium friends who were “in a continuous state of intellectual tension, knowing that they had thousands of books to read and an infinity of things to learn, but believing that when they absorbed the centuries of human thought, they would evolve a line of their own and in turn become creators.” Whether Mikhail was also a member of the group is not known, but at least the circle formed part of the intellectual environment in which he grew up. The group’s ethos and structure anticipated a group to which he later belonged in Nevel, although the Vilnius group was more extravagantly nonconformist in the Symbolist form. A former member of the Vilnius group recalled that “occasionally they spent the night feasting and carousing, or hoping to induce visions, in smoking hashish, but more often they walked until dawn around Vilna, reciting poetry and philosophizing.”

What effect the invigorating night wanderings through the labyrinth of Vilna had on youthful rebellious minds stimulated by narcotics is unknown, but the city could certainly provoke poetic visions of a non-conformist and heterogeneous future. Symbolism was by no means unique to Vilna and it found a fertile ground in any literary environment of the period where modern -- rational and scientific -- renditions of the world failed to provide answers for the meaning of human life, its communal history and its social

progress. Symbolism personalized the universe: it made it a home of an individual mind and personal destiny. In this it opposed Baroque allegory, Romantic sentimentalism and modern rationalism, which stress the universality of human life and death. On the other hand, by using an elaborate, self-referential imagery, symbolism comes much closer to Baroque sensuality than any other modern worldview.

**MSTISLAV DOBUZHINSKY**

The modern metropolitan and cosmopolitan environment, with its simultaneously occurring processes of personal, family and generational alienation and national, cultural, and/or social consolidation, was the beloved poetic nexus of the Symbolists. But Russian Symbolism, especially after the 1905 revolution, "ceased to be a completely cosmopolitan movement [and] was more or less preoccupied with the national character and fate." Russian Symbolism flourished in the unsuccessful revolution that nonetheless liberalized the cultural and political scene of the empire. It was epitomized by the artistic group around the Russian journal *Mir Iskusstva* ("The World of Art") (1898-1905) led by the cultural impresario Sergei Diaghilev, the mastermind behind the sensational and scandalous *Ballets Russes* seasons in Paris in the 1910s. After 1910, doctrinal controversies and personal feuds that were fuelled by the seemingly eternal conflict between Slavophiles and Westernizers split Russian symbolism into numerous political, aesthetic and mystical groupings. The 1917 revolution with its explicit radical social and avant-garde cultural concerns put to rest most of the ideological and literary disagreements of the symbolists. Under the pressure of new political and aesthetic trends, Russian Symbolism simply disintegrated and many of its proponents went into either an internal or external exile, and some of them tied up their poetic and biographical destinies with Lithuania.

One of the closest artistic allies of Diaghilev was painter Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, who first collaborated with the Russian-French impresario in the early years of the *Mir Iskusstva* movement (1900s) and later, he designed sets for the 1914 Parisian season of the *Ballets Russes*, one of the most anticipated European cultural events of the time. (The


102 For more on the biography and artistic development of Dobuzhinski, see *Mstislav Dobuzhinski* (Moscow: Izobrazitelnoye Isskustvo Publishers, 1982).
previous season shocked and invigorated the metropolitan public with the revolutionary performance of Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring.*) Dobuzhinski was quite familiar with the rapidly ‘modernizing’ cosmopolitan aesthetic tastes of the European metropolitan culture. He studied painting in Munich (1899-1902) with Anton Azbe -- one of the key tutors of the avant-garde art movement -- and became associated with many of the future members of the *Blaue Reiter* group (Jawlensky and Kandinsky). He also spent some time in the ‘alternative’ art school in Nagy Banya, Hungary and travelled widely around the ‘traditional’ artistic centres of western Europe: Berlin, Dresden, Paris, Venice, etc. But Dobuzhinsky’s artistic sense of Europe and western art was developed in Vilna, where according to his personal recollections, he was instinctively and gradually taught to recognize and respond to local topographical chronicles of western European aesthetic milieus:

The most elegant churches of Vilna were built in the 18th century, and there I learned the spirit of that age. In addition, Vilna accumulated a whole spectrum of architectural layers from Gothic, ornate Baroque and Classicism (the Governor’s palace where Napoleon had stayed). There was also a delightful late Gothic brick church of Saint Anna – in winter, surrounded by snow, this small church looked like a perfect theatre decoration. It was said that Napoleon, seeing it, felt extreme grief for the fact that he could not take this little Gothic toy with him to Paris. After beloved Saint Petersburg, my eye and taste organically continue to evolve by being surrounded with true masterpieces of Vilna. Here, I became attuned to the importance of architectural proportions, the elegance of flat surfaces interrupted with a cartouche or decorative shield (for instance, the Cathedral or Saint John Church), the beauty of rocaille – and most importantly, I started to feel the poetry of architecture.\(^{103}\)

Hence, when during his student years Dobuzhinsky went for the first time to western Europe, in this case, Dresden, he “felt completely surrounded by the familiar decorations of [his] native Vilna, with the same Rococo and the same flat facades of the eighteenth century buildings around the Old Market Square.”\(^{104}\) Even after his European ‘grand tours’, Dobuzhinsky never forgot the enormous aesthetic impact of the city. *Vilna* was probably lacking the cultural vigour of modern western metropolises, but in terms of its architectural and imaginary terrains, it could easily compete with any artistic capital of Europe. Once, on his way from Munich to Russia, Dobuzhinsky made a brief visit to *Vilna.* The artist’s reaction to the city was the same -- a pure enchantment: “as always, my beloved city delighted me. And every time, when after each trip abroad -- usually on my


\(^{104}\) Ibid., 213.
way to Saint Petersburg - I made a customary stopover, Vilna, with its exquisite Baroque, never failed a test of comparison."

In Vilna, Dobuzhinsky also started to practice his modern artistic vision, and the entire cityscape became a living model for his spontaneous and fresh brushing techniques. He turned his hometown into a large artistic studio where he could experiment with his emerging avant-garde sensuality of the world. In Russia, the plein air painting method, especially in an intimate, everyday urban surrounding, was still considered to be a novel aesthetic approach. Most art schools at the time were still encouraging their students to follow the aesthetic traditions of nineteenth century academicism that heavily relied on set models and fixed landscapes. In addition, a portrait of urban life -- especially of those scenes perceived to be distinctively non-Russian -- was yet to become a fashionable artistic theme among Russian artists and their audience. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Russian national painting tradition was still heavily influenced by the so-called Peredvizhnik (Wanders or Itinerants) group, established in the 1870’s, who wanted to reach and educate a larger audience by portraying ‘realistic’ natural and social scenes of the Russian life. The main artistic and public premise of the Peredvizhnik was to popularize and fuse the ideal Russian landscape with explicitly Russian social settings through travelling exhibitions. (Hence, the name of the group.) Since the Peredvizhni tend to focus on Russian rural landscapes and small-town events, they had very little interest in the ‘exotic’ or non-Russian parts and peoples of the empire.

From the mid-1890s, the cultural group around Mir Iskusstva tried to change this academically orthodox and thematically Slavophile vision of what had become a mainstream Russian painting tradition by introducing the Art Nouveau and Post-Impressionist aesthetics into the Russian scene. Because the Mir Iskusstva artists either concentrated in Saint Petersburg or had been educated in western European metropolitan centres, they did not shy away from cosmopolitan outlooks. The Mir Iskusstva journal, for instance published richly illustrated translations of the French Symbolists, such as Mallarmé and Verlaine. On the other hand, most of the young artists were firmly engaged with the bourgeoning modern Russian literary, musical and aesthetic trends, which soon came to be known as the Silver Age of Russian culture. (The so-called Russian cultural

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105 Ibid., 256.
Golden Age was the first part of the nineteenth century — the era of post-Napoleonic Romanticism, Historicism and Orientalism.

While the avant-garde group had a certain international and bohemian flair, it was not strictly speaking a political or social movement. The group rejected utilitarianism and positivism, celebrated individualism and metaphysics, and searched for the unity of flesh and spirit; but it did not see collective social struggle or personal political defiance as artistic values. Consequently, perhaps unwillingly, most of the artists who were involved in the movement -- in contrast, for instance, to the artistic and personal ideals of more radical modernist writers and artist -- were social conformists: many were employed by the tsarist bureaucracy and were often involved in the promotion of ‘official’ imperial culture.

Arguably, Mir Iskusstva was a cultural by-product of Russian imperial geopolitical and social politics which had attempted to strengthen the empire by a simultaneous, yet often contradictory, promotion of modernization and Russification of the state. Therefore, another theme of the movement was “the reconciliation of Russia and the West. Both Merezhkovsky (one of the key founders and writers of the journal) and Diaghilev quoted Dostoevsky as saying that the Russian’s second homeland is Europe, and that the Russian means at the same time to be in the greatest degree European and universal. Therefore the journal was “devoted to both Western and Russian art, music, theatre, and literature, and even the last issues contain articles on Russian folk art alongside reproductions of contemporary Western avant-garde art.”

In general, the movement certainly wanted to appeal to the modern Russian audience which felt equally at home in European cultural centres and the imperial outposts of Russia. Therefore, the Mir Iskusstva framed Russian localism through specific cosmopolitan -- usually avant-garde -- aesthetic lenses and concrete metropolitan design values. It promoted the arts and crafts movement, and insisted on the representational theatricality, sensuality and artificiality of an artistic frame. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the movement also celebrated the eighteenth century Russian renditions of the architectural and artistic imagination of the Baroque and Rococo periods which had fused the ‘rational’ aesthetic European values with local ‘Oriental’ exuberance. In other words, the Mir Iskusstva attempted to map out a metropolitan Russian purview, and one can add,

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an imperial cultural outlook, through a prism of avant-garde cosmopolitism and local metaphysics.

Vilna could perhaps uniquely pertain to such a perplexing combination of Russian aesthetic sensibilities, but at the turn of the twentieth century it was an economically and culturally marginalized place within the empire. A vast majority of local non-Russian intelligentsia in the city -- in fact, in the entire region -- could neither socially consume nor financially afford the aesthetic luxuries of the imperial metropolis, simply because the local national, linguistic and cultural inequalities were too overwhelming. Only a small and privileged Russian minority could find the cultural concerns of the Mir Iskusstva relevant to local urban circumstances. Hence, for most Russians, while Vilna provided a perfect picturesque panorama of the historical fusion of European Baroque with Russian spirituality, it could not sustain the aesthetic vigour of modern artistic visions. The city was neither a metropolis nor an ideal (Russian) small town: it neither possessed the ever-changing spirit of modern urbanity nor the unspoiled and intact ‘primeval’ body of rural idealism.

Yet for Dobuzhinsky, Vilna’s cosmopolitan provincialism became his aesthetic test-ground where in the domestic seclusion of the city’s Baroque old town, he could master modern artistic techniques. Dobuzhinsky was intimately connected with Vilna and the city seemed to be closely familiar with him. This mutual familiarity created a sense of informality that apparently breached the boundaries between artistic gaze and everyday life. For Dobuzhinsky, Vilna was a stage. He envisioned himself not as its creator, but as one of its key actors. In this urban theatre, the struggling aesthetic spirit of the artist reconciled with the corporeal local world.

After the invigorating cultural season of Saint Petersburg, in which the aspiring artist mostly participated as an excited spectator (Dobuzhinsky was not a recognized artist at the time and worked as a clerk in the Ministry of Transportation), Dobuzhinsky would often go back to Lithuania and Vilna, where out of sight of the metropolitan critics he polished his avant-garde gaze:

In the summer of 1903 ... I returned to my beloved Vilna with my wife and little daughter, Verochka. Here I made a few novel paintings in the mixed technique of watercolours and graphic design. They were novel because I became much bolder in my techniques: I started to sharpen my point of view and strengthen my sense of composition.

In Vilna, for the first time, if one can discount 2 or 3 paintings of my student years, I started to draw in chalk -- a courtyard, fully filled with boxes and a
sticking out Baroque belfry; a long empty wall of the Peter and Paul Church with a tree in front of it and other small architectural motifs... I also tried to draw forest, but mostly unsuccessfully.

In the following years, I mostly painted in Vilna where I would often return from Saint Petersburg. Then, I was not ashamed to paint openly in streets. Painting Vilna was a cozy, domestic affair, since nobody troubled me there, except for the occasional foul smell of the picturesque Vilna “ghetto” — my favourite spot — with its narrow and crooked alleys, arched gateways and colourful little houses. When I had finished my painting session, old Jewish merchant-women, who were usually sitting with their baskets near the “rinshtok” [gutter], told me: “Come back to us again.” Once I noticed somebody’s finger pointing from behind at my painting: “The proportions are incorrect” — I was reprimanded by an art school student. I thanked him for his suggestions. Another time, when I was painting a pictorial vacant lot I heard a voice: “A third artist paints this place — it must be a lucky corner.” I turned around and saw a passing policeman giving me his honours.107

Mstislav Dobuzhinsky’s intimacy with Vilna was based on the fact that his father was a high-ranking tsarist military officer who first was posted and then retired in the city. Dobuzhinsky’s parents lived separate lives -- his mother was an opera singer and left Mstislav at a very young age to the care of the father. In general, and in contrast to most of the peers, he grew up in a rather unorthodox social and geographical environment. While the family’s home was Saint Petersburg, its living domain was the entire Russian empire: the father served and travelled in Poland, Finland, the Ukraine, the Danube delta, Turkistan, the Caucasus Mountains, etc. He spent most of his childhood exclusively in between the imperial capital and the peripheral towns of the Russian empire: Vilna and Kishinev in Bessarabia (Moldova). His first true contact with the Russian countryside occurred when he was seventeen and in his own words, after growing up in “the ‘European’ Saint Petersburg ...and Baroque and Catholic” he “looked at the Russian towns with the eyes of a stranger. Maybe that is why I sensed the village life in such a raw and vivid imagination.”108

Still, the cultural loyalties and domestic memories of Dobuzhinsky’s family were firmly grounded in Lithuania. Dobuzhinsky’s paternal line seemed to come from the Lithuanian nobility and his grandfather lived and served for some time in Brest-Litovsk. Yet the most unusual aspect of the grandfather’s heritage was his adoration of the old Polish-Lithuanian -- Sarmatian -- traditions. He proudly displayed the portraits of Kosciusko and Copernicus in his study and Mstislav could learn world geography from the

107 Dobujinsky, Vospominaniya, 289-290.
108 Ibi., 169.
old Polish book, *Księga Swiata (Orbis Pictus).* Furthermore at Easter of 1884, nine year old Dobuzhinsky came for the first time to *Vilna* to visit his uncle. Despite the decades of severe anti-Polish and anti-Catholic oppressions, the city still greeted the young Russian visitor with its usual medieval-Baroque exuberance:

Spring with its gently blue skies was already in Vilna. After the geometrical and austere Saint Petersburg, I suddenly encountered narrow crooked lanes with multicoloured houses with slanting red-shingled roofs surrounded by soaring church towers and spires. Everything around me was festive, fully warmed by the sun, and the air reverberated with a remarkable and celebratory Easter resonance. This was not a hum of the immeasurable orthodox piety that I came to know during my visits to Novgorod or an everlasting bell-echo; here, the sound of bells arrived in waves, in an extremely triumphal and dignified way. Here, for the first time I heard the sound of the Catholic bells.

Four years later, the family moved from Saint Petersburg to *Vilna,* where Mstislav Dobuzhinsky graduated from the local Russian gymnasium. He left *Vilna* in 1895 for the imperial capital where he started to study law at the University of Saint Petersburg.

On a socio-political level, Dobuzhinsky’s family belonged to the privileged community of the Russian bureaucratic-military elite of *Vilna,* whose superior position within the local linguistic and public hierarchy was never truly challenged. The cosy and familiar environment of Dobuzhinsky’s beloved *Vilna* could only be assured by the spatial modernization of the tsarist order, and the artist was fully aware of the intrusive and even aggressive nature of his domestic surroundings. “Our suburban neighbourhood” in *Vilna,* recalled the painter decades later, “was called *Peski* and it was just being developed. Most streets were already laid out, but there were no houses, only fences, painted in white, yellow or odd pink, the most adored colours in *Vilna.* At the intersection of future streets there were already visible street-name signs: Tombov, Yaroslavl, Voronezh and Kostroma Streets. These names had the goal to imprint Russianness on the city and even then, this process of intense Russification troubled me greatly.”

The public loyalty to the tsarist empire situated the Dobuzhinskys among the Russian colonists of *Vilna,* but their intimate connections to Lithuania and their awareness of the invasive imperial hierarchy position them much closer to local ethno-linguistic realities. For one, Dobuzhinsky’s father seemed to fraternize with individual members of local Jewish community more extensively than had been necessary for pure commercial or social reasons, and his ‘gentle’ and respectful

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109 Ibid., 86.
110 Ibid., 72.
111 Ibid., 150.
approach to non-Russians definitely increased the artist’s alertness to Vilna’s heterogeneous cityscape. Moreover, according to Dobuzhinsky, his father wanted him to become a truly ‘European man’ and Vilna was perhaps the best place to accept Europe without renouncing your Russian loyalties. For Dobuzhinsky, Vilna opened the doors to the historical and aesthetic landscapes of western Europe; at the same time, the city enveloped him within the Russian form of an imperial identity. In other words, at least, for the liberal-minded, but not socially revolutionary local Russians, Vilna could be experienced as an imperial home-place where accustomed Russian symbols bonded with fascinating European signs.
Figure 4.5. *Saint Catherine’s Church* by M. Dobuzhinski, 1906. *Source: Vladas Drėma, Dingės Vilnius* (Vilnius: Vaga, 1991), 238.
In general, Russian Symbolists were probably more inclined to 'Europeanize' or globalize their poetic anxieties in Vilna than in other provincial towns of the empire, simply because they lived in an environment which refused to become a singular national event. “Before the 1905 revolution,” for instance, “15 periodical publications, all Russian, were in circulation in Vilnius, while in 1911 their number had increased to 69 periodicals, among them 35 Polish, 20 Lithuanian, 7 Russian, 5 Jewish and 2 Byelorussian.”112 At the turn of the twentieth century the city’s poetic visions, as much as its political and social lives, were nationally divided. Furthermore, among the writers and poets of all the local linguistic communities, Vilna provoked metaphysical and spiritual evaluations of the relationship between individual and nation. And all of them tended to romanticize and idealize the place and its significance within a specific national and/or religious community. Still, there were few examples where local artistic expressions had successfully crossed their linguistic or ideological frontiers. One of them was Russian-Jewish sculptor, Mark Antakolski (1843-1902), who mainly lived in western Europe, but became one of the ‘official’ sculptors of the Russian empire. He was born and owned a house in Vilna, and just before his death he was given the honour to design the locally resented monument to Catherine II, which for the last decade of the Russian rule adorned the Cathedral Square of the city, probably the most historical and mythologized site of Lithuania. Another example of the cross-national cultural ‘collaboration’ was the short artistic career of Mikalojus Konstantinas Ciurlionis (1875-1911), Lithuanian Symbolist composer and painter, whose music and narrative vision fused local landscapes and mythologies with the metropolitan aesthetic sensitivities of Saint Petersburg and Warsaw.

Because of their dominant cultural and linguistic position within the empire, Russian writers and artists were less inclined to integrate within the multinational landscape of Vilna. Dobuzhinsky was an exception to the rule, but even in his case, he approached Vilna more as an aesthetically mediating place between his Russian and European identities than a self-sustained polyglot world. Arguably, despite the local official policies of imperial assimilation, the Russian artistic vision of the city evoked national

112 Venclova, Vilnius, 53.
isolationism. Hence, in 1870, a widely popular, conservative and religious Russian poet, Fyodor Tyutchev (1803-1873) could proudly celebrate the eternal, metaphysical Russian sway in Vilna: “Above the ancient Russian Vilna/ Shine crosses of the homeland/ And orthodox sound of copper-bells/ Resounds in heavens.”\textsuperscript{113} A few decades later, Tyutchev’s sentimental and chauvinistic spirituality was rediscovered by the Russian symbolists. His aesthetic acceptance, however, did not necessarily mean an ideological endorsement of his extreme nationalistic views. Russian symbolism was sharply influenced by decadent sensualities of the French (Baudelaire and Verlaine) and English (Wilde) writers and although it could inflame some ‘patriotic’ feelings, in general, the symbolists assumed a role of cosmopolitan flaneurs. These urban nomadic ‘aesthetic instincts’ were more spiritualized and enlarged by the Russian symbolists than their western European counterparts, in part because of a much more ambiguous metropolitan and modern personality of the Russian empire. While most French and English symbolists were mapping their ‘imaginary landscape’ through a bipolar vision of humanity which often drew parallels between (or contrasted) modern urban alienation and primeval nomadic wanderings, the Russian poets looked at their Eurasian (or modern-traditional) imperial identity for poetic inspiration.

In a geographical sense, Vilna was not an Asian place, but neither was it a decadently modern and industrialized site. Cultured and sophisticated Russians could feel there as being both metropolitan intruders (colonizers) and urban wanderers (flâneurs). Moreover, in the early part of the twentieth century, Vilna could function as an antidote to the chauvinist poetic rhetoric of the previous literary generation, which often commemorated nostalgic rural and traditional aspects of Russia. Therefore, it is not surprising that several important and long-lasting Russian symbolists, both native and non-natives of Lithuania -- such as Konstantin Balmont (1867-1942), Jurgis Baltrušaitis (1873-1944), and Valery Bryusov (1873-1924) -- were searching for the unattainable modern site of national harmony and imperial tranquillity in the passing sights of Vilna.

Bryusov, whose personal relationship with Vilna was marked by his nine-month long stay in Poland and Lithuania at the beginning of the Great War (he was a military

\textsuperscript{113} Feodor Tyutchev, “Nad Russkoj Vilnoj starodavnej” in Russkaja literatura v Litve XIV-XX v., ed. Pavel Lavrinec, 330. Author’s translation.
reporter), was in his youth a follower of Tyutchev. He was one of the most devout Russian proponents of literary decadence: his early writings scandalized the public with images of overt sexual desire and sadism. And he also made “pathological states and cultural cataclysms” his narrative subjects. Consequently, Bryusov was fully aware of Tyutchev’s redundant chauvinism, which, in the end, poetically captured the official tsarist geopolitical doctrine regarding Lithuania. Still, Bryusov, especially in his later period, was in many ways a Romantic, who strongly believed in the semi-messianic role of a poet and the poetic world; and although he promoted a modern literary sensibility and poetic structure, he was attached to the nineteenth century Russo-European narrative tradition. He searched for his poetic voice in polyglot text-worlds that led him from Virgil to Edgar Allan Poe and back to ancient Armenian scriptures. So facing wartime Vilna, Bryusov could not escape or deny the ‘nomadic lures’ of the polyphonic spaces of the city. Accordingly, a parallel sense of loss and discovery, and the desire of the imperial concord and the reality of local discord -- in short, the tension between the ideal Vilna and the corporeal city -- marks Bruysov’s lyrical encounter with the place.

Some of these encounters were captured in the poetic cycle published under the title, Seven Colours of the Rainbow, in 1916, the second year of the war. Vilna was lost to the German army in the fall of 1915 and by the time of the publication, most of its Russian inhabitants evacuated the city. The poems however were probably written while the city was in the front zone of military actions. So, one of the poems from the cycle openly confronts the myth of the tsarist Russian permanence in Vilna:

Again I am alone – homeless drifter,
But it is so easy to breath.
Where now, my troubled spirit,
What wanderings will occur next?

Yet my spirit – he wants to go
Ahead, until the end;
For my heart intoxicates
At the site of the Castle Hill.

At my feet is “the ancient Vilna” –
A network of streets, buildings and roofs

And Vilia effortlessly gushes
Breaking tranquil silence.

But farther, behind the hills –
The bursts of the storming war,
And momentarily, in clear weather
A victorious song can be heard.
Below though, where linden trees
Quiver under the daily stress,
A clever smiling face of Pushkin,
Again will look at me.

"In Vilna"116

Bryusov envisions a Russian home in Vilna not because of its bureaucratically constructed national and religious spirituality, but because of its geo-narrative location as a guardian of the memory and border of the empire. More than a hundred years of Russian domination transformed the city from an occupied, semi-colonial site into a narratively engaged imperial site. Finally, Vilna became a Russian palimpsest -- a miniature yet rich provincial tapestry where modern Russian senses of home and empire were entwined. For Bryusov and most other Russian symbolists, unlike the previous literary generations, Vilna was no longer a nationally threatening curiosity and/or historical-geographical anomaly, but an enthrallingly ordinary place. One protects such a casual, commonplace site as one attempts to shield a home: not by defending its specific ideological and geopolitical locations, but by guarding it from the exigencies of catastrophic events.

The Russian victory, of course, is a desirable but phantom event -- a mirage that could be only dispelled by recognizing the spatial and aesthetic limits of the somewhat outdated imperial force. Pushkin is the most adequate cultural symbol of the Russian empire, for he assumed the seemingly impossible role of both an arduous critic and persistent defender of the imperial order and national hierarchy. Moreover, Pushkin embodies both the centripetal and centrifugal modes of Russian imperial (metropolitan) identity: as a noble, the poet belonged to the imperial court of the northerly Saint Petersburg, but through his paternal side, he also could identify with the 'nomadic' Oriental south. Pushkin’s great-grandfather was a captured Abyssinian who became a general through the patronage of the Russian empress in the first part of the eighteenth century. This relative, named Hannibal, was acquired by the Russian ambassador in

Constantinople (Istanbul) from the Ottoman Seraglio and sent to Peter the Great to Russia. Incidentally, it was widely believed among the Russian public, that in 1705 Hannibal was baptized in Vilna in a small Orthodox church by Peter the Great while the tsar was ‘visiting’ the city during one of his military campaigns against the Swedish army.\textsuperscript{117}

Pushkin’s stony smile is of course a reprimand to Tyutchev’s wordy chauvinism, for it warns about the fallacies of the centripetal and single-minded worldview. A Russian in the vast Eurasian empire is always a wanderer as much as a modern flaneur is always a guest within the convoluted Baroque topography of Vilna.

Bryusov seems to accept the ubiquitous smile of the Romantic bard with a sense of the corporeal eventualities of the place.\textsuperscript{118} The combating world is undeniably ever-present in Vilna and the feeling of a momentary (personal) liberation is overshadowed by the recognition of the forceful inversion of urban commonplace by the imperial war machines. So Bryusov enters the familiar terrain of the city bringing with him the approaching cannons of the encroaching frontline. The ideal and self-enclosed universe of Vilna with its lovely Catholic churches, lively Jewish quarter and invigorating Russian spirit finally opens up to the modern world. But are the warring empires -- which after all constitute the most powerful social and technological forces of modernity -- ready to accept the city with its still undetermined geopolitical location and questionable national identities? The modern war machine could erase the historical divisions of Vilna; but by eradicating the past or disregarding the present, war simply draws new lines of segregation. A war in Vilna always trumpets the beginning of a new epoch. At the same time, a new occupation of the city only reinstates its discordant geographical location:

More often the streets of Vilna
Are draped in mourning.
The war harvest is great
The open crypts are huge.

More than often, usually in a corner
Of the darkened churches,
Sits helplessly in her absentminded tragedy
A mother, sister or a daughter.

\textsuperscript{117} On the literally and family connections between Pushkin and Vilna, see Juozas Jurginis, “Puškinas ir Vilnius” in Istorija ir poezija: kultūros istorijos etiudai (Vilnius: Vaga, 1969).

\textsuperscript{118} Ironically, the bust of Pushkin together with the other two tsarist monuments of Vilna -- the statues of Muraviev and Catherine II -- were taken into the interior of the Russian empire by the retreating Russian a few days before the occupation of the city by the German army.
The war like a heavenly thunder,
Shudders the frightening world...
Yet dreams still lull the miracle child,
The patron of Vilna — Casimir.

The undeclared dream, the same as always,
Like a dream of bygone time,
Elevates the shrine of Saint Anna,
With the crowning beauty of its masonry.

And the sea of local sorrows,
Full of pity misfortunes,
Roars in the Jewish quarter
Under the shrieks of Russian victories.

"More often"\textsuperscript{119}

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CHAPTER FIVE
WARTIME WILNA: BETWEEN HOMELAND AND FOREIGN COUNTRY

VILNA IN WAR

Aloof on the broken road.
in the crow's tracks on the snow,
drove the Corsica, a southern emperor,
shrunken with anger, --
overtaken at evening
by holy curses. The hungry
wolves dragged nights
of marsh-haze after him.

Yet the blue autumn
reaches for village and cloud.
Now, paths of home,
your beauty is like tears.
Sandy paths, the years
have stepped you out.
"The Road of the Armies" (Johannes Bobrowski)¹

In 1914, war in the tsarist empire inevitably invoked narratives of the Napoleonic
invasion of Russia. The war of 1812 had made Vilna an integral part of the Russian
historical experience and national consciousness. The city had been in Russian possession
since 1795, but until the fateful Napoleonic campaign of 1812 it remained a ‘foreign’ --
frontier -- town of the Russian empire. The gathering of the Russian army and the imperial
court at Vilna during the war -- before and after the Napoleonic invasion -- introduced the
city to a much larger Russian public. And after the war it entered the Russian public
imagination through the published memoirs of participants of the anti-Napoleonic
campaign. In the war narratives of the French and western Europeans, Vilna was the place
of the final collapse of the Grande Armée that led to the ruin of Napoleonic Europe; in the
Russian narratives of the same war, Vilna became the site where the military glories and
geopolitical powers of the Russian empire had thrust into Europe. If the officers and
soldiers of the Grande Armée saw Vilna as the portal city of the Orient, then their Russian
counterparts witnessed it as the entrance into Europe.

¹ Johannes Bobrowski, “The Road of the Armies” in Shadow Lands, translated by Ruth and
In Russia, the war of 1812 came known as the *Otechestenaya voina* or the War for the Fatherland.\(^2\) The Russian title of the war, which exclusively refers to the Russian campaign of the anti-Napoleonic wars, suggests the defensive aspect of the campaign. A large part of this campaign was fought in Lithuania, but by baptizing the war as the defence of the fatherland, the Russian narratives of the campaign ‘organically’ incorporated Lithuania into the Russian fatherland. For most patriotically inclined Russian officers, the war of 1812 meant more than just a defence of the homeland; it meant the restoration or even enlargement of the wounded Russian imperial pride and glory. Lithuania embodied both the national and imperial meanings of the war, for it was there that the geopolitical interests of the Russian empire became fused with the national-religious pride of the tsarist regime. *Vilna* of course was not truly a Russian town, and in many ways it was a conquered, semi-colonial town, but because of its challenging national belonging, it came to be seen as the ‘geographical’ shield of the Russian national spirit. It protected Russia not just from western Europe, but also from Poland.

The diary of Denis Davidov, the Russian partisan leader of the 1812 War and well-known poet of the time, reflects this national-imperial nature of the war. Without fearing “to spare their blood for their country,” Davidov’s partisan detachment chased and attacked the soldiers of the Grande Armée all the way from Moscow to *Vilna*.\(^3\) Davidov reached the environs of *Vilna* at the beginning of December (end of November according to the Russian Julian calendar), and because he led a non-regular Cossack army unit that harassed the survivors of the Napoleonic retreat, he approached the city not from the east, that is the direction of Russia, but from the west, from the side of the infamous *Ponari* Hills. His Cossack comrades were involved in the slaughter of the retreating soldiers of the Grande Armée and Davidov entered *Vilna* victoriously through the path of massacre:

> From Novy Troki to the village of Ponari the road was clear and smooth. But from Ponari, where the road branches off to Kovno, mountains of dead men and horses, a host of carts, gun-carriages and caissons left barely enough room to get through; piles of enemy soldiers, barely alive, lay in the snow or sought shelter in the carts, awaiting a cold and hungry end. My path was lit up by blazing wooden huts and hovels whose wretched occupants were being burned alive. My sledge kept bumping against heads, legs and arms of men who had frozen to death, or were close to dying. My journey from Ponari to Vilna was

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\(^2\) It is often mistakenly translated into English as the Patriotic War.

accompanied by a strange chorus of moans and cries of human suffering which
at times dissolved into something more akin to a joyous hymn of liberation.

I appeared before His Serene Highness on 1 December [according to the
Russian calendar]. What changes in the general headquarters! Whereas
previously a ruined village and a smoky hut surrounded by sentries, or a log
cabin with folding stools, served as a setting, I now saw a courtyard filled with
fancy carriages and a crowd of Polish grandees in dress uniform, captured
generals and our own generals and staff officers roaming all over the place!  

Davidov did not stay in Vilna for long, because he was appointed to the position of
military administrator of the neighboring Grodno province. “The city of Grodno,”
according to Davidov’s geopolitical assessment of the Russian empire was “the Lithuanian
town, closest to the border with the Grand-Duchy of Warsaw: and local ties of friendship
and family constituted elements bitterly opposed to our forces. The Polish inhabitants of
Grodno also had close links with the inhabitants of the left bank of the Niemen and with
Warsaw, the centre of conspiracy and crucible of hatred for Russia -- additional factors
designed to harm our cause. The Jewish population of Poland, on the other hand, were so
devoted to us and prompted by the hope of enriching themselves, that they refused to spy
on us, and everywhere, time and again, provided us with the most important information
about the enemy.”  

And in Davidov’s patriotic worldview, the Russian force “had to punish
the former and cajole the latter.”  

Grodno was taken without a fight, and in Davidov’s words, the Russians were
greeted only by the Jews: “Wild with delight, the Jewish crowd, with screams and cries of
‘Hurrah!’ accompanied me to the town square. Not one Pole was to be seen anywhere, not
so much out of national pride, since they threw themselves at my feet that very evening, but
from ignorance of the events that had taken place.”  

Hence, once he arrived in the city, he
immediately issued a proclamation that not only reasserted the tsarist control of the region,
but also demanded the unconditional loyalty of local residents to the Russian nation. He
personally read the proclamation in the main square of the town before the forcefully
assembled crowd that was big enough to appreciate the importance of the event:

Judging by the reception given to the Russian troops by the Polish inhabitants
of Grodno, I can readily see that they have not heard about the events which
have taken place: Russia has been freed. All our forces entered Vilna on 1
December. They are now on the other side of the River Niemen. Of the enemy

4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., 157-158.
6 Ibid., 158.
7 Ibid.
army, half-a-million strong with a thousand cannon, there remain only 15,000 and four cannon which managed to escape across the Niemen. Let the Polish gentry put on mourning clothes. Few among you have not lost a relative or a friend; out of 80,000 of your troops who dared to invade our land, only about 500 are left to run home; the rest lie about on the highway, frozen stiff and covered by Russian snow.

I came here as a result of a peace agreement; we could have achieved the same through armed force, but I renounced my detachment’s glory for the sake of sparing this city, which belongs to Russia. You are well aware that street fighting always ends up with houses being looted, and pillage ends up with fires.

And what do I see? I have come to save you and you wish to bring ruin upon yourselves. I see, in the faces of the Poles who have come here, hatred and insidious plans; I see insolence and challenge in their eyes, swords and daggers beneath their belts. And what for, if you honestly wish to return to the obligations you should never have abandoned?

Yet, in spite of yourselves, I must take measures to save you, because if there is one shot the whole town will pay for it. The innocent will perish with the guilty. Everything will turn to dust and ashes!

Fortunately for the ‘liberated’ city, Davidov’s wrathful desires to exercise communal punishment on the inhabitants of the town came to nothing, but the Russian commander still felt that local Polish residents needed to be taught a harsh lesson. The military occupation of the city and the death of many relatives could only constitute a partial punishment: the ‘treacherous’ Polish residents of Lithuania needed to be publicly humiliated.

Grodno, like Vilna, was adorned with signs of loyalty to Napoleon, and these pro-French and anti-Russian symbols infuriated the new military dictator of the city:

I noticed various allegorical images which poked ridicule at Russia. But the most remarkable one was on the balcony of a pharmacist. It represented the French eagle and the white Polish eagle tearing apart our double-headed eagle. I had the man summoned immediately and ordered him to have ready by the 12th, our Emperor’s birthday, a totally different picture showing these two birds fleeing from the Russian eagle.

I did not spare the other citizens whose houses had exhibited similar images. They were ordered to display, by the same date, new pictures extolling Russia’s liberation from the ‘enlightened’ barbarians. Everyone complied without objection; the pharmacist alone complained that he would not have enough time to execute the complicated picture that had been assigned to him.

Until now I had only made an outward show of cold severity, but I was waiting for a chance to let my anger boil over in order to humiliate the Poles and their haughty attitude. The opportunity had now risen. My comrades later told me that my nastiness had been transformed into ‘ideal beauty.’ I bellowed with anger, and an electric spark ran through the Polish crowd. As for the pharmacist, he drew himself up as straight as a thermometer and turned as white as a dose of

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8 Ibid., 158-159.
magnesia. I had him placed under guard with orders that through the whole day of the 12th there should be no fire of any kind in his house, not even in the kitchen, and on the 13th, when there were to be no illuminations, he would light up all his windows and display the commissioned picture on his balcony. And so it was done. To conclude my ravings (as they were referred to by the Poles and with which I agree for once) I summoned a Polish priest who had pronounced words of praise when Napoleon invaded the Russian empire and ordered him to compose and read aloud in the Russian church an address in which he would abuse and curse Napoleon with his troops and allies, praising instead our Emperor, people and army. Since I did not know Polish, he was to submit his text on the evening of the 11th to Khrapovitsky [Davidov's assistant] for his approval.

Furthermore, I designated 100 cossacks to be in constant readiness and placed at Khrapovitsky's disposal whenever he felt the need to use force to carry out his orders. These same cossacks were sent on patrols day and night and ensured that there were no gatherings of more than five people.

[...] I ordered that the Greek Orthodox Russian church be reopened and all services resumed. On the 12th — the Emperor's birthday — I required that all town officials turn to greet me, that the city be illuminated and all church bells be rung the whole day long. Finally, I demanded from the new town elder a list of all officials and citizens who had volunteered to serve the Grand Duchy of Poland.

[...] All the instruction given to the inhabitants and city officials were carried out to the letter. The Poles were seething with resentment at being forced to transformed themselves from the status of armed knights to that of obedient servants of the Russian empire, and, worst of all, having to obey the leader of the Jewish community.9

In the end, while the Polish and Lithuanian inhabitants of the reoccupied country were being punished for being too supportive of their brethren residing across the Niemen River (Grodno was located on the right (Russian) bank of the river), Davidov was rewarded for his unwavering loyalty to the tsar. Ten days after Alexander's birthday, when Davidov was again chasing down the remnants of the Napoleonic army on the other side of the Niemen, he received a package from Vilna with the imperial decorations that he had previously requested from the emperor for his determination “to destroy the enemy.”

“Now that I am beyond our country’s borders,” wrote Davidov to the emperor, “I must obediently beseech Your Serene Highness to grant me the orders of Vladimir 3rd Class and St George 4th Class.”10

Although Davidov proclaimed Lithuania to be a rightful domain of Russia, he approached the inhabitants of Grodno as colonized subjects of the empire, who not only betrayed their duties but also antagonised Russia with their mutinous behaviour. While the Russian re-occupation of the Lithuanian frontier town created more animosity, the

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9 Ibid., 159-160.
10 Ibid., 161.
situation in the capital city was more subtle and nuanced. Once more, most of the Russian army with its imperial headquarters gathered in Vilna, and the city was again transformed into the playground of the tsarist court. The Russian army reached Vilna exhausted, albeit in much better conditions than the Grande Armée, and while the imperial court was celebrating victory, most Russian officers and soldiers were quietly hoping for the end of the war.

Aleksandr Chicherin, a minor Russian officer who spent most of his spare time sketching the witnessed war terrain, reached Vilna with the first regular Russian troops. After travelling for a month through the unchangeable “horrible spectacle” of death, during which the only pleasure was “to find a small stretch of snowy terrain that was free from the ghastly dead,” Vilna appeared to him as a mirage of normality. He had been stationed in the city a few months earlier, and the memories of its comforts were still fresh in his mind. In Vilna, Chicherin simply expected “to rest for a while from life on the march, have a decent dinner, go to the theatre, stroll through boulevards, and amend his wardrobe.” More realistically, he just wanted to find a cup of good coffee and piece of cake.

These expectations were not unrealistic, considering the fact that Vilna had been preparing to entertain the emperor and his military court for his upcoming birthday celebration. Chicherin was lodged in a house near the palace and he could see the extensive preparations for this three-day mini-season of imperials balls, aristocratic parties and theatre performances. But Chicherin was poor and could not afford the extremely inflated price of coffee, and because of his low military rank he was not invited to the parties of the court. Hence, instead of the promised urban entertainment and comforts, Chicherin found Vilna to be “a village: I did not attend the theatre; yesterday’s ball proceeded without me; I did not go to the military parades, drills, and, in general, I don’t go to the parties.... Yes, I almost forgot; yesterday I went to see the illuminations, but like a pondering philosopher, I meander through the streets of the city with the crowds trying to decipher the unfamiliar cryptograms” of the place. Chicherin felt isolated in Vilna, albeit his isolation was caused

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12 Ibid., 68.
13 Ibid., 74.
not so much by the strangeness of the city as by the commanding rule of the Russian imperial power over the city.

The young officer, who, like most members of the educated Russian elite, expressed his immediate impressions of the war in French, knew that he was “born to die for the fatherland,” but the surrounding spectacle of death infused with the celebratory mood was too much to bear for him. Vilna induced a sense of loneliness and he tried to console himself with some drawing, but could not find an appropriate subject or theme for his imagination.

‘What should I draw?’ – I asked myself this morning after a short walk. Everything I see around me makes me depressed. I am alone in the room, where I am tortured by melancholy and unfulfilled desires, and I do not have anybody to converse with; I stand up, dress up and go outside, where I hope to chase away my depression by watching the life of the street.

But what a strange mass of people I am encountering on my walks. Are these medical safe-guardians from epidemic diseases? Is this a destitute soul asking for help? Quickly, get rid of him, because he spreads diseases. Do you see this poor fellow, barely breathing near the bonfire that is supposed to eliminate the dangers of the epidemic? Run quickly – but if you are truly compassionate as you think you are, you should have stabbed him with a sharp knife, because this is the only kind-hearted act he can hope to receive from you.

Now, please go with me to the busy thoroughfare of the city and you will see a different sort of revolting spectacle – the chaos of this world! Here everyone is running, waiting behind the doors, gathering around the windows. A general starts a conversation with a bureaucrat and tries to please him with a sweet talk. A clerk rudely disperses the crowd – he is in a hurry – on his shoulders rests the fate of the fatherland.

It is simply impossible to describe what kind of things you can see if you live near the Imperial Headquarters, and what kind of melancholy all this turmoil induces! Is it feasible that this monstrosity that conceals a dagger under the mask of friendship – this poison in the air that comes from some corrupt breathing and infuses everything with a beautiful smell of flowers – always takes over people and incites their sinful desires? Is it possible that the love of the fatherland, truth, reason and justice – even in unison – will not be able to prevent this monstrous excitement from spreading around the city like a poisonous disease...?

In Vilna, defeat leads to the corruption of body and victory causes the corruption of the soul, and the sentimentally sensitive Chicherin felt trapped within the local landscape of corporeal pollution and spiritual contamination. He was paralyzed by this fused spectacle of horror and victory and tried to retreat into the comforting life of his Polish landlady’s household. Here, Chicherin found Rosalia, a niece of his landlady, and he

14 Ibid., 93.
15 Ibid., 75.
quickly felt in love with her. And when on December 23th, the time came to say goodbye to Vilna “a place so pleasant from a distance and so ornate with fantasies, but where it was impossible to find any amusement,” he felt only melancholy at leaving the young Polish woman, who became his romantic incarnation of the city: “So, Rosalia, I dedicate my farewell thoughts to you, and I will remember only you when I want to grieve for Vilna. ...Maybe you will find an honest husband, who will give you prosperity and happiness -- then, love him dearly; but I know from my personal experience that once love enters our heart, we should say goodbye to tranquillity and joy for the rest of our lives. So again, goodbye Vilna, goodbye for ever.”

Vilna’s geopolitical, narrative and perhaps biographical tensions between (Russian) homeland and (European) empire were never clearly articulated by the contemporaries of the military campaign of 1812, but they were captured by Lev Tolstoy in his epic novel War and Peace. Tolstoy finished his novel in 1869, at a time when there were very few living active participants of the Napoleonic wars. Tolstoy, of course, does not juxtapose Europe and Russia as purely antagonistic forces, but he ties them through a meandering story of human (and family) lives that are inevitably shaped by the flow and flux of (inter)national history. Yet perhaps more importantly, Tolstoy connects the panoramic landscape of warring Europe with the domestic terrain of several aristocratic Russian families.

Vilna appears in the middle of the novel -- it appropriately enters the narrative with the invasion of Napoleon into Russia at the fateful historical moment for both Russian and French empires. At this point, Vilna, a relatively insignificant frontier outpost, became a marker of a historical absurdity driven by the irrationality of the human mind and the vain ambition of imperial expansionism:

On the 12th of June the forces of Western Europe crossed the frontier and the war began, that is, an event took place opposed to human reason and to all human nature. Millions of men perpetrated against one another so great a mass of crime -- fraud, swindling, robbery, forgery, issue of counterfeit money, plunder, incendiarism, and murders -- that the annals of all the criminal courts of the world could not muster such a sum of wickedness in whole centuries,

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16 Ibid., 94.
17 Ibid., 95.
18 For more on the relationship between Tolstoy and Lithuania, see Birutė Masionienė, Levas Tolstojus in Lietuva (Vilnius: Vaga, 1978).
19 On the narrative role of Vilna in War and Peace, see Jurginis, “Lietuva L. Tolstojaus “Kare ir taikoje” in Istorija ir poezija, 194-204.
though the men who committed those deeds did not at that time look on them as crimes.

What led to this extraordinary occurrence? What were its causes? Historians, with simple-hearted conviction, tell us that the causes of this event were the insult offered to the Duke of Oldenburg, the failure to maintain the continental system, the ambition of Napoleon, the firmness of Alexander, the mistakes of the diplomats, and so on.

According to them, if only Metternich, Rumyantsev, or Talleyrand had, in the interval between a levée and a court ball evening party, really taken pains and written a more judicious diplomatic note, or if only Napoleon had written to Alexander: “My respected Brother, I consent to restore the duchy to the Duke of Oldenburg” there would have been no war.

We can readily understand that being the conception of the war that was presented to the contemporaries.... We cannot grasp the connection between these circumstances and the bare fact of murder and violence, nor why he duke’s wrongs should induce thousands of men from the other side of Europe to pillage and murder the inhabitants of Smolensk and Moscow and to be slaughtered by them.20

The Russian tsar casually waited for an apology from his ‘imperial brother’ in Vilna; but he was also preparing for war, for everyone knew that once the war machine is put in motion, only the death of a hundred thousand people could halt its rapid progression:

The Russian Emperor had meanwhile been spending more than a month in Vilna, holding reviews and inspecting manoeuvres. Nothing was in readiness for the war, which all were expecting, though it was to prepare for it that the Tsar had come from Petersburg. There was no general plan of action.

[...]The longer the Tsar stayed in Vilna, the less ready was the Russian army for the war, which it had grown weary of expecting. Every effort of the men who surrounded the Tsar seemed to be devoted to making their sovereign spend his time pleasantly and forget the impending war,

[...]The very day on which Napoleon gave the order to cross the Niemen, and the vanguard of his army crossed the Russian frontier, driving back the Cossacks, Alexander was at a ball given by the generals on his staff at Count Bennigsen’s house.21

Informed of the attack, Alexander reputedly announced: “To enter Russia with no declaration of war! I will consent to conciliation only when not a single enemy under arms is left in my country!”22 Four days later, Napoleon, in Vilna, residing in the palace quickly evacuated by Alexander, was receiving the local dignitaries. “The Emperor was in excellent spirits after his ride about Vilna, and was greeted and followed with acclamations by

21 Ibid., 694-95.
22 Ibid., 697.
crowds of inhabitants. From every window in the streets through which he had passed draperies and flags with his monograms had been hanging, and Polish ladies had been waving handkerchiefs to welcome him.”

The Russian army reoccupied Vilna twenty-four weeks later and the city appears again at the end of the novel as a climactic site where the imperial frontiers of Russia become equated with the boundaries of domestic Russian happiness:

On the 29th of November Kutuzov reached Vilna – his dear Vilna, as he used to call it. Twice during his military career Kutuzov had been governor of Vilna.

In that wealthy town, which had escaped injury, Kutuzov found old friends and old associations, as well as comforts of which he had been so long deprived. And at once turning his back on all military and political cares, he plunged into the quiet routine of his accustomed life, so far as the passions raging all around him would permit. It was as though all that was being done, and had still to be done, in the world of history, was no concern of his now.

[...] The next day the commander-in-chief gave a dinner and ball, which the Tsar honoured with his presence.

Kutuzov had received the Order of St. George of the first rank; and the Tsar had showed him the highest marks of respect, but every one was aware that the Tsar was displeased with the commander-in-chief.

[...] The Tsar’s displeasure was increased in Vilna by Kutuzov’s obvious unwillingness or incapacity to see the importance of the approaching campaign.

When the next morning the Tsar said to the officers gathered about him: “You have not only saved Russia, you have saved Europe,” every one knew at once that the war was not over.

Kutuzov alone refused to see this, and frankly gave it as his opinion that no fresh war could improve the position of Russia, or add to her glory; that it could but weaken her position, and cast her down from that high pinnacle of glory at which in his view Russia was standing now. He tried to show the Tsar the impossibility of levying fresh troops, and talked of the hardship the people were suffering, the possibility of failure, and so on.

[...] The war of 1812, in addition to its national significance, dear to every Russian heart, was to take a new European character.

The movement of men from west to east was to be followed by a movement of peoples from east to west, and this new war needed a new representative, with other aims and qualities, and moved by impulses different from Kutuzov’s.

For the movement from east to west, and the establishment of the position of peoples, Alexander was needed just as Kutuzov was needed for the deliverance and the glory of Russia.

Kutuzov did not see what was meant by Europe, the balance of power, and Napoleon. He could not understand all that.

After the enemy had been annihilated, Russia had been delivered and raised to the highest pinnacle of her glory, the representative of the Russian people, a Russian of the Russians, had no more left to do. Nothing was left for the representative of the national war but to die. And he did die.

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23 Ibid., 711.
24 Ibid., 1252-1256.
Tolstoy finishes the *Vilna* section of the historical drama with a passing note of domestic insignificance -- the sudden and unmourned death of Kutuzov, who actually took up the command of the joint Russian and Prussian armies in the beginning of 1813, but died before the start of the German chapter of the anti-Napoleonic campaign. His unanticipated but not unforeseeable death exonerates Kutuzov from the 'imperial burden' of the Russian monarchy; yet the long military career of the old general included many campaigns of the Russian imperial wars in Poland-Lithuania, the Ottoman domains and western Europe. And as a governor of *Vilna*, he was after all a ruler of the conquered land. Arguably, only during the 1812 invasion did his military duties acquire purely national-liberation qualities.

With the historically synchronized death of Kutuzov and the opening of the European campaign, Tolstoy seems to map out the geo-ideological transformation of the Russian state from a national to an imperial powerhouse. This is of course a misleading narrative plot, for Russia had been legally transformed from a 'national' monarchy into a multinational empire in 1721 by the decree of Peter I who assumed the title of emperor of Russia. (At the time, there was only one empire in Europe, the Holy Roman Empire, dissolved in 1806, and France only became an imperial state in 1804.) In general, the idea of the separation between national and imperial interests was never taken seriously by any colonial and/or imperialist state, and Tolstoy himself associates the pre-Vienna Congress boundaries of Russia, which included vast territories and diverse peoples of recently acquired Lithuania, the Crimea, Transcaucasia, Bessarabia and Finland as legitimate and uncontested parts of Russia. Indeed, the largely non-Russian *Vilna* for Tolstoy serves as a home-field for the Russian military and bureaucracy. Hence, despite the anti-war and somewhat anti-autocratic message of *War and Peace*, Tolstoy's geographical (but not spiritual or historical) idea of Russia was not so much different from the proponents of the imperialist expansionism of the 'historical' Russian homeland.

**THE RUSSIAN FRONT**

The fusion of the 'spiritual' dimensions of the Russian fatherland with the state mechanisms of modern (European) empire had always been the official doctrine of the tsarist regime. The synthesis of the two elements was intensified at the turn of the twentieth century when national and social frictions were constantly manipulated and rearranged by all sides. Increasingly, the state used imperial commemorations for consolidation of
national pride. In 1912, there was a massive festivity of the hundredth anniversary of the defeat of Napoleon. The year of 1913 was marked by the celebratory gala of the tricentennial of the Romanov dynasty. The epicentre for both commemorations was the original -- ‘national’ -- capital of the Russian state, Moscow, because neither the war of 1812 nor the accession of Mikhail Romanov on the tsarist throne had much to do with Saint Petersburg, the imperial capital of Russia. The historically peripheral but geographically significant Vilna had its own role to play during both anniversaries. In 1912, the collapse of the Grande Armée was remembered by an organized tour of local Napoleonic ‘military graveyards.’ The hills of Ponari became the narrative and geographical nexus point of the commemorative tour. On the other hand, the tsarist dynastic rule was honoured by the consecration of the Romanov Church, one of the largest and most ornate Russian Orthodox shrines in the city. Designed in a ‘traditional’ Byzantine-Muscovite style, located in one of the most modern quarters of the city, and built on the highest elevation point possible, its bright cupolas perched high above the Baroque domes and steeples of the old town.

Predictably, the beginning of the war in 1914 in Vilna was marked by a mandatory imperial visitation. Two months after the outbreak of the hostilities on the Eastern front, the tsar honoured this borderline provincial city with a short stopover on his way to the frontline, which at the time was already stretching for hundreds of kilometres from the Baltic Sea to the Carpathian Mountains. Russia was victorious, and by the end of September its troops advanced deep into East Prussia (a part of the German empire) and Galicia (a part of the Austro-Hungarian empire). On the other hand, the German army was pushing eastwards in Poland. Vilna was yet to become a frontline town, but here the war was manifested much more acutely than in any of the imperial capitals of Europe, which were still gripped by the initial patriotic ecstasy of the promises of imminent victories.

In general, the war in Lithuania was certainly not a welcome event, and except for a very few Russians, local residents had little to gain from the Russian victory. Still, for their imperial loyalty, the tsar’s government promised a nominal cultural autonomy of the

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25 The hundredth anniversary of the 1812 War also spurred a publication of various books, including Russian memoirs, about Vilna’s role during the war; see, for instance, C.F. Dobryanski, *K istorii otechestvenoi voiny. Sostoyania Vilny v 1812 g. — Zapiski Sev.-zapadnovo otdeleniia imperatorskovo russkovo geograficheskovo o-va*, book 3 (Vilna, 1912); also O. A. Kudrinskii, *Vilna v 1812 godu* (Vilna, 1912).
Lithuanian and Jewish communities; and it even agreed to address the unsolvable ‘Polish problem.’ Some Lithuanian, Jewish and Polish politicians in Saint Petersburg -- the members of the Duma -- expressed their hopes for a national emancipation by declaring eternal loyalty to the Russian imperial universe. Bernard Pares, “the official British observer with the Russian armies in the field,” immediately noticed the patriotic jubilation after his arrival in Petrograd, the renamed capital of Russia, at the end of the summer of 1914. He went to the Duma [Parliament] to meet the elected officials of the empire:

A few representative speeches were expected, but with a remarkable spontaneity not only every section of political opinion, but every race in the vast Russian empire took its part in a striking series of declarations of loyalty and devotion. Each man spoke plainly the feelings of himself and those for whom he spoke. Perhaps no speeches left a greater impression that those of the Lithuanians and of the Jews; these last found a noble spokesman in Mr. Friedman [the representative from Kovno gubernia]. The speeches in the Duma, which were circulated all over the country, were a revelation to the public and to the Duma itself; and the war thus had from the first a national character; it was a great act in the national life of Russia.26

Pares of course represented the official opinion of the British state, which was in alliance with the Russian monarchy, and in 1915 he published a propaganda-travelogue, *Day by Day with the Russian Army*, that outlined his wartime experience on the Eastern (Russian) front. So, perhaps, it is not surprising then that he projected the imperial ideal of British society onto the Russian socio-ethnic landscape. In order to objectify his personal and official British views, he nonetheless quotes the rector of Moscow University: “Tell them in England that we have one heart and one soul with them.”27

Pares however noticed that there were some justifiable differences between Russia and Britain. For one, Russia was branded by its social, cultural and economic ‘inferiority’; secondly, the country had a much more convoluted relationship with ‘European civilization’ than any other European power; and thirdly, since the geographical and racial boundaries between the metropolitan and subjugated peoples of the Russian empire were never clearly defined (this was especially true in the western, European, part of the empire), there was a general assumption in the west that Russia was painfully affected by various antagonistic national, racial and social tensions. In this sense, Russia corresponded

27 Ibid., 15.
to the ‘socio-anthropological’ landscape of the German-Austrian axis, which was the economic, geopolitical and even cultural nemesis of the Franco-British alliance.

Pares attempted to alter this rather damaging point of view by describing the wartime consolidation of the imperial (reactionary) force with people’s (revolutionary) power. He calls this sudden reaction to the enemy’s attack “the nationalisation of Russian public life, which had so long been under the strong control of the reactionary German influences. The liberation from these influences was sealed by the re-naming of the capital. The German name, St. Petersburg, was exchanged for the Russian Petrograd. This was no fad. It was the fitting end to a long struggle of the Russian people as a whole, under a national sovereign, to develop itself independently of any mailed fist, to manage its own affairs as Russian instincts should direct.”

A great part of this ‘national instinct’ was the patriotic redirection of the revolutionary sensibility of the mob, which for a decade posed the greatest threat to the survival of the tsarist autocracy. At the declaration of war, the “wonderful scene before the Winter Palace showed the sovereign and people at one; and the wrecking of the German Embassy was the answer of the Russian workmen to the active propaganda of discontent that had issued from its walls.” From Petrograd, Pares followed the tsar to Moscow, where the unity between the people and autocracy was hermetically sealed by the celebratory fusion of the historic experience and contemporary necessity of the Russian nation: “In Moscow in 1812 the Emperor met his people after the beginning of the war. Gentry offered their lives; merchants, with clenched fists and streaming eyes, offered one-third of all their substance. In 1914 the Emperor again went to pray with his people in Moscow, and the growth of a still greater Russia has only augmented those proportions, deepened the reach of the historical example of patriotic self-sacrifice.” Hence, considering the immensity of historical recollections and the outflow of patriotic feelings, Russia was ready for the exigencies and sufferings of modern warfare more than any nation of Europe:

The whole country was at once at its best...The difference between the Russians and us [British] was that while the feeling, often so acute with us, could often find no road, in Russia, with her conscription and her huge Red Cross organisation, the path was easy. All the life of the country streamed straight into the war; age limits did not act with us; and the rear, including the

28 Ibid., 13.
29 Ibid., 4.
30 Ibid., 13.
capital, was depleted of nearly every one. This made one feel that no good work could be done here without access to the army. Nearly all my friends were gone off, and I was anxious to join them.\textsuperscript{31}

As in 1812, the Russian path from the imperial capital to the war-zone led through \textit{Vilna}, and Pares carried his official diplomatic and military duties to Lithuania. He arrived in the city on October 8, 1914, following the luxurious train carriage of the emperor. The multinational and in general anti-Russian \textit{Vilna}, in the eyes of the British propagandist, greeted Nicholas II with a devotion and loyalty unparalleled by any other place in the empire:

The Emperor’s visit to the Vilna was a great success. He rode through the town unguarded. The streets were crowded, the reception most cordial. The upper classes in Vilna are mostly Poles, a kind of Polish “enclave.” There are several splendid Catholic churches. On the road to the station are gates with some revered Catholic images, before which all passers by remove their hats. There is a large Jewish trading population often living in extreme poverty: for instance, sometimes in three tiers of cellars one below another. The peasants are mostly Lithuanians. Thus there are not many Russians except officials. At the beginning of war the nearness of the enemy was felt with much anxiety. Now there is an atmosphere of work and assurance. The Grand Hotel and several public buildings are converted into hospitals, where the Polish language is largely used. The Emperor visited all the chief hospitals, and spoke with many wounded, distributing medals in such numbers that the supply ran short. He received a Jewish deputation and spoke with thanks of the sympathetic attitude of the Jews in this hour so solemn for Russia. The general feeling may be described like a new page of history. Among Poles, educated and uneducated, enthusiasm is general. This is all the more striking because in no circumstances could Vilna be considered as politically Polish. Vilna shows all the aspects of war conditions, but the country around is being actively cultivated.\textsuperscript{32}

On the same day, Stanley Washburn, an American-born military correspondent for \textit{The Times} of London, who was closely familiar with Russia, also passed through \textit{Vilna} on his way to the front. His impressions of the city were much less enthusiastic -- he saw neither the imperial pomp nor the displays of Polish loyalty. Indeed, for Washburn, \textit{Vilna} was located outside the pageants of war altogether: “We reached Vilna the following morning [October 8]. I had been through there a half dozen times before but never stopped. This town is one of the largest Jewish towns in Russia and is very old. As there

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 11. 
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 17.
was nothing of interest there I contented myself with strolling around for an hour or two and then returned to the train.”

In peaceful times both Washburn and Pares would probably have reached Russia from Germany via Vilna. But the “war broke,” in Washburn’s words, and “completely upset all normal travel. Ordinarily, in my many trips to Petrograd I had taken the Nord-Express from Berlin, but this was impossible, hence we had to cross Norway and Sweden to reach our destination.” This was certainly a long, unusual and complicated routing and in London nobody knew “about the routes except Cook & Son.” But from Petrograd there was no difficulty in reaching the Eastern Front and after leaving Vilna, both observers arrived at the general headquarters of the Russian army in Baranovichi (a town in Belarus) a matter of two days. Pares arrived at “the Russian headquarters as the bugle sounded for evening prayer. The atmosphere here was of complete simplicity and homeyness.” The more experienced and keen Washburn, however, noticed “three blue special trains hidden in a pine forest about two miles from the railroad station,” where the emperor “was living in a luxurious private car, much finer than any American car I had ever seen.” In general, both military experts agreed on the democratic and even egalitarian atmosphere at the headquarters. “Though Russia is an autocracy,” remarked Washburn, “there is more social and civil equality there than in any country of which I know, and men in high positions are treated by nobility with far more democracy that is shown by American millionaires. They are received with far less ostentation that is shown by the “nouveaux riches” of England and America toward their subordinates. The food was simple and the order forbidding strong drinks was followed strictly. Vodka, champagne and liqueurs, which had always been so dear to the heart of the Russians, had utterly disappeared, and the Commander-in-Chief [the tsar] himself permitted on his own table nothing stronger than claret or white wine.” In short, in the face of a geopolitical crisis, the modernized Russian monarchy managed to restrain its traditional opulence and arrogance, and there

34 Ibid., 27.
36 Ibid., 17.
38 Ibid.
could be no greater contrast between the tsarist inactivity and frivolity during the Patriotic War of 1812 and the imperial seriousness during the Great War.

Like all military correspondents, Pares and Washburn were eager to see and experience the frontline up close. But they formed their opinions about the geographical intricacies of the war in different ways. Washburn rushed to understand modern military frontline warfare in a more traditional fashion by reading maps:

> It is futile to study this phenomenon [war] without beginning at the bottom. First one must know the history of the country, the character of the people, and the terrain where the fighting is to take place. One can do no more in war without maps that one can do in navigating a ship without charts. As I had spent eight years studying topographical maps of Japan, France, Germany, and England and other countries, in connection with playing the "War Game" or what we call 'map maneuvers," I had become somewhat adept in reading military maps. I purchased every map I could get hold of in Petrograd and began to commit to memory, as far as I could, the country over which the Russian army must of necessity fight."

His cartographic memory helped Washburn to navigate through the always changing and jagged line of the Eastern Front, which at that time, was cutting across the Russian, German and Austrian empires. Still, his extensive cartographic knowledge of the geographical terrain could not guide him through the actual landscape of the war. "It is tiresome to live through a war, but even worse to write about it. I have spent the last twenty years trying to forget the war, "wrote Washburn at the beginning of the Second World War, "yet it is still painful to recall it."

Washburn was interested in and concerned with the painful details of life on the frontline, whereas Pares was eager to accumulate a panoramic vision of the war. Hence, at first opportunity he boarded a plane that circumnavigated parts of the Russian-Austrian frontline in southern (Austrian) Poland:

> We made a circle above the town [Tarnow], returned over the aerodrome, saluted our friends and then struck away inland away from the front to get the necessary elevation. We passed over a map of ponds and villages and copses, all clearly marked in the bright sunshine, with a long ridge of the snowy Carpathians to the right of us. Then we turned and swept higher over the same ground as before straight for the lines. In front, at right angles to us, lay the dividing river like a long, twisted ribbon, and as soon as we neared it we swept to the right and along it. All the different points at which I had stayed come out clear in the sunlight. Here was the piece across the river where I had seen the scouting; there were "The Birds" with the high ruined church behind them; further came the smaller

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Ibid., 38.

Ibid., 49.

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outpost; and in the distance lay the marches in the neighbourhood of the Upper Vistula. We again passed about and this time passed right over the river which divided the hostile lines, following further southward by the broken bridge and to the main road, near the point where I had sat at night among the sentries and to the hills which had been the scene of the action with the Tirolese. But for me the main interest of this, my first air ride, was that suddenly the unknown land beyond the fatal line was as clearly outlined as all that land that was well known to me. Till now I had seen here a field and a line of ramparts, there a river with trees, and there again a hill. It is true that sometimes I had had good field-glass views of a given landscape with signs of life, but now to the naked eye both sides were for the first time parts of one common world, the dividing line ran thin and almost undividing, and all was alive. There occurs to one the notable description by Tolstoy of Nicholas Rostov looking across the field. The wonderful and real things that that field meant were gone. The tremendous and human struggle of all Europe was become a simple problem of science; one had mounted to the skies and reached what Napoleon, with his heartlessness and his seeing mind, had called “the celestial side of the art of war.” What would he have given for this view, where his trained eye could have marked down not only the numbers indicated by slight symptoms, but the full bearing of each, suggested by the flash of genius so typical of him. Surely it was a measure of magnificent consolation for the enormous widening of the area of combat.

The dull flats beyond the river rose to higher ground eastward, and there on a high wooden plateau ran the railway dead straight, and at one point a stationary train marked the centre of many of our troubles, the point from which the 42-centimetre guns had been bombarding Tarnow. As our aeroplane flew along the river, there flicked out from a copse a shot from a masked Austrian air-battery, posted there to keep off the too curious eye. I was told afterwards that there were other shots, but we did not see or hear them.41

So, while the strategies and tactics of the Great War were the best examples of modern military ingenuity and technological brutality, the ghosts of the Napoleonic invasion were clearly present on its Russian Front. This became especially apparent in the summer of 1915, when German defensive tactics turned into offensive strategies and a full-scale occupation of Russian territory began. By mid-October, winter was already approaching the entrenched Russian-German frontline that had stabilized along the eastern boundaries of Lithuania. Most of the German army was concentrated in Lithuania, which was almost over night transformed from an imperial Russian to a colonial German province. Confronted with the possible collapse of the Russian defence system, Washburn rushed to familiarize himself and the German army (!) with the tragic Napoleonic predicaments of the Russian winter warfare:

41 Pares, Day by Day with the Russian Army, 166-167.
battle pictures ever painted. Among them were pictures of the French Old Guard freezing in the snow and burning the Imperial eagles to keep themselves warm; piles of skulls left following spring; Cossacks cutting up French troops in the snow storms and possibly the worst of all, the crossing of the Beresina by the fragment of Napoleon’s army, less than forty thousand out of the 680,000 he had in June.

[...] In two days I reached the staff of the Emperor in Mogilev, where we were cordially received and put up at a hotel by orders of Alexeiev [Chief of Staff]. The next day I had a long talk with him, and outlined to him what I suggested he could do in the way of propaganda. I wrote a memorandum for him, urging that all these terrible pictures of the Russian winters that I had brought from Moscow be printed on red paper and put up in packages of a thousand, where they could be cut loose from airplanes and scattered all over the snow. I wrote a dozen captions for these, pointing out what happened to Napoleon in 1812, and asking the soldiers what would happen to the Germans during the winter. This received the approval of the staff.  

It is not clear if Washburn’s propaganda recommendations were turned into actions. In any case, the modern German army, with the help of an extensive railway supply system, was prepared to winter in Poland-Lithuania.

THE FACE OF WILNA

There is a certain tragic irony that once war crosses the Lithuanian frontier and its capital again becomes an indefensible victim of the warring European parties, its Baroque sensualities come back to life, as if local ancient “Sarmatian” traditions put a curse even on the speediest form of modernization -- the ideological, economic, political and technological transformation of the place through the exigencies of war. So, as in Baroque visualization of the universe, high and low, celestial and profane, fantasy and topography, reality and propaganda, perfection and ruins, joy and grief, history and eschatology, and future and death become tools of modern mapping. Under such ‘cartographic’ circumstances, the divisions of Vilna/Wilna become exaggerated and embellished, metamorphosing the city into a mere representational symbol. At the same time, the wartime mappings of the place painfully alter local reality to the point when the modern life of the city depends on the physical survival of its residents.

War certainly ages cities, but it also paradoxically brings youth into the picture, for any military occupation or a resistance to it -- modern or ancient -- depends on the

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physical strength and emotional vitality of young people, especially young men and even adolescent boys, the physical backbone of any army. So in a way, war and violent conflicts bond Modernity with Baroque, since in both instances, the universe is viewed as a domain of youthful ambitions that is nonetheless governed by the rules of death. This juxtaposition of youth and age, strength and weakness, flesh and decay creates a theatrical sense of the world where ‘natural’ transitions of the human body, or for that matter historical mutations of society, are interpreted as signs of the contradictory universe. Baroque allegorical landscape is perhaps much more elaborate than the minimalist sense of modern military cartography, but both assembled reality as a theatre, that is as a fragmentary, intrusive and disruptive element of the world. According to Christine Buci-Glucksmann, in Baroque landscapes:

[One] can see, well before modern art, allegory as the testimony of the domination of the fragment over everything, of the destructive principle over the constructive one, of passion, as the excavation of an absence, over the mastery of reason. Only the fragment is able to demonstrate that the logics of the body, of feeling, of life and death do not coincide with those of Power or the Idea. In the fragment there appears precisely that which is mute (hence music), that which is new (even if it is death), that which is unmastered and profoundly ungovernable; catastrophes that embody the very act of representation.

Reality is here consigned to a perennial antinomy, to the deceptive game of reality as an illusion, in which the world is simultaneously evaluated and devaluated. 'The profane world, considered from the point of allegory, is simultaneously evaluated and devaluated.' In it there lies the specific seduction of Baroque, in which the pre-eminence of the aesthetic — of play, of appearance — is united with metaphysical loss against the background of affliction and melancholy. The metaphor of the theatre — of the world as theatre and the theatre as world — portrays the particular temporality of the Baroque.... Over this eternal displacement of appearances there lies the presence of an omniscient, but now distant, spectator: God. The abyss between reality and illusion, however, is insuperable: the theatre now knows itself to be theatre.43

“The history of the city,” declares a 1916 German guidebook to Wilna, “could not be summarised in books and chronicles; the history of the city is most obviously reflected in the self-expression of the place... .The human face mirrors life experiences and reflects the fate of an individual; similarly, the city’s character and its role are revealed by the general urban layout that outlines the historic development, traumas and vigour of the site.”44 “The map of Wilna,” continues the guide, “looks like a face of an old person who might have had

43 Christine Buci-Glucksmann, La Raison Baroque: de Baudelaire à Benjamin, as quoted in Ian Chambers, Culture after Humanism, 91.
a long life, but never truly experienced the most important -- threshold -- moments in life."45 This uneventful face-map of Wilna communicates the city as an order-less spatial organism where "the crooked streets and lanes intertwined" without any rationale or meaningful purpose.46 Moreover, this erratic urban labyrinth does not have "a heart that could monitor its everyday life and it lacks a skeleton -- or a clear structure of a street hierarchy -- that could sustain an energetic modern life."47

The incongruous, spineless and aged urban body is a result of the city's historic misfortunes:

Wilna, like many other ancient towns, experienced many devastating fires. Both hard times and a lack of gifted leaders always infringed on a full recovery of the city. So, this is how the old, wrinkly face of the city matured: since there was no general plan, each house was built with no consideration to other buildings, Hence, a straight line became a curve, and, because of the hilly terrain, these curves metamorphosed into an urban web. Looking at Wilna, even the entwined puzzling network of ancient streets of Rome appears to be coherent and rational.48

As a result, the aging Wilna -- in contrast to many other ancient towns of western Europe -- is unfit to meet the challenges of modernity and its lifeless, exhausted urban organism is in desperate need of some kind of radical rejuvenating surgery.

This is precisely what Paul Monty, the author of the guidebook, proposes. "The city map," states the self-appointed guide to Wilna, "summons an incision."49 The spatial confusion must be eradicated -- the old-town streets should be enlarged, straight avenues ought to be laid out, crooked corners need to be eliminated, inert urban squares have to be redesigned and unruly local rivers must be embanked. Most importantly, the city should openly face the railway station -- the nexus of modern global links -- rather than shy away from it. In the best traditions of metropolitan modernity, the railway station of Wilna must conjoin the reconstructed urban heart via a ring of wide boulevards. Consequently, "the crooked ancient streets should be straightened up and broadened so the centre of the town has a direct access to the train station. In the end, this operation will create a main urban axis that will immediately harmonise the map of the city."50 Monty concludes his idealist

45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., 10.
49 Ibid., 12.
50 Ibid.
sketch of the city with an evocation of metropolitan modernity and its dictatorial master-designer “Baron Hausmann, the creator of the Parisian boulevards,” who in the author’s view “would find plenty of inspiring work in Wilna.”

For those with a less radical and/or powerful vision of the cityscape, there is only one solution -- a personal assimilation within the old fabric of Wilna. According to Monty’s guidebook, in Wilna, cartographic knowledge, spatial memory and even modern visualization of the city are pointless: “In many cities, one can orient himself by remembering the names of the streets and by noting their geographical relationship. Not so in Wilna, where a traveller has to cross the same street several times before he can even distinguish it from other streets.” Furthermore, Wilna has no memorable squares -- or focal points -- that could orient the gaze and energy of a lost visitor. While the town possesses many “big and small squares that look very charming in spring, there is no main square that could centralize the city’s life. All the squares, like the city’s crooked streets, had emerged capriciously, so they have no clear public function.” There is nothing in Wilna comparable to “the Marktplatz in Hildesheim, the Altmarkt in Dresden, or the Piazza in Florence.” The huge Cathedral Square of Wilna, which is “not even a square but a park -- a vast green corridor that leads to the Castle Hill and the surrounding gardens” -- has no municipal purpose. “This seemingly limitless expanse is not bounded by a single house. It is framed on one side by the city, but on the other side the square is freed by wilderness.... The progressive rhythm of modern life has yet to invade Wilna’s squares and general lethargy still rules over the city.” In brief, the city lacks of recognizable representational space that could function as its official welcoming and/or gathering site. So “until a drastic face-lift occurs, visitors have to accept the barely understood street logic of the place, because only by tolerating its outmoded rationality, they would be able to navigate through this incomprehensible urban maze.”

Since there is no focal point or central axis from which an accumulative discovery of the place could begin, a ‘modern’ form exploration of the city is impossible. However,

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51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 17.
53 Ibid., 13.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 15.
57 Ibid., 12.
despite the clear lack of metropolitan qualities, the streets and courtyards of the city “which often assume a role of squares” are full of invigorating activities. In the eyes of Monty, Wilna is marked by an exceptional sense of urban porosity that stimulates spontaneity, so the encountered cityscape often induces impromptu explorations of its meandering life. The best way to know and conquer Wilna is by having to wander into it without any specific direction or purpose. As a result, Monty asks his fellow travellers (or readers) to forget the map and dismiss the first rather unpleasant impressions of the city, and enter it with an open, uncommitted mind. “Any person who looks at the town from the surrounding hills or some tall buildings (such as the lofty barracks near the train station)” remarks Monty, “can see that Wilna is a big city. But, many travellers, who only stop here for a couple hours on their way to more important destinations witness only to a sad uninviting spectacle of an impoverished provincial town with inadequately paved streets that immediately extinguishes any desire to explore the city. Yet, the colourful life of this town where everything is so intertwined becomes alluring only through an unhurried wandering through its winding streets.”

In other words, Monty asks the travellers -- including those who have very little time or desire to discover the city -- get a ‘feeling’ rather than an ‘experience’ of the place. Wilna invokes sensual corporeality rather than material rationality: it is not a spectacle but a stage, a theatrical site not an exhibitive sight. Accordingly, Monty invites his audience to become flâneurs, and use his textual references not as guides but as narrative explorations of possible urban encounters. In short, he packages Wilna as a lingering adventure or a memorable escape from the everyday sights of modern Europe.

In ordinary, that is peaceful, circumstances, this kind of suggestion might look a bit naïve, counterproductive and even presumptuous: tourists, especially those who visit Wilna, usually do not have time, need or desire to venture into what Monty himself describes as an unessential and lethargic provincial town. But these were not ordinary times, and Monty’s audience was not a crowd of intentional travellers or voyeurs. Monty published his travel guide in Wilna during the second year of the Great War and his German readers were most likely the soldiers and officers of the Tenth German Army who were stationed in the vicinity of the city. The Tenth Army was a combating army and its vast battlefield spread across Lithuania, but it also was an occupying and colonial army,

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58 Ibid., 16.
since it was engaged in a civilian and military administration of the occupied parts of the Russian empire. Hence, most of its soldiers, and especially its high-ranking officers, had a dual duty to fight the Russian enemy and to rule the recently subjugated population of Lithuania.

So in a way, Monty attempts to familiarize the German occupiers with the potential new territorial and ethnographic additions of the swelling Vaterland. And with the help of his Wilna guide he tries to transform battling frontline soldiers into artful semi-colonial flâneurs. Hence, his invitation to tour Wilna has strong pedagogical qualities, for it exposes the nomadic but regimented soldiers to the freedoms and pleasures of independent urban connoisseurs. In other words, it seeks to retrain the toughened, brutalized and often cynical military men into sensual and sanguine gentlemen.

Paradoxically, despite its urban imperfections, Monty thinks that Wilna is the best place for such a transformation or relearning experience to occur. While the rest of the world, including the German homeland and Eastern Front, moves forward, in Wilna’s crooked streets and small lanes “life has not yet become history” and even during the war everything here “stays intact.” Accordingly, in Wilna, a soldier-flâneur can potentially encounter the world that had been “untouched” by the most crucial -- threshold -- moment of his young life - the imminent experience of death at the frontline trenches.

Of course, the notion that Wilna escaped the cruelties of the war or the modern age arose from a nostalgic and wishful dreamscape of the German conqueror. The approach of the German-Russian frontline in early September of 1915 transformed the city:

After Kowno’s fall, Wilna prepared for evacuation. Streets had long been crowded with carts of refugees fleeing east. Now the [Russian] government departed, officials and agencies cramming the train station to bursting with packages and freight. With them they took their monuments and statues, symbols of tsarist rule. Parishioners surrounded churches to prevent bells from being taken away. The city shut down, mail and telephone service severed. As the Germans neared, cannon were soon heard from three sides. Zeppelins floated over the city to drop bombs on darkened streets. The retreating Russians were determined to leave as little as possible to the advancing Germans. In the evenings, the city’s fringes were lit by flames, as fire ‘evacuated’ what railroads could not. The government sought to mobilize all local reservists, so that their manpower would not fall to the enemy. Soon planned measures turned to panic. Arson teams set fire to homesteads, farms, and manors, pillaging, looting and driving people east by force. On September 9, 1915, the army chief ordered that all men from 18 to 45 were to retreat with the army. A crazy manhunt began,

59 Ibid., 23.
natives and deserters hid or fled to the woods. Those caught by police were sent to collection centers to be moved out. Intensifying Zeppelin bombardments, shattering the train station and dropping explosives at random, announced the end. The last Russian regiments and Cossacks marched out of a city that seemed dead. In the dreamlike interval before the arrival of German soldiers, life slowly began to stir again, as locals organized civic committees, police militia, and newspapers. The last farewell of the Tsar's forces was the sound of explosions, as bridges were blown up.⁶⁰

After skirmishing battles with the retreating Russian forces, the imperial German army finally entered Wilna on Tishri 10, 5676. The day, according to the Jewish religious calendar, was one of the holiest days of the year -- Yom Kippur. On this Day of Atonement, which marks the end of the Days of Awe (and calls for the beginning of New Year), sins against God are pardoned and reconciliation with God is reaffirmed. This is not a joyous festival, but a sober day of fasting, self-denial and prayer. Traditionally, in the morning of the eve of Yom Kippur, the Jews of an eastern European town would go to cemeteries. When “the Day of Judgement is imminent, people have to repent, cleanse themselves. But first they have to appease their dead. Now they are going to the cemetery, to their dead, begging them for forgiveness, pleading with them to plead with God on their behalf,” remarked German writer Alfred Döblin during his visit to Poland. ⁶¹

In the evening, however, the Jewish town becomes quiet, as it seals itself from the rest of the world in the ecstatic moment of prayer. For Joseph Roth, the writer and journalist of metropolitan Vienna and Berlin of the post-World War I era, the strict observance of Yom Kippur defined the physical and spiritual universe of the Eastern European Jewry:

I had seen them losing consciousness once before, but it was through prayer. It was during Yom Kippur. In Western Europe that gets translated as the “Day of Atonement,” a phrase that reflects the Western Jew’s whole willingness to compromise. But Yom Kippur is a day not of atonement but of expiation, a heavy day whose twenty-four hours contain enough penitence for twenty-four years. It begins at four o’clock the previous afternoon. In an almost entirely Jewish town, this greatest of all Jewish festivals feels just as a great tempest must feel to those in a frail vessel on the high seas. The streets suddenly go dark as candlelight breaks from windows, and the shutters are closed in fearful haste – and so tightly closed that one has the impression they won’t be opened again until Judgement Day. There is a general taking leave of all worldly things: of business, of joy, of nature, of food, of the street and the family, of friends and

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acquaintances. People who just two hours ago walked the public streets in their
everyday clothes, wearing ordinary expressions, hasten through the lanes quite
transformed, making for the prayerhouse, dressed in the heavy black silk and
dread white of their funeral suits, in white socks and loose slippers, head down,
prayer-coats bundled under their arms. The great silence that now deafens an
otherwise almost orientally noisy town oppresses even the lively children,
whose shouting and crying play such a prominent part in the symphony of the
streets. All the fathers now bless their children. All the women now weep in front
of the silver candelabra. All friends embrace one another. All enemies beg one
another for forgiveness. The choir of angels blows a fanfare for Judgement Day.
Soon Jehovah will open the great volume in which this year’s sins, punishments,
and destinies are recorded. Candles burn for all the dead. Other candles are lit
for the living. The dead are only one step away from the world, as the living are
from the next.

The great praying begins. The great fasting has been in progress for an hour
already. Hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of candles burn behind or
beside one another, they incline together, they pool in one great flame. From a
thousand windows there breaks a wailing prayer, interspersed by soft, mild,
otherworldly melodies copied from those of the heavens. Some prostrate
themselves on the ground, lie there for a long time, then get up, sit on footstools
or flagstones, hunker there, and suddenly leap to their feet, sway back and forth
from the waist, and run around incessantly in the tiny space like ecstatic sentries
of prayer. Entire buildings are filled with white funeral shirts, with the living who
are absent, with the dead who are alive. Not a single drop is permitted to moisten
the parched lips and refresh the dry throats that cry out in so much pain – not to
the world but to the heavens. They will not break their fast today or tomorrow. It
is a shocking thing to know that not one Jew in this town is going to eat and
drink. All have suddenly turned into spirits, with the attributes of spirits. Every
little trader is somehow superhuman, because this is the day on which he wants
to reach God. All without distinctions: The rich are no better off than the poor, as
none of them will have anything to eat. All are sinners, and all pray. A giddiness
comes over them, they reel, they rant, they whisper, they hurt themselves; they
sing, shout, wail. Heavy tears trickle down their old beards, and their hunger is
taken away by so much pain in their souls and by the immemorial melodies that
fill their ecstatic ears.

The only comparable transformation I saw was at a Jewish funeral.  

Yom Kippur ends with a concluding prayer, N’iloh. The word N’iloh “means closing, and it
originally meant the closing of the gates of the Temple. But it was interpreted to mean the
closing of the gates of heaven, when one has the final opportunity to do penance whole-
heartedly and to plead for a successful year. It is an extraordinary moment ... [the] great
Yom Kippur candles are almost burned down. ...This is the end. In a moment, a man’s fate
will be sealed.”

2001), 40-43.
63 Hayyim Schauss, The Jewish Festivals: History and Observance (New York: Schocken
Figure 5.1: The occupation of Wilna, a Russian government city, August 1915. A German propagandistic postcard with an erroneous topography of the city and a wrong (earlier) date for the occupation. Source: Aleksandras Kubilas, Sanctuaries of Vilnius in Old Postcards (Vilnius: Lithuanian Association of Collectors), 43.
According to the western (Gregorian) calendar, the Yom Kippur of the year 5676 fell on September 18, 1915; but, according to the Russian Julian calendar, it was the 5th of September. Hence, for Wilna and its residents, the day when the German army entered the city was also a day when a calendar year changed its form. The German occupation literally brought a new temporal (western European) order, and in many ways, on the same day, when, metaphorically speaking, the city's gate was stormed by the invading army, Wilna's fate was unsealed. And on this day, more than hundred years after Napoleon's invasion, Wilna, a (former) provincial town situated in the western borderlands of the Russian empire, was placed again in a wartime chronotopic limbo by the fast moving geopolitical and national transformation of war-torn Europe.

WILNA IN WAR

A successful German offensive against the Russian forces started in the spring of 1915. "On April 27, our march into Lithuania and Courland began," summarised the commander of the German army in the East, general Erich von Ludendorff. Since the beginning of hostilities in August 1914, the German army fought battles mostly either on their own territory in East Prussia or along the frontier regions of Russian Poland. For nine months, German soldiers were defending the German homeland against Russian aggression. With the advance of the spring offensive of 1915, however, the German army entered and occupied the western borderlands of the Russian empire, and a new phase of the war on the Eastern front had begun. This new phase, which lasted to the end of the war in November of 1918, was marked not only by exhausting and endless trench warfare, but also by an extensive German military and administrative colonisation of the occupied territories. As in 1812, initially, Lithuania, with its unofficial capital, Wilna, played one of the key roles in the projected final victory of the German Reich. According to Ludendorff's memoirs, the imperial strategists in Berlin envisioned a quick collapse of the Russian front after a successful takeover of Wilna by the German army:

It seemed more advisable, in the first instance, to take Kovno by a direct attack of the Tenth Army from the west, and a simultaneous enveloping movement by the Niemen Army from the north. Once this fortress had fallen, the corner-stone of the Russian defence on the Niemen, the road to Vilna and to the rear of the Russian forces would be open. If the Niemen Army and the Tenth Army could

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receive even small reinforcements at the right moment and be supplied with sufficient transportation, it was to hoped that they could fall on the northern flank of the retreating host, via Vilna, with such force that the summer campaign of 1915 would end in a decisive defeat of the Russian armies.\(^65\)

In other words, while the occupation of Wilna and the envisioned defeat of the Russian forces did not necessarily guarantee an immediate German victory, at least it offered a prospect of the cessation of the fighting on the Eastern Front. Ultimately, this would have strengthened the German position in the West, which, potentially, could have lead to a collapse of the French and British defence in France and Belgium. So, from the perspective of the German military strategists, the successful German advance towards Wilna was seen as a prelude to a possible German victory in western Europe. Hence, for a brief moment, in the minds of the German high military commanders, the fate of Europe was aligned to the geopolitical destiny of Wilna.

Ludendorff, the Chief of the Staff in East and, later, the First-Quartermaster-General of the German Army, was directly responsible for the military success of the campaign. By the end of 1915, a vast section of North-western Russia -- including Lithuania, Courland and parts of Byelorussia (the former lands of the Lithuanian Grand Duchy) -- was occupied by the German military; yet, the projected victory on the Eastern front did not materialize. Despite the continuity of military operations, the occupied western Russian gubernias that were inhabited by a great variety of peoples (practically all non-Russians) were seen by the imperial German military-administrative planners as a geopolitically vacuous space. The primary goal of German regional geopolitical policy was to translate (or translocate) the so-called Severo-zapadnyie (North-Western) provinces of the Russian empire into the so-called Ober-Ost (North-Eastern or Upper-East) frontier of the German state.\(^66\)

Accordingly, after the German military occupation, this vast territory with several million people was immediately incorporated into the German political and/or economic realm. This regional translation brought new forms and methods of economic exploitation, but it also, as the new official title of the region suggested, initiated a drastic geographical re-orientation of various local societies. To put it simply, the occupied peoples --

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 175.

\(^{66}\) On German administrative policies in the occupied Russian territories, see A. Strazhas, *Deutsche Ostpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg: Der Fall Ober Ost, 1915-1917* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1993).
Lithuanians, Jews, Poles, Byelorussians, Latvians, etc.—were destined to various degrees to be culturally Germanized, and their military subjugation was meant to enforce their political loyalty to the German nation.

The process of Germanization (or Eindeutschung), however, was impeded by the general lack of geographical understanding of the occupied territories. According to Ludendorff, despite its proximity—Lithuania was situated just across the Prussian border with Russia—the Germans possessed very little ‘useful’ information about the recently acquired region. In addition, the heterogeneous population of this region had different historical relations to the German Kultur. So, instead of the evacuated Russian imperial space, the German military commander encountered a puzzling territory inhabited by a melange of ‘unknown’ and ‘hidden’ peoples with incomprehensible languages whose responses to the German occupation were neither uniform nor consistent:

The country was in a devastated condition owing to the war, and only where we had been in occupation for some time was there any approach to order. ...The population, apart from the German portion, held aloof from us. The German districts, especially the Balts, had welcomed our troops. The Letts were opportunists, and awaited events. The Lithuanians believed the hour of deliverance was at hand, and when the good times they anticipated did not materialize, owing to the cruel exigencies of war, they become suspicious once more, and turned against us. The Poles were hostile, as they feared, quite justifiably, a pro-Lithuanian policy on our part. The White Ruthenians were of no account, as the Poles had robbed them of their nationality and given nothing in return. In the autumn of 1915, I thought I would like to obtain some idea of the distribution of this race. At first they were, literally, not to be found. Subsequently we discovered they were a widely scattered people, apparently of Polish origin, but with such a low standard of civilization that much time would be required before we could do anything for them. The Jew did not know what attitude to adopt, but gave us no trouble, and we were at least able to converse with him, which was hardly ever possible with the Poles, Lithuanians, and Letts. The language difficulties weighed heavily against us and cannot be overestimated. Owing to the dearth of German works of reference on the subject, we knew very little about the country or the people, and found ourselves in a strange world. In a region as large as East and West Prussia, Pomerania, and Posen together we were faced with an appalling task. We had to construct and organize everything afresh.67

In order to organize a new, comprehensible order for the occupied territory, in October of 1915 the Eastern Headquarters of the German army was moved from East Prussia to Kowno, a former gubernia centre some hundred kilometres west of Wilna. From Kowno, Ludendorff ruled the Ober-Ost Land that quickly was nicknamed the “

67 Ludendorff, My War Memories, 221-222.
In general, the administrative regime in the Ober-Ost served the immediate military needs of the German army; yet it possessed some governing structures and bureaucratic systems of German civilian administration. Without any specific directive from Berlin, "a new political formation took place, a quasi-state with its own supreme power, legislation, administration and jurisdiction, its own policy, its own system of direct and indirect taxation, customs, money, etc. No established patterns were followed, except, perhaps, some reminiscences of medieval Teutonic practices and those applied in modern German colonies." Thus, although the occupied territory preserved its military, frontier-like character, it was organized and run according to the bureaucratic practices that had been already established in the German African and South Pacific colonies.

After the stabilization of the Eastern Front in December 1915, with no great military strategies to exercise, running the quasi-civilian administration of the Ober-Ost became Ludendorff's main distraction from the 'uneventful' and 'boring' frontline life. While the war was fought for the sake of German imperial ambitions, the semi-colonial rule of the Ober-Ost was envisioned as a benevolent "work for civilisation." "The monotony of trench warfare," remembers the general, "was greatly relieved for the men by their industrial employment. I sympathized with this feeling, and was glad to find a fresh field in which to serve the Fatherland. A very stimulating piece of work had fallen to me, and it absorbed my whole attention ... We felt that we were working for Germany's future, even in a strange land ... At that time I had in mind plans similar to those which the navy had carried out with great success at Kiao-chau."

Initially, the Ober-Ost was divided into several administrative districts -- Kurland, Litauen, Wilna, Suwalki, Grodno and Bjalystok -- and Wilna, which was the largest and most important city in the occupied region, should have become a 'natural' capital of the Ober-Ost. (In addition, the western and northern borders of the Ober-Ost roughly corresponded with the boundaries of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, thus making Wilna the potential 'historical' capital of the Ober-Ost.) Yet German authorities, and

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69 Ibid., 193.
71 Ibid.
especially Ludendorff, seemed to be highly suspicious of the city, and for the entire duration of the German rule the military and administrative headquarters of the Ober-Ost remained in smaller but nationally less divisive Kowno.

There were some practical reasons for the German skepticism about the central position of Wilna within the Ober-Ost region. Up until the end of 1917 the German-Russian frontline ran some sixty kilometers east of the city; so Wilna was still considered to be a ‘frontline’ town that was directly threatened by any possible Russian counter-offensive. In contrast, in Kowno, which was located near the East Prussian border, the war became a more distant affair. Accordingly, there the “work for civilisation” could proceed with more efficiency under more ‘peaceful’ conditions. In addition, the proximity of Kowno to East Prussia made German military and administrative communications with the imperial Fatherland a more reliable and speedier affair, so the economic and political colonization of the region could be monitored from a relative imperial proximity. Yet, perhaps most importantly, the German soldiers and officers could be more readily reminded of the historical duties of the German civilization in Kowno than in any other occupied city.

In occupied Lithuania, military responsibilities and the social obligations to the German nation were united and internalized through the “German concept of Pflicht, or duty,” that was filled with ‘idealism ... and was anchored to a view of history as myth, as poetic justification of the present and future.” Upon his arrival in Kowno, according to his memoirs, Ludendorff immediately filled the local topography with the mythological memories of the Teutonic expansionism eastwards. At the same time by recounting the (military) birth story of modern Germany, he quickly translates the insignificant, provincial ‘tsarist’ town into a symbol of a prosperous German future:

Kovno is a typical Russian town, with low, mean wooden houses and comparatively wide streets. ...On the farther bank of the Niemen there stands the tower of an old German castle of the Teutonic Knights, a symbol of German civilization in the East, and not far from it there is a memorial of French schemes for the conquest of the world — that hill upon which Napoleon stood in 1812 as he watched the great army crossing the river.

My mind was flooded with overwhelming historical memories; I determined to resume in the occupied territory that work of civilization at which the Germans had labored in those lands for many centuries. The population, made up as it is of such a mixture of races, would never accomplish anything of its own accord, and, left to itself, would succumb to Polish domination.

I was proud to think that, over a hundred years ago, after a period of great weakness and tribulation in Germany, we had thrown off the foreign yoke. Now

72 Eksteins, Rites of Spring, 194.
that same Germany, first beaten by Napoleon because she was decadent and subsequently united by the efforts of a few great men, stood victorious in this World War against enemies who far outnumbered her and added fresh glories to her record. The German people had been through so much already to expose themselves again to such a terrible fate. The men who were leading Germany only needed to develop her latent powers to add fuel to the holy fire burning — as I then thought — in every German heart.

A happy future of assured prosperity seemed to be opening out for the Fatherland.73

By fusing local topographical features with German historical events, Ludendorff ‘organically’ ties the historical destiny of the occupied region to the future prospects of the German empire. In Kowno, the spectre of German history evokes patriotic idealism, and, ultimately, in Ludendorff’s mind, his encounter with Kowno becomes a model for every German to follow. “In this town,” continues Ludendorff in his memoirs “in the former Orthodox church, a magnificent building, typical of the Russian despotic rule in that country... I heard for the first time on foreign soil the beautiful old melody sung as a hymn: ‘I have given myself/With heart and with hand/To thee, land of love and life/My German Fatherland.’ I was deeply moved. This hymn ought to be sung every Sunday in all the churches, and should be engraved on the hearts of all Germans.”74 In the end, everything in Kowno -- including the ‘despotic’ and ‘Oriental’ Russian elements -- redirects the general’s gaze towards the insular world of the unbeatable German spirit.

This translocation of local topography into German history is laden with historical paradoxes and narrative omissions. The failed Napoleonic campaign to Russia that started with the famous Niemen (Memel) crossing in Kowno and ended with the infamous death march in Wilna does not remind the general about the dangers and foolishness of the war. Nor does it remind him about the potential dangers of venturing deeper into Russia. Ludendorff, whose actions in Russia closely followed the footsteps of Napoleon, does not see himself (or Germany) in the light of the military catastrophe of the Grande Armée. Instead, the topographical sighting of the ghost of Napoleon awakens his pride in German political will and culture. Hence, in Kowno, even the looting of the city by the German army -- an almost identical re-enactment of the first day of the Napoleonic invasion -- “was done in as orderly a manner as possible, but a certain amount of confusion was inevitable.”75 This confusion was not to be blamed on the inappropriateness or inefficiency of German order,

73 Ludendorff, My War Memories, 210-212.
74 Ibid., 212.
75 Ibid., 211
but on “the regrettable conditions imposed by the exigencies of war... . To the individual who suffers it is a matter of indifference how: he loses his property. He understands nothing of the necessities of war, and therefore is ready enough to talk about the enemy’s barbaric methods of warfare.” Still, in spite of these minor forms of ‘disorderliness’, Kowno, at least could inspire a belief in the German ability to rule and civilise the occupied region.

Things were quite different in Wilna where, according to Ludendorff, “extraordinary difficulties had still to be overcome.” These difficulties arose not so much from the German military and administrative inability to secure or command the town, but from the city’s ‘problematic’ historical location and national dependencies. Kowno, writes Richard Dehmel, German media censor for the Ober-Ost territories, “differs little from East Prussian provincial towns... and the [city’s] panorama reminds one of Venice with its lagoons rather than Moscow or Petersburg. ...True Russia begins only in Wilna, the city of hundreds of churches and thousands of bordellos; yet, even there, Lithuanian and Polish spirits dominate the place.” In other words, in Wilna, not unlike the centuries before the war (for instance, during Forster’s stay in Lithuania), the German Kultur and Pflicht could potentially succumb to the corruptive ‘Sarmatian’ influences of impenetrable local spatial and historical relations.

Wilna had never fitted into any single or simple geographical, historical and/or national category, and its spatial ambiguity became one of the greatest geopolitical challenges for the German authorities. Furthermore, in contrast to Kowno, the old capital of Lithuania had never been occupied by the Teutonic Order and its rather independent, highly divided but less subservient geography and history often outlined the inevitability of imperial -- dynastic or geopolitical -- doom. In the vicinity of the city, proclaims another German writer of the World War I period, “the dogmatic division between West and East becomes senseless: everything here -- religions, languages, cultures, peoples, histories, and architectural styles -- intertwines.”

76 Ibid., 211-212.
77 Ludendorff, My War Memories, vol. 2, 154.
78 Richard Dehmel, Zwischen Volk und Menschheit: Kriegstagebuch, as quoted in Albrecht, Keliai į Sarmatiją: dešimt dienų Prūsijoje, 208.
79 Alfred Brust, Die verlorene Erde as quoted in Albrecht, Keliai į Sarmatiją: dešimt dienų Prūsijoje, 211.
Just before the war, Wilna had close to 200,000 inhabitants: roughly forty percent of whom were Jewish, more than thirty percent Polish, about twenty percent Russian and the rest consisting of small Lithuanian, Byelorussian, German and Tartar minorities. The demographic situation changed dramatically once the German counter-offensive began in the spring of 1915. The German invasion into the Polish and North-Western provinces of Russia caused an enormous flood of refugees. On the Russian side of the fast moving frontline, Washburn witnessed the immensity of human suffering aggravated by a sudden displacement:

> Of my own knowledge I knew that the Russians had burned everything before them as they had done in 1812, but I had thought [it was] exaggerated until I covered this road. For hundreds of miles it was covered with the unfortunate peasants, old men, old women, dead mothers holding live babies in their arms, bodies lying in the ditches, and overturned cars. I had become used to casualties in battle but all this misery of the civilian population was the most depressing thing I had seen anywhere in war or peace.\(^80\)

A vast majority of local Russians and a substantial number of the Lithuanian speaking population (several hundred thousand) fled Lithuania for the interior provinces of Russia. In addition, the Russian military authorities under the command of the Grand Duke Nicholas ordered a forced evacuation of all Jewish inhabitants of the frontier districts of the region. Many were moved but did not manage to outrun the approaching frontline and in the end, “tens of thousands of fugitives were driven from the provinces of Kovno, Grodno and Suvalk into the province of Vilna, swelling the swarms of refugees who had previously fled from the war-troubled zone; so that, by the summer of 1915, the city of Vilna already contained several thousand Jewish and Christian [refugees].”\(^81\)

On the day when the German army took control of Wilna, the German military commander of the city, General Pfeil, issued a proclamation in three languages -- German, Russian and Polish. It was addressed to all inhabitants of the city and it proudly declared the liberation of a historical Polish city from the tsarist tyranny: “The German military forces pushed the Russian army out of the territory of the Polish city of Wilna. Several German army divisions entered into the notable and legendary city of Wilna. The city has always been a pearl of the Polish realm ...and, Germany is a friend of this realm.”\(^82\)

\(^81\) Cohen, *Vilna*, 360.
However, the national divisions within the city became evident the next day when the members of the Lithuanian national committee objected to such a pro-Polish formulation of the ‘liberation’ declaration and demanded its recall. In addition, the representatives of the Jewish community also expressed a concern about the pro-Polish tone of the declaration. Consequently, the German authorities were forced to recognize the multinational character of Wilna and its surrounding area, and institutionalized a semi-official multilingualism. While the German language replaced Russian as the official language of the Wilna district, the colonial authorities also recognized public usage of four local languages: Polish, Yiddish, Lithuanian and Byelorussian.

To find out more about the ethnic diversity of the city -- so there would be no imperial confusion -- the German authorities initiated an official census. This census was intended to evaluate the economic and geopolitical, that is, ethnic, linguistic and religious, ‘potentials’ of the city, hence, in addition to the number of people, it included the count of domestic animals and poultry, cars, bicycles, wagons, machinery, land, etc. The city’s inhabitants were classified according to their mother-tongue and religion. Consequently, the linguistic and national categories of the German census differ little from the categories used in the Russian census of 1897. Although the data of the census were never officially enumerated, they did not remain a secret among local Polish, Lithuanian and Jewish politicians and communal activists.

It was clear from the census that the city had lost most of its Russian residents; but it was also obvious that despite a large influx of Jewish and Polish refugees, the city’s population was reduced by third. There was a total of 140,840 counted inhabitants and according to their mother-tongue, they were divided into several national groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>70,629</td>
<td>50.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yiddish</td>
<td>61,265</td>
<td>43.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanian</td>
<td>3,699</td>
<td>2.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>2,030</td>
<td>1.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belorussian</td>
<td>1,917</td>
<td>1.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>0.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>0.21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5.2: 'Unscrambling the ethnic confusion of occupied Lithuania': a German statistical map of the Lithuanian military-administration district, 1918. **Source:** Danguolė Gudienė, ed., *Lithuania on the Map*, exhibition catalog (Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 1999), 100.
Figure 5.3: A German map of the garrison-region of Wilna, 1917. Source: Danguolė Gudienė, ed., Lithuania on the Map, exhibition catalog (Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 1999), 103.
According to religious affiliation, the city’s population was segregated into five categories:

- Roman Catholic 76,196 (54.10%)
- Judea 61,233 (43.48%)
- Greek Orthodox 2,049 (1.45%)
- Protestant 1,158 (0.83%)
- Other 204 (0.14%) \(^3\)

These statistical findings firmly established Wilna as a linguistically Polish-Yiddish town; but Ludendorff still could never figure out the geopolitical and national future of the city. In his colonial plans for the Ober-Ost, he frequently calls Wilna a Polish town, but he also makes it a capital of a semi-independent Lithuanian duchy ruled by a Prussian prince. For the German administration, as for the tsarist authorities before them, the numerical, cultural and social strength of the Polish population became the greatest geopolitical nuisance. Undoubtedly, in the general’s opinion, “any [German] prince at Vilna would have had the Polish nobility at his court, the officers of the army would have been Poles, and so would the majority of the civil officials.” So, only “Prussian Germans could keep Lithuania for the Lithuanians, and provide officials and officers, which they could not do in anything like sufficient numbers. States capable of an independent existence are not produced by political catchwords, nor are small nations kept alive thereby. I was, therefore, by no means pleased with vague solution, which seemed so very dangerous for Germany’s future.”\(^4\) Hence, left unorganized, Wilna, in addition to being a national riddle, spelled future geopolitical uncertainties for the entire German Reich.

Beside the political difficulties, Wilna posed some of the greatest economic and sanitary problems. The local German administration attempted to regulate food distribution and instituted a card system, which resulted in the banning of traditional market and commerce activities. In addition, the German mayor of the city instituted heavy labour requirements for most residents of the city. Since the population was already starving, the health conditions in the city deteriorated rapidly. Soon, death became an everyday occurrence among its residents and its landscape was marked by the symptoms of illness and deprivation:

The Russians had left a legacy of cholera, which was stamped out by November 1915; but the physical privation of those sixteen months led to an epidemic of typhoid, which raged from the beginning of 1917 for nine months and was

\(^3\) Sukiennicki, *East Central Europe during World War I: from Foreign Domination to National Independence*, vol. 2., 161.

accompanied for a time by dysentery. In the summer of that year there was hardly a house in Vilna which did not display a red ticket warning public that the plague had entered there. Urgent cases usually had to wait two or three days before the ambulance could call to remove them to the isolation hospital, and in many instances it arrived too late. People had to queue up for coffins. The hearse were unable to cope with the demand, so that coffins were ranged along the pavement to await the wagons upon which they were piled. Vilna became a city of the dead, and those who still moved about felt that they were mere ghosts.  

In the eyes of the German officials, the disease-ridden city was a picture of cultural backwardness (Unkultur) and there were many attempts to regulate the hygienic habits and sanitary practices of the population. The military administration forbade selling food in open markets and ordered disinfection of shops, banned funerary processions and “forced everyone to get vaccinations against cholera, measles, etc; [it also] prohibited the population from changing residences, and finally registered and examined prostitutes.”  

Still, these extreme measures of mass disinfection and isolation of the ‘diseased’ residents achieved very little simply because the main precondition for the spread of the epidemics - the severe food shortage and malnutrition -- was never truly addressed. Above all, the city, like the rest of the Ober-Ost region, was to serve the needs of the German empire, and practically all available food was requisitioned by the occupying army.  

The German administration was more successful in sanitizing the city from Russian cartographic and topographic influences. As the German language replaced the Russian, all the street names of the city were changed and/or translated from Russian into German. Overall, the German local authorities changed very few names, but, ironically, the name of Muroviev Square was changed to Napoleon Platz. (It is not clear if Ludendorff had anything to say about this change, and what historical memories the newly baptized Napoleon Platz was supposed to provoke among the local residents and German soldiers. Undoubtedly, this change was made under pressure from the Polish population of the city.) Nevertheless, the Germans did not introduce any place-names commemorating Prussian kings, German emperors, ministers, generals, cities or historical sites. So in the end, the German phonetic map of Wilna sounded like a translated (tourist) map of an exotic, distant town where alongside some easily recognisable and comprehensible (original) place-names,  

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85 Cohen, Vilna, 366.  
86 Petras Klimas, Iš mano atsiminimų (Vilnius: Lietuvos enciklopedijų redakcija, 1990), 45.
such as Deutsche, Wall or Juden Streets, there were many unfamiliar and obscure spatial denominations, such Pohulanka, Subotsch or Susdal Streets.

In addition to the linguistic translation of the place, in order to accommodate the religious needs of the Tenth Army, the Russian Orthodox church of Saint Nicholas was converted into a Protestant church. (Incidentally, in the 1840's, the tsarist administration converted the same church, originally built as the Jesuit Saint Casimir’s church, into an Orthodox cathedral. This was the same church, where Dostoevsky, while visiting the city, went to pray.) Here, in the summer of 1916, Kaiser Wilhelm II, who visited the city on his tour of the Eastern Front, prayed for the souls of German soldiers.

During the war, of course, the German interaction with Wilna was not limited to visiting royalty and high military command. Tens of thousands of German troops were stationed in the city, and many wounded or sick soldiers were treated in the city's hospitals. Furthermore, because Wilna was one of the key transportation hubs linking the German fatherland with the Eastern Front, many soldiers periodically crossed through the city on their way to either the frontline or home. Subsequently, the city quickly evolved into a major frontline ‘tourism’ location and its exotic strangeness was suddenly infused with a certain sense of spatial familiarity and even intimacy. On many occasions, there seemed to be some limited fraternization of German soldiers with local residents, especially with the Yiddish-speaking Jewish community. Most soldiers were able to communicate with the Jews in German and they heavily relied on local Jewish knowledge and experience of the place. In fact, there were some indications that a few German-Jewish intellectuals, who served in the Ober-Ost region, despite the wartime inconveniences, were able to discover their ancient and largely ignored Jewish origins within the more segregated, intimate and traditional universe of Wilna Jewry.

Wilna, like any town near the frontline, had its own share of public houses and for many German soldiers their brief encounters had obvious sexual connotations. In this case, the relationship between the two ‘partners’ was kept within a private circle of armed comradeship, since German military and social censorship did allow such a discussion to reach the public in the Vaterland. The extent of these socially asymmetrical relationships and memories is hard to know, but some of the interaction between local women and German soldiers was based on more equal social and material co-dependency. Lucien Finance, an Alsatian, while serving the German army in Wilna, for instance, married a local woman, and his reminiscences of the city (recorded in 1995) indicate a reasonable
degree of reciprocity between local (Polish) residents and German soldiers. Incidentally, the German military commanders did not trust the Latinized “men from Alsace-Lorraine.... They were, therefore, generally sent to the East.”\textsuperscript{87} Hence, there was a high number of ‘unreliable’ Alsatians stationed in Wilna, and, perhaps this factor alone, as Finance suggested, might help to explain a higher degree of sociability of the German soldiers with the local population. After all the Alsatians, like most residents of Wilna, possessed a ‘frontier’ identity: they were bilingual and their national loyalties depended on the imperial and dynastic fortunes of the opposed European forces.

Travelling via Berlin and Königsberg, private Lucien Finance, a native of the small Alsatian town of Seleste, was involuntarily brought to Wilna. Here, he experienced his first fierce battle, during which, he remembers decades later, he had “probably done many terrible things.” “Somebody had to die,” recounts Finance “and it was either them [Russians] or I.” After the “heroic defence” of the Green Bridge in Wilna, Finance’s commander wanted to nominate him for the Iron Cross. But he cared less about military vanity than his personal survival: “I told him that I did not need the Iron Cross. Instead, I asked him to help me to stay away from the front. The commander promised to employ me at his office, because, as he exclaimed, ‘such a brave man deserved our respect!’.... Consequently, the captain placed me in the accounting bureau of the military headquarters.”\textsuperscript{88} As a result of his bravery being noticed, from the first day of the German occupation of Wilna until the final withdrawal of the German troops in November of 1918, Lucien Finance lived in the city.

Soon he felt in love with Maria [unknown last name], a Polish woman who worked in the local bank and at the end of his stay in Wilna he married her. (After the war, Maria moved with him to France.) Consequently, in Finance’s recollections, Wilna emerges as a place where the rather ordinary if unconventional events of his family life intertwine with the everyday frontline experiences: battles, injuries, sudden death, illness, hunger, looting, discipline, hierarchical subordination, desertion, etc. Therefore, in his distant memories, trivial personal details and intimate experiences of the city outweigh panoramic or heroic experiences of the place. In short, for Lucien Finance, as perhaps for many other German soldiers, Wilna possessed no direct ideological or clear geopolitical meaning. It was simply,

\textsuperscript{87} Ludendorff, \textit{My War Memories, vol. 1}, 137.
\textsuperscript{88} Jean-Noel Grandhomme, “Vilnius 1915-1918 m. seno kareivio iš Elzaso prisiminimai” in \textit{Metai} (July, 2000), 130.
as he put it, a familiar place on the “other side of Europe” where he was lodged by the unpredictable forces of the imperialist war.\textsuperscript{89}

Finance’s estrangement from the idea and practice of German Kultur was obviously sharpened by his Alsatian heritage, but his attempt to ‘domesticate’ Wilna was perhaps an expression of a more widespread desire to impress the contours of home onto the somewhat ominous environment of an occupied city. For the soldiers who spent months and years at the front, the search for a domicile surrounding worked as a mild anesthetic, a self-induced hypnosis that inverted the experienced topography of war into the remembered landscape of peace. Hence, Wilna, at least in its German (non-militarized) narrative and representational renditions, was painted with the colours of nostalgia and even sentimentality. On the other hand, it was framed by the unyielding sense of modern European, and often metropolitan, socio-cultural superiority. The culturally and geo-historically ambiguous Wilna evoked a conflicting and often unexplainable notion of intimacy and estrangement, and as a result of such an emotional contradiction, it was approached through a constantly shifting point of view. A look from above was juxtaposed with an intimate gaze; a view from a distant murky lens was quickly replaced with an exaggerated close up. In a sense, the German military encounter with Wilna embodies the narrative and, perhaps, the experienced aspects of ‘the heroism of modern life’ that is often marked by “melancholy and boredom.”\textsuperscript{90}

Trench warfare, of course, could be the most accurate incarnation of heroic modern life, since it was marked by prolonged periods of discomforting boredom and unavoidable physical and psychological trauma. The line between mundane subsistence and disorientating confusion -- like the line between life and death -- was erased by modern techniques of war. The soldiers of the Napoleonic era had been predisposed to looting: they were scavengers, simply because the army or the state lacked the technological and bureaucratic abilities to fully exploit the occupied territories. In contrast, modern empire was efficient enough to organize a systematic abuse of the conquered regions. Therefore, the soldiers of the Great War were gleaners who could only access the already harvested terrain.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 136.
Figure 5.4: Christmas greetings from Wilna: a picturesque corner, 1916. Source: Aleksandras Kubilas, Sanctuaries of Vilnius in Old Postcards (Vilnius: Lithuanian Association of Collectors), 209.
WANDERING THROUGH WILNA

The modern (urban) hero reincarnates himself through a combination of social superiority, commotion, boredom, grief and gleaning. Thus, in Walter Benjamin's words, "flâneur, apache, dandy, and rag-picker were so many roles for him. Heroic modernism turns out to be a Trauerspiel in which the hero's part is available." Modern heroism as much as Baroque allegory requires an elaborate and rapidly metamorphosing stage, a place where mundane can quickly became extraordinary, and death, ruins and misery could be absorbed into memory, treasures and ecstasy. Such a transformation requires the creation of the illusion of the real -- or the assemblage of the surreal landscape -- which is often achieved through a mirror-like reflection of the world. Therefore, heroic modernism "is a theatrical presentation before a mirror, to an audience of one. Even the crowd, with its draped-mirror eyes, pays scant attention to the heroic performer. Playing the part of the hero for one's own amusement soon becomes tedious. The attempt to avoid boredom becomes the shortest, surest route to it. ...The modern hero, in seeking to avoid the tedium of the mundane and commonplace, plunges more swiftly and deeper into it. Trapped in repeated suffering or caught in unchanging boredom, the modern hero is a profoundly melancholic figure, a stoic."

Paul Monty, in his unusual travel guide of Wilna, attempted to beat back the stoic sentimentality of the modern hero by infusing his cyclical (boredom/suffering) and implausible (isolation/exposure) wartime existence with an aura of mystery, adventure, discovery and revelation. The guide, Wanderstunden in Wilna, was first published in 1916 by the printing house of the local (military) German newspaper, Wilnaer Zeitung. In all, the German military authorities published six books about Wilna, but none of them seemed to be as popular as Paul Monty's guidebook. The guide went to three subsequent editions -- the last was published in 1918, at the end of the German occupation -- and was officially endorsed by the military commanders of the 10th German Army. (The number of published copies, however, was not large.) Monty, whose biographical details are lost in historical obscurity, was most likely a journalist (probably a military officer) employed by the German press in the occupied regions. In fact, many of the entries in the tour guide were

91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
first written and published in the *Wilnaer Zeitung* as feuilletons, short satirical tales and idyllic stories concerning everyday German encounters or traditional events of the city. And only later, probably because of their popularity, were they collected in the book.

Hence, from its origins, *Wanderstunden in Wilna* — *The Wander-time in Wilna* — breaks the conventional narrative structure of a travel guide, because it had been assembled as a collage of impressions rather than a collection of suggested itineraries or notable spectacles. Accordingly, two narrative elements — segmentation and individualisation — shape the pace and itinerary of the proposed journey through *Wilna*. Since the guidebook presents a non-linear and extremely punctuated view of the city, the traveller can start a tour at any place or any time. In other words, the journey is perfectly appropriate for the soldier and/or modern hero whose time is often limited by some geographical constraints. The soldier is not a free man and his temporal and spatial coordinates are mapped out by other, superior powers. Once he breaks the superimposed rules, he becomes a violator of, or in more contentious situation, a deserter from the imperial or national hierarchies. As a result, the suggested excursions are usually short and abrupt.

Monty could not advocate any act of military defiance, but this does not mean that his impressions of *Wilna* were non-transgressive. The main protagonist of these short stories — or short excursions — is almost always an anonymous German soldier whose relationship with the city is, nevertheless, extremely personalized. Usually, Monty portrays the soldier as an isolated individual — a lonely and nomadic traveller — without any clear connection to the city or, for that matter, any distinct attachments to a specific social hierarchy or territorial unit. Still, through various anonymous observations and insignificant experiences of the place, this seemingly independent character emerges as having a detailed autobiographical knowledge of the world. Monty’s soldier interacts with the city through what could be identified as modern (German) middle-class social experiences and cultural sensibilities. So it seems that his anonymous wanderer is a university-educated, well-travelled and well-versed individual whose sensations of *Wilna* are framed by his cultivated metropolitan knowledge of the urban world and cosmopolitan experiences of the cultural European universe. In short, Monty’s soldier-traveller is a modern (German) man who firmly locates himself within a two-layered sphere of western civilization and German *Kultur*. If, according to Eksteins, western European civilization was underlined by a sense of “rationalism, empiricism and utility” that focuses on the
external and logical appearance of the world, then the German idea of *Kultur* was
“concerned with ‘inner freedom,’ [and] authenticity” that called for the rediscovery of the
most essential, spiritual, aspects of life. Consequently, Monty delineates the city through a
twofold projection of the rational and the emotional which nonetheless maps out the
familiar and strange worlds not through juxtaposition but through their coincidental
unison. *Wilna* emerges as a place suspended between homeland and an exotic world, where
the boundary between customary and extraordinary, external and internal disintegrates.

The German travelogue of *Wilna*, in a way, is an act of reconciliation of the two
aesthetic and ideological frames of the world. The guide starts with a ‘logical’ and
historical evaluation of the city which abruptly ends with a conclusive verdict denouncing
*Wilna* as a city that is located outside the rational universe of western European metropolis.
This conclusion, however, entices certain historical and spatial freedoms, and, in *Wilna*,
Monty’s heroic traveller finds his ‘inner spirit’ that leads him away from the brutal
exigencies of modern war. At the time of war, this foreign, irrational city, announces Monty
in one of the idyllic moments of his urban discovery, literally “speaks to our emotions.”
This narrative diagram that mirrors the exterior spatial irrationality of the city with the
most private feelings of the soldier is one of the few recurring themes uniting the otherwise
disjointed encounters and travelogues of the place. In this shadowy reflection, *Wilna*
reconfigures as an eerily familiar place where civilization melts into emotions and where
the war disintegrates into a barely noticeable background.

The guide contains no practical tourist information, such as specific details
concerning accommodations, food, and transportation, for the soldier does not need such
information, since his lodgings and food, at least in theory, are provided by the military.
(No soldier could venture into the city independent of his military duties). In addition,
during the war, most commercial activities were either banned or severely restricted. So,
the author of the guide felt no need to burden his readers with information concerning the
practically non-existing tourist needs. In addition, Monty probably would have been
censored had he revealed the location of the semi-legal saloons and bawdy houses.

Yet paradoxically, the omission of the practical knowledge of the place made the
guidebook a more intimate text. Monty narrates the city as it would have been narrated by

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Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 77.
a local person who has no patience, time or urgency for any tourist attractions. In a way, *Wanderstunden in Wilna* tells an ‘indigenous’ story of the city and it addresses a ‘local’ military crowd. In fact, Monty, sometimes sarcastically, sometimes sincerely, refers to *Wilna* as ‘our town,’ and he usually focuses on minuscule patterns and trivial details of a specific local time-space that captures the everyday essence of urban life. Accordingly, he ventures into the neighbourhoods and individual urban sites, and investigates conventional street events that could fully exist outside the tourist framework of the place.

Despite this general intimacy, Monty opens the moving exposition of *Wilna* with a general overview of the place, entitled “The portrait/face of the city.” Then he moves to more detailed architectural and historical investigations of the city’s numerous churches and monasteries, after which he pauses for a while in the Jewish Quarter and, finally, moves towards its even more exotic quarters, such as the so-called Turkish village of *Wilna*. This first exhibitive part of the guide is followed by more commonplace entries, grouped together under the title “On the streets” which capture various hazardous and/or entertaining aspects of *Wilna*’s street life such as its outmoded wooden pavements and unconventional market scenes. The next part focuses on less mundane spectacles -- Easter night and the religious Corpus Christi procession -- but it also includes extremely lyrical and intimate urban experiences, such as the coming of the spring, moonlight or the blossoming of a lilac bush. The final part, in a rather conventional way, explores the city’s picturesque hilly surroundings and forested environs. The book concludes with a comprehensive list of the Germanized streets-names and small folding map of *Wilna*.

In general, Paul Monty focuses on ambiguous and constantly changing spatial and temporal feelings of the place rather than its historic meanings. There were some other German language publications published by the same press of the Tenth Army that specifically concentrated on the ‘objective’ architectural and historical landscape of the city. One of the publications was entitled *Wilna: Eine vergessene Kunstsstätte*, written by Paul Weber, the professor of architectural history at Jena University and published in 1917 -- “the third year of the Great War.” The book was directed to the “Soldatenheime an der Ostfront” and had an extremely nationalistic cultural character; and one chapter, elaborately named “Deutsch-mittelalterliche Kulturdenkmäler in Wilna” ascribed all the aesthetic achievements of *Wilna*’s cityscape to the geographically expanding ‘cultural
spirit' of the German nation. In contrast, Monty did not dwell on historical cultural parameters and national values of the city; instead, he attempted to domesticate the contemporary space and aesthetic feeling of the place. Therefore, only a few isolated and scattered details of local history mark his laconic architectural descriptions of some intriguing churches or temples.

In this deliberately a-historical narrative light, natural phenomena, such as the altering seasons of the year, contrasting weather conditions, changing colour of the daylight or simply individual topographical features, rather than historical facts or architectural elements, become the most important descriptive devices to localize the traveller's experience and knowledge of the place. This cyclical and 'naturally organic' narrative approach is probably a reflection of the literary genre of Monty's text: many articles in his guidebook were initially written for specific urban events or 'seasonal' issues of the newspaper. Nonetheless, in combination, these impressionist views become an expressionist, almost Dadaist, tableau of unrelated feuilletons, vignettes, humoresques and short essays. There is a detectable anti-war sentiment within some of these short excursions for they often celebrate the unattainable feeling of peace and ordinary life. Yet, overall, the travelogue builds the reality of an extremely autochthonous experience of the place. At the same time, it creates an illusion of an autonomous and almost automatic knowledge of the city. In a way, *Wanderstunden in Wilna* is not a discourse about the city of Wilna, but a monologue about the inescapable spectre of war.

For Monty, *Wilna* is first and foremost suspended in a theatrical setting that fuses the two organizing principles of the world: the chaos of war and the ordinariness of peace. For the front line soldier, the temporal duality that separates the time of war from the era of peace acquires specific spatial connotations. Peace is outlined through the memories of domestic life and war is delineated by the immediate experiences of trench warfare. Yet, for the German soldier on the Eastern front, the peace-war duality points to another layer of spatial distinctions. Peace encircles the clearly defined boundaries of the German homeland (the *Heimat*), while war delimits the nebulous territory of the conquered 'strange land.' The temporal distinction between peace and war turns into a spatial frontier that separates the home/land from the occupied country. Within these peculiar narrative

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frames, the picture of Wilna is assembled through a juxtaposition of the memories of the home/land and the experiences of the trenches.

In other words, Monty maps the momentary threshold between peace and war as a line that separates the familiar German universe from the exotic world of the East. Consequently, the tension between war and peace is emphasized not through local temporal separation that divides the city’s history into two distinct periods (pre-war and wartime periods), but through a spatial discord that divides the life of the soldier. For the German soldier, Wilna, so to speak, remains internally veiled by his own, private, experiences of war; yet, through his anonymous and somewhat cloudy eyes and obfuscating walks, the city is revealed to the German wor(l)d.

On the German imperial map of wartime Europe, Wilna was inscribed as a peripheral place, a city whose historical destiny had been dictated by more powerful, that is non-local, events and forces. Wilna was literally and metaphorically speaking a frontier town, a place on the easternmost margins of European civilization. Surrounding the city, there was a vast geographical space of ‘undetermined’ geopolitical, ethnic and linguistic associations. The city was located outside the immediate spatial sphere of German Kultur and history; that is, a geographical area that was destined to be completely acculturated into the German national world, such as Alsace, East Prussia, or for that matter the newly conquered Russian territories of Courland and Livonia (the contemporary Latvia and southern Estonia). Furthermore, close to the city, there was a ‘no man’s land’ -- the several hundred kilometres frontline that for two years separated the warring imperial enemies, the German and Russian armies. This was the point of exile for most soldiers, a territory that existed outside known civilization.

Once the war became more brutal and moved beyond the immediate vicinity of the ‘civilized’, peaceful and familiar world, the German soldier, too, acquired some of the transgenic features: “As an agent of both destruction and regeneration, of death and rebirth, the soldier inclined to see himself as a ‘frontier’ personality, as a paladin of change and new life. He was a traveller who had journeyed, on order, to the limits of existence, and there on the periphery he ‘lived’ in a unique way, on the edge of no man’s land, on the margin of normal categories.”

96 Eksteins, Rites of Spring, 211.
unfamiliar land. Not only had the soldier voyaged to the extremes of human existence, but he also travelled to the borderlines of the German world. Here, in the occupied territories, he was asked to be a pioneer, a bearer of German *Kultur*. And it was from this vacillating and unsettled land of the eastern frontier and from this socio-cultural location that most of the soldiers came to *Wilna*.

In the East, the soldier, so to speak, lived a twofold frontier life. In the trenches, he endured endless discomforts and fears in no man’s land, where at least, he could rely on his camaraderie with other soldiers. But outside the immediate frontline, in the *Ober-Ost Land*, he was surrounded by unrecognizable customs and unfamiliar languages of the local population. Here, he had nobody. Yet, paradoxically, while life in the no man’s land pushed the soldier’s experiences outside the normal categories of human existence, life among the local strangers (as Lucien Finance’s life-story reveals), returned him to the world of conceivable human relations.

In the end, the encounter of the German soldier with the city of *Wilna* is a meeting of two frontier characters. Both are strangers to each other; but both are ‘forced’ to accept each other. The old city, in some ways, shares the fate of a young German soldier, whose life becomes inconsequential in the larger picture of the war. Because of the Great War, the geopolitical destiny of the city and the biographical fate of the German soldier intertwine. The uneventful cartographic ‘old face’ of *Wilna* mirrors the unfulfilled biographical opportunities of the soldier. Both the city and the soldier are united by the war and only the prospect of peace can unravel this involuntary marriage of their two destinies.
Figure 5.5: Guarding the Chapel of Ostra Brama. A German wartime postcard, 1916. 
Source: Aleksandras Kubilas, Sanctuaries of Vilnius in Old Postcards (Vilnius: Lithuanian Association of Collectors), 86.
Figure 5.6: ‘A modern hero’: Wilna wanderer. A photograph of a German soldier in Wilna, c. 1916. Source: Gerard Silvain and Henri Minczeles, *Yiddishland* (Corte Madera: Gingko Press, 1999), 47.
The first mutual sighting of the soldier and the city occurs in the train station. Here, in a place of cyclical and anonymous arrivals and departures, the thresholds of the homeland and the borderland overlap. In the provincial train station of Wilna, announces Monty, “war and peace come together...but the line that separates the history of the city and the fate of those ‘who come here from abroad’ remains intact.” In other words, the train station is a geographical point where both the soldier and the city, still retain their independence. The train station does not necessarily belong to the city, but is a “giant waiting room that belongs to everyone. It frees people from their dependent relationships with their homelands, apartments and parent’s houses.” Yet, while the station, so to speak, ‘liberates’ the modern traveller from all the domestic (and national?) responsibilities, it also entraps him within a specific geographical war perimeter. The German soldier is not a free subject; he is a transportable item that is moved along the iron threads of war. “This traveller is not an individual,” reminds the author of the guide, “but an object, a living cargo who is forced to conceal all his domestic ties with everyday life.”

The soldier’s estrangement from his homeland is not a sign of his independence, but rather is an emblem of his subordinate position. In the wartime train station of Wilna, the intoxicating feeling of personal mobility is restrained by the overwhelming sense of collective subjugation. Here, in this intermediary site of peace and war, personal adventure and imperial duty consolidates into a single act of conquest.

War regulates the everyday routine of this transport hub, but various scenes and acts of war still take recognizable forms and shapes of peaceful domestic activity. Modern rhythms of life that regularize the mundane operations of the train station camouflage the immediacy of war:

Wilna’s train station is like any train station during wartime – everything here serves the needs of war. There is not the slightest indication of confusion or disorder: military and civilian trains always arrive and depart on time. And the trains move in both directions: westwards towards home and eastwards towards new battlefields. The train station does not fully belong to the city, because it conforms to the rules and regulations of the colossal war-machine that runs the entire world.

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97 Monty, Wanderstunden in Wilna, 28.
98 Ibid., 27.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., 28.
At the same time, in the train station, the soldier can still witness the comforting residues of domestic life, because “with its calm order, the train station reminds one of peace. The waiting room, train schedules, ticket-sellers, buffets, baggage claim rooms and everything else that makes a train journey possible equally comfort both military and civilian passengers.”

In the train station, women and men of all ages share the same act of coming or going, and German officers and soldiers appear to mingle freely with local peasants and civilian employees. The station is a no man’s land, but, in contrast to the frontline, it seemingly belongs to everyone. Conclusively, in Monty’s view, in this spatial intersection of war and peace “individual destinies intertwine” but only for a brief moment in order to be immediately untangled.

In part, because the train station belongs to the war, it becomes a part of a foreign (imperial) body that inserts itself within the self-enclosed walls of the city. So, despite its apparent calmness and transitory feeling, the relationship between the city and the traveller-soldier is fully controlled by the hierarchical and disciplinary dynamics of the war. Initially, the impact of the city on the voyager’s destiny and destination is minimal, and only “outside the station, [where] the city begins,” does the soldier become fully enveloped by its domesticity. “In the train station,” observes Monty, “a traveller still feels homeless; but, outside it, he is suddenly confronted with the advertisement of his new homeland [Heimat]. The city entraps the traveller and takes him away: from now on, the traveller does not have to search for anything -- he only needs to follow. And until the waiting hall of the station takes the departing soldier back to the war, the city fully controls his fate.” From this first interaction, the relation between the city and the soldier evolves according to perplexing rules of the interdependency between the two ‘frontier’ characters. Effectively, the meeting of the soldier with the city is circumscribed by the soldier’s endless search for home in the unfamiliar land. The yet to be named city seems to hypnotize the modern traveller with its promise or advertisement of home. Evidently the soldier, who in the semi-colonial circumstances of the Ober-Ost is actually a victorious conqueror, is willing to submit to the elusive and seductive powers of the city. Conversely, by accepting the town as the promise of his ‘new homeland,’ the soldier, perhaps involuntarily, indicates his domineering status over the city.

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101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
Even outside the train station, *Wilna* opens up as a nameless and faceless city, a place with no clear connections to Germany and/or direct associations to the soldier. The city, so to speak, is plastered with meaningless propagandistic ‘advertisements of a new home’ -- fictitious and unbelievable promises of peace and happiness -- that conceal the true national location, historical nature and imperial future of the place. Therefore Monty, in a way, uses his jagged narrative to unveil the city’s ‘authentic’ location and he constantly confronts his German audience with a three-fold mapping of the place.

Firstly, Monty locates *Wilna* within a broad map of western European civilization. On this map, the city is positioned on its periphery, and the peculiar local traditions, customs and architectural details are often described as being marked by specific non-Western trademarks, such as the expansive and disheveled Russian and Asiatic urban spatiality or the cramped and disorienting ‘Oriental’ quarters of the old town. According to Monty, in *Wilna*, following the Russian imperial norms of spatial organization, there is no strict division between official and public functions of urban space. Most of its squares, streets and gardens, especially in its modernized districts, lack the intimacy and coherence of western European public places. In short, the modern face of the city has never acclimatized to the everyday needs of local residents. For instance, the *Lukischkiplatz* on the *Georgsstrasse* which had been newly modernized is a “typical Russian wasteland, without any clear relation to the surrounding buildings.”¹⁰⁴ And the *Georgsplatz* situated in the middle of the city’s modern shopping street “lacks architectural coherence and a European sense of spatial order.”¹⁰⁵ These places function as dull ‘official grounds’ without any clear public role. In contrast, the ‘Oriental’ urban features are detected in always busy and overcrowded streets and alleys of the old town. In this vast maze of everyday life, especially in the Jewish quarter of the city, there is no apparent distinction between private, domestic life and public, commercial operations. Because of these combined qualities, *Wilna* is dubiously located in-between the two geographical extremes: the seemingly endless, uninhabited Russian expanse and congested ‘Oriental’ urbanity. Only the *Napoleonplatz* in front of the bishop’s palace turned into Russian governor-general’s

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 14.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid.
residence (formerly containing the monument to Muraviev) is a true, in the western sense of the word, public space of the city. 106

The second map locates Wilna within the German sphere of wartime Europe. This peculiar map traces the German military advances on all European frontiers: France and Belgium in the west, Russia in the east and Serbia in the south. So, while the first map is based on historical and often abstract academic conclusions about the differences between western European civilization and its Russian and/or Oriental counterparts, the second map actually is based on more immediate German military experiences of Europe. On this rather schematic projection of Europe, Wilna is not so much positioned in opposition to German cities, as it is contrasted to other (non-German) European places. Hence, Monty aligns or compares Wilna with other German occupied towns, be they French or Serbian. The most curious aspect of this map is that while it explicitly outlines the German military advances across Europe, implicitly, it provides miniscule details about the soldier’s relations with various occupied populations. For instance, the writer makes a brief and satirical comparison between the linguistic and commercial interactions of the German soldiers and the local inhabitants in Nisch, Serbia, and Wilna. In the end, through such minimal disclosures of the occupied cityscapes of Europe, Wilna is revealed as an extremely eccentric site, a place unrivalled in its amusing ‘tourist’ potentials. 107

Finally, Monty repeatedly juxtaposes the perplexing landscape of Wilna with the intimate urban scenery of the Heimat. In the eyes of the frontline soldier, Wilna, with its Baroque churches and seemingly unruffled pace of life, transfigures into a distorted mirage of his own (German) hometown. Despite its foreignness and strangeness, Wilna can be accessed through familiar -- spatial, historical, architectural and even limited linguistic (Yiddish) -- references that actually can locate the lost modern hero within the sphere of German Kultur. Hence, the Gothic church of St. Anna, for instance, pleases the German visitor with its architectural “energy that could only be found among the cathedrals of Southern Germany.” 108 The descending picturesque views from the Castle Hill evoke lyrical words of “the famous German poet.” 109 And the narrow winding cobbled streets of Wilna’s old town recapitulate youthful street adventures in “small university towns” of Germany

106 Ibid.
107 Ibid., 86.
108 Ibid., 40.
109 Ibid., 27.
that could be summarized by a familiar student tune. Through these predominantly middle class German spatial and biographical references, the incomprehensible spatiality of Wilna is fraternized, courted and finally becomes ‘domesticated.’ These unveiled scraps of the familiar terrain reassure the displaced German soldiers of the geographical proximity of the homeland, but in this scenario, the occupied city stands as an imperfect remainder of the idyllic German life.

In summary, the three-layered mappings of Wilna outline its global, European and German ‘locations’ to produce a manifold and often conflicting sense of the place. In Monty’s account, the city’s geographical location is constantly shifting between the ancient, exotic and/or Oriental, and the recognizable and often modernized landscape of urban Germany. Rarely, if ever, does Monty parallel these two worlds as equal partners, but he inscribes the city’s mediating and changeable settings within its own highly theatrical landscape. So he introduces the Wilja River -- the key local topographical feature -- as “a poor sibling of her two sisters: Spree and Tiber.” This seemingly senseless comparison has no historical equivalent, and it could be seen as pure poetic invention. But, by allying the natural, topographical element of the city with two other geographical properties, Monty ‘organically’ situates Wilna between the two spatial ends that frame the entire historical development of western civilization. At one end of this spectrum, there is a modern ‘heart’ of western civilization epitomized by the river Spree, an unpretentious stream than runs through the metropolitan centre of Europe, the German imperial capital, Berlin. On the side, there is the river inevitably associated with the glories of the ancient and/or Catholic Rome. In its allegorical European power, the Wilja, of course, cannot compete with either of the two rivers, even if in a strictly geographical sense, the Lithuanian stream is no less significant than its two equivalents. It is not clear if Monty’s poetic reference has anything to do with the Baroque Roman mythology of the city, but there is an undeniable sense that his allusion attempts to locate Wilna at the historical and geographical margins of western European civilization.

This topographical dislocation transforms the city into a sight that can simultaneously direct the soldier’s gaze towards two contradictory worlds: the contemporary centre of modern Europe and dehistoricized extremities of the known and experienced world. In short, Wilna is located in dialogically intense territory, somewhere

110 Ibid., 87.
111 Ibid., 12.
“between the homeland and a foreign land ("zwischen Heimat und Fremde"), somewhere between the centripetal metropolis and centrifugal peripheral cosmopolis.112 (In a way, this location echoes the geographical identity of the city articulated by George Forster in the 1780s as the place between semi-civilization and semi-savagery.)

For the modern hero (not unlike the sentimental rationalist of the Enlightenment era), Wilna’s unique location as the place in-between home and exotic opens possibilities of unexpected personal freedoms. As an occupier, the soldier can ‘freely’ explore the city, but as a homeless, displaced and intrusive individual, he can also freely imagine the city. In Wilna, the idea of Heimat and Fremde provoke two different urban approaches: the notion of the foreign land invokes conquest and the feeling of home insinuates wandering. So, the German soldier’s journeys through Wilna is something in-between the two approaches. The idea of Wanderstunden -- a casual roaming through the landscape -- summons peaceful exploration of the site, but, during the specific spatial and temporal circumstances of the war, it becomes possible only through the act of conquest. What the casual wandering through Wilna implies is that the German soldier acquires a dual personality: he is both a conqueror and flâneur. A conqueror is an individual who subdues and confines the place; the flâneur, in contrast, is a person who opens it up and reveals it to the world.

Initially, through the act of conquest the soldier distances himself from the city, but by becoming flâneur, he attempts to establish intimate relations between himself (and Germany) and the city. Thus, Monty’s exploration of the city is constantly shifting between the two narrative modes: on the one hand, he insistently tries to frame the place within different categories of foreignness, and, on the other hand, he repeatedly exhibits its intimate closeness. Wandering becomes a simultaneous act of distancing and approximation. The invisible line between distance and proximity, between conquest and intimacy of the place becomes a narrative trajectory through which the soldier-flâneur explores Wilna:

In this world, the right to conquer foreign cities is a privilege reserved only to a few mighty rulers and military leaders. Yet every traveller can successfully master unknown cities if he understands the secrets of wandering. If the traveller is a clever strategist, he will certainly consult various maps and chronicles before he ventures into a strange town. But if the traveller is an artist — and wandering is the freest form of art — he will approach the city from a completely different angle. Without any hesitation, the urban wanderer will let the wind guide

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112 Ibid., 79.
him through the unfamiliar streets of the far-flung city. This form of travelling breaks all fortifications and fortunately for the traveller, there is always a fresh breeze in the good old city of Wilna. So here, without any difficulty, anybody can endlessly roam through streets and squares.\(^{13}\)

Because it does not possess a fixed spatial position, Wilna constantly metamorphoses alongside the wanderings of the German soldier. Hence the soldier, who exists outside the accepted bourgeois norms and domestic practices, gradually turns from a detached observer -- an uninvolved flâneur or disinterested spectator-- into a passionate narrator, the author of the place. Essentially, Monty urges the soldier to forget the strategies of war and/or bourgeois life and become an artistic inventor of the place. He invites him to venture into the peripheral streets, small lanes, abandoned parks and semi-illegal markets. Furthermore, he summons him to enjoy the urban curiosities which require little or no financial resources: observing unusual or clandestine commercial activities based on bargaining and bartering, train station hustle, playing children, praying Jews, park skaters, etc. In general, Monty encourages the soldier to shed his military duties and become a free performer whose sense of time and space is unconstrained by everyday jobs, financial obligations or domestic tasks.

In the end, this gleaning of the city metamorphoses the soldier from a contractor of destruction into an agent of creation, and to Monty, for the proponent of this unusual change, there is no better place than Wilna where such magical individual transformation could occur. The city offers just the right mixture of the familiar and strange, so it can effortlessly -- with a breeze -- translate the experience of modern war into an aesthetic practice of urban living.

In Wilna, however, this 'bohemian' form of urban conquest requires some caution and practice. For the soldier-turned-artist, the occupied city still poses some unpredictable physical challenges. The city exists outside the war zone, and the soldier who is stiffened by the uncivil, brutal existence of the frontline needs to relearn the movements and flows of civil lifestyle. For the German soldier, the encounter with Wilna highlights his own contradictory status in the Ober-Ost region. The pre-war, civilian German experience, of course, embodies the essence of modern European feeling of the world: 'The German experience lies at the heart of the 'modern experience.' Germans often used to refer to

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 76.
themselves as the *Herzvolk Europas*, the people at the heart of the Europe. Germans are also the *Herzvolk* of modern sense and sensibility.\(^{114}\) However, the frontline soldier loses some of that sensibility: he becomes a 'half-savage and half-civilized' creature. Thus, his encounter with the semi-modern *Wilna* turns into a pedagogical act. Firstly, the soldier needs to be reacquainted with his own modern origins -- that is, he has to rediscover his own 'modern European' heart. And, secondly, he needs to learn how to apply his regained modern urban sensibilities to the 'non-modern' spaces and practices of *Wilna*. In other words, through the process of rediscovery of his modern heart, the German soldier is compelled to discover the ancient soul of *Wilna*:

When a soldier returns to the city from the war zone, his relationships with the world and people go through enormous changes. If the soldier came back directly from the frontline, where he had led a primitive life of forest people, a rapid acclimatization into urban life is impossible. At the front, the soldier's feet get used to swampy and muddy terrain, but in the city, he faces a solid street pavement. In these circumstances, an ordinary event, such as walking, becomes an extraordinary act, and the soldier needs to master anew the unhurried pace and rhythm of various street movements.

But if fate brings this frontline creature to Wilna, he needs to learn something else. He needs to master how to navigate the crooked passages of this city. The main streets of Wilna are like the streets everywhere in Europe: people promenade on broad sidewalks that clearly separate the street from the buildings. In Germany, we learned to call this part of the street the Bürgersteig -- and we almost forgot another [French] name for it, the Trottoir, which, among the people, came to be known as Trittoir.

But how to describe, in German, or any other foreign tongue, the uncivilized [*unbürgerlich*] sidewalks of our city? What term could explain this narrow plank along the gutter that constantly squeaks and moves under your feet: it suddenly goes up and then disappears completely in the mud.... Of course, rarely, does this shaking piece of wood belong entirely to one person -- all pedestrians are very keen to use it. So, a fascinating dance, always with new movements, evolves around it: first, you leap on it, then, you raise up, twist and bounce again, but try to keep a balance. It is not a walk, but a quadrille.\(^{115}\)

This choreographic discovery of *Wilna* leads the soldier-artist into the urban world that exists ‘outside’ the cartographic (and military) knowledge and modern experiences of the place, and via these impassable, outmoded forms of urban pathway Monty directs him into the crooked alleyways and crowded courtyards of the old town where the heart and soul of the city is located. Surprisingly, in these minuscule, uncharted spaces of *Wilna*, the German soldier finds the historical sources of modern urban life. In *Wilna*, declares the

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\(^{114}\) Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 68.

\(^{115}\) Monty, *Wanderstunden in Wilna*, 82-84.
guidebook, “there are some secret lanes and pathways that are familiar only to local residents. These intimate passageways connect countless houses and courtyards, but you cannot find them on any map. The romantic spirit of these alleys is an anomaly in our society ruled by extensive railway travelling; nonetheless, from these intimate, ancestral places our modern sense of commercial passages originated.”

The romantic and nostalgic character of these old-fashioned passages arises not from their depleted, picturesque and outdated functionality, but from their active, effective and extremely productive presence in the everyday life of the city. The commercial alleys of Wilna truly functioned as commercial passages of the modern metropolis, only they are infused with the mysteries and disorder of the ‘Oriental bazaar:

Every city in Europe has some secret passages, but they are usually very quiet, deserted places. But not in Wilna! Here, to this day, the mysterious alleyways of Wilna are full of life. Still the most intriguing aspect of Wilna is not that these passages are always alive, but that every inhabitant of the city intimately knows them. Along these privatized public lanes, the entire commercial life of the city is organized. You can buy here anything you want: furniture, sausages, shoes, iron beds, furs, etc. In Wilna, these alleys are as important to the general well-being of the city as grand boulevards in a modern metropolis. In these secret alleys, life has yet to become history.

Wilna, in Monty’s accounts, seems to posses urban qualities more suitable for a southern and/or Oriental town, than for a northern European and/or Russian place. The city is marked by a certain commercial and spatial porosity that makes the street life a highly unpredictable and entertaining spectacle. This is especially true in the old Jewish part of the town where, in the eyes of the German traveller, the social and spatial walls that usually separate the domestic from the commercial are completely obliterated. The densely populated yet relatively small Jewish Quarter is located in the middle of the old town of Wilna and is completely encircled by monumental Catholic Baroque churches. It is also bordered by main commercial thoroughfares of the city. Yet, despite its central location and historical age, the Jewish Quarter, at least among the non-Jews, was never perceived to be a worthy tourist attraction. (It usually got very little attention in the Russian and Polish tourist guides of the city of the period.) In general, Monty’s narration lacks any local national sympathies and throughout his entire travelogue, Wilna remains a city populated by anonymous (non-German) residents. Yet he seems to be almost hypnotized by the

116 Ibid., 20.
117 Ibid., 22-23.
Jewish part of town and he constantly re-directs the wandering and often lost German traveller to these crowded and often impassable alleys. Hence, Wilna's Jewry becomes the organizing centrepiece of his artistic local experience.

Monty is interested in the old Jewish neighbourhood not because of its architectural or even aesthetic beauty, but because of its intact, that is 'uncorrupted', authenticity. In the Jewish quarter, the German traveller faces the space that is not only anomalous to modern, western, urban spatiality, but is also anachronous to the historical evolution of European civilization. In other words, the Jewish neighbourhood offers travelling possibilities that transport the nomadic soldier beyond the frontiers of Europe into a self-enclosed ethnographic universe of biblical antiquity. "At the heart of the big city of Wilna," announces the German guide, "there is an ocean island where the people of Israel lead an isolated life. In the past, the gates of the ghetto kept the Jews together, but today, traditions and piety keep them apart from the rest of the people." As Monty warns his modern hero, a journey into this urban atoll is not without certain physical risks, because "regardless of weather conditions, the sky in the Jewish quarter is always dark. The westerner who accidentally comes to the shores of this island is immediately assaulted by the sea of dirt and poverty. The ear is constantly offended by dissonance, and the nose -- well, the nose is unmercifully attacked by extremely foul smells. To the wandering European, a stroll through the Jewish neighbourhood is an extreme challenging affair, because only local residents can endure its stifling rancid air."

In this unapproachable, displeasing, threatening and physically offensive (not unlike a tropical city), but, at the same time, mysterious and mirage-like urban environment, the German soldier-aesthete suddenly becomes a colonial ethnographer whose patience is soon to be rewarded with a hectic spectacle of an Oriental town:

In winter, the residents stay tucked away from cold and wind in their houses. But on a warm summer day, the crooked, cramped street with its narrow sidewalks and impassable pavement turns into a stage. This local scenography is familiar to everyone who has travelled to the Orient. Yet, in contrast to Tangier or Algiers where the crowd is dispersed by numerous streets, here, the street assembles people into a crowd... On this street, where domestic life flows into the street from every corner, the private secluded life of a single individual melts into a communal episode. Commerce, an ancient disposition of this [Jewish] nation, regulates every gesture of local residents. The entire Ghetto is a giant market place. Most stores however look like caves without any light or fresh air. So,

118 Ibid., 59.
119 Ibid.
Figure 5.7: *The war in the East. Wilna: a Jewish alley, 1916.* Source: Gerard Silvain and Henri Minczeles, *Yiddishland* (Corte Madera: Gingko Press, 1999), 41.

Figure 5.8: *Wilna’s persecuted Jews: a view of the meat market in the old Jewish ghetto, c. 1917.* Source: Gerard Silvain and Henri Minczeles, *Yiddishland* (Corte Madera: Gingko Press, 1999), 43.
various trades commence in within the endless gateways, courtyards and hallways of the buildings: every corner, alcove and opening in the wall bursts with action... You leave the Jewish Quarter with two memorable images: numerous shopping baskets and children.\textsuperscript{120}

Monty’s ‘ethnographic’ evaluation of the dominant business practices of the Jewish Quarter dismisses the official German policies that attempted to regulate every market transaction. Food was rationed and majority of the urban population was on the brink of starvation, but according to numerous administrative decrees, most commercial dealings, especially those that involved the selling of farm produce, were censored. Hence, Monty witnessed, described or imagined the illegal and semi-illegal market life of the city that served the basic need of its impoverished and hungry residents. In general, this was not a large-scale trade, since it relied on an unpredictable flow of smuggled agricultural goods from the Lithuanian countryside. Even the German military authorities had to admit that the wartime ‘spectacle’ of local Jewish commercial life had little to do with the ‘traditional’ business practices and norms of ‘Oriental’ Jewry. In fact, \textit{Wilna’s} Jewish Quarter poorly served the official ‘ethnographic’ requirements of the German colonial documentation of the occupied \textit{Ober-Ost} region and its peoples. “On one occasion,” remembers Hirsch Abramowicz, who was a resident of the city during the Great War “the Germans devised a rather original way to exploit the passion for fish among the inhabitants of Vilna. Notices in Yiddish were pasted up in every Jewish neighborhood stating that on Friday, fish would be sold in the marketplace at ten pfennings per pound and in unlimited quantities. On Friday, people streamed into the marketplace by the thousands, but there was no fish for sale. The Germans needed to shoot film footage of Vilna’s Jewish population, and this was the only way it was possible to assemble a large crowd in those days.”\textsuperscript{121}

Nonetheless, in Monty’s \textit{Wilna}, the busy life of the Jewish Quarter “keeps boiling here all the time, until, suddenly, all shopping baskets, weights and children disappear. The Sabbath call closes all the commercial caverns and the customary street racket quickly calms down. The drama of everyday life is finally over.”\textsuperscript{122} Yet even this religious aspect of the Jewish weekly cycle was dramatically altered by the German occupation. The German administrative regulations did not only significantly modify commercial spaces and habits

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 59-60.
\textsuperscript{122} Monty, \textit{Wanderstunden in Wilna}, 62.
of the city’s residents, but also forced the breaking of the traditional sanctity of the Sabbath call. Periodically, throughout the occupied territories, “Jewish stores were ordered to be open for business for several hours on Saturday. This put an end to the small-town fear of desecrating the Sabbath. The Germans had no regard for these religious feelings and frequently forced Jews to clean the streets, repair the pavement, and so on, on the Sabbath.”¹²³ Yet despite these enforced modes of ‘modernization’ of local Jewish traditions, or, perhaps, because of them, Monty continues to explore the Jewish Quarter by following the ‘secretive’ paths of the religious and pious Jews.

So, once the first act of the everyday drama of the Jewish Quarter is over, a second act of the Jewish religious ‘spectacle’ begins. In order to witness this act, the soldier-ethnographer has to break social and physical walls that literally separate him from the inhabitants of the Jewish district. He must become a participant of the communal event and rather than simply observing and recording the Jewish religious customs, he has to re-enact this cyclical episode of ancient traditions. Accordingly, on the Sabbath evening, Monty invites the soldier to join the enigmatic ceremony of the “ancient Jewish tribe.” But first, the modern hero has to find the spiritual heart of the Jewish religious life of Wilna, the Great Synagogue, which, usually, remains unapproachable to ‘foreign ‘invaders:

The road: the Great Street [Grosse Strasse], German Street [Deutsche Strasse], Jewish Street [Jüdische Strasse].
All significant religious [Christian] buildings of Wilna are clearly visible and are easy to find; in contrast, the famous Great Synagogue is concealed from the peering eyes of the traveller. It is simply impossible to find it, because it is hidden behind the ordinary and unexceptional houses of the Jewish Quarter. The traveller might pass by this House of God a hundred times without ever suspecting its close proximity. A single opening, one of those mysterious Wilna gates, reveals its undisclosed location: the gate of the building marked as German Street 12 is the magic entrance point into the elusive world of the Great Synagogue.

The best time to enter this mysterious universe is around six o’clock on a Friday evening. Only a few steps away, the busy and noisy German Street is full of shops with modern window displays, but once the traveller crosses the threshold of the gate, he is immediately transported back into the land of ancient history. The narrow, winding lane greets him with the stuffy air of the ghetto: the walls of the buildings are adorned by unrecognizable Hebrew letters. The enormous crowds of pious Jewish men rush by the traveller, but not a single building around him indicates the sacred presence of the House of God that could attract so many people. But the traveller, without being fully aware where it would take him, must follow this stream of faithful men. Is it possible that this

insignificant house in front of him that swallows this procession of people is the final destination of his exploration? He must be patient and follow the footsteps of those who just disappeared inside the building. A dark stairway leads downstairs, and, then, unexpectedly, it becomes clear what hides behind this narrow walkway. Finally, the Great Temple is found! The building, like a symbol of the time when the religion forced its followers to bow their heads, is submerged deep into the ground ...Centuries have darkened its walls, but the synagogue has preserved its incredible sense of reverence and piety. ...Near the synagogue there are a bathhouse and library, which makes this entire building complex the nexus of the Jewish universe. A religious man can live his entire life without leaving the courtyard of the Great Synagogue. His life, guarded by traditions and customs that came here from distant countries and centuries, exists only few steps away from the wartime turmoil of contemporary Wilna.\textsuperscript{124}

At the end of this urban expedition into the religious epicentre of Wilna Jewry, Monty comes to a realization that the two worlds -- the city and the ‘Jewish island’ -- not only live two separate lives, but also orient themselves to different temporal and geographical orders. They have different calendars and spatial memories that make them incompatible; hence, for the modern traveller, it becomes extremely difficult to frame this compact Jewish world that seems to burst with the religious piety and mysticism of ancient times. Nothing except, perhaps, some rudimentary knowledge of the biblical past can explain and describe the witnessed Jewish life and space. The encountered Jews -- young and old men who come to the synagogue courtyard for religious and social reasons -- simply ignore him and the incidental flâneur leaves the Jewish Quarter with a bewildering feeling of being out of place, as if he was chased away from Wilna by some cultural force that refuses to acknowledge his presence.

He tries his artistic and ethnographic luck in a remote corner of Wilna, the old Jewish cemetery on the other side of the river. As a rule, Monty does not try to place the living Jewish world within the European and/or German worlds, yet, faced with the Jewish dead, in the third act of his Jewish ‘drama,’ he feels obliged to force at least the Jewish past into the German cultural chronology. The third act and the trip to the Jewish cemetery start with crossing the waters: the cemetery is reached from the centre of the city by a ferry ride. In this old and relatively remote cemetery and surrounded by “strange, foreign and indecipherable” tombs, Monty attempts to encircle the Jewish universe with the biographical marks of notable German characters. “It is obvious that not a single corpse has crossed the gates of the cemetery for several decades,” observes the guide. “Everything

is marked here by decay, oblivion and ‘expired’ past. The first graves appeared when
Martin Luther was still a child -- the last burials took place here at the time of Goethe’s
death.”125 With these temporal enclosures of the German Kultur, Monty finally locks the
gates of Jewish Wilna.

After this three-act visit to the local Jewish world, Monty moves further away from
the old town into one of the most ‘exotic’ suburbs of Wilna, Lukischki. In this semi-rural
corner of the city, framed by a ‘typically Russian urban space,’ the Lukischkiplatz, the
unfinished closure of a modern boulevard, the Georgstrasse, the imposing structure of the
tsarist prison and the Wilja River, the modern hero finds another impenetrable site of
Wilna, the so-called Turkish Quarter. It “should be pointed out from the beginning,” warns
Monty, “that the so-called Turkish Quarter does not mean that there is an entire
neighbourhood in Wilna inhabited by our trustworthy allies, the Ottomans. This name is
given to one of the city’s districts occupied by the followers of the Muslim faith.”126 But,
given its association with Islam, the small neighbourhood becomes an imprint of the Orient
on northern Wilna’s soil. “We cross the Lukischki square, a vast urban expanse,” continues
the guide, “and enter into the contrasting world of an Oriental urban maze.”127

Closer inspection of this Oriental labyrinth reveals the existence of a less mysterious
but no less exotic local spectacle. Surprisingly, only the newly built unassuming mosque
and the old Muslim cemetery are left as residues of the former ‘Oriental maze.’ The so-
called Turkish corner is nothing more than a picturesque village near the city centre: “If
stone pavements and brick houses indicate urban place, then we know that here we are in a
true village. We are surrounded exclusively by wooden houses and long fences and the
street facades of the buildings are outlined by the most fantastic wooden carvings.”128 And
in contrast to the Jewish neighbourhood, which conspicuously exists outside the perimeters
of war, this remote and desolated ‘Turkish’ neighbourhood that from the 15th century has
been housing local Muslim Tartars, is fully rearranged by the spectre of war. The needs of
war dictate every gaze and thought of the modern visitor, and ironically, the wooden
houses with their graciously carved details do not insinuate aesthetic amusement, but

125 Ibid., 68-71.
126 Ibid., 73.
127 Ibid., 74.
128 Ibid.
provoke a strictly utilitarian response. "In wartime," concludes Monty "you can not resist thinking about all these wooden constructions as being extremely usefully turned into firewood. But it seems that the locals will fervently protect every single wooden detail of their houses."\(^{129}\)

In the end, this suburban village does not deliver the expected Oriental ‘experience’ of the place, and Monty quickly withdraws into a more promising and enigmatic site, the small Muslim cemetery located next to the neighbourhood. Here, he makes a brief grieving commentary about the sad historic fate of the displaced (Tartar) soldiers who were brought from their Crimean homeland some centuries ago:

A strange feeling engulfs one while looking at rows of these foreign graves overshadowed by the high dome of the nearby Christian church of the prison…
High above the graves perches a shiny cross, an imperial symbol that dominates over the homeless half-moon of the mosque. The forefathers of the local residents were prisoners of war, whose graveyard dreams are the last vestiges of the Islamic faith. Sorrow and grief lingers over the mosque and the entire Turkish district.\(^{130}\)

Confronted with the historically distant dead, Monty leaves this “melancholic neighbourhood” that gently slopes on the left bank of the Wilja River with no clear sense of spatial direction. The brief visit to the ‘Turkish Quarter’ concludes the tour of the city and the two following entries, “On the other side of the river” ("Am andern Ufer") and “Over the roofs” ("Ueber den Dächern"), are literally concerned with the joys and dangers of losing yourself in the sights of the foreign city. In the end, the geographically imprecise and lyric wanderings through the city produce a contradictory effect: while they familiarized the German soldiers with the most private and secluded features of the city, they also re-established an emotional distance between the conqueror-artist and the inhabitants of the place. Apparently the ‘new home’ is not only populated by unfamiliar people, but is also haunted by various ghostly memories of home.

Initially, the German wanderings implied a pure physical activity -- a free rambling through the city without any burden of personal memories or pre-existing knowledge of the place. This wandering was meant to liberate the soldier from all personal responsibilities -- it made him a nomad. Simultaneously, it was meant to open up the mysteries of the city. In contrast to the military conquest of the place, which is usually a collective act and involves

\(^{129}\) Ibid.  
\(^{130}\) Ibid., 75-76.
a certain degree of planning, the wandering is supposed to be an individual act of unintentional spatial conquest.

Modris Eksteins, however, reminds us that during the middle years of the Great War, the "war became increasingly a matter of individual interpretative power," and Monty's proposed itinerary through Wilna seems to conform to this idea. With each new journey, new adventure and new imagination, the relationship between the soldier and the city becomes less anonymous, and the boundary between the two loses its initial sharpness and precision. Progressively, the protagonist of Wilna's excursions finds it more difficult to separate the occupied city from the melancholically remembered anonymous German hometown. The corporeal and unreal merge into a seductive, dangerously hypnotic surreal, and the travelling soldier starts to nervously experience rather than just see the city. The unmediated closeness of and prolonged exposure to the city provokes an emotional outburst that leads to a dangerous excavation of the soldier's inner world.

In one of the most personalized (autobiographical) entries of the guidebook, Monty maps out his short journey through his living (working?) room. "I can not identify the itinerary of this journey," declares the writer, "because this road is very short, and besides, it is not for public use. I only need to stand up from my table and come closer to the window of my room, and I can see all landmarks of Wilna. ... The entire city is situated in a valley that spreads between our private little hill and the Castle Hill. My window simultaneously frames and reflects this endless space of Russian proportions. From this window, my eye can easily glide over the roofs, frontons and towers of the city." But, instead of examining the panoramic wonders of this 'Russian' expanse, Monty's eyes glean over the private, domestic moments of the city's residents. From his towering distance, he can pick up mundane scenes that generously fill the exposed courtyards and apartments. He can scan the most commonplace 'secrets' of the city that usually remain hidden from the impassionate eye of the foreign intruder. And at this panoptical moment, the German soldier changes from a bohemian flâneur into a predatory voyeur.

Slowly but surely, this voyeuristic investigation leads to more disturbing rediscoveries and once the mysteries of the city are obliterated by his panoptical gaze, the author-traveller finds himself surrounded by the glaring spectre of his lost home. This is not the glorious and ecstatic apparition of the Vaterland encountered by marshal

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131 Eksteins, Rites of Spring, 212.
132 Monty, Wanderstunden in Wilna, 78-79.
Ludendorff in Kowno, but a tormenting and disorienting vision, a delirium that can only lead to personal crisis. It could be compared to the final stage of typhus fever -- the disease that ravaged so many lives at the end of the Great War -- described by Thomas Mann as "debilitation ... at its worst" when "no one can say whether the patient's mind has sunk into the void of night or if it has become a stranger to his body and has turned away to wander in distant, deep, silent dreams, unmarked by visible signs or audible sounds. The body lies in total apathy. This is the moment of crisis."  

Exposed by the remote closeness of the city, the soldier is haunted by his own loneliness, his own sense of displacement and homelessness. The voyeur becomes a fugitive, a victim of his own curiosity:

An unusual sensation captures the soldier who gazes at the city from above. After spending months deep in the forest, the city lights and shadows stir up memories. As if he was hallucinating, the soldier sees the streets and squares of his native town. The war has created something phenomenal, something that moves in-between the fatherland and a foreign land.

After surviving all seasons of the year in wilderness – after a year at the frontline – we acquire an uncontrollable desire for the city. At least, we want to see undamaged houses with intact roofs and unbroken windows. We sit in the window and gaze at this town – the name of which we never wanted to know – and feel its sway over our life. The mystery of the city unfolds: unknown but so dear, foreign but so intimate, this city lies bare in front of our eyes. ...Strange yet familiar, the town below speaks to our feelings. Its stony body becomes less enigmatic; but its soul, its inner voice, illuminated by the bright midday light, remains mute. Only after dark, it slowly starts to open up. In the dark, when the glow of the Sabbath candles reaches us out from the unveiled windows and when on a warm summer night, a gentle murmur from the homes of its inhabitants (who, because of the war, are forbidden to go outside into the streets) starts to wander around, our feelings, seduced by such secrets, calm down. Yet, it would be much better if our emotions would have been left untouched, so we could leave all these whispers and rustles, and unscathed could go back into the darkness of night.

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Figure 5.9. ‘Over Wilna’s roofs’. Photo by Jan Bulhak, c. 1930. Source: The National Geographic Magazine 74:6 (June, 1938), 779.
The hill above the river Wilja is the historical cornerstone of the city. Here, the grand duke Gedimyn built his castle, and from these heights, he ruled his vast domain. According to a legend, his grave is also located somewhere on this hill. Today, these relics of the past are turned into an observational tower. From this elevated point, the history of the city begins; but today, there is no desire to remember history.

The view from the Castle Hill is the most beautiful in all of Lithuania. The eye glides above snowy roofs, fields and hills towards seemingly endless horizons. The distant dark hills perfectly frame the city, and the countless spires and domes provide a remarkable sense of rhythm and motion to this incredible urban portrait. (Paul Monty)

Figure 6.1: Panorama of Wilna from the Castle Hill by J. Grutzka, 1917. Source: Vladas Drėma, Dinges Vilnius (Vilnius: Vaga, 1991), 74-75.

1 Monty, Wanderstunden in Wilna, 23.
Western nations have suffered a great misfortune. For centuries now, an old emotional structure has been perishing here; it's been supplanted by enlightenment, science, politics, government. But—who dares deny it?—new emotions, new raptures are appearing. We are glowingly rooted in the earth; people are realizing this slowly, distantly. But many have an eye out only for the dissolution of the old, the emptiness replacing it. And they see very clearly the machines, industries, the wars of plunder, wars of expansion, scores of wage earners and masses of pack animals. Things can't go on like this. This era will not remain the technological one. People will be complaining about materialism for a long time. It contains emptiness; anyone can see it. But this emptiness heralds the future; that's why I don't like the romantic bellowing. We'll get the weeds underfoot in time and trample them. The new ways of thinking will require far more time to become knowledge and feeling than to become a machine.

I praised Cracow, the Church of St. Mary, the hanged Man, the Righteous man. They are alive. The ancient is always the newest. But these machines here are also genuine, powerful—living steel. They've won my heart. I'm not concerned about their connection with the Hanged Man and the Righteous Man.

I—and if the contradiction gapes all the way to nonsense and all the way to hell—I praised both of them. (Alfred Döblin)

In 1924, a forty-six year old German writer and physician, Alfred Döblin, made a brief visit to the Polish city of Wilno. Döblin came to Wilno on the train from Warsaw, the capital city of the newly resurrected Polish state. The Great War had ended six years ago, followed by the creation of a long string of smallish independent states that separated the former imperial powers of east-central Europe. The post-war geopolitical reconstruction of the region split the territory of the long deposed Grand Duchy of Lithuania according to modern national divisions. The modern Lithuanians, Poles, Byelorussians and Russians had their own, nationally independent or autonomous, states. Only the Jews, the largest minority group in the region, were left stateless. Still, under the treaties signed at the Paris Peace Conference in 1920, ethnic minority rights were supposed to be safeguarded by the new states; and initially, the Soviet regime established in central-eastern Byelorussia also tolerated and on some occasions even promoted Jewish cultural autonomy.

Wilno, Vilnius, Vilna, Vilne and Wilna, however, fit very badly into this novel map of Europe. The city's linguistically, culturally and politically meandering histories made them a contentious source of permanent conflict. The Lithuanians claimed Vilnius as the historical heart of their nation-state; the Poles defended Wilno as the cultural jewel of Polish-Catholic civilization; the Byelorussians perceived Vilna as a natural addition to their ethno-linguistic terrain; and the Jews still considered Vilne to be the Jerusalem of the

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Döblin, Journey to Poland, 250-51.
North. In addition, the victorious Entente powers looked at the city as one of the key defensive bastions against possible future German or Soviet expansionism. On the other hand, the Soviet regime in Moscow pointed to Vilna as a geopolitical example of capitalist-nationalist Europe.

The legal case of Wilno/Vilnius was probably one of the largest in the newly created League of Nations. Between the end of 1918, when the German army withdrew from the region and 1922, when the area around the city was incorporated into the Republic of Poland, Wilno/Vilnius was occupied and controlled by six different armies and administrative regimes. First came the Polish legionaries, then the Red Army, then the Soviet Lithuanian-Byelorussian militia, then the Lithuanian forces, then again the Polish units of so-called Middle Lithuania, and finally, the Polish state army. Poland and Lithuania were legally at war with each other over the city and its region until 1938 and no diplomatic relationship existed between the two neighbouring countries for two decades. In general, the leading countries of the Entente, especially France, supported the territorial claims of Poland; the Soviets insisted on the rights of the Lithuanians. Bolshevik Moscow regarded the “Paris -- Warsaw -- Vilna” trajectory as a geopolitical arrow designed to destroy the proletarian state. An educational book about the issue of Vilna published in 1923 articulated the Soviet position vis-à-vis the geopolitical status of the region:

The struggle for Vilna – on one hand is the struggle for the self-determination of Lithuania in the context of its relationship to Poland, on the other hand, it is the fight against the imperialist ambitions of Poland. The question of Vilna is directly linked to the survival of Soviet Russia. The region of Vilna serves as a bridge of closer economical cooperation between Russia and the West. The Vilenschina [the Vilna region] is located near our western borders and it could be turned into a aggressive bastion of our enemies who still hold their arms.3

Soviet Russia was eager to establish economic and political connections with the disenfranchised and geographically mutilated Germany, and Poland, or rather Wilno, stood in between the countries. The geopolitical policies of the defeated and now republican Germany, like the policies of the Soviet regime, were geared towards the weakening of the Polish state and, in general, were encouraging the Lithuanian claims over Vilnius. So while throughout the inter-war period, the Polish suzerainty over Wilno was recognized internationally, the city’s national identity and geopolitical belonging was treated with uncertainty. For instance, after almost twenty years of the Polish administration of the city,

3 I. Shubin (Samarin), Parish-Varshava-Vilno (Moskva: Krasnaya Nov’, 1923), 24.
in the June 1938 issue of the National Geographic magazine, Wilno was still claimed to be the “Stepchild of the Polish Frontier.” The magazine, through its usual elaborate and visually compelling photo-spread, summarized to its readers the geopolitical condition of Wilno:

Long a shuttlecock for warring nations, Wilno Province, sandwiched between Lithuania and White Russia, was taken by Poland from the Bolsheviki. Lithuania, whose historical capital was the deeply religious city of Wilno, protested Polish occupation and severed diplomatic relations. Recently Poland massed troops and airplanes along the frontier and Lithuania agreed to renew normal intercourse. So intense was the feeling during the 18 years of disagreement that all communication across the border was suspended, even postal service.\(^4\)

Wilno might have belonged to Poland, but its identity within the nation-state Europe remained indeterminate, and when in 1939, the two militarized totalitarian states -- Nazi Germany and Stalinist Soviet Union -- divided Poland, Wilno again was forced to join a different national and ideological family of Europe.

Still, despite its tragic and unsettling location, the population of the city and its region retained its polyethnic and multireligious character. Indeed, this depopulated (it reached the pre-war population numbers of 1913 only at the end of the 1930s) and economically impoverished town (it was almost completely cut off from its traditional hinterland and imperial markets) managed to sustain its multilayered features. Wilno, in the memories of Czeslaw Milosz, was “an enclave: neither Poland nor non-Poland, neither Lithuanian nor non-Lithuanian, neither a provincial town nor a capital, although it was more of a provincial town than anything else. And obviously Wilno, as I see it from a distance, was eccentric, a city of crazily commingled strata that overlapped each other, like Trieste or Chernowitz.”\(^5\)

\(^4\) Douglas Chandler, “Wilno, the Stepchild of the Polish Frontier” in The National Geographic Magazine (June, 1938), 777.
\(^5\) Milosz, Beginning with My Streets, 27.
Wilno, Stepchild of the Polish Frontier

Figure 6.2: Wilno, Stepchild of the Polish Frontier. Source: The National Geographic Magazine 74-6 (June, 1938), 777.
Alfred Döblin

Alfred Döblin, an eccentric in his own way, arrived in Wilno completely ignorant of the city’s historical weight. In fact, he had little time or patience for imperial (or for that matter, nostalgic) readings of European history. He was deeply interested and involved in his home terrain, the working class districts of metropolitan Berlin. Döblin resisted focusing on war, for he came to Poland to witness and record the workings of the Paris Peace Conference. Yet, Wilno greeted him with its usual splendid landscape that nonetheless still chronicled the dangers of war:

Starting at dawn, I gazed out the train window. ...A castielike building shoots past on the left, a ruin. The entrances and outlets of tunnels are guarded by sentries with rifles; the country is in a state of unrest. The newspapers report attacks by Bolshevists and anonymous gangs; I suddenly feel that these are more than attacks by gangs, these are war movements. We lumber very slowly across a high narrow bridge. How wonderfully lively is the landscape. The hills turn into mountains. The red and yellow of the withering trees; in between, the hushed dark green of the tall firs. Long rows of railroad cars on the tracks, movement inside the train. Outside, small houses, individuals, groups, on streets. Wilno Station.6

Döblin, like most European men of his age, was intimately familiar with the spectacle and feeling of war. He spent the war years on the Western Front as a physician; so, in spite of the appealing landscape and mundane scenery, he could accurately diagnose the city’s ‘geopolitical’ troubles. Despite the ceasefire, the political struggle over Wilno was still in progress, and war, the declaration of its future troubles, still dwelled in Wilno. The city’s train station, like most of the city, retained its unsettling frontline features. Still, the writer-physician tried to avoid the signs of war, because he planned his trip to the neighbouring country to experience the birth of a new state and new national society. Furthermore, in Poland he was hoping to find and map out the political and ideological contours of modern post-war Europe, yet, in Wilno he was inescapably confronted with the German relics and spectres of the Great War:

I hear pleasant things about the German occupation. The Germans, I’m told, left three cemeteries behind: one for civilians, one for officers, one for rank and file. The Good German Lord holds court according to civil and military laws. Then, out in the Zakret Woods, I see their graves in long, long rows: simple wooden crosses, as well as the strange Greek Orthodox crosses of Russians: the horizontal beams slant. The hush is profound. Below lie countless dead men who left this world amid the roaring of canon, amid the moans in a hospital. Poor

6 Döblin, Journey to Poland, 84.
creatures; not one of them could have left this dreadful life without complaint. I
feel tormented and abashed as I walk along these rows. I sense that I must ask
forgiveness. Because they lie here and I live. I do not want to ask, I must not ask
how they are. I would like to: they feel so good, as snug and comfy as the long
green grass that rises from their graves.\(^7\)

Alfred Döblin’s decision to go on a prolonged trip to Poland -- he spent almost two
months there -- materialized from his impromptu desire to explore the ‘unknown’ Eastern
world beyond familiar Berlin. The writer had very little knowledge of or specific interest in
Poland, and, in general, he was not an eager traveller. He lived with his wife and three
young children in the eastern part of Berlin, where, in addition to his literary career, he
was fully consumed by his professional duties at the local health planning office. As a rule,
he despised tourism and leisure travelling, and saw them to be pure expressions of
bourgeois idleness and escapism, a hedonistic desire to flee everyday reality into the
unfamiliar worlds of the others. Döblin, who always consciously tried to separate himself
from the norms and practices of the comforting bourgeois lifestyle, was more passionate in
the metropolitan discomforts of the working class that surrounded him every day in his
professional medical job. Nonetheless, as a writer, Döblin was not immune from the
temptation to explore distant and exotic worlds beyond the customary geographical
perimeters of Europe. He was also interested in historical events or even futuristic events
that seemingly had little to do with the realities of the European postwar metropolis. In
fact, before his trip to Poland, the celebrated author of Berlin Alexanderplatz -- the work
that was published in 1929 -- had written, in addition two other works, two novels of a
historico-geographical and futuristic nature. His first novel was Die drei Sprünge des Wang-
lun (published in 1915) set in seventeenth century China, and his second novel Wallenstein
(published in 1920) was about the Thirty Years War. Meanwhile, in 1924, the year of his
trip to Poland, Döblin published a work of science fiction, Berge Meere und Giganten,
described as a story of a “flight from the present into the future and back to a prehistoric
era.”\(^8\)

Döblin was neither Realist nor Naturalist, in the nineteenth-century literary
conceptualization of these two terms. But neither did he reject the idea of capturing reality
through physical (outer) and physiological (inner) descriptions of the world. In his
theoretical works on the writing of novels, the writer propagated the idea of the ‘factual

\(^7\) Ibid., 97-98.
\(^8\) Heinz Graber in “Introduction” in Döblin, Journey to Poland, x.
imagination’ (Tatsachenphantasie) that leads to a creative synthesis uniting the realistic exploration of a place with the imaginary mapping of it.⁹ Hence, he employed the representational techniques of exaggeration and montage that shaped the artistic forms and imagination of Expressionism and Dadaism.

Individual destiny was at the core of Döblin’s narrative investigations of the world. He never separated the individual from his or her social and physical surroundings. Furthermore, he never assumed that the amalgamated, collective shape of reality is simply too imperceptible or disjointed to be grasped by a single individual or narrator. Therefore, while advocating and practicing the idea of a ‘multitude of visions,’ he also searched for universal truths or narrative tools that could reconcile the peculiar view of the author with the multiple perspectives of the audience. His theory of epic writing, the ancient genre that probably is best suited for the productive fusion of the narrator, story characters and readers, developed in the late 1920s. It demands that the author must be simultaneously a lyricist and dramatist. Yet overall, the author must be reflective in his own condition as a creator of the story.¹⁰ The shape, form and even plot of the narrative evolve through this self-reflection of the author to the point that, as Döblin argues, one “works his way towards the theme by writing. Thus the reader experiences the production process along with the author.”¹¹

The idea and narrative practice of the reader as the creator depends very much on the author’s ability to involve his or her readership in the act of transgression and transformation. The reader, as much as the author, must be aware of the geographical, historical, social and linguistic limits of the familiar surrounding; and at the same time, both ought to be ready to venture into a strange narrative terrain without the expectation of any personal reward. Both have to accept the privileges and shortcomings of their personal circumstances, and both have to embrace the nomadic and often helpless nature of their enterprise. In short, both have to become open to the world with its possibility of endless metamorphosis through the mutually reinforcing process of writing-reading.

Of course this was an extremely idealistic, even Romantic, understanding of the social and cultural role of the author, but it was also a sign of Döblin’s reaction to the

¹¹ As quoted in Dollenmayer, The Berlin Novels of Alfred Döblin, 62.
intrusive nature of modern propaganda -- which, especially during the war, “evoked extremes of emotions: passionate hatred and unrealistic visions of the future.” Döblin, while using the descriptive techniques and narrative clichés of propaganda writing and imagery, attempted to mediate between the two opposing feelings of hatred and hope. In a sense, he was trying to write anti-propaganda, which, under enormous social tensions and political animosities that marked the post-war era, often became a propaganda tool in its own right.

Döblin envisioned his journey to Poland as an act of anti-propaganda, and he invited firstly himself and then his German readers to discover this new and strange but at the same time close and familiar country with open eyes and emotions. In Germany the hatred of Poland, the country that had risen up from the relics of the three European empires, ran high. But more irritating for many in the former kingdom of Prussia was the fact that the German and Polish nations, the assumed historical archenemies, were now positioned as equal geopolitical partners on the nationalized map of modern Europe. Before the war, very few German-speaking Prussians or Silesians lived outside their national home -- after the war many of them found themselves living in foreign countries, primarily Poland and Lithuania.

Döblin was born in the Pomeranian port of Stettin, but grew up in Silesian Breslau and Prussian Berlin. All three cities were close enough to the post-war Polish-German frontier to be directly affected by the national partition of the German empire. Moreover, Döblin’s mother’s family came from the Prussian province of Posen, the historic region of the old Polish kingdom, known as Wielkopolska [Great Poland]). Polish was one of the languages spoken in her family. From 1918, the city of Posen, known again in Polish as Poznan, became part of independent Poland. Alfred Döblin, a Berliner to his core, nonetheless suspected that Poland, despite its century-long cartographic disappearance, swayed heavily over the biographical and geopolitical destiny of German society. Although its presence in Europe had always been challenged, Poland nevertheless had been much closer to the German inner universe than anyone wanted to acknowledge, since it was first shattered and then reconstructed in part because of Prussian and German expansionism. Hence, Döblin saw his voyage to Poland also as an act of atonement, a journey that leads to

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12 Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 236.
a self-analysis or self-evaluation. Ironically for the writer, the journey opened the possibility to fully experience the modern heart of Europe, or as he enigmatically put it: "Death of the heart?"\textsuperscript{13}

As a rule, in preparation for his writings Döblin made an extremely vigorous historical and geographical investigation of his topic. But he usually had very little time and resources for a physical exploration of foreign places, and most of his discoveries were conducted within the reading rooms of Berlin libraries and among the shelves of various archives. His factual imagination often relied on the information collected and put together by the metropolitan gatekeepers of global knowledge. The trip to Poland, in a way, was Döblin’s attempt to go beyond the systematized and catalogued understanding of the world that, as a rule, divides places and peoples according to the specified historical and contemporary data of a given state. Döblin had little patience with the institutions, borders and statistics of the state, but in Poland he wanted to experience both the forces of the national government and communal resistance to its oppressive rationale. Thus, Döblin went to Poland to collect information and gather ‘feelings’ of the country.

Döblin arrived to Poland intellectually unprepared, so to speak, and he did not know what to expect from the country. Before and during the trip, he deliberately avoided most of the scholarly knowledge about the country. As he sarcastically remarked, he "leafed through" several books about Polish literature and Polish Jews, "read very carefully" one book, \textit{Tage in Hellas} by B. Guttmann, and "neither read nor leafed through the national libraries in Berlin, in Warsaw, in Cracow, and in Lwow."\textsuperscript{14} The narrative outcome of the rather spontaneous trip was several articles that appeared throughout 1925 in the \textit{Die Neue Rundschau}, the magazine where since 1919 Döblin published most of his writings. The magazine also probably funded Döblin’s trip to Poland. In 1926 the writer collected some of the articles and with a few important additions published a book of his Polish impressions, appropriately entitled, \textit{Reise in Polen}, and much later translated in English as \textit{Journey to Poland}.

\textsuperscript{13} Döblin, \textit{Journey to Poland}, 263.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 267.
Döblin frames his entire trip within a mutating sense of estrangement. In contrast to most travelling experiences, the journey begins with a sense of confinement: the train ride from Berlin to Warsaw does not liberate the traveller but imprisons him within uncontrollably and unpredictably changing spatial and temporal orders. From the start, his voluntary journey to Poland moves as a sudden exile from home into a strange land: “The train zoomed off from Berlin like an arrow. ...I -- am not here. I -am not in the train...but then I get into the train...I am caught. The train carries me off, holds me captive, rocks me along the rails into the night.” Yet, for the traveller, the most troubling aspect of this forced mobility was not so much the feeling of being speedily carried away from Berlin into a foreign land, but the looming experience of crossing the national frontier that separates Germany from Poland:

The train lumbers on. Black midnight has come. The train halts; is this a station? ...We have to walk across dark platforms, down and up staircases, into gigantic wooden shacks – to the customs office. This is a foreign country. The train has crossed the border. I am walking on foreign soil. That’s how fast it all went. I was just thinking about it, two weeks, three weeks ago, at home, weighing pros and cons. It was my plan. Now it stands before me, moves, is no longer in my mind, rolls around me. I comb about it. Now it is more powerful than I. How dreadful this translation of an idea into visibility.

For Döblin, the ‘translation of an idea into visibility’ foremost embodies a personal alienation from the entered country. The new boundary between Germany and Poland with all its modern political and social trappings -- passport controls, customs and foreign currency exchanges -- incapacitates his knowledge and experience of the world. Since Döblin is unfamiliar with Polish, from the moment he crosses the frontier he can only rely on his sensual and imaginary rather than linguistic orientations: “The signs on the staircase walls contains words, syllables, whose meanings I can’t surmise. They are probably just saying: Such and such a train departs from the platform. But in the foreign language, these words excite me, arouse my expectations. How could they help it? Now I begin to go dumb, go deaf.” (Incidentally, the Polish word (as in most Slavic languages)

15 Ibid., 1.
16 Ibid., 3.
17 Ibid.
for a German -- niemec -- comes from the word meaning dumb and/or deaf, or weak and incapacitated.)

While Döblin opens his trip in Warsaw with the incapacitating feeling of being speechless, which still offers a possibility of imagination, he ends his journey in Danzig – “a free city against its will”\(^\text{18}\) with a feeling of complete isolation and alienation. Surprisingly, he felt estranged not from Poland, but from his metropolitan home, Berlin:

> Am I glad to be walking here? There’s order and cleanliness here. The building facades aren’t crumbling. The roadway surface is impeccably intact. Here, respectable well-nourished faces hang in the photographer’s window. They’re comfortable, with a light and sometimes thick powdering of self-complaisance. This is – Herzenstod, the death of the heart! ...Dullness, blankness on the face of the sitters. And not just in the photographer’s vitrine; he caught them expertly. The faces of the people walking the streets next to me are like that: efficient hardworking creatures, but all the same. ...I’m embarrassed, I feel terribly abandoned.

> And this, dear heart, also awaits you in Germany. Here you have cleanliness, order, prosperity. Here you’re at home. Not everything – will be like this. It only crashes down on you during the first moment.\(^\text{19}\)

If, for Döblin, the trip begins with the alienating “translation of the idea into visibility,” then the journey ends with the uncomfortable retranslation of visible signs -- photographs, people, streets and houses of Danzig -- into the idea of home. The entire voyage modulates between these two notions: when Döblin has an idea he maps it on a specific Polish cityscape, and, conversely, out of the foreign terrain, he extrapolates the notions and emotions of his homeland. Thus, in summary, *Journey to Poland* is not a simple narrative catalogue of travel impressions, but a discourse about social, political and emotional conceptualizations of modern Europe as home. Throughout his entire trip, Döblin is haunted by his own marginal position which evokes apprehension. At the same time, it also provokes curiosity and, sometimes, an uncontrollable desire to know what makes an idea a visible, corporeal reality. And in Poland, Döblin is continuously perplexed by the evolving translocation of the nation into a state, traditions into modern practices, and extraordinary into familiar.

Despite seemingly random wanderings through Poland, three interconnected research concerns direct Döblin’s Polish travel itinerary. Firstly, the writer literally went to

\(^\text{18}\) Ibid., 261.
\(^\text{19}\) Ibid., 259-260.
Poland in search of the Jews. Secondly, he wanted to observe the 'ground level' fusion of
government and ethnicity into a single nation-state unit. Post-war Poland with its
conflicting and freshly defined territorial and ethnic boundaries provided the best example
of this incongruous modern European geopolitical phenomenon. Finally, once Döblin
arrived in Poland he was driven deeply into the country by the inexplicable passion for its
spiritual topographies. In the end, it was the simultaneous discovery of intense local
religiosity, speedy processes of nation-building and Jewish modernity that made a
permanent imprint in Döblin's comprehension of himself and his relationship with the
world. 20

In 1921 Döblin raised a perplexing question about the 'factual' existence of millions
of Jews immediately beyond the eastern frontiers of Germany: “The issue of East
European Jewry is a chapter unto itself. In case it is true that great masses of Jews,
millions, live there as a cohesive group. ...We would have to determine whether millions of
East European Jews really live in Poland and Galicia. ...A geographical expedition would
have to be fitted out to confirm this question.”21 Three years later, presumably, finding no
reliable account about these great Jewish masses, the writer himself embarked on an
ethnographic expedition. His trip to Poland was supposed to translate the unsatisfactory
statistical data into a visual, material reality. Yet, besides these purely 'geographical'
concerns, the writer found some more intimate, biographical motivations to justify his trip.

Döblin was born in 1878 into an assimilated and acculturated German-Jewish
family, whose religious affiliations to Judaism were limited to a customary celebration of a
few important Jewish holidays. He grew up fully aware of his Jewish origins, but he was
not greatly influenced by Jewish religious specifics or Hebrew (and Yiddish) language and
literature. Years later, in 1948, in a book about his WWII exile, he described his early
Jewish past as insignificant: “I had been told at home in Stettin that my parents were of
Jewish origin and we were a Jewish family. That was about the only thing concerning

20 In many ways, Döblin's comprehension and spiritual relationship to Judaism was formed
during his journey through Poland; see Klaus Müller-Salget, “Döblin and Judaism” in A
Companion to the Works of Döblin, ed. Roland Dollinger, Wulf Koepke and Heidi Thomann
21 Graben, “Introduction” in Döblin, Journey to Poland, xiv.
Judaism that I noticed about our family.”22 “My parents,” continuous the writer, “celebrated two holidays: New Year’s and Yom Kippur.” Döblin went to a German school, and he encountered there some aspects of anti-Semitism “as a matter of course.”24 But these experiences, in his mind, were no different than for most of his “schoolmates who had been told the same thing I had been told at home.”25

In general, young Döblin was not interested in his Jewish roots: “During my occasional religious instruction I learned a little Hebrew, no more than the basics. Why should I be interested in learning Hebrew on top of Latin, Greek, and French, when I had always found linguistic instructions disagreeable? What with the Iliad and the Odyssey, the lays of Edda and the Nibelungen and Gudrun, I had little interest in the early history of the Israelites, who later dispersed and disbanded.”26 He felt even less attachment to the modern Jewish religious system. At school, “instruction in Judaism was equivocal and more voluntary. ... As for teaching, the actual religious teaching -- I read it and listened to it. It was, and remained, superficial to me. It did not affect me emotionally. I felt no connection to it.”27

His professional and creative life did not change his attitudes towards his Jewish roots and the Judaic religion and up until the early 1920s he did not show any specific interest in the social, political, cultural or spiritual life of German Jewry. He became more interested in Jewish politics, especially in the question of the Jewish national future as it was approached by German Zionist leaders, only after in “the first half of the nineteen-twenties, something resembling pogroms were taking place in Berlin, in the city’s eastern section, on Gollnow Street and its surrounding.”28 This pogrom-like attack on the Jewish section of the city “happened against the paramilitary background of those years; Nazism was in its infancy.”29 Immediately after these events, Döblin was drawn into a discussion group organized by the representatives of Zionism in Berlin who tried to invigorate interest in Jewish national politics among the German intellectuals of Jewish origin. “As a result of

23 Ibid., 106.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 110.
29 Ibid.
these discussions,” remembered Döblin, “someone came to my apartment to persuade me to take a trip to Palestine, which I found strange. His attempts at persuasion had a different effect on me. I did not, to be sure, agree to go to Palestine, but I found that I wanted to know more about the Jews. I discovered that I didn’t know them. I could not call Jews those of my acquaintances who called themselves Jews. They weren’t Jews in their beliefs, in their language, they were perhaps the vestige of an extinct people who had long ago assimilated to their environment. So I asked myself and others: where are the Jews? I was told: in Poland.”

Yet this pragmatic decision had more subjective motivations. The writer’s parents came from Posen, which at the time of their birth belonged to Prussia but after the Great War was incorporated into the newly created Polish state. His grandparents still spoke Yiddish, while his parents were already speaking mainly German and some Polish. Döblin’s parents met in Posen but later moved to Stettin, where his father, Max Döblin, owned a cutting shop. At forty, Max Döblin left the family and fled with his mistress to Hamburg and some years later to America. Meanwhile, Döblin’s abandoned and poverty-stricken mother with five children moved to Berlin. This move, in the writer’s words, determined his “entire way of being. ...My memory of that trip to Berlin in 1888, of our beggar’s existence that followed, of our poverty, has never left me. And so I grew up. That is what home meant to me. The notion that we, that I, belonged to the poor stayed with me. ...I belonged to the nation that was poor.”

For the rest of his life, Döblin seemed to have a very strenuous emotional relationship with his father, and he simultaneously “loudly cursed and silently admired” him. He saw his father, and, hence, his own impoverished social condition, as the generational casualty of the Jewish cultural and geographical displacement. His father was a person without a homeland: “He was -- ethnologically -- the victim of resettlement. All his values were reevaluated and devaluated.” Döblin, in a way, attempted to reverse this genealogical pattern of spatial and linguistic nomadism by trying to reconcile himself with the unknown world of his ancestors: “Only in my generation has the memory, including the
joyous memory of our background and the old respect, been heavily and gradually revived.
I -- survived the great resettlement.”

Döblin’s statement echoes the cultural sentiments of a much larger group of acculturated German-Jews who grew up in the ‘vacuous’ middle-class national and religious environment of the so-called Westjudentum. At the end of the nineteenth century they suddenly found themselves haunted by the invisible marks of their own ‘hidden’ Jewishness. Before and especially during the First World War, when the German army occupied vast Russian territories inhabited by east European Jews, an increasing number of German-Jewish intellectuals ‘discovered’ their ancestral roots among the inhabitants of the Polish, Lithuanian, Byelorussian and Ukrainian shtetls. These ‘discoveries’ were possibly best captured and promoted by the German-Jewish magazine, Ost und West, which started to be published in Berlin in 1901 and continue to be published until 1923, a year before Döblin’s trip to Poland. The idea of the magazine, as the title suggest, was to reconnect the two branches of Ashkenazi Jewry: the emancipated western European, the Westjuden, and the more traditional eastern European, the Ostjuden.

The editors of the magazine promoted a ‘re-ethnification’ of modern Westjuden by introducing them to the traditional, pre-emancipated lifestyle of the Ostjuden. The magazine “repeatedly spoke of a ‘harmonious’ Jewish identity, an identity poised between tradition and modernity and between East and West.” One of the targeted audiences of the Ost und West was a younger generation of German (Jewish) intellectuals which, in many ways, was trying to break away from the comforting but also restricting social and cultural habits of their parents’ generation. The magazine enabled the “Jews between twenty and forty to break with their parents’ Westjudentum while also distancing themselves from the negative side of Ostjudentum.” In other words, the Ost und West attempted to fight the estranging result of the ethno-linguistic ‘resettlement’ of the older Jewish generation by reconnecting the younger, that is already completely assimilated generation, with their geographical and cultural roots. It is not clear, however, if Döblin was personally connected with the Ost und West or its editors, but his trip to Poland, in

34 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 83.
many ways, exemplifies the spirit of the ‘re-ethnification’ of the Westjuden promoted by the magazine.

More than twenty years after the trip and after the Holocaust, Döblin remembered his journey to Jewish Poland as the most memorable testimonial act of his life: “I went to Poland. I have written a book about it. I went there and for the first time in my life I saw Jews. I was deeply touched by the sight of them. I have never forgotten what I saw in the ghettos of Warsaw, of Wilna and Krakow, and particularly what I saw in the town of a great rabbi, in Gura Kalvaria.”37 The witnessed Jewish topography simultaneously shocked, astonished and mesmerized the writer, but he never managed to ‘re-ethnicise’ himself. Among the traditional Polish Jews, especially among the Hasidic Jews, he remained an outsider. He felt no connection to their world: “They were a strange people, from another world altogether. They had their own religion, their own language, their surroundings. I had as little in common with them as they had with me.”38

In general, Döblin’s encounter with the traditional Ostjudentum evolved in-between two emotional reactions: dismay and fascination. As a result, he is simultaneously captivated by and fearful of the ‘foreign’ Eastern European Jewish lifestyle. During his first day in Warsaw, where the largest Jewish urban community in Europe resided (approximately 300,000 people or about one third of the city’s population), Döblin ‘unintentionally’ sights the primary ‘subject’ of his geographical investigation. Döblin describes the initial moment of the ethnographical idea becoming a visual reality:

I stand at a trolley stop, perusing the very obliging streetcar signs, which indicate every passing line and its route. All at once, a lone man with a bearded face comes toward me through the crowd: he wears a black, ragged gabardine, a black visored cap on his head, and top boots on his legs. And right behind him, talking loudly, in words that I can recognize as German, another one, likewise in a black gaberdine, a big man, with a broad red face, red fuzz on his cheeks, over his lips... I feel a jolt in my head. They vanish in the throng. People pay them no heed. They are Jews. I am stunned, no, frightened.39

Döblin’s shock arises from both the familiar proximity and distant strangeness of the Ostojudentum. In the unaccustomed world of the Polish metropolis, surrounded by indecipherable spatial markers, he detects familiar (German-like) sounds. This German

37 Döblin, Destiny’s Journey, 110.
38 Ibid., 111.
39 Döblin, Journey to Poland, 7.
tongue, probably Yiddish, nonetheless leads to the unfamiliar yet expected sight, a visual echo of his family’s past.

The initial dismay is soon replaced by a fascinated curiosity and even obsession. The often impoverished and/or traditional Jewish neighbourhoods of various Polish towns, like in Alexanderplatz, the working class district of Berlin and the home-terrain of Döblin, magnetically draw the traveller into their spatial webs of everyday events. Here, the impassionate ethnographic and cultural observations transgress into a deep psychological self-analysis, and within these often mundane but always puzzling urban commonplaces, Döblin finds the essence of his own ‘modern identity crisis.’ The mystification of the other becomes the awakening of the self; the detestation of modern western values, with their unfulfilled promises of freedom, equality, brotherhood and peace, transforms into the inexplicable adoration of the simple stoic Jewish refusal to become another victim of European modernity.

In Cracow, at the end of his trip, Döblin’s obsession with the Ostjudentum reframes his own position vis-à-vis the rhetoric and practices of western Enlightenment. Here, he finds the philosophical scaffoldings of his ideal identity, the unattainable and unbearable personal location that emerges in-between the cracks of modernity and the layers of Jewish traditions: “The Hotel Royal! I’m supposed to return to it. Yes, that’s where I have to go. Am I not looking for Faust, Dr. Twardowski? The Jews! The Jews are going there! I want to see the dead. The perishing things that live. I don’t want renovations. Those people in black coats and fantastic fur caps on the sidewalk! Don’t I recognize them? The Jews! The darkness in the market-place, illuminated by electric light. The magic ship rising on the ocean. I have to see these things without further ado.”

Once he is back in the Jewish neighbourhood, Döblin’s feverish disorientation turns into a direct accusation of the conformist lifestyle of the acculturated German Jews: “I know what the enlightened gentlemen, the Jewish Enlighteners will say. They laugh at the ‘stupid backward’ members of their own nation, they’re ashamed of them. They’ll poke their shallow fun at me. The world was born with them and has reached utter perfection with them.” Immediately, through this juxtaposition of the invisible, assimilated Westjudentum and visible, stoic Ostjudentum, Döblin articulates his own identity: “I, neither an Enlightener nor a member of these national masses, a Western European passerby -- I view those ‘Enlightened’ ones

40 Ibid., 190.
41 Ibid., 191.
like Africans who flaunt the glass beads they’ve gotten from sailors, the dirty cuffs on their dangling arms, the brand-new dented top hats on their heads. How poor, how shabby, how unworthy and soullessly devastated the Western World is, giving them those cuffs; how are they supposed to know.”

From this supposedly neutral standpoint -- the ‘Western European passerby’ -- Döblin accuses the acculturated German Jews of deliberately mimicking European norms and camouflaging their true national identities. He racializes and caricatures the ‘soulless’ emancipated Jews, but, cautiously, does not reflect on his own condition. In a way, he distances himself from both Jewish worlds and tries to find a personal space in-between the familiar but irritating Westjudentum and the strange but enthralling Ostjudentum. And in the end, Döblin’s exposure to the Polish Jewish world did not produce a complete sense of alienation; instead of inaction, it insinuated him to promote the political and social agendas of the Yiddish speaking population of Europe. From the painful post-Holocaust retrospection, Döblin summarizes the political effects of his ‘Jewish’ discovery of Poland in a much more personally pragmatic way. The journey to the Ostjudentum stirred his emotions, but not his rational mind:

My interest in the Jewish experience was heightened by this journey. The plan to create a land for what remained of this homeless and persecuted people made sense to me. Perhaps the Jews, having been uprooted from their own land and having floated among the peoples of the world for two millennia, could once again find land upon which they could develop in their own way, utilizing their own strengths. I rejected a nationalist Zionism; it was too European for me and too bourgeois. So I joined the ‘territorialists.’ I even tried to learn Yiddish. I travelled, wrote, and spoke out in support of this movement. But I remained outside it. My words meant nothing, and I felt nothing. It was yet another flag I could not carry.

THE GRAVE OF THE NATION

Despite Döblin’s compulsive interests in the Jewish religious and cultural movements, his book, Journey to Poland, if not the trip itself, was meant to be a socio-political investigation of independent Poland. In addition, the book was to offer a critical look at the post-war geopolitical realities of nation-state Europe. Accordingly, Döblin opens the narrative of his trip with a known epigram from Schiller’s Wilhelm Tell: “For Every Border Wields A Tyrant’s Power.” But he underlines it with his own clarification: “These

42 Ibid.
43 Döblin, Destiny’s Journey, 111.

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words are aimed at all states and at the State per se."

So, Döblin begins his narrative journey to Poland by illuminating it with the key socio-political issue of many leftist intellectual and revolutionary movements, the oppressive regime of the modern state.

In the post-war era, Döblin’s personal political views and social affiliations were marked by his strong alliance with the German socialist movement. In 1918, he joined the Independent Social Democrats; later, in 1921, he switched to the Socialist Party of Germany. However, Döblin was never an ideologue and he quickly became disappointed by socialist party politics: “I embrace socialist thought, the true idea, the basic feeling of a human brotherhood. I observed party politics and saw -- boss rule. ...And in the end I was part of a small group in Berlin who had spilt with one party and another, basically we were all disappointed and disillusioned.” While Döblin believed in the progressive role of a socialist state, in general he deeply mistrusted the hierarchical structure of any administrative regime. He was influenced by Russian anarchist thought, especially by the writings of Bakunin and Kropotkin, and at some point in his life he promoted the idea of “ethical socialism” in which the “free form of a state ...is the prerequisite for the development of a communal structure.” Socialism and any form of national state building, be it the Soviet system or western European national democracy, were other flags that he could not carry. Döblin, in his own words, went to see in Poland how “the delusion of the unique significance of the state and the recognition of its power live on.”

Hence, Döblin describes his trip not as a leisurely tour, and not even as an expedition into the Ostjudentum, but as a didactic examination of the post-war geopolitical terrain of eastern Europe. Döblin felt extreme repulsion towards any nationalist ideologies, and he understood the modern socio-political fusion of the state and nation to be the greatest ethical and moral challenge. He saw the post-imperial emergence of the nation-state as another instrument of economic exploitation and linguistic oppression. Still, in Poland, he could not but reflect on some more positive aspects of the national state, such as cultural and educational independence of the formerly oppressed national groups and a limited economic empowerment of the nation.

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44 Döblin, Journey to Poland, 1.
45 Döblin, Destiny’s Journey, 111.
46 As quoted in Kort, Alfred Döblin, 25.
47 Döblin, Journey to Poland, 240.
The modern nation-state is primarily defined by geographical and linguistic borders. One limits the territorial extension of the state and the other confines the population within a specific cultural domain. Poland at the time was far from a linguistically and territorially monolithic country. Like most states that were organized on the principle of national self-determination, Poland was truly a mini multinational realm that emerged from the ruins of the grand empires of Europe. The Polish state statistics, as Döblin noted, could not conceal the inter-territorial and international character of the new republic: "I have the official Polish Almanac for 1924; I will not allow myself to be intimidated by the statistics. According to the census of 1921, this Poland has four hundred thousand square kilometres of surface area, inhabited by twenty-seven million people. Eleven million of these people were supplied by the old Congress of Poland, eight by Austria, four by Prussia. Four million are missing: they occupy the "Eastern territory," the districts of Grodno, Wilno, Minsk, Volhynia." Roughly two-thirds of the population was Polish, fourteen percent was Ukrainian, almost ten percent was Jewish, more than five percent was Beylorussian, about two and a half percent was German, and less than half a percent was Lithuanian. (There were also some lesser minorities of Russians, Czechs, Tartars and others.) Döblin attempted to frame the newly constructed Polish state within the changing spatial-linguistic terrains. Hence, his itinerary attempts to encompass the two variables of post-war Poland, territorial consolidation and cultural fragmentation.

The birth of the Polish nation-state, like the emergence of many other European nation-states, came under the sign of war, and in Poland Döblin is often guided by the topographical imprints of war: ruins, depopulated cities, military parades and cemeteries, etc. But his investigation of the country is also steered by the invisible phantoms of future wars: the hatred found among the ethnic groups of Poland, political mistrust of neighbouring states, the ideological frictions of the urban population, cultural isolationism, and above all, the international worship of the coercive functions of the modern state.

In Döblin's opinion, the most significant shortcoming of the modern state comes from its political and cultural re-alliance with nationalist movements and monochromatic views of history. In Poland, faced with a great variety of national expressions (Polish, German, Jewish and Ukrainian), Döblin comes to the conclusion that the modern

48 Ibid., 9.
European state automatically becomes an oppressive structure precisely because of its national character that can only encompass one history and one future:

There is something gruesome about today's nationalism. I lose desire to advocate the freedom of nations. I lose all desire to comfort and threaten with 'borders,' which have a 'tyrant's power,' where I see the tyranny of nationalism. ...And history. I know how 'history' is taught: megalomania is coupled with ignorance. I know how 'freedom' is taught: with hatred toward the neighbor. National consciousness, national unconsciousness. ...How blind they become, how terribly they exaggerate and cut themselves off, these nations, all of them chasing after the same Western goods. ...I don't like the nation for its own sake. What can a body do with bad blood?49

Ironically, in Döblin's opinion, rather than enhancing national development, the state ensures its death: "Today's states are the graves of nations."50 Yet Döblin goes even further, for he understands the European system of nation-states not only as a vast graveyard of nations, but an intrusive social mechanism that atomizes individuals:

In our era, the lives of nations have long since overlapped political borders. The old state still stands between them, fat, complaisant, and admired — a mammoth has been, a lazy ichthyosaur that must be eliminated by modern-day brains.

But it is even more urgent to address the individual, the self. I am flabbergasted by the incredible violence inflicted by a hing that calls itself the state. ...The truly human groups, the truly rational sphere of the self, of the individual, must rally against this entity. ...The state has grown beyond all bounds — a direct or abstract matter of concern; no one can now grasp it emotionally. The fond sense of homeland, attachment to family, love for friends, love for one's tribe; all these things have been devoured by the state, a monster that turns them into goodness knows what.51

Because of his linguistic shortcomings, Döblin was incapable of a deeper understanding and more rewarding experience of the polymorphous Polish society. His observations, therefore, are fleeting impressions of a lonely, one can say even extremely marginalized and private, traveller. Döblin wants to "know what is going on in this country right now, which forces, powers are organizing the state, which forces govern officially and which unofficially. Who wields power and who wields words...? I ask: Who goes hungry in this country and who is sated? What are the political crimes here? Who and how many people are in prison for political crimes? Which crimes are the most frequent."52 Yet, Döblin feels incapable of finding answers to these puzzling questions, not so much because

49 Ibid., 150-151.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., 240.
52 Ibid., 31.
he is confronted with a secretive state machinery and invisible ideologies, but by his own ignorance. "I soon throw in the towel," announces the writer, "because I don't speak the language, or rather the languages of the country: Polish, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Yiddish, Lithuanian."\(^{53}\)

Still, in Poland, the writer attempts to fulfill his public tourist duties. He patiently visits museums, libraries, and schools, attends concerts and theatre performances, and engages in conversation with various local officials, intellectuals, religious leaders, and simple folk. Nonetheless, he never manages to cross the linguistic and social boundary that separates the deeply sceptical metropolitan Berliner from more provincial yet perhaps more cosmopolitan and enthusiastic local intellectuals. So on various occasions Döblin eagerly becomes a carefree and even ignorant tourist whose only distraction is the endless and often meaningless interchange of urban-rural scenery. He is often bored and even ashamed, again, not necessarily by the country or its people, but by his own experience as a bourgeois traveller. In Warsaw, for instance, he finds himself surrounded by the modern spectacle of comfortable and entertaining urbanity. "What do I find everywhere?" Döblin asks: "Upper-class Europe. Some of me is at home here too."\(^{54}\)

As a rule, Döblin's narrative of the trip reflects his contradictory and seemingly incongruous relationship to Poland, but before anything else, Journey to Poland is an autobiographical work. It is possible, however, to summarize Döblin's narrative as an attempt to examine and reflect on visible and invisible frictions that separate modernity from other historical, or for that matter geographical, traditions. In contrast to Berlin where a modern lifestyle and social practices rule supreme, in Poland the writer encounters a parallel and often intertwined existence of modern and traditional topographies. Döblin was not so much intrigued by the visible opposition of the two universes as he was extremely attracted to the sites and spectacles of their intercourse. In Cracow, for instance, he is mesmerized by the intimate closeness of the two topographies: "Confusing, poignant -- this proximity of two worlds: electric light, modern promenades, automobiles -- and that, the Cloth Gazebo, and also that, the slender church of St. Mary. How they crowd each other, encounter each other, kiss each other over their shoulders."\(^{55}\)

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\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 49.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 187.
For Döblin, this amalgamation of modern and traditional raises a representational question of the relationship between the ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ appearances of the world. In his early professional days, Döblin practised psychiatry and unconscious experience of place is a theme of many of his writings. While Journey to Poland is perhaps not a work of psychoanalytical spatial exploration, its narrative coherence, nonetheless, greatly relies on the narrator’s emotional and psychological experience of the place, Döblin entered Poland ‘deaf and dumb’, and he remained so throughout his entire trip, but he certainly managed to translate the idea of the country into a narrative visibility. “I enjoyed being here,” Döblin writes in his farewell note, “I’m enthralled; what kind of human breed is this, human mixture; what seething life, powerful stimuli. I would have loved to get deeper into everything; but I remained deaf and dumb. And now, farewell. This land exists. I realize it from the bottom of my heart.”

Disappointed by his own inability to reflect on the multiplicity of Poland, Döblin turned his geo-social exploration of the country into a personal spiritual adventure. At the time of the trip the writer was atheist; but in Poland, he confronted the perplexing realm of religious piety and imagery that literally transformed his spiritual world. Removed from his modern metropolitan surrounding, the lonely traveller became increasingly drawn into the traditional realm of spirituality. So, quite unexpectedly, the investigative journey gradually metamorphosed into a personal spiritual pilgrimage.

Döblin was transfixed by all the religious spectacles and experiences of the region: the graceful Gothic simplicity and elegant Baroque exuberance of the Catholic sphere; the genuine devotion of the Greek Orthodox domain; the intimate piety and impulsive unpredictability of the Judaic world. Within this multifaceted, contradictory and sometimes openly antagonistic religious realm, rather than within the incongruous and jagged modern politics or contemporary cultural life, Döblin finds the ultimate centre of his universe: “Is it a dead world and a new world? I don’t know which is dead. The old one isn’t dead. I feel intimately and violently attracted to it. And I know that my compass is reliable. It never points to anything aesthetic, it always points to living, urgent things.”

During his trip, Döblin seems to respond to Judaism and Christianity with an equal passion. Among the worship sites and imaginary sights of the two spiritual traditions, and

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56 Ibid., 256.
57 Ibid., 187.

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surprisingly even among some of their contemporary structures, the writer finds the antidote to the discomforting trappings of European bourgeois life:

I unconditionally reject and repudiate classicism Hellenism, and humanism. They are bourgeois easy chairs, deep, lazy lounge chairs. When I approach the Middle Ages, which waft toward me here, cooling from the dark vaults, hushing around the churches, the monks and nuns, around the houses with fortified walls, I know where I belong. I’m a born enemy and adversary of serene classicism and overly beautiful Grecism, and adversary of their emulation and their very doctrine, because they are perishable. ...I’m an enemy of normal, lukewarm, shabby humanism. Just as I despise today’s democracy, the name for a nonentity.58

In other words, Döblin rejects everything that leads to republican Athens and Rome -- the predecessors of the western notion of democracy, humanism, rationalism and the Enlightenment -- and he fervently accepts the road to Jerusalem, the spiritual incarnation of the promised future.

RESURRECTED EUROPE

Döblin comes to the old Lithuanian capital after a two-week stay in Warsaw, the capital of the second republic of Poland where he spent Yom Kippur, which in 1924 fell on October 10. By this time, he was not a dumb or blind traveler, and he pretty much knew what to expect from the provincial city: the town, like Warsaw, was ruled by the Russian empire, and had a large Jewish population, but it is clearly dominated by Polish Catholic traditions. He had certainly heard something about the disputed historical and political location of Wilno from various people in Warsaw. He also knew that Wilno belonged to the statistically and demographically unaccounted region of the modern Polish state, the so-called “Eastern territory” or Kresy in Polish, where, in general, national, linguistic and territorial identities were still in flux.

In Warsaw he heard numerous stories about Jozef Pilsudski, the military and political founder of modern Poland and also a native of Wilno region. For a decade, Pilsudski advocated the restoration of the confederate state based on the multiethnic principle of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, but he found very few supporters among the nationally divided peoples of the region. In many ways, Pilsudski’s geopolitical dreams failed, for the region had been among different nation-states; yet

58 Ibid., 188-189.
Döblin found Pilsudski to be an impressive and contradictory personality, perhaps even an untimely or belated reincarnation of the political and social contradictions of the modern European world:

a revolutionary a la Mazzini, a revolutionary to the core. He is anticlerical, he had been married twice, with several children from his second wife. The clergy then pushed him, as head of state, to have a church wedding. He is radical leftist, although no longer a member of the PPS [Polish Socialist Party]. He resolutely organized the army in his way, with his friends and helpers in the lead: he shoved the old Russian and Austrian officers behind the fresh ones. So that many younger men have high military ranks here. He is a fascinating, deeply passionate man, a thorough anti-parliamentarian. He calls parliament a chatter room. He refuses to be elected head of state, because he doesn’t want just to open exhibitions. He is now on the sidelines, but only for a while, no doubt.59

Despite his contradictions, Pilsudski is a national idol, especially among his hometown natives, the Poles of Wilno. He donates all his state salary to the re-established University of Wilno. A decade later, after his death, he leaves his heart to the city: it will be buried together with the remains of his mother alongside the Polish Legionaries who were killed in the battles of Wilno in one of the oldest Catholic cemeteries of the city. The tomb containing Pilsudski’s heart and his mother’s body will become a modern Polish shrine for the rest of the century. To this day, it is attended by the Polish state and various patriotic associations.

In Warsaw, Döblin was also warned about the deceptive and ‘hazardous’ nature of the Kreys, the borderland regions of the Polish state and nation. One state bureaucrat asked him not to trust the representatives of local minorities who would definitely portray the Polish state and its national policies in the gloomiest colours. And “a very intelligent, very down-to-earth National Polish politician” informed him about the causes of Polish anti-Semitism and Jewish poverty, claiming they stem from the aggressive nature of the Lithuanian Jews:

Jews and Poles were on excellent terms until 1903, then the Jewish Russians showed up, energetic, sly, the hated Litvaks [the Lithuanian Jewry in Yiddish]; they aroused the opposition of the Poles and the local Jews. Now they have fused with them. The Jews are unilaterally merchants, but Poland’s economic foundation is too narrow for so many merchants. That is the cause of their poverty. Incidentally, nowhere is the tension between very rich and very poor as great as among the Jews.”60

59 Ibid., 33.
60 Ibid., 36-37.
A propaganda poster in Warsaw announcing “Airplane Week” also reminded the traveller about the “danger of war from Bolshevist Russia.” Wilno was located just about a hundred kilometres from the newly posted Soviet border and about forty kilometres from the demarcation line that separated the confrontational Polish and Lithuanian armies -- a truly frontier if not an outright frontline town.

Wilno was also further east than any town he had been to in his life and Doblin was expecting to see more of the by now familiar Asian or Oriental topographical intrusions into the Polish cityscapes, such as the notorious Russian Orthodox churches built under the demands of the tsarist administrators. Those “dreadful and paralyzing” sites -- “the steppes of Volga” -- such as the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Warsaw, where “anyone would be dumfounded by this sight, for terrifying Asia is frozen here in stone.” Still, he was also prepared to see more of the Catholic church “splendour, columns, Baroque altars, golden pomp” that almost indiscriminately adorns practically every Polish town.

Perhaps most importantly, after exploring several Jewish neighbourhoods of the Polish capital, he could witness and record the ethnographical display of the Jewish city without his initial dismay or astonishment. In the large, busy and populous districts of the Nalewki Street in Warsaw, Doblin quickly learned to recognize and read Jewish faces and spaces:

Paperhangers, bakers, butchers, junk shops. A book peddler hawking Yiddish publications. Gangs of kids: I notice their Slavic faces: the Jewish features emerge later on. ...The shops signs: Kleinfinger, Berlinerblau, Rottblut, Halbstrunk, Tuchband, Zwei fuss, Alfabet, Silberklang. Painters, whitewashers, stroll along, in smocks, toting ladders: skullcaps on their heads. When talking, these people seldom move their arms and hands; what you see in Western Europe is disfigurement. A few old men have twirled earlocks; from behind, in their heavy, skirtlike caftans, they look like women. When they step across puddles, they lift their caftans like women. Very many of the ones standing here have dreamy expressions; they look somnolent.

But in the suburban and much smaller town of Gura Kalwarja, the seat of one of the most important Hasidic rebbe courts, Doblin learned how to identify the biblical ‘physiology’, dignifying patriarchal features and nomadic ‘Oriental’ manners of the Ostjudentum:

I recognize how festively earnest, profoundly earnest -- no, agitated -- these people are. Now, I realize what their beards mean. You understand the beard

61 Ibid., 24.
62 Ibid., 5.
63 Ibid., 12.
64 Ibid., 53-54.
when you see these men standing there in their big wide prayer shawl, which they have drawn over their heads. These are Arabian heads, these are men of the great sandy desert. I can picture the huge mounted camels next to them. Their sharp, richly expressive overly lively faces. Something mighty, lordly, heroic lies upon them. I can see them as warriors, these are not men on Nalewki Street in Warsaw.65

And again, in Warsaw, a day or two before his departure to Wilno, at the beginning of Sukkoth, the Feast of Tabernacles, he suddenly realized that the historical, geographical or generational gap between ancient nomadic traditions and modern urban alienation is erased by the sudden outburst of festive energy on Jewish streets:

The Feast of Tabernacles is right around the corner. Planks are already carried to the courtyard of Jewish streets, ordinary boxboards, raw, to be hammered and trimmed into shape. A door is inserted; the roof is covered with verdure. Hut by hut grows in the courtyards. Every family has a table and benches, they push them inside. In many courtyards, they shunt wire from the electric system, over to the roof of the tabernacle, to light the interior. ...A strange feast for this nation. Do they realized what they're preparing here? These are remnants of a nature festival. What a drab memory for a nation of peddlers and thinkers. No soil, no country, no state. No sowing, no harvest, no nature. ...Their metaphysics is that of active people whose active energy has been blocked and who have therefore turned inward. They are: Arabs. Supranational religions have derived from them, but they themselves have remained the Jewish people and their religion has remained their religion. ...They are now going to celebrate a feast of nature in the dark courtyards of the metropolis, next to garbage cans, on roof-high balconies. It looks like a gesture of the indestructible masses: despite everything!66

Alfred Döblin disembarks in Wilno from his overnight train journey from Warsaw in the middle of the Feast of Tabernacles. He expects to find a provincial, smaller and perhaps more intimate version of the metropolitan Jewish festive spectacle which joyfully disarrays the rather oppressive and uneventful everyday life. In contrast to Warsaw, where he had many appointments and meetings, the writer wants to explore the city without any specific duties or responsibilities. He also wants to forget the intriguingly glitzy and cacophonous yet annoyingly familiar bourgeois trappings of the metropolitan life of Warsaw: expensive restaurants, fashionable jazz clubs, dance halls with maddening tango tunes, casinos, cafés, theatres, opera, concerts, museums, movie theatres, trams, cars, endless commercial signs, rows of shops, propaganda posters, electric lights, etc. He knows that Wilno is a small town and he is ready to explore it thoroughly, by foot and alone.

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65 Ibid., 69.
66 Ibid., 70-71.
Döblin arrives in this northernmost city of Poland when the Lithuanian weather usually makes a drastic turn from a balmy and crispy autumn to a stormy, soggy and extremely chilly beginning of winter. He is lucky -- the weather conditions are perfect: light frost but no rain or wind.

As soon as Döblin leaves the arrival hall of Wilno train station, he steps out of the picture of modern war with its ruinous landscape and threatening movement of troops onto the magic ground of the theatrical and operatic local (‘Sarmatian’?) religiosity. Wilno, in contrast to Warsaw, engulfs the traveller not with modern signs of urban chaos but with the unexpected sounds and unpredictable sites of its meandering Baroque spatiality:

In the frosty morning, I stroll along an avenue. It is flanked by low houses, most of them old and wretched. Then, from the left, a street runs into an avenue, a rather narrow street without a real sidewalk. I keep looking about for the main thoroughfare, I assume there has to be one. Then the arch of a tall, sizable gateway looms over the street; I hear singing, I pass, seeking through the old structure. A crowd of people is lying on the right: peasants, townsfolk, male and women, on the ground, kneeling, bowing their heads all the way down. But these are not singers, the singing comes from somewhere else, from above. And when I turn around, I see a chapel up on the arch. And, open to the street, an altar stands there, with many burning candles and a tangle of things that I cannot distinguish. The people coming up the street are holding their hats or caps. I too doffed my hat under the archway. A miracle-working effigy of God’s mother is up there. The Madonna looks lively. She appears over a tremendous half-moon, which resembles the huge curling horn of an animal. She is visible from the chest up. Her sacerdotal clothes are richly ornamental. Her crowned head leans to the right. Her two hands lie crossed on her chest. Her narrow throat emerges from splendid and very colourful garments and cloaks. Then comes a high narrow face, her eyes are open only a crack, her lips are shut. Sharp golden rays surround her entire head. She prays, or is entranced, or listens, mild and melancholy, or is absorbed in her sorrow, trying to transcend it: I cannot pinpoint her expression. The image looks suggestive, touched. The seekers here tend to fuse their pain with that of the celestial being and to withdraw more calmly. It is a great achievement of art that it can make such an image and that a painted image can serve as an example.67

Döblin’s first impression of Wilno -- truly, his humbling entrance into the city -- is marked by his unintentional stumbling into the famous Ostra Brama Gate with its sanctified image of the Mother of God. More than anything else, the icon of the Ostra Brama Madonna embodies the divisive nature of the city’s geopolitical, national and religious landscape. The ‘national’ genesis of the image, which since the seventeenth century has adorned one of the city gates, is unclear. The Greek and Russian Orthodox

67 Ibid., 84-85.
churches claim it to be of Byzantine or Muscovite origin; the Catholics trace it to early renaissance Italian or local Lithuanian origins. Yet despite this disagreement, it has been traditionally respected and fought for by most Christian religions (except, Protestants, of course) of the region. For centuries, the lavishly adorned icon with its symbolic gestures indicating the Sarmatian supremacy of Christianity over Islam was worshipped as the patroness of Wilno and Lithuania, but in 1927, the Mother of God of Ostra Brama was ceremoniously crowned as the celestial Queen of Poland. Thereafter it protected the nationally divided Catholic communities in all regional countries: Lithuania, Poland and Byelorussia.68

Döblin was probably unaware of the contested nature of the image, but he was certainly enthralled by the unexpected, almost mirage-like appearance of this Lithuanian 'Mona Lisa'. His surprising encounter with the Ostra Brama Gate was a consequence of Wilno's 'anti-modern' spatiality. As Monty, Döblin's visiting predecessor pointed out, since there is no straightforward access between the train station and the centre of the city, the traveller is always forced to wonder through the twisting maze of Wilno streets. Döblin could have easily come to the old town through some other gateway; in which case, he would have probably seen the city through a completely different frame.

Nonetheless, his timely encounter with local Catholic piety could be seen as a predicament of biographical spiritual transformation. In 1941, in his Hollywood (Los Angeles) exile, long after his journey to Poland, Döblin and his family converted to Catholicism. This was a break not only with his socialist and atheist history, but also with his Jewish past. His religious conversion in America was certainly not a forced act made under the threat of personal survival. It was a thoughtful and willing act and for the rest of his life Döblin never regretted his religious 'awakening.' The seeds of his rather dogmatic religiosity could be detected in his intense imaginary fusion of biblical motives and places with modern stories and spaces. His impression of Poland is full of such narrative twists, but in Poland he seemed to be equally drawn to both Christian and Judaic spiritualities. While it is possible to detect the symbols and images of his belated and obsessive Catholicism within his 'emotional' encounters with the Polish cityscapes, it is risky to read

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68 With an intense twenty-century emigration of local population to the Americas and Australia, the cult of the Ostra Brama Virgin was carried to numerous Polish and Lithuanian communities outside the region.
them as some kind of biographical omens of his future spiritual terrain. Still, in his personal investigation of the private roots of his religious transformation, Döblin cites his unintentional encounters as signs of divine grace:

There are two types of encounters one must be grateful for. One is the encounter with persons who fulfilled our wishes and answer our questions. The other is the encounter with those people, or books, or events or images, that create wishes in us and cause us to ask questions. Those are the encounters reminiscent of a spring shower in the desert that cause luxuriant greenery to flower from a ground that yesterday was hot, yellow sand, that had never given any suggestion of such plentiful, splendid growth.69

Döblin’s post-World War II religious writings are marked with mirror-like allusions to Baroque allegory. Some of them heavily relied on the dual allegory of exile-home that juxtaposes and at the same time connects the corporeal and eschatological landscapes of Christian imagery. In 1948, after his return to a ruined Europe, Döblin frames his personal life journey by the truths of the Gospel:

‘In the midst of life we are surrounded by death.’ That is true. But add to that a sentence from the Gospel according to John: ‘He came to his own home.’ It reads: ‘He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home and his own people received him not.’

When, at the beginning of my own journey of destiny, I attended a Christian service in France — as an outsider, then — I was surprised by its somber and sad nature. Christianity, after all, bears glad tidings. I saw that sadness was not really the message. Those who are believers, absentminded and playful as they are — like children, really — must be led to the true reality, to seriousness, to great and then greater things. Solemnity, respect, and humility are required. I was almost a cipher in the face of the inscrutable prime mover that led me out of my everyday existence in order to become one of God’s creatures, a child. In the face of our not very appropriate, not very innocent existence, we need a dose of sadness, of dejection and remorse, they need even to dominate. And when that best of all possible examples of true and pure existence, the Passion, occurred and we experienced how we received that original love, and when a terrible light illuminated our pitiful life — then basically there was room only for grievous, bitter, if not totally despairing solemnity.

But it remains true that this world is his home.

And if they did not recognize him then he recognized them and did not turn away, no matter how they treated him. Nor, so that there be no doubt about him, did he call for the appearance of some ‘Messiah’ under impossible conditions, even for the distant future. Original love needed no go-between. It came to his own home in its own way: unnoticed, simply.70

69 Döblin, Destiny’s Journey, 109.
70 Ibid., 322.
Figure 6.3: *Ostra Brama Gate* by M. Dobuzhinski, c. 1910. Source: Aleksandras Kubilas, *Sanctuaries of Vilnius in old Postcards* (Vilnius: Lithuanian Association of Collectors), 87.
It would be too elemental and deductive to map out Döblin’s Catholic spiritual landscape through his encounter with Wilno. But as Georg Forster’s enlightened revolutionarism was agonisingly challenged by the irrational and threatening Sarmatian mishmash of Wilna, Alfred Döblin’s hyper-religiosity was provoked by the impenetrable modernity of the Baroque Wilno. After his incidental spiritual shock of the Ostra Brama encounter, Döblin becomes immediately stunned by the completely unexpected scenery of ordinary modern life. The confusing sight and sound of the Ostra Brama induces a pleasure of nomadic discovery, the puzzling appearance of the adjacent street provokes a disturbing sense of personal dislocation:

The street is named Ostra-brama. It lies almost mute, the worshipers barely emitting a sound. At the corner, men are burying drainpipes in the ground. I amble up the street with its small houses, woefully paved. It is ten A.M. But the shops are still closed. A few are open. And then I look at the names on the signs and realize it is the Jewish stores that do not open. The Feast of Tabernacles is still in progress.

The street widens like a square. On the other side, an ancient stone box: it’s the old theater, with carriages in front. Upon passing a movie house, I notice that the posters come in two languages: there are Polish posters and Yiddish ones. The signs of many shops are likewise in the Hebrew alphabet, in Yiddish. I often encountered this in Warsaw, in the Nalewki district; but here, it’s spread throughout the city. There seems to be a very large or very courageous Jewish population here. Yet I don’t see any Jews, and that’s the second thing. Individual Jews must be standing around, even if it’s holiday. And now I notice that I do see them but don’t notice them. They stand next to me outside the movie house, walk about in white caps, young men and girls; older ones slowly cross the bumpy square, conversing in their language. No one wears a caftan! They all wear European clothes — and yet do not speak Polish. This is a different breed of Jews than in Warsaw.\(^1\)

The modern appearance of local Jews is contradicted by their clear linguistic distinction, which, in Döblin’s imagination of the Ostjudentum, becomes the source of his geographical bewilderment. In Wilno, the modernization of Jewish traditions did not insinuate a split between the insular world of communal life and the external universe of European affairs. The Jews of Vilne/Wilno are not an island, but a country whose boundaries are drawn not by geopolitical or military forces but by the linguistic and cultural perimeters of the Yiddish language, or Yiddishland.

Haim Sloves (1905-1988), a Yiddish writer and playwright of communist persuasion who was born in Poland but spent most of his life in France, describes Yiddishland as a country permanently marked by a geographical fluidity: “There is a land which figures on

\(^{71}\) Döblin, Journey to Poland, 86.
no map of the world, a strange, unknown land of almost unreal immensity, whose ever-changing frontiers traverse continents and oceans. It is the land of Yiddish. How many claim this language as their own, from New York to Moscow, from Buenos Aires to Warsaw, from Jerusalem to Paris, from Melbourne to Johannesburg? Millions."72 Yiddishland did not have a capital city, for it was simply “the land where Yiddish was spoken. Around the Yiddish language, there was Yiddiskeit, a pluralist cultural amalgam.”73 Yet if Yiddishland was too fluid, porous, heterogeneous and changeable to possess a centre, it nonetheless had a pivotal core around which its cultural and political strength could be organized. Before WWII, Vilne “was the heart of Yiddishland, perhaps even its spiritual capital, and claimed also to be the center of Litvakland, a local minority of the Ashkenazi Jews and a cultural concept which, to a greater or lesser extent included Litvak rationalism and the pureness of the language.”74 The religious embodiment of this rationalism was the Goan of Vilne and its epicentre was the courtyard of the Great Synagogue in the middle of the medieval-Baroque city; the contemporary incarnation of the Yiddish language tradition was the Yiddish Scientific Institute (YIVO) with its modern building outside the old town.

YIVO was initially founded in Berlin in 1924 as an academic centre that would collect and promote scholarship in Yiddish about Yiddish-speaking Jewry.75 In 1925, YIVO was moved closer to the core of Yiddishland, Vilne. The idea of this geographical move was to “break down the barriers between Jewish and general knowledge, bringing Jewish scholarship into a productive relationship with European culture.”76 According to one of the organizers of the move, the shift of YIVO from metropolitan and sophisticated Berlin to provincial and impoverished Vilne was meant to liberate Jewish knowledge and experience from the paternalistic supervision of the assimilated German Jews: “The scholarly work in Yiddish is ...an emancipation from the ghetto circle of scholarly interests

73 Ibid.
74 Ibid., 16.
that the activists of “Wissenschaft des Judentums” cultivated as a special task for the Jewish collective. It obliterated the boundaries of “Jewish” and “general” knowledge, the conceit that “Jewish” knowledge is a special “national” thing that we must find within our own borders and “general” knowledge is a thing for individuals....”77 In short, the move of YIVO from the heart of European modernity to the centre of the Litvakland was meant to break the boundaries of Jewish knowledge without diminishing its core linguistic and cultural values. Accordingly, the presidential board of YIVO included an extremely diverse array of Jewish scholars, from Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud and German physicist Albert Einstein to Jewish-Russian historian Simon Dubnov and Yiddish linguist Max Weinrich.

Vilne was perhaps not the best site for YIVO, simply because the town was too small, isolated and economically poor; in addition, popular and institutionalized anti-Semitism, like everywhere in pre-war Poland, was endemic. Yet various Jewish observers “often viewed Vilna as the exemplar of an East European Jewish community, a locale where the rich traditions of the past could serve as the basis of an innovative new culture. As a speaker at the 1930 YIVO conference put it: ‘for us Vilna is not simply a city, it is an idea.’ ”78 In large, Vilne’s status as an ideal capital of Yiddishland was based on the city’s unsettled geopolitical and undetermined cultural location within the nation-state map of Europe. In this contested town and region of Lithuania, no single national, linguistic, religious or ideological force could reign supreme, and the Yiddish-speaking Jews could carve their own historical urban cartography that outlived most of the ruling regimes:

“Indeed, if Vilna had a specifically Jewish geography, it was largely created through the use of a distinct language. While the city officially changed from Vilna to Wilno to Vilnius, Jews called the city “Yerushalayim d’lite [the Jerusalem of Lithuania],” a name that never appeared on any official map. Moreover, Jewish residents employed their Yiddish vernacular to stake a claim to particular parts of the city, both formally and informally. Just as Jews had their own name for Vilna, certain parts of the city, particularly those in the Jewish quarter, had distinctive Yiddish appellations. Most buildings were organized around the courtyards [hoyfn] which were called after their owners; for example, the courtyard with an entrance at 7 Yidishe Street was known as Reb Shaul Shiske’s Hoyfn and 8 Yatkever Street as Urel-Feygl Hoyfn. Some streets also had their own names in Yiddish, such as St. Nicholas Street, known to Jewish residents as Gitkes-toybes zavulek [Gitke-Toybe’s Alley]. Since the designation of thoroughfares changed frequently as successive Russian, German, Lithuanian, and Polish regimes came to

77 Ibid.
power, Jewish street names were sometimes older and better known than their official counterparts.”

It is not clear how much Döblin knew about local Jewish toponymy, but he certainly enjoyed the spatial freedom he found within the cartographic ambiguity of Wilno. He liked the experience of the geographical collision of the centrifugal and centripetal historical forces; yet he quickly became disturbed by the philosophical and geopolitical implications of the toponymical instability of the city. The administrative changes to the map of Wilno were not a theatrical act of altering ideological decorations and national settings, but a brutal act of geographical violation. They not only mapped out the nation-state on urban space, but also displaced local history:

I have a map of Wilno from the Russian period and a more recent map. Nearly all the streets and squares have been renamed. In Warsaw, this renaming delighted me, elated me; strange: here, I don’t really care for it. It seems to have been inflicted upon the city from above. It did not issue from within, as in Warsaw. The main thoroughfare in the center used to be called Bolshaya, the one in the northwest Georgievsky Prospekt; now Bolshaya is called Wielka and Zamkowa, and Georgievsky Prospekt is renamed after Adam Mickiewicz. Then there is Slowacki Avenue, a Pilsudski, a Sigmund, a Kosciuszko Avenue. [...] Suppression makes you crooked and feeble. And Poland does not lie free like Russia, not vast like Russia; it is wedged in east and west, between north and south. This produces anything but simple people. A bridge: is that land or water? I feel distressed.

The Wilno territory is a burning issue. The Lithuanians claim Vilnius as their capital. The Poles have occupied it. The Polish-Lithuanian border is closed. A permanent state of war exists between the two young states.80

In mutating Wilno, the metaphor of the Sarmatian region as a bridge of Europe that historically connects east with west and ties north to south becomes a disorienting spatial marker, a dysfunctional and useless compass that only provokes a sense of anxiety. Here, in this remote city corner of the continent, in the city where the “streets are almost alleys, twisting, with small plain houses” and its provincial residents are clothed in “small-town, medium-town garb”, the travellers “standards are skewed.”81 Hence it is impossible, as Döblin discovered soon, to find an urban vector, or a “main thoroughfare” which could orient the historical and geographical direction of the place.

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79 Ibid., 67.
80 Döblin, Journey to Poland, 89-90.
81 Ibid., 86.
Dutifully, and possibly in the expectation of a better comprehension of the city, Döblin climbs up the steep Castle Hill from where, since the political establishment of Wilno, a commanding view of the region opens to every ruler, occupier and or eager tourist. Döblin knows or perhaps intuitively feels that the Castle Hill is the focal point of Lithuania, its historical and geographical heart. Yet, in contrast to most observers, he has no patience for the tranquil, distant beauty of Wilno's Baroque horizon and instead of the harmonious cityscape he maps out the architectural markers of chaotic local (Sarmatian) history. Furthermore, he reverses the usual gaze by looking at the hill rather than inspecting the city from the hill. Hence, he concentrates on the valley below the Castle Hill, the lowermost meeting point of east, west, north and south. Here, in the shadow of the hill, Döblin detects the origins of the city's or, perhaps, even Europe's tragic fate -- the unhappy and fruitless marriage between Athens (or Rome) and Jerusalem, the pagan and biblical versions of the universe:

But looming autumnally, in a blaze of yellow and brown foliage, the castle hill stands there, with the oldest of old Wilno. There once lived a Lithuanian grand prince, Gedymin, who built his castle up there. Down below, a fire burned in a pagan temple. The man whom the beautiful, delicate Jadwiga of Poland had to marry, the first Polish-Lithuanian Jagiello, became a Christian -- by contract, I believe -- and destroyed the temple. He replaced it with the Cathedral of St. Stanislaw, to wreak vengeance on Christianity. When a Christian sees this dreadful edifice, he reverts to paganism. Nothing comes of these shotgun marriages. The church looks like a Greek temple or a Polish municipal theatre. Vistula antiquity. The marriage was dissolved by death, Poland and Lithuania are asunder again, the cathedral could not be rescinded. Supposedly, St. Kazimierz has a silver coffin here, weighing two thousand five hundred pounds; eight silver statues of Polish kings stand here, but the perfumes of Araby...

Inescapably, in the Cathedral Square and the surrounding park, Döblin discovers the invisible sights and unheard sounds of more recent European frictions and imperial occupations: "The Russians took along their monument to their Pushkin from the part at the foot of the castle hill. They must have been after the metal. German headquarters were housed here after Rennenkampf's retreat; German music was played at the town park in the afternoon. Rows of benches are lined up as in a resort park." He seemed to hear something about Wilno of the Great War years, after all. Did he read and follow Paul Monty's Wanderstunden in Wilna or was it the geographical intuition of a frontline soldier?

82 Ibid., 94.
83 Ibid., 95.
Figure 6.4: Cathedral Square. A German postcard, c. 1917. Source: Aleksandras Kubilas, Sanctuaries of Vilnius in old Postcards (Vilnius: Lithuanian Association of Collectors), 60.
The narrative boundary between local historical knowledge and European geographical intuition is completely erased once Döblin gets down from the observational point of the Castle Hill and comes across the former Russian governor’s palace. Here, at the administrative junction of Lithuania’s modern history, the accidental tourist transforms himself into a knowledgeable tour guide and while the narrator turns into a liberator, the bourgeois German stranger becomes a naturalized native. Through this spontaneous but nonetheless incredible change of roles, Döblin manages to ‘domesticate’ the place. No longer does this old town feel alien to him, for he finally uncovers its spatial mysteries. Wilno has to be experienced as a nomadic place, a mutable site that only surrenders to ‘experienced’ drifters, people who survive the resettlement:

On the hill. Red brickwork; legend has it that a tunnel runs from here to Troki, the neighboring village. Red barracks below, yellow bushes down the slope, the shiny black surface of the river: the Wilja. Masses of small red-roofed houses down below, a rolling of wagons, a hammering. Behind me, to the side, stand — oddly enough — three adjacent tall white crosses: Poles, I hear, who were killed by General Muraviev in 1863. During the occupation, the Poles, forgetting nothing, already got to work putting up these crosses. A cannon: the Russians used to fire it at twelve noon as a midday signal. So many old customs: doctoral graduation in the church, the blowing of trumpets, the shooting of cannon. Clocks have been circulating recently, but how slow do such things come to the notice of the authorities. I delight for a long time in the shiny water of Wilja; behind it, the wreath of forests.

After looking down at what is known as Castle Square, with a small old church next to it, and the castle itself, I am down below again, unable to make up my mind about entering. After all, it’s only for the old breed of tourists, and I belong to the new breed. My companion would love to see it; he’s from Wilno; so I’ve decided to show him the castle.

‘The Russian governor-general lived there?’
‘Yes’
‘I knew it; it was obvious. Later on, the Germans turned it into either an officer’s mess or an army hospital — the general command was over there, wasn’t it?’
‘A hospital’
‘The marble plaque with the gold inscriptions says that Napoleon stayed here during his retreat from Russia. He had to leave town in disguise during the night of November 24, 1812.’

A gypsy woman passes the entrance, she’s holding a child by the hand. The gypsies have a camp outside the town; lots of them coming from Russia. My companion says they’re fleeing the Bolsheviks.

‘They’re not fleeing the Bolsheviks, my son. When poor people come to power, they strike only at the rich. The gypsies always flee, or rather, do not flee, they wander.’

I impress the word ‘wander’ on my companion. Then we enter the courtyard of the castle. It almost one p.m. We can walk undisturbed. Napoleon has fled, the Russians have left, the Germans are gone. Now we are here. My companion and I ponder whether we should hoist a flag, issue a proclamation in Polish and
Yiddish, explaining that we have come as friends and that the inhabitants should assist us and our troops in every way. But he first wants to ask the caretaker, and I have no objection. The caretaker noticed us, and he was so startled that he instantly took off for lunch. My companion catches up with him. They speak — what do they speak? Russian. They admire Napoleon and speak Russian or Polish. I do not admire him and I speak French. When I address the porter in French, he replies that he doesn’t know Yiddish. Crestfallen, I wander along, climb stairs. ...But I do not regret coming here; this is an unusual castle. Muraviev has to be here; I smell his presence, you can smell him here. The caretaker answers calmly: First of all, he doesn’t know Yiddish; secondly, Muraviev is not here. What I smell is the sewage system, which isn’t here. He says it hasn’t been here since Napoleon’s time, and ever since, it’s been making itself felt with an intensifying smell. This condition is preserved, for this is a castle, a historic sight and smell. I am relieved, the dreadful Muraviev is not here. The caretaker shows me a real vestige of the Russians: a winding staircase to which several stairways lead. The secret stairways that the great tyrant used for his emergency escape. \[84\]

Once Döblin unlocks the secrets of Wilno and chases away the ghosts of the past, he quickly becomes accustomed to the city, and despite the descending winter cold, he enthusiastically proceeds with his plan of resettlement:

I find German Avenue, the Jewish street. Here, I understand the language. Store by store, countless people. Jews, hauling, lugging, standing in groups. A rare caftan, usually European provincial garb. Very narrow lanes, street peddlers all the way to the courtyards. The shops are open, often windowless, rows of meat and poultry stores cheek by jowl. Arches span a few streets. They mark the boundaries of the old ghetto. This is energetic life, here and at the castle hill, on the water, where soldiers exercise. \[85\]

Now, Döblin is enthralled not so much by the Jewish traditionalism and the survival of biblical spirituality and practices, but by the modern outlook of the emerging Jewish nation. He sees that in Wilno the Jews, as much as the Poles, Lithuanians and other European peoples, are becoming a nation; that is, they are involved in the conscious building of a homeland based on the principles of national sovereignty. He loses his interest in the numerous architectural landmarks of Wilno: “I am taken to a number of churches; I follow obediently, but cautiously shut my eyes and ears inside. At one church, I see a chubby Polish peasant face hewn in a stone pillar. At another church, I am told, Napoleon stood in front of it and said he’d like to take this church to Paris. I can’t stand these goddamned old artworks.” \[86\] Instead he wants to explore the future: “I get to see the

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\[84\] Ibid., 95-96.
\[85\] Ibid., 98.
\[86\] Ibid., 97.
changing, loosening forces. In Eastern Europe, the emancipation of the masses is taking place within a national framework -- indeed, the strongest accent is on nationalism.\textsuperscript{87}

Armed with such curiosity, Döblin dives into modern Jewish Vilne. He visits the confronting Zionist and Yiddishist organisations and newspapers, and he goes to see Hebrew and Yiddish schools and teachers’ colleges. He immediately discovers the national fissures: “not just the Baal-Shem vs. the state, but also Orient vs. Occident. The first rift in the Jewish nation: Gaon, Baal-Shem vs. secular politics. The second rift among the emancipated Jews: supporters of the bourgeois state vs. Socialists. The Socialists -- universal, humanistic, international -- are better at holding the old Gaon line, the great supranational idea.”\textsuperscript{88} But the greatest rift is of course between the promoters of Yiddish and the advocates of Hebrew. “Both are modern, national, Western.”\textsuperscript{89} Both see themselves as “civilizers” and demand the right of national self-determination: “the Jewish millions are developing a new sense of a free European nation, throwing off the weight of the old bondage and contempt. They want to be national minorities or else have the old Asiatic homeland borrowed from their religion.”\textsuperscript{90}

The travelling writer is overwhelmed with the religious weight and future possibilities of modern restoration of the Jewish homeland. However, the prospective end of the geographical Jewish ‘wanderings’, in Döblin’s opinion, has its spiritual consequences. The fusion of the political state and ethno-linguistic nation requires sacrifices -- the abandonment of the destroyed Temple, the rejection of the eschatological home that has become the driving force of Jewish spirituality. In short, modern communal desire for a political homeland is an act of a personal betrayal, the rejection of the Messiah:

I can’t help thinking as I go out: What an impressive nation Jews are. I didn’t know this nation: I believed what I saw in Germany, I believed that the Jews are industrious people, the shopkeepers, who stew in their sense of family and slowly get to fat, the agile intellectuals, the countless insecure unhappy refined people. Now I see that those are isolated examples, degenerating, remote from the core of the nation that lives here and maintains itself. And what an extraordinary core is this, producing such people as the rich, inundating Bal-Shem, the dark flame of the Gaon of Wilno. What events occurred in these seemingly uncultured Eastern areas. How everything flows around the spiritual! What tremendous importance is placed on spirituality, on religion! Not a minor stratum, an entire mass of people -- spiritually united. Few other nations are as

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 109.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
centered in religion and spirituality as this one. Jews had an easier time of this than others, they didn’t have to tussle with polities, revolutions, wars, border improvements, kings, parliaments. They were relieved of such concerns two thousand years ago, by the Romans. And the Jews didn’t complain. It didn’t make them sit by the waters of Babylon and weep. Their focus was always on the temple. They needed the state only for the temple. The proper temple stands only on Zion. When the state didn’t emerge, the idea gradually transformed the entire nation. The Jews were soundlessly imbued with the renunciation of land and state. And they made themselves into the nation of the temple. The nation that carries the temple within itself. An unparalleled process. It was only possible under such prolonged, artificial conditions.

What if history were turned backwards and the Jews were really given Zion? And this is becoming an urgent issue. The old artificial conditions can no longer be maintained, their rigor is slackening. The modern age, economic necessities, are driving the Jews out of their seclusion. The backward movement is rolling. The tragedy of fulfilment is rolling. The temple that they will find if they seek it will not be the Temple. The religious ones, the spiritual ones know it. They say: Only the Messiah can give us the Temple. The most genuine Jews stopped waiting for the ‘state’ long ago. One can preserve oneself only in the spiritual; that’s why one must remain in the spiritual. Politics cannot bring about heaven, politics produces nothing but politics. The ‘modern’ era presents no problems for those Jews.

However, today’s external circumstances, political, economic, and the plight of the masses are facts. The old organism will put up a strong resistance to all change. ‘State,’ and ‘Parliament’ loom on the horizon – against the Gaon and the Baal-Shem.91

Even before his journey to Poland, Döblin was very cynical about Zionist ideologies and national policies. He was not an anarchist, but he did not trust the state, especially a bourgeois state. Nor was he against the concept of national self-determination, yet he understood that no nation can exist in a spatial vacuum and the rights of one nation will always lead to the creation of national minorities. He simply did not subscribe to the liberal-democratic concept of dividing peoples, social classes, nations and states into majority and minority groupings. He was also sceptical of the dictatorial and socially hierarchical Bolshevik tactics. In this sense, he was ‘classical’ socialist who believed in universal rights, but, in the early part of the 1920s, his political position had been quickly outmoded by more aggressive nationalist and ideological forces.

Since Döblin did not trust Zionist ideology and its advocacy of the Hebrew language, it was natural that in Wilno he felt much more at ease with the socialist proponents of the Yiddish language. Wilno was the cornerstone of both linguistic socio-political ideologies -- the Zionist parties and the Bund, the socialist Yiddishist -- so it is not

91 Ibid., 102-103.
surprising that he could easily compare the social, political and educational achievements of both modern factions. 92 He clearly preferred the Bund and he even cautiously admired the spectacular ‘modernization’ of Yiddish through extensive pedagogical and publishing work. Yet he could not easily dismiss the parallel successes of the pro-Zionist organizations and institutions of Wilno. Moreover, a substantial number of Wilno’s Zionists were also socialists, members of the Po’ale Zion (Workers of Zion), Zionist Socialist and other smaller groupings. There were also the ‘traditional’ bourgeois General Zionist party and the ultra-conservative Mizrahi. In other words, the Zionist movement of Wilno was perhaps even more socially and ideologically divided than other nationalist movements, and Döblin could not articulate his mistrust of the Zionist vision through his usual scepticism of marginalized socialists.

Faced with such complex modern socio-ideological linguistic realities of the local Jewish world, it is surprising but not incomprehensible that Döblin magnified the erroneousness of the Zionist movements through the religious lens of the Lithuanian Orthodox Jews. Wilno, since the time of Gaon, has been the epicentre of the Jewish Orthodoxy that strived to uphold the Talmudic doctrines against their more recent Hasidic or Haskala interpretations. “The Gaon,” declared Döblin, “was not defeated. His city, Wilno, the Jerusalem of Lithuania, remained the center of the rationalism.” 93 The Orthodox rationalism was not necessarily an explicitly anti-modern tradition, for it recognized the changing scientific, technological, cultural and political realities of contemporary Europe. It also did not seek to fully isolate or separate the Jewish world from the increasingly secularized goyim surrounding. The traditionalists, however, could not accept the modern concept of national self-determination without any divine intervention. Only the Messiah could bring Jews home.94

93 Döblin, Journey to Poland, 101.
Figure 6.5. *Wilno Synagogue*, photograph by Jan Bulhak, c. 1929. Source: Gerard Silvain and Henri Minczeles, *Yiddishland* (Corte Madre: Gingko Press, 1999), 66.
Figure 6.6: Wilno: ulica Jatkowa (Jatkowa Street) in the middle of the Jewish quarter, c. 1925. Source: Aleksandras Kubilas, Sanctuaries of Vilnius in old Postcards (Vilnius: Lithuanian Association of Collectors), 206.
Figure 6.7: The old synagogue: a photomontage by M. Vorobeichic, 1931. Source: M. Vorobeichic, Ein Ghetto im Osten (Basel: Orel Füssli Verlag, 1931), 1.
Although the religious practices of rationalist Orthodoxy required a communal involvement, there was a strong tradition among the religious Litvak Jews of the search for a personal relationship with God. This personalized religious outlook became embodied in Musar movement, formulated by the nineteenth century Lithuanian rabbi, Israel Salanter. The Musar movement was a little-known phenomenon outside its original Lithuanian ‘homeland’, but it certainly greatly influenced the socio-religious outlook of Vilne Jews. Lucy Dawidowicz, who in 1938 came to Vilne from New York to study at YIVO, had never heard of the Musar movement before she met one of its most ardent local proponents, a Yiddish writer, Chaim Grade. She described Musar as a personalized spiritual struggle with the Manichean duality of the world:

Musar in Hebrew means both edification and chastisement. As a movement, musar originated in Vilna in the mid-nineteenth century and then spread throughout the Lithuanian area of Russian Poland, but it never made headway anywhere else in Eastern Europe. It must have appealed to the litvak mentality and became the litvak’s alternative to Hasidism. Musar aimed to restore ethical integrity in daily life and to reinvigorate the observance of Judaism through moral reflection and self-improvement. Students in the musar-yeshiva devoted as much time to the study of ethical literature as to the study of Talmud. Spiritual wrestling was the core of the curriculum. The students had to practice a regimen of spiritual exercise whose purpose was to inoculate them against sin and secularism. They would deliberately behave eccentrically so as to humble and humiliate themselves, for instance, wear a coat inside out or go without shoes. They would do so in their own yeshiva circle, and also in public, so that the townspeople could mock and despise them.

Self-mortification, the musarmites believed, could bring about a state of moral restoration. Man’s evil urge had to be repressed. The id and the ego, lust and vanity, man’s instinctual passions, had to be totally extirpated.95

Döblin never mentions the Musar movement or its adherents in his account of Wilno, but his extremely spiritualized and mortified formulation of the Jewish religion definitely has a Musar-like outlook. His criticism of the Zionist or for that matter, any secularized Jewish ideology also embodied some of the elements of Musar religious piety and ethical conduct. In addition, Döblin’s relationship with Wilno or any other city exhibited modes of eccentric inwardness. No place in the writer’s mind exists outside personal consciousness; at the same time, no human life could be experienced without the unconscious absorption of geographical differences.

The Musarnikes, "anticipating Freud, to some extent ... believed that the subconscious mind has to be moved by severe introspection, as a result of which ethical and religious conduct becomes second nature." In 1948, upon his return to post-war Germany, Döblin echoes this introspective self-analysis as the most challenging act that, just like life and death, is the most fundamental and natural human performance:

"My body -- I have known this for some time -- has many layers. It is constructed of a number of elements that are scattered about in the world, they are gathered from all over the world, and are innocuously called 'chemical elements.' But they are not simple structures, they are complicated ones. However, I do not know what they are nor how they contribute to this concert called "I."

They say that cells are the body's most elementary basic form, they combine, die, are very diverse, make up flora and fauna.

And when I feel, wish, perceive, desire -- from which layer do these things come? What is dominant? What is representative? I say that I "perceive." But what does all that entail, how many worlds is my I made up of? Am I a unity?

If I now am beginning to lose my body, if the structure is beginning to decay, I know only that there is something here whose role is finished, but it seems to me that it was never something with which I truly identified myself.

I have certainly not stormed through life: "Great and mighty at first, now wise and prudent."

I passed most of my existence like any other citizen, in the same country I left sixteen years ago. I did what I had to do, spend time observing nature and other things, did all kinds of thinking and fantasizing, some of which I wrote about. In the end -- oh, what a divided, chaotic time, what a divided, chaotic country I live in now."97

Predictably, Döblin is taken to the old Jewish cemetery of Wilno located directly across the river from the Castle Hill. "A Jewish cemetery," writes Israel Cohen in his 1943 history of Vilne, "in the traditional parlance of orthodox Jewry, is Bet 'Olam, a 'House of Eternity,' a term that may be said to combine a love for euphemisms with a belief in immortality. Vilna has two such 'houses,' situated at a considerable distance from one another. The old cemetery, which lies beyond the River Vilia ... stretches over a very large area, looking for most part like a deserted field, with grass growing wild; for the number of gravestones is comparatively small."98

The cemeteries nonetheless had an important function; they chronicled and encircled the local Jewish past. "Most Vilna Jews," remembers Dawidowicz, "knew their

97 Döblin, *Destiny's Journey*, 316.
history not so much from reading books as from visiting the two Jewish cemeteries, where their history was literally entombed. ... Tradition has it that Jews used [the old cemetery] as a burial ground as far as back as 1487, but the first historical records begin in 1592. The Russian authorities closed that cemetery in 1830 for lack of space.”

This cemetery was the oldest in the city and the biographical dates of on its tombstones roughly summarized the centuries of the Sarmatian legend. The Jews of course were never seen as Sarmatians, but their ‘Oriental’ presence in Lithuania certainly contributed to the evolution of the western European myth of the Sarmatian mishmash. Within its shifting and movable boundaries, Yiddishland also included Sarmatia, the old territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Döblin was curious about cemeteries; he went to the Jewish one in Warsaw on the Day of Atonement. The cemetery was packed with a restless mass of lamenting women and praying men. Döblin was aghast: “Cold shivers run up and down my spine when I see and hear these things. ...It is something primordial, atavistic. Does it have anything to do with Judaism? ...It is the remnant of a different religion, animism, a cult of the dead.”

In Wilno, he agrees to go to the cemetery only because he is intrigued by his two young guides who were probably activists in the Yiddishist movement. The cemetery is closed and, like three mischievous teenagers, they have to break in. Döblin is amused by this mildly subversive feature of the otherwise boring tourist adventure: “it’s a terrible thing to say -- we laugh, laugh as we step into the cemetery, bolt the gate behind us.”

The deserted cemetery mesmerizes the writer, not so much by its aesthetic or historical value, but by its commonplace piety, its ordinary closeness to God and its melancholic loneliness that encompasses both human insignificance and energy. For the first time, in fact, the only time, during his impressionistic account of Poland, Döblin leaves his thoughts unfinished. He abandons his narrative in front of the tomb of the Goan as if he wanted to leave the gate of this house of eternity open, as if he hoped for a return, a future gathering point -- a stone tablet? -- after the decades-long cycle of endless resettlements and chaotic exiles:

99 Dawidowicz, From That Place and Time, 48-49.
100 Döblin, Journey to Poland, 66.
101 Ibid., 111.
Here, we find a vast lawn with several trees and, irregularly, here and there, alone and in clusters, low stone slabs. Withered leaves lie everywhere, even piled up in a few hollows. A fine drizzle is coming down. The stone tablets bear long inscriptions, red and yellow square Hebrew scripts. Lions often depicted on the slabs. Shards, stone fragments lie about. Terrible the neglect of the cemetery. Bits of bricks, small stones on many headstones. Straw under the small stones, also slips of paper with Hebrew writing. These are memorial tokens of pious Jews who have prayed here. For they travel from far away to pray at the graves of famous men, holy men. That deep and dark feeling drives them to come here. Somehow — they think, they feel — the holy man is still by his grave, by his body, and they can approach him as their forebears did during his lifetime. The dead man is tied to his grave, his vanished soul to the corpse, and his soul can be evoked by prayer. And the pious man, the rebbe, the saints stand closer to God and can obtain more than normal man from God, perhaps by way of God. How dilapidated everything is here. I hear shouts, orders, soldiers singing, and at once, a mooing. I climb over a small rise on which shattered stone plaques are strewn. When I stand on top, I see a cow grazing below. Pasturing on the graves. Its pats lie around.

...The Jews of Wilno, I find, are proud, but only partially and in a very Eastern manner. The grass runs wild and high. On the mounds, you keep stepping on shattered headstones. They often bear the beautiful, tail-lashing lions, the ancient symbols of strength. The tomb of the Gaon of Wilno. A low stone house with fences of irons bars, it’s locked. It contains his grave and the grave of his kith and kin. He lies here together with these people, who he didn’t know so well during his lifetime. When his wife died, he said “I had to go hungry very often, but I did it for the sake of Torah and God. But you went hungry because of me, a human being.” Whole piles of small written notes lie on his stone plaque and on the adjacent ground. They even hang outside, on the iron fence, tied to the bars with straw and tussocks...

After his conversion to Catholicism, Alfred Döblin returned from his wartime American exile to bombed Germany in October of 1945. He dreaded and avoided Berlin, his home city where had lived from 1888 until 1933 when he was forced to leave the capital of Germany for Paris. Instead, he settled in “the golden city of Mainz,” where a century and half earlier, Georg Forster returned to European ‘civilization’ after his ‘Sarmatian exile.’ After the war, Mainz, like many towns of Germany “was merely rubble as far as the eye could see, faceless masses of it, foundations, iron, girders, facades.” Two years later, Döblin finally went to Berlin. The area around Alexanderplatz, the writer’s narrative home terrain, greeted him with the tranquility of a necropolis:

102 Ibid., 113.
103 Döblin, Destiny’s Journey, 294.
Everything is still familiar, everything has been reduced to silence.... Here and there a surviving façade signified where a house once stood. It served as a reminder, but then it didn’t, as well. It was far from what it had once been. It is no longer what I knew, or where I lived. But it was engaging in a new way. It has been struck and marked by a divine light. You had to sit here in the ruins and let them affect you, as I repeatedly said and felt. ...And once again I see that it is easier for a human being to change than for a city. A human being can transform himself. A city falls apart.\textsuperscript{104}

Figure 6.8: \textit{Jewish cemetery in Vilne,} c. 1916. \textbf{Source:} Gerard Silvain and Henri Minczeles, \textit{Yiddishland} (Corte Madre: Gingko Press, 1999), 70.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 306-310.
CONCLUSION POSTSCRIPT VILNIUS

As I finish writing my thesis, the ‘exact’ location of the geographical centre of Europe has been moved again. According to a new scientific conclusion reached (again) by the French National Geographical Society, the continental centre is located at 54 degrees and 50 minutes latitude, and 25 degrees and 18 minutes longitude. The new calculation is based on the exclusion of various political protrusions of Europe, such as the islands of the Azores, the Canary Islands and Madeira which geographically speaking belong to Africa and some of the Greek islands that are on the Asian side of the Aegean Sea. These minor cartographic adjustments tightened up the elastic and ill-defined boundaries of Europe and also shifted the epicentre of Europe a bit closer to Vilnius. The newly determined centre of Europe is situated just six kilometers north of the Lithuanian capital.

While the Lithuanian politicians, geographers and local tourism advocates were relieved that the centre of Europe remained in the country -- it could have easily slipped away into the territory of neighbouring Belarus -- this cartographic move caused a slight local topographical and aesthetic embarrassment. The ‘old’ centre had been already adorned with a monument commemorating the ‘political unity’ of Europe, erected to celebrate Lithuania’s entry into the European Union. In contrast, the new geographical centre of Europe falls onto an unimpressive site of monotonous, privately owned agricultural fields with no visible topographical or architectural hallmarks, except for a small homestead that had been converted into a workshop producing gravestones for the seemingly ever-growing market of Vilnius’s cemeteries. In other words, on the ground, the ‘new’ centre of Europe is a funereal site that in the eyes of most local promoters of Vilnius’s continental centrality should have stayed at the inconspicuous fringes of a modern European capital. Hence, the move of the centre of Europe closer to Vilnius has been a mixed cartographical blessing: it verified and even strengthened the city’s claim to a European geographical significance, but it also highlighted its commonplace relationship to death.

Of course I am tempted to see in this ironical local twist of modern scientific geographical manipulations a ‘topographical echo’ of Vilnius’s Baroque spatiality -- where monumental pomp served as both an architectural camouflage and representational
reminder of death. It seems that death in Vilnius, as in most Baroque visualizations of the world, always manages to insert itself into the living realm. Yet I also see this accidental correlation of the European cartographical findings with Vilnius's mortuary-related industry as a narrative chance to close my journey with an entry into the 'subterranean' geography of the city. My work is primarily about the representational (visible and exposed) location of Vilnius within the mutating historical idea and political cartography of Europe. However, underneath this biographically framed narrative terrain, there is a 'genealogical' layer of the city's changing relationships to Europe. This topographical stratum is dominated not by personalized images, texts and memories of the place, but by thousands of marked and unmarked graves which constantly reiterate Vilnius's story as a frontier location where biographical facts (for instance, dates and locations of birth and death) and/or anthropological data ('ethnic' identity of local relics and the causes of death) could be read as geopolitical and ideological markers of Europe. Döblin ends his narrative of his visit to Wilno in the old Jewish cemetery -- I want to close the circle of my narrative passages through the city with a short detour into the contemporary European geography of Vilnius's dead.

In general, the narrative connection between the dead and living can be seen as a cryptogram codifying the most fundamental values and belief systems of a given society. The eschatological map of the other world in a way is a reflection of a desirable yet unattainable geography of the place. The real and/or imagined space through which the dead and living interact functions as a passageway connecting the corporeal world with its ideal counterpart. In this context, corpses and their resting sites -- the relics of the corporeal -- are often turned into flexible symbols of metaphysical currency; they become markers of the 'perfect' ideological and geopolitical order of the place.

In her study of the post-socialist 'political lives' of the dead, anthropologist Katherine Verdery points to the representational elasticity and social profundity of relics. The presence, or for that matter, the absence of dead bodies is an essential part of a communal narrative of place:

A body's symbolic effectiveness does not depend on its standing for one particular thing, however, for among the most important properties of bodies, especially dead ones, is their ambiguity, multivocality and polysemy. Remains are concrete, yet protean; they do not have a single meaning but are open to many different readings. ...Dead people come with a curriculum vitae or résumé - - several possible résumés, depending on which aspect of their life is being
considered. They lend themselves to analogy with other people's résumés. That is, they encourage identification with their life story, from several possible vantage points. Their complexity makes it fairly easy to discern different sets of emphasis, extract different stories, and thus rewrite history. Dead bodies have another great advantage as symbols: they don't talk much on their own (though they did once.) Words can be put into their mouths - often ambiguous words - or their own actual words can be ambiguaged by quoting them out of context. It is thus easier to rewrite history with dead people than with other kinds of symbols that are speechless.

Yet because they have a single name and a single body, they present the illusion of having only one significance. Fortifying that illusion is their materiality, which implies their having a single meaning that is solidly "grounded," even though in fact they have no such single meaning. Different people can invoke corpses as symbols, thinking those corpses mean the same thing to all present, whereas in fact they may mean different things to each. All that is shared is everyone's recognition of this dead person as somehow important.  

In short, within an extensive geo-narrative structure and plot line of a specific locale, dead bodies and their commemorative relics often function as chronotopic figures that connect and fuse temporal (historical) chronology of the place with its spatial multiplicity. As recognizable corporeal currencies of a symbolic capital, dead bodies can be accumulated and circulated according to specific ideological, geopolitical an/or representational needs. Thus, the most 'valuable' narrative asset of dead bodies is their transitory and transitive nature: they come from the past but 'speak' to the future. As such, relics differ from other symbolic elements in their embodiment of temporal corporeality and spatial circularity; so 'unlike notions such 'patriotism' or 'civil society,' for instance, a corpse can be moved around, displayed, and strategically located in a specific location. Bodies have the advantage of concreteness that nonetheless transcends time, making past immediately present. ...That is their corporeality makes them important means of localizing a claim."  

This rewriting of history often involves a spatial rearrangement of the dead and/or their commemorative relics. Hence, the localization of a specific geopolitical claim is much easier to legitimize by a highlighted visibility of the dead. Correspondingly, the fastest way to eradicate the past and thus to alter the future ideological and narrative possibilities of a specific locale is through the elimination of the dead from the visible topography of the place.


2 Ibid., 27-28.
Traditionally, Vilnius's dead have always been essential participants in the geopolitical and ideological reframing of the city's location within Europe. The turbulent and contested regional history has supplied a constant flow of multivocal dead with contrasting résumés and antagonistic post-mortal loyalties. The dead of Vilnius -- as much their living counterparts -- communicate in different languages and articulate diverse views on Europe. Hence, as I see it, Vilnius's cemeteries and memorial spaces are threshold sites where, in the Bakhtinian sense of the word, various narrative knots of Europe are simultaneously tied and untied. To enter these both physically and allegorically metamorphosing spaces of Vilnius is to witness the changing (local) representational possibilities of Europe. In other words, the post-mortem cartography of Vilnius is a fused topographical imprint of the city's changing corporeal and imaginary location within Europe.

In the summer of 1940, seventeen years after Döblin's tour of Wilno, Ann Louise Strong, a young British labour union activist, made a stopover in Vilnius on her journey to Moscow. The raging European war had again altered the geo-ideological location of the city: in that summer Vilnius became the capital city of Soviet Lithuania. During her visit to Vilnius, Strong summarized a peculiarly framed European condition of the city: “Whoever solves the problem of Vilna can solve the problem of Europe. Vilna is an insoluble mixture of national hates ... [and] a world example -- there are many such in Europe -- of the insolubility of the problem of national hates under capitalist rule.” At the same time, she was also cynically reminded by an American diplomat, that the “only thing to do with Vilna...is to pick it up and take it a long way and squeeze the people out into their respective nations and then put the town itself in a museum.” The first part of the American ‘recommendation’ was brutally implemented by the Nazi and Stalinist occupations and within a decade (from 1940-1950), through murder, deportation, exile, ‘repatriation,’ and emigration, Vilnius lost about ninety percent of its pre-WWII population. Although in the post-war decades, the ethnic composition of Vilnius changed dramatically, because of the continuous flow of immigrants from Lithuania and other parts of the Soviet Union, the city retained its multilingual character. However, just before the

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3 Anne Louise Strong, Lithuania's New Way (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1940), 31.
4 Ibid.
collapse of the Soviet Union, the Lithuanian speaking population, for the first time in modern history, gained a demographic majority.

Predictably, the Soviet authorities initiated a series of narrative erasures that eliminated many cemeteries and dead bodies from the topographical surface of the city. Often the ‘unwelcome’ local dead of ideologically and/or nationally ‘suspicous’ origins were replaced with the corporeal relics of Soviet heroic figures. Immediately after the end of WWII, the German war cemeteries that held the military dead of both world wars were first to go. Next, came the elimination of old Protestant cemeteries where many local ‘European’ (mostly of German origin) expatriates, including the numerous professors of the university were buried. The bodies and graves of many professional colleagues of Georg Forster and Jozef Frank who died in Vilnius were desecrated by the orders of the Soviet Lithuanian administration and a large part of the biographical past of the university was erased. The small Muslim cemetery near the main city prison melancholically encountered by Paul Monty during the Great War was also leveled. With the destruction of the cemetery and the adjacent mosque, the last vestiges of the historic Tartar neighborhood were eliminated from the cityscape. In addition, the Soviet civic authorities also severely diminished the visibility of various Polish and Lithuanian religious and national historical figures by removing their bodies to less prominent sites. The silver casket containing the relics of Saint Casimir, for instance, was moved from the Cathedral to the Saint Peter and Paul Church. However, the most devastating blow to the city’s historical topography came with the ruthless destruction of the two Jewish cemeteries which after the Nazi annihilation of the local Jewish population and Soviet repression of the greatly diminished Jewish community were the most evidential remainders of the centuries-long history and geography of Jewish Vilne. The civic and ideological monuments of the ‘new’ (Soviet-Lithuanian) Vilnius were often built on the ground of these destroyed cemeteries. Indeed, many of the tombstones from the Jewish (and also the Protestant) cemeteries were used by local authorities in various construction sites as building materials. Some of the Jewish headstones ended up as stepping-stones in a stairway leading to the top of one of city hills offering a panoramic view of the altered topography and skyline of the post-war Vilnius.

As a result of these ideological and utilitarian eliminations of urban cemeteries, the rapidly growing Soviet Lithuanian Vilnius -- by the late-1980s the city’s population had reached almost six hundred thousand people -- became a city with a very shallow commemorative history full of topographical ‘memory voids’ and unexpressed or
suppressed national (and European) identities. Hence when Vilnius became the capital city of independent Lithuania in 1991, its ideologically contested and nationally challenged topography was turned once more into a symbolic battleground for the geographical and historical definition of Europe. “The free democratic Lithuania,” states Venclova, “faces a task of creating a new identity for Vilnius without rejecting a single historical and cultural streak of the city. Having integrated its past and its entire cultural potential, Vilnius is turning into a European capital worthy of its founders and best citizens”

In this process of turning Vilnius into a European capital, the local dead again became key participants of the geo-narrative drama. A German voluntary association restored the destroyed military cemeteries of Vilnius in a geographically and ideologically inclusive way: the graves of the German soldiers were resurrected in parallel to those of the Russian soldiers. In fact, the restored German and Russian military cemeteries from the Great War lost their historical authenticity by gaining a few symbolic headstones commemorating the German soldiers of Jewish origins and the Russian soldiers of the Muslim faith. Today, among the rising forest of the Protestant/Catholic crosses one can find a patch of Orthodox crosses interspersed with tombstones bearing the Star of David or the Islamic Crescent. (The original German cemeteries contained only Christian and secular nationalistic commemorative symbols.) Other destroyed (Jewish, Protestant and Catholic) cemeteries however have not been restored, thus still leaving huge local ‘memory gaps’ within the commemorative topography of Vilnius. Thus, in a strange but deliberately coordinated way, through their post-Soviet reincarnation, the restored military cemeteries that boldly attest to the violent history of the twentieth century occupations of Vilnius became funerary markers of the city’s own diverse religious past.

 Meanwhile, the ‘corporeal’ weight of Europe in Vilnius has increased dramatically with the unanticipated unearthing of a few thousands of human remains on a vast commercial and residential development site in the fall of 2001. This discovery created a minor local sensation, not just because of the high number of corpses, but mostly, because of their mysterious origin and sinister location. The mass grave was in the territory of a former Soviet military base; thus, impulsively, its whereabouts raised memories of countless crimes committed by the Stalinist regime. After all, seven years before this discovery, just a few hundred meters away from the newly found mass grave, hundreds of

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bodies of NKVD (KGB) victims were recovered from the park of the former Tuskulėnai (Tusculanum) estate. The newly uncovered burial ground could have been easily an extension of the first site. It was also suspected that the remains could have belonged to Polish soldiers killed at the beginning of World War II and hastily buried en masse. Very soon, however, with the help of metal detectors, workers (and anthropologists) found more mundane and easily identifiable objects, such coins and buttons, scattered among the bones. Many metal artifacts had French inscriptions and bore recognizable portraits of Napoleon. Immediately, it became obvious that the human remains once were the soldiers of the Grand Armée who died in Vilna in 1812.

Although the historical factuality of ten thousand French soldiers buried in Vilna had never been disputed, there was no hard evidence of their corporeal existence, since the Russian authorities seemed to bury them in deliberately unmarked (and soon forgotten) locations. So even Frank, for instance, who returned to the city in the summer of 1813, could find no visible traces of massive burial grounds that should have contained thousands of human remains. Therefore, the recently discovered relics provided the first archaeological proof of the tragic role that Vilna played in the history of Napoleonic Europe. As soon as the ‘national’ identity of the bodies was established, the municipal authorities contacted the French Embassy in Vilnius. The French government quickly responded to the baffling news from Vilnius by sending an anthropological team, and assumed an immediate ‘administrative responsibility’ for the military relics.

Still, the national association of the thousands of corpses found in Vilnius with contemporary (and historical) France has become a matter of international ‘genealogical’ debate since a vast majority of the soldiers, officers and accompanying personnel that formed the Grand Armée were not of French origins. In fact, soldiers from at least twenty (contemporary) European nations participated in the fateful march on Moscow: so alongside the French, there were Germans (Bavarians, Prussians, Westphalians, Saxons), Dutch, Flemish, Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, Austrians, Poles, Lithuanians, Swiss, Croatians, Hungarians, etc. Furthermore, according to limited archeological evidence, most of the three thousand bodies that have been so far uncovered in Vilnius were identified as belonging to the non-French military units of the Grand Armée.

Because the mass grave in Vilnius is the largest burial site from the Napoleonic wars ever to be uncovered and examined, it provided enormous scientific value and political capital. From a scientific point of view, the diverse ethnic composition of the remains has
been an anthropological treasure, for it provides an anatomical cross-section of the European male population (only a few women were found among the dead) bonded together by the deadly Lithuanian winter of 1812-1813: "Now, crammed between construction cranes and stacks of concrete brick a corps of archeologists and anatomists is mining a mass grave of Napoleon’s soldiers, reconstructing the army’s final days -- and taking a remarkable measure of what it was like to be a man in Europe nearly two centuries ago."

The disclosure of the remains also offered an excellent opportunity for worldwide media to come to Lithuania, which rarely makes international headlines. The mayor of Vilnius invited journalists from all major national and international news corporations to witness the discovery. And, subsequently, two television networks -- BBC and Discovery Channel -- have been directly involved in the amusing anthropological exploration of the site. In the mass graveyards of Vilnius, BBC found plenty of material for its series, “Meet the Ancestors,” and the Discovery Channel collected footage for its new documentary, “Moments in Time.” In addition to the media exposure and the exclusive rights to record it, both companies provided some additional funding for the future exploration of the site. The anticipated media-driven scientific disclosure of other funereal sites has been also heralded by the civic administration as a long-overdue ‘geographical’ discovery of the city. “It puts us on the map,” declared the mayor of Vilnius, because it “confirms how important a role the city has played’ in the struggle over the historical destiny of Europe.”

Yet, these European -- international -- bodies conveniently camouflage the contested and ambiguous location of Vilnius both within ‘united’ Europe and the modern Lithuanian state. Usually, as I have already pointed out, Vilnius’s dead are historically controversial and geographically problematic, because they, metaphorically and literally speaking, segment, segregate and divide the city according to different national identities and destinies. Instead of outlining a linear historical and geopolitical trajectory of the place, the dead of Vilnius -- Jews, Poles, Russians, Germans, Lithuanians, or members of the Catholic, Protestant, Russian Orthodox, Judaic, Islamic and various secular communities -- and their divergent memories, delineate contradictory experiences of European disunity.

For instance, the relics of the NKVD victims found on the Tuskulénai estate pose a typical narrative and commemorative challenge. According to the NKVD records, all victims were killed between 1944-1947, and many of them were members of the Lithuanian resistance movement. Notwithstanding, among the killed there were also German military officers, who were accused of crimes against civilians; some local Nazi collaborators, who were persecuted for their participation in the Jewish genocide; numerous deserters from the Soviet Army, who committed serious criminal offences; and local civilians charged with homicide. Considering such a wide array of criminal offences and personalities, no single memorial can encompass the contradictory conduct and memory of the killed individuals. A memorial to all NKVD victims has been most strongly objected by the local Jewish community, which sees it also as a commemoration of some Nazi executioners. These relics, like many other local corpses, raise extremely sensitive historical and moral questions: do all remains deserve the same commemorative treatment? Should they be reburied together or split apart according to their documented life deeds? Since the badly decayed bodies have no clear identity marks, is it even feasible to correctly identify them? (So far, only about fifty bodies have been identified.) Under such contentious historical interpretations, indecisive scientific findings and diverse ideological circumstances, some kind of commemorative and, perhaps even, post-mortem physical segregation of the dead could be the only valid ethical answer to this memorial dilemma.

In contrast to the local dead, the ‘foreign’ relics of the Grand Armée, perhaps unintentionally, but reassuringly, map the historical march towards the unity of Europe. Of course, historical retrospection and individual anonymity give them a locally uncontested presence. In fact, it became clear from the beginning that the local (post-mortem) international assemblage of distant and muted Europeans could become one of the greatest tourist attractions of Vilnius. Soon after the discovery, the Vilnius tourist office started to plan for so-called ‘Napoleon tours’ of the country. “Vilnius,” proudly declared a headline in Lietuvos rytas, the national daily, “will also be celebrated for the dead of Napoleon’s army.” Because about eighty per-cent of the soldiers who served in the army were not French, their collective profile, in a strange way, fits the international

8 For more, see Stasys Vaitiekus, Tuskulénai: egzekucijų aukos ir budeliai (Vilnius: Lietuvos Gyventojų Genocido ir Rezistencijos Tyrimo Centras, 2002), 106-134.
9 “Vilnių garsins ir Napoleono palaikai” in Lietuvos rytas, section Sostiné (September 13, 2002), 1.
characteristics of the enlarged European Union. Consequently, both French and Lithuanian authorities have insisted that while the remains found on Lithuanian soil make “a part of the collective French memory,” in general, they belong to a transnational heritage of Europe.\(^{10}\)

Despite the fact of ‘belonging’ to Europe, the relics were taken into joint France-Vilnius custody. Bringing the multinational remains to France was ruled out, and since French law does not permit cremation of French soldiers, it was decided to rebury the relics in Lithuania. After a detailed scientific analysis, the ceremonial reburial of the remains took place on June 1, 2003. The relics were put to rest in the ideologically and nationally most diverse cemetery of Vilnius. Appropriately, this large cemetery, known as the Soldiers’ Cemetery, contains the remains of soldiers of many wars and nationalities. But alongside German, Russian, Polish and Soviet, and now, Napoleonic, troops there are also graves of Lithuanian Communist party officials, local cultural and academic elite, and the victims of the Soviet army attack on Vilnius in 1991. The French government paid about sixty thousand euros for the memorial, and while the reburial ceremony was orchestrated by the Vilnius Municipality, it closely followed the official French instructions concerning the burial procedures for fallen (French) soldiers. Many Lithuanian state officials, members of the diplomatic corps from most European countries, and the representatives of the Napoleon Society from France attended the ceremony. Priests blessed the ground and in his eulogy, Jean Bernard Harth, the French ambassador in Lithuania, drew a parallel between 1812 and 2003, referring to Lithuania’s ninety per-cent backing in a referendum three weeks prior for joining the EU in May 2004. The attendees of the reburial ceremony were also cautiously reminded about the fallacies of war and dangers of forced integration of Europe. Still, the reburial ceremony was eventually transformed into a eulogy for a misguided attempt to unify Europe: “Napoleon was on a quest for a united Europe,” remarked the ambassador “but it failed because it attempted to unite a continent by force. ...Today, we see this dream of a united Europe coming true because it is done peacefully.”\(^{11}\)

Subsequently, this somber commemorative ritual bounced back into the city as a pageant celebrating war as a spectacular component of the European consolidation. The

\(^{10}\) “Rasti palaikai – daugelio tautų paveldas” in Lietuvos rytas (March 30, 2002), 7.
 discovery of the relics initiated public curiosity about Vilnius's role in the history of the Napoleonic wars; so the burial of the remains became an integral part of the official celebration, "Vilnius 1812", which was meant to familiarize the citizens of Lithuania with the history of a brief French occupation of the city. The three day long event (May 30- June 1, 2003) was also meant to celebrate Vilnius as a pivotal geopolitical site that altered Lithuanian (and European) history. The primary benefactor and organizer of the celebration was the Lithuanian Ministry of Defense, and the climax of this urban festivity was the reenactment of a battle between 'French' and 'Russian' forces on the right-bank of the Neris River (the site of the new municipality building and a modern business and entertainment center of Vilnius, located next to Europe Square). After the battle, victorious Napoleon (an actor) entered Vilnius and the occupation of the city by costumed impersonators of the Grand Armée was greeted by a massive public party, sponsored and supplied by a local beer company. Since in 1812 there was no battle between the two armies in or around Vilnius, the contemporary theatrical performance of the battle was not just a costume drama, but a historical farce. Still, before the festival, Linas Linkevičius, the Lithuanian Minister of Defense and the chairman of "Vilnius 1812" organizing committee, declared that "the march of Napoleon's army through Lithuania brought a breeze of freedom and the possibility of liberation. Moreover, it offered a chance for Lithuania to come closer to Europe." In a way, during the celebration of the "Vilnius 1812" events, the unfortunate victims of the forced unification of Europe -- who, by the way, ignominiously died from cold, starvation and disease on their way back to (western) Europe from their catastrophic occupation of Moscow -- were resurrected as glorious liberators of Vilnius who delivered Lithuania to Europe. Since anthropologists expect to find more bodies of the Grand Armée soldiers, the reburial ritual celebrating the unity of Europe has the potential of becoming a fairly regular event. Moreover, regardless of the pace of new scientific discoveries, the "Vilnius 1812" festival is already scheduled to become one of the most entertaining events in the ever-intensifying local schedule of European celebratory spectacles. So, if not in life and death, then certainly in their post-mortem reanimation, the bodies and relics of Vilnius will continue to resurface as central symbols of the city's (peripheral) European status.

The return of ‘foreign’ bodies as symbolic hallmarks of Vilnius’s frontier location has a long local history. The indigenous (pagan) Lithuanian founders of the city cremated dead bodies; hence, there are no pre-Christian relics in the vicinity of Vilnius. Bodies as statements of territorial claims appeared on local topography only with the arrival of various christian missionaries and the alternating visibility of the relics of the Orthodox and Catholic saints in Vilnius testify to almost seven hundred years history of ideological struggle for the future European destiny of the city. Vilnius (old and new) seems to be built on a vast burial ground, for practically any incision into its ground (or for that matter its history) brings onto the surface its ‘unrecognized’ dead. For instance, the oldest surviving cemetery in Vilnius belonged to the Jewish community, and although it was leveled during the Soviet period, the subterranean reminders of its centuries-long existence still periodically resurface on the modern face of the city. Yet because of the changing geographical, ideological, genealogical and narrative location of Vilnius, local dead often come into sight as ‘strangers.’

Vilnius’s geo-narrative interplay between local ‘strangers’ and foreign ‘natives’ is probably best captured by Johannes Bobrowski, a German poet whose relationship to the mythological land of Sarmatia has been shaped by an intense sense of personal and historical atonement. In 1961, he published his first poetic cycle entitled Sarmatische Zeit (Sarmatian Time) dedicated to his life-long encounters with Sarmatia. In a nutshell, the poetic cycle captures the poet’s vast geographical and emotional experiences as a (Wermacht) soldier on the Eastern Front and prisoner of war in the Soviet Union. Yet Bobrowski, in his own words, envisioned his lyrics as a meditating and mediating atonement for the historical German encounters with their eastern neighbours: “This become a theme, something like this: the Germans and the European East -- because I grew up around the river Memel, where Poles, Lithuanians, Russians and Germans lived together, and among them all, the Jews -- a long history of misfortune and guilt, for which my people is to blame, ever since the days of the Order of Teutonic Knights. Not to be undone, perhaps, or redeemed, but worthy of hope and honest endeavour in German poems.”

For Bobrowski, European history and local geography fuses in Sarmatia into a narrative space that opens up as a threshold, a swelling terrain of images, experiences,

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place-names, memories, stories, faces, voices and natural features. It is a time-space of discoveries and evocations, but also of losses and irrevocable changes. Hence he starts to draw his map of Sarmatia with a poem that begins as a toponymical trace of the city and ends as historical prophesy:

Vilna, you –
oak –
my birch,
Novgorod –
once in the woods the cry
of my springs flew up, my days’
step sounded over the river.

O, it is the bright
glitter, the summer constellation,
given away; by the fire
squats the teller of tales,
those who listened nightlong, the young ones,
went away.

Lonely he will sing:
Across the steppe
Wolves travel, the hunter
Found a yellow stone,
It flared in the moonlight. –

What is holy swims,
a fish,
through the old valleys, the wooded
valleys still, the fathers’
words still sound:
Welcome the strangers!
You will be a stranger. Soon.

“Call”

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