

Andrzej Romanowski, *Młoda Polska wileńska (Wilno's Young Poland)*, Kraków 1999, Wydawnictwo Universitas, 455 pp., index of persons, Eng. summary, il.

A. Romanowski's book — despite its slightly misleading title — is not a description of another variant of the modernist cultural current which in the Polish lands acquired the name of Young Poland. The author aims to show a broader process — the revival and development of Polish culture in the territory of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, incorporated directly in Russia after the partition of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, and following the downfall of the January 1863–1864 insurrection subjected to extremely strong Russification. His field of interest encompasses also the former Livonia and those lands which the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth lost to Russia before the partition, especially the Smolensk and Vitebsk regions. The processes occurring in the Polish groups of those territories did not diverge from the contemporary trends in the Byelorussian–Lithuanian lands, which resulted from the more general phenomenon of the obliteration of pre-partition political borders.

Romanowski tries to vindicate the role of Wilno (and to a lesser extent also Minsk, Grodno and other centres) in the Polish cultural output before World War I in a situation where specialists in general history, the history of literature and art concentrate all their attention on such centres as Cracow and Warsaw. He proves that Wilno was an essential point on the cultural map of the then Poland, and the development of theatre life, fine arts, cabaret, periodicals and publishing at large, as well as educational activity and film production did not diverge from that in central Poland. However, the problems of borderline culture, so frequently and willingly shown by the authors preoccupied with Wilno and the Polish eastern borderland in general, do not come within the scope of his work. At the beginning of the 20th c. the national cultures (Polish, Lithuanian, Byelorussian and Russian) shunned closer contacts with each other, while cases of getting across the borders of one's own culture were few and devoid of significance; however, Romanowski devotes a special sub-chapter to Mieczysław Dowojno–Sylwestrowicz (Mečislovas Davainis–Silvestraitis), a Polish–Lithuanian journalist who gained the reputation of a scandalizing, negative hero of Young–Polish Wilno.

The story (and also prehistory) told by Romanowski has a very clear chronological framework. The author draws attention to the powerful, traumatic significance of the downfall of the January uprising and the victimization that followed, as a result of which Polish life came almost to a standstill in the above-mentioned territories. Polishness withdrew to private households and was reduced to traditional customs, generally connected to religious and family holidays. Any external, legal activity was deprived of any national accents or those supporting Poland's independence. This special positivism of Wilno lasted two decades longer than in Warsaw, and finished only with the 1905 Revolution, which brought in its wake a softening of the policy of the Russian authorities.

Concessions enforced in 1905 enabled for a revival of Polish political movement, as well as publishing and educational activity, and Poles were no longer forbidden to purchase land in the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This was followed by a surprisingly rapid — although not long-lived everywhere — renaissance of Polish literature, art and theatre. The book closes with the year 1915 and the German invasion of this territory; only the First World War and especially the battles for the frontiers of the arising national states, unleashed at its close, did signify — in Romanowski's opinion — the real end of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The first two parts of the book are devoted to two stages of development of Polish cultural life in Wilno following 1905: the author calls them respectively: the period of a break-through (1905–1906) and the period of the bloom (1907–1915). The turn of 1905 saw a veritable explosion of cultural and educational initiatives which took advantage of the liberalization of Russian policy. Romano-

wski presents the beginnings of Polish press and publishing activity in Wilno, the amateur and professional theatre movement, Polish educational, scholarly and scientific life, and even sport. In the autumn of 1906 a permanent Polish theatre, the first in Lithuania, run by Nuna Młodziejowska, was established, first in Minsk, and since October 1906 in Wilno, which also played host to the theatrical companies and actors coming from Congress Poland and other Polish lands. The analysis of the literary milieu shows many relations with central Poland: the leading journalists and men of letters of Wilno — Benedykt Hertz and Czesław Janowski — had earlier worked for Warsaw publishers and periodicals; in 1905–1906 Wilno was visited by outstanding Cracow authors who came to deliver lectures here; here also lived for a certain time the poets Andrzej Niemojewski and Edward Słoniński, representing the Young Poland movement, who had earlier been connected with Warsaw. The first years following the 1905 Revolution saw a rapid re-Polonization of Wilno, whose influence embraced almost the whole area of the former Grand Duchy.

In his analysis of the years 1907–1915 Romanowski focusses on the most important centres of social, literary and artistic life in Wilno. He brings to the forefront the role of Young Polish cabarets (especially “Banda”, as well as “Ach” — open from 1908–1914), and Nuna Młodziejowska’s theatre. Its company consisted not only of local actors, but also visitors from other Polish lands (e.g. Juliusz Osterwa, one of the most outstanding artists of the Polish stage of the first half of the 20th c.). Its ambitious productions became artistic events whose fame went beyond the borders of Wilno. Among those who co-created the magnificence of the Wilno theatre was Ferdynand Ruszczyc, painter and author of innovatory décor for many productions. The creative work and charisma of this outstanding artist ensured him the rank of a man who was a whole institution in Polish Wilno before 1918 and later, when he was professor at the Department of Fine Arts of Wilno University.

Featuring prominently on the cultural map of Wilno were Polish periodicals, especially “Kurier Litewski” (established in 1905), “Dziennik Wileński” (1906), “Przegląd Wileński” (1911) (the latter run by Jan Lorentowicz and Benedykt Hertz, who reprinted in it many items from Warsaw and Galician press), as well as “Tygodnik Wileński” (1910), run by Ferdynand Ruszczyc, the only periodical devoted completely to culture, literature, and fine arts. The revived activity of the Polish intelligentsia also found an outlet in open, half-legal as well as completely clandestine educational organizations. The picture of Wilno in the period of Young Poland is complemented by the discussion of musical societies (especially “Lutnia” — The Lute), publications, private book and art collections as well as clubs and other places hosting the most popular balls and entertainment of the Polish élites of the city.

The author complements his work on the cultural life of Wilno with the chapter *Between the Niemen and Dnieper Rivers*, devoted to analogous phenomena in other towns of the former eastern Borderland of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The roles of Minsk and Grodno were especially important. Among the 100,000 inhabitants of Minsk, Poles made up over 11%; the animator of its active, if overshadowed by Wilno, cultural life was the poet Bogusław Adamowicz. Grodno was even more connected with the activity of a single personality, since here resided Eliza Orzeszkowa, the leading Polish novelist of the 19th/20th c. (d. in 1910). Lagging behind were other provincial centres: Białystok, Nieśwież, Kowno, as well as the territories lying on the fringes of the then spiritual motherland of Poles — Mohylów, Vitebsk, the towns of the former Polish Livonia (Dyneburg, Libawa-Libau, Mitawa-Mitau), Riga as well as Smolensk, where the 4–5,000-strong Polish colony (among 75,000 inhabitants) was concentrated in the active Polish Club, standing out from the life of this city.

Following the 150 years of partitions and half a century of deliberate Russiantization, the former Borderland of the First Commonwealth saw an unusual, unprecedented revival of Polishness. This phenomenon was also — as

Romanowski shows — an important factor which determined the continuity of the mainstream of Polish culture in the 20th c. Over the long decades of partitions, Poles — divided by the frontiers of several state organisms — found their unity almost exclusively in their spiritual motherland, while the vitality of Polish culture was the principal foundation enabling the reconstruction of their independent state. Cultural animation in the Grand Duchy, described by Romanowski, turned out to be a transient phenomenon. It did not affect the countryside at all, which continued to be Byelorussian or Lithuanian. The cities that dropped out of the Commonwealth in the first, and partly in the second partition — following some years of the expansion of Polishness — recovered their Russian character about 1910. However, the achievements of Young Poland in Wilno were of a lasting nature. The flourishing Polish culture in Wilno became the basis of its cultural development in the years of the Second Republic. The activity of Ruszczyk, Hertz, Jankowski, Lorentowicz, Młodziejowska and others prepared the ground for the greatest cultural achievements of inter-war Wilno — the "Reduta" theatre society, and especially the "Żagary" poetic group — which feature prominently in the Polish cultural output of the 20th c. The picture of Polish cultural activity in the east of Poland in 1905–1915 already foreshadowed the general territorial shape of the Second Republic, finally established in the Treaty of Riga in 1921; the only exception being Minsk, which before World War I was a significant Polish cultural centre, and after 1921 found itself outside Polish borders. Andrzej Romanowski's analysis and conclusions in *Młoda Polska wileńska* provide important arguments in favour of the thesis about the permanence of pre-partition heritage of Poles and the role of literature (or more broadly: the artistic world) in the process of handing this tradition down to the generations living in the 19th and 20th cc.

One can raise a few objections to Romanowski's book. He is almost exclusively interested in so-called high culture, thus he makes no attempt to trace the changes occurring at the beginning of the 20th c. in the Lithuanian and Byelorussian villages. His decision to leave out of account the question of the borderline culture is convincingly justified in the introduction to his book. However, as a result, the micro-world of the Poles in Wilno, Minsk and Grodno (to say nothing of other centres) is deprived of its reference points; the reader may get the impression that the system of prohibitions and repressions applied by the Russian Empire was the only background to the development of Polish cultural and national life. Especially striking here is the absence of Jews, who made up a considerable part of the population in eastern cities.

The author sinned even more by treating the animators of Polish life as a collection of individuals, more or less outstanding or outright anonymous, and subjecting them to no sociological analysis. Among the heroes of the book there are artists, professionals, and landowners, frequently — as in the case of Ruszczyk or Młodziejowska — acting as those who go between various milieus. However, the most important hinterland of Polish cultural renaissance in Wilno and other major centres consisted of the intelligentsia, at the beginning of the 20th c. an autonomous stratum, standing out from others due to their sense of identity and belief in their national mission. Their literary, artistic, educational, scholarly and scientific activity in Wilno was a result of the process occurring in the 19th and 20th c. in all Poland, i.e. the fact that this class took over the responsibility for the culture and science of the nation from the hands of the gentry (and — in centres other than Wilno — the rich bourgeoisie).

The specificity of the anticlerical modernist culture partly justifies the marginal presentation of the role of the Catholic Church and Catholic culture in general as a power supporting the renaissance of Polishness. In smaller centres, however, the Catholic parishes — as the author frequently repeats — happened to be centres of the life of Polish colonies. Nevertheless, the representatives of the ecclesiastical hierarchy — if they distinguished themselves in the field of culture — have been treated by Romanowski on a par with other heroes of his book. The

author willingly emphasizes that the participation of clergymen in cultural life of the beginning of the 20th c. testified to a certain extent to their independence from the conservative stance of the Church; we can cite the example of the bishop of Wilno Edward Ropp, the owner of among other journals "Kurier Litewski", who according to Romanowski "was an open-minded person, resenting clericalism". However, the question remains unsolved whether — and to what extent — "Wilno's Young Poland" developed in opposition to traditional Catholicism, which constituted an important plane of the self-identification of Poles in the Orthodox Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th c.

However, even if some aspects of Romanowski's work do not satisfy us completely, this is because other parts of the book present a wealth of threads and reflections. *Młoda Polska wileńska* modifies the traditional picture of modernist culture in Polish lands in the 19th–20th cc., enriching it by hitherto underestimated centres and proving that the cultural unity of Poles survived the period of partitions even on the fringes of their spiritual motherland.

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