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Ivory Tower of Babel: Tartu University and the Languages of Two Empires, a Nation-State, and the Soviet Union

By

David Ilmar Beecher

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History in the Graduate Division of the University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:
Professor Yuri Slezkine, Chair
Professor Margaret Anderson
Professor Irina Paperno

Fall 2014
Ivory Tower of Babel:
Tartu University and the Languages of Two Empires, a Nation-State, and the
Soviet Union

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By

David Ilmar Beecher
ABSTRACT

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by

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Doctor of Philosophy in History

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Professor Yuri Slezkine, Chair

This is the history of a remarkable multilingual university and university town on the edge of Europe under four different states: the Swedish Empire (1632–1710), Russian Empire (1802–1917), National Republic of Estonia (1919–1940), and Soviet Union (1944–1991). In every incarnation Tartu University was founded in the throes of a war that reconfigured the political boundaries, intellectual ideals, and languages of Europe: the Thirty Years War, the Napoleonic Wars, World War One, and World War Two. Tartu’s ever changing political and linguistic identity makes the University that once held the most powerful telescope in the world a good observatory upon the history of Europe and Russia as well as the globe and the cosmos. But ultimately, this is as much a tale of continuity as transformation.

At a skeptical distance from all the metropolitan capitals that founded and funded it (Stockholm, Saint Petersburg, Tallinn, Moscow), Tartu stood for an ideal of Europe that was at once more universal and more particular than that of any state that laid claim to its academic culture. In fact, its actual role approximated the Biblical myth of the Tower of Babel: intended each time to help build a new state in a new language (both literal and ideological), Tartu University ended up cultivating other languages for remembering the past, understanding the present, and imagining the future. This was especially true of the Soviet period—the focal point of my dissertation—when Tartu taught Bolshevik ideology in two official languages (Estonian and Russian), but became known throughout the Soviet Union as an “oasis of Europe” with numerous communities of linguistic and cultural study that seemed to stand apart from the state, but from each other as well, each in the ivory tower of its own literal and academic language.

The most famous of these communities was the “Tartu School of Semiotics” led by the Professor of Russian Literature, Yuri Lotman. By situating Tartu University’s most famous scholar of the twentieth century against the background of his everyday life among Estonian-speaking strangers rather than his scholarly ties with Russian-speaking friends and colleagues, I want to show what Lotman’s theory of culture—especially the binary divide between Europe and Russia at its core—owes to Tartu. Lotman’s idea that universal knowledge cannot be found in any one universal language, but must be sought in translation between particular ones, is thus both my method and my argument. Juxtaposing numerous perspectives composed in multiple languages, I show how Tartu University’s uncomfortable position in space and time between languages and states (rather than firmly embedded in any one) allowed its scholars to see the world in terms (and languages) well beyond those imagined by any official ideology or discourse. Thus, Tartu became for them—as it can be for us—an excellent observatory on the relationship between the particular and the universal, the national and the cosmopolitan, and Russia and Europe.
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My Estonian grandmother, Taimi Kiiss, was born in the town of Tartu on January 31, 1922. Before the Russian Revolution, her parents had spent several years in the multilingual metropole of the Russian Empire. In Saint Petersburg her father, August (1882-1965), studied violin at the Conservatory and played in the orchestra of the Mariinsky Theater while her mother, Anna (1881-1970), earned an attestation for her linguistic abilities so she could work as a governess, teaching French and German to the children of Russian aristocrats. Before there was a place for them at Tartu University, many would-be Estonian intellectuals like Anna with her talent for languages, and August, who had joined the Herderian movement to collect folksongs and folk melodies from the Estonian countryside, sought upward mobility in cosmopolitan Saint Petersburg. Estonian independence and the Russian Revolution sent many of them home.

Taimi grew up in Tartu, in the new world of the Estonian National Republic, where she studied piano with the leading composer of the day, Heino Eller. When she turned nineteen she married a young man from a nearby farm, Ants Lepasaar, a law student at the recently nationalized University of Tartu. They fled the Soviet occupation in 1944. Ants disappeared near Posen in 1945, and Taimi carried the rest of her family—her parents and two young daughters—into exile. After nearly five years in the DP Camps of Germany after the War, the family finally came to the United States of America. The war and its aftermath ended Taimi’s hopes of becoming a concert pianist, but she made a new life for herself in this country as a public school music teacher in Providence, Rhode Island. She died on May 12, 2012, a few months after her ninetieth birthday, a citizen of the United States of America. Taimi never remarried, never lost her strong Estonian accent, never found out what happened to her husband in 1945, and never learned to think of herself as American.

Though inflected by it, this work is not Taimi’s story. This is the story of the home she left behind. For the house in Tartu where Taimi and her parents had their apartment at Kastani Street #9 became the home in the 1950s and 60s of Yuri Lotman, one of the most remarkable scholars of the Soviet Union and the central figure of the Tartu School of Semiotics. He was born on February 28, 1922 in revolutionary Petrograd, less than 180 miles away and one month after my grandmother. On the most intimate level, this story arises out of a desire to understand how my grandmother’s home became Yuri Lotman’s home, how the children and grandchildren of one of the greatest Russian literary scholars of all time became Estonian citizens, while my aunt, mother, brother, and I all became American citizens, how the historical forces that uprooted one family and sent it looking for a new home gave new roots and a new home to another.

In 1494 the Treaty of Tordesillas launched the age of global European Imperialism by dividing the New World between the monarchies of Spain and Portugal with the blessing of Pope Alexander VI. In the twentieth century, the United States of America and the Soviet Union returned the favor to Europe with NATO and the Warsaw Pact and the Iron Curtain between them, appealing to the higher authority of scientific and ideological truths disseminated at their respective universities. On the most universal level, this study uses Tartu as a peripheral Baltic observatory on Europe—its states, universities, and languages—ever since the imagined community of Latin Christendom with its Latin-speaking priesthood began to crumble into a Babel of national elites, each with its own imagined community speaking its own tongue. But for me this is a story that begins with two families in the two most powerful states of the twentieth century, strangers to one another’s experience, united only by the Estonian language, Tartu University, and the memory of two very different times when Kastani Street #9 was home.
Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to the understanding, support, and example of my Berkeley advisor, Yuri Slezkine, and professors Peggy Anderson and Irina Paperno. Yuri gave me the courage to believe that I could say something universal about Tartu University; Peggy showed me the value of comparative historical perspectives on Germany and Russia and introduced me to the unique cultural environment of hometown Germany; and Irina made Yuri Lotman and Soviet literary theory come to life. I have learned so much from each of them and they have all put enormous time and energy into my writing and thought. With Irina I had the special benefit of someone who knows my subject from the inside out as a former student of Yuri Lotman and a colleague of several of the people in my dissertation. I am especially grateful to her for opening doors to me in Lotman’s world that would otherwise have remained shut.

In Tartu I had an equally important fourth advisor in Aigi Rahi-Tamm at the History Department of Tartu University. Over the course of several years in Tartu our nearly weekly conversations did more to help me navigate the Estonian archives and cultivate my intuitions for Soviet Tartu than any other written or human source. If Tartu came to feel like a second home while I was there, this was in large part due to her good humor, enthusiasm, friendship, and help. A final expression of academic gratitude—long overdue—is to my undergraduate tutor at Harvard through three years, Matt Maguire, who taught me to think comparatively about the history and literature of France and America, and to notice language as a theme in both by listening to Herman Melville’s “language of the land and language of the sea.” Matt brought out the best in me, and without his faith, I might not be writing these words today.

This project could not have been completed without the generous support of a Fulbright IIE grant to Estonia and Russia and a European Union DoRa Grant for collaborations between local scholars and foreign graduate students in the EU’s new member states. Aigi was instrumental in helping me procure DoRa funding.

I am thankful as well to many dear friends both near and far: my friends at Domus Dorpatensis for giving me a home away from home in Tartu; my friends in EÜS Veljesto for making me one of their own, and humoring me for a year as the self-proclaimed “dictator” (technically chairman) of our society; to Uku for introducing me to so many other sides of Estonian life; to my friends in Berkeley—above all Penny, Grahame, and Anaita—for being there from the beginning with their warmth, ideas, and camaraderie. And I thank Anna especially for her love and the inspiration of countless conversations, for believing in the light at the end of the tunnel, for helping me balance my view of the world from the perspective of Tartu with a view from Tblisi, and for our own private “Friendship of the Peoples.”

Most of all, I thank my parents, Merike and Jonathan, for their adoration and for their eternal enthusiasm for everything I say and do (would that every child had parents like these), and for giving me a home in two languages. This dissertation is dedicated to them. And last but not least, I thank my brother, Lembit, who has shared those homes with me, for listening so intently on long drives down the California coast from Berkeley to Santa Cruz and helping me to see in music what I have sought in language. For each of us in our own way, our grandmother’s life story is a point of entry into the past.
Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Dorpat (German) = Tartu (Estonian) = Iur’ev (Russian)

**Estonian**

**EKS**
Emakeele selts / Mother Tongue Society—first established at Tartu University in 1920 for the promotion and protection of the Estonian language and the systematic study of all its dialects; revived after the Second World War in 1955 and moved to the Soviet Estonian Academy of Sciences in Tallinn, from which it organized conferences and “Mother Tongue Days” in towns and villages all across the ESSR. In 1940 it had 44 members; in 1989 it had 427; since the collapse of the Soviet Union, membership has declined. On the initiative of schoolteacher Meinhard Laks, Estonia’s annual *Emakeele päev* (Mother Tongue Day) is celebrated since 1996 on March 14th, the birthday of Kristjan Jaak Peterson (1801–1822), the first Tartu University student to proclaim his ethnic Estonian origin. Called the herald of Estonian national literature, Peterson helped to introduce Finno-Ugric folklore to Europe with a German translation of Finnish mythology. His poetic promise and scholarly career were cut short by tuberculosis.

**EKSA**
*Emakeele seltsi aastaraamat* / *Yearbook of the Mother Tongue Society*—published since 1955

**ENSV**
Eesti Nõukogude Sotsialistlik Vabariik / ESSR (Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic)

**EÜS**
Eesti Üliõpilaste Selts / Estonian Student Society—the first Estonian Student Society was founded in 1871. In 1919 it gave its colors (blue, black, and white) to the flag of the newborn Estonian National Republic. Thereafter, all Tartu University student societies bear the EÜS label (e.g. EÜS Veljesto, EÜS Põhjala, etc.) and are generally co-ed. They tend to be more relaxed in their standards, demands, and codes of conduct than the fraternities or sororities.

**korp!**
korporatsioon / fraternity or sorority—each Tartu University fraternity and sorority has its own tri-color sash and cap.

**metsavend**
“forest brother”—anti-Soviet partisan. The *metsavennad* (plural) were active in their resistance to Soviet power in the Baltic world approximately from 1941–1954.

**NL**
Nõukogude Liit / Soviet Union
Siseministeerium / Ministry of the Interior

Tartu Riiklik Ülikool / Tartu State University

Väliseestlatse Kultuurisidemet Arendamise Ühing / Organization for the Promotion of Cultural Ties With Foreign Estonians—state security subsidiary founded in Soviet Estonia in April 1960 to promote and monitor ties between Estonians living in abroad in the West and Estonians living in the ESSR.

German / Estonian

Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft / Õpetatud Eesti Selts / Learned Estonian Society—a society founded at Dorpat University in 1838 to study Estonian national culture. Among its founders was Dorpat’s first Lecturer in the Estonian Language, Robert Faehlmann. The Society conducted its meetings and published its journal (from 1840) in German. It was shut down in 1950 and revived in 1988.

Russian

Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei / The Main Camp Administration—system of Soviet prison camps

Komitet gosudarstvenoi bezopasnosti / Committee for State Security

Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del / Ministry of Internal Affairs

Narodnyi komissariat vnutrennikh del / People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs

Vyshee Uchebnoe Zavedenie / Institution of Higher Learning
Introduction. Tartu University and Its Languages

For its 350th-anniversary celebration in 1982, Tartu State University commissioned a wall-length painting of itself in imitation of Raphael’s fresco The School of Athens in the Vatican.1 Raphael had represented the great thinkers of the ancient world at the turn of the sixteenth century using his contemporaries for models. Thus, Plato bore a striking resemblance to Leonardo da Vinci, and the ancient philosopher of flux, Heraclitus, looked a lot like a brooding Michelangelo. In Tartu’s 1982 version of this image, Raphael’s figures acquired a triple incarnation as the thirty-seven greatest scholars in the 350-year history of the University of Tartu, “the Athens of the Ema River,” as seen from the perspective of late Soviet socialism.2

There is something quintessentially Soviet in representing Tartu as a multinational imagined community or “Friendship of the Scholars.” But a closer look reveals that the proportions are all off. To begin with there are only two explicitly Soviet scholars represented here at all. And there is something strange about the nationalities. Seventeen Germans, ten Estonians, four Russians, three Swedes, one Armenian, an ambiguous Pole, and an even more ambiguous Frenchman would hardly constitute what the Soviet Union had in mind when it established the “Order of the Friendship of the Peoples” in honor of its 50th anniversary in 1972.3

Titled in Latin, the universal language of academic scholarship, the painting Universitas Tartuensis symbolically defamiliarized the Soviet order of things and its ostensibly universal language.4

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1 The artist, Enn Põldroos, reported to me that the painting was ordered by the Soviet Estonian Ministry of Culture, but that the idea to represent Tartu University this way was his own. The University “then approved my design. Since I hadn’t studied the University’s history before, I had the help of a consultant recommended by the University. This was a very helpful gentleman, whose name I unfortunately do not remember. With his help we put together a list of figures to include and he helped find iconographic material. The general principle was to represent figures from the past and leave out contemporary celebrities.” [“kiitis seda heaks. Kuna ma ise polnud varem kuigi tõsiselt uurinud ülikooli ajalugu, oli mul palju abi ülikooli poolt soovitatud konsultandist. See oli väga abivalmis häära, kelle nime ma küll kahjus ei mäluta. Tema abil sai koostatud kujutatud nimekiri, samuti aitas ta ikonograafilise materjali otsimisel. Üldiselt sai võetud põhimõtteks esitada valdavalt minevikutegelasi ja vältida kaasaegseid kuulsusi.”] Põldroos reported that the reception of the painting was generally positive, but that “one critical review appeared in the newspaper by a University professor, who accused me of taking advantage of people’s general level of cultural ignorance in order to plagiarize Raphael’s work and pass it off as my own. Boris Bernstein came to my defense with a thorough rebuttal (probably in the newspaper Rahva Hääl [Voice of the People]). Later [my painting] has been cited several times as the one of the first examples of conceptual art in Estonia.” [“Siiski ilmus ajalehes ühe ülikooli professori ‘paljastav’ arvamusavaldus, kus , et ma, eeldades inimeste kultuuriteadmatust plagieerisin salamahti Rafaeli. Sellele vastas põhjaliku artiklikga (vist ‘Rahva Hääles’)].” Letter from the artist November 30, 2009.

2 The “Athens of the Ema River” had been Tartu’s nickname since its history was first written one month after its inauguration in 1632.


4 Sergei Dovlatov was excoriated for much less when he wrote an article for Soviet Estonia in November 1973 about a Scientific conference in Tallinn on the Study of Scandinavia and Finland. His editor attacked his failure to put the nations of various participants in the appropriate Soviet order: “You have committed a gross ideological blunder…. The problem is the way you listed them—the order you put them in…. An ironclad order must be followed. The People’s Democracies first! Then the neutral states. And at the rear the members of the capitalist bloc…. ” Sergei Dovlatov, The Compromise, trans. Anne Frydman, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 5.
For the painting to work, we must imagine these scholars speaking to one another across several different languages and centuries in a single, universal language of scholarship. However, nothing was more contested in Soviet Tartu than language, for Tartu had two official languages (Estonian and Russian), and an inordinate fascination with other languages (like the African, Asian, and “minor” European languages (e.g. Danish) studied at its informal Institute of the East), not to mention the problem of language as such, raised in various study groups and university publications from the Russian-based Trudy po znakovym sistemam (Sign System Studies) to Esperanto-based Interlinguistica Tartuensis.

In 1967 news of Tartu’s fascination with languages reached the Eastern periphery of the Soviet Union. A headline in the Buriat Newspaper Pravda Buriati on December 27, 1967 read “Do you speak Swahili?”:

This question would not sound strange at Tartu State University, though there is no formal Eastern Studies department here. Here it is possible to encounter a physicist or chemist, who can speak Japanese, a mathematician, who knows Tibetan and translates from Arabic, a geographer who is a specialist in Turkish. In the small auditorium, where oriental enthusiasts gather every week, you might even hear ancient Sanskrit or the African language of Swahili.5

This is a study of the European university that seeks to understand the Babel of tongues that was Soviet Tartu by situating it against the background of the various states and languages that have laid claim to its academic culture.

The university is one of Europe’s oldest and most resilient institutions. Older than the modern state, it has outlived all the polities it was designed to serve. Second in age only to the Church, its Latin name (“universitas”) and remarkably constant institutional structure date back to the first centuries of the last millennium in Bologna (c.1100) and Paris (c. 1200), though its spiritual origins have been sought as far back as 425 AD in the Byzantine Pandidakterion, established by Emperor Theodosius II in Constantinople.6 Either way the university was born of an effort to reconcile two fundamentally incompatible languages and traditions of learning at the

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5 “Znaiete li vy sukhili?”: “Takoi vopros v Tartuskom gosudarstvennom universitete ne pokazhetsia strannym, khotia na ego fakul’tetakh i ne gotoviat vostokovedov. Zdes’ mozho vstreiti’ fizika ili khimika vlaeduevchikh iaponskim izykom, matematika, kotoryi znaet tibetskii ili perevodit s arabskogo, geografa spetsialista po turetskomu izyku. V malen’koi auditorii, gde kazhduii nedeliu sobiraiutsia liubiteli vostokovedy, mozno uslyshat’ dazhe drevnii Sanskrit i afrikanskuu rech’ suakhili.” (Newspaper clipping from personal archive of Pent Nurmekund, Правда Буряти). The postwar Soviet Union’s official «Friendship of the Peoples» nationalities policy rendered almost any expression of intercultural curiosity on the part of its subject peoples a topic of newsworth of All-Union importance. However, it bears mentioning that none of the languages studied at Tartu mentioned in the article—Japanese, Arabic, Turkish, Tibetan, Sanskrit—were in fact languages of the titular nationalities of the Soviet Republics.

6 For a convincing argument that locates the institutional model of the medieval (and modern) university in Paris and Bologna see Charles Homer Haskins, The Rise of Universities (New York: Henry Hold and Co. 1923). The Pandidakterion of Byzantine Constantinople is sometimes called Europe’s first university. It had 31 chairs (fifteen in Latin; sixteen in Greek) for law, philosophy, medicine, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music, and rhetoric and served to provide state bureaucrats with a liberal arts education. See E. Jeffreys, The Oxford handbook of Byzantine Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 790. For a closer look at this “University” a few hundred years after its first founding, during the so-called “Macedonian Renaissance” of the 9th and 10th centuries, see Paul Speck, Die Kaiserliche Universitat von Konstantinopel: Præzisierungen z. Frage d. höheren Schulwesens in Byzanz im 9. U. 10 Jahrhundert (Munich: Beck, 1974).
root of Western Civilization, the polytheistic multiplicity of pagan Greece and monotheistic unity of Christian Rome. That Raphael’s fresco of the “School of Athens” adorns the reception room to the Papal Apartments of the Vatican is perhaps the clearest sixteenth-century expression of this unlikely synthesis.

From the foundation of the “Athens of the Ema River” in 1632 to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Tartu offers a good comparative vantage point upon the linguistic dynamics of the European University under three very different kinds of states—imperial, national, and Soviet. It is also a good observatory upon wider webs of cultural exchange linking Europe’s metropolitan centers and small-town peripheries.7 This is more a story of continuity than change, for Tartu has always been an “Ivory Tower of Babel.” It is “Ivory” because it is a small-town university that has stood aloof in the provincial periphery of all the states it has served with an ambiguous relationship to the metropolitan capitals that have laid claim to it. It is “Babel” because it has tended to conduct its internal business between languages rather than within them; the minutes of its seventeenth-century Academic Senate, for example, have been preserved for posterity in an uneven mix of Latin and the northern European dialect of German (Niederdeutsch), just as the minutes of the meetings of its Communist Party Leadership after the Second World War moved back and forth unpredictably between Russian and Estonian. As such, Tartu has never had a clear and transparent medium for the transmission of universal meanings that the universities of many more univocal Western states (especially France and England) have taken for granted since the late eighteenth century, with their comfortably national universities, civilizing missions, and comparative success in making the rest of the world speak their language.

Tartu University’s most famous scholar of the Soviet period was Yuri Lotman (1922–1993), a professor of Russian literature. Born, bred, and educated in Soviet Leningrad, he found himself surrounded by Estonian-speakers for the first time when he arrived in Tartu in 1950.8 In his scholarly work, Lotman turned Tartu’s bilingual predicament into an epistemology and a worldview:

The domain of reality cannot be represented by a single language, but only by an aggregate of languages. The idea of the possibility for a single ideal language to serve as an optimal mechanism for the representation of reality is an illusion. A minimally functional structure requires the presence of at least two languages and their incapacity, each independently of the other, to embrace the world external to each of them.9

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7 In a sense I hope to do for twentieth century Tartu in the Age of Yuri Lotman, what Lionel Gossman has done for nineteenth century Basel in the Age of Burckhardt. In his chapter “An Archimedean Point Outside Events” Gossman attempts to justify Basel as a vantage point upon the nineteenth century: “Still, compared to those states, such as France and Prussia that were even further advanced on the road of modernization, Basel’s marginal position in great power politics could be seen as an advantage; its very parochialism and provincialism were qualities by which the city-state might be held back for a while from the abyss to provide an excellent observation post for the historian.” Lionel Gossman, Basel in the Age of Burckhardt: A Study in Unseasonable Ideas, (1), 101.


The inherent parochialism of every language—no matter how cosmopolitan—is easy to forget in the metropolitan capitals that have taught the world to speak their language. It is harder to forget in the bilingual university towns of the periphery, as Lotman’s global claim about the inadequacy of any one language to apprehend “reality” attests. Lotman’s statement seems to reject a belief—so fervently yearned for in the opening decades of the twentieth century by esperantists and visionaries from across Europe, the Soviet Union, and the Americas—in a world meaningfully united and integrated by a single, global language. But Lotman’s attitude toward this aspiration throughout his life—like that of Tartu University more generally throughout its history—remained profoundly ambivalent.

If Tartu’s bilingual predicament was typical of many of the universities of imperial Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth century and the non-Russian national republics of the Soviet Union in the twentieth, Tartu University’s importance was enhanced by the peripheral position it occupied in all of the states that it served—imperial, national, and Soviet—as a self-conscious symbol of Europe. But like most symbols of Europe, Tartu’s identity was hotly contested. The Swedish Empire founded Tartu University in the Thirty Years War in 1632 to perpetuate the Lutheran integration of European society, but clashed with the local Baltic German colonial elite about establishing a place in the university for the Estonian, Liv, and Latvian “languages and people of the land” (Chapter 3). In 1802 Tartu was re-founded and rebuilt as the only German-speaking university in the Russian Empire, charged by the Minister of Enlightenment, Sergei Uvarov, with the Europeanization of an indigenous Russian intelligentsia in 1827; but Tartu did less to underwrite Uvarov’s “Official Nationality” than to perpetuate unofficial ones with its German scholars and national fraternities—Russian, Estonian, Latvian, Armenian, Ukrainian, Polish, and Jewish—all founded on the German model (Chapter 4). After Estonian national independence in 1919, Tartu’s illustrious imperial past enhanced the European pedigree of its newly minted national statesmen, but also checked the cultural legitimacy of the national capital in Tallinn (Chapter 5). Finally, as a Soviet university from 1944, Tartu was supposed to educate a new Soviet Estonian intelligentsia, but did more to defamiliarize the Soviet center with Tartu’s European past (Chapters 6 to 8).

Underlying the welter of all these institutional ruptures in the political identity of Tartu University was a slow, creeping transformation in the identity of “the people of the land,” as peasants across Europe tended to call themselves after their earliest encounter with the medieval Church. Conquered, colonized, and converted by Pope Celestine III’s “Livonian Crusade” of the thirteenth century, the Baltic tribes nonetheless remained ambivalent toward Christianity.10 The “Singing Revolution” that marked the end of Soviet rule in the Baltic States and eventually their entry into European Union might be seen as the final chapter in a story of pagan and Lutheran syncretism that began when a young Lutheran pastor stationed in Riga in the 1760s, Johann Gottfried Herder, started collecting Estonian and Latvian folksongs (among those of many others nations) and proclaimed the pagan folksong “the living voice of nations, indeed, of Humankind itself.”11 Estonia’s first national song festival took place one hundred years later in Tartu in 1869, and after it moved to Tallinn it became a strand of continuity, linking Estonian national

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10 In fact, the Lithuanian tribes resisted the incursions of the Livonian Order, and were Christianized even later.
11 Herder included seven Estonian folksongs, translated into German, in his collection *Folksongs (Volkslieder)* when it was published in two volumes in 1778-9; this work was became *The Voices of Nations in Song (Stimmen der Völker in Liedern)* when a second edition appeared in 1806, making the explicit link between the folksong and national identity even stronger.
identity in the Russian Empire, Estonian Republic, and Soviet Union with seven, four, and ten national song festivals organized in each of these periods respectively.\textsuperscript{12}

By organizing the study and collection of pagan Estonian folksongs and folklore through its German-speaking “Learned Estonian Society” (founded in 1838), Tartu University turned peasants into Estonians. But at the same time, by examining them in German in the context of a wider and more universal Lutheran tradition, it turned Estonians into Europeans. Among the last peoples to stake a claim as legitimate Europeans, the Estonians came to inherit in the Soviet Union the cultural function and identity of the recently departed Baltic Germans and Swedes, sent “home” under the terms of the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939. Where the exploration and study of the furthest reaches of the Russian Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries fell to Germanic and Scandinavian names like Bering, Baer, and Wrangell, in the twentieth century it was a Tartu-trained Estonian scholar, Lennart Meri, whose travelogue translated the Koryaks of Kamchatka for a German-speaking readership in Leipzig in 1968.\textsuperscript{13} Nothing grasps the symbolic resonance of this cultural transformation like the disproportionate use of Balts, and especially Estonians, with their unmistakable “pribaltiiskie” accents, to represent Germans in late Soviet cinema. These roles ranged from Tsarina Alexandra Fedorovna, played by the Estonian actress Vera Lina in Elem Klimov’s 1973 depiction of the final days of the Russian Empire, \textit{Agonia}, to hundreds of Nazi roles in films spanning from the 1950s to the 1980s.\textsuperscript{14} Yuri Slezkine has observed that “The Estonians... who in nineteenth-century Russia tended to be portrayed as ‘sullen Finns’ and inarticulate rural barbarians (\textit{chukhontsy}), came to represent the epitome of Western development and sophistication after their reincorporation into the empire in 1940.”\textsuperscript{15} By its Lutheran and German Bildung of the pagan Estonian nation over the course of three and a half centuries, Tartu University turned Estonia into the most European national republic of the Soviet “semiosphere.”\textsuperscript{16}

The “semiosphere” was a term invented by Yuri Lotman in Soviet Tartu to describe the world as a linguistic system, the “semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages.”\textsuperscript{17} It was modeled on Vladimir Vernadsky’s concept of the “biosphere.”\textsuperscript{18} But Lotman stressed the divisions within its internal space as much as its overarching unity:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{12} These festivals are chronicled at the Museum of the Song Festival (Laulupeomuseum) at 14 Jaama Street. in Tartu, Estonia. The museum opened its doors in 2007. “The exhibition is focused on the first and also the second song festival, the centennial celebration of the song festivals in 1969 and on the birth of the tradition of song festivals of student and boys’ choirs (1956 and 1976 respectively) in Tartu, the university town and the cradle of Estonian national conscience.” http://linnamuuseum.tartu.ee/?m=3
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Originally published as \textit{Tulemägede maale: Reisipäevk 160. Meridiaanilt [In the Land of Fire Mountains: A Travelogue 160 degrees from the Meridian]} (Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1964), the German translation \textit{Es zog uns nach Kamtschatka} [We were carried to Kamtschatka] (Leipzig 1968), was based on the Russian translation, \textit{V poiskakh poteriannoi ulybki [In search of a lost smile]} (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1965).
  \item \textsuperscript{14} The Nazi roles portrayed by Baltic actors like the Estonian Tõnu Aav, Latvian Uldis Lieldežis, and Lithuanian Algimantas Masulis in late Soviet films is the subject of the Estonian Documentary Film \textit{Nazis and Blondes [Fritsud ja blondiinid]} (2008) by Arbo Tammiksaare. Tammiksaare attempts to chronicle how the easy identifications of Baltic people with “Nazis” in Russia today was produced in Soviet cinema by the use of Baltic actors to play these roles in Soviet cinema for nearly fifty years.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Yuri Slezkine, \textit{Arctic Mirrors}, 390-391.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} The irony of this transformation was enhanced by the fact that the Estonians, unlike the Russians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Belorusians, Moldovans, or even Tadzhiks of Central Asia, spoke a Uralic rather than an Indo-European language.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} “The Semiosphere” (1984) in Yuri Lotman, \textit{The Universe of the Mind}. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 123.
\end{itemize}
The structure of the semiosphere is asymmetrical. Asymmetry finds expression in the currents of internal translations with which the whole density of the semiosphere is permeated. Translation is a primary mechanism of consciousness. To express something in another language is a way of understanding it. And since in the majority of cases the different languages of the semiosphere are semiotically asymmetrical, i.e. they do not have mutual semantic correspondences, then the whole semiosphere can be regarded as a generator of information. Asymmetry is apparent in the relationship between the center of the semiosphere and its periphery. In this somewhat opaque commentary upon linguistic transparency, Lotman suggested that what is lost and found in translation lies at the root of all our knowledge and imagination. Translations of the language of the center into the language of the periphery and vice versa are as interesting for their “semiotic asymmetries”—for what they fail to express (their silences) and for what they express in excess (their noise)—as for their capacity to render transparently the meaning of any text in another tongue. Years earlier, Lotman had written that “[t]he combination of translatability-untranslatability (each to different degrees) is what determines the creative function.”

One of the assumptions of my work, following Yuri Lotman, is that in every incarnation of the “semiosphere” where Tartu has played a part (imperial, national, and Soviet), centers and peripheries have been mutually constitutive, asymmetrical “generators of information.” In the nineteenth century, Tartu University served the Russian Empire both as a distorting mirror upon itself and a second window to the west. Tartu-trained scholars populated the ranks of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, studied the furthest reaches of the imperial periphery, and translated Europe for Russia into distinctly bürgerlich, German-speaking terms, to offset the francophone Europe imagined in the aristocratic salons of imperial Saint Petersburg. After twenty years of Estonian independence, no place in the Soviet semiosphere stood better poised than Tartu to provide its own alternative, small-town, peripheral perspective upon the Russian soul or the “imaginary west” imagined in the “deterritorialized milieus” of the Soviet metropole.

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18 Vernadsky coined the term biosphere in 1926, but it wasn’t until the 1960s and 70s that this kind of global thinking, became universally popular with the emergence of concepts like Marshall McLuhan’s “global village,” Kenneth Boulding’s “Spaceship earth,” and Lester Brown’s “world without borders,” not to mention the dissemination of iconic images like the “Earthrise” photograph taken on the Apollo 8 mission (1968). American president Lyndon Johnson sent a copy of this photograph to every major head of state.


21 See Alexei Yurchak’s study, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. 
The Core and Periphery of the Soviet Semiosphere

On the frontiers of China, of the Roman Empire, of Byzantium, we see the same thing: the technical achievements of the settled civilization pass into the hands of the nomads who turn them against their inventors. But these conflicts inevitably lead to cultural equalization and to the creation of a new semiosphere of more elevated order in which both parties can be included as equals.

–Yuri Lotman

Yuri Lotman’s dialectical account of a conflict between core and periphery that culminates in a “a new semiosphere of more elevated order in which both parties can be included as equals” echoed the official view of core-periphery relations in the Soviet Union. This vision has also found widespread currency among Western scholars eager to save the Soviet Union from the charge that it was “just like” traditional colonial empires. Francine Hirsch has written that “[u]nlike Tsarist Russia or the European colonial powers, which defined their metropoles in opposition to their colonized peripheries, the Soviet Union defined itself as a postcolonial multinational state that was the sum of all its parts.”

Soviet Union may indeed have been the sum of its part, but the relationship of its parts—and especially its languages—deserves a closer look.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, two new strands have emerged in Soviet studies to complicate our understanding of the Soviet experiment and its constituent parts. Each has focused mainly, though not exclusively, on the 1930s; each has sought to make sense of the unexpected and often unintended ways in which the Bolsheviks built a new world. Where scholars once debated the making of the Soviet Union politically from above and socially from below during the Cold War, the new map of Soviet studies—like that of many fields in the humanities and social sciences since the Second World War—has acquired a lateral rather than vertical orientation, a core and a periphery, a “Soviet self” and “Soviet nationalities.”

Studies of the “Soviet self” have identified Soviet civilization with the Russian-speaking core of the Soviet Union. Some of the most prominent include Stephen Kotkin’s magisterial microhistory of Magnitogorsk, Igal Halifin’s interpretation of Soviet autobiographies, Jochen Hellbeck’s reading of Soviet diaries, Alexei Yurchak’s ethnography of the social world and experience of the “Last Soviet Generation.” Each in its own way has sought to reconstruct the making of a distinctly Soviet self within the parameters of a uniquely Soviet language.

22 Lotman, The Universe of the Mind, 142.
24 As in Lotman’s “semiosphere” an asymmetrical core-periphery worldview can be found in the economic “dependency theory” developed by Hans Singer and Raul Prebisch in Argentina (1949), and the global theory of world-systems developed by Immanuel Wallerstein in America under the influence of Fernand Braudel (1970s). But even in fields that do not subscribe to the theoretical views of Lotman, Singer, Prebisch, or Wallerstein the idea of core and periphery relationships have acquired a structural presence in organizing knowledge, as in the field of French literature—where the literature of the metropole is now offset by the “francophone” literature of the postcolonial periphery.
Kotkin investigated the role of the “Grand Strategies of the State” in building socialism and the “Little Tactics of the Habitat” in living it. The phrase Kotkin used to bridge the gap, “Speaking Bolshevik,” set the agenda for studies of “Soviet subjectivity” by Halfin and Hellbeck, who read Soviet diaries and autobiographies as tools of linguistic self-reinvention, attempts by Soviet citizens to transform the “spontaneity” of their peasant and national origins into authentically cosmopolitan, Russian-speaking Soviet “consciousness.” In his case study of the Great Purge at Leningrad Communist University, “the flagship of the new, revolutionized education,” Halfin chronicled how students denounced one another and “Stalinist language bested their wills” infecting all levels of communication, from private “letters and diaries” to “NKVD internal memoranda” to the “deliberations at Central Committee level”: “Words, idioms, turns of phrase, even jokes remained almost identical. This interchangeability highlights the versatility of the Stalinist language, its ability to address any audience without losing its internal coherence.”

Alexei Yurchak carried Kotkin’s idea of “speaking Bolshevik” under the Bakhtinian banner of “authoritative discourse” into the period of “Late Socialism,” spanning from the 1950s to the 1980s. After the death of Stalin, argued Yurchak, the language of the state underwent a “performative shift.” The vast majority of Soviet citizens, neither apparatchiks nor dissidents, continued speaking the language of the Bolshevik Party. In fact, the language hardened and barely changed at all over the next thirty-five years. But in the absence of an unquestioned authority like Lenin or a Stalin to enforce the official line, their relationship to that language changed. Yurchak’s study included respondents from several different Russian-speaking urban centers—Moscow, Kaliningrad, Smolensk, Sovietsk, Novosibirsk, Yakutsk, and Penza. But at the empirical core of this work was Leningrad and especially “Inna and her friends,” former students at the State University of Leningrad in the 1970s and 80s.

For Yurchak, various officially sanctioned gathering spaces—including the “Literary Club Derzanie,” Archaeological Circle, or even Leningrad University’s Komsomol organization—permitted free and open discussion on all manner of unintended topics. Yurchak called these spaces “detterritorialized milieus” and the intense intersubjectivity (obshchenie) they encouraged an unintended, if distinctly Soviet self (svoi), who imaginatively lived outside (vnye) or beyond the borders (zagranitsa) of the authoritative discourse in an “imaginary west,” while still inhabiting the authoritative discourse “performatively.” From all this he drew the conclusion:

Instead of thinking about various local milieus of svoi and their practices as periods and spaces of authenticity and freedom that were ‘carved out’ of and suspended outside state socialism, and from which that system was resisted and opposed, we should rather


26 Jochen Hellbeck speculated about the use of the Russian language in the diary of one of his star sources, the son of a Ukrainian kulak, Stepan Podlubny: “Podlubny probably wrote the lyrics to gain proficiency in Russian, which was still a foreign language for him.” For Hellbeck, keeping a diary was a technique Podlubny used to transform himself into a more cosmopolitan and universal (i.e. Russian-speaking) Soviet human being. Hellbeck, *Revolution*, 169.


consider them as phenomena that were actively engaged in and productive of a shifting socialist system.\textsuperscript{30}

Under “really existing Socialism” the vast majority of really existing Soviet people were like Inna. They did not rebel against the system or aspire to “live in truth,” like Vaclav Havel, but rather to a “normal life” within the constraints of their Socialist language and civilization. Sergei Dovlatov’s striking portrait of the writer Joseph Brodsky was Yurchak’s exaggerated prototype for the “selfhood” of this last Soviet generation:

He did not struggle with the regime. He simply did not notice it. He was not really aware of its existence. His lack of knowledge in the sphere of Soviet life could appear feigned. For example, he was certain the Dzerzhinskii was alive. And that the Comintern was the name of a musical group. He could not identify members of the politburio of the Central Committee. When the façade of the building he lived was decorate with a six-meter portrait of Mzhavanadze, Brodsky asked: ‘Who is this? He looks like William Blake.’\textsuperscript{31}

Like Dovlatov’s Brodsky, the members of Yurchak’s last Soviet generation seemed to live in a self-contained virtual reality of their own making, oblivious to the world of their parents or people at the margins of the Soviet experience (other Soviet national republics, dissidents, or activists). Though Yurchak’s “last Soviet generation” lacked the ideological enthusiasm and single-mindedness of the first Soviet generation of the 1930s studied by Kotkin, Hellbeck, and Halfin, they exhibited the same self-enclosed, presentist lack of awareness or interest in anything that did not conform to their own particular brand of Soviet “consciousness.”

Studies of “Soviet nationalities” have defined Soviet civilization by the very thing purged from the study of the “Soviet self”—i.e. its multiethnic and multilingual periphery and the tenacity of the past in shaping the present. Many joined Yuri Slezkine in noticing the “chronic ethnophilia of the Soviet regime” and the “earnestness of Bolshevik efforts on behalf of ethnic particularism” to enable its nationalities to speak for themselves, each in its own particular native tongue.\textsuperscript{32} In some cases this meant studying the floor plan of the Soviet “Communal Apartment” and the history of its development.\textsuperscript{33} In others, it meant rummaging about in the individual rooms and their national languages to find out what actually went on in them.\textsuperscript{34} But it always meant situating the Russian core in relation to its non-Russian periphery, to the peoples of the “sea,” “mountains,” “steppe,” or “tundra” as they were styled in the geographical determinism that Soviet ethnography inherited from the Russian empire, and perpetuated almost despite itself

\textsuperscript{30} Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, 157.
\textsuperscript{31} Dovlatov as quoted in Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, 127.
at Leningrad’s Ethnographic Museum.35 For Soviet “consciousness” was produced as much in the reflected “spontaneity” of its Nenets-speaking, reindeer-herding, “Arctic mirrors” (its “last among equals”) as its Russian peasants.36

The production of a new kind of Soviet people was also a story of various internal ethnic migrations beyond the assigned rooms of the Slozkyine’s “communal apartment.”37 Some were state-sponsored and violent, like the deportations of the Volga Germans (1941), the Karachi and Kalmyks (1943), the Crimean Tartars, and Chechen-Ingush nations from their native homelands (1944).38 Others were voluntary quests for upward mobility, like the relocations of the members of various ethnic groups to urban centers. One of the Soviet Union’s most successful “internal diasporas,” the Georgians, infused Soviet civilization with a distinctly Georgian flavor, bringing their food, dance, music, film, and customs to Moscow and Leningrad and pretty much everywhere else.39 (Even Tartu has two Georgian restaurants today). At the same times, Jews came to set the invisible standard for universally transparent Soviet “consciousness” as they migrated from the Shtetl in the Pale of the Settlement to the Soviet Union’s metropolitan core, foregoing the secular Yiddish-speaking Jewish homeland Stalin established for them in the Soviet Far East in 1934.40 In many cases, they became more expert Russian-speaking custodians of metropolitan Soviet culture (including Russian national culture) than their Russian hosts themselves.41

In Moscow The Fourth Rome: Cosmopolitanism, Stalinism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931—1941, Katerina Clark followed four such “cosmopolitan patriots” from the non-
Russian Western periphery of the Russian Empire to the Soviet capital. All had at least one Jewish parent; all had a multilingual upbringing; all belonged to the Soviet intelligentsia; none was born in Moscow. Two of them, Sergei Eisenstein and Mikhail Tretiakov, grew up in the Baltic and spoke more German at home than Russian. Years later in 1933 Eisenstein would proclaim that “Moscow as a concept is the concentration of the socialist future of the entire world.” Thus, Moscow as a capital of a world civilization was born at its core in the eyes and words of its non-Russian periphery.

Representing two different research programs, the “Soviet self” and “Soviet nationalities” also reflect two different ontologies of Soviet civilization. One derives from the Russian-speaking core of the Soviet experience, the other from the encounter between the Russian core and non-Russian periphery. Nowhere is the divide between them more visible than in a juxtaposition of Katerina Clark’s Moscow in the mid-1930s and Alexei Yurchak’s Leningrad in the mid-1970s. The cosmopolitanism of the former, following Yuri Slezkine’s Jewish Century, is produced by multilingual, ethnic others, who came to the center from the periphery to “translate” Moscow for the world and the world for Moscow as cultural “intermediaries” on the basis of their very real international experience. The cosmopolitanism of the latter, by contrast, is entirely self-contained, produced within the “deterritorialized” spaces of the city, by a svoi (self) who lived vnye (outside or beyond) in an “imaginary west,” engaged in more solipsistic “dialogism” than actual dialogue.

The idea of multivocality was central to Yurchak’s vision of the “last Soviet generation,” despite the absence of a non-Russian periphery from his account. As Yurchak wrote, “The authorial voice is always deeply decentered and multivoiced, the point that Bakhtin, one of the inspirations of this book, argued forcefully. This book could only become possible because of the multiple temporal, spatial, and cultural decenterings of my authorial self.” Elsewhere, following Bakhtin, Yurchak stressed that the “speaking self” is “never bounded or static but always ‘dialogized’” and moreover that “speaking implies inhabiting multiple voices that are not ‘self-enclosed or deaf to one another’ but that ‘hear each other constantly, call back and forth to each other, and are reflected in one another’.”

In performative practice, however, Yurchak’s Bakhtinian view of a metropolitan Soviet “speaking self” seems to insulate the very idea of the “Soviet self” against foreign languages, dissenting voices, or the past. For if one claims a priori that the “speaking self” or “voice” is “never bounded” and “always dialogized” then comparatively univocal apparatchiks and dissidents cease to be “speaking voices” at all. Playing Yurchak’s own game and reading dialogism “performatively” to see how it is deployed in this text—rather than “constatively” as Yurchak reads Bakhtin—one could argue that “dialogism” becomes another authoritative discourse of the kind it was designed to challenge and dispel. Legitimized by its internal Bakhtinian “dialogism,” the newly “rehumanized” Soviet self earns the right to ignore its non-Russian speaking voices and pathologize its univocal dissidents and activists by labeling them ne normal’nye (“not normal”). The high incidence of untranslatable Russian words in Yurchak’s evocation of this experience (svoi, vnye, obshchenie, zagranitsa) cannot help but raise the question, could people for whom Russian was not a native language or a primary mode of self-

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43 Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, 33.
44 Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, 19.
expression or self-identification, hope to share in this version of the Soviet experience without becoming Russians themselves?

Yurchak claimed his mission was “to contemplate and rehumanize Soviet socialist life.” In his book the drab gray world of late socialism became colorful, multivocal, ambivalent and thoroughly postmodern. “The True Colors of Communism” Yurchak playfully proposed were “King Crimson, Deep Purple, and Pink Floyd.” But what did these colors and this version of the “rehumanized” Soviet self have to do with the colorful ethnic rituals on display today at the national pavilions of Moscow’s “All-Union Exhibition Center” or the transformative migrations of various peoples—some to the Siberian tundra, others to the metropolitan center of the Soviet Union? Which were the “true colors” of the new humanity that the Soviet Union unintentionally produced? Were they the ethnically opaque, internal passport-bear Soviet nationalities that Yuri Slezkine found in the rooms of the “Communal Apartment” and in the encounter between the Soviet Union’s rootless “mercurians” and its rooted “apollonians”? Or were they instead the ethnically transparent, multivocal, universally human Soviet selves that Alexei Yurchak found in the “detterritorialized,” spaces of the Russian-speaking core? Could these be one and the same Soviet people?

For nearly forty years Bakhtin has enchanted western cultural studies with magical words like “polyphony,” “dialogism,” “carnival,” and “heteroglossia.” These words have charmed scholars by their apparent success in resolving the internal contradictions of modern society, promoting respect for differences on the one hand, while integrating those differences into a more urbane, humane and cosmopolitan whole on the other.

Bakhtin’s thought is often traced back to the multilingual and multiethnic cities of his youth, Vilnius and Odessa, two of the most talkative urban centers in the periphery of the Russian Empire. Michael Holquist and Katerina Clark have drawn this connection explicitly:

The Vilinus 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 the ossification and stagnation of thought.

But for others who had their Bildung in the somewhat smaller towns of this multiethnic, multilingual world, like Ludwig Zamenhof (1859—1917), the inventor of Esperanto, Russia’s periphery was teaching a very different lesson:

The place where I was born and spent my childhood gave direction to all my future struggles. In Bialystok the inhabitants were divided into four distinct elements: Russians, Poles, Germans and Jews; each of these spoke their own language and looked on all the others as enemies. In such a town a sensitive nature feels more acutely than elsewhere the misery caused by language division and sees at every step that the diversity of languages is the first, or at least the most influential, basis for the separation of the human family

46 Yurchak, Chapter 6.
into groups of enemies. I was brought up as an idealist; I was taught that all people were brothers, while outside in the street at every step I felt that there were no people, only Russians, Poles, Germans, Jews and so on.\textsuperscript{48}

Where Bakhtin heard “polyphony,” Zamenhof heard cacophony. Where Bakhtin celebrated Babel as a value in itself, an antidote to any “single language of truth,” Zamenhof invented a “single language of truth” to end Babel, based on the “conclusion that the only language acceptable to all nations would be a language that belonged equally to all nations, that was not the language of oppressor or oppressed, that was free from painful memories.”\textsuperscript{49}

As a tool of historical interpretation Bakhtin’s concepts have been very useful in showing how official discourse is permeated with lower body humor and Rabelasian “carnival,” in challenging the vaunted purity of any speaking voice with its own internal “polyphony,” in tearing down conceptual walls and boundaries more generally by “heteroglossia” and “dialogism.” But Bakhtin is considerably less useful in explaining how cultural misunderstandings harden into antagonisms, how walls become intractable or linguistic chasms unbridgeable, or for that matter why Ludwig Zamenhof and Esperanto had such widespread appeal in the first half of the twentieth century in the first place.

The bilingual world of small-town Tartu University cannot be understood either in the categories of Mikhail Bakhtin or Ludwig Zamenhof. Neither leaves room for solitude, privacy, or meaningful forms of independence. In a Zamenhofian world one language of truth drowns out all others; in a Bakhtinian world where “the word is a two-sided act,” the deep silences of human experience are drowned out by relentless metropolitan babble. The voices of the center and the periphery of the semiosphere have always carried different memories, spoken different languages, and often inhabited mutually incomprehensible “lifeworlds” (Lebenswelten).\textsuperscript{50} Much of their encounter throughout history has been a silence lost in translation.

Where “being silent” in English merely signifies the absence of speech or sound, active verbs in Estonian (\textit{vaikima}), Russian (\textit{molchat’}), or German (\textit{schweigen}) turn silences into a self-conscious, signifying acts. The paleontologist, Stephen Jay Gould, has addressed the vital role unheard silences in both culture and science in a brilliant little essay, “Cordelia’s Dilemma”:

\begin{quote}
[King] Lear’s tragic error, which shall lead to blinding, madness, and death, lies in not recognizing that silence—overt nothing—can embody the deepest and most important meaning of all. What, in all our history and literature, has been more eloquent than the silence of Jesus before Pilate, or Saint Thomas More’s date with the headsman…? The importance of negative results—nature’s apparent silence or nonacquiescence to our expectations—is also a major concern in science.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{50} See Edmund Husserl, \textit{Die Krises der europäischen Wissenschaften und die trnaszendentale Phänomenologie} (1936).
\end{flushright}
For Gould, the reluctance to publish studies with “silent” results skews our perception of scientific truth, just as we fail to hear the “silences” of the fossil record for what they really are. It seems human beings prefer to fill silence with texts, to believe in “missing links” that satisfy the demands of theory or ideology—like the “Piltdown Man” (20th century) the “Donation of Constantine” (12th to 15th centuries) or “Ossian’s” Scottish national epic (18th to 19th centuries)—than confront the possibility that silence itself is the objective reality that should inspire and guide our investigation.52

In Herman Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener, a Story of Wall Street” it is the silence of the title character rather than his speech that threatens his employer’s comfortable vision of a Protestant American society working for the benefit of all; likewise in Moby-Dick it is the “whiteness of the whale,” the silent blankness of the other, its refusal to mean anything at all—that inspires the “fiery hunt” in the first place. Often viewed as sacred, silence is the deep bond that unites belief and unbelief:

All profound things and emotions of things are preceded and attended by Silence. …. Yea, in silence the child Christ was born into the world. Silence is the general consecration of the universe. Silence is the invisible laying on of the Divine Pontiff’s hands upon the world. Silence is at once the most harmless and the most awful thing in all nature. It speaks of the Reserved Forces of Fate. Silence is the only Voice of our God.53

After his arrest and nearly thirty years of silent withdrawal, even Bakthin turned late in life to contemplating the varieties of silence that hide behind the Russian words tishina and molchanie. For some, it was in this period that he became an icon of Russian Orthodox belief:

Quietude and sound. The perception of sound (against the background of quietude). Quietude and silence (the absence of the word). The pause and the beginning of the word… In quietude nothing makes a sound (or something does not make a sound); in silence nobody speaks (or somebody does not speak). Silence is possible only in the human world (and only for man).54

Tartu is a good place to begin to hear and contemplate the deep silences, the dark matter as it were, of the Soviet semiosphere. For in the Soviet “Friendship of the Peoples” there was no nation more silent or aloof than the Estonians, no Babel more hushed than Tartu. No part of the Soviet semiosphere gave better opportunities for undisturbed thought or was better at holding its tongue in important culturally productive ways than Tartu. Its silences played a role in several remarkable cultural achievements after the Second World War, like the Tartu School of Semiotics or the composition of Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s Gulag Archipelago, to say nothing of the work of Estonian scholars, who were so successfully insulated by the Estonian language

52 The Piltdown Man “discovered” in 1912 was an elaborate hoax that was supposed to fill a missing link in human evolution; “The Donation of Constantine” was a medieval forgery that gave authority to the Pope in Rome over Christendom; James MacPherson claimed to have discovered and “translated” the Scottish National Epic “Ossian,” which it turned out he wrote.
53 Herman Melville, Pierre, or the Ambiguities, ed. H. Hayford, H. Parker, G. Tanselle (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 204.
against wider inclusion or incorporation into a more general Soviet experience that they remain inaudible to non-Estonian speakers to this day.

Estonia’s foremost indigenous intellectual of the twentieth century, Uku Masing (1905-1985) is best known for his silence while sheltering the Latvian-born Jewish folklorist, Isidor Levin during the Nazi occupation of Tartu. An explicitly Lutheran theologian, and polyglot, who translated the bible into Estonian directly from Hebrew, Masing, who had studied in Germany in the 1930s, always sought to oppose true “Estonianness to Germanness,” stressing Estonians ties to pre-Christian pagan languages and beliefs, famous for his declaration that like the Estonians, like the Irish are not truly a “white” race. He was deprived of his professorship by the Soviet state and lived out the remaining four decades of his life in nearly total silence, known less for what he thought or wrote than for the fact that he could not be heard. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, five volumes of his poetry and thousands of pages of his academic writings and notes on various theological and linguistic questions appeared in print for the first time: The World from the Perspective of a Theologian (1990), The Reason for Pessimism (1995), Buddhism (1995), The Estonian Religion (1995), Memoirs of Plants (1996), We Have Hope (1998), A General History of Belief (2000), The Religion of Polynesia (2004) Language and Mind (2004), Uku Masing and the Bible (2005). Masing’s silence clearly informed the intense spirituality of his life and writings; but even more it informed the spirituality of his reception. If Uku Masing is something of an Estonian martyr and saint, it was more for his silence—the fact that he was alone, unheard, and unrecognized, spurned by the world—than for anything he actually said.

To some extent, Estonian-speakers and Russian-speakers in Soviet Tartu lived in two separate Tartus, insulated against one another by their languages and the silence between them, a silence that was perhaps more exaggerated in Tartu than in any other part of the non-Russian Soviet periphery. Though official Soviet statistics ranked Estonians as the most literate nation in the Soviet Union, the same statistics reported that Estonians had the worst proficiency in Russian. Conversely, the rules of engagement in Soviet Tartu rarely compelled (and in some cases did not permit) Russian-speaking students and professors to learn the language of the titular nationality of Estonia well enough to make it a lingua franca. Tartu State University institutionalized and perpetuated this divide. It segregated students into groups according to their national languages and fields of study. They would then attend all their required classes together with the same group of students, leaving little time or opportunity for contacts outside the group. Most of the native Russian speakers among the teaching staff were clustered together in the departments of Russian Language, Literature, and the so-called “red disciplines”—i.e. Political Economy, Marxist-Leninist Philosophy, and Scientific Communism. Moreover, students (and to a lesser extent professors) lived in informally segregated housing and rarely studied in departments devoted to each other’s national experience.

But it would be equally misleading to imagine that Russian- and Estonian-speaking spheres of Tartu constituted coherent national blocks or communities. For Tartu’s social and academic world was fragmented along many different lines of silence. Innumerable identity-groups regarded one another suspiciously from afar, and gave each other a wide berth. Many, like the department of Russian literature, the Tartu School, Tartu’s Scandinavianists, the Sociological circle, the Oriental Institute, the Mother Tongue Society, the devotees of Uku Masing, the department of Finno-Ugric studies—imagined themselves as tragic martyrs and

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55 The art historian Boris Bernstein is a notable exception here, though the fact that he lived in Tallinn rather than Tartu, might have something to do with his greater engagement with Estonian culture and society.
embattled victims of a world that conspired against them, relatively oblivious to the fact that what they took to be the Romantic uniqueness and originality of their own personal embattled predicament made them exactly like everybody else in Tartu.

Even the most intimate spheres were not immune to doubt about their members. For it was common knowledge from the 1960s onward—whether or not it was true or not is another story—that every formal collective had its KGB informer, and much silent thought and energy went into finding out who, among one’s intimates this person might be, since a faceless enemy is always the most terrifying. But as a consequence, the intimate circles of Soviet Tartu ostracized and excluded many more imaginary KGB informers than real ones. In any case, Tartu society proved structurally incapable of achieving Yurchak’s easy standard for intimacy where “[a]nyone could become svoi through obshchenie, and, conversely, was not svoi if they refused to participate in obshchenie.” In bilingual Tartu, obshchenie was earned, not given, and the inveterate shyness of the townsfolk with regard to strangers made those who sought it out with excessive alacrity seem like they were drunk, mad, or agents of the state. Unaccustomed to Estonians’ capacity for silence, baffled Russian-speakers would sometimes turn to their Estonian neighbors with the impossible question: “Why don’t you respect us?” (“pochemu vy ne uvazhaete nas?”). To this inquiry the most common Estonian response was silence.

Of course there were exceptions, cultural intermediaries, who moved back and forth between various intimate spheres. But these were the most suspicious figures of all. One was Valmar Adams, a shape-shifting polyglot in Lotman’s department of Russian literature, who went by many names, (Vilmar, Valmar, Vladimir), and taught Yuri Lotman and his colleagues in the department of Russian literature, Boris Egorov, much of what they knew—or thought they knew—about Estonians, perpetuating several apocryphal legends in the process. (According to Adams, Estonians believed that Lotman wore his moustache out of deference to Comrade Stalin and were stunned by the fact that he did not shave it off after Stalin’s death; this legend survives into the pages of Boris Egorov’s 1998 biography of Yuri Lotman). Russian-speakers took Adams for an Estonian; Estonian-speakers took him for a Russian, and each blamed his moral failings on the cultural shortcomings of the other nation. For Adams was loud, arrogant, unreliable, and bombastic—like a Russian! But he was also petty, stingy, stubborn, and self-absorbed—like an Estonian! Equally at home in both languages, Adams became a foreigner to both worlds, grumbling towards the end of his long life in Tartu (1899—1991) that he had never lived under a state where things were good for him. Indeed, he had served prison sentences in three of them—the Estonian Republic, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union—for “collaboration” with the other two. From the beginning the identity of Tartu and its University lay in the interstices between several different languages, but also several different states. In the twentieth century alone the state flag on the top of the main building changed seven times.

Those, who tried to cross the internal divides of Tartu often got stuck in the silent no-man’s land in between. And those who managed to forge new friendships or new communities often did so by means of a third more neutral or scholarly language—English, French, German, Esperanto, Semiotics, or in some more rare and colorful cases, Farsee, Arabic, Danish, Chinese, Hebrew, or Swahili. In fact these “third” languages proved as important in building trust within the internally fractured Estonian- and Russian-speaking worlds of Soviet Tartu as in overcoming the Russian-Estonian linguistic divide.

56 Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, 149.
57 The memory of this question from the Soviet era is a common Estonian cultural trope today, and appeared in several of my interviews with Soviet era Tartu scholars.
But as much as it divided people, Tartu also held them together in interesting and unexpected ways, forging unexpected identities and communities in the process. The most internationally famous community born of Tartu and its silences was the Tartu School of Semiotics. Where the differences and disagreements of its members often devolved into personal attacks and backbiting in Moscow and Leningrad, Tartu University somehow held the school together—as a name, a language, a spiritual destination, a source of inspiration, a sacred memory, a common prayer, a pure and unadulterated symbol of academic purity and the integration of all knowledge, the very ideal of the nineteenth-century European University at its romantic origins after the French Revolution.58

In his writings on the semiosphere, Yuri Lotman mused that “the inner world reproduces the cosmos.”59 If this is true, the social world of Tartu ought to be seen as the unacknowledged inspiration for—perhaps even the unstated microcosm of—Lotman’s semiosphere. In Soviet Tartu the silent divide between the languages of the center and periphery reached down into the lives and works of individual scholars and structured them as much as it divided and fragmented their interactions with each other, producing a curiously bifurcated vision of the world, Tartu, and even the self among many of its scholars. Quoting Goethe’s Faust in German in his last scholarly work, Lotman gave eloquent expression to this divide:

Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach, in meinen Brust!
Die eine will sich von der andern trennen.60

[Two souls alas, reside within my breast!
And each withdraws from, and repels, its brother]61

One of Lotman’s souls was born of his silent encounter with the Soviet Union’s non-Russian periphery, where it spoke in the universal scientific language of semiotics of the inadequacy of any one tongue to express reality and the limits of “translatability.” Lotman’s other soul lived in the Russian core of the Soviet Union, in a hermetically sealed bubble that had never left its home in Leningrad and spoke in vaguely hagiographic Romantic terms that would do credit to Novalis of the capacity of any language to body forth its own internal reality (“Dann fliegt vor Einem geheimen Wort/ Das ganze verkehrte Wesen fort.”), to create its own self-contained existence independent from and indifferent to all other languages:

Petersburg does not have its own point of view on itself—it has always to posit a spectator. In this sense both Westerners and Slavophiles are equally the creation of Petersburg culture. It was typical in Russia to find a Westerner who had never been to

58 See Boris Bernstein’s account of the multidimensional internal discourse of the Tartu School members in his memoirs, pointing out certain passive aggressive attacks and reproaches. Bernstein writes, for example, of the tensions between A. Zholkovsky and Yuri Lotman, taking his cues from Zholkovsky’s own memoirs. Boris Berstein, Vana Kaev (Tartu 2009), 345. See also the essays in Sergei-Nekliudov, Moskovsko-Tartuskaia Shkola.
59 Lotman, The Universe of the Mind, 140.
61 To complete the quote, though Lotman does not, one soul clings to the ground, while the other flies off into the Cosmos. “Die eine hält, in derber Liebeslust, Sich an die Welt mit klammernden Organen; Die andere hebt gewaltsam sich vom Dust Zu den gefilden hoher Ahnen.”
the West, knew no Western languages and was not even interested in the real West. Turgenev walking through Paris with Belinsky was struck by his indifference to the French life on all sides of them.62

Lotman’s nineteenth-century Petersburgers seem to anticipate and foreshadow the cosmopolitan solipsism of Alexei Yurchak’s “Last Soviet Generation,” for both lived in the self-contained and hermetically sealed bubble of an “imaginary west.” The silent irony of Lotman’s claim that “Petersburg does not have its own point of view on itself,” of course, was that Lotman did not write these words from Leningrad, but from the non-Russian Soviet periphery in Tartu. While Tartu forced Soviet immigrants from the core into recognition of a non-Russian-speaking other, who did not share their view of the world, it also left them alone to their own devices and cultural codes. While Tallinn—and later Leningrad and Moscow—were besieged with Finnish television and consumer culture, Tartu remained a world apart, the perfect incubator for the lost world of the nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia and its latter-day Pushkin, Yuri Lotman.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union Lotman’s two souls have found institutional embodiment in Tartu University: one lives on in Tartu’s Estonian-speaking department of Semiotics; the other survives to this day in Tartu’s Russian-speaking department of Russian literature. Annual displays of ceremonial togetherness on Yuri Lotman’s birthday (February 2863) reproduce that lost illusion of multiethnic intimacy that was the great Soviet “Friendship of the Peoples.” But for the rest of the year they live in separate worlds in the same intimate Baltic German University town. For on the most fundamental level they are made of different languages (Russian and Estonian), and like Faust’s two souls, “each withdraws from and repels its brother.”

One of the defining cultural dramas of world history in the late twentieth century arose out of the conflict of the languages of the periphery and the languages of the center, and the silence between them, a silence that structured relationships between people, but at the same time, people within themselves. After the Second World War in the Soviet Union, this drama was born of the encounter of a Soviet core and its periphery and their mutually irreconcilable languages: the conflict between rooted nationalism and rootless cosmopolitanism, between national particularism and human universalism, between remaining true to your inherited self and becoming a new person. The life and work of Yuri Lotman, like that of all of Tartu’s scholars, was an improvised resolution to this conflict: “The serpent grows by shedding its skin,” wrote Yuri Lotman. “This is the exact symbolic expression of what goes on in the scholarly process. In order to remain true to itself, the process of cultural evolution must suddenly change at the right moment. The old skin grows tight and no longer protects, but inhibits growth.”63 There are few better observatories upon these contradictory strands of


identity and their attempted reconciliation in a wider European, and maybe even global context, than Tartu University. For there were few places within the Soviet semiosphere where the deep silence in Soviet discourse between the particularism of national identity and the universalism of humanity was rendered more audible, where the voices of the center and periphery each spoke so clearly against the background of their silent encounter in the Soviet Union’s only German university town.

**The Athens of the Ema River**

Reduced to a shadow of its former self after its incorporation into the Soviet Union in the Second World War, Tartu nonetheless remained convinced of its cosmopolitan cultural superiority to the oceanic civilization in which it lay submerged. In this sense, the Soviet Union’s “Athens of the Ema River” had little in common with the Athens of Ancient Greece. It had much more in common with the Athens of the Eastern Roman Empire after 324 AD.

In his 1853 study, *The Age of Constantine the Great*, Jacob Burckhardt wrote that when Emperor Constantine moved the seat of Imperial power to the “New Rome” in the East, Constantinople became “the expression of new conditions in the state, in religion, and in life,” and that “the Ancient history of the city, which was now regarded with heightened interest, … seemed full of presage of great future nearing fulfillment.”

Its population swelled:

From the subjugated cities [Constantine] brought a populace together at Byzantium, so that many drunkards might alternately applaud him in the theater and spew forth their wine. He was pleased with the acclamations of persons who were not in control of their senses and he rejoiced to hear his name called by men who are mindful of no name at all had it not been thrust upon them by daily usage.

This unflattering account of the cosmopolitan metropolitan center of the New Rome was taken from what Burckhardt called the “realistic and unfriendly language of the pagan Eunapius.” Eunapius was a Greek sophist and historian, born in 347 AD, the author of the *Lives of the Sophists*. Most important, he was a man educated in Athens, not Constantinople, where he taught rhetoric and grew bitterly antagonistic to the official Christian religion of the Empire that funded his endeavors in Athens.

As Burckhardt’s quotation from Eunapius implies, there was more to Byzantine civilization than its new metropolitan capital, the millennium it seemed to promise, and its drunken perspective upon itself as the culmination of world civilization. The “detrimentalized milieux” of metropolitan late Socialism (like the Leningrad café Saigon) were also alcoholic ones according to the poet Viktor Toporov in an interview, “My vypivali kazhdyi den’” [We Drank Every Day].

In his final chapter, Burckhardt located Constantinople among three other ancient cities—Rome, Jerusalem, and Athens. All three had once been centers of their own cultural worlds; now they belonged to the imperial periphery of the New Rome and its civilization. And it was of *this* Athens that Burckhardt wrote,

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65 Eunapius as quoted approvingly by Jacob Burckhardt in *Age of Constantine*, 350.
There was another city in the ancient world Empire, a city which was perhaps never named under Constantine …. The position of Athens had been greatly diminished after the Peloponnesian war, …. It had grown more and more deserted and was reduced to small compass. But the aura of glory which surrounded the city, its easy and pleasant life, the majestic monuments, the reverence for the Attic mysteries, and the awareness of the whole Hellenic world of its debt to Athens—all of this drew a continual stream of free and educated spirits to the city; philosophers and rhetors appeared, and numerous disciples followed. From the time of Hadrian—the new founder of Athens, as gratitude styled him—study burgeoned into a sort of university, which was in a way made secure by imperial endowment and later became the most important source of livelihood for the impoverished city.67

Athens was funded by the imperial capital and integrated to its Empire as a center for serious learning, or as Burckhardt proposed, indulging in a rare moment of anachronism, a “sort of university,” which saw the revival of Plato’s Academy in the fifth century with the Neoplatonist school of Plutarch, Syrianus, and Proclus.68 But its foreign languages—both literal and metaphorical—also alienated it. Until the seventh century the official “court” language of the Eastern Roman Empire was Latin.69 Athens spoke Greek. But even more important perhaps, its urban space still uttered a silent language all its own:

[...]

The Parthenon of Pallas Athene and the Propylaea looked down upon the city in their ancient and virtually undisturbed majesty; despite the Gothic incursion under Decius and despite the plunder under Constantine, perhaps most of what Pausaniaus had seen and described in the second century still survived. But the pure harmony of architectural forms, the untrammelled grandeur of the images of the gods, uttered a language that was no longer wholly intelligible to the spirit of this age.70

In the Soviet Union, Tartu had a distinctly German small-town ambiance, neither rural nor urban. It had an intimate cobblestone town square and European cafés, for it fell on the side of a civilizational divide raised on coffee rather than tea.71 The university had all the neoclassical trappings and gothic accents of a European university as imagined at the turn of the nineteenth-century: a botanical garden, a small observatory, a medical amphitheater, a museum of antiquities with a few ancient Greek sculptures, but many more Roman copies from 700 BC to 400 AD. Most had been acquired in the course of the nineteenth century.72 Until 1982 it kept its

69 To some extent Latin and Greek co-existed side by side in the Eastern Roman Empire. Greek was always the language of higher education, the majority of the citizens of Constantinople, and practical administration. See “Greek and Other Languages: Late Antiquity and the Early Byzantine Empire” in E. Jeffries, J. Haldon and Cormack, *Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 778-9.
70 The Age of Constantine the Great, 371.
71 “The first coffee shop, Kiva Han, dates back to 1475 in Istanbul, and the tradition of European Coffee houses is often traced to Vienna in 1650s, a tradition imported by a Pole who had spent nearly ten years in Istanbul established the first Coffee shop in Vienna with bags of coffee beans inherited during a Ottoman siege on Vienna…….”
university library in the ruins of the Gothic red-brick, thirteenth-century Cathedral on the hill at the center of town, where students and professors went for long walks along shaded paths and nineteenth-century footbridges past the sacred pagan Estonian sacrificial stone, the reminder of a still older faith. For Estonians and Russians alike, 1000-year-old Tartu had an air of ageless and uninterrupted European authenticity that 300-year-old Leningrad—for all its metropolitan grandeur—could never quite duplicate.

Tartu’s most visible architectural monuments, including the library in the ruins of the Cathedral and the main building of the university, with its six Doric columns and pediment, had been designed by Johann Wilhelm Krause (1757—1828), the poor son of a Silesian forester, born in the village of Dittmannsdorf into the ravages of the Seven Years War and the spirit of German “sentimentalism.” He followed in the footsteps of his literary heroes, Klopstock, Lessing, and Goethe to the University of Leipzig, where he studied theology. To pay his debts, Krause fought as a mercenary for the English in America’s War for Independence (1782-3). His sympathies were with the rebels, but choosing a side in this war was not a luxury he could afford. Many years later he would reflect (in the third person) on how his choices had alienated him from the newborn United States of America:

> It was possible to see the birth of a free state and joyful determination mixed with pride on every face…. How much would Wilhelm have given to have served that cause—to have been able to share with the several million people their intoxication from the freedom they had won and to look down with the proud look of a citizen of that country on the servants of injustice. It was too late. What would he have given even now to become one of them, only they didn’t want anyone who had not suffered together with them, had not done his utmost and shed his blood …. Oh, it was too late for all that, too late.73

Krause’s American dream was over before long before it began and he returned to Europe, where he proved equally unable to find a niche in metropolitan Amsterdam. Krause finally found his own private promised land quite by chance in the German-speaking Baltic periphery of the Russian Empire in 1784 (much as Yuri Lotman would do 150 years later).74 In 1802 Krause became Tartu’s first professor of architecture, economics, and agronomy at the University whose architectural ensemble he was to design over the course of the next decade. For this service he was ennobled and awarded the Russian Imperial Order of St. Vladimir in 1809 and in 1823 became an advisor to Emperor Alexander I when he was appointed to the State Council (Gosudarstvennyi Sovet). Still, Johann Wilhelm von Krause kept his home and Lutheran loyalties in Tartu—or Dorpat as Germans then called it—where he remained a professor until his death in 1828.


In 1806 Krause designed a brick obelisk in the “Lycian” style of Asia Minor for all the bones unearthed at the construction site of Tartu University.\footnote{75} It bore four brass plaques, one on each side, in each of the four languages current in Tartu at the time—Latin, German, imperial Russian, and the Tartu dialect of Estonian—in less than transparent translations of one another:

Here lie the bones of many nations [\textit{the Latin version specifies Germans, Finns, Poles, and Swedes, but omits Estonians or Russians}]. Tartu [\textit{Dorpat/Дерптъ/ Tarto—the Latin version omits the name of the town entirely}] buried them on the grounds of Saint Mary’s Church from the 13\textsuperscript{th} to the 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries [\textit{the Latin version indicates 600 years rather than specific dates}]. Upon their graves Alexander built a new temple of wisdom [\textit{aedes Academiae/ neuen Wohnsitz der Musen/ новое обиталище муз/ wastse tarkuse templi}]. This place was given for their resting place in June of 1806.\footnote{76}

1806 was a year of great expectations in Europe. It saw the demise of the thousand-year-old Holy Roman Empire. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel thought he saw the “World Soul” (\textit{Weltseele}) on horseback when Napoleon rode into Jena on October thirteenth.\footnote{77} Napoleon’s entry into Berlin less than two weeks later provoked Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s flight to Königsberg, where he started composing his \textit{Addresses to the German Nation} in the silence of his six-month Baltic exile.\footnote{78} Both these Lutherans would eventually serve as rectors of the new University of Berlin, founded by the philologist Wilhelm von Humboldt and the Lutheran theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher in 1810. It was a time when the “national soul” and the

\footnote{75} The pre-Hellenic tombs of Anatolian Lycia (in the southwestern part of modern Turkey) captured the imaginations of European Romantics in the early years of the nineteenth century through the drawings of Luigi Mayer, an Italian-German artist, who toured the Ottoman coast in 1791 together with Sir Robert Ainslie, the English Ambassador to Turkey at Constantinople. More than 1000 such tombs survive to this day. In many ways Lycians’ role in Ancient Rome and Greece resembles the place of the Greeks in Byzantium, the Estonians in the Soviet Union, or the Swiss in modern Europe. This last connection has been drawn explicitly: “In fact their image in antiquity was much like that of today’s Swiss: a hard-working and wealthy people, neutral in world affairs but fierce in defense of their freedom and conservative in their attachment to ancestral tradition. Lycia was the last region on the entire Mediterranean coast to be incorporated as a province in the Roman Empire and even then the Lycian Union continued to function independently. The Lycians spoke a language of their own and with their own unique alphabet, before adopting Greek around the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century BC. Their many monuments, especially their beautiful tombs which embody their ancestor cult, still dot the entire landscape of the southwest coast of Turkey.” \url{http://www.lycianturkey.com/who_were_the_lycians.htm}. See also Anthony Keen on “The Kings of Lycia in the Achaemenid Period” in Roger Brock and Stephen Hodkinson, \textit{Alternatives to Athens: Varieties of Political Organization and Community in Ancient Greece} (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2003).

\footnote{76} Maiorum. Hic iacent ossa Germanorum, Fennorum, Polonorum, Suecorumque. Per DC annos in coemeterio sanctae mariae sepultorum. Ex area ubi uauspiciis, felicissimis, Alexandri. Novae surgunt aedes academiae huc transla tata qui et reddita. Juni MDCCCVII. [I hope it is ok to make an exception for the use of cyrillic here in this one quotation, since the point is to reproduce exactly what is on the plaque of this monument in order to suggest its archaic quality and foreignness to modern Russian, German, and Estonian, rather than its familiarity to any of those languages.]

\footnote{77} “This morning I saw the Emperor [Napoleon]—this world-soul (diese Weltseele)—ride through the town… It is a marvelous feeling to see such a personality, concentrated in one point, dominating the entire world from horseback… it is impossible not to admire him.” Hegel’s letter to his friend Niethammer, 13 October 1806 as quoted in Shlomo Avineri, \textit{Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 63.

\footnote{78} Fichte was in Berlin at the time of Napoleon’s invasion. Forced to flee to Königsberg, he returned after the Peace of Tilsit in July 1807, “where he delivered his celebrated Addresses to the German Nation under the noses of the occupying forces.” Daniel Breazeale, “Fichte and Schelling: The Jena Period” in Robert Solomon, \textit{The Age of German Idealism} (London: Routledge, 2003), 147.
“world soul” seemed to move together, united in the “academic autonomy” and “imagined community” of the early nineteenth-century European University.79

But in the Soviet Union after the Second World War, like Athens in the age of Constantine, *Alma Mater Tartuensis* “uttered a language that was no longer wholly intelligible to the spirit of this age.” Less a beacon for an alternative future than a reminder of an alternative past, Tartu became in the Soviet Union what it had always been for its empires and nation-state—an inassimilable, untranslatable, and therefore integral part of the high culture of this civilization from the height of its geopolitical power in 1944 to its sudden and unexpected collapse in 1991.

79 German-speaking Lutherans had a hand in reimagining universities all across Europe, in France, Italy, and Tartu, among other places. The French naturalist (and devout Lutheran), George Cuvier, reformed French and Italian education under Napoleon Bonaparte. He also happened to be a childhood friend and Stuttgart classmate of Georg Friedrich Parrot, the first Imperial Rector of Tartu University under Alexander I. Of Cuvier’s role in overseeing the implementation of Napoleonic educational policy in the Papal States one nineteenth-century one admirer has written: “It was remarkable enough, that a Protestant should hold this office in the metropolis of the Papal dominions, but the moderation and benignity of M. Cuvier knew how to soften inconsistencies; his tolerance for all sincere doctrines of religion proceeded from conscientious motives, and therefore he was not likely to revolt the creed of those among whom he mingled.” R. Lee, *Memoirs of Baron Cuvier* (New York: J.&J. Harper, 1833), 20. In the Bourbon Restoration and July Monarchy, Cuvier became “Grand Master of the Protestant Faculties of the French University.” See Phillipe Taquet, “Cuvier’s attitude toward creation and the biblical Flood”, in Martna Köbl-Ebert. *Geology and religion: a history of harmony and hostility* (London: Geological Society of London, 2009), 127.
In his interpretation of individual works of art, Jacob Burckhardt’s eye naturally went to the background. In his one sentence on Leonardo da Vinci’s Mona Lisa in Der Cicerone, his 1855 guide to Italian Renaissance art, it was not the smile that captivated him most, but rather what was going on behind the central figure: “he uses [the landscape] … to achieve its dreamlike effect.” In writing of Raphael’s School of Athens, Burckhardt’s first comments described not the ancient philosophers, the ostensible subject of this painting, but rather the room where they are gathered—“The wonderfully elegant hall, which composes the background”—and the clarity of the atmosphere behind them, “free of all mystery.” Taking all its elements together, Burckhardt found in this one moment of conversation a Renaissance encapsulation of the entire thought and spirit of the ancient world, directing attention once again to the background: “One would feel oneself so whole in such a building!”

Burckhardt’s focus on the background in Renaissance art was also his historiographical orientation, as he claimed in a letter to a friend in 1842: “With my historical research the background has always been the main thing, and this is the cultural history to which I want to devote my energies.” In his classic study of the Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (1860) the great works of art of the Renaissance, so lovingly evoked in his Cicerone from five years before, were all but invisible; rather his attentions went to the environment that made them possible and out of which they emerged. Even its most often quoted section on the birth of the “individual” is less a series of potted biographies of remarkable Renaissance men and their accomplishments in the manner of Walter Pater’s Studies in the History of the Renaissance (1873), than an exploration of the idea of the individual and individuality as a social and cultural norm, a kind of background to the age.

In Burckhardt’s evocation of the life and accomplishments of Leon Battista Alberti as the quintessential “multi-sided personality” of the Renaissance, Alberti served to illuminate the background more than the background served to illuminate Alberti. Among many other features of Alberti’s personality, Burckhardt noted how “with his feet together, [Alberti] could spring over a man’s head”; “how in the cathedral, he threw a coin in the air till it was heard to ring against the distant [rafters]; how the wildest horses trembled under him”; how his soul was so...
sensitive that “more than once, when he was ill, the sight of a beautiful landscape cured him”; how he had no fear of plagiarism, and “imparted, as rich natures always do, without the least reserve, giving away his chief discoveries for nothing”; and finally how “an iron will pervaded and sustained his whole personality; like all the great men of the Renaissance, he said, ‘Men can do all things if they will.’” Whether or not any of these improbable “facts” about Alberti were true ultimately mattered less to Burckhardt than that these were the things that mattered to the social world in which he lived and worked; that these were the kinds of things Alberti’s Renaissance biographer, Vasari, found worth mentioning about him. Burckhardt concluded his detailed evocation of all of Alberti’s accomplishments by dismissing them entirely: “And Leonardo da Vinci was to Alberti as the finisher to the beginner, as the master to the dilettante. Would only that Vasari’s work were here supplemented by a description like that of Alberti! The colossal outlines of Leonardo's nature can never be more than dimly and distantly conceived.” What mattered most to Burckhardt was not Alberti’s particular individuality, but what Alberti’s feats revealed about the moral and aesthetic Renaissance environment in which a man like Alberti became possible.

1.1 Tartu in the Age of Lotman

Like Burckhardt’s interest in Raphael’s School of Athens (1516) as the ultimate Renaissance emblem of the culture of the ancient world, my interest in the Soviet Estonian adaptation of this painting Universitas Tartuensis (1982) as the ultimate Soviet emblem of the culture of the “Athens of the Ema River” has less to do with the thirty-seven figures represented in it or their achievements, than it has to do with the background behind them. Among the scholars here are those responsible for the discovery of the mammalian egg, the precise curvature of the earth, and the element “Ruthenium,” but also for the invention of the concept of the German novel of self-development (the “Bildungsroman”) and the “atom” of modern linguistics (the “phoneme”). Almost half of them are nineteenth-century German scientists (biologists, chemists, pharmacologists, physicists, surgeons, and astronomers). However, none of these scholars or their scholarly contributions is the focus here. The focus is rather the conversation (or lack thereof) among them, the nearly invisible space they inhabit with its atmosphere. What matters about this painting is what these figures can show as a group about the collective and symbolic identity of Tartu University. What matters, above all, is that these (and not others) were the scholars whose achievements late Soviet Estonian Socialism found worthy of commemoration.

In place of Raphael’s Plato and Aristotle in the center, stand Johann Skytte, the founding Rector of Tartu University under the Swedish King, Gustav Adolphus (1632), and Friedrich Parrot, a Stuttgart-educated Frenchman from Montbéliard in Franche-Comté and the first rector of the Imperial Russian University of Tartu under Alexander I (1802). Where the lines of perspective converge between their heads in the background is Tartu University’s observatory. In the 1830s it held the most powerful telescope in the world.

When Tartu’s Soviet identity and academic work are seen not just against a local background but also a broadly European one in light of its history over the course of the longue

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86 This last sentiment had an important afterlife in the American and Soviet Empires of the first half of the twentieth century.
87 Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, last paragraph on Alberti.
durée, Tartu also becomes a powerful observatory upon universal themes like language, the university, the state, and community. Though attentive to institutional transformations, my history of Tartu University—as a German university town—is less the history of an institution than it is the history of a cultural phenomenon. As such, it is written in the spirit of Burckhardt’s idea that cultural history ought to be about the background, less an investigation of the “great works of the human spirit” (a point of view sometimes mistakenly attributed to him) than the study of “a complete way of life,” even if it happens to be the complete way of life of cultural and intellectual elites rather than of ordinary people.

To the extent that my study of Tartu University has protagonists they are treated in the spirit of Burckhardt’s portrait of Alberti, less important for themselves than for what they can illuminate about their background. Three of the most significant, in ascending order of importance are Hans Kruus (1891–1976), Tartu’s first professional Estonian historian; Paul Ariste (1905–1991), Tartu’s foremost scholar of Finno-Ugric languages; and Yuri Lotman (1922–1993), Tartu’s most famous scholar in any field, a professor of Russian literature and semiotics. They belonged to three different generations and three different Tartu communities, and had little, if anything, to say to one another. But their careers overlapped and each occupied an important scholarly, social, and administrative position at Tartu University in the Soviet period. Only one of them, Hans Kruus, actually appears in the painting Universitas Tartuensis.

All three are familiar faces in the Estonia. But only Yuri Lotman is a truly international figure. Lotman’s ideas have carried beyond the state borders of the Soviet Union and the specific national discipline to which he devoted his scholarly career (Russian literary culture) and found a global audience. He is known and studied less for his place in the world, than for his perspective upon it. In a modest way his work has achieved the universality that might be said to be the aim of every ambitious scholar in the humanities and social sciences, to say something so interesting (if not true), however narrow the field of his empirical research, that it becomes a universal reference point or a transparent lens upon the world, rather than an opaque and embedded part of its own particular time and place. In this sense, Lotman resembles such better-known public intellectuals as Marx, Weber, Foucault, or Derrida. All their careers, reputation, and authority derived in important ways from the European University. Each was a Prometheus, an icon of broadly synthetic “thought” rather than narrowly “scientific research.” Each investigated the social construction of reality even if the “social” became increasingly constructed in language in late twentieth-century thought. Their names came to enchant scholarly discourse with a higher, vaguely religious sense of purpose, even as they have sought to “disenchant the world,” to reveal the bars of the nearly invisible “gilded cage” in which we are caught, whether by an analysis of “productive forces,” “genealogies of power,” or “textual deconstruction.” Moreover, each produced his own language (none of which is easy to read), a departure from rather than intervention in an existing scholarly or academic discourse of the day. Some even have their own cults, as does Lotman.

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88 See Raymond Williams Keywords for this distinction between two types of culture. For the expression of the point that Burckhardt’s interest in the intellectual life of the Renaissance was actually a form of social history see Benjamin Sax, who writes that Burckhardt was “interested not just in great works of art, but in the social forms which gave rise to them. He was fascinated with those self-conceptions which underlay these forms and not with the development of the conception of individualism as such. To Burckhardt cultural history was social history.” Benjamin C. Sax, “State and Culture in the Thought of Jacob Burckhardt.” Annals of Scholarship, III 4(1986), 1-36.

89 For Lotman’s academic cult see for example the 1991 compilation of Lotman’s work, The Universe of the Mind (1991) introduced by Umberto Eco and translated by Ann Shukman, or the collection Lotman and Cultural Studies:
Due to his comparative international visibility, Lotman requires an additional word of contextualization for the purposes of this study. Shortly before one of Lotman’s colleagues in Tartu’s department of Russian language and literature, Boris Gasparov, was expelled from the Soviet Union for dissident involvements and sympathies in 1980, Lotman gave him a book inscribed “to a wanderer from a home-dweller.” For Gasparov—and Lotman as well—the distinction between home-dwellers and wanderers grasped the divide between two kinds of intellectual engagement with the world, two ways of being, which also signified two ways of knowing. “Wandering” Gasparov left the Soviet Union, while “home-dwelling” Lotman tried to make peace with his predicament. At the same time, Gasparov’s poststructuralist sympathies carried him off intellectually in pursuit of foreign lands and paradigms, while Lotman’s work remained grounded in a spiritual home of Romantic early 19th-century Russian literature, a methodological structuralist home contained within the larger edifice of Soviet science, and above all a personal and institutional home in Tartu and its University. Lotman spent the entirety of his professional career in Tartu, from his arrival as a Soviet colonist from Leningrad at the age of twenty-eight in 1950 until his death forty-three years later following Soviet decolonization in a newly independent Estonian Republic.

For me, Lotman’s distinction between home-dwellers and wanderers, an allusion to the work of the minor 19th-century Romantic Russian poet Konstantin Batiushkov, can be translated into the central historical tension of this study between the ideal types of “wandering,” cosmopolitan universalism on the one hand and “home-dwelling,” local particularism on the other. Historiographically, it can also be translated into two ways of doing intellectual history: wanderers follow their chosen people and ideas out into the world, while home-dwellers sit in their adopted home and wait to see which of the world’s people and ideas come to them. This is clearly a study of the latter type, for it is rooted in a place rather than a people. It is a microhistory of the internal dynamics of Tartu University and the scholars who happened to end up there, set against the backdrop of the various social, cultural, and political networks they occupied in Tartu. Moreover, it is based on several years of life, interviews, and archival research in Tartu.

Nothing better grasps the symbolic appeal, power, and paradox of the dream of a global society united by a single language than the work of Alexander Dulichenko (b. 1941). He came to Tartu as a professor of Slavic languages from another Soviet periphery in Krasnodar. In 1982, the same year as Tartu University celebrated its 350th anniversary, he founded the Esperanto-based journal *Interlinguistica Tartuensis* with the help of some Estonian colleagues. But the culmination of his Soviet-era work was *Mezhdunarodnye vspomogatel'nye iazyki* [International Auxiliary Languages], a comprehensive global index in Russian to 912 different metalinguistic projects from the second century to 1990, a culmination of several decades of collecting. Intellectually dedicated to the project of overcoming national difference, it was personally

*Encounters and Extensions* (2006) with Lotman-inspired essays by scholars in various fields. Lotman has been the subject of scholarly monographs in Japan and Korea as well.


dedicated to specifically national or «fatherland» figures («Posviashaetsia pamiati vidnykh predstavitelei otechestvennoi interlingvisticheskoi mysli»). Dulichenko's work was a kind of metaindex to metalanguages, born of a desire to grasp the sum total of all human efforts to invent a universal language that would be both more «logical» and more «neutral» than Latin. Amost two-thirds of them came from Europe, from small towns and large cities ranging from Lisbon’s “Internacional” to Kiev’s “Cultural”; from Moscow’s “Ao” to Timisoara’s “Europäische Sprache”; from Omsk’s “ReNeo” to Belfast’s “Eeris”; from Dublin’s “Lingua philosophica” to Tallinn’s “Transcendental Algebra.”

With his index, Dulichenko reimagined the map of Europe, but also retold its story. For the entire period from the second to the fifteenth century, Dulichenko had only managed to identify some ten such metalanguages. The seventeenth century saw the invention of forty-one more, including those of Descartes, Leibniz and Sir Isaac Newton. To this the eighteenth century added fifty. With the definitive decline of Latin as the language of international diplomacy, “religion, culture, and scholarship” metalinguistic activity exploded in the nineteenth century with the invention of at least 246 new languages. But more than half the total number conceived and developed in the course of world history according to Dulichenko's index derived from the past ninety years, and most of those came from Europe.

With 560 different metalanguages, it seems that nothing has divided Europe or the world more in the twentieth century than the promise of perfect global linguistic unity. In the spirit of Burckhardt’s Alberti, I am less interested in the truth of Dulichenko’s lists, than for what the categories he applied to the enumeration and classification of metalanguages might show about his social and cultural background, and how the idea of counting metalanguages became an interesting and meaningful way of making sense of the world in the first place. If I have belabored Dulichenko’s index, this is because its image of Europe and the world seems such a

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92 “Posviashaetsia pamiati vidnykh predstavitelei otechestvennoi interlingvisticheskoi mysli—I.A. Boduenu de Kurtene, V.K. Rozenbergeru, P.E. Stoianu, N.V. Iushechmanovu, E.A. Bokarevu, E.P. Svodostu.” Jan Badouine de Courtenary, the inventor of the phoneme and later the president of interwar Poland’s Esperanto Society had been a Tartu professor for about ten years in the late nineteenth century. Alexander D. Dulichenko, Mezdunarodnye vspomogatel’nye iazyki (Tallinn: Valgus, 1990), 5.


94 See Dulichenko’s index to international languages by place of origin, 414—425.


96 “V srednevekov’e, kogda nabliudaetsia sil’naiia territorial’naia i politico-ekonomicheskia drobnost’, problem edinogo sredstva izykovogo obshcheniia nakhotdet chastino razreshenie v latinskem izyke, kotoryi spol’zuetsa v razlichnykh stranakh preimushchestvenno Evropy kak izyak religii, kul’tury i nauki. Nariadu s etim oformliaetsia mysl’ o sozdaniia iskusstvennogo izyka, kotoryi, s odnoi storony, byl by logichnym v grammaticheskem i semantichekem plane i, takim obrazom, izbaven ot vsevozmozhshih iskliuchenii, kotorye prisushchi estestvennym izykyam (v tom chisel i latinskemu; s drugoi—iavialsia by iznachal’no neitral’nym i tem samym ne daval by preimushchestv ni odnomu narodu.” Dulichenko, Mezdunarodnye, 7.

97 Alexander D. Dulichenko, Mezdunarodnye, 14.
perfect global projection of the intimate social and intellectual milieu from which it came. As a microhistory, my work is the story of several different languages and the separate worlds they occupied in Tartu, and the traces their words bore of the common place where they were born. At the same time, it is the story of a universal, utopian dream, common to so many different Tartu scholars throughout the Soviet period, to invent or find a more cosmopolitan or “universal language” of science to overcome the hermetic isolation that was their common lot in scholarly and everyday life.

Ultimately, however, like the Tower of Babel itself this is less a story about how Tartu’s scholars learned to speak to one another than how they did not, and perhaps were rendered structurally incapable of doing so by the university, town, and state in which they lived and worked. It is also about the internal contradictions of their own thought. Thus while this is a social history of ideas, it is different from Maxim Waldstein’s The Soviet Empire of Signs: A Social and Intellectual History of The Tartu School of Semiotics. Though Lotman has an important place for me, it is less in the company of the intellectual “wanderers” and ideas he brought with him from Leningrad or Moscow, than in the company of the “home-dwelling” strangers with whom he shared an institutional and civic fate in Tartu, and above all in the context of the longue durée of the history of Tartu and its University. Lotman is but one of a few central scholars, set against the background of more peripheral ones, and offset by the memory of earlier ones, to illuminate the environment of Tartu and the inordinate interest in linguistic and literary activity that it has inspired and supported through the ages. By contextualizing Yuri Lotman less in terms of the Russian Formalist intellectual tradition he brought with him from Leningrad, than the social and intellectual world—he came to inhabit in Tartu, I run the risk of defamiliarizing Tartu University’s most internationally renown scholar of the 20th century beyond recognition. I hope this will enable us to see him more clearly.

In 1999 the Estonian newspaper Eesti Päevaleht ran an article entitled “Semiotician Yuri Lotman Elected Estonian Scholar of the Century.” On the eve of the new millennium, Lotman had come in first in a national referendum to determine the most important Estonian scholars of the twentieth century. Paul Ariste was a close second. Hans Kruus was conspicuously omitted from the list entirely, tainted as he was by his explicit role in the Sovietization (both cultural and political) of the 1940s, though his scholarly contributions to the Estonian nation rival those of any other person. The presence at the top of this list of two scholars in the humanities in a land where the standard of scholarship has always been that of German science—represented in the painting Universitas Tartuensis by astronomers, surgeons, physicists, chemists and biologists—is surprising. Even more surprising is the selection of a scholar of Russian literature, born and raised in Leningrad, who never really mastered the Estonian language, rarely spoke in it (and certainly never taught in it), in a country where the “mother tongue” is almost a national religion. What kind of story ends in the new millennium

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98 Since the Soviet collapse Dulichenko has continued to publish on metalanguages. His popular-scholarly work In Pursuit of the World Language or Interlinguistics for Everyone (Maailmakeele otsinguil ehk interlingvistikat kõigil) appeared in Estonian translation in 2004. It included interviews with two of Tartu University’s leading Soviet-era Estonian Polyglots, Paul Ariste and Pent Nurmekund, and bore Pieter Brueghel the Elder’s 1563 painting of the Tower of Babel on the cover.

99 Waldstein’s book, which was published in 2009, has omitted the specification “social and intellectual” from its title, but it remains in most other respects almost identical to the dissertation.

100 “Sajandi Eesti teadlaseks valiti semiootik Juri Lotman.” Eesti Päevaleht (27.10.1999). See www.epi.ee/artikkel_95185.html
with the headline “Semiotician Yuri Lotman Elected Estonian Scholar of the Century”? The broadly European answer to this narrowly Estonian question is at least 1000 years long.

The remainder of this chapter is an elaboration and justification of my approach to Tartu in the *longue durée*. My first task is to establish a pan-European social background for my study of Tartu and its University, attentive on the one hand to the local particularities of its trilingual development over the course of the last millennium, and on the other to the typical features of its 700-year-identity as a small German town with a nearly 400-year old University. My second task is to show how and why some of the common preoccupations (if not the diverse methods) of Jacob Burckhardt and the Annales School offer an especially good historiographical orientation for my own study of Tartu, insofar as their ideas were informed by a social setting that was in many ways similar to Tartu. For Tartu in the age of Yuri Lotman, like Basel in the age of Burckhardt, or Strasbourg in the age of Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre were all small, stubbornly independent, traditionally Lutheran and German-speaking university towns on a frontier between at least two different languages and their mentalities. Like Lotman’s Tartu, Strasbourg had lost its Germans shortly before the arrival of Bloch and Febvre.

1.2 Tartu in the Baltic *Longue Durée*

The armies of the Third Reich and the Soviet Union both swept through Tartu’s streets in the Second World War. The town square, briefly called “Adolf Hitler Platz” from 1941 to 1944, became “Soviet Square” when Tartu was definitively incorporated into the western frontier of the Soviet Union in 1944. In 1991 Estonian Independence gave the town and its university a new identity, and in 2004 Tartu became part of the European Union. The flag flown from the top of Tartu University’s main building to proclaim its political allegiance has changed at least seven times since the beginning of the twentieth century. Tartu University has flown the colors of the Russian Empire (1900—1917), the Second German Reich (1917), Revolutionary Russia (1918), The First Estonian Republic (1919—1939), the Soviet Union (1940—41), the Third Reich (1941—1944), again the Soviet Union (1944—1991), and finally the rehabilitated Estonian Republic (1991—), to which the flag of the European Union was added in 2004. Given the bewildering welter of states and ideologies that have laid claim to Tartu and its University in the 20th century, state-centered geopolitics is scarcely the best frame through which to see the underlying continuities in what happened there. Like the rest of Europe, Tartu’s history in the twentieth century can only be told properly against the background of its *longue durée*.

Tartu has perched on the banks of the Ema River not far from the shores of lake Peipus, one of enduring internal frontiers of Europe between Western and Eastern Christendom, for the last millennium. Until Estonia’s adoption of the Euro and definitive economic integration into the European Union in January 2011, a reminder of this line adorned the back of the Estonian five-crown note: two medieval fortresses facing each other across the Narva River, the Teutonic fortress of Narva and Russia’s Ivangoz’s fortress built to oppose it in 1492. Thus, in the same year that the Vatican blessed the discovery of a new world in the West, granting the monarchs of Spain and Portugal the right to divide it up among themselves with the “Treaty of Tordesillas” in 1494, it faced the limits of Europe’s internal Crusade in the Northeast with the Civilizational...
divide between Eastern and Western Christendom that forms the Eastern border of the European Union today.

Long before it had Tartu, the Baltic world had a place, however marginal, in the imagination of the Roman Empire. Tacitus placed the Baltic upon the periphery of Germania (ca. 98 AD), calling its people the “Aestian nations”:

Upon the right of the Suebian [Baltic] Sea the Aestian nations reside, who use the same customs and attire with the Suebians, their language more resembles that of Britain. They worship the Mother of the Gods. As the characteristic of their national superstition, they wear the images of wild boars. This alone serves them for arms, this is the safeguard of all, and by this every worshipper of the Goddess is secured even amidst his foes. Rare amongst them is the use of weapons of iron, but frequent that of clubs. In producing of grain and the other fruits of the earth, they labour with more assiduity and patience than is suitable to the usual laziness of Germans. Nay, they even search the deep, and of all the rest are the only people who gather amber. They call it glesum, and find it amongst the shallows and upon the very shore. But, according to the ordinary incuriosity and ignorance of Barbarians, they have neither learnt, nor do they inquire, what is its nature, or from what cause it is produced. In truth it lay long neglected amongst the other gross discharges of the sea; till from our luxury, it gained a name and value. To themselves it is of no use: they gather it rough, they expose it in pieces coarse and unpolished, and for it receive a price with wonder.

For Tacitus the Baltic was a British (i.e. Celtic)-speaking, glesum (i.e amber)-gathering world, whose indigenous folk lacked the “usual laziness of the Germans,” but were still marked by the “ordinary incuriosity and ignorance of Barbarians,” with no inkling of the true value of their amber, which Roman traders taught them to collect. In the cosmopolitan eyes of the Roman Empire, this was the provincial Baltic periphery before Tartu.

Tartu is the oldest town in Estonia and one of the oldest in the Baltic. It is also one of the oldest towns in the northeast corner of Europe, where it predates the capitals and major cities of the region that have shaped its destiny at various historical junctures by at least a century: Moscow (1147), Tallinn (1154), Berlin (1192), Riga (1201), Warsaw (1242), Stockholm (1252), Königsberg/Kaliningrad (1255), Vilnius (1322), Helsinki (1550), and Saint Petersburg (1703).

The exact age of the original settlement there has not been determined and its origins (like most origins) remain enshrouded in mystery. In one widely accepted legend, pagan Finno-Ugric-speaking tribes established Tartu sometime before 1000 and named it for Taara, the pagan God. In another it was named for a wild ancestor of modern domesticated cattle, a kind of prehistoric European bison, tarva (aurochs), which disappeared from the continent, in all but domesticated form, in 1627. Either way the name of the town in most European languages derives from an adaptation of a common Finno-Ugric root—Latin Castrum Tharbatum, Finnish Tartto, Latvian Terbata, and German Dorpat.

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101 Tacitus, Chapter XVI in Germania (London: Macmillan and Co, 1869)
102 Hillar Palamets, Lugusid Toonasest Tartust. 17.
Only the first explicitly Christianized Russian name for Tartu (“Iur’ev”) made no reference to the pagan god or edible beast. In 1030 one of the forefathers of Russian statehood, Yaroslav the Wise of Novgorod and Kievan Rus, seized, fortified, and christened the settlement in an expansion of his domain and Tartu entered the world of the written word in Nestor’s Chronicle (1095) with the phrase: “Yaroslav went and conquered the Chuds and founded the city of Iur’ev” («…и Ярослав на чюдь, и победи я, и поставил град Юрьев»). But the power of Yaroslav’s language to shape and reinvent the pagan community proved limited and his reign in Tartu like the name “Yuryev” fell into obscurity some thirty years later when the Baltic tribes reasserted their independence. For the next hundred and fifty years, the Baltic remained one of the last dark places on the European continent to resist conversion to Christianity.

The colonization and incorporation of Tartu into pan-European networks of trade and belief happened in the thirteenth century when Teutonic crusaders from the West, recently returned from their failed efforts to recover the Holy Land, rallied to Pope Innocent III’s Livonian Crusade to convert Europe’s last remaining Baltic pagans to Christianity. Their eastward surge or Drang nach Osten ended with the “Battle on the Ice” of Lake Peipus in 1242. The twentieth century immortalized this moment on the eve of the Second World War with Alexander Nevsky, one of Joseph Stalin’s favorite films by the Baltic-Jewish filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein. But before their defeat, the Crusaders had captured Tartu, made it the seat of the easternmost Diocese of German-speaking world, and started building its towering Red Brick Cathedral in 1224. Merchants followed the knights of the Livonian Order, and Tartu became a full-fledged member of the Hanseatic League, a medieval trade network based in Lübeck, consisting of some one hundred semi-autonomous Northern European towns, spanning from Cologne to Bergen and from London to Novgorod.

Over the centuries a trilingual division of society emerged in the town of Tartu and in the Baltic more generally, loosely corresponding to Fernand Braudel’s tripartite division of history in Civilization and Capitalism. Relatively short-lived imperial elites (Danes, Poles, Swedes, Russians) ruled for no more than one or two hundred years in Tartu. They occupied the position of Braudel’s “Perspective of the World,” each with its own language, but conducting its business in Latin or a vernacular—competing for nominal political control of the Baltic lands and their resources. Underneath this impermanent political superstructure, lived the Baltic German colonial elites. Like Braudel’s “Wheels of Commerce,” they took administrative, economic, and spiritual control of the region in the thirteenth century, and never let go until the formation of the independent Nation States of Latvia and Estonia in 1919. Finally, there were the Estonian, Ingrian, Livonian, and Latvian “people of the land” with their “languages of the land” and their “structures of everyday life.”

Fighting off Polish Catholicism in the West and Russian Orthodoxy in the East, the briefly expanding Swedish Empire gave Tartu its Lutheran university in the Thirty Years War in 1632, staffed by local German elites. Even after it fell to Peter the Great and the Russian Empire in 1708, Tartu remained a Lutheran, German university town (the only one in the Russian Empire) until the declaration of Estonian independence in 1919 ended German social and

103 Palamets, Lugusid Toonasest Tartust, 13.
106 Tõnis Lukas, Tartu toomhärrad 1224-1558 (Tartu, 1998)
Balthasar Russow, Liivimaa Kroonika (Stockholm: Kirjastus Vaba Eesti, 1967)
cultural hegemony and the Hitler-Stalin pact some twenty years later sent Tartu’s 700-year-old German population “back” to Germany in 1939. For both of the Empires that it served—Swedish and Russian—Tartu came to represent an idea of Europe with an attempted integration of all three levels of societies, their languages, and their interests. But like most ideas of Europe, Tartu University remained hotly contested.

These are the structural and demographic shifts in the local background over the course of the last millennium necessary to see the socialist and nationalist currents that swept through Tartu, its trilingual society, its university and its scholars in the 20th century. When the smoke of the Second World War cleared from Tartu’s streets in September 1944, Russians and Estonians found themselves together on the streets of this Baltic German university town for the first time in history since the thirteenth century without its Baltic Germans.

1.3 Tartu as a German University Town

For most of the last millennium, despite the presence of Estonians and Russians there, Tartu has been a relatively small Baltic German town. Of its 12,374 inhabitants recorded in 1844, 7492 were German, 3316 were Estonian, and 1187 were Russian followed by 189 Latvians, 130 Poles, and 60 others. As such, there is another social background that can help to illuminate Tartu’s internal social and intellectual dynamics through the ages, that of the German University town.

Nothing is so basic to the identity of Europe today as its cities. A study of The Making of Urban Europe 1000—1994 contends that “it is the cities, small and large, that continue to embody the unity and diversity of Europe today. In their schools, streets, and institutions tomorrow's identities and loyalties will be formed and will play out.” Urbanization can be seen as the story of Europe over the long term: the largest city in Europe in 1000 was Constantinople with a population of less than half a million, followed by Cordoba, Seville, Palermo, and Kiev (Rome had severely declined by this time), and the vast majority of Europe’s population lived in the rural countryside. The few cities of Europe were all in the South. By 1900 the balance of urbanization had shifted, and Europe’s leading metropolitan centers fell to the North, led by London, with a population of more than six million people, Paris, with about half as many, Berlin, Vienna, and Saint Petersburg. As European cities grew in size, so did their number and concentration, to the point that aerial night photo of Europe in the 1990s revealed points of light spanning the entire continent swelling together into a single swath of uninterrupted urban illumination along the Rhine River from Belgium and the Netherlands down to Switzerland. In the course of the twentieth century, more than half of Europe’s population came to live in cities. “In a single millennium Europe had become urban.”

108 Raimo Pullat, Tartu ajalugu (Tallinn: Kirjastus “Eesti Raamat”, 1980), 128. The northern frontier of Catherine the Great’s 1791 Pale of the Settlement fell slightly to the South, so Tartu never had the abundant Jewish population of Baltic towns further to the South, though it did have a synagogue.
110 Making of Urban Europe, 11.
But European urbanization is about more than numbers; it is also about qualitative changes in ways of life. “The urbanization of society” is “a process that involves people in ‘urban’ behaviour, modes of thought, and types of activities whether they live in cities or not.” If in earlier times “towns were deeply penetrated by the countryside” in modern times urban life and sensibilities have reached out and colonized the country. In cultural representations, country is on the side of nature, community, tradition, and familiarity, while town is on the side of artifice, individualism, innovation, and strangeness. Still, the cultural image of urbanization seems to cut in nearly opposite directions. The city may have been the background for the making of coherent and freely acting individuals (Burckhardt’s Rennaissance men were distinctively urban). But the city has also lead to their fragmentation: “city-dwellers live in several and separate social worlds and … they adopt a different personality in each.” The urban environment may be conducive to cosmopolitan tolerance and mutual respect, free from vices of close-minded rural provincialism, but also to anonymity, alienation, indifference, and crime. As a cultural image, the city seems to embody the moral force and purpose of Western Civilization just as much as its nihilistic disruption.

Not all cities are created equal, however, and their role in history is contested. Fernand Braudel opened his discussion of European cities in *Capitalism and Material Life* with the question, “Why were [western cities] like steam engines while the others were like clocks…?” Max Weber sought to pinpoint the difference between “Occidental” and “Oriental” cities in a different way, oriented less to their potential for accelerating economic growth, than their political and social distinctiveness. For Weber, all cities were centers for markets, but only European ones were centers of freedom. “In Central and Northern European cities the principle appeared: ‘City air makes man free.’ The time period varied, but always after a relatively short time, the lord of a slave or bondsman lost the right to subordinate him to his power.” Cities were also laboratories of citizenship: “More than anything else the fully developed ancient and medieval city was formed and interpreted as a fraternal association. Therefore, as a rule these cities had a corresponding religious symbol standing for the associational cult of the burghers as such. There was usually a city-god or a city-saint specifically available to the burghers.” With their discrete identities and unique spiritual life, and the collective power of their townsmen against the incursion of individual feudal lords, the medieval city for Max Weber embodied the fraternal spirit of primitive democracy.

Even within Europe a dual role has been assigned to cities that grasps the divide between Weber’s and Braudel’s perspectives. On the one hand cities are seen as “containers,” protecting themselves against the incursions of the surrounding countryside, on the other “magnets,” pulling the surrounding countryside to them. The story of the European urbanization over the *longue durée* is probably more a story of magnets than containers, as one by one they tore down their still-standing medieval walls in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for more fluid integration.

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113 The *Urban Experience*, 16-17 and Raymond Williams’s identification of country with “home” in *Town and Country*, 297.
115 Braudel as quoted in Jan de Vries.
117 Weber, 97.
with a wider economic world, and integration into the emerging states of Europe. In *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Braudel noted, that “the cities were no longer undisputed rulers of the world. Their reign, which had lasted throughout the early rise of Europe and the Mediterranean, from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, was beginning to be challenged at the threshold of modern times by the territorial state.” 119 With the subordination of the city to the territorial state, cities became agents of full-fledged capitalism and industrialization. To take Braudel as the last word on urbanization, however, is to exclude everything that makes European cities distinctive, interesting, and important according to Max Weber.

Mack Walker has underscored the often-overlooked importance of small semi-autonomous German towns in the social history of ideas in Europe. The underlying similarity of their experience and background is difficult to see for they lacked a common identity: “each lived apart from the others. And none was just like any other. What was common to them all derived from the individuality of each of them.” 120 With their elaborate guilds and corporate structures that survived into the nineteenth century, German hometowns (with their “hometownsmen”) proved much more resistant to incursions of the state and its ideologies, which were almost always perceived as foreign intruders, than comparatively unstructured rural villages and manors (with the purely personal relations of their “countrymen”) or fluid and bureaucratic metropolitan capitals (with the comparatively anonymous relations of their “movers and doers”). 121 Suspicious of foreigners of all stripes within their “webs and walls,” they cultivated and “incubated” a small town worldview, and a singular vision of freedom, often at odds with the vision propagated by nineteenth-century liberal bureaucrats and merchants in metropolitan centers. This was a vision marked by what the eighteenth century commentator Justus Möser called *Eigentum* in his “History of Osnabrück.” *Eigentum* literally means property, but in the language of the hometowns, it meant much more—a sense of personal, social dignity related to membership in the local community. 122 In a fleeting aside, Walker shows how this provincial urban social world informed the ideas emanating from it as when Eisleben-born, Erfurt-educated, and Wittenberg-employed Martin Luther translated a Biblical verse from the Greek into the central German hometown value of *Eigentum*: “He came into his own, and his own received him not” (“Er kam in sein Eigentum, und die seinen nahmen ihn nicht auf.”). 123 In other words, Luther’s German translation of God’s universal message was born in the provincial moral language of hometown Germany; Luther’s Jesus was a hometownsman, whose neighbors had failed to take him in.

For all its Estonians, Russians, and other minorities, Tartu was structurally a German hometown, but it was also a university town, and in Walker’s “story of a thousand towns” with their narrowly defined “selves” and broadly defined “others” universities belong to the world of the “others.” Walker calls universities “Germany’s place for mixing and changing.” 124 They

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119 Braudel as quoted in Jan de Vries, 6.
120 Mack Walker, 1.
121 “Individualisiertes Land” is the territory spanning from the Rhineland to upper Saxony, an expression coined by Heinrich Riehl following the Revolution of 1848.
122 Walker, 1.
123 Walker, 3.
124 Walker offers a wonderfully nuanced description of all various functions and people universities served, while reaching a disappointingly simple conclusion, relegating them to a position outside hometown dynamics and sensibilities: “...[the University] was Germany’s place for mixing and changing. University life and the careers it
represent the incursion of the state with its “movers and doers” (professors, merchants, bureaucrats, and other “Störer” or troublemakers) into the lives and language of hometown Germany. Students, also foreigners to these towns, banded together in fraternities (Landmannschaften), based on their common points of origin, to insulate themselves as much as possible from contact with Spiessbürger (a German student word for backward and conformist hometownsmen).125

This assessment may be appropriate for Walker’s embedded case study of the free imperial town of Franconian Weissenburg, with its five hundred dwellings and a population between three and four thousand, and no indigenous university of its own. But Walker seems to underestimate or overlook the extent to which the communities of the “individualized country” of Western and Central Germany, the focus of his study, were in their essence university towns.126 Early modern Freiburg, Tübingen, Basel, Strasbourg, Bonn, Worms, Jena, Erfurt, Wittenberg, Heidelberg were all larger than Weissenburg, significantly larger in some cases. Around 1815 Basel had a population of around 16,000, Strasbourg of 50,000. But this was still considerably more modest than secondary metropolitan centers like Lyon with 100,000 or Hamburg with 110,000 at the same time.127 Moreover, like Weissenburg, Strasbourg, Basel, Worms, and Cologne were all Imperial Free Towns and they were ruled by a very limited set of families, with strict laws limiting immigration and marriage, with elaborate guild structures, long-standing home town traditions of municipal self-rule and independence, and a generally skeptical, conservative orientation toward all reforming projects and ideologies. Though he liked relatively liberal and metropolitan Zurich, Friedrich Engels found Basel absolutely revolting: “Such a barren town, full of frock-coats, cocked hats, philistines and patricians and Methodists, where nothing is fresh and vigorous but the trees around the … Cathedral.”

The universities of these towns were not foreign bodies imposed upon them by the state after 1648, when Walker begins his story, but long-standing and organic parts of their development. Whatever tensions existed between town and gown, hometown universities borrowed corporate structures, values, and sensibilities from the municipality (in the making of

125 Walker, 130. “These organizations, together with the university’s legal rights of self-government, separated and indeed protected students from the civil society of the town where the university was located—defense of academic freedom against the outraged Bürger….A student’s alien and changing environment was probably the reason why he joined together with other students from his own area into his corps, people in whom he recognized his own habits of speech.”
126 Walker derives the idea of “individualized country” (individuieretes Land) from Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, writing after the Revolution of 1848, to set off the territories of the West and Center from more centralized territories of Habsburg Austria and Hohenzollern Prussia.
127 Gossman, Basel in the Age of Burckhardt, 18.
128 Gossman, Basel in the Age of Burckhardt, 15.
their fraternities and societies), and the towns in turn derived a good share of their municipal individuality, identity, self-confidence, not to mention income from their universities, for the student body was also a market. Lionel Gossman noted the deep investment of Basel’s conservative patrician class in its university in the early nineteenth century: “the Basel elite put its greatest cultural effort into the renovation of the University and the establishment of what was to be one of the first important publicly supported (as opposed to princely) museums in any German-speaking land, that is to say, into two institutions whose function … was to celebrate the past and promote respect for tradition.”  

During the revolutionary uprising in the countryside in the early 1830s, the university returned the favor: with two exceptions, the “entire professoriate, ‘liberals’ and conservatives alike … sided with the city” against the rural rebels.

With their peculiar and embattled vision of freedom (echoed in the medieval saying that “town air makes one free”), university towns came to occupy a profoundly ambiguous position as both intermediaries between and stumbling blocks for the larger leveling forces of more distant metropolitan states that tried to control them and the rural masses from the surrounding countryside that sought to overwhelm them. The ambiguity of this relationship with its peculiar brand of provincial, small town cosmopolitanism is a large part of what Tartu enables us to see.

1.4 Basel in the Age of Burckhardt and Strasbourg in the Age of Bloch

My approach to “the Athens of the Ema River” is inspired by historical sensibilities born and cultivated at two other provincial, historically Lutheran, German-speaking university towns on an even more intellectually resonant internal frontier of Europe than the 700-year divide that separates Eastern from Western Christendom in Northern Europe. For both Basel and Strasbourg are towns of the Rhine River. The Rhine flows from its source in the Swiss Alps to the floodplains of Belgium and the Netherlands where it empties out through several tributaries into the North Sea. Ancient Roman settlements marked the birth of Rhine towns of Basel (Augusta Raurica), Strasbourg (Argentoratum), Worms (Borgetomagus), Mainz (Moguntiacum), Coblenz (Confluentes), Bonn (Bonna), Cologne (Colonia Agrippinensis), Nijmegen (Noviomagus), Utrecht (Trajectum). The tall spires of their Gothic Cathedrals sprang up in the High Middle Ages and a lively trade in things and ideas made the Rhineland an important link between Renaissance Italy and Flanders. Around the same time the towns of the Rhine valley, its tributaries and nearby rivers also acquired their universities—Heidelberg (1386), Cologne (1388), Mainz (1471), Freiburg (1457), Basel (1460), and Strasbourg (1538).

Over the centuries, Basel and Strasbourg provided the cultural background to the emergence and encounter of various broadly European cosmopolitans and their ideas. Paracelsus studied and taught medicine at the University of Basel in the early 16th century, before wandering off in pursuit of “hidden knowledge” in Asia-Minor and Northern Africa. Basel was also the place he encountered Erasmus of Rotterdam, the 16th-century’s most vocal and universal spokesman for religious tolerance within the bounds of a conciliatory Catholicism. Erasmus, like Martin Luther, was in many ways a man of the small university towns of Europe. He spent most of his life, wandering from one to the next—Turin, Leuven, Cambridge—before alighting

130 Gossman, Basel in the Age of Burckhardt, 96.
131 Gossman, Basel in the Age of Burckhardt, 1-2.
in Basel. Basel’s definitive conversion to Lutheranism in 1529 sent Erasmus packing to nearby Freiburg, though his corpse found its way back less than ten years later to its eternal resting place beneath the recently reformed Catholic Cathedral of Basel. The University of Strasbourg retained much of its original Lutheran, German identity—including its library—even after repeated incorporations into Catholic and Republican France in 1681, 1792, and 1919. In 1770, Strasbourg and its University provided fertile common ground for an exchange of ideas between the wandering Baltic German father of rooted national identity, Johann Gottfried von Herder, from East Prussian Mohrung, and Europe’s most cosmopolitan German-speaking man of letters and the intellectual father of “world literature,” Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, from metropolitan Frankfurt.132

Subject to the impulses of French civilization in the West and German culture in the East since the late 18th century, imperial Basel and Strasbourg have long occupied a precarious position between two worlds and languages (much like imperial Tartu) that partakes in both, but ultimately stands apart. Born in Nancy, historian Lucien Febvre, was particularly well positioned to see Basel from his perch in the history department of the University of Strasbourg. Where Walker saw only antagonism to the outside world, Febvre found pockets of cosmopolitanism and places of refuge within the webs and walls of these Rhineland university towns:

They are states unto themselves. The Basler is a citizen of Basel, the man of Cologne a citizen of Cologne. If we could ask them, retrospectively, about their origins and, as we say, their ‘nationality,’ we would be astonished by their answers…. If the Rhenish cities recognized or served any higher political formation, it was the Empire, the Holy Roman Empire of Germany, the cosmopolitan Empire that embraced Italy and Burgundy as well as the Rhineland and the German territories proper…. Its tutelage was mild, its orientation to Italy and Burgundy favorable to communities of merchants. Indifferent to all frontiers, other than those that marked them off from their own surroundings, and harboring within their walls representatives of many ‘foreign’ countries, the cities were cosmopolitan by profession, no doubt, but also by taste and temperament.133

Lionel Gossman quotes extensively from Febvre in his introduction to Basel in the Age of Burckhardt to evoke the peculiar atmosphere of the free city-states of the Rhineland as the

132 Are Mohrung and Frankfurt hometowns? Königsberg? I am not sure. I imagine that Königsberg isn’t, it was too politically important as the capital of East Prussia. Mohrung was small and self contained (like Weissenburg); Frankfurt was large, but it did not reach Grobstadt status until the late 19th century (more than 100,000 inhabitants) and it was also an imperial free town like Weissenburg. It is one of the instructive ironies of socially informed intellectual history that Immanuel Kant, who spent nearly the entirety of his life rooted in the Baltic Prussian University town of Königsberg, enjoys a reputation today as the most cosmopolitan German Enlightenment philosopher with his three critiques and declaration of “hospitality” as the first human right, while his far more cosmopolitan student, the East Prussian-born Johann Gottfried von Herder, who collected folksongs of various peoples he encountered as a pastor in Livonian Riga, and left his post while still in his twenties to wander across Europe, visiting its small towns and great cities, has come down to posterity as the father of rurally rooted nationalism. Is the difference between Herder and Kant the difference between someone who has seen something of the world and someone whose anthropology and idea of the world is basically a priori concept? Is Kant’s First Critique anything more than a justification of a sedentary way of life? Kant concludes that A priori synthetic statements are possible—ergo I do not need to see the world to know something of it.

appropriate social background against which to see the life and thought of Jacob Burckhardt, just as Burckhardt’s position in Basel was the social background that enabled him to see the small city states of Renaissance Italy and Ancient Greece. Gossman duly notes narrowness and limitations of Basel: “its inhabitants lived out their lives in self-enclosed groups, shut off from each other yet observing each other suspiciously and critically.” Burckhardt complained himself of the lack of “intellectual stimulation.” And yet, they also could provide what Gossman calls an “Archimedian point outside events” for the observation of the modern world.

The small university towns of the Rhineland were complicated places. Simultaneously open and closed, parochial and cosmopolitan, they deserve a language of their own, for theirs was neither the parochialism of Walker’s rural countrymen nor the cosmopolitanism of the metropolitan movers and doers, but something else entirely. And it is this curious melding of parochialism and cosmopolitanism of small German university towns that can illuminate the social and intellectual background of imperial, German-speaking Tartu before definitive arrival of the Estonian Nation State in 1919 and the Soviet Union in 1944. What became of that background—its persistence and disruption—is the subject of this study.

The historiographical movements born in Basel and Strasbourg also deserve to be seen against this common background of the University towns of the Rhineland. For Jacob Burckhardt’s cultural history and the Annales School’s integrative “total history”—synthesizing geographical, social, demographic, economic, and psychological (mentalités) elements—were born in the embattled intellectual climate and culture of provincial Basel and Strasbourg facing the self-satisfied cosmopolitanism of state-oriented Berlin and Paris. Each is an example of a productive tension between peripheries and metropoles in the social history of ideas. Nowhere in peripheral, small-town Europe has the European historical profession undergone such fundamental revision and reinvigoration, or faced such deep challenges to its professional assumptions and canons of belief as in the peripheral Rhineland towns of Basel in the age of Burckhardt or Strasbourg in the age of Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre.

A Basler by birth, the son of a local protestant pastor, Burckhardt studied with Leopold von Ranke in Berlin and is widely recognized as Ranke’s most talented student. Still, he ultimately rejected the “power” of center for the “freedom” of the periphery, when he declined his advisor’s chair—the most highly paid and prestigious university chair in history in the modern world at the moment—for a teaching position in his native town of Basel, where he could say whatever he wanted alongside his younger colleague, friend, and admirer, Friedrich Nietzsche. Though it remained a decidedly peripheral place in 19th-century historiography, Basel was nonetheless an important reference point for the German academic establishment in Berlin. Wilhelm Dilthey made an intellectual pilgrimage to teach alongside Burckhardt in Basel for a semester in 1867. And Burckhardt’s most talented student, the art historian Heinrich Wölflin, made the journey back to the center when he became an art historian in Munich and Berlin seeking in the spirit of his mentor (who venerated the “background” above all else) to tell the history of art without any proper names.

The significance of the relationship between center and periphery, between Berlin and Basel found expression in the words of a leading professor of the German historical establishment in Berlin in the first half of the twentieth century, Friedrich Meinecke:

Some day a book should be written on the topic: Berlin and Basel in the age of the founding of the Bismarckian Reich. It should show how the modern German study of history as a history of the spirit culminated in these to places in two different positions that came in to conflict with one another. The two positions should be shown to have resulted from their historical backgrounds and contexts—Prussian-German on one side; Swiss (but still closely connected to the spiritual life of Germany as a whole) on the other. Pride and satisfaction at the rise of Germany as a strong nation-state on one side; criticism, suspicion, and anxiety in the face of that very achievement on the other. Droysen, Treitschke, and Dilthey joining their voices with that of Ranke; the young Nietzsche, Overbeck, and Bachofen joining theirs with that of Burekhardt. A book such as this could become a symbol of our spiritual destiny.\(^\text{135}\)

Peripheral though Burckhardt may have been in his lifetime, Meinecke found a better guide in him to the shattered Post-World War Two World than Ranke, writing to a friend toward at end of his life in 1947: “I think you will agree with me that Burckhardt saw this wicked world of today in far sharper focus than Ranke.”\(^\text{136}\)

While Burckhardt ultimately rejected the center for the periphery, the story of the Annales School followed a nearly opposite trajectory. Lucien Febvre was a man of the provinces, born in Nancy, the capital of Lorraine, to an academic family with roots in neighboring Franche-Comté. Marc Bloch came from an assimilated Jewish Alsatian family, but was born in Paris. Both studied at the elite Parisian institution for the education of professors, the École Normale Supérieure, where Marc Bloc’s father already taught. Bloch also spent a year abroad studying in Berlin (1908-9), where he attended the lectures of the Tartu-born Lutheran theologian and church historian, Adolf von Harnack.\(^\text{137}\) Strangers to one another in metropolitan Paris, Febvre and Bloch met for the first time in Strasbourg immediately following the First World War in the University of Strasbourg’s department of history. Both arrived in Strasbourg in some sense as intellectual “colonizers” (or “liberators”) of the town as the German professoriate was expelled. Their “offices were adjoining, and the doors were left open.”\(^\text{138}\) Each inherited the interests and techniques of the other.\(^\text{139}\) After they made a name for themselves with their journal, *Annales d’Histoire Economique et Sociale* in 1929, they migrated back to the center, taking “total history” with them, where it grew after the Second World War.

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137 See H. Stuart Hughes on Bloch’s “year at Leipzig and Berlin, where he attend the courses of the great historian of religion Adolf von Harnack,” 33. Adolf von Harnack, was born into the family of the Tartu theology professor Theodosius von Harnack in a stately townhouse on the main-street of Tartu, that still bears a plaque dedicated to the home of the Tartu professor of theology, Theodosius von Harnack, and the birthplace of his son Adolf. Adolf von Harnack became an important voice in the “liberal Lutheran” establishment of Berlin and had the ear of Bismarck. He was also the teacher of the most important dissenting voice within Lutheran theology at the time of the rise of Hitler, Karl Barthes. Barthes rejected liberal theology largely because of his teachers avowed support for the German war effort in the First World War. Unsurprisingly Harnack has no place in the Soviet painting *Universitas Tartuensis*.
139 H. Stuart Hughes writes that “Febvre took over the theological battles of the Reformation initiated by Bloch; Bloch took over histories of technology and economy first undertaken by Febvre,” 36.
under the stewardship of Febvre’s star pupil, Fernand Braudel, and his successors into the defining French movement of world historiography in the twentieth century.\(^{140}\)

For all their differences, the cultural history of Jacob Burckhardt’s and the total history of Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch (and the Annales school more broadly) shared a common historiographical orientation, born of the spirit of the semi-independent university towns of the Rhineland where these sensibilities first emerged. Burckhardt held aloof from the national aspirations of Germany by rejecting the professorship offered him in Berlin; Febvre and Bloch, by contrast, remained French patriots. Both had fought for France in the first World War and they eagerly accepted the opportunity to return to Paris when the opportunity presented itself in 1933 and 1936 respectively; Bloch perished in the French resistance in the Second World War. Still, all three were united in their historical scholarship by their refusal to accept the state—let alone the nation-state—as the ultimate agent or purpose of human history. Instead they looked to the margins of the political center for historical meaning.

The professionalization of the historical discipline in Europe, pioneered by Leopold von Ranke at the University of Berlin, with its cult of disinterested objectivity and the archive, established rigorous standards of documentation and evidence for a field that had previously been dominated by gentlemen scholars and literary dilettantes. But it also narrowed the field of legitimate techniques and topics of research.\(^{141}\) The leading figures of the philosophical, historical, and legal disciplines at the University of Berlin—Hegel, Ranke, Treitschke, and Savigny—were all formally state officials living close to the metropolitan state archives at the core of Prussian political power. A state-centered approach to scholarship made sense in mid-nineteenth century Berlin. It may also have made sense in late nineteenth-century Paris where historians like Ernest Lavisse, Charles Seignobos, and Alphonse Aulard saw their task as describing the emergence of republican institutions within a French nation where monarchical loyalties ran deep.\(^{142}\) State-centered history made considerably less sense in a Rhineland world that looked skeptically upon all territorial states, their ideologies, and the metropolitan capitals from which they were both ruled and studied. The return of Febvre and Bloch to Paris in the thirties happened in the throes of a worldwide depression that had temporarily shaken faith in the national state as the all-powerful agent of world history, and a growing interest in the underlying economic and social forces that were the subject of Annales school historiography.

Though all three had trained at the center with the leading scholars of the day (and though Febvre and Bloch returned there), their posts in the periphery far from Berlin and Paris gave them the time and space to invent their own interpretive language for the past while exploring smaller provincial libraries and archives, and the courage to combine elements and approaches that the division of academic labor at the center would have encouraged them to leave to other

\(^{140}\) While in a POW camp near the old Hanseatic capital of Lübeck, during the Second World War, Fernand Braudel wrote and dedicated his three tiered study of the Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip the Second—perhaps the single best recognized Annales School work—to the spirit of the work of his mentor and advisor, Lucien Febvre.

\(^{141}\) Though socio-cultural had provoked interest since the mid-18th century, Peter Burke observed that “one of the consequences of the so-called ‘Copernican Revolution’ in history associated with Leopold von Ranke was to marginalize, or remarginalize, social and cultural history.” Peter Burke, The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929—89 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 7.

\(^{142}\) See H. Stuart Hughes on the French Historical Profession before the Annales School with its convinced republican “positivists,” Langlois, Lavisse and Seignobos, who all believed “the facts could speak for themselves” and that the meaningful “facts” were political, 22.
disciplines.\textsuperscript{143} Oriented as much to teaching as to publication in these Rhineland university towns their questions grew out of an engagement with colleagues and students. Burckhardt and Nietzsche even spent several hours a week teaching the children of the municipal elite at the local high school, the \textit{Pädagogium}.\textsuperscript{144} In Strasbourg, the singular milieu gave a certain intensity to the relationship between Bloch and Febvre, which it later lost in Paris. They met nearly every day for thirteen years from 1920 to 1933, and found an interdisciplinary cohort of interested colleagues, including the psychologist, Charles Blondel, the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, the literary and psychological historian Henri Bremond, and the historian Georges Lefebvre. According to Peter Burke this unique “milieu favoured intellectual innovation and facilitated the exchange of ideas across disciplinary frontiers.”\textsuperscript{145}

Their peripheral position in the emerging historical professions of Germany and France before the Second World War gave them the freedom to notice aspects of the past their metropolitan colleagues dismissed as epiphenomenal. The background rose to the fore in the historical vision of both Burckhardt’s cultural history and Annales School total history. Spatially they focused on the geographical, demographic, mental, and cultural worlds of their subjects. Temporally they were preoccupied as much with continuity as with change, with “motionless history,” with enduring \textit{mentalités}, the \textit{longue durée}, and epochal shifts rather than political events and the march of progress. These, of course, were explicitly the categories of the Annales School historiography, but they were prefigured in important ways in Burckhardt’s central idea of cultural history as a history of the background.\textsuperscript{146} Their studies were at once locally and regionally grounded in the culture of the Rhineland—attentive to the uniqueness of individual towns, regions and provinces—but also directed at something more broadly European and perhaps even global than the ephemeral Great Powers of the day, as Burckhardt’s \textit{Reflections on World History} [\textit{Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen}] or Lefebvre’s geographical study co-written with of \textit{The Earth and Human Evolution} [\textit{La terre et l’évolution humaine}] attest.

To those in the center, even to sympathetic readers, this kind of orientation could prove frustrating. In one of the first reviews of Jacob Burckhardt’s \textit{Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy} from 1860 Wilhelm Dilthey found that “Burckhardt, while taking us by the hand through so many of the great cultural achievements of the age, gave us no help in interpreting the meaning of the Renaissance or in understanding its relation to the present.”\textsuperscript{147} Burckhardt’s \textit{Renaissance} was published in 1860 at the height of the fervor leading to Italian unification. Yet Burckhardt did not write of an “Italian Renaissance,” that is, of a proto-national movement leading to the consolidation of an Italian nation-state or at least a national movement. Rather Burckhardt wrote of the “Renaissance in Italy.” His work was dedicated to the provincial and urban peculiarities of a particular geographical region, broadly cultural and European rather than narrowly political and Italian. Like Burckhardt’s historical research, Annales school studies cut across the grain of the historical establishment in contradictory ways: where Berlin and Paris saw rupture in the

\textsuperscript{143} Lucien Febvre “wide-ranging essay,” \textit{La terre et l’évolution humaine}, actually “annoyed some professional geographers because it was the work of an outsider.” Peter Burke, \textit{The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929—89} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 14.

\textsuperscript{144} See Gossman on Basel’s \textit{Pädagogium}. Carl Spittler, the future Swiss Nobel laureate in literature attended the history courses of Burckhardt and Wackernagel at the Pädagogium and at one point asked Friedrich Nietzsche for a recommendation.

\textsuperscript{145} Burke, 16.

\textsuperscript{146} H. Stuart Hughes has noted that Lucien Febvre explicitly expressed his debt to Jacob Burckhardt’s historical vision late in life, 31.

\textsuperscript{147} Dilthey as paraphrased in Benjamin Sax, 6.
succession of political regimes, Basel and Strasbourg saw the endurance of long-standing cultural mentalités and social sensibilities; where Berlin and Paris saw continuities in the emergence of national states, Basel and Strasbourg stressed the divide between present political arrangements and those of the past.

If Burckhardt’s *Renaissance* evoked the social background behind the intellectual and cultural monuments of an epoch, Lucien Febvre’s *Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais* (1935) did something very similar. H. Stuart Hughes has written that

To this day, historians … make a … distinction between social and intellectual history. Febvre’s *Rabelais* bridged both these divisions. It was a work of original scholarship on a highly specific theme, which had broadened out to encompass a historical question of major dimensions. It was also a study of intellectual monuments—literary and theological—which never lost sight of the social realities and the psychological atmosphere in which those writings had been conceived. After the publication of *Rabelais*, the ‘history of ideas’ could never be quite the same again.”

Febvre’s study was about the social and cultural limits of the thinkable in sixteenth-century Europe. In his introduction, he even suggested that he had weighed the possibility of discarding Rabelais entirely from the final product in the name of his deeper purpose: “Is [this] a monograph on a man, Rabelais? As great as he was, I would not have bothered to write that…. Perhaps I should have discarded my initial Rabelais scaffolding…?”

Febvre’s study of Rabelais set him against a broadly European intellectual background. But the background for Febvre could also be explicitly local, as in the case of an extended elaboration in his monograph on the Rhineland of a 1519 portrait by Hans Holbein the Younger. This was the portrait of Bonfacingus Amerbach, the son of a leading Basel printer and humanist:

Look at him, this young friend of the aging Erasmus—who manages to find a tone of unwonted tenderness when he speaks of him—look at him in his tolerant humanity. He is one of the luminaries of the Reformation at Basel, yet Cardinal Sadolet never misses an opportunity of sending him long and affectionate epistles; a sincere evangelical, fully cognizant of the value of a Farel or a Bèze, yet not hesitating to chide them harshly for speaking one day with partisan narrowness against the memory of Erasmus. A man. There he is, as he prepares, at his age of twenty-four, to journey to Avignon to study with the great Alciatus: handsome in his youthful strength, with a virile grace that springs from modesty and integrity. A living retort to those who keep saying that partiality and blind fanaticism were the unavoidable destiny of the men of the sixteenth century. But who, gazing on this effigy, could articulate the name of a city? He is a Baseler, to be sure, and a great Baseler. But we know that he is a Baseler. No one, seeing him, would say that he is a Swiss or a German. Bonfacingus Amerbach, the representative of a rather rare physical and moral human type, no doubt of that. But even more, the product of a culture. Of the authentically humane culture of the cities of the Rhine.”

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150 Lucien Febvre *Le Rhin*, pp. 96/97, as qtd. in Gossman 3-4.
Like Burckhardt’s portrait of Alberti as the quintessential Renaissance man, Febvre’s evocation of Bonfaccius Amebach as the embodiment of the “authentically humane culture of the cities of the Rhine” served to illuminate the background more than the background served to illuminate Amebach. It was quite literally an effort to read the culture of a city into the face and deportment of a figure in a sixteenth century painting.

Skeptical of state power and its vision of the march of progress, interested in continuity as much as change, focused upon social and cultural backgrounds at once local and broadly European, the Annales School and Jacob Burckhardt shared at least one more fundamental feature in their historiographical orientation that could be traced to their peripheral position at the university towns of the Rhine: their visual rather narrative representation of the past. Burckhardt’s *Renaissance* is a mosaic; Braudel’s *Mediterranean* a pointillist painting; Bloch’s *Feudal Society* is an anatomical chart; and Lucien Febvre’s *Problem of Unbelief* is a group portrait, situating Rabelais against the background of various broadly European contemporaries ranging from Martin Luther to Erasmus. There is little in the way of chronological development or change over time to any of these works or their arguments. Besides the vague claim that the Renaissance was “the leader” of his own epoch, the six sections of Burckhardt’s *Civilization of the Renaissance*—on the State, the Individual, the revival of Antiquity, the Discovery of the World, Society, and Religion—existed all at once in suspended historical simultaneity, as different aspects of a single multifaceted and often contradictory world, on which it would be very difficult if not impossible to pass moral judgment.

If the political histories produced in the metropolitan centers of Berlin and Paris tended to be smooth narratives of the emergence and development of states and their institutions over time, the visual orientation of Burckhardt and the Annales School moved disjointedly in many different directions at once. They were full of counterfactual speculations, and unanswered questions, which did more to open realms of investigation than resolve them. Lucien Febvre sought the limits of the thinkable in the sixteenth century: “If Rabelais had wanted to shake the belief in miracles by frontally attacking it in his books … he would have written something other than a parody.”

In the civilization of the Renaissance, Burckhardt asked why the Renaissance in Italy failed to produce great tragedy on the order of a William Shakespeare or great religious dissent on the order of a Martin Luther? He also wondered aloud whether the “make-up” of women in the Renaissance was the harbinger of a new era of self-fashioning, or was it the vestigial echo of a more ancient tribal practice. If the political histories produced in Berlin and

151 In his 1766 essay “Laokoon “ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing introduced an important distinction into European aesthetics between visual and poetic art. According to Lessing visual art belonged to the realm of the *nebeneinander* (next-to-one-another) whereas poetic art to the realm of the *nachaeinander* (after-one-another). In other words, visual art realized itself in space, whereas poetic art realized itself in time. The simultaneity of visual art and the unfolding through time of poetic narrative meant that the problems confronted by the visual artist and the poetic artist were completely different. The poetic artist was forced to translate every spatial relationship into a temporal language, whereas the visual artist had to translate temporal relationships into a spatial language. Thus, they belonged to different dimensions and the greatest challenge for the visual artist is the representation a sequence of events, just as the challenge for poet was the successive the representation of simultaneously occurring events. (“Laokoon: oder über die Grenzen der Mahlerei und Poesie” (1766) in *Laokoon: Lessing, Herder, Goethe*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1910), 17.)


153 These are precisely the kinds of counterfactual questions students in the history programs of leading American research universities born under the star of Leopold von Ranke are discouraged from posing.
Paris strung their images into narratives, the histories of Burckhardt and the Annales School embedded their narratives into larger pictures: which left room for several different simultaneously occurring interpretations and versions of the past, and as such were threatening to the legitimizing and centralizing function of state-centered histories. The stories and vignettes embedded in these images thus were not singular events or turning points, but evocations of a general texture and quality of life.

In the age of ideology, the visual as opposed to narrative orientation toward the past of Burckhardt and the Annales school allowed them to avoid the ideological commitments of the metropolitan center. Attempts to label Burckhardt a conservative, or subsume Bloch and Febvre to some form of French national republicanism is to exaggerate their national commitments and interests, to force the periphery, in other words, to speak the language of the center.¹⁵⁴ H. Stuart Hughes does precisely this when he write of Bloch and Febvre: “They also lived rooted in French patriotism, deep and unquestioned—just as they taught their pupils to seek in France’s soil and in the tangible evidence of France’s monuments the key to the riddles of historical interpretation that had eluded their predecessors.”¹⁵⁵ In their studies of provinces and regions as opposed to states and nations, in their evocation of a broadly European culture as well as intimately local one, Bloch and Febvre spoke the language of the particularizing provincial periphery rather than the universalizing metropolitan center. Written during the dark years of the Second World War from within the ranks of the French Resistance, one might expect to find in Mark Bloch’s Historian’s Craft a denunciation of the particular evils of German national socialism and an appeal to the moral superiority of France’s universal more cosmopolitan metropolitan civilization. Instead, Bloch criticizes the totalizing metropolitan ideal of a perfectly impartial and objective history advocated by Leopold von Ranke, and the judgments it subtly passes in the name of simply stating the facts.¹⁵⁶ The notion that the “facts speak for themselves” without interpretation is an eminently metropolitan position, advocated as much by Republican French historians like Ernest Lavisse and Seignobos in Paris, as Leopold von Ranke in Berlin.¹⁵⁷ Instead of universal standards, Bloch appealed to particular exceptions, and “understanding” to help us see and make sense of the person who is not like us or the people of

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¹⁵⁴ See Hayden White, *Metahistory* for a profoundly ungenerous assessment of Burckhardt’s conservatism
¹⁵⁵ H. Stuart Hughes, 20.
¹⁵⁶ Of Leopold von Ranke’s two “laws” (Gesetze) for history laid out in his *History of Roman and German Peoples* only the first is well known. But if we were to read a few sentences further we would see to what extent the second law overdetermines the first. In the first he claims he only wants to show things as they really are; in the second he claims that he will show the “evolution of unity and progress of events.” [“Entwickelung der Einheit und Fortgang des Begebenheiten”]. Hayden White could argue in *Metahistory* that Ranke is a historian of the “Comic mode of emplotment” because of this second law. The imperative to tell a story of the evolution of a greater or higher “unity” seems to overdetermine the imperative to write of things as “they really are.” In other words, Ranke can never tell a story of disruption, where things fall apart. However assiduously he adheres to the facts, history for Ranke is always about the making or consolidation of identities, nations, and states. “[Der Historiker] will bloß zeigen wie es eigentlich gewesen. ... Aus Absicht und Stoff entsteht die Form. Man kann von einer Historie nicht die freie Entfaltung fordern, welche wenigstens die Theorie in einem poetischen Werke sucht, und ich weiß nicht, ob man eine solche mit Recht in den Werken griechischer und römischer Meister gefunden zu haben glaubt. Strenge Darstellung der Thatsache, wie bedingt und unschön sie auch sei, ist ohne Zweifel das oberste Gesetz. Ein zweites war mir die Entwicklung der Einheit und des Fortgangs der Begebenheiten.” Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker* (1824).
¹⁵⁷ See H. Stuart Hughes on the French Historical Profession before the Annales School with its convinced republican “positivists,” Langlois, Lavisse and Seignobos, who all believed “the facts could speak for themselves” and that the meaningful “facts” were political, 22.
our nation, and cautioned against the political judgments that historians of the center are inclined to make in light of alleged universality of their perspective and their historical narratives:

When all is said and done, a single word, ‘understanding,’ is the beacon light of our studies. Let us not say that the true historian is a stranger to emotion: he has that, at all events. ‘Understanding,’ in all honesty, is a word pregnant with difficulties, but also with hope. Moreover, it is a friendly word. Even in action, we are far too prone to judge. It is so easy to denounce. We are never sufficiently understanding. Whoever differs from us—a foreigner or a political adversary—is almost inevitably considered evil.  

In almost identical language Jacob Burckhardt expressed his contempt for the historical judgments of the metropolitan center, in terms of its inclination to offer easy judgments and subsume the world to universal languages and laws that have little to do with the way the periphery actually functions.

For all my interest in states, universities, and language, this is not a diplomatic history of states, an institutional history of universities, nor even a cultural history of language. Rather, in the spirit of Jacob Burckhardt and the Annales School it is the study of the social background that undergirds and informs them all. It may seem provincial and old-fashioned to rely on late nineteenth and early twentieth century historiographical sensibilities like those of Jacob Burckhardt and the Annales School, especially after a twentieth “linguistic turn” has set the cultural history on a new footing. The social vision of culture which gave Burckhardt’s background and Annales school total history its coherence and their common historiographical orientation has lost its coherence, eroded and undermined by the onslaught of the linguistic turn which has turned the very idea of the “social”—the common foundation of Burckhardt’s cultural history and the Annales school’s total history —into a discursive construct. Still, in a study where the belief in the value and power of language to make sense of the world forms such an important part of the background, it is essential that I take my methodology from somewhere else. Just as the market-driven university of administrative excellence is scarcely the best place from which to study the virtues and vices of capitalism, the methods of discourse analysis and the linguistic turn scarcely offer the best observatory from which to see the linguistic construction of the modern world. To rely on them would be to paint white on white. Both the conception of Tartu as a German University town like Basel or Strasbourg and the work of Burckhardt and Annales historians with their emphasis on continuity rather than change, on pictures rather than narratives, and backgrounds rather than individuals inform my own conception of my task.

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159 For the an assessment of how the “University of Excellence” has triumphed over the “University of Culture” in the latter half of the twentieth century with the “Decline of the Nation-State,” see Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).
PART I: EUROPEAN TARTU

In 1824 Dorpat (Tartu) University acquired the most powerful telescope in the world. It was ordered by the astronomer Friedrich Georg Wilhelm Struve (1793—1865) from an optician in Munich, Joseph Frauenhofer, and towed by horses some 1500 kilometers across the continent. Struve used the 12-meter Fraunhofer Refractor to make several important astronomical discoveries over the course of the next decade involving Jupiter’s moons, Halley’s comet, and many stars. But Struve’s most important discovery did not involve the telescope at all. Struve used Tartu’s observatory and more than 265 towers (mostly church steeples) from northern Norway to the Black Sea to provide the first precise calculation of the curvature of the earth in a series of triangulations that came to be known as the “Struve Geodetic Arc.” With his measurements, Struve revealed the earth’s less than perfectly spherical form. As impressive for the social, political, and linguistic coordination it required as for the discovery itself, this international, multiconfessional, and multilingual endeavor spanned the better part of his life, from 1816 to 1855. At the time, the arc passed through only two states—The Kingdoms of Norway and Sweden and the Russian Empire. Today, after the rise of the nation-state and decolonization, it passes through ten: Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine.

Struve used Tartu’s Observatory as the first point in a series of triangulations designed to reveal something about the nature of the world. In a metaphorical sense this is how Tartu can be used to reveal something about the nature of the European University, i.e. by triangulating Tartu’s place among the languages, states, and universities of Europe and Russia over the course of four hundred years. Established by bishops and princes on the model of Paris with its four faculties encompassing all universal knowledge (Theology, Law, Medicine, and Philosophy), European universities were designed to serve what Harold Berman has called Europe’s first state, the church, as it emerged at the time of the Gregorian reforms. However, eventually they also sprang roots in the particular towns where they had their home. The more deeply they were embedded in their local communities, the more independent they could become from Church (and eventually state) power and ideology and the more open to alternative ways of seeing the world for all the corporate social conservatism of their hometown environments. German universities like Tübingen, Freiburg, Göttingen, Halle, Jena, Heidelberg, Königsberg, Marburg, Leipzig, Basel, Wittenberg, Rostock, Greifswald, and Strasburg came to play a crucial role in the intellectual history of Europe. It was at small-town Universities like these that German-speaking culture cultivated its language of particularizing “empathetic understanding” to challenge the universalizing and homogenizing rationalism of French civilization. It was also at small-town German Universities with their Burschenschaften beginning in Jena in 1815 (pop. 5000) that European national movements seemed most threatening to the crowned heads of Europe. A leading figure in international European politics, Prince Klemens Wensel von Metternich

160 Here I take exception to Mack Walker’s one-sided characterization of universities as agents of the liberalizing state with its “movers and doers.” In many cases (early 19th-century Basel is a wonderful example), the corporate town fathers treated their universities as a matter of local, municipal, or even regional pride, and guarded them jealously against the manipulations of the state. Burckhardt was a hometownsman born into the local guilds. And if Basel was singularly tolerant of Nietzsche in a way that Berlin could never be, it was because of its corporate conservatism rather than despite it.
cracked down on University autonomy with the Carlsbad Decrees of 1819. Small-town European universities never lost sight of the universalist pan-European vision of truth they inherited from the University of Paris, but their particularism rendered them especially sensitive to the limits of state-sponsored universalism, and open to other forms of freedom and identity.

This is not to say that there were no agents or advocates of the state at these universities. Immanuel Kant in Baltic Königsberg served as a propagandist for the Prussian State. It is ironic that his famous 1784 essay, “What is Enlightenment?”—one of the eighteenth century’s most memorable appeals to independent thought and reason (Sapere Aude! Dare to know!)—is accompanied a few lines down with rather obsequious praise for the magnanimity of his Majesty King Frederick the Great, who made this freedom possible. But what made these universities interesting and distinct from more metropolitan universities was the simultaneous presence of something else. If Kant noticed the “crooked timber of humanity” in Königsberg, it was also in Königsberg that his best student, Johann Gottfried Herder, started building a house out of that timber, challenging Kantian universalism and its faith in the perfect transparency of “language as such” with the linguistic opacity and particularism of the Herderian nation, a “Language Community” or Sprachgemeinschaft. Herderian cultural nationalism should not be reduced to a desire for linguistic isolation. It was rather the birth of a different, multinational kind of worldview, that would survive the nineteenth century and into the twentieth as an antidote to the homogenizing violence of liberal and socialist universalism. In his first job as a Lutheran pastor in Riga in the 1760s, Herder began collecting Estonian, Livonian, and Latvian folksongs, and in one of his very first scholarly efforts turned Livonian multilingualism into a worldview: “How little progress would we have made, were each nation to strive for learnedness by itself, confined within the narrow sphere of its language?”

In a world of increasingly powerful states in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the small town German University held out as Europe’s first depolitical “Third World”—in the original, positive sense of the term used at the Bandung Conference in 1955—refusing to accept the categories of intellectual debate as defined in politicized metropolitan centers. This was especially true in the multilingual borderland of the German-speaking world, in places like Basel, Strasburg, and Tartu that looked skeptically upon state-centric scholarship of Paris, Berlin, Saint Petersburg, and Moscow. It is not by chance, I would argue, that Jacob Burckhardt’s invention of the Renaissance and Cultural History (in the 1860s) and the “Total History” of the Annales School (in the 1930s), happened in traditionally German-speaking University towns like Basel and Strasburg in a multilingual European borderland. For all the states it served, Tartu had a similarly destabilizing function, imagining the world in terms that made Stockholm, Saint Petersburg, and Tallinn uneasy, both by generating new ideas in new languages and holding on to or recovering old ones long after they had fallen out of favor in metropolitan Europe and Russia. In Part One, I show how Tartu held aloof in the peripheral, multilingual, and transnational world of the Baltic, representing Europe as a German university town, generating its own idiosyncratic reconciliations of metalingual universalism with multilingual particularity in the Swedish Empire, Russian Empire, and Estonian National Republic.

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161 For a wonderful take on the Kant-Herder relationship and its implication for all universalizing philosophy and particularizing anthropology see Jonathan Zammito, Kant and Herder and the Birth of Anthropology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

Chapter 2. The Linguistic, Intellectual, and Political Origins of Europe

And in the entire country, which one could compare to a mighty kingdom, there was not a single good school or university, but rather nothing but inferior grammar schools in the main cities.

– Balthasar Russow, The Chronicle of Livonia (1577)

The European University is a quintessentially corporate, medieval institution, initially charged with the intellectual integration of Latin Christendom. On the most universal level, this study asks how the European University has served universal values in a world that no longer believes in a universal language nor a universal state. Tartu University can help us to see Europe. But first Europe must help us to see Tartu University.

2.1 Europe and Its Languages Between Babel and Pentecost

“Europe arose when the Roman Empire crumbled,” wrote Marc Bloch. Lucien Febvre concurred: “Europe became a possibility once the Empire disintegrated.” Umberto Eco defined this moment of Europe’s birth in explicitly linguistic terms:

Europe first appears as a Babel of new languages. Only afterwards was it a mosaic of nations…. Europe was thus born from its vulgar tongues. European critical culture begins with the reaction, often alarmed, to the eruption of these tongues. Europe was forced at the very moment of its birth to confront the drama of linguistic fragmentation, and European culture arose as a reflection on the destiny of a multilingual civilization.

Long before the emergence of a Latin-speaking European university in the twelfth century and the consolidation of a multi-confessional European state-system at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the story of Europe begins with a multilingual cultural encounter: between the languages of ancient philosophy, scripture, and everyday speech; between the codices of Roman law, the Biblical Commandments, and tribal custom.

From an early date, Europe’s elites were bilingual, speaking Latin as well as a vernacular. Adam Smith represented the linguistic emergence of Europe in precisely this way in The Wealth of Nations: “Two different languages were thus established in Europe, in the same manner as ancient Egypt; a language of the priests, and a language of the people; a sacred and a profane; a learned and an unlearned language.” And in several places elites spoke more. Until the

163 From the dedication “To the noble, worthy, most learned and wise lord mayors and counselors of the laudable imperial free city of Bremen, my benefactor lords” in The Chronicle of Balthasar Russow and A Forthright Rebuttal by Elert Kruse and Errors and Mistakes of Balthasar Russow by Heinrich Tisenhausen, trans. Jerry Smith (Baltic Studies Center, Madison, Wisconsin, 1988), 2 and 3.
166 “Side by side with the Germanic codes, Roman law survived as the customary law of the Roman population, known no longer through the great law books of Justinian but in elementary manuals an dform-books which grew thinner and more jejune as the time went on. The Digest, the most important part of the Corpus Juris Civilis, disappear from view between 603 and 1076.” Haskins, Birth of Universities, 10.
fifteenth-century England was ruled in three languages: English, French (following the Norman invasion of 1066), and Latin.\(^{168}\) It also had the Celtic languages of the periphery. Innumerable dialects divided the lands of Germany. In addition to Latin, the elites of the Iberian Peninsula had to contend with Hebrew, Arabic, and Basque and a quickly proliferating variety of Romance tongues and dialects, which came over the centuries to be known as Catalan, Léon, Galician, Portuguese, and Castillian.\(^{169}\) Moreover authority—both religious and secular—was always problematically multilingual. In 794 a Frankfort Synod echoed Saint Augustine when it announced “Let no one believe that God may be worshipped in three languages only [Latin, Greek, and Hebrew]. God is worshipped in all languages and people’s prayers are answered if they are just.”\(^{170}\) In their *Strasbourg Oaths* of 841, the sons of Emperor Louis the Pious took office in two different languages: “One swore the oaths in a language that was on its way to becoming French, the other used a language that was on the way to becoming German.”\(^{171}\)

In *The Making of Europe*, Robert Bartlett has given Europe’s linguistic multiplicity an important place in the worldview of Europe’s first scholarly elite:

> Medieval ecclesiastics and scholars, with their biblically based belief in the common descent of mankind and their theory of an original community of language found it natural to see the post-Babel differentiation of language as the first step in the formation of races or peoples. ‘Races arose from different languages, not languages from different races,’ as Isidore of Seville, the [7th-century] schoolmaster of the Middle Ages, put it. The same point is expressed even more pithily by another Latin author: ‘language makes race’ (gentem lingua facit).\(^{172}\)

Representations of the Tower of Babel are another place to see Europe’s early multilingual identity. The first known image of the Tower of Babel dates back to a Bible of the fifth or sixth century. Over the course of the next millennium a trickle of representations became a flood.\(^{173}\) At their peak in the 16th- and 17th-centuries, hundreds of Towers of Babel adorned the architecture of cathedrals and churches, stained glass windows, and the illuminated borders of world maps and learned manuscripts.\(^{174}\) But the Tower of Babel also became the subject of independent works of art and the organizing conceit for works of scholarship. Two paintings of the Tower of Babel by Pieter Bruegel the elder (1525-1569) and several more from his school epitomized a sixteenth-century obsession with the motif among Dutch and Flemish artists, where linguistic identities gave rise to confessional ones.\(^{175}\)

In 1679 one of Europe’s most universal, if eccentric, intellectuals published a history of the world under the Latin title, *Turris Babel (The Tower of Babel)*. Athanasius Kircher (1602—

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\(^{168}\) Le Goff, *The Birth of Europe*, 134.

\(^{169}\) Le Goff, *The Birth of Europe*, 135.

\(^{170}\) Le Goff, *The Birth of Europe*, 133.

\(^{171}\) Le Goff, *The Birth of Europe*, 133.

\(^{172}\) Le Goff, *The Birth of Europe*, 133.

\(^{173}\) Eco, *Perfect Language*, 17.

\(^{174}\) Helmut Minkowski offers reproductions of nearly 400 pictoral and sculptural representations of the Tower of Babel from the last two millennia in Europe. More than 300 of these reproductions come from the 17th century or before. See Helmut Minkowski, *Aus dem Nebel der Vergangenheit steigt der Turm zu Babel: Bilder aus 1000 Jahren* (Berlin: Rembrandt-Verlag, 1959).

\(^{175}\) In addition to Bruegel’s paintings, the works of numerous other Dutch and Flemish artists can be seen in Minkowski, 53-77.
1680) has been called the “last Renaissance man.” His book, printed in Amsterdam and richly illustrated with multiple depictions of the Tower of Babel by Dutch artists, might be seen as the final Baroque expression of an era in which the universal ideal of Europe was sought in the image of a united Christendom. Kircher was originally a Jesuit professor of ethics, mathematics, and oriental languages (Hebrew and Syriac) at the University of Würzburg. Later he was called to Vienna to succeed Johannes Kepler as the court mathematician of the Habsburg Monarchy. In Turris Babel, Kircher depicted “all of the world’s surviving languages [as] degenerate renditions of the original hermetic mysteries as revealed in Hebrew.”

As a social reality, Europe is the unintended byproduct of the destruction, disorder, and Babel wrought by the barbarian invasions, the multiplicity of languages and cultural syncretism left in its wake. Umberto Eco has evoked this situation at the time of the fall of Rome:

> It has been calculated that toward the end of the fifth century, people no longer spoke Latin, but Gallo-Romanic, Italico-Romanic or Hispano-Romanic. While intellectuals continued to write Latin, bastardizing it ever further, they heard around them local dialects in which survivals of languages spoken before Roman civilization crossed with new roots arriving with the barbarian invaders. But as an intellectual ideal, Europe is also the attempt to restore harmony and order to a fallen world, to integrate its various strands by means of universal knowledge.

This promise of redemption has wavered between two linguistic models. One dreams of a new or reconstituted universal language (of faith or science) to heal the curse of Europe’s multilingual predicament; looking back to the Biblical tower of Babel it laments the loss of a time when “the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.” The other finds redemption in multilingualism itself; it looks forward in the spirit of Pentecost from “The Acts of the Apostles,” when the followers of Christ learned “to speak with other tongues” translating the Word of God into the languages of everyday life:

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome,

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179 Eco, 16.
Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.\textsuperscript{181}

The European university and its intellectual culture was born between these two responses to Europe’s multilingual predicament. For the first universal language of European scholarship—like the language of the Church and European diplomacy—was neither a language of primordial Christian unity nor a language of everyday life, but the surviving if altered remnant of a defunct, pagan empire. “Scholastic Latin was an artificial language.”\textsuperscript{182}

\section*{2.2 Europe and Its First Universities}

With its four faculties—of Theology, Law, Medicine, and Philosophy—the University of Paris became the archetype for the European University. By the end of the fifteenth century, some eighty universities spanned the continent.\textsuperscript{183} Most were in the West, with the highest density along the cultural gradient that ran from Italy to England along the Rhine river through the Low Countries. Prague (1348) and the Jagiellonian University at Krakow (1364) were among the first universities of the East. German Universities proliferated at the same time. But even here, the University of Paris with its four faculties, remained the dominant model.\textsuperscript{184}

The German universities, none of them older than the fourteenth century, were confessed imitations of Paris. Thus the Elector of Palatine, Ruprecht, in founding the University of Heidelberg in 1386—for these later universities were founded at specific dates—provides that it ‘shall be ruled, disposed, and regulated according to the modes and matters accustomed to be observed in the University of Paris—a worthy one let us hope—it shall imitate the steps of Paris in every way possible, so that there shall be four faculties.”\textsuperscript{185}

The medieval University was an important institutional agent and perhaps the ultimate symbol of the effort to overcome the Babel of European society by means of a higher, theologically inspired integration of all knowledge. At its root, the intellectual problem it emerged to solve was a linguistic one: how to make the Greek texts of Aristotle speak to the Hebrew texts of Jesus Christ in the language of Latin so as to govern the territories and save the souls of illiterate commoners, who spoke “the languages of the land,” and had little interest in what either Christ or Aristotle had to say. From the first efforts of Peter Abelard (1079—1142) “to apply [Aristotle’s] logical method of inquiry to theology” to the comprehensive synthesis of the\textit{Summa Theologica} of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), scholasticism emerged as the method of critical thought of the medieval university. Its lectures and disputations were intended to integrate an ever-growing body of contradictory texts composed in a variety of languages into a meaningful whole in the name of Latin Christendom.\textsuperscript{186} A brief look at the emergence of the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{181} King James Version, Acts 2: 1-41. \\
\textsuperscript{182} Le Goff, \textit{The Birth of Europe, 400—1500} (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 134. \\
\textsuperscript{183} Rashdall, Universities, I, p.xxviii; map at beginning of Vol II and in Shepherd, Historical Atlas (New York, 1911), p. 100. as cited in Haskins, 29. \\
\textsuperscript{184} Jacques le Goff has called it the only model: “Only the Paris model has survived of the present day.” Jacques le Goff, \textit{The Birth of Europe}, 121. \\
\textsuperscript{185} Charles Homer Haskins \textit{The Rise of Universities} (New Brunswick: Transactrion Publishers,1923), 29. \\
\textsuperscript{186} Haskins, \textit{The Rise of Universities}, 72.
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European university in the eleventh and twelfth centuries will clarify its double role in giving
voice to Europe’s linguistic multiplicity on the one hand, while seeking to overcome it on the
other.

For many centuries after the fall of Rome, monasteries did the intellectual work of
Europe. Monks preserved and transcribed surviving textual fragments. Beginning in the tenth
century cathedral schools taught the seven liberal arts to the sons of noblemen to prepare them
for positions in ecclesiastical and lay administrations. In a world with tremendous faith in the
wisdom and power of the written word, intellectual culture consisted in rote learning.187 But
texts were limited, and learning reduced to an essentialized, if somewhat haphazard, Latin
catechism, “condensing and dessicating knowledge”:

In the monastic and cathedral schools of the earlier period the text-books were few and
simple, chiefly the Latin grammars of Donatus and Priscian with some elementary
reading-books, the logical manuals of Boethius, as well as his arithmetic and music, a
manual of rhetoric, the most elementary propositions of geometry, and an outline of
practical astronomy such as that of the Venerable Bede. Of Greek, of course, there was
none.188

The problem of Europe’s linguistic multiplicity faded into the background.

The emergence of European universities fell to a time—coinciding with the Crusades
(1095-1272)—when a deluge of manuscripts in several different languages from the near East
startled Europe with the inadequacy of existing institutions of learning to perform the intellectual
integration of Latin Christendom:

Between 1100 and 1200 … there came a great influx of new knowledge into western
Europe, partly through Italy and Sicily, but chiefly through the Arab scholars of Spain—
the works of Aristotle, Euclid, Ptolemy, and the Greek physicians, the new arithmetic,
and those texts of the Roman law which had lain hidden through the Dark Ages.… This
new knowledge burst the bonds of the cathedral and monastery schools and created the
learned professions.189

At first the Church tried to ignore the linguistic problem at its root. In his own comprehensive
history of the world that was The Wealth of Nations, Adam Smith noted the delay in the
incorporation of Greek and Hebrew into the “common course of university education,” observing
how the Church fell back on the infallibility of the “Latin translation of the Bible, commonly
called the Latin Vulgate,” which had been “dictated by divine inspiration” and was “therefore of
equal authority with the Greek and Hebrew originals.” But the problem of translation would not
go away so easily:

[Reformers] set themselves … to expose the many errors of that translation, which the
Roman catholic clergy were thus put under the necessity of defending or explaining. But
this could not well be done without some knowledge of the original languages, of which

the study was therefore gradually introduced into the greater part of universities; both of 
those which embraced, and those which rejected, the doctrines of the reformation.\footnote{Adam Smith, \textit{Wealth of Nations}, 826.}

Even before the Reformation and the institutionalization of the study of ancient (and later modern) languages in university curricula, the European university was a response to an ever-growing plurality of texts and learned languages, and the need to figure out what to do with them.

The legal historian Harold Berman has connected the origins of the University of Bologna—sometimes called the first university—to the rediscovery in the 1080s of a single document (last seen in 603): “It was highly convenient, and not wholly accidental, that a manuscript of Justinian’s Digest turned up in a library in Florence in the 1080s, and it was surely not accidental that very soon a university was founded in Bologna—the first European university—to study that manuscript.”\footnote{Harold Berman, \textit{Law and Revolution I: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 528-9; see also Haskins, \textit{The Rise of Universities}, 8.} As Berman suggests, even when working with Latin texts from ancient Rome, the problem that faced an emerging class of European jurists at the first European university was a problem of cross-cultural and very often linguistic translation:

The terms had acquired new meanings. There were no Western counterparts to the Roman magistrates (praetors), legal advisors (jurists), or advocates (orators). The prevailing legal institutions were largely Germanic and Frankish. Thus it was the body of law, the legal system, of an earlier civilization, as recorded in a huge book or set of books, that formed the object of Europe’s first systematic legal studies.\footnote{Berman, \textit{Law and Revolution I}, 122.}

The scholars of the University of Bologna, led by its first great professor Irnerius, developed the field of civil law.\footnote{Haskins, \textit{The Rise of Universities}, 12.} At around the same time, a university emerged at Salerno (the “City of Hippocrates”) in Southern Italy to translate and interpret rediscovered Greek medical texts, capitalizing on the significant Greek-speaking minority in its population.\footnote{Haskins, \textit{The Rise of Universities}, 9.}

Bologna and Salerno each had their specializations, connected to the particular documents they rediscovered. But the University of Paris, which grew out of the Cathedral School of Notre Dame in the last decades of the twelfth century (precise founding dates are the meaningless inventions of posterity), was the most ambitious and universal in its intellectual reach. With its four faculties—of theology, law, medicine, and philosophy—it promised the integration of all knowledge through the study of newfound texts, covering all realms of existence as imagined in medieval Europe: the care of the soul (theology), the care of the body (medicine), the care of the social order (law), and the philosophical underpinnings for knowledge in all these realms, based first and foremost on the trivium of the Liberal Arts (rhetoric, grammar, and logic) and thereafter on the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy).

On an even deeper level, the integration of knowledge in all these areas was based on a theological worldview that “truth is something which has already been revealed to us by authority.”\footnote{Haskins, \textit{The Rise of Universities}, 70.} The words of Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), another founding figure of
medieval scholasticism, grasp this orientation to knowledge with remarkable self-reflexive clarity: “I believe in order that I may know, I do not know in order to believe.”

Thus, the forms of scholastic medieval learning—the lecture, usually read from prepared texts of established authorities, and disputation, formalized debate to uncover truths by reasoning deductively from first principles, served knowledge by positioning new texts within a previously established canon of beliefs. Ambitious claims for the integrative power of scholastic disquisitions have been used to account for the growing intellectual unity of medieval Europe:

Scholastic disputation arose in the late eleventh century in connection with new developments in monastic learning, and over the course of the next two centuries, it developed systematically and centrifugally from France and Italy to become a formative practice in the scholastic culture of medieval Europe, eventually transcending the frontier between private and public spheres and extending to multiple levels of society.

The Scholastic disputations derived from the need to reconcile and integrate seemingly contradictory positions, perspectives, texts, and languages into an ever-widening cultural repertoire for the sake of a higher unity. It was institutionalized in the thirteenth century “as a central component of university education.”

Provoked into existence by a growing awareness of long-forgotten texts and languages, European universities at first excluded most of them (along with vernacular tongues) from their curriculum. Instead, they focused on just a few, especially Aristotle’s Logic:

If the absence of the ancient classics of vernacular literature is a striking feature of the university curriculum in arts, an equally striking fact is the amount of emphasis placed on logic or dialectic. The earliest university statutes, those of Paris in 1215, require the whole of Aristotle’s logical works, and throughout the Middle Ages these remain the backbone of the arts course.

But even Aristotle was a linguistic problem waiting to happen and a challenge to biblical orthodoxy as more and more original Greek texts and their Arabic commentaries came to light: “all through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there was an intermittent fight between Christian theology and pagan philosophy as represented by the works of Aristotle.”

This dialectical pattern of encounter, refutation, and integration or exclusion, which became the model for the assimilation of other texts and traditions into the curriculum (and canon) of the European university over time, can be seen in the treatment of Aristotle’s other works at the University of Paris:

By the twelfth century, the New Logic was pretty well assimilated, but then came Aristotle’s Metaphysics and natural philosophy, with their Arabic commentators, the study of which at Paris was formally forbidden in 1210 and 1215. In 1231 the Pope requires them to be ‘examined and purged of all suspicion of error,’ but by 1254 they are

196 Haskins, The Rise of Universities, 70.
a fixed part of the curriculum in arts, not expurgated but reconciled by interpretation to the Christian faith.\textsuperscript{201}

As other texts and authors came under consideration, the pattern for their debate and integration or exclusion was already set by the attempt to render Aristotle compatible with Christian theology. Even before they acquired a formal place in the curriculum of the European University, classical and oriental languages left a mark on European elites and intellectual life. By the thirteenth century, “Latin translations from Arabic and ancient Greek proliferated by such scholars as Adelard of Bath or Burgundio di Pisa.”\textsuperscript{202} The use of awkward Roman numerals (I, II, III) gave way to more efficient Hindu-Arabic ones (1,2,3) as Muhammed Al-Khwarizmi’s treatise of 825, \textit{On the Calculation with Hindu Numerals} was translated from Arabic into Latin in the twelfth century as \textit{Algoritmi de numero Indorum}.\textsuperscript{203} By the end of the thirteenth century the Franciscan friar and scholastic, Roger Bacon, claimed that teachers of Greek and Hebrew could easily be found “in Paris and in France and in all other regions.”\textsuperscript{204}

At first, the study of languages served more particular and proximate purposes in connection with the Crusades, like converting Muslims and Jews or negotiating the release of Christian hostages from the Holy Land. After a few failed attempts by the Vatican, Dominican monks organized schools of languages (\textit{studia linguarum}) for missionary purposes in several places in Southern Europe and North Africa. The languages studied included Persian (the language of the Mongol Empire) and Turkish as well as Arabic.\textsuperscript{205} In the 1130s two scholars who had studied together at the Cathedral School of Notre Dame, a predecessor to the University of Paris, traveled together to the Crusader States of Palestine. The friendship and collaboration of Robert of Ketton (\textit{Robertus Ketenensis}), born in present-day England, and Herman of Carinthia (\textit{Sclavus Dalmatia}), born in present-day Slovenia, attests to the pan-European reach of medieval elites and networks of learning. Ketton’s first Latin translation of the Koran appeared in 1143 under the title: \textit{Lex Mahumet pseudoprophete} (Law of Muhammad the false prophet).\textsuperscript{206} Intended for exclusion from the Europe’s academic curricula, this translation nonetheless emerged from the same intellectual and cultural milieu that gave rise to the universities themselves. This point is worthy of methodological reflection. Purely institutional histories of the European universities, which focus merely upon their people and curricula, can never grasp their intellectual or social importance. For European universities have always occupied a position on the boundary between Europe and its others—between the ideas, texts, and people admitted to them and those excluded from their institutional boundaries. The outsiders of one generation are quite often the insiders of the next.

The Church Council of Vienna of 1311 marks the first formal recognition of the importance of languages to the intellectual integration of Christendom and an attempt to

\textsuperscript{201} Haskins, \textit{The Rise of Universities}, 73.
\textsuperscript{202} Norman Davies, \textit{Europe}, 349.
\textsuperscript{203} See Arthur Mazer, \textit{The Ellipse: A Historical and Mathematical Journey} (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2010), 96.
\textsuperscript{204} The Franciscan friar and scholastic Roger Bacon claimed this. “Transmission of Greek and Arabic Learning”\textit{ Science in the Middle Ages}. 77
incorporate them into university curricula. A decree sponsored by church officials and a few leading scholars of the day, including Raymond Lull and Roger Bacon, called for the establishment of chairs of Greek, Hebrew, Chaldean, and Arabic at the Universities of Paris, Bologna, Avignon, Oxford, and Salamanca: “The proponents of the measure urged that the teaching of Oriental languages should serve the twofold purpose of assisting in the conversion of the infidel and advancing biblical exegesis.” The position of these chairs of linguistic study in university curricula over the course of the next few centuries fluctuated and was far from secure. The Church Council of Basel of 1341 attempted to revive the decree of Vienna. But what seems significant here is the growing recognition on the part of Church authorities by the early the fourteenth century that the universities could not perform the integration of Latin Christendom without the study of oriental and classical languages.

According to the historian Robert Bartlett, medieval Europe was made by internal colonization. And universities, as “powerful instruments of cultural homogeneity” played a vital role in the cultural integration of the continent. By the thirteenth century “these international centres of learning and education had … acquired something like their modern form: corporate, degree-granting institutions run by teachers who lectured to, disciplined and examined students.” One of the most important ways universities promoted this political and social unity was through the development of a transferable legal terminology and methods: “The graduates of the university law schools went back to their own countries, or moved to other countries, where they served as ecclesiastical or lay judges, practicing lawyers, legal advisers to the ecclesiastical, royal, and city authorities and to the lords of manors, and as administrative officials of various kinds.” But ultimately, the intellectual unity of Latin Christendom that the medieval university helped to perpetuate was as much a unity of elites as it was a unity of beliefs. This point has been made even more resonantly by David Knowles:

From 1050 to 1350, and above all in the century 1070 and 1170, the whole of educated Europe formed a single and undifferentiated cultural unit. In the lands between Edinburgh and Palermo, Mainz or Lund and Toledo, a man of any city or village might go for education to any school, and become a prelate or an official in any church, court, or university (when these existed) from north to south, from east to west.

Even as universities spread their scholars and ideas across the European continent, they also insulated them against the vagaries of political power. As a semi-autonomous social body and a method of critical inquiry, the European university was always more than just an agent of the political order that sponsored it. Universities became places for the expression of particular linguistic identities and alternative visions of the whole. With their corporate privileges, granted by popes, kings, and princes, they had a certain degree of autonomy (e.g. the exemption from taxation) and power (e.g. the authority to award degrees, beginning with the licensiate or right to teach). These privileges insulated them from the surrounding society as a corporate structure, and gave them resilience in the face of the very political authorities that sponsored them in the first place, as they generated their own kind of authority through teaching and scholarship.

208 Robert, Lust for Knowledge, 48.
209 Bartlett, Making of Europe, 288.
210 Berman, Law and Revolution I, 161.
211 David Knowles as qtd. in Berman, Law and Revolution I, 161.
Like all medieval corporations, universities were “batie en hommes” (built of men) in the words of the 15th-century French scholar Etienne Pasquier, and had their own internal dynamics and power structures. Before they had any traditions or buildings to speak of universities functioned as a teaching relationship between “masters” and “scholars.” Harold Berman has underscored this point in reference to the achievements of medieval scholarship: “‘The principal books of law and theology were the natural outgrowth of university lectures.’ In other words, science—scholarship—came from teaching, and not vice versa.” Capitalizing on the teaching relationship and drawing their members mostly from monasteries and noble families, the universities institutionalized a new class of men, relevant to the political and social order of Europe, but devoted to learning for its own sake, posing as many difficult questions as they answered.

Peter Abelard was a founding figure of medieval scholasticism and a prototype for the university professor. But he was also in the words of Charles Haskins, a “brilliant young radical, whose persistent questioning and scant respect for titled authority, drew students in large numbers wherever he taught, whether at Paris or in the wilderness.” The teaching relationship turned this son of a minor Breton nobleman into an international European celebrity and a threat to the establishment. What Peter Abelard embodied, and what came to set the university apart from the cathedral schools and monasteries of the previous era was the institutionalization of dissident or opposing positions within its culture. Harold Berman has also stressed this point:

In Paris in the early 1100s, Peter Abelard dared to contradict his bishop and teach a ‘countercourse’ against him. It was out of this confrontation that the University of Paris emerged in the twelfth century. Thus, the European universities established themselves from the beginning as educational institutions where professors were free to take opposing positions. This was in contrast to the earlier system, known since antiquity, under which each school had been dominated by a single teacher or a single theory.

Even the author of the *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas, was less a pillar of the political and social establishment than he was an embodiment of the intellectual disagreements at the root of Latin Christendom. In attempting to understand the position of Thomas Aquinas in the world of his contemporaries, Elizabeth Lowe has shown the extent to which he was an embattled figure in conflict with nearly all of the prevailing authorities of his time:

Not only did most scholastics believe that propositions drawn from Thomas’ teachings had been thoroughly condemned in 1277, but the pope, the majority of bishops, most Franciscans and the secular *magistri* who dominated the university theological faculties had aligned in a formidable opposition to the Aristotelianism with which Aquinas’ teachings were commonly associated.

In truth, Thomas Aquinas’s synthesis of Aristotelian thought and theology were very far from representing a united orthodoxy of belief, and attests to the contested nature of his teachings in his own day, despite his fame and influence. If Thomas Aquinas was emblematic of anything, it

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was the critical culture of the medieval university, the institutionalization of scholastic forms of intellectual disagreement and dispute, more than the making of universally accepted body—a “summa”—of legitimate theological knowledge.

Universities had a vexed relationship both to the Latin-speaking authorities above and the vernacular tongues of society below. Despite their capacity to challenge political authorities, universities were insulated against the communities and towns where they made their homes, and were treated (at least initially) by townspeople with a certain degree of suspicion as foreign bodies to which the age-old conflict between “town and gown” attests. Nonetheless, they gave expression to voices from below, institutionalizing particular linguistic and regional identities, even contributing to the rise of later national stereotypes. The Latin-speaking masters and scholars of the universities each formed a medieval corporation, set off from the language of the land and united by the language of Latin. But internal divisions among students emerged very early on. In the thirteenth century the University of Paris was already internally divided into four “nations” (fraternal corporate organizations) based on students’ points of territorial origin and their native languages or regional dialects. The four original nations of the University of Paris were the French, Norman, Picardian, and Allemagnian nations. They give a sense of the geographical range and distribution of the majority of its students, who came from across Western Europe. The French nation included other Latin peoples, while the Allemagnian nation united students from Britain and Germany, and the Picardian contained students from the Low Countries. Thus the university of Paris institutionalized territorial identities and languages, a pattern later repeated at universities across the continent from Prague to Tartu.

Over the course of the next few centuries the perceived importance of languages and literatures to the intellectual culture of Europe grew and received ever more institutional attention, eventually threatening the linguistic, intellectual, and even political coherence of Latin Christendom. Too often understood (ever since the writings of Jacob Burckhardt) as a movement occurring outside the European universities, the philological revolution that was the Italian Renaissance stood in dialogical relation to the culture of the medieval university, which it in turn helped to shape. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the study of classical and oriental languages—of Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, Chaldean—found a permanent home in the curricula of most European secondary schools and universities. For their part, Renaissance humanists owed their intellectual orientation to the universities by challenging the universal metaphysical synthesis of all knowledge based on Aristotle and attacking the irrelevance of scholastic forms of thought with the philological study of particular texts and languages. Using techniques of linguistic interpretation and textual exegesis, a former professor of eloquence at the university of Pavia, Lorenzo Valla, exposed the Donation of Constantine as a fraud. The Roman Catholic Church had used this apocryphal document for many centuries to legitimize its authority by claiming to be the rightful heir of the Roman Empire. With his heightened attention to the details of language, a former university professor undermined the intellectual foundations of the territorial authority of the Latin Church.

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218 Indeed, in his 1629 address at the inauguration of the newly founded Swedish Lutheran gymnasium of Dorpat (Tartu), its founder Johan Skytte, promised that instruction at this school would be given in all of the “four basic” languages. He did not bother to indicate what they were, suggesting that by the mid-seventeenth century the identities of those languages would have been self-evident to anyone in attendance, evidence of the degree of institutionalization of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Chaldean in academic culture of Europe by the seventeenth century. See facsimile edition of Friedrich Menius, Relatio von Inauguration der Universität zu Dorpat, geschehen den 15. Octobris, im Jahr 1632 (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 1997), 22.
But even here the Renaissance might be seen more as a culmination than a departure from the intellectual culture produced and consolidated at Europe’s first universities. For as a philological revival the Renaissance renewed and intensified the concern for original textual sources that had given rise to the universities of Europe in the first place. This continuity in the aims and evolution of European academic culture can be heard in 1564 in the remarks of a Calvinist humanist in Paris, Petrus Ramus, attempting to describe the advance in European civilization over the course of the previous hundred years:

Let us imagine a teacher of a university who died a hundred years ago and had now returned among us. If he compared the efflorescence of the humanistic disciplines and the sciences of nature in France, Italy, and England as they developed since his death, he would be shaken and astonished when he compared his own age with the present. He knew only human beings who spoke in a crude barbarian manner. Now he sees countless persons of all ages who speak and write Latin with elegance. As regards Greek, he would have repeatedly heard the usage: ‘That is Greek, that is unintelligible.’ Now, he would not only hear Greek being read with the greatest of ease but he would encounter scholars who would be able to teach this language with the greatest expertise. And how could one compare the darkness which once covered all the arts with the light and the brilliance of today? Of the grammarians, the poets and the orators only Alexander of Villedieu and the works like Facetus and Graecismus, in philosophy only Scotus and the Spaniards, in the medicine the Arabs, in theology there were few, one does not know where they came from. Now he would hear Terence, Caesar, Virgil, Cicero, Aristotle, Plato, Galen, Hippocrates, Moses, the prophets, the apostles and the other true announcers of the gospel and he would hear them speaking in their own languages. How could he not be astonished? It is almost as if he raised his eyes from the depth of the earth to the heaven and saw for the first time the sun, the moon and the stars.\(^{219}\)

The intellectual history of Europe, according to Ramus, was one of continuity rather than of rupture, a narrative of the progress of learning and culture. Ramus imagined his own historical moment as the culmination of their original multilingual integrative purpose, expanding knowledge with a growing repertoire of learned languages and textual authorities. Though he was a Protestant, Ramus had not given up on the ideal of a united Latin Christendom; indeed, in his enumeration of the authorities of the ancient world, he was less focused on what divided Calvinists from other Christians than in their common intellectual inheritance in the culture of the European university. His optimism proved premature. Ramus was killed a few years later in the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of Parisian Protestants in 1572.

At the same time, the vernacular languages were becoming languages of European culture. The works of Dante, Rabelais, Cervantes, and Shakespeare helped consolidate the modern literary languages of Italy, France, Spain, and England respectively, as Renaissance humanists turned their intellectual energies increasingly to the world of the present. The incorporation of the vernacular into university curricula was slower in coming than the incorporation of ancient languages. Ultimately though, the institutionalization of both were related processes, connected to the perceived value of hearing authorities, as Petrus Ramus put it,

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“speaking in their own languages.” In this sense, both owed something to the Protestant Reformation. With the stress on each person’s reading of scripture for himself rather than the inherited teachings and the hierarchical traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, every language became a potential source of authority and the idea of translating the word of God into the languages of everyday life gained currency. With his translation of the Bible directly from the ancient languages of Hebrew and Greek into German, Martin Luther removed the Scholastic Latin language of pan-European scholarship entirely as a conduit between the ancients and the moderns.

Paradoxically, the Reformation that ultimately shattered the unity of Latin Christendom between 1517 and 1648 with the rise of confessional states—each with its own church speaking its own language—was a movement that had its roots in the integrative intellectual culture of the European university. It all began, after all, with a ritual of medieval scholasticism when an Augustinian monk and professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg nailed his 95 theses to a church door, calling for a public Latin disputation on the question of Church Indulgences: \textit{Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgiarum}. Thus, a scholastic ritual originally intended to promote the more perfect union of Latin Christendom served in fact to tear it apart.

Still, the greatest significance of the medieval origins of the European University for Tartu is as much one of continuity as rupture. Its capacity to provoke Babel in any particular political and social context must always be seen in light of its effort to overcome it. A remarkably stable and backward-looking institution with its growing libraries, beholden to the inertia of its traditions, the European university became a powerful repository of cultural memory amid the political upheavals and transformations that wracked Europe in centuries to come. On the one hand, the medieval university institutionalized a new kind of elite for Europe, based on knowledge rather than birth; on the other hand it preserved the medieval monk for modernity. Always behind the times, never the most innovative or efficient model of intellectual change or progress (academies and institutes have always served this purpose much better), the European university has rendered Europe and the world a more important and more interesting service. It transformed Europe by keeping it the same, preserving the ideals, structures of knowledge, patient techniques of inquiry, attention to language, and memory of a vanishing ideal of European unity under radically different states and reformist agendas.

Perhaps the most enduring continuity in the contribution of the university to European civilization ever since medieval scholastics attempted to make Aristotle speak to Jesus Christ in the language of Latin has been its role as place for sustained conversation and intellectual encounter—between the sacred and the profane, the universal and the particular, the center and the periphery, the professor and the student. Its task has always been one of reconciliation as its scholars have worked to achieve a more universal language of faith or science while giving voice to an ever-growing number of the languages and cultures of the world.

In 1651 in \textit{Leviathan}, Thomas Hobbes, an Oxford graduate himself, expressed exasperation at the inability of England’s universities to serve the interests of the state:

And the Divines and such others as make shew of Learning, derive their knowledge from the Universities and from the Schools of Law, or from the Books, which by men eminent in those Schooles, and Universities have been published. It is therefore manifest, that the Instruction of the people, dependeth wholly, on the right teaching of Youth in the Universities. But are not (may some man say) the Universities of England learned enough
already to do that? or is it you will undertake to teach the Universities? Hard questions. Yet to the first, I doubt not to answer: that till towards the later end of Henry the eighth the Power of the Pope, was always upheld against the Power of the Common-wealth, principally by the Universities; and that the doctrines maintained by so many Preachers, against the Soveraign Power of the King, and by so many Lawyers, and others, that had their education there, is a sufficient argument, that though the Universities were not authors of those false doctrines, yet they knew not how to plant the true.220

In short, Hobbes argued that between the variety of doctrines they sponsored and their appeal to an earlier and more universal order of Latin Christendom (headed by the Pope), the English universities were pretty useless historically as agents of the unified state power. A few centuries later, another Oxford graduate, Adam Smith, expressed comparable frustration with the old-fashioned organization of knowledge at universities, with their failure to teach men the “real business of the world.”221 It would be hard to imagine a better endorsement of the capacity of the university to see the world from afar and stand outside its own time and place than Thomas Hobbes’s seventeenth-century disappointment with its failure to become an unquestioning agent of the state and Adam Smith’s eighteenth-century disappointment with its failure to teach the business of trade.

In some sense, universities have always stood apart from the worlds they occupy, and have always been behind the times. This may in fact be their greatest virtue as observatories upon reality. In dedicating his Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge “to the Institut Polytechnique de Philosophie of the Université de Paris VIII (Vincennes),” Jean-Francois Lyotard noted that “this very postmodern moment […] finds the University nearing what may be its end, while the Institute may just be beginning.”222 There is nothing particularly original about this kind of prediction. Manifestos announcing the inability of universities to keep up with modernity (let alone postmodernity!) and prophets of their imminent demise have been there all along. But somehow universities have proved more resilient than their detractors. If the dying memory of postmodernism is preserved anywhere—if anybody still reads Jean-Francois Lyotard today—it is most probably at some dusty old university rather than one of the shiny new institutes he predicted would take their place.

Universities have served as a cornerstone of Europe’s critical culture as much by being behind the times as being ahead of them, by questioning languages of universal truth as by generating them. The Lutheran University of Tartu founded by the Swedish Empire in 1632, Europe’s first great Protestant Monarchy, was a traditional medieval, Latin-speaking, scholastic institution, devoted as much to the vanishing and increasingly irrelevant theological ideal of a pan-European vision of Latin Christendom as to the modern secular interests of the emerging Swedish state. It was this backward-looking impulse, more than its progressive embrace of the scientific revolution, the early currents of the Enlightenment (this was the moment, after all, when Descartes came to Stockholm), or Swedish imperial interests, that was the source of its

221 “The greater part of what is taught in schools and universities, however, does not seem to be the most proper preparation for that business.” Smith, The Wealth of Nations, 832.
222 It is often forgotten that the original essay was commissioned by the Conseil supérieur de l’éducation de Québec as a consulting piece for its universities. See Jean François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), xxv. 
critical potential. And something very similar might be said of Tartu University under Russian, Estonian, and Soviet rule as well.

2.3 The First European State and Its Baltic Frontier

“Europe is both a region and an idea.” Rather than try to disentangle the two, it is more productive to see Europe as the outcome of the effort to bring the one into political alignment with the other. For more than a thousand years, until the seventeenth century, the intellectual ideal of territorial Europe was Latin Christendom, and like all ideals of Europe, Latin Christendom was also a worldview. Europe has always been an extroverted place. Long before Columbus and the Age of Exploration, Europe’s elites looked beyond the boundaries of their continent for their world-historical-identity and sense of purpose. Unlike Beijing’s Forbidden City, which proclaimed itself the “center of the world” from the time it was built in the early fifteenth century, the first known European world map of the seventh-century monk, Isidore of Seville, placed Jerusalem at the center. Asia occupied the upper half, while Europe and Africa were scuttled off to the margins in the lower left and right quadrants, the sons of Noah—Sem, Japhet, and Cham—separated by the receding flood that left the Mediterranean, Red, and Black Seas and the Don River. In a literal sense, medieval Christendom was anything but Eurocentric, for it was born in exile from its own spiritual capital.

The Crusades to reconquer Jerusalem attest to Europe’s extroverted orientation and capacity to mobilize itself nine times between 1095 and 1272 for the sake of Christendom. What made this possible and transformed Latin Christendom from a vague spiritual ideal of one embattled group of territorial Europeans into a viable political reality for the entire continent was the consolidation of Papal hegemony over the Frankish and German kingdoms of Europe, relegating (in theory at least) even the most powerful monarchs subordinate as a Second Estate to the poorest priests of the First. In 1075 Pope Gregory VII announced a new political and legal order in his Dictatus Pape: “The Pope was to be the ‘sole judge of all’ and to have the sole power ‘to make new laws.’” The legal historian Harold Berman has argued that the “Papal Revolution gave birth to the modern Western state—the first example of which, paradoxically, was the church itself.”

The capacity of the church to raise armies from across Western Europe to recover the Holy Land within twenty years of this Papal Revolution attests to its power and the extent of its theologically inspired control and coherence. But Europe also had to be made (and maintained) socially, through the processes of internal colonization. In The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950-1350 Robert Bartlett has identified four overlapping strands of European integration, each with its own hierarchies and elites, by which the spiritual and administrative authority of Latin Christendom spread from the metropolitan urban centers of Italy across the vast rural and forested expanses of the continent, incorporating and Christianizing pagan tribes. These agents included (1) the international Holy Orders of

223 Robert Bartlett, Europe, 1.
224 See Jacques le Goff and Robert Bartlett for an elaboration of this argument.
226 Berman, Law and Revolution I, 104
227 Berman, Law and Revolution I, 113 and 114.
crusading knights and monks with their castles and monasteries; (2) ecclesiastical administrative units or “dioceses” with their cathedrals and bishops, all beholden via archbishops and archiocioses to Rome; (3) chartered towns with their special privileges, merchants, and town councils; (4) and finally universities, founded by Popes, Bishops, and Princes, but very rarely the towns where they had their homes. Universities emerged to ensure the common ideological foundations of authority among all these secular and religious elites.

Together, these were the overlapping sinews of the web that bound Europe together as region and an idea, as a territorial space with a common intellectual culture and a common sense of time, increasingly set off from “two hostile poles” of “Byzantium and Islam.” Though the concept of the “century” was not invented until the end of the 1500s, the birth of Christ became the new beginning of history already in 532, thanks to the calculations of the monk Dionysius the Little. Latin Christendom acquired a distinct civilizational identity from the Orthodox East. “For the whole of the future Europe, except the Orthodox eastern region, the Christian calendar ensured the promotion” of Christmas Day and Easter. From the seventh century onward church bells and bell towers followed the progress of Latin Christendom across the continent and gave a predictable, audible order to the day in every village and town.

As Robert Bartlett has observed, by the eleventh century “‘Latin Christendom’ can be used to designate not merely a rite or an obedience but a society.” And adherents of the church in the West came increasingly to identify themselves as “Latin.” The territorial reach of Latin Christendom expanded over the course of the following centuries. In 1164 the town of Uppsala in Sweden, which had been a pagan stronghold one hundred years before with a temple dedicated to the deities of Thor, Odin and Frey, became the “archiepiscopal see of the Swedish church.” Throughout this process, Europe acquired its own centers and peripheries:

By the fourteenth century a large part of Europe, including England, France, Germany, Scandinavia and northern Italy and Spain had come to possess a relatively high degree of cultural homogeneity. The whole fringe around this area, however, was characterized by a mixture of, and often conflict between, languages, cultures and, sometimes religions. Everywhere in this fringe zone race relations mattered in a way they scarcely did in the more homogeneous central zone—and these relations were not between equals: they involved domination and subordination, control and resistance.

Europe should be sought neither in its metropolitan centers nor its peripheral borderlands, but in the sinews that bound one to the other. The particular value of Europe’s fringe as an observatory upon Europe is its imperfect integration. In the encounter between the local illiterate culture of the periphery, the standardized forms and laws of Europe’s metropolitan centers, and currents coming from other literate civilizations abroad, we can see the nature, extent, and limits of European cosmopolitanism in relation to its own internal other as well as the wider world.

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228 Le Goff, *Birth of Europe*, 25.
230 For these reflections on the emergence of a common European sense of time see Le Goff, 24-25.
The Baltic world belonged to this fringe borderland. It was in fact one of the last places on the European continent to be integrated into Latin Christendom. And this is how the province of Livonia, named for one of its Finno-Ugric pagan tribes, the “Livs” or “Livonians” was represented and remembered in the chronicles of medieval Western Europe. The death of the last surviving native speaker of Livonian was announced in 2009, and then again 2013. In 1493 Livonia (Lifland) was called “the last province and region of the Christians” (”Die letzte provinz und gegen der cristen”) in the yet-unstandardized German dialect of the World Chronicle (Weltchronik) of the Nuremburg book printer, Hartman Schedel. Schedel also printed a Latin translation of his book. In the few sentences that followed, Livonia appeared as a wild frontierland. Schedel noted that “the Tartars often pass through this region” and that until “The Teutonic Brothers converted this land to Christianity by the sword” it was a place of “paganism” and “idolatry.”

The story of the integration of the Baltic world to Latin Christendom by the overlapping elites of Europe’s Holy military orders, dioceses, and towns began in the twelfth century:

At the same time as Islam was being attacked and pushed back in the Mediterranean, Christian missionaries and conquerors were penetrating the last stronghold of native European paganism in the lands east of the Elbe and around the shores of the Baltic. Here those West Slav peoples who had not converted, the so-called ‘Wends’, and their distant linguistic cousins, the Balts (Prussians, Lithuanians and Latvians), along with the Finno-Ugric Livonians, Estonians and Finns, constituted an arc of non-literate polytheism that stretched from the borders of Saxony to the Arctic Circle.

In 1193 Pope Celestine III called for a Livonian Cruade, which was taken up by Pope Innocent III after him. Indeed, the attempted conquest of the Holy Land and the conquest of Europe’s last indigenous pagans were related processes, since the Teutonic knights were a religious order formed at Acre in the Levant, sent to the Baltic after their failed attempt to take back Jerusalem.

At the same time the colonization of Livonia was also being organized and coordinated by the Archdiocese of Bremen, which sent its first monks to the region in 1180 and established the first diocese of the region at Riga. In 1203 Riga’s Bishop Albert founded an order of “warrior monks” of his own, the “Livonian Knights of the Sword,” sanctioned by the Pope in 1204 to perpetuate the conversion and settlement of Livonia. Their oath of celibacy required them to recruit constantly from Western Europe, establishing their local center of power at

235 “Liiv” means “sand” in Estonian and the Livonian language, which was spoken mostly along the sandy coast of what is today Northern Latvia and Southern Estonia is linguistically very close to Estonian. Until the latter half of the twentieth century the language could still be heard in this region. The scholars of Tartu University, led by Paul Ariste, studied Livonian culture and folklore at the interwar University of Tartu and in the Soviet Union. Vikars Bertholds, allegedly the last native speaker of Livonian, born in 1921, died on February 28th, 2009. For an obituary and account of his passing see Jaak Prozes and Ott Heinapuu, Eesti päevaleht. March 4, 2009. The same claim was made in 2013 with the passing of Grizelda Kristina, an émigré to Canada in 1944. See “Death of a language: last ever speaker of Livonian passes away aged 103” in The Times Europe, June 5, 2013.

236 This line appears in Hartmann Schedel’s original Weltchronik of 1493, which has been reproduced in a facsimile edition as Die Schedelsche Weltchronik (Dortmund: Harenberg Kommunikation, 1978), ccxxxviii.


Wenden (Cesis), where the Grandmaster of the Livonian Order took up his residence in 1209, between Riga and Dorpat (Tartu). In 1236 following their defeat at the hands of the pagan Lithuanians at the Battle of Saule, they were eventually absorbed into the ranks of the Teutonic knights.

The diocese of Dorpat (Tartu) was established in 1224, following a nearly year-long siege of the pagan settlement there. The local Estonians appear to have been assisted in their resistance to the foreign invaders by the Slavic Prince Viatchko of Koknese. Following their defeat, work began on the giant red brick cathedral on the hill overlooking the settlement below. At the same time the bishop’s fortress was built. This “Castrum de Tarbatet” was mentioned by Pope Gregory IX in 1234 when it withstood another attempted siege that same year from the Slavic, Orthodox East by Yaroslav, the Duke of Novgorod, father of Alexander Nevsky.

Nothing is more evocative of the Teutonic “Drang nach Osten” (Surge to the East) and clash of civilizations in medieval Livonia—Latin Christendom vs. Slavic Orthodoxy—than the “battle on the ice” of Lake Peipus in 1242, immortalized in Sergei Eisenstein’s film, Alexander Nevsky (1938).

The Kingdom of Denmark also participated in the Livonian Crusade, establishing a Duchy of Estonia, based in Reval (Tallinn) in 1219 with the help of its own archbishop. Here the cultural ties that bound the Baltic world to the metropolitan centers of Latin Christendom can be seen in sharpest relief. The Danish Archbishop of Lund, Anders Sunesen arrived in the Baltic in 1206 as a missionary. “In his dealings with the Estonians he confronted a non-literate, polytheistic Finno-Ugric people whose cultural and social distance from Latin Christendom was enormous…. But Sunesen was himself an intermediary and dual agent of what Robert Bartlett calls “The Europeanization of Europe.” Sunesen had studied in Paris with scholars “with generations of scholastic discourse behind them and participated in the cultural life of a pre-eminent academic centre, where new translations from Greek and Arabic were beginning to circulate and where the formal structures of the university were taking shape.” At home in Denmark, he used his Latin learning to give expression to the legal order of his own place of origin, translating the customary laws of his native region (Scania) into Latin. But in the Baltic periphery, he showed no such sensitivity to local laws or customs. Instead, he worked tirelessly (sometimes brutally) for the evangelization of region. In 1219, he presided over the fortress in Reval (Tallinn), where he weathered a siege of the pagan Estonians he was trying to

\*Note: Where necessary and relevant, I will use two names to introduce the towns and places of the Baltic world throughout this work, first their official or most prominent name current at the time for the sake of accuracy followed by their present name for the sake of clarity (in parenthesis). This should serve as a reminder of the perpetual flux of Baltic identities through the ages, falling prey neither to the linguistic absolutism of the radical nationalist nor that of the radical imperialist, each of whom claims the right to name the world according to his own language. The representation of Baltic identities at the intersection between two names, is very much in the spirit of Yuri Lotman, who suggested that any minimally responsible representation of reality requires at least two languages. This makes a lot of sense in the Baltic especially, where at any given moment in history different people used different names for the same towns and places. Dorpat and Tartu were always simultaneously in use by its Estonian and German speaking populations. In some cases, the “official name” never really caught on, as in the case of, Yurjev, the Russian name for Tartu between 1890 and 1917. Even Russian speakers tended to use a russified pronunciation of the German name, calling it “Derpt” rather than the name imposed by Imperial Saint Petersburg.

240 Pullat, Tartu, 26.
241 Pullat, Tartu, 23 and 27.
242 Bartlett, Making of Europe, 291.
243 Bartlett, Making of Europe, 290.
244 Bartlett, Making of Europe, 289
245 Bartlett, Making of Europe, 290.
Thus, already in the thirteenth century, “the evangelization of the pagans of Estonia was organized by a man who had studied in the schoolrooms of France and Italy.”

The colonization of Livonia was as much a matter of the pen as the sword. Indeed, many of the aforementioned events are only known to posterity because missionaries wrote about them at the time. Another early missionary from Saxony, known as “Henry of Livonia” arrived in 1205 and gave the province its first written chronicle in the 1220s and thus an identity in the Latin-based textual culture of medieval Christendom: “Henry’s chronicle is designed as a founding narrative for the new bishopric, Riga, aiming at establishing its legitimacy and identity. The narrative begins with the arrival of Meinhard, an Augustinian monk, from Saxony to Livonia in the 1180s.” However, the narrative also served to bind Livonia to Latin Christendom in a more universal sense. With its reference to Babylon in the very first sentence, the chronicle gave the heathens of Livonia a place in the tale of the redemption of a fallen world, which had been divided ever since the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel: “Mindful of the confusion wrought among peoples of Egypt and Babylon, in our own time Divine Providence has seen fit to awaken the Livonians from the sinful slumber of their idolatry.”

Despite its missionary framework and theologically inspired worldview, Henry’s Chronicle was not totally blind to the local world it set out to convert and transform. It also gave birth (in writing) to a few indigenous folk heroes, like the Estonian tribal elder, Lembitu of Lehola, who fought against the invaders until his death in battle in 1217. The missionaries had played the local tribes against each other, “recruiting the Livonians and Lettgallians for war against the Estonians.” This tactic prefigures the chronicles of European colonization of the New World several centuries later. In his Account of the conquest of the Aztecs of Mexico by Hernan Cortes in 1520, the eyewitness and soldier Bernal Diaz notes how Cortes played various native tribes against the Aztec Empire. In one interpretation, Diaz’s Cortes had mastered the “signs” of the local culture partly with the help of native informants, like his trilingual interpreter, Doña Marina.

Henry’s Livonian Chronicle also had its morally ambiguous intermediaries, translators, and interpreters. One stands out in particular. Caupo, the tribal elder of the Livonians of Turaide, had been one of the first tribal chieftains to convert to Christianity. He was baptized by the monk Theodoric in 1191 and became an important friend to Albert, the Bishop of Riga.

The name Tallinn comes from this period as a contraction of the Estonian words taani linn (Danish fortress). If Denmark gave Tallinn its Estonian name, Tallinn gave Denmark its flag (Danneborg), according to one legend at least. The flag derived from a battle near Tallinn on June 15, 1219, the story goes, when a Danish priest, while praying to God for victory, saw a white cross on a red field in the sky. But wherever it came from, the flag came into use by the end of 1219. As such it is the oldest state flag in the world still in use today as the flag of an independent nation.

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247 Bartlett, Making of Euroe, 291


250 Raun, Estonia, 16.


aiding and abetting the missionaries in their conquest of the other tribes of the region. In one remarkable passage, Henry recounts Caupo’s visit to see the Pope in Rome:

After this, brother Theodoric traveled to Germany together with other pilgrims, who had in this same year [1203] fought for the glory of God in Livonia, and took with him a Livonian by the name of Caupo, who had been as if the King [“quasi rex”] of the Livonians of Turaida. And having traveled through a great part of Germany, he brought Caupo to Rome and presented him to the Apostolic Father. The Pope received him with great generosity, kissed him, and asked him about the conditions of the tribes that live in vicinity of Livonia and thanked God for the conversion of the Livonian tribe to Christianity. A few days later, Pope Innocent gave Caupo a gift, namely a hundred pieces of gold, and blessed him as he set out again for Germany, leaving him in great love with God. And by means of brother Theodoric he sent to the Bishop of Livonia a copy of the bible written in the hand of the blessed Pope Gregory.253

In 1217 Caupo, the “quasi rex” of the Livonians, fell on the same battlefield as the leader of the Estonians, Lembitu, except that he was fighting for the other side.254 Was Caupo the first native Christian visionary in the Baltic or a traitor, who sold his people and his land to the Pope for a hundred pieces of gold? The problem of Caupo of Turaid is in some sense the larger problem the Baltic periphery has posed to the cosmopolitan claims of European civilization and universalism throughout history: how to join Europe without losing oneself?

As early as 1208 the pagan lands of the Baltic tribes had been subsumed politically into an ecclesiastical state called Terra Mariana (The Land of Mary) and were made a part of the Holy Roman Empire, with local authority shared between several Baltic dioceses and the Livonian Order. In 1215 they were placed under the direct Papal jurisdiction, at around the same time as an “Albigensian Crusade” (1209-1229) attempted to stamp out a growing Cathar heresy in the South of France.255 For the coherence of Latin Christendom had to be maintained by the repression of heretics in its comparatively urbanized heartland—the towns of Albi, Foix, and Carcassonne were all Cathar strongholds—as well as established by the conversion of heathens in its rural periphery. Even after its formal incorporation to Latin Christendom, Livonia still faced rebellions and uprisings from within. The Estonian siege of Reval (Tallinn) castle in 1219 was one example. But the most widespread if last great act of pagan resistance to Latin Christendom was the St. George’s Night Uprising of 1343 to 1345 across the districts of northern Livonia and Danish Estonia. “Centered in Harjumaa [Harria], Läänemaa [Rotalia], and Saaremaa [Osilia], the revolt was a bloody affair that involved the killing of nearly all Germans who remained in the countryside in these districts as well as the slaughter of thousands of

253 “Post hec frater Theodericus cum peregrines, qui per annum illum in Lyvonia sub cruce sua Deo militaverant, in Theuthoniam abies, quondam Lyvonem, Cauponem nomine, qui quasi rex et senior Lyvonum, de Thoreda secum assumit et, magna parte Theuthonie perlustrata, tandem eum Romam duxit et apostolico exhibet. Quem apostolicus benignissime recipiens deosculatur et de statu gentium circa Lyvonian existencion multa perquiriens, pro conversione gentis Lyvonic Deo plurimum congratulatur. Transactus diebus aliquantus, idem venerabilis papa Innocencius predicto Cauponi dona sua, videlicet centum aureos, porrigit et in Theutoniam redire volenti magno caritatis affectu valedicens benedicet et bibliotecam, beati Gregorii pape manu scriptam episcopo Lyvoniensi per fratem Theodercium mittit.” Heinrici Chronicon Lyvoniae, 16-17. Estonian translation consulted as well: Henrik Liivimaa Kroonika, 29-30.
254 Henrik Liivimaa Kroonika, 219.
255 The Crusades, 163–168.
Estonian-speaking peasants in retribution." The rebellion and its ultimate failure marked the onset of Baltic serfdom for the non-Germanic peoples of the land.

In addition to the knights of the Holy Orders (with their rural estates and manors), and the Bishoprics of Riga, Tartu, and the Danish Duchy of Reval (with their urban cathedrals and fortifications), a third somewhat independent sinew of power, with its own set of elites, came to bind the Baltic World to Europe. This was the commercial and defensive confederation of the Hanseatic League of Northern European towns and merchants, with its capital at Lübeck. For Jacques Le Goff, the “Hanseatic North” marks one of three great interconnected “commercial centers” of medieval Europe along with the “Italian South,” and the “zone of contacts” between them encompassing “southeastern England, Normandy, Flanders, Champagne, the Meuse region, and the lower Rhineland.” The lingua franca of the Hanseatic League was Niederdeutsch (Low German), which survives in modern form as Flemish, Plattdeutsch, and Dutch—like three linguistic tidepools left by a receding flood of medieval urbanization that once engulfed the entire length of the northern coast of Europe. In the fourteenth century it would have been identifiable (if not universally comprehensible) to any merchant from London to Novgorod.

With its mix of Latin and Niederdeutsch, the world of the Baltic elites—like all the elites of Europe—was bilingual from the start. Over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, all the major Baltic towns—Reval/Tallinn (1248), Dorpat/Tartu (1280), Riga (1282), Narva (1345), and Pernau/Pärnu (14th century) joined the Hanseatic League, cultivating stronger urban identities and freedoms than existed in many other parts of Eastern Europe. A remarkable document from Lübeck’s State Archive attests to the League’s lingering self-confident vision of its own power and dedication to the province of Livonia as late as 1573. States did not yet have a monopoly on legitimate violence in Europe, and the Hanseatic League proposed a resolution to raise an army “to defend Livonia against the Russians and bring it back under the authority of Lübeck and the other Hansa towns.” Livonia’s towns—like its ecclesiastical and military elites—remained predominantly German for many centuries to come. Still, their populations stayed low: Tallinn had about no more than 8000 inhabitants by 1550; Tartu had about 6000. This was typical of the towns of Northern Europe: Stockholm around the same time had a population of only 7000. The only great metropolis of the North at this time was London; its population of 50,000 in 1500 would explode to 500,000 over the course of the next century and a half. The German-Scandinavian presence in Livonia never amounted to more than ten percent of the total population and the Baltic elites presided over a rural world that spoke neither Latin nor German.

Before the outbreak of the Protestant Reformation, three interlocking bilingual Latin and German-speaking sinews bound the Baltic world to Latin Christendom: the Teutonic Knights, the Archdiocese of Bremen, and the Hanseatic League. In the Birth of Europe, Jacques Le Goff...

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259 Raun, Estonia, 22.
has stressed the early cooperation of these different strands in the integration of the Baltic world
to medieval Europe: “Lübeck coordinated its commercial activities with the efforts at the
conversion and the conquest of the new German military order, the Teutonic Knights, then active
in Prussia.”262 The fact that membership in the first two of these three strands required an oath
of celibacy meant that their numbers had to be replenished continually—acts of indiscretion
notwithstanding—by recruiting missionaries from Western Europe. After the Protestant
Reformation of 1517, these sinews started to come unravelled. The Teutonic Order was
secularized in 1525 when its Grand Master, Albert of Brandenburg, converted to Lutheranism
and became a Duke of Prussia, pledging himself as a vassal to the service of Catholic Poland,
and effectively turning the Order into conventional, self-reproducing nobility, increasingly
wedded to its land. For nearly a century and half, between the outbreak of the Reformation
and the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, Europe turned against itself. Frequent wars and uprisings
erupted and plagued much of the continent.

Livonia was no exception, and a twenty-five year Livonian War broke out in 1558
following a conflict between the Diocese of Tartu and Ivan IV (“the Terrible”) over a question of
tribute. As the Holy Roman Empire began to fall apart, several emerging powers in the
Northeast corner of Europe—especially Orthodox Muscovy, the Catholic Polish-Lithuanian
Commonwealth, and Lutheran Sweden—competed for this last province of Latin Christendom.
In the midst of the fray, the Town Council of Reval (Tallinn) commissioned a new Livonian
Chronicle in the 1570s. The task was assigned to Balthasar Russow, a native son of the city and
Lutheran deacon at the Church of the Holy Ghost (one of the main churches of Reval). He had
traveled and studied abroad in Stettin and Wittenberg, and acquired a relatively broad culture for
a man of his time and station, reading Melanchton, Erasmus, Cicero, and Aesop in Latin. He
learned rudimentary Greek.263 As the son of a Reval (Tallinn) merchant, he was a patriot of the
city, though not formally a citizen. It is telling perhaps that Russow’s Chronicle of the
conversion and colonization of the Baltic began with its merchants rather than with the Bishopric
of Riga or Pope Celestine’s call for a Livonian Crusade:

In the year of Our Lord 1158, in the time of Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa, the merchants
of Bremen sailed to Livonia for the first time, and stepping ashore in the land of the
Livonians due to storms and bad weather found before them a wicked, pagan people.
And when the pagans saw the Christian merchants, they attacked them in an atrocious
manner, took their possessions and killed several of them.264

More than three hundred years earlier, Henry of Livonia had composed his Chronicle in
the universal Latin language of the church on behalf of the bishopric of Riga. It told the tale of
the integration of Livonia to Latin Christendom in its early years by conquest and missionary
work, and anticipated the end of Babel in the Baltic. Balthasar Russow’s Chronica der Provinz
Lyfflandt from 1578, by contrast, was composed in Niederdeutsch, the language of the Hanseatic
League, on behalf of the elders of Tallinn, well after the Reformation had arrived and divided the

262 Le Goff, Birth of Europe, 120.
263 The Chronicle of Balthasar Russow and A Forthright Rebuttal by Elert Kruse and Errors and Mistakes of
264 “Meie Issanda aastal 1158, keiser Friedrich Barbarossa ajal, purjetasid Bremeni kaupmehed esmalt Liivimaa alla
ja astusid randa, kus liivlased elavad, vastu tahtmist tormi ja maruilm töttu, ja leidsid eest kurja paganliku rahva.”
Russow, Chronicle, 21.
Baltic elites amongst themselves. Russow accused them of narrow selfishness, greed, and a loss of the missionary vision that had brought them here in the first place and made it possible for them to cooperate in the making of medieval Livonia. Of the collapsing loyalties to each other, he wrote how “several archbishops of the two dioceses of Riga and Dorpat went so far... as to appeal to the unbelieving Russians and Lithuanians for assistance, and to enlist them against the Teutonic Order in Livonia.”

Tallinn and Northern Estonia, unlike the rest of Livonia, had given itself up to Swedish dominion without a fight in 1561. And of all the powers represented in Russow’s Chronicle, Lutheran Sweden appeared in the most positive light. Meanwhile, the archenemy was Ivan IV (“the Terrible”) and the Muscovite invaders. To some extent Ivan’s early reputation in Europe derives from this representation in Balthasar Russow’s chronicle. But in Russow’s narrative the Muscovites appeared less as political or religious agents in their own right than as a force of nature—a curse inflicted by God to punish the Baltic German elites of the first, second, and third estates for losing sight of their common, sacred purpose. Foreshadowing the collapse of Latin Christendom as the unifying ideal of European civilization, Russow’s Chronicle showed the unraveling of the sinews and narrative that had bound Livonia to Europe (and Europe to itself) ever since the Papal Revolution some five hundred years before as a region and an idea.

For all its noble, ecclesiastical, and urban elites, there was one sinew of power that Livonia lacked: a university. Its absence was duly noted in Russow’s preface, composed in Reval (Tallinn) in 1577, and dedicated to the “the praiseworthy mayors and town councilmen of the Free Imperial city of Bremen.” In it he wrote, “And in the entire country, which one could compare to a mighty kingdom, there was not a single good school or university, but rather nothing but inferior grammar schools in the main cities.” The implication here seemed to be that a university might have saved Livonia, or at least helped to keep the Livonian elites united when faced with the Muscovite invasion that marked the outbreak of the Livonian War. Russow’s mention of the absence of a Livonian university also seems significant for another reason. It suggests the extent to which by the late sixteenth century the university had become a pan-European phenomenon and value, something that could missed by its absence, even in Europe’s “last province and region of the Christians.”

But the absence of a good school or university did not only threaten the bonds that bound Livonia’s elites to each other and to a more universal idea of Europe; it also threatened the bonds that bound Livonia’s elites to the indigenous peasantry. Failure to convert the Baltic peasantry to Christianity was the ultimate sign of the failure of the Baltic elites to fulfill their universal, missionary purpose:

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265 For an example of these internal divisions see Russow’s account of the “The conflict between the Tallinners and the aristocracy” [“Tüliasi tallinlaste ja aadli vahel.”] Russow, 71.
266 Russow, Chronicle, 2.
267 Surrender without resistance would become a leitmotif of Tallinn history. In 1940 Tallinn proved similarly acquiescent to Soviet demands, a source of great national shame for Estonians today.
268 “How the Fortress of Tallinn Gave Itself Up to the Swedes, 1561.” Russow, 136.
269 “As the villain of the book, (‘the archenemy’), Ivan's historical reputation stems in part from Russow’s chronicle.
270 Balthasar Russow, Liivimaa Kroonika, 7.
271 From the dedication “To the noble, worthy, most learned and wise lord mayors and counselors of the laudable imperial free city of Bremen, my benefactory lords” in Balthasar Russow’s Chronicle of the Province of Livonia (Chronica der Provintz Lyfflandt, 1583), 2 and 3.
in the whole land there was not a single good school, from which a simple preacher could have emerged, who understood the non-German language. This is the reason the churches were empty and falling apart.... And if somewhere in a church there was a pastor, then he was typically a foreigner and did not understand the language of the non-Germans and preached to the Germans in German, which the non-German peasants could not understand...272

The elites had allowed the native population to revert to paganism by failing to learn their language or teach them their own. In the absence of a good school or university, Livonia was Babel.

Over the course of the next hundred years, Dorpat was a battlefield, occupied and burned to the ground several times. It suffered enormous casualties as three emerging states (and their three religious confessions) fought for control of the town and its population. For each of these states the possession of Dorpat coincided with the maximum extent of its power, size, and ideological coherence. The outbreak of the Livonian War (1558—1582) definitively uprooted the city of Dorpat from the periphery of the Holy Roman Empire. In 1558, the Cathedral on Domberg (Cathedral Hill) saw its last Roman Catholic Bishop, Herman Wesel, an immigrant from the Lower Rhine, deposed and eventually deported to Moscow.273 The Grand Prince of Muscovy, Ivan IV replaced him with an Orthodox metropolitan and deported 100 heads of families, 9 members of the municipal government, 88 citizens, and 30 widows. By some German accounts, in the aftermath of these purges, there were only “three Germans left in Tartu.”274

In 1583 The Grand Duke of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Stefan Bathory, drove out the metropolitan and with the help of his chancellor Jan Zamoyski, established Tartu’s Jesuit seminary in the lower town. Dorpat became one of two bastions of the Jesuit Counter-Reformation in Livonia (the other was Riga), seeking to convert from within and recruit from abroad a new Roman Catholic population. The Poles permitted the local Germans to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of Luther’s reformation in Tartu in 1617, but drew the line when it came to Estonians: “The Jesuits guarded the door of St. John’s Church and did not let the Estonians attend the German services. In 1619, they went so far as to chase Estonians out of Church with sticks to prevent them from hearing the German sermons.”275 The Germans might have been a lost cause with their entrenched corporate rights, but the Jesuits still held out hope for the re-conversion of the indigenous Estonians to Roman Catholicism.276

272 “ei olnud tervel maal ainustki head kooli, kust oleks vähemalt tulnud lihtjutlustaja, kes mittesaksaks keelt mõistab, mispärast koolide puudusest kirikud hulk aastaid täiesi tühjad olid ja lagunesid.... Kui kuskil kirikus oligi õpetaja, siis oli see harilikult võõramaalane ja ei osanud mittesaksaks keelt ning jutlustas sakslastele saaksaks keeleks, mida mittesaksaks talurahvas ei võinud mõista.” Russow, Liivimaa kronika, 88.
273 Pullat, Tartu, 63 and 91.
274 Pullat, Tartu, 91.
275 Jesuiidid valvad Jaani kiriku juures ega lasknud eestlasi saksa jumalateenistusele. 1619. aastal laksid nad haidukitel eestlasi keppidega kirikust saksa jutlusest välja ajada.” Pullat, 98.
Finally, in 1629 shortly following the Swedish conquest of Livonia, King Gustav Adolphus turned the building that housed the Jesuit Seminary into a Lutheran gymnasium on the initiative of his former tutor and the new General Governor of the province, Johan Skytte. An imperial decree promoted the gymnasium to the status of a university three years later. To some extent it both preserved the memory of the universal integrative ideal of Latin Christendom and gave expression to the particular provincial, territorial identity of Livonia. This can be seen already in the official seal of the new university, which bore an image of King Gustav Adolphus holding a Bible in one hand and a sword in the other (evoking the crusaders of bygone days) encircled by a Latin phrase: *Sigillum Academiae Dorpatensis in Livonia*. (Seal of the Academy of Dorpat in Livonia). By the early seventeenth century, the speakers of many different languages—each with their own vision of the whole—had laid claim to various parts of the territory of Livonia: Estonian, Livonian, Latvian, Niederdeutsch, Polish, Russian, Danish, Swedish, and of course Latin. Fifty-five years after Balthasar Russow bemoaned the absence of a university to overcome and integrate the Babel that had erupted in the Baltic world when its German elites forgot their missionary purpose and lost the ability to cooperate and communicate in Latin, an emerging imperial Swedish state founded the Latin-speaking Lutheran University of Dorpat in 1632 to do precisely that.

Chapter 3. A Latin University: Dorpat and the Swedish Empire

Unus rex, una lex et grex unus [One king, one law, one people]
— Johan Skytte, founding Chancellor of Dorpat University

The foundation of the University of Dorpat was an imperial act, signed into law in Latin in the midst of the Thirty Years War by the young Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus from his “military encampment near Nuremberg on the last day of June 1632.” At the time, Adolphus’s Protestant army of 100,000 soldiers occupied this “Free and Imperial City of the Holy Roman Empire” and prepared to face the siege of the still larger army of his Catholic Habsburg enemy, Albrecht von Wallenstein. Like Napoleon after him, Adolphus integrated in his person two seemingly antiethical models of leadership: he was at once one of the last great Warrior Kings, a man made by personal prowess in battle and a military genius, but at the same time one of the first great modern statesmen, who built his empire as much by the education of an imperial intelligentsia and bureaucracy as by military conquest. It took more than a month for the King’s founding decree, complete with the official privileges and legal rights of Dorpat University, to traverse war-torn Europe and reach Johan Skytte, the Swedish Governor-General of the combined provinces of Livonia, Karelia, and Ingria, in their newly established provincial capital of Dorpat.

Dorpat University was born in translation. At the inaugural ceremony on October 15, 1632, the King’s decree was read aloud in Latin and Skytte delivered a Latin address himself. Less than one month later, an eyewitness to the events, Dorpat’s first professor of history and antiquities, the Mecklenburg-born immigrant, Friedrich Menius, wrote the first history of Dorpat University, translating both addresses into his own somewhat idiosyncratic Northern dialect of German that still preserved a few traces of Niederdeutsch. But what is most striking here is the language that is missing. From the battlefield of Nuremberg in June to the formal

279 In fact the Swedish Gymnasium in Dorpat, founded in 1629, had functioned with the permission of King Gustav Adolphus as a university since April 1, 1631. In the course of his military campaigns across Germany, Adolphus recruited professors for Livonia. Still, the official ceremony for its inauguration as a University did not occur until October 15, 1632. The founding decree was composed on the last day of June 1632 by the Julian Calendar still in force throughout most of Protestant Europe (Catholics were the first to adopt the modern Gregorian calendar): “Datum in unserem FeldtLäger bey Nürnberg den letzten Junij Anno 1632.” Menius, Relatio, 52.
281 Friedrich Menius, Relatio von Inauguration der Universität zu Dorpat/ geschehen den 15. Octobris, Im Jahr 1632 (Dorpat: Gedruckt zu Dorpat in Lieffland durch und in Verlegung Jacob Beckern, 1632). A facsimile reprint of the original seventeenth-century text together with an annotated Estonian translation can be found in Friedrich Menius, Jutustus Tartu Ülikooli inauguratorsoonist, mis toimus 15. Oktoobril 1632. aastal (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 1997). Much more self-conscious about language than most academic texts published in by the University Presses of American and Western European countries, Estonian publications of historical texts (like this one) are almost always bilingual. All further references to this work will be identified as Relatio.
inauguration of Dorpat University in October, to the first history of the University printed one month after its inauguration on Dorpat’s first Printing Press, in all the important and official communication between the Swedish King, Swedish Governor General of Livonia, and the newly appointed German professors of Dorpat, the Swedish language had never been used.

The aim of this chapter is to evoke the particular intellectual and linguistic character of Swedish Dorpat (Tartu) in the context of its place in Imperial Sweden, and Sweden’s place among the great powers of seventeenth century Europe. From 1632 to 1710 Dorpat University used Latin, and a traditional medieval scholastic framework for learning to reconcile its German and Swedish speakers and impart a universal, Lutheran vision for understanding the world. From beginning to end the Primarus, first Theologian—who also doubled as the Pastor of Saint Mary’s Church, preaching to its Swedish Congregation—remained the highest paid and most prestigious Professorship at the University. Meanwhile, the Secondarus, Second Theologian, earned a significantly lower salary as the pastor of Saint John’s Church, preaching to a German Congregation. Disciplinary distinctions did not yet have the rigor that they would acquire in the nineteenth century, and scholars of law, medicine, and Ancient Greek and Oriental languages would often seek promotion as professors of Theology. However, official state-sponsored Lutheran Orthodoxy proved constricting, and Dorpat scholars and students began to look for other identities in other languages, other ways of remembering the past and imagining the future, discovering the particularism of their local Livonian environment in the process, while drawing upon ideas from far-flung parts of the globe, over which neither Stockholm nor Uppsala managed to exert much influence.

3.1 The Thirty Years War and the Rebirth of Europe

Dorpat University was a product of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) that gave birth to Europe’s confessionalized state system in 1648. Triggered by the Defenestration of Habsburg officials in Prague—much as World War I would be triggered by the Assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand in another disgruntled city of the Habsburg Monarchy three centuries later—the Thirty Years War was in some sense Europe’s first “Total War,” certainly its most destructive armed conflict before the twentieth century. It left much of Continental Europe in ruins, claiming eight million lives, including innumerable civilian casualties as bands of marauders pillaged towns and villages in the wake of armies.282 Long before the French levée en masse of 1793, the Thirty Years War involved the total mobilization of populations, eroding boundaries between combatants and civilians; moreover, it had a millenarian character as the culminating War of the Wars of the Religion of the 16th and early 17th centuries with the demand for the “the total destruction of the enemy and their way of life.”283 It left a deep imprint on the historical memory and imagination of Europe for centuries to come as a kind of Armageddon, the standard against which all future conflicts would be judged down to the “Thirty Years War of the Twentieth Century.” Leopold von Ranke, the father of the modern historical profession with his exacting standards of archival research, wrote only one full biography over the course of his prolific career—that of the Habsburg Commander of the Thirty Years War, Albrecht von

Indeed, in German historiography the Thirty Years War became the founding moment of German national history. The ripples of the War reached far into Eastern Europe and to some extent around the world. Bohdan Khmelnytsky’s 1648 Cossack uprising in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth would define Ukrainian-Russian relations for centuries to come. The War even had a global dimension with Battles fought between the Dutch and Portuguese navy over Brazil, West Africa, and Indonesia.  

The emergence of Europe’s new state system in 1648 at the Peace of Westphalia did not yet mean a total abandonment of Latin Christendom. Britain had not yet really emerged as an important player on the world stage; it was preoccupied with its domestic affairs, caught in the throes of its own Civil War and Revolution. Russia was only just re-emerging from its inward-looking “Time of Troubles” (1598-1613) with the ascendancy of the first Romanovs. The height of Swedish power was reached in 1660. The historian Michael Roberts suggests that an ordinary European in this year would have identified four great monarchs: “the [Holy Roman] Emperor, the kings of France and Spain, and the king of Sweden.” A generation earlier, under the long reign of Zygmunt III Vasa (1587-1632) the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth might actually have headed the list as the most significant power on the continent, certainly the one with the widest territorial grasp following its successful occupation of Moscow (1610-1612), something neither Napoleon nor Hitler managed to accomplish in centuries to come. But of these five Great Powers of seventeenth-century Europe, four were Catholic. Only Imperial Sweden embodied the hopes and dreams of Latin Christendom as the world’s first modern Protestant state, though in many ways still a traditional Composite Monarchy, that relied on the language of Latin to define itself internally and its relationship to the world at large.

### 3.2 The Swedish Empire and Its Universities

Established in the rooms of a recently abandoned Polish Jesuit Seminary, the Lutheran University of Dorpat was the brainchild of Johan Skytte, a leading Swedish Statesman, ennobled by the King and appointed Chancellor of the University of Uppsala (the leading academic institution in the realm). His rise to prominence from comparatively humble origins began as the polyglot tutor to the King. Skytte combined in his person a respect for the deductive universalism of scholastic traditions (with their attempt to reconcile all questions in the language of Latin) and the inductive particularism of humanist philological attention to detail that had led, for example, to the exposure of the Donation of Constantine as a fraud by Lorenzo Valla, and the

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284 Peter Wilson, *The Thirty Years War*, 7.
285 “The Spanish-Dutch War was not merely a secondary theater of the Thirty Years War but a fiercely waged conflict in its own right. In a sense, it was the first world war. While the main armies maneuvered in Flanders, the privateers of Dunkirk ravaged both Dutch commerce and vital fisheries. Lesser forces were fighting in the Mediterranean and the Caribbean, Africa, India, the Philippines, and Brazil. Such remote pontificates as the emperor of China, the shogun of Japan, and the kings of Ceylon and Kongo were drawn into the conflict.” William P. Guthrie, *The Later Thirty Years War: From the Battle of Wittstock to the Treaty of Westphalia* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), 186.
287 Zygmunt III Vasa was a polyglot himself, speaking Swedish, German, Italian, Latin, and Polish. His “long reign … from 1587 to 1632 represents the peak of Polish-Lithuanian wealth, power, and culture, and yet it also marks the beginning of the Commonwealth’s decline toward destruction,” Daniel Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State, 1386-1795* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 131.
enthusiasm for other languages that philological methods engendered. Skytte’s hero was the French Huguenot humanist murdered in the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of Protestants in Paris in 1572, Petrus Ramus. Competent in seven or eight different European languages, Skytte even taught his King Gustavus Adolphus to converse in the Scots dialect. Skytte’s qualifications were his pan-European education and travels, which included, among many other institutions of learning the Universities of Wittenburg, Paris, Cambridge, Strasbourg, and Basel, where the remains of Erasmus of Rotterdam had found their final resting place.

In marked contrast to his highborn rival for the Kings ear, the Swedish statesman Axel Oxenstierna, Johann Skytte came from comparatively modest origins. He was a man made by his humanist education rather than birth, though this was no longer an age of noble indifference to education, and Oxenstierna was exceptionally well-educated himself, having learned to speak several learned languages at many of the same small-town German universities attended by Johan Skytte (including Wittenburg). But like so many self-made men of humble origins, Skytte sought to secure privileges for his son based on high birth. After the opening ceremonies in October 1632, he left Dorpat University in the hands of his son, a nineteen-year-old student at the same University at the time. The title and position were purely honorific, since the actual control of the University fell into the hands of its only Lutheran theologian with a doctoral degree, Andreas Virginius, incidently the only aristocrat on the faculty in the first period of the University. His parents owned an estate in Pomerania. The empire paid for itself (at first). The king paid his advisors with estates in the newly conquered Baltic territories. Oxenstierna’s estate fell just between Tartu and Riga in the heart of Old Livonia. Skytte, who administrated the newly acquired Province as a Governor General, was given a land grant further to the North in Ingria.

289 The writings of Petrus Ramus (1515-1572) were included in the original Constitution of Dorpat University among the permitted texts for the teaching of Philosophy. Most of the others were authors from antiquity: Euclid, Archimedes, the Greek Philosopher Proklos (412-485), Ptolemy, Copernicus, the Byzantine Mathematicians Theodosius and Pappos, the Alexanderian Mathematician Menalos, etc., Constitutiones, 59.
291 History of Tartu University, 129.
To his formula for the unification of the Swedish state—“unus rex, una lex, et grex unus” (One King, one law, one people)—the founding Chancellor of Dorpat University and a tutor to King Gustavus Adolphus, Johan Skytte, might have added: “una lingua” (one language).\(^{292}\) That he did not reveals the extent to which the question of language was still taken for granted in Imperial Lutheran Sweden in the seventeenth century. Dorpat was one of three new Latin-speaking universities built in an arc of expanding imperial power around the intellectual center of the Swedish state at Uppsala over the course of the seventeenth century. Formally it was an exact copy of Uppsala, appropriating its Constitution word-for-word as so many Universities of the Holy Roman Empire had done in an earlier era, modeled explicitly on the University of Paris.\(^{295}\) The other new universities established by the expanding Swedish state were the Universities of Åbo/Turku (1640) in present-day Finland and Lund (1666) on Sweden’s present-day border with Denmark. Thus, Dorpat colonized the Baltic periphery as much for Europe as for Sweden, reconciling Baltic German and Swedish-speaking elites in the language of Latin, while converting Estonian, Latvian, and Livonian pagans to Lutheran Christianity. Dorpat even supplied a governor and a few colonists to Sweden’s distant colonies in Africa and America at the height of Sweden’s imperial power in the mid-seventeenth century, when Queen Christina played host to René Descartes in Stockholm.

Sweden’s commitment to Lutheranism had been formalized with “the resolution of the Assembly at Uppsala in 1593.”\(^{294}\) Nearly a hundred years later King Karl XI defined the relationship between Church and Scholarship more precisely when he decreed that the teachings of Descartes would be permitted in all non-Theological matters in 1689.\(^{295}\) Meanwhile, the incipient ideology of Swedish nationalism (“Gothicism”) rose to prominence in Uppsala with Sweden’s last Catholic Archbishop in the 1590, Johannes Magnus, who declared the ancient Runes to be the original language of mankind, having been spared the confusion of Babel. Gothicism endured as an important source of identity for the state and its academic establishment throughout Sweden’s imperial century. Olauf Rudbeck (1630–1702), a professor of Medicine at the University of Uppsala, became a staunch propagandist for the Runic language. Even Dorpat’s founder, Johan Skytte, came under their influence. When he endowed a “Chair of Eloquence” at the University of Uppsala, he stipulated that the holder of this chair be bound to “deliver orations on the achievements of ‘the old Gothic men.'”\(^{296}\) Those “old Gothic men” with their Runes may have mattered in Uppsala, but they were all but absent from Dorpat’s universalist curriculum in the Baltic periphery, where a preoccupation with the local environment led to other areas of concern, and a certain skeptical attitude toward the Gothicism of the Imperial center. In fact, it was a former Livonian Professor at Dorpat University, Jakob Wilde, who made the sharpest criticisms of Rudbeckius and Gothicism when he moved from the


\(^{293}\) Georg von Rauch, Die Universität Dorpat und das Eindringen der frühen Aufklärung in Livland, 1690-1710 (Essen: Essener Verlagsanstalt, 1943), 433.


\(^{295}\) Karl XI’s 1689 pronouncement made it legal to use Descartes in matters that did not directly touch upon religion; separation of science and religion and introduced into the Swedish state. Arvo Tering, Descartes, 92.

periphery to the center as the Imperial Historiographer of Sweden in the first years of the eighteenth century, relying largely on the natural law theorist Samuel Pufendorf for arguments to combat “Gothicism” as a legitimate principle of integration for the Swedish state. A national conflict arose, as the centralization of state came to be seen as “Swedification.”

3.3 Swedish Livonia and German Dorpat

Dorpat University became an agent and symbol of Baltic particularism and alternative visions of Latin Christendom as much as it was a force for integration into the Swedish state and Lutheran Orthodoxy. In some ways the divide was built into the town and its University from the very beginning. For there were two Lutheran churches in Dorpat. Saint Mary’s Church served the Swedish Congregation, and Saint John’s Church served the German Congregation. The pastors for each were the University’s First (Primarius) and Second (Secondarius) Professors of Theology respectively. Other Confessions were not allowed to practice their faith; the only Catholic in town was the French Dance, Riding, and Duelling Instructor, Bazancourt, but even he came under considerable pressure to convert when he married a local girl. Though modelled on Uppsala, which had between 1000 and 1500 students, Dorpat was small by comparison, with barely more than a hundred in any given year. All told, 1706 students, mostly Germans and Swedes attended the University between 1632 and 1710. Less than 10% of these were aristocrats, since the Baltic German aristocracy preferred to send their children to older, more authentically German (and less suspiciously Swedish) universities. Over the course of the century the style and self-presentation of the university student evolved: if the typical University student of 1632 was a monk, simply clad, by the 1690s he was a finely dressed gentleman, with aristocratic pretensions. University students often carried swords. Though very few were actually aristocrats (less than 10%), the nobility increasingly defined the cultural mode of self-expression of the university student. Indeed, the aspiration of 17th-century commoners at Dorpat


299 Rauch, Dorpat, 416.

300 Villu Tamul, Album Academicum: Universitas Tartuensis (Tartu, 1994), 12.

301 Inno, Tartu, 66.
University to aristocratic values and virtues foreshadows the very same aspiration and identification in the intimate circles of Yuri Lotman in Soviet Tartu after the Second World War.

At the other end of the social spectrum, Baltic peasants mostly remained excluded from the University despite the universalistic rhetoric in the opening speeches of Gustavus Adolphus and Johan Skytte about the University and its service to all segments of society. Serfdom had never existed in Sweden and as a “fourth estate” Swedish peasants enjoyed greater political representation than anywhere else in Europe, where they were subsumed into the third estate and their interests therefore largely ignored. However, serfdom endured in its overseas Livonian colony, restricting access to the University and complicating the legal identity of the realm. Many German and Swedish students and professors, nonetheless, served as Lutheran pastors to local peasant communities. Posing a further social challenge to the integrity of the Swedish state were student “nations” (“dissidia nationalia”). Initially forbidden, they gradually gained acceptance (as they had in Paris in the 12th century) and divided students according to their native tongues and provincial points of origin (Swedish, Finnish, Imperial German, and Baltic German).

The Lutheran University of Dorpat began as a Lutheran Secondary School or “Gymnasium” in 1630. It was founded at the prompting of the King’s polyglot tutor, Johann Skytte, whose founding decrees—read allowed to the citizens of Dorpat on August 18th, 1630—bespeak his linguistic sensitivity and democratic vision of education. Dorpat University’s first professor of history antiquities, Friedrich Menius, translated Skytte’s Latin address into his own idiosyncratic Northern German dialect, while still interspersing it with Latin words. In his address, Skytte praised the magniminity of his Majesty King Gustavus Adolphus for founding

in your hometown of Dorpat a particular school [a.k.a. a “trivial school” intended for local children to learn Latin and the first three Liberal Arts or “Trivium”—DB] and a Gymnasium or Collegium. The nobleman, town citizen, and peasant youth are all equally welcome to come study and learn not only in the four fundamental languages [i.e. Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Chaldean—DB], but also in French, Latvian, Estonian, and Ingrian, to learn public speaking, writing, reading, arithmetic and fortification, especially the Liberal Arts and the three faculties of the humanities (studiis humanioribus). And they are to be taught in such a way that later every one in his own language, in his own fatherland, might provide honorable service both in Churches and secular callings. And also so that there would be no need to recruit other individuals from the outside (who are not familiar with the language of this land), but that the children of local inhabitants would always be preferred in churches and schools and other governing institutions.302

In this curious grouping of languages, the Swedish and German languages are omitted, while French is grouped together with Latvian, Estonian, and Ingrian. The Gymnasium was promoted

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to the rank of University two years later in 1632. In the end, the Skytte’s vision of state centralization was not fulfilled; the state evolved more along the lines of Oxenstierna’s vision rather than Skytte’s. Part of this vision was the maintenance of Baltic particularity and distinctness: serfdom was not abolished.

Whatever humanist elements Johan Skytte wanted to introduce into Dorpat’s curriculum, the form of academic discourse remained resolutely scholastic, consisting almost exclusively of dissertations, lectures, and disputations. And yet even these medieval structures attest to the infusion of local peasant culture and distant world religions into academic discourse along with German Pietism and Cartesian Rationalism. Many dissertations included aphorisms, dedications, and sayings written in the local languages on their title pages. The syncretism of Dorpat thought emerges in the incorporation of references to the particular dimensions of the local environment, as can be found in a dissertation in 1706 written on the old pagan Temple of Uppsala, before it became the site of the Swedish Church. It also included references to the old Livonian pagan sites of Mojahn (Mujani) in present day Latvia and Packerort (near Reval-Tallinn) in present day Estonia. At the same time, the Professor of Philosophy, G. Sjöberg allowed his students to engage in disputations in which they adopted Cartesian positions. Still, Descartes never became an uncritically accepted dogma. In 1699 Abraham Cartenius—a future pastor in Finland—delivered a disputation on the subject of Animal Psychology, in which he argued against Descartes’ position that animals are automatons, mechanically controlled by their instincts and therefore incapable of thought. Meanwhile, Dorpat’s Mathematics Professor S. Dimberg became one of the first scholars in all of Europe to offer a lecture course on Sir Isaac Newton’s *Principia Mathematica* (1687) from 1693 to 1698. In all these ways, Dorpat University facilitated a syncretic encounter between particular local elements and intellectual currents from abroad.

But perhaps the best insight into the seventeenth-century encounter between Europe and its Baltic periphery, between linguistic universalism and particularism at Dorpat University can

303 The original Constitution of Dorpat University under Swedish rule provides a guide to the prescribed form of academic life with its Disputations and Lectures, with precise specifications of the curriculum, indicating which grammars and texts should be used to teach various subjects. See the original Latin text of Dorpat’s Constitution in a bilingual Latin-Estonian edition, Marju Lepäjõe, ed., *Constitutiones Academiae Dorpatensis* (*Academia Gustaviana*) (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 1997), 50-60.

304 See for example Mathias Lemcken’s dedicatory poem in Estonian, used in H. Chr. Wag(e)ner’s dissertatio, “de Trinitate Platonis et Platonicorum” as quoted in Karl Inno, *Tartu Universitist in Estonia During the Swedish Rule, 1632-1710* (Stockholm, Förlag Vaba Eesti, 1972), 119.


306 See Georg von Rauch for a discussion of the various syncretic elements in Dorpat dissertations from the late 17th and early 18th centuries; see also the bilingual German-Estonian book compiled after a Tartu University Library exhibition by Arvo Tering, *Descartes ja tema ideede jõudmine Baltimaaile 17. Sajandil ja 18 sajandi algul*. René Descartes’ 400. Sünnipaastapäevale pühendatud näitus Tartu Ülikooli Raamatukogus aprill–juuni 1996 [Descartes and the Arrival of His Ideas in the Baltic in the 17th and Early 18th Centuries: An Exhibition Devoted to René Descartes’ 400th birthday at Tartu University Library] (Tartu 1996), 93 and 97. Olof Rudbeck and Peterus Hoffwenius were the most important Cartesians at Uppsala; in 1664 Theologians tried to ban the teaching of Descartes. M.G. de la Gardi defended Descartes but his ideas did not arrive before 1656 because teachers were older. 1690—Rostock and Greifswald Gabriel Sjöberg and Micael Dau (philosophy) but also Olof Hermelin (eloquence) 93—at least 10s of disputations on subject of Descartes: “S. Dimberg oli jõudnud omaast ajast ete Descartes’I filosoofiat ületades: nimelt luges ta a. 1693-1698 ühena esimestest Euroopas loenguid Isaac Newtoni Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica (1687) alusel.”
be found in the Baltic reception of the Latin guide to the Greek language, Janua linguarum reserata sive linguarum et scientiarum omnium (The Door to Languages Unlocked, or the Seedbed of all the Languages and Sciences). This was the work of a Czech-speaking, Moravian Protestant, Jan Comenius (1592-1670), first published in 1629. It quickly became a sensation, the second most popular book in Europe after the Bible, translated into twelve different languages. Comenius had been driven from his homeland following the confessionalization of Moravia during the Thirty Years War. His linguistic interests and aspirations were all in some ways related to a desire to restore unity to a world that had been shattered by this War and had turned him into an exile from his homeland. He turned down the offer of John Winthrop (Jr.) to become the President of Harvard College in the British colonies, and sought refuge instead in various Northern European states—the Dutch Republic, England, and Sweden—where he advised the governments on educational policy and dreamt of a perfect language in which false statements would no longer be possible.\textsuperscript{307} Better than any other single work, his Door to Languages Unlocked embodied the emerging Protestant inversion of attitudes about Grammar and Language: if language had traditionally been taught on the basis of the rules of Grammars, Comenius was among the first to implement the opposite idea, that grammar should instead be taught on the basis of language.\textsuperscript{308} As noted by Umberto Eco, this distinction between grammatical rules and texts would later occupy a fundamental place in the scholarly work of Yuri Lotman.\textsuperscript{309}

Even after he fell out of favor in Sweden for advocating a reconciliation of Lutherans and Calvinists, the work of John Comenius (Jan Komensky) was translated and transmitted to the Baltic periphery of the Swedish Empire by one of the most important seventeenth-century professors at Dorpat University, Johann Gezelius (1615-1690).\textsuperscript{310} Like Johan Skytte, Gezelius was scholar of relatively humble origins, whose education carried him from the first Swedish gymnasium at Västerås to the universities of Dorpat and Uppsala. In 1642 he returned to Dorpat as a professor of Greek and Oriental Languages. The influence of Comenius can be seen in Gezelius’s own Greek grammar, using language to teach Grammar (rather than the other way around), avoiding a scholastic obsession with rules and exceptions. In his introduction he stated that this was his explicit aim. It became the most popular textbooks for teaching ancient Greek in the Swedish Empire.\textsuperscript{311} Like almost all of Dorpat’s Professor’s of Ancient Greek under Swedish rule, Gezelius served at the same time as its Professor of Oriental Languages (linguae Hebraeae et aliarum Orientalium). In this capacity, he was responsible for teaching Hebrew, and the fundamentals of Chaldean (Biblical Aramaic), Arabic, and Syrian. He produced a Hebrew Grammar and proved instrumental in procuring Hebrew letters for Dorpat’s Printing Press, established only a few months before Dorpat University itself in the summer of 1632. Originally

\textsuperscript{307} Peter Hofstadter, Gödel, Escher, Bach (Vintage Books, 1979), 635.
\textsuperscript{308} TÜA I, 200. For an overview of turning points in European ideas about language and linguistics see Vivien Law, The History of Linguistics in Europe: From Plato to 1600 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
\textsuperscript{309} “Lotman recalls the customary twofold experience of language learning. Adult learners are usually introduced to an unknown language by means of rules…. On the other hand, a child, when first learning to speak, is trained through exposure to a continuous textual performance of pre-fixed strings of language and s/he is expected to absorb competence even though not completely conscious of the underlying rules. The difference between grammatical learning and textual learning led Lotman to look at the various texts which are current in a culture in order to see that culture as a set of texts and a non-hereditary collective memory.” Umberto Eco, “Introduction” in Yuri Lotman, The Universe of the Mind (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990), xi.
\textsuperscript{310} TÜA I, 200.
\textsuperscript{311} TÜA I, 200.
it only had two sets of letters: Gothic and Latin, which were both used in printing the first history of Dorpat University one month after its inauguration in October 1632.312

Over the course of his career Johan Gezelius wrote more than 150 works in Latin, Greek, Swedish, and eventually Finnish as well. Even as a Professor of Greek and Oriental Languages at Dorpat, he worked toward his doctorate in Theology at the University of Uppsala. Appointed Bishop of Åbo (Turku) from 1664 until his death in 1690, he promoted the Finnish language, earning his reputation as the “Father of Finnish literacy.” He also presided over the curriculum of Turku University as its vice-chancellor, and devoted the rest of his life to an improved, annotated Latin translation of the Bible. With his Pentecostal commitment to promoting literacy in Finnish on the one hand, while attempt to purify and perfect the Latin language on the other, Gezelius was Dorpat University’s clearest embodiment of the ambivalent linguistic spirit of seventeenth-century Europe, that looked to sources written in ancient languages to help turn academic Latin into a language of truth, while at the same time seeking this same power for even the humblest languages of everyday life.

In the sixteenth century Russian Orthodoxy was known quite neutrally throughout the Baltic World as “Moskowitische Glaube” (Muscovite Faith) or “Russische Glaube” (Russian Faith). Under the polarizing pressures of confessionalization in the seventeenth century, the prevailing term became “Moskowitscher Irrglaube.” (The Muscovite Heresy).313 Invasions from the Orthodox East interrupted the work of the University several times. In 1656 Russian forces invaded Southern Livonia, laying siege to Dorpat and expelling not only the Swedish Garrison on Cathedral Hill but also the Professoriate. The Governor General of Estonia, Bengt Horn, was a former student of Dorpat University, and so quite sympathetic to its plight. He provided the exiled professors with a place to read lectures and hold disputations in the provincial capital of Reval (Tallinn). There the University continued to function until it petered out for lack of municipal support in 1665.314 It took the concerted and combined effort of the Livonian Knighthood and the citizens of Dorpat to see the University reestablished in Dorpat in 1688. But the Swedish Monarchy was concerned that in Dorpat the University was not only more vulnerable to Russian attack, but also a bit too far removed from the direct control of Stockholm or Uppsala, and eventually succeeded (against the wishes of the Dorpat citizenry) to have it relocated to the coast. In 1699 Dorpat University became Pernau University until the Great Northern War finally ended Sweden’s presence in the Baltic entirely turning its former colonies into Russian ones in 1710. The demise of Dorpat came two years earlier in 1708 when Peter the Great burned it to the ground, promising the Baltic German nobility the restoration of ancient privileges that the Swedish Monarchy had tried to reduce. There was much talk of the restoration of Dorpat University in the eighteenth century, but neither the Russian Imperial State nor the Baltic German nobility took action. Still, lists of local literati numbering over a hundred for every major town in Livonia by the end of the 17th century suggest that despite its failures in enforcing Swedish state-sponsored Lutheran Orthodoxy, Dorpat University had succeeded in at least one important aspect of its Baltic mission: to generate a literate, Lutheran, Latin-speaking, elite, which valued learning above birth and thought in pan-European and increasingly global terms, where none had existed before.

312 TÜA I, 203.
314 History of Tartu University, 1632-1982, 32.
Chapter 4. A German University: Dorpat and the Russian Empire

What is needed is a Russian system and a European education.

–Sergei Uvarov

In 1756 Voltaire made his famous quip that the Holy Roman Empire was neither Holy, nor Roman nor an Empire. This was also approximately how the nineteenth-century Moscow University history professor Sergei Soloviev characterized the attitude of Sergei Uvarov (1786—1855), the Russian Minister of Enlightenment under Tsar Nicholas I, towards his own tri-partite “Official Nationality” policy: “Orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality [Pravoslavie, samoderzhavie, narodnost]; Orthodoxy—while [Uvarov] was an atheist not believing in Christ even in the Protestant manner; autocracy—while he was a liberal, nationality—although he had not read a single Russian book in his life and wrote constantly in French or in German.”

Whatever truth there might be in Soloviev’s biting assessment, Official Nationality was what Sergei Uvarov set out to implement in Russia’s schools and universities. Within a day of his official confirmation as Minister of Enlightenment in April 1833, he wrote a circular to the Superintendents of each educational district (okrug): “I trust you will join me in raising the universities to the highest possible level and that professors will act in the unifying spirit of Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality.” Soloviev was himself one of Uvarov’s “discoveries” and appointees to the history faculty of Moscow University, and as such, a good example of the way in which the Russian state, for all its involvement in producing and censoring its own intelligentsia, failed to control its image or silence criticism emanating from its universities.

Without taking Soloviev’s assessment of Uvarov’s cynicism at face value, it can serve to introduce some of the contradictions and ambiguities that plagued the Russian imperial state throughout its long nineteenth century, including its vexed relationship to Europe, the Russian language, its own multiethnic and multiconfessional society, its universities and emerging intelligentsia. These contradictions and ambiguities were especially pronounced at Dorpat University, which had been reestablished by Tsar Alexander I in 1802 in the throes of Napoleon’s rise to power in Europe. In some ways, Dorpat became a microcosm of the multinational dynamics of the Empire as a whole (and therefore a good internal vantage point upon them); in other ways it held aloof from them in its multilingual Baltic corner of Europe. As the only German-speaking University in the realm, it became an internal European “oasis” of cultural life, an intermediary and meeting point for scholars from Russia and across Europe, while at the same time shielding and protecting elements of Russian culture expelled from the center (just as Livonia had given a second home to communities of Old Believers expelled from Russia following the Petrine reforms). It was this singular combination of proximity and distance that made Dorpat University such an excellent internal observatory upon the social and intellectual dimensions of European-Russian relations in the nineteenth century. Paradoxically,

316 “Ce corps qui s’appelait et qui s’appelle encore le saint empire romain n’était en aucune manière ni saint, ni romain, ni empire.” From Voltaire’s 1756 Essai sur l’histoire générale et sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations as quoted in The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 796.
317 Nicholas Riasanovsky, Official Nationality, 70-71.
318 Uvarov’s “O vstuplenii tovarishcha ministra tainogo sovetnika Uvarova v prava i obiazannosti ministra narodnago proveshchenniia” as translated and qtd. in Whittaker, Russian Education, 156. See also Riasanovsky, 73.
the russification of the University in the 1880s—German-speaking Dorpat became Russian-speaking Iur'ev—did little to bring order or unity to the university (or better integrate it into the realm); it led rather to the even more rapid proliferation of a Babel of scholarly and fraternal societies on the German model, each with its own faith and unofficial nationality speaking its own tongue. 319

4.1 The Napoleonic Wars and the Rebirth of Europe

Tsar Alexander I reestablished Dorpat (Tartu) University in 1802, in the throes of pan-European upheaval that began with the French Revolution and culminated in the Napoleonic Wars (1789-1815). Domestically, the memory of the Pugachev rebellion also played a part. Patrick Alston has suggested a direct link between the two: “The initiator of the program to preclude Pugachev by means of Condorcet was the dreamful pupil of La Harpe who became autocrat of all the Russians at the age of 23”—i.e. Alexander I. 320 Dorpat was thus born of a mixture of fear and fascination with the political, social, and intellectual struggles in Europe that were subordinating theology to state bureaucracy, converting notions of cyclical time into linear progress, establishing the nation as the fundamental cultural (if not yet political) unit of human life, and replacing Latin with French as the reigning European lingua franca. Indeed, it was not until 1803 that the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg (founded in 1725 on the model of Paris through the combined efforts of Peter the Great and Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz) made its definitive switch from Latin to French. 321 None of its transactions were translated into Russian until after the Russian Revolution.

Though its casualties were less than half of those of the Thirty Years War (around three and half million), the global dimension of the Napoleonic Wars were in some sense greater, with important theaters all around the globe, extending to the Indian Ocean, the Dutch Colonies in the Far East, and the French Colonies in the West Indies—Cayenne, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Haiti. For their use of modern techniques of propaganda, media, and conscription the Napoleonic Wars—like the Thirty Years War before them—have been called the “First Total War.” 322 However temporarily, Napoleon’s conquest of Europe overturned and called all traditional structures of authority into question, putting an end to the moribund Holy Roman Empire in 1806 and giving birth and inspiration in the conflicting emotions he inspired to cultural nationalism all across Europe and the French colonies. Beethoven initially dedicated his Third Symphony (the “Eroica”) to Napoleon, but ended up blotting out his name. After Napoleon defeated the Prussians at the Battle of Jena, Hegel, wrote: “I saw the Emperor—this world-spirit—go out form the city to survey his realm. It is a truly wonderful experience to see such an individual, on horseback, concentrating on one point, stretching over the world and

319 Isabelle Phibbes, The Grand Duchy of Finland (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), 6; Pirkko Forsman Svensson, “From Monolingual to Bi- and Multilingual Instruction at the University of Helsinki,” Presentation at “Bi- and multilingual universities—Challenges and future prospects” at the University of Helsinki, 1-3 September, 2005.
321 From 1783 to 1802 the transactions of the Academy were published under the Latin title: Nova Acta Academiae Scientiarum Imperialis Petropolitanae. From 1803 until 1916 they were published under the French title: Mémoires de l’Académie Impériale des Sciences de St. Pétersbourg, avec l’Histoire de l’Académie.
322 See David Bell, The First Total War: Napoleon’s Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007).
dominating it.”

At the same time, however, Napoleon replaced traditional monarchs with his brothers and cousins. In their dress and self-presentation, the leaders of the Haitian Revolution, Toussaint L’Ouverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines modeled themselves upon Napoleon even as they resisted his rule. As a cultural phenomenon, Napoleon may have had his greatest impact in European literature—in Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* and in Stendhal’s *Red and the Black* for example—as a contradictory symbol of liberation and oppression, of unbridled will and the rule of law.

Napoleon’s invasion of the Ottoman Empire gave birth to an independent Egypt under Ottoman Janissary Muhammed Ali; the discovery of the Rosetta Stone in 1799 by one of his soldiers put Europe’s relationship to the Ancient World on new linguistic footing, when Champollion, with the help of Ancient Greek and Coptic, provided the first successful translation of Egyptian Hieroglyphics. Napoleon’s invasion of Russia in 1812 and Russia’s “Patriotic War” of resistance became the defining moment of Russian Imperial and National history, commemorated in works of literature and art ranging from Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* to Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture*, a cultural prototype for the “Great Patriotic War,” as the Second World War came to be known in the Soviet Union.

Napoleon’s stated goal (as it had been for Gustavus Adolphus) was European unification: to “found a European system, a European Code of Laws, a European judiciary: there would be but one people in Europe.”

But this time Dorpat University was reborn on the far-side of a new pan-European aspiration to reunite Europe under the star of a new belief system, and on the near side of more traditional forms of authority. Russian ambivalence about Europe remained the defining feature of Russian national identity throughout the nineteenth century, achieving its clearest intellectual expression in the Slavophile-Westernizer controversy, in which Slavophiles (like Yuri Samarin, Ivan Kireyevsky, Aleksey Khomiakov, and Konstantin Aksakov) advocated the cultivation of a Russian national identity from indigenous Russian resources, while Westernizers (like Chaadayev, Herzen, and Belinsky) turned in varying degrees toward the West. But what was the West and what was Russia?

At first at least, Russian scholars—like their German counterparts—looked East for their cultural identity to offset the homogenizing force of anti-ethnic French Civilization of the French Revolution that had declared War on all the little languages and dialects of France. On June 4, 1794, the Abbé Grégoire (1750-1830) presented his report on the state of the French language to the National Convention: Report on the necessity and means to annihilate the patois and to universalize the use of the French language. For Grégoire, France was a tower of Babel—he used this metaphor explicitly—in dire need of linguistic unification:

Without exaggeration one can be certain that there are six million French, especially in the provinces, who do not know the national language; that an equal number is incapable of keeping up with a conversation; that in the final analysis the number of those who speak it purely probably does not exceed three million, and probably the number of those who write it correctly is even less.

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323 October 13, 1806.
324 “Yes, that’s what it was! I wanted to become a Napoleon, that is why I killed her…. Do you understand now?” Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Constance Garnet (Dover, 2001), 326. See also Julien Sorel in The Red and the Black.
Thus, with thirty different local dialects, we are yet, in so far language is concerned at the Tower of Babel, while at the same time we are in the vanguard of nations in the domain of liberty.

Whether it should be possible to diminish the number of idioms of Europe, the political state of the world bans the hope to gather the people by a common language. This concept proposed by some writers, is foolhardy and chimerical. A universal language is, to its own domain, what the philosopher’s stone is to chemistry.

But at least one can make more uniform the language of a great nation, in a way that all its citizens compose without obstacle to communicate their thoughts.326

In the difficulty of making a clear distinction, Dorpat University played a crucial intermediary role as the founder of Dorpat’s Professor’s Institute expressed state policy: “What is needed is a Russian system and a European education.”327 The foundation of Dorpat University was part of the first serious attempt to create a comprehensive centralized state educational system for the Russian Empire. Crucial to the later development of Dorpat University, Sergei Uvarov was still a student at the small-town German University of Göttingen when it was formally inaugurated as a Russian Imperial Institution in 1802. His role was comparable to that played by Johan Skytte in the Swedish Empire. Both were in some minor nobleman, men made as much by their learning as by birth: and each in his own way stood for the centralization of the state, against the higher ranking nobility, for which Dorpat was to play an explicit role.328 Also like Skytte, Uvarov had traveled extensively in Europe, and acquired comparable pan-European linguistic abilities: “He developed a facility in seven languages [Russian, French, German, Italian, Latin, Greek, and English], wrote in four and, during his lifetime, authored over two dozen essays on a variety of literary, historical, scientific, and scholarly topics that brought him repute throughout Europe.”329 In the course of his European travels he spent two years at the small-town German University of Göttingen beginning in 1802. As such, it is a bit ironic that this man, who did more than any other to institutionalize education in Russia as a state enterprise—and promote the importance of Dorpat in particular—is remembered as “the foremost autodidact of his time.”330 In some sense, Uvarov did everything

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326 On peut assurer sans exaggeration qu’au moins six millions de Francais, surtout dans les campagnes, ignorant la langue nationale; qu’un nombre égal est à peu près incapable de soutenir une conversation suivie; qu’en dernier résultat, le nombre de ceux qui la parlent purement n’excède pas trois millions, et probablement le nombre de ceux qui l’écrivent correctement encore moindre.

“Ainsi, avec trente patois différents, nous sommes encore, pour le language, à la tour de Babel, tandis que, pour la liberté, nous formons l’avant-garde des nations.

“Quoîq’il y ait possibilité de diminuer le nombre des idioms reçus en Europe, l’état politique du globe bannit l’espérance de ramener les peuples à une langue commune. Cette conception, formée par quelqes écrivains, est également hardie & chimérique. Une langue universelle est dans son genre ce que la Pierre philosophale est en chimie.

“Mais au moins on peut uniformer le langage d’une grande nation, de manière que tous les citoyens qui la composent, puissent sans obstacle de communiquer leurs pensées.”

327 “O naznacheniou russkikh universitetov i uchastii ikh v obschestvennom obrazovanii,” Sovremennik 13, No. 3 (March 1848): 37, as qtd in Whittaker, Russian Education, 4.

328 Whittaker, Russian Education, 7.

329 Whittaker, Russian Education, 1.

330 Whittaker, Russian Education, 1.
backwards. His scholarly career ended as most scholarly careers begin, with degrees, a Masters and then a posthumously awarded Doctorate, from the University of Dorpat.\textsuperscript{331} It is a testament to the Dorpat’s special place in the Empire that one of Russia’s most powerful statesmen and the architect of both “official nationality” and imperial education policy sought scholarly recognition and legitimacy from the least Russian University in the Russian Empire at the end of his long and illustrious political career.

The French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars undermined the territorial, intellectual, and linguistic coherence of Europe’s old regime, putting an end to Europe’s last moribund universal monarchy, the Holy Roman Empire, while giving currency to the idea of national states, national universities, and national languages and literatures.\textsuperscript{332} The emerging social sciences contributed to Europe’s modern ideologies of liberalism, socialism, and nationalism. For the first time, universities added professorships and eventually departments of modern language and literature to their curriculum. In his last work, \textit{The Conflict of the Faculties}, Immanuel Kant elevated the department of philosophy above theology, law, and medicine, calling it the most universal university discipline, the only discipline not directly beholden to the state. But in the course of the nineteenth-century “the national literature department gradually [came] to replace the philosophy department as the center of the humanities and a fortiori, as the spiritual center of the University.”\textsuperscript{333} For all its preoccupation with nations, nineteenth-century Europe nonetheless remained a continent of empires, from Napoleon’s conquest of Europe to the restoration of a balance of power at the Congress of Vienna, to the imperial suppression of University autonomy in the Carlsbad decrees of 1819 and the Revolutions of 1848, to the Scramble for Africa at the end of the century. Even the political unification of Germany in 1871 was an ambiguous imperial-national moment—the political birth of an empire (The Second Reich) but also of a nation. Germany did not truly become a nation-state until the Weimar Republic, and the oldest nations—Spain, France, and England—have always been at least a little bit imperial. Ultimately, the national and imperial tendencies of 19\textsuperscript{th}-century Europe should be thought together rather than separately. Ever since its nineteenth-century rebirth with an “idea,” the university occupied an awkward position within a Europe that was ruled in empires but thought in nations. Even the most significant statement in the English language on the “idea” of the university as an institution for teaching universal knowledge was born of Britain’s ambiguous national and imperial predicament.\textsuperscript{334} It was addressed at mid-century to the problem of creating a

\textsuperscript{331} Whittaker, \textit{Russian Education}, 2.
\textsuperscript{332} It is interesting to note how skillfully the word “nation-state” is avoided in British historiography. The language of both nationhood and statehood is left for the continental Europeans; meanwhile the British have invented their own unique and seemingly untranslatable vocabulary: the Commonwealth, the United Kingdom, Great Britain. If the French nation declares itself coterminous with all of humanity (and human rights), the English declare their independence from the European discourse and achieve their own universality by refusing to speak the language of nationality at all. The view from nowhere is a view from England. The untransferable categories of British historiography make it difficult to see the extent or nature of British exceptionalism in European and World History. But most states are not as successful as the British have been in defining the terms of their own national historiography and getting the rest of the world to accept these terms without so much as a whimper.
\textsuperscript{333} Bill Readings, \textit{The University in Ruins} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 69. While Bill Readings has argued that the literary raison-d’être of the nineteenth century European University was especially pronounced in England, in fact the institutionalization of literary studies at the university was more rapid and pronounced in Eastern Europe. As Galin Tihanov has observed the first chair of Russian literature in Russia was established in 1835, while the first chair of English literature in England was not established until 1852 (at University College London) and a comparable chair did not exist at Oxford before 1894.
\textsuperscript{334} For further reflections on the need to overcome the artificial divide in Britain between “domestic” and “imperial” history, see David Armitage: “The ideological history of the relations between the Three Kingdoms of England,
specifically Catholic University for Ireland by the Oxford don, Cardinal John Henry Newman, who wrote: “One of the special objects which a Catholic University would promote is that of the formation of a Catholic Literature in the English language.”

If Newman’s “idea of a university” was conceived for the Irish-Catholic periphery of the United Kingdom, the most important model of the modern European university was born of an effort to revitalize the German-Lutheran center of the Prussian monarchy after the French Revolution. Founded in 1810, the University of Berlin was the brainchild of Wilhelm von Humboldt, a philologist and specialist on Basque, one of Europe’s most peripheral and unusual orphan languages. Humboldt’s university was conceived in conversation with two other romantics, the Lutheran theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and nationalist philosopher, Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Bill Readings has summarized their achievement:

Under the rubric of culture, the University is assigned the task of research and teaching, respectively the production and inculcation of national self-knowledge. As such, it becomes the institution charged with watching over the spiritual life of the people of the rational state, reconciling ethnic tradition with statist rationality. The University, in other words, is identified as the institution that will give reason to the common life of the people, while preserving their traditions and avoiding the bloody, destructive example of the French Revolution.

The nineteenth century university was imagined as much as an institution of memory as of reason, an antidote to revolutionary forgetfulness; its task was deeply cultural—i.e. simultaneously social and intellectual, to generate a particular community for the pursuit of universal knowledge, but also universal knowledge for a particular national community. Speaking as the first rector of the University of Berlin, Johann Gottlieb Fichte invoked the spiritual nature of the university’s national quest in universal terms—not only to build a better a future, but also to remember a better past, and thereby to provide a link to eternity:

The University… is the institution… where each generation hands on… its highest intellectual education to the succeeding generation… All this, however is solely with the intention that the divine may ever appear in the human with fresh clearness…. Now if the university is this, it is clear that it is the most holy thing which the human race possesses. Since the education given there preserves… and hands on everything divine that ever burst forth in mankind, the real nature of mankind lives there in its uninterrupted life, far from everything transitory; and the University is the visible representation of the immortality of our race.

Scotland and Ireland in the sixteenth century reveals the inseparability of—and, in many ways, the identity between—state-formation and empire-building in the early modern period. For the last half-century, historians have argued that the origins of English (and, later British) imperial ideology can be found in English policy towards Ireland under the Tudors.” David Armitage, The Ideological Origins of the British Empire (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), 24.


Bill Readings, The University in Ruins, 15.

Fichte as qtd in The Soul of the American University, 105. ; “the most holy thing which the human race possesses.” Thomas Albert Howard, Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 34.
The 19th century saw the sacrilization of the European University in two places—Prussia and Britain, carrying on the legacy of an institution that was first invented in Paris: an institution committed to forming people in the British case and to shaping ideas in the German case.

4.2 The Russian Empire and Its Universities

Dorpat was among the first four Russian universities built to integrate the expanding multilingual, bureaucratic Russian imperial state since Marburg-educated Mikhail Lomonossov had established the first Russian University in Moscow in 1755. The others were Saint Petersburg, Kazan, and Kharkov. Until the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917, these universities—along with several later additions—had the task of domesticating European learning and ideals for Russian purposes: on the one hand they were supposed to help integrate the realm by translating Europe for Russia; on the other they were supposed to help Europeanize an indigenous Russian cultural elite. It was Sergei Uvarov who gave the clearest and most concise formulation to the state agenda. He wrote, “What is needed is a Russian system and a European education.”

And no Russian University was more European than Dorpat, as the only German-speaking, Lutheran University in the realm, especially after the Catholic and Polish-speaking University of Vilnius was shut down following the Polish uprising of 1830. Though Uvarov was not the founder of Dorpat University for Russia as Johan Skytte had been its founder for Sweden, he nonetheless gave Dorpat its clearest sense of purpose within the framework of state education policy. In 1828 he established Dorpat’s “Professors Institute” with the explicit task of cultivating an indigenous Russian intelligentsia, training Russian professors for the universities of Moscow, Saint Petersburg, the Academy of Sciences, and Russia’s other universities.

Long before there was such a thing in Russia, August Ludwig Schlözer (1735-1809), who had studied in Uppsala and lived for a while in Saint Petersburg, taught Russian history at the University of Götingen. He contributed greatly to the national consciousness and pride of a would-be Russian intelligentsia as Russian student memoirs attest. Like many other Russians, Sergei Uvarov most likely attended his lectures. “Schlözer considered Russia an integral part of the European family, and upheld the Normanist theory of the origins of the first Russian state, namely that the Varangians had brought political organization to this Eastern outpost in the ninth century A.D.”

As the only German speaking University in the realm, Dorpat was the most “European,” and the most integral to the universal identity of the Russian Imperial state. Unlike Swedish-speaking Helsinki, which held aloof in the semi-autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland, or Polish-speaking Vilnius where student uprisings led to the closure of the University in 1832, Dorpat was the only non-Russian-speaking University in the Empire to play a crucial role in the linguistic and intellectual integration of the realm. The Dorpat rector and historian, Gustav Ewers, founded Russian legal history with his 1808 monograph, the Origins of the Russian State. Praised by Karamzin, it was written against his own Uppsala-educated professor at Göttingen, August Ludwig Schlözer. As Russia’s only German University, Dorpat had the dual task of

338 “O naznacheni i russkih univ er sitetov i uchastii ikh v obshechestvennom obrazovanii,” Sovremennik 13, No. 3 (March 1848): 37, as qtd in Whittaker, Russian Education, 4.
339 Whittaker, Russian Education, 14.
340 Cynthia Whittaker, Russian Education, 14.
"Europeanizing" the emerging Russian intelligentsia and ensuring the loyalty of the Baltic German elite. The Imperial Minister of Enlightenment, Sergei Uvarov, who designed Tsar Nicholas I’s “Official Nationality” policy, founded a “Professors Institute” at Dorpat to train Russian scholars for Saint Petersburg and Moscow in 1828—an utterly unique institution that proved an unqualified success by Europeanizing twenty-two important Russian professors over the course of eight years of existence.

Conversely, Dorpat’s role in rendering Germans faithful to the Tsar can be seen in the oaths of allegiance signed (first in German and later in Russian) by newly hired recruits from Western Europe, like Nietzsche’s colleague from Basel, the Lebensphilosoph Gustav Teichmüller, another testament to Dorpat’s role as a facilitator of scholars and scholarship between Europe and Russia. Dorpat-educated Baltic Germans filled the ranks of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg, where they conversed in French with their Russian compatriots, though most learned at least some Russian as well. The most eminent Dorpat alumnus there was the German-, Estonian-, and Russian-speaking anthropologist, Karl Ernst von Baer. He exaggerated (but just a bit) when he claimed that all the eyes that had seen the furthest reaches of the Russian Empire—from the Caspian Sea to Kamchatka—had been trained at Dorpat.

Allow me to express the gratitude of the Academie [of Sciences] in another respect. Wherever an inquiry is needed, even in the most desolate areas, it has been the pupils of this university, and often only this one, who have stood at the ready. Who has, in fact, the products of nature on the furthest no longer trodden by people tip that stretches from Siberia into the Arctic Ocean, who collected in the burning steppes of Central Asia? Who is studying at this moment the rock formations of snowy Kamchatka, and who measures in the sun-scorched corridors beyond the Caucasus, the currents of the sea air and the change of heat? The silent and yet so eloquent book you are preparing today, provides the answer to these questions. They were all students of Dorpat.

According to Karl Ernst von Baer, Tartu University was the Russian Empire’s way of looking at itself. Without Tartu, Russia was blind. In his 1864 autobiography, commissioned by the Knightly Order of Estonia, Baer expressed his belief that Dorpat might become a “nursery” for the Russian intelligentsia, but only if Baltic Germans could learn to speak better Russian.

Baer was acutely aware of the deficiencies of his own Russian, which he claimed to speak worse than either German or Estonian.

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342 See autobiography for this claim.
343 See, for example, Baer’s reference to his “rather halting Russian” in Karl Ernst von Baer, Autobiography, 357.
4.3 Russian Livonia and German Dorpat

A pan-Russian student movement—a “studenchestvo”—started to take shape by the 1860s in Imperial Russia, given coherence by the narrative the emerging Russian intelligentsia produced of its own origins. Benjamin Nathans writes that “universities were the first places that oppressive social distinctions had begun to dissolve in a shared ethos of idealism and public responsibility. In no other area of Russian society—save perhaps Russian literature—were the hopes of transcending inherited social divisions so powerfully invested; the university appeared, in the historian Martin Malia’s words, as ‘one of the few islands of democracy in the most unequal society of Europe.” Alexander Herzen remembered his years at Moscow University in the 1830s in rather utopian terms, not for their “Europeanness,” but rather for their contrast to what he knew or imagined he knew of English Universities:

The youthful strength of Russia streamed to it from all sides, from all strata, as into a common reservoir, in its halls they were purified of the prejudices they had picked up at the domestic hearth, reached a common level, became like brothers…. Young men of all sorts and conditions coming from above and from below, from the south and from the north, were quickly fused into a compact mass of comradeship. Social distinctions had not among us the offensive influence that we find in English schools and barracks, let alone in English universities.  

What Herzen praised in the student bodies of Russian universities was much more characteristic of German universities than British ones, where the college system, placed students under direct supervision of masters and tutors, and gave them little opportunity to form societies or fraternities of their own. In its radical pursuit of consciousness, the Russian “studenchestvo” reached its peak between 1899 and 1905. But with its German academic culture, Dorpat University somehow stood apart from the rest. The idea of “studenchestvo” was not alien to Dorpat, especially after Russification of the professoriate and student body in the late 1880s, but they lived in a world that was still culturally German and demographically Estonian, Lutheran rather than Orthodox.

Dorpat remained an agent and symbol of Baltic particularism as it had in the Swedish Empire. It was nearly fifteen times bigger now, though still a distinctly small-town university, less than half the size of the Universities of Moscow or Saint Petersburg. All told, 30,032 matriculated students, mostly Germans passed through its doors between 1802 and 1917. Only 11–13% of them were Russian. The percentage of aristocrats (mostly Baltic Germans) doubled from what it had been under Swedish rule (upwards of 20%). Much more than they

344 Herzen as quoted in Benjamin Nathans, Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia (Berkeley: University of California, 2002, 239–240.
345 Benjamin Nathans, Beyond the Pale, 239-240.
348 The percentage of hereditary nobles among the students bodies in 1880 (before Russification): Saint Petersburg (26.4%), Moscow (19.8%), Kharkov (21.1%), Kazan (10.6%), Dorpat (23.6%), Warsaw (45.2%), Odessa (12.1%); after Russification of Dorpat to Yuriev: Saint Petersburg V.R. Leikina-Svirskaiia, Intelligentsia v Rossii vo vtoroi polovie 19ogo veka (Moscow, 1971), 62 and 64.
ever had under Swedish rule, Baltic Germans elites came to see the University as their own particular invention, and the great Russian-Baltic historiographical debate of the nineteenth century concerned the relative contributions of the Russian state and the Livonian nobility to the re-establishment of Dorpat in 1802 and its promotion thereafter. Meanwhile the demographics of the town were shifting underneath the University, but not in the direction of Russianization. While the Baltic had been the last part of the Swedish empire to keep serfdom, it was the first part of the Russian Empire to end it on the initiative of the German landholders themselves (c. 1820). From 1844 to 1897 the population of Tartu exploded from 12,374 inhabitants to more than 40,700. Over the course of this 53 year period, an influx of peasants from the countryside changed the face of the urban population from 61% German (and 27% Estonian) to 70% Estonian (and 17% German). The Russian population remained a constant minority, hovering around 10%.

In 1869, Dorpat’s Professor of Russian History, Carl Schirren, got himself expelled from both the University and the Empire for his publication of a vituperative “Livonian Answer” to the Riga-based Slavophile “Mr. Yuri Samarin” in defense of the Lutheran faith, German language, and Livonian Court System. The conflict only deepened over the course of the century as the Baltic German elite, once the most docile and loyal servants of the state, became its biggest headache, exasperating all parts of the Russian intelligentsia. Anton Chekov wrote disparagingly of Dorpat in a letter to his friend, the writer and editor, Alexei Suvorin in 1888: “You ought to write an article calling for the money the Ministry pours into that Dorpat University of Sausages for useless German students, to be spent instead on schools for Tatars, who can be valuable to Russia. I would write it myself, but I haven't the skill.” His lack of “skill” did not keep him from working his feelings about Dorpat into a novella instead. In “The Duel,” serialized in Suvorin’s journal Novoye Vremya only three years later, one of the characters exclaims: “Yes, the Germans! The Germans!” Since leaving Dorpat, where he had studied medicine, Samoilenko had seldom seen Germans and not read a single German book, but in his opinion, all the evil in politics and science proceeded from the Germans.

The Imperial government concurred with Chekhov’s assessment. At this very moment Saint Petersburg was in the throes of transforming German Dorpat into Russian Iu’riev.

In Imagineled Communities, Benedict Anderson cites Dorpat as a prime example of the extension of “Official Nationality” to the non-Russian Imperial periphery, but mistakenly claims the University was shut down in 1887. What happened instead was a change in name and language. Dorpat adopted Russian as its lingua franca, forcing German professors and

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349 The Russian point of view was most thoroughly developed by the Russified University of Yuriev (Dorpat) itself in Evgenii Petukhov’s nearly 500 page history of the University since 1802 and the supplementary volume devoted to professors. See Evgenii (1902). Meanwhile attacks on this perspective—invariably in the German language—could be heard as late as 1933, when Roderich von Engelhardt, a Baltic German nobleman and doctor and member of the Herder Gesellschaft in Riga, wrote Die Deutsche Universität Dorpat in ihrer geistesgeschichtlichen Bedeutung (Reval: Franz Kluge, 1933).
350 Of its 12,374 inhabitants recorded in 1844, 7492 (61%) were German, 3316 (27%) were Estonian, and 1187 (10%) were Russian followed by 189 Latvians, 130 Poles, and 60 others Raimo Pullat, Tartu ajalugu (Tallinn: Kirjastus “Eesti Raamat”, 1980), 128. By 1867 an influx of peasants to urban centers rendered “German Dorpat” 46% Estonian, 42% German, 9% Russian and by 1897 Estonians accounted for more than 70% of the rapidly growing urban population while the German population had fallen proportionally to 16.7%. Kodulinn Tartu (Tallinn: Eesti NSV Teaduste Akadeemia Koduuriirjate Komisjon, 1980), 109 and 119.
instructors who were not competent to teach and publish in the language to leave the University and quite often the empire as well. While the Russian population of the town never rose above 10\%, Russians became a majority in the student body after the transformation, just as Germans had been before. Only the department of Lutheran Theology retained its language and religion to become an embattled bulwark of Baltic German identity in a predominantly Russian student body, which in turn resided in an increasingly Estonian town. Baltic Germans were not the only ones to cultivate an “unofficial nationality” at Dorpat University. Already in 1838, with the support of German scholars interested in the local population the University had acquired a “Learned Estonian Society,” which led to the publication of the Estonian National Epic Kalevipoeg under the authorship of the Germanized ethnic Estonian, Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald in the 1850s. It appeared bilingually, in simultaneous if separate Estonian and German editions. In this sense, Estonian national consciousness was born in the German language. In 1870 Dorpat University acquired its first German-style Estonian student society, which later gave its colors—blue, black and white—to the national flag.

Other emerging nations established their own social, intellectual, and linguistic enclaves at the University as well. Rector Georg Parrot invited Khachatur Abovian, his young Armenian guide on a mountaineering expedition to Mount Ararat, to attend Dorpat University. Abovian discovered German romanticism during his student years in Dorpat in the 1820s and 30s and subsequently—before disappearing mysteriously from the face of the earth in 1848—founded modern Armenian literature with his novel, The Wounds of Armenia (1841), the first important work of literature to be composed in the modern Armenian language. A “Dorpat School” of Armenian poetry followed, as Armenian students followed in Abovyan’s footsteps and founded their own national fraternity at the University.

The proliferation of various national and ideological communities on the German model intensified after its russification as Iur’ev. Estonian, Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Jewish, Armenian, Georgian, Communist, etc. societies and organizations turned Iur’ev into a veritable Babel at the turn of the twentieth century and in some sense a microcosm of the Russian Empire as a whole. In 1916, on the eve of the collapse of the Russian Empire Iur’ev’s 2624 member student body consisted of 683 Russians, 628 Jews (five times more than the 5% Jewish quota officially imposed by the imperial capital in Saint Petersburg), 400 Germans, 391 Estonians, 177 Poles, and 161 Latvians, 45 Georgians, 24 Armenians, 24 Lithuanians, but only 3 “foreigners” (students from outside the borders of the Russian Empire).

Among its Communist agitators in 1900 was Dmitri Ulyianov, Lenin’s little brother, who came to complete his medical degree after being expelled from Moscow University for his revolutionary activities. With the Russification of German-speaking Dorpat into Russian-speaking Yuryev in the 1890s, the University ironically did more to fracture the realm and cultivate particularist loyalties—each

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354 “It is also telling that when self-organized Jewish student associations first appeared, in 1881, they did so exclusively in the Baltic provinces, at Dorpat University and the Riga Polytechnic Institute, both of which were outposts of German Academic culture,” Benjamin Nathans, Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 250.

355 “Whereas in the west young Armenians went to Paris and Venice for their higher education, in the east they went to Dorpat University and St Petersburg. The role of Dorpat (Tartu) in Estonia is particularly important in this context. From the 1830s onward Russian Armenians went there to study the humanities and fell under the spell of the work of the romantic poets Goethe and Schiller, as well as German thought.” Razmik Panossian, The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars (New York: Columbia University Press), 142.

356 Universitas Tartuensis 1632-2007, 225; for comparisons to other universities see TÜA II, 394: Tartu has around 1706 students around 1900; in 1899-1900 Paris has 12,171 students, Berlin has 11,312, Vienna 6981, Cambridge, 3016, Leipzig has 3849, Moscow 4461, and Petersburg 3662.
with its own vision of universal truth and speaking its own language—than serve the interests of the autocratic state, advance the spiritual mission of Russian Orthodoxy, or enhance the authority of the Russian nation and its language. In the end, the only nationalities Dorpat-Iur’ev served were unofficial ones.

Until the formal “Russification” of Dorpat in the 1890s—when its name was changed to the more appropriately Slavic-sounding “Iur’ev” and the lingua franca of all its faculties (except for theology) became Russian, most of its professors remained native German speakers; many did not speak Russian at all. Professors were required to sign a loyalty oath to the Russian Tsar and state, and as late as the 1870s these oaths were still being signed in German. But the role of the university in extending state authority, has always been offset by its role in challenging it. Dorpat also became a rallying point for Lutheran Baltic German culture in a predominantly Orthodox empire, even as it found its autonomy curtailed somewhat after the European revolutions of 1848. In a series of talks delivered in the Aula (Main Auditorium) of Tartu University between in 1810 and 1814 Dorpat’s first Professor of Aesthetics and the University librarian, Karl Morgenstern, a German-Jewish correspondent of Goethe and many other Weimar intellectuals, invented a key German literary concept, the “Bildungsroman”—or novel of self-development. Indeed, the idea of literary self-development and cultivation formalized by Morgenstern at Dorpat University, expressed an important undercurrent in German romanticism that lay at the root of the new model of the European University established with the University of Berlin by a few leading German Romantics that same year, led by the philologist Wilhelm von Humboldt, the Lutheran theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, and the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte.

The best embodiment of Dorpat University’s linguistic spirit under Russian rule before Russification might be the biologist Karl Ernst von Baer (1792-1876). Dorpat’s most eminent scholar of the nineteenth century never actually became a Dorpat professor, though Dorpat framed his career at both ends and played a formative role in his identity and worldview; his son attended the University as well. He was born into the provincial Baltic German nobility, and

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357 For an example see the oath of Gustav Teichmüller, a professor recruited from the University of Basel to the Chair of Philosophy in Dorpat in 1872. When he left his professorship, Friedrich Nietzsche, a professor of philology at the same university, applied unsuccessfully for his chair. The text of his “Eidliches Gelübde” reads as follows: “Ich Gustav Teichmüller gelobe und schwöre bei Gott dem Allmächtigen und seinem heiligen Evangelium, dass ich will und soll Seiner Kaiserlichen Majestät meinem Allernächsten Grossen Herrn und Kaiser Alexander Nikolajewitsch, Selbstherrsch der aller Reussen, und Seiner Kaiserlichen Majestät Erben des Thrones aller Reussen, Seiner Kaiserlichen Hoheit, dem Grassfürsten Cäsarewitsch Alexander Alexandrowitch, treu und redlich dienen und in Allem unterwürflich sein, ohne meines Lebes, bis zum letzten GBlutstropfen zu schonen, und alle zu Seine.... “ Teichmüller also disavowed membership in any Masonic Lodge or other secret society: “Ich ekläre, dass ich zu keiner Freimaurer-Loge oder zu irgend einer anderen geheimen Gesellschaft, oder in noch ausser dem Reiche, gehöre, und auch künftighin keener solchen Gesellschaft angehöre werde.” 16. August, 1871. EAA.f.402.n3.s1640. pages 24 and 25.

358 The rediscovery of Morgenstern’s crucial role in the invention of this concept goes back to a 1961 article by Fritz Martini, “Der Bildungsroman. Zur Geschichte des Wortes und der Theorie.” Previously the term was thought to be the invention of Wilhelm Dilthey from the second half of the nineteenth century. But as Rolf Selbmann has observed, the phenomenon of the Bildungsroman existed even long before Morgenstern invented a word for it: “Wie so oft existiert die Sache vor dem Begriff. Als der Dorpater Ästhetikprofessor Karl Morgenstern in den ersten Jahren des 19. Jahrhunderts den Terminus ‘Bildungsroman’ erfindet, ist der so definierte Roman eine längst eingeführte Gattung.” For Rolf Selbmann’s comment, Martini’s essay, and Morgenstern’s own original lectures at Dorpat University see Zur Geschichte des deutschen Bildungsromans. Ed. Rolf Selbmann (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchges, 1988).
grew up on his uncle’s estate, Lasila Manor in Rakvere Parish in Northern Estonia. After
attending the German gymnasium in Reval, he went on to Dorpat University as a medical
student. Looking back at his youth in his old age from his Dorpat home in 1876, Baer recounted
the first impressions of his arrival in 1810 as an almost religious experience: “When
approaching from the north I first had a view of the town, including the old, imposing ruin on
Cathedral Hill, now converted into the library, it seemed to me that I saw light irradiating
the entire surroundings like the light emanating from the Christ child in Correggio’s painting.”359
Dorpat was a small town, with only a few thousand inhabitants; it remained predominantly
German and German-speaking until the second half of the century, and the buildings of the
newly constructed University were still being built.

Baer was still a student in 1812 when Napoleon invaded Russia; and with a few of his
classmates patriotically heeded a call to treat the wounded soldiers of the Russian army
encamped near Riga. There Baer noted the irony of the fact that most of the soldiers he
encountered in both Napoleon’s Grande Army and the army of the Russian Tsar were native
German speakers.360 He defended his dissertation in Latin in 1814 on “Diseases Endemic to the
Estonian People” (De Morbis Inter Esthonus Endemicis), one of the first ethnographic studies of
the Estonian nation, written shortly before Estonians learned to take a scholarly interest in
themselves and conceive of themselves as a nation. The linguistic awakening of the Estonian
nation began a few years later with the words of the Tartu University student, translator,
polyglot, and poet, Kristjan Jaak Peterson. Shortly before he succumbed to a romantically early
death of tuberculosis at the age of 21 in 1822, Peterson wrote the words that were cast in bronze
and came to adorn the foot of the new Peterson monument on Cathedral Hill in Soviet Tartu in
1983: “Is not the language of this land, rising to the sky upon the wings of song, entitled to
eternity?” [Kas selle maa keel laulu tuules ei või taevani tõustes üles igavikku omale otsida?]361

Meanwhile, Baer’s dissertation was full of reflections—by no means flattering—on
Estonian customs, dress, and cultural peculiarities. In Baer’s youthful account, the Estonians
maintained their place among Europe’s last (and least civilized) Europeans. In the concluding
lines of his dissertation he lamented: “I doubt there is in Europe an educated land, where today in
medicine so many harmful prejudices exist, as can be found in contemporary Livonia and
Estonia.”362 Made aware of the limits of his medical education in provincial Dorpat, he went
abroad to deepen his knowledge of physiology and biology at the universities of Berlin, Vienna,
and Würzburg. For seventeen years thereafter he was a professor of at the University of
Königsberg. Elected to the Russian Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg, he spent the
remaining thirty-three years of his career in Russia. He retired to Dorpat in the 1860s, where he
spent the last decade of his life as a leading continental critic of Charles Darwin. His home was
a social and intellectual hub for the increasingly embattled Baltic German elite of Dorpat with its
anti-materialist, spiritualist undercurrents, expressed in the Lebensphilosophie of professor,
Gustav Teichmüller. This recent transplant from another small-town extra-territorial periphery
of the German Empire had been a colleague of Friedrich Nietzsche and Jacob Burckhardt at the
University of Basel. When he accepted a post at Dorpat he swore an oath of loyalty to the

360 Autobiography of Karl Ernst von Baer, 100.
361 The first Estonian-language newspaper, published in Tartu, dates back to 1806, Maa-rahwa nädalaleht (Weekly
Newspaper for the People of the Land).
362 “Ma ei tea, kas Euroopas on mõnda haritud maad, kus isegi veel tänapäeval meditsiinis nii paljul röögalt
kahjulikke eelarvamuslikke vaateid esineb, nagu neid Liivi- ja Eestimaal täheldada võime.” 177-78.
Russian Tsar (in German), formally declared himself free of all Masonic influences, and left Friedrich Nietzsche to apply (unsuccessfully) for his chair in philosophy back at Basel.\textsuperscript{363}

One of the reasons Baer’s life is so well documented is that the Baltic German Knightly Orders commissioned him to write his own autobiography upon his return to Dorpat. When he died the University decided to erect a monument in his honor on Cathedral hill. But the monument also attracted international attention—and designs—from across Europe, eliciting the praise and symbolic support (one pound) of Charles Darwin, who addressed a letter to Dorpat University in which he called his former continental rival and critic, “the most important zoologist of our century.” For all his opposition to Darwin’s theory of evolution in the last decade of his life in Dorpat, Baer may have been one of Darwin’s most important intellectual provocateurs, whose contributions to knowledge of animal development were a prerequisite in many ways for Darwin’s theory of evolution. Karl Ernst von Baer is one of the heroes of the work of evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould, \textit{Ontogeny and Phylogeny}.

Having studied Latin, Greek, French, Italian and English with a private tutor at his uncle’s home near Paide, Baer also quickly became fluent in his three languages of everyday life. He spoke German with his family and as a Dorpat University student, Estonian with the children on the estate and various governesses, and eventually he learned Russian as well, though he did not become proficient in this language by his own account until he accepted a position at the Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg. Throughout his life each of these languages played some kind of role in his identity, since each represented a realm of thought and experience that remained to some degree inaccessible to the other two. Upon numerous occasions he attempted to translate experiences in these various cultural realms for others, embodying thus in his person as well as his scholarship the multilingual if distinctively German identity of Russian Dorpat. The translator of his autobiography, Jane D. Oppenheimer has underscored this separation in his own experience, noting that “he led two entirely different scientific lives, the first in Prussia, the second in Czarist Russia”: in Königsberg he was a leading (if not founding figure) of embryology, focusing quite literally upon the interior life and development of organisms; in Saint Petersburg his gaze moved outside to the environment: he was an “explorer, a geographer, an ethnographer, a physical anthropologist, an ecologist.”\textsuperscript{364} Indeed, his furthest travels carried him to \textit{Novaya Zemlya} and beyond to Russian America. He even wrote on the “The Indians of Upper California,” in which he compared the natives of America to those of Siberia.

In the 1840s a talented Hungarian philologist, Antal Reguly (1819–1859) paid Karl Ernst von Baer a visit at the Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg. Like his counterpart in Finland, Matthias Castren, Reguly was deeply curious about the links between Finno-Ugric and Uralic languages, and traveled deep into Russia to investigate them; he was in fact the first ethnographer to visit the Mansi people and collect their folklore and study their language. Reguly earned Baer’s respect by proving his proficiency in Estonian: “I came to like him very much” wrote Baer. “He really aroused my admiration when he spoke Estonian. Though he spoke slowly and seemed to ponder the words and inflections, he spoke grammatically correctly and his pronunciation was that of a born and bred Estonian, although he lived among the Estonians only for a few weeks.”\textsuperscript{365} However, the German press managed to twist their mutual sympathy into national antagonism (Hungarian-vs.-Russian), postulating spite where there was

\textsuperscript{363} EAA f.402, n.3, s.1640.
\textsuperscript{364} Jane M. Oppenheimer, “Science and Nationality: The Case of Karl Ernst von Baer (1792-1876)” in \textit{Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society}, Vol. 134, No. 2 (June 1990), 77. (pp. 75-82)
\textsuperscript{365} Baer, \textit{Autobiography}, 354.
only sympathy. The *Hamburger Correspondent* reported on Reguly’s visit to Baer, noting on May 17, 1844 that the Hungarian Scholar “was promised support by Herr v. Baer, if he promised to send faithful reports to the academy. ‘Reguly refused this solely because the offer was made by a Russian.’” Baer tried to set the record straight in an article he published under the title of “Dichtung und Wahrheit” in the German *St. Petersburg Zeitung* (1844, No 113). His amusement at being called a “Russian” in the German press notwithstanding, he insisted that the newspaper had gotten the story entirely wrong. He had never offered Reguly any money, but merely moral support. So the national conflict reported in the newspaper was a total fabrication on two accounts: (1) for falsely attributing national antagonism to Reguly (2) and for falsely attributing Russian nationality to Baer. But Baer did not stop there. He took this opportunity to clarify his own attitude toward national patriotism:

Do they believe that patriotism, and a really national one, can thus be proved and reinforced? The proof would be very unconvincing. True patriotism presupposes self-respect and therefore does not need to proclaim it, nor does it need to put down others in order to lift itself up, for it is aware of its own worth and presupposes that others are aware of it too; because he does not doubt himself at all, a true patriot can appreciate others. Of all the important nations, the English probably have the most resolute patriotic and national feeling. Is it not generally known that a wrong or a favor done to an Englishman even in the remotest corner of the earth causes each of his compatriots who hears of it to sympathize? However, this strong national feeling does not prevent the English from appreciating foreign worth. At least in scientific matters, no nation expresses its recognition as forcefully as the English; in practical matters it probably is no different. Patriotism cannot be enhanced by self-praise or by the degradation of others; on the contrary, this can only enhance vanity. Patriotism is enhanced by exemplary deeds which inspire emulation.366

In other words, national patriotism—rightly felt and practiced (on the English model)—should consolidate a community but at the same time open that community to the world. Charles Darwin’s generous praise of his Baltic German rival, Karl Ernst von Baer, upon the latter’s death seems to be evidence in favor of Baer’s point, especially considering Baer’s generally negative assessment of Darwin’s theory of evolution. For all his criticism of small-minded national patriotism, Baer nonetheless remained an impassioned Dorpat patriot, who believed the greatest achievements of the Russian Empire to be mostly the work of his alma mater and especially its German scholars. In 1852 he returned to Dorpat from the Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences as one of its most illustrious graduates to speak at the University’s 50th anniversary celebration. In his address he noted with pride how his once humble and provincial alma mater had produced so many great scholars for the Russian Empire. The eyes that had first seen and mapped the furthest reaches of the realm, he claimed, from the icy seas of Siberia to the burning steppes of central Asia, from the glacial snows of Kamchatka to the gentle tradewinds that blow beyond the Caucasus—all those eyes had been trained in Dorpat.367 According to Karl Ernst von Baer,

Dorpat University was the Russian Empire’s way of looking at itself. Without Dorpat, Russia was blind. At the same time, in order for Dorpat’s students and teachers to be audible in Russia, Baer recognized the importance of fluency in Russian. Twenty years later in his autobiography Baer wrote that German students of Dorpat should learn Russian in order to be heard and to become socially relevant:

Since Dorpat University has risen to such a level of excellence in recent years that we are proud to see her as the model university, efforts should be made to produce a generation of future professors from among the non-tenured lecturers. The best of these could become eligible for professorships at Dorpat or other universities of the empire...Dorpat would become the nursery of the Russian Empire, and the lecturers out of self-interest would strive for perfection of their knowledge of the Russian language.368

German romanticism became an important social and intellectual inspiration and model for the emergence and expressions of other particular national identities at Dorpat University. Dorpat’s Russian intellectual circles—including some friends of Pushkin—and later national Russian fraternities (“Slavia” and “Ruthenia”) at the turn of the twentieth century were scarcely docile or single-minded agents of the Russian state, despite a common, unifying concern for Russia’s language and literary culture. Dorpat University’s “Learned Estonian Society,” founded in 1838, gave birth to the Estonian national epic, first published in German-Estonian translation in the early 1850s. In 1870 Estonian students founded a national student fraternity (complete with the national colors of the future state flag). Thus, the Estonian nation had a university—complete with an intellectual culture and a student body (albeit no professorships yet)—well before it had a state.

But Estonia and Russia were not the only nations to cultivate their nationality in the encounter with the German-speaking faculty within the walls of the Russian Imperial University of Dorpat. National organizations founded on the integrated model of German romantic academic culture—complete with combined stress on individual- and national- development—also included Latvian, Ukrainian, Polish, Lithuanian, Jewish, Georgian, and Armenian student organizations and scholarly societies. Many of these survived, or were in fact first founded well after the Russification of the 1890s. Estimates suggest that Dorpat University contributed to forty different national intelligentsias, providing a “European” university education even to the great Ossetian poet, Tsomak Gadijev, who studied at Dorpat from 1903-1908 and to the first indigenous Chuvash doctor, Aleksei Efremov.369 Dorpat did as much to fracture the Imperial Russian state, promoting particular loyalties and unofficial nationalities as to consolidate a united vision of Russia under the tripartite Official Nationality of Sergei Uvarov and his three capitals—Kiev for Orthodoxy, Saint Petersburg for Autocracy, and Moscow for Nationality.370

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und wer misst in den sonnenverbrannten Fluren jenseit des Kaukasus die Strömungen des Luftmeeres und den Wechsel der Wärme? Das stumme und doch so beredte Buch, das Sie heute vorbreiten, gibt Antwort auf diese Fragen. Sie alle waren Zöglinge Dorpats.” Speech of Karl Ernst von Baer as qtd. in Roderich von Engelhardt, Die deutsche Universität Dorpat in ihrer geistesgeschichtliche Bedeutung (Reval, 1933), 469.

368 Baer, 99.
369 TÜA II, 375 and 389.
370 “Kiev was enshrinced as the seat of Orthodoxy, as St. Petersburg was that of Autocracy and Moscow of Nationality, thus neatly underlining the essential historical unity and development of the empire.” Whittaker, Russian Education, 193.
In his slogan for the Tartu-based “Young Estonia Movement” (1905-1919), the poet Gustav Suits (1883-1956) reconciled a particularist aspiration to political independence with a universalist aspiration to become part of Europe. Born into a family of teachers in Tartu, Suits acquired international experience at an early age by spending his summers in Finland. After a year at the philology faculty of Iur’ev (Tartu) University he moved to Helsinki to study literature and aesthetics from 1905 to 1910. As one of Estonia’s most important national poets, but also one of its foremost literary scholars and critics, Suits taught at Tartu University all through the interwar period from 1921–1944. He became a professor in 1931 and chaired its Department of Estonian and Comparative Literature. As a testament to his more than merely national reputation, he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Uppsala in Sweden in 1935.

At Iur’ev University the problem of the Estonian nation for Gustav Suits had been its place in Europe. For his students at Tartu University that international problem was quickly translated into national, domestic terms. In a collection of essays published by the Veljesto Student Society in 1923, Thoughts of an Emerging Intelligentsia, one of Suits’s first students of Estonian literature, August Annist, gave expression to a divide he already saw emerging between the Estonian nation and the Estonian state, between the culture of Tartu and the politics of Tallinn. He warned that unless Tartu was vigilant the homogenizing force of the latter would overwhelm the former:

Tallinn as the capital city [päälinn]—like before—is only an international city for speculation, business, and pleasure, bars, and newspapers, for people who have no time to deal with such “unimportant” questions as that of a wider ideology or worldview. These last themes are the province of petit bourgeois Tartu. Tallinn is for doing business and politics, for making money and careers! And ever more the spirit of Tallinn has started to spread to other places. If Tartu falls silent, there will be weary silence over the entire land.372

Even in translation it is easy to hear the youthful self-confidence and enthusiasm of a university student in these words; lost in translation, however, are traces of the uniquely Southern Estonian dialect in which it was written. It emerges already in the second word. Instead of “pealinn” for

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372 “Tallinna, päälinnanagi—see on endiselt ainult rahvusvaheline angeldajate, äri ja lõbu linn, lokaalide ja perekunnalehtede linn, kes ei viitsi tegutseda nii väheluliste asjadega nagu miski laiem ideoloogia või yldse ilmavaade. Viimane on ikka olnud väikekodanliku Tartu asi, Tallinnas tehakse ainult äri ja politikat, raha ja karjeri! Ja ikka enam on see Tallinna vaim hakand levima ka mujale. Kui Tartugi vaikib, siis on väisind vaikus yle terve maan.” August Annist, Mõtteid valmivast intelligentsist [Thoughts of an Emerging Intelligentsia]. (Tartu: Odamees, 1923), 9.
“capital city” as one would write in Tallinn, August Annist wrote “päälinn” as one would write in Tartu and other parts of Southern Estonia.

Annist may have written “päälinn” out of unthinking habit. After all, he was born and grew up on a farm in Southern Estonia, attending various provincial schools before fighting in the War for Estonian Independence (1918-1919). Or he might have written it out of self-conscious regional pride to defamiliarize the official dialect of the national language spoken in the capital. Either way it underscored his main point that Tartu and Tallinn did not see eye to eye upon the identity of the Estonian nation-state. He contrasted the unreflective, cynical, and superficial cosmopolitanism of the capital city with its political elites to the spiritual and moral depths of its intellectual center in Tartu. This was a cultural critique of Western Civilization very much in the spirit of Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West*, a popular work in interwar Europe. But it could be traced much further back. The habit of questioning politics with culture became a European phenomenon already at the fraternities and scholarly societies of small town German Universities in the nineteenth century, beginning with Jena in 1815, the same year that Napoleon’s radical upheaval of the continent came to its abrupt end, and the Congress of Vienna imposed a conservative order back on Europe. But in its broadest outlines it could be sought even further back. What Annist wrote was nearly identical to the critique launched in 1772 by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Considerations on the Government of Poland*. Rousseau lambasted the cynical cosmopolitanism of pan-European elites, trained at broadly European institutions to call their own narrow self-interest the universal interest of humanity, while lacking any moral or patriotic commitments to a particular time, place, or people that a national university might inspire:

There are no more Frenchmen, Germans, Spaniards, or even Englishmen, nowadays, regardless of what people say; there are only Europeans. All have the same tastes, the same passions, and the same morals. All, in the same circumstances, will do the same things; all will call themselves unselfish, and be rascals; all will talk of the public welfare, and think only of themselves; all will praise moderation, and wish to be as rich as Croesus. They have no ambition but for luxury, they have no passion but for gold; sure that money will buy them all their hearts desire, they are ready to sell themselves to the first bidder. What do they care what master they obey, under the laws of what state they live? Provided they can find money to steal and women to corrupt, they feel at home in any country.373

World War One returned Europe to the Babel of nations first given voice by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars as newly nationalized universities all across Eastern Europe struggled to reconcile the nation with the state, balancing the commitments of their emerging intelligentsias with the aims of the states that funded them.

This chapter observes the role of Tartu University as a national institution both in creating the nation-state and also challenging it from within, or at least generating alternative perspectives upon the world. As the harsh criticism to which August Annist subjected Tallinn from his vantage point in Tartu already in 1923 attests, Tartu University stood aloof from the political center of power, questioning the political authority of state, just as Dorpat University

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had stood aloof from Stockholm in seventeenth-century Imperial Sweden or from Saint Petersburg in nineteenth-century Imperial Russia. On the one hand, Tartu became the leading center for the standardization of the Estonian language with the foundation of the Estonian Mother Tongue Society in Tartu in 1920. But at the same time, Tartu had its own dialect of Estonian—more a symbol than anything else—in which Estonian students and scholars like August Annist declared their cultural independence from Tallinn and expressed dissatisfaction with the state. Meanwhile, Estonia’s cultural minorities—especially its Germans, Russians, and Jews—all established their independent enclaves at Tartu University for the pursuit of independent cultural agendas, often along divergent national and ideological lines, and each in the bubble of its own language. In the National Republic of Estonia, Tartu University came to embody an ideal of Europe at once more particular and more universal than that of Tallinn. Holding aloof from the organs and centers of power of the state, Tartu University was both an oasis from and an observatory upon the world for its scholars, its ethnic Estonians and ethnic minorities alike.

5.1 World War One and the Rebirth of Europe

The collapse and fragmentation of four great empires in the First World War—Ottoman, Habsburg, German, and Russian—gave birth to the nation-states of Eastern and Central Europe and the national republics of the Soviet Union. A Total War, a Global War, and an Industrial War: World War One has been called all these things. It mobilized entire populations. Its system of alliances drew in not only the great powers of Europe into the fray but their colonies as well. With the deployment of technologies like poison gas and the machine gun, the casualties of the First World War were unprecedented (sixteen million dead and twenty-million wounded). Just as the Napoleonic Wars spread national consciousness to Europe, the First World War brought national awakenings to the rest of the World. At the same time, World War One turned a Europe of empires into a Europe of nations. In 1795 Immanuel Kant had attempted to imagine a new world order that would provide for perpetual global peace and security: to this end he called for (1) universalizing the republican form of government, (2) forming a global federation of free states, and (3) limiting the “law of world citizenship… to conditions of universal hospitality,” in other words, establishing guidelines to secure the right of “foreigners” to be treated without hostility all around the globe.374 Imagined very much in this spirit, the new overarching world order of interwar Europe was to be the League of Nations, and the new underlying principle of European politics was to be “national self-determination.” National self-determination was propagated across the continent from Woodrow Wilson in Versailles to Lenin in Petrograd. As Terry Martin has observed, “While Lenin and Stalin opposed the creation of a Russian nation-state, they accepted the principle of the nation-state and sought to create the basic essentials of the nation-state—a national territory, elite, language, and culture—for each Soviet ethnic minority.”375 In fascist Italy, a member of the League of Nations from the very beginning, the philosopher Giovanni Gentile called for “a totally politicized society” in which the new state was to provide, “total representation of the nation and total guidance of national goals.”376 Thus,
even totalitarianism could be used as a term of praise in interwar Europe so long as it was envisioned as the ultimate expression of national self-determination, rather than its violation or perversion, as it would come mean in its application by Western scholars and émigrés (e.g. Brezinski and Arendt) to the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

Over the course of the interwar period the League of Nations grew from forty-four to fifty-eight member states. It toyed briefly with the idea of using Esperanto as a more universal and neutral lingua franca, but ultimately made do with the three most imperial national languages of its founding Western European members: French, English, and after some hesitation, Spanish as well. Ultimately, the ideal of national self-determination, which was not yet exclusively associated with the nation-state could be imagined in any number of different political contexts, and proved more resilient and universal than the League of Nations itself. Indeed, the United States never joined the League and the Soviet Union was a reluctant and short-lived latecomer. It never really fit, since it was not itself a nation-state—though it consisted of national republics—and had its own competing vision of the international world order in the form of the Communist International (1919—1943). When asked by foreign journalists in 1927 to explain Soviet abstention, Stalin responded that “the Soviet Union is not prepared to share the responsibility for the imperialist policy of the League of Nations, for the ‘mandates’ which are distributed by the League for the exploitation and oppression of the colonial countries...” But the Soviet Union joined the League all the same in 1934, only to be expelled five years later for its own imperialist invasion of Finland. In the languages of interwar European Capitalism and Socialism “Imperialism” was not an easily translatable concept.

Of the several national republics to emerge briefly and tentatively as sovereign states from the break-up of the Russian Empire, most—Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan—were quickly absorbed back into the Soviet Union in 1922, where they joined the newly formed Soviet Socialist Republics of Central Asia (the Uzbek, Turkmen, Tajik, Kazhak, and Kirgiz SSRs). The Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were the exceptions to the rule. But in the unpredictable power-vacuums the chaos of World War One had produced all across Eastern Europe, nothing was a foregone conclusion. The declaration of Estonian Independence on February 24, 1918 as an “independent and democratic republic” in its “historical and ethnographic borders” was purely symbolic when it was made and carried no practical weight since the German Imperial Army marched into Tallinn the very next day. In the throes of their own war for independence, caught between the armies of Imperial Germany and Bolshevik Russia in 1918, Estonian nationalists proposed several different political solutions to the problem of Estonian national self-determination. Sovereign statehood was only the most utopian. Other solutions, which seemed more feasible at the time, included “a non-Bolshevik Russian federation, a Scandinavia alliance, [and] a Finnish-Estonian union.”

Various schemes to imagine a viable political community for Estonian nationhood were also imagined by Estonian nationalists abroad from Stockholm to Petrograd. One of the most interesting came from Alexander Kesküla, a Tartu-born, Tartu University-educated Estonian Bolshevik, whose time abroad at the Universities of Berne, Zürich, and Berlin had turned him

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377 See Kontra, Miklós; Phillipson, Robert; Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove; Varady, Tibor. Language, a Right and a Resource: Approaching Linguistic Human Rights (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999).
379 Raun, Estonia, 105
380 Raun, Estonia, 104.
into an ardent Estonian nationalist. Still he continued to cultivate his Bolshevik connections for instrumental purposes, seeing to the publication of the works of Lenin and Bukharin in Sweden, and playing an important role in negotiations between the Russian Bolsheviks and the Imperial German high command that led to Lenin’s return to Petrograd in 1917 on a sealed train. The historian Michael Futrell has written that “Kesküla’s chief aim, its seems, was an independent Estonia, and promoting a Russian revolution was probably just one card in his hand.”

In fact, Kesküla dreamed of Estonian national self-determination in the context of a new multinational state, vaguely modeled upon the Austro-Hungarian Empire that would encompass the entire “Baltic Sea Region”—including the cities of Tartu, Tallinn, Helsinki, and Petrograd—and eventually Norway, Denmark, and Iceland as well. He hoped that Lenin would foment just enough disorder and chaos in Russia to bring his own schemes for Estonian national self-determination to fruition. Known in Sweden for his “affluent life and the lavish parties he and his pretty Swiss wife gave in their elegant villa at Stocksund, on the northern side of Stockholm,” he was asked at one point there by a Finn about his plans for Petrograd. He noted that “it would make an excellent stone quarry for Estonia, which was poor in stone.”

But things did not go as he hoped and he lived out his retirement in Madrid, where he nursed a grudge at history for having forgotten him, serving as a kind of personal mentor to Yale University’s future Sterling Professor of Political Science, Juan Linz (1926-2013). In 1961 he wrote in German that it was he, Kesküla, who had “made ‘a man’ out of Lenin.”

Another possible path for Estonian national self-determination was sketched out in Revolutionary Petrograd. Like Kesküla, Hans Kruus had studied history at Tartu University in its Russian-speaking Tsarist incarnation as Iur’ev. But his studies were cut short when he was mobilized into the Tsarist army along with 100,000 of his countrymen. Kruus found himself in Petrograd at the time of the outbreak of the February Revolution and with the support of compatriots Gustav Suits and Villem Ernits assumed leadership of the Estonian branch of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, which they founded together. In January 1918 he met with the Bolshevik Commissar of Nationalities, Joseph Stalin, to negotiate a place for Estonia as an independent “Worker’s Republic” within the Communist International in the manner of Mongolia. Stalin was not impressed. In 1940 Hans Kruus would take his orders directly from Joseph Stalin as the acting Prime Minister of Estonia in the Bolshevik puppet government of Johannes Vares, underwriting the Soviet Occupation that was the outcome of the Hitler-Stalin pact as an expression of Estonian national will. But in 1918 the political form or direction of Estonian national self-determination was neither for Kruus nor Stalin to decide.

As late as December 1918, the Red Army still controlled about half of the territory that would become the interwar republic of Estonia. An Estonian Bolshevik government took form in Tallinn under the leadership of Jaan Anvelt, an Estonian peasant from Viljandi province,
who had studied at Tartu’s Teacher’s Seminary (together with Hans Kruus), and then gone on to pursue a degree in Law at Petrograd University where he joined the Communist Party just before the revolution. In the German-language newspaper *Dorpater Zeitung* on July 21, 1918, the Baltic German director of the University Art Museum, F. v Stryck, had proposed an international university in which Germans, Estonians, Latvians, and Russians would all have an equal place. However, such rootless cosmopolitanism made the Bolsheviks uncomfortable and on December 31, 1918, the head of Estonia’s short-lived Red Ministry of Education and Culture, Artur Vallner, arrived in Tartu by train to see if the Estonian mathematician Jaan Sarv would agree to become the rector of the new Bolshevik University of Tartu. There was nothing particularly Bolshevik about this choice. In fact, Peeter Põld, an Estonian Lutheran theologian and the interim curator of Tartu University for the provisional Estonian national government, had broached his old friend Jaan Sarv with the exact same request a few weeks before.

But when Tartu definitively (albeit very briefly) fell into the hands of the Bolsheviks on December 21, 1918 Põld fled to Tallinn, and it was Vallner rather than Põld who came knocking at Sarv’s door with a proposal for Tartu University. In his journal entry from the next day Sarv remembers:

Yesterday A. Vallner arrived [in Tartu] by way of Tapa. He proposed that I take the leadership of the university upon myself…. About the future of the University, he said that the threat of Russification was past, and that Estonia has been recognized as an Independent State, and that Russian forces reside here merely as members of the alliance. I requested a day to consider his proposition, and at his suggestion consulted with J.V. Veski, V. Ernits, and J. Aavik, to see if they would be willing to work at the university as lectors. Since our goals for the university were very similar, I agreed to accept his offer.\(^\text{388}\)

A humble peasant by birth, Jaan Sarv (1877—1954) had one important Bolshevik credential as a devout atheist. As the newly appointed Bolshevik Rector of Tartu University for about three weeks from December 1918 to January 1919, Jaan Sarv granted that all three local languages (Estonian, Russian, and German) should have some kind of place in the instruction at Tartu University, which would make it possible to recruit professors from both Russia and Germany.\(^\text{389}\)

But he believed the Latvians should found their own university in Riga, and was ultimately consistent on the national identity of the institution as an Estonian University. In early January of 1919, Sarv got as far as drafting an Estonian constitution for the new Bolshevik University. The first paragraph read: “Tartu University of the Estonian Workers’ Commune has as its task 1) to make scholarship possible in Estonia, 2) to train the necessary specialists for the workers and 3)…”


to give the workers a higher education.”^390 There would be five faculties—mathematics, physics, astronomy-geology, biology, sociology, and philology—and a plethora of institutes in agriculture, medicine, and pedagogy among others. Russian, German, and Estonian would all be used, but Estonian would have a special status: native Estonian speakers would be exempt from the stringent degree qualifications demanded of the speakers of other languages when seeking employment as university instructors; the university would reach out to the general population by offering lectures on popular science in Estonian; and every department should have “at least one instructor who could offer lectures in satisfactory Estonian.” Sarv even fantasized about academic autonomy, something that would most certainly have been called into question if his scheme had ever made it off the drawing board.^391

What the cases of Sarv, like the cases of Kesküla and Kruus, reveal is the extent to which the ideal of national self-determination of the Estonian nation and its university was taken for granted in the most diverse attempts to imagine a viable political order and state for the Estonian nation. But two weeks later on January 14, 1919, the Bolsheviks were driven out of Tartu. They left with a bang, executing some nineteen Tartu citizens—especially important religious leaders—in the basement of Kompani Street #5 on the eve of their departure. The newly made religious martyrs to Estonian independence were not even, for the most part, Estonians. Apart from Paul Kulbusch—who became the first ethnically Estonian Orthodox Saint in the process—they included two ethnically Russian Orthodox priests Mikhail Bleive and Nikolai Bezhanski, and a few leading Baltic German Lutherans like Tartu University’s professor of Theology, Gotthilf Traugot Hahn, and the pastor of Tartu’s St. John’s Church, Moritz Wilhelm Paul Schwartz.^392

The fighting continued for many months. The provisional government dispatched emissaries to various foreign governments in a desperate attempt to promote the cause of Estonian independence abroad and seek foreign allies—Jaan Tõnisson to Scandinavia, Ants Piip to Great Britain, and Kaarel Pusta to France.^393 French and British offered formal declarations of sympathy and some military supplies, but ultimately “both powers refused to commit themselves to what they viewed as a hasty division of the former Russian empire.”^394 In May 1919 an entire Estonian Communist regiment of some 1000 men under the command of Leonard Ritt deserted the Red Army and went over to the Estonian national side together with their commander. Still, there was an important international dimension to Estonian independence, and the story of the Estonian national victory had as much to do with international volunteers as the power of nationality over ideology. The army that finally won Estonian independence grew to 74,500 men by the Spring of 1919 and included 3,700 Finns, 2,750 Russians (mostly “Whites” who had fled the “Reds”), 1,500 Latvians, 700 Baltic Germans, 300 Ingrians, 200 Danes, 180 Jews, and 178

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^390 “Eesti Töörahva Kommuuna tartu ülikoolil on ülesandeks 1) Eestis teaduslikku tööd võimaldada, 2) töörahvale tarvilikke eriasjatundjaid ette valmistada ja 3) töörahvale kõrgemat haridust anda.” TÜA III, 28.

^391 “...igas kateedris pidi vähemalt üks õppejõud suutma eriainete loenguid pidada rahuldavas eesti keeles.” TÜA III, 29.


^393 Raun, Estonia, 105.

^394 Raun, Estonia, 106.

Swedes.  

Lenin finally sent ambassadors to negotiate the “Peace of Tartu,” formally recognizing Estonian independence on February 2, 1920. Like the “Weimar Republic,” the interwar Republic of Estonia began not in its political capital but in its leading town of national culture. Having emerged as a sovereign nation-state in 1920 Estonia was accepted into the League of Nations one year later along with Latvia and Lithuania. Thus, Tartu University’s international, universalist orientation came from the West rather than the East as Estonia began taking its cues (and sometimes orders) in French and English from the League of Nations, rather than in Russian from Anatolii Lunacharskii, Nadezhda Krupskaia, and the leading figures in the Soviet Ministry of Education (Narkompros).

5.2 The Estonian National Republic and Its University

World War One made “national self-determination” the universal principle of political legitimacy in Europe and turned Tartu into a national Estonian university in 1919. It was supposed to help consolidate the newly independent nation-state, producing elites and scholarship for the capital city of Tallinn. As Estonia’s only traditional European University, Tartu did, in fact, create a national intelligentsia, training most Estonian lawyers, doctors, politicians, professors, diplomats, and journalists. Meanwhile, most of the technical elite received its education at the newly established Polytechnic Institute in Tallinn. One of the greatest services of Tartu University to the newly founded Estonian National Republic was to help standardize the Estonian language and give expression to some of the first independent Estonian efforts in various fields of scholarship. To some extent the story of the emergence of Estonian literary language can be traced all the way back to the two Biblical translations of the Swedish period. But much of the work of integrating Tartu into Europe, with a national

397 Raun, Estonia, 110.
398 The formalization of two different written versions of Estonian dates back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Baltic German and Swedish missionaries, working independently out of Dorpat (Tartu) and Reval (Tallinn) produced two different translations of the Bible on the basis of the Northern and Southern dialects of Estonian respectively, Heinrich von Stahl in Reval (Tallinn) in 1715, and the father and son Andreas and Adrian Viriginus, both pastors in Viljandi with ties to Dorpat (Tartu) University, in 1686. The Northern dialect took the lead in the 18th century, and at the time of the Estonian Declaration of Independence in 1919 there was no question which dialect would form the basis for the newly established national language. However, there was still a lot of work to be done to standardize Estonian, and a growing ethnographic fascination with the multiplicity of dialects in interwar Estonia. The Mother Tongue Society dealt with both. The Southern—“Tartu”—dialect has remained a source of pride and difference within the Estonian nation. Newspapers in one version of the Southern dialect (Võru keel) continue to appear in Southern Estonia to this day. The Setu or Seto dialect of Estonian a bit further South is totally incomprehensible to Northern Estonians. On the basis of the tireless efforts of the Estonian Mother Tongue Society over the course of the century, the Estonian Language Institute, currently based in Tallinn, recognizes sixteen different regional Estonian variants for the following sentence in standard Estonian “Meie ööbik on tänavu mujale läinud” (“Our nightingale has gone elsewhere this year”). These regional dialects are as follows:

Hiiumaa: “Meide ööbik aa seesta maeale lain.”
Saaremaa: “Meite ööbik oo siasta mäale läind.”
Muhumaa: “Meite üübik oo siosta mõjale lain.”
Lääneemaa: “Meite ärjälend oo tänänkond maale läin”
Vigala: “Mede künnilind uu tänabu maeale läind”
Kihnu: “Mede künniljõnd ond tänävasta maalõ läin”
Harju-Risti: “Mete üöbik oo tänavu maeal lain”
language adequate to take on the world happened in the interwar period. Tartu’s first professor of Finnic languages, Lauri Kettunen (1885–1963)—a Finn—founded the Estonian “Mother Tongue Society” (Emakeele selts) at Tatu University on March 23, 1920 to help study and standardize the Estonian language. From 1920–1940 it published the academic journal Eesti Keel (Estonian Language). Kettunen directed the Society until he left Estonia in 1925, whereupon leadership was taken over by his young Estonian successor, Albert Helmut Gustav (1892–1964). He changed his name to Andrus Saareste in 1935 in the context of a campaign initiated by the Mother Tongue Society to Estonianize people’s names. By 1940 the Estonian Mother Tongue Society had forty-four members. In addition to the standardization of the language, they also organized the systematic collection of Estonian dialects; by the 1940s they had an archive with more than 6500 pages of dialect text and 720,000 slips of paper with individual dialect words.399

Another vital way in which Tartu University and its scholars served the Estonian language and the making of the Estonian National Republic was by the translation of international works into Estonian, and thereby the cultivation of an Estonian vocabulary for fields ranging from medicine to British and continental philosophy. Jaan Sarv (1877–1954) graduated from Iur’ev (Tartu) University in 1907, and later became Tartu’s first Estonian professor of mathematics. But perhaps his most important contribution to Estonian science was as a translator of mathematical terminology that had hitherto been studied in Latin or German. Many of these Estonian translators of human and natural sciences hailed from the Estonian student society, Veljesto. They included Estonia’s foremost interwar philosopher, Alfred Koort, who translated much recent—English, French, and German—philosophy into Estonian—from Dewey to Dilthey. There was also the promising young historian of the French Revolution, Peeter Tarvel, who introduced Estonia to the historiography of the French Revolution.

Like many other newly independent nation-states in Eastern Europe, the Estonian national republic was a democratic republic that underwent an authoritarian turn in the 1930s. The irony of this turn, like that of many other newly independent national republics of interwar Eastern Europe, is that it was intended to prevent a Fascist takeover. At the same time, the national republic remained supportive of its internal ethnic minorities. Estonia’s 1925 law (unique in interwar Europe) for the cultural protection of ethnic minorities—Germans, Jews, Swedes, and Russians—remained in effect until it was abolished by the Soviet Union in 1940. It enabled these groups to form internally bonded communities and live lives apart from the Estonian nation-state, each in the bubble of its own language(s). There was little in the way of mutual antagonism, but little in the way of mutual solidarity either. The Tartu Estonian polyglot and literary scholar, Ain Kaalep, remembered the institutional segregation of Estonia’s national minorities from own childhood in the late 1920s: “we had a an especially cool attitude toward

Kuusalu: “Meie üöbik on tänävu muvale mend”
Järveama: “Me õiselind on tänavu maale läind”
Põhja-Virumaa: “Meie kirikuid on tänävu mojale lähind”
Väinama: “Me isiseiske on olo tänävu mojale mënd”
Kodavere: “Meisissaks on tänävude mõjale lähud”
Karksi: “Mee kiriküüd’ on tao muial lännü”
Southern-Tartumaa: “Meisissaks om tainavu muiale lännu.”
Võrumaa: “Mii sisaseom timahavva muialo lännü. ”
Setomaa: “Mii sisasek’ om timahavva muialo länüq”

This internal diversity is all the more remarkable considering that the Estonian language barely has a million speakers. See http://www.estinst.ee/publications/language/dialects.html

the German schools, since the Germans kept themselves apart from the other national ethnic groups. With Russian and Jewish schools we had almost no contact at all.”

A report printed in the *Jewish Chronicles* of London in 1936 described Estonia as an “oasis of toleration,” but principally because it afforded Estonian Jews the opportunity to live apart from everyone else in the manner of Estonia’s Germans, Russians, and Swedes:

> The collective spirit predominating among the Estonian Jews is best evidenced by the ‘Bialik Club’ in Tallinn, one of the finest cultural institutions in Eastern Europe, containing a well-equipped library, a spacious reading room and a theatre. The 300,000 Jews of Warsaw have nothing to equal it. Its moving spirit, chief and organiser and protector is Mr. N. Golstein, a wealthy business man. Estonia’s correct attitude towards its minorities has also given local Jewry another opportunity which is unique in Europe to-day. As a logical conclusion of their cultural autonomy, the Jews have been given the right to establish a separate Chair of Judaica at Estonia’s only University at Tartu, after a petition by the Jewish Cultural Board to the Government in 1929. The Government promptly announced that such a Chair would be opened as part of the Faculty of Philosophy, with the right of students to graduate in that department, the funds to be provided by the Jewish Cultural Board, but the accommodation to be granted by the University.

Even after the authoritarian turn of 1934, the progressive Minorities Law of 1925 was not repealed, nor were the special corporate privileges given to Estonia’s minorities rendered somehow more vulnerable. If anything, these protections were more strictly enforced. The scholar of Estonia’s Jewish population, Anton Weiss-Wendt, has noted that there was little antagonism between Estonia’s Jewish population and ethnic Estonians in interwar Estonia. Like everywhere else in Europe there were a few Estonian Anti-Semitic periodicals; but most (e.g. *Juudid*, *Kes on juudid?*, or *Kas meie või juudid?*) died out for lack of interest and a readership already in the 1920s; the only successful one, *Valvur*, actually fell victim to the new authoritarian censorship law of 1934. Ultimately, Weiss-Wendt concludes that when the Holocaust came to Estonia it was essentially “Murder Without Hatred” (the title of his book).

A larger lesson might be learned from the case of Estonia: attempts to explain the political dynamics of interwar Europe by focusing primarily on national antagonisms or the conflict among ethnic minorities, are inadequate. What emerges from the example of Estonia, is the extent to which national struggles and antagonisms were all but absent from the dynamics of Tartu University and its relations with state power when compared to its earlier Russian imperial and later Soviet incarnations of the University. To be sure, Estonia and its University remained a Babel of nations—each living in the separate sphere of its language—but it was a Babel of indifference more than antagonism. And in the larger European context, Tartu remained in many ways a haven for various national groups. It even gave its Jewish minority something that no

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other state had provided: an independent Chair of Jewish Studies at Tartu University. Thus, the conflict between Tallinn and Tartu that emerges already in the writings of August Annist in 1923 and intensified after 1934 in the so-called “era of silence,” was almost entirely a conflict that occurred within the bounds of the Estonian national community. Only within the Estonian language was there a true clash between the culture of Tartu and the Politics of Tallinn.

5.3 The Politics of Tallinn and the Culture of Tartu

The university proved unruly and expressed alternative visions of the nation, which did not conform to the desires of the state. Tensions between the political capital of Tallinn and cultural center of Tartu led to the idea of an independent “Tartu vaim” (“Tartu Spirit”), sometimes expressed in the Tartu dialect of Estonian against the standardized Estonian of the North. President, Konstantin Päts, and his rival, the statesman Jaan Tõnisson, had both studied law at Tartu University when it was Russian-speaking Iur’ev, belonged to rival Estonian fraternities, and founded rival Estonian-language newspapers in Tallinn and Tartu respectively. In 1935, Päts fired Tõnisson from his post as editor of the Tartu newspaper (Postimees), effectively ending any kind of public criticism of the government. Thus the state inaugurated a dictatorial “Era of Silence” in the mid-1930s.

But for all his nationalism, Gustav Suits also had significant leftist sympathies and credentials. Together with the historian Hans Kruus, Gustav Suits had founded the Estonian branch of the leftist, agrarian Socialist Revolutionary Party. Thus, it is worth pointing out that with Gustav Suits and Hans Kruus at the top of the literary and historical establishment of Tartu respectively—Estonian national consciousness and historical memory—were both former Socialist Revolutionaries, who had imagined a place for Estonia as an independent national republic in the Communist International, and that Hans Kruus had even consulted in 1918 with Stalin, the Bolshevik Commissar of Nationalities, about this possibility.

Still, just as in the previous Swedish and Russian Imperial periods, Tartu University remained a haven and refuge for other languages and ways of thought, which retained their cultural autonomy until the Soviet Occupation. All told, 20,094 students, mostly ethnic Estonians (80%) but also 3852 others, led by the Baltic German minority (1602), attended the University between the World Wars. In 1929 Albert Einstein wrote Tartu University a letter of thanks (in German) for founding one of the first (and only) university chairs for Jewish Studies in Europe. The only occupant of the chair, Lazar Gulkowitsch, was a refugee from Hitler’s Germany, a professor of Semitic languages at the University of Leipzig. Gulkowitsch spent his days at the national Estonian University of Tartu together with his predominantly Jewish students in something of a linguistic bubble of German, Hebrew, and Yiddish, which they experienced as a haven of independent life and thought until the Soviet Union abolished Gulkowitsch’s Chair in 1940. Despite the linguistic isolation of its various intellectual communities during the “Era of Silence,” Tartu University did provide an institutional basis for

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403 The complete list of students by nationality matriculated at Tartu University during the interwar period also includes 835 Jews, 821 Russians, and 254 Latvians, 103 Finns, 75 Swedes, 55 Poles, 27 Lithuanians, 11 Danes, 7 French, 6 Ukrainians, 6 Swiss, 5 Czechs, 5 Hungarians, 5 Brits, 4 Dutch, 4 Norwegians, 4 Tatars, 3 Livonians, 2 Crimean Karaites, 2 Georgians, 2 Armenians, 1 Belorussian, 1 Ossetian, 1 Italian, and 1 American. Villu Tamul, 12 and 95-99.

404 EAA,f.2100,n.19,s.158
their integration into wider pan-European networks of scholarship. Students and professors published their works under the auspices of the University, studied abroad, and attended international conferences in London, Paris, Prague, and Berlin (something unthinkable for Soviet scholars at the same time). Lazar Gulkowitsch published a few studies of Hasidism and reflections on rational and mystical elements in Jewish thought under the auspices of Tartu University, traveling to present his work at the Universities of Cambridge and Uppsala. Indeed, Tartu may well have been the only place in interwar Europe where Jewish studies survived until 1940 in the German language. Ironically, Tartu University proved more openly supportive of Jewish national culture as a monoethnic Estonian institution than it ever was as a multiethnic imperial Russian or Soviet one.

Several nationalities had fraternities and scholarly societies in Tartu, including multiple Jewish student organizations, formed (like most others) on the German model, with their very own colors, sashes, caps, swords and dueling traditions. A juxtaposition of two black and white interwar photographs—one of three members of the Estonian Ugala Fraternity (1932) the other of three members of the Zionist Hasmonea Fraternity (1938)—reveals the transformation of the particular into the universal. In these nearly identical photographs, Jewish students and Estonian students turn the particular style of the 19th-century German Burschenschaften into a universal style for the expression of their own particular national identity. The proud poses, smart suits, white gloves, fine rapiers, tricolored sashes and caps are all the same. The only difference (though this cannot be seen in the black and white photographs) are their respective tricolors: Azure, Gold, and White for Hasmonea and Black, Blue and White for Ugala.405

Not all national societies were equally bellicose in their self-presentation. Tartu’s Academic Society for Yiddish History and Literature (1884-1940) had been one of the two first Jewish corporate university organizations formed in the Russian Empire (the other was in the Livonian capital of Riga), and it survived under the Estonian National Republic until it was abolished by the Soviet Union in 1940. Veljesto (1922-1940) was a national Estonian student group that broke away from the original Estonian Student Society in 1922. Both Veljesto and its Jewish counterpart were more reserved organizations, open both to men and women and without any of the flamboyant German corporate paraphernalia that marked Ugala and Hasmonea. In fact, many of Estonia’s most prominent linguists, literary scholars, and writers were either Veljesto members or fellow travelers: Paul Ariste, Valmar Adams, August Annist, Julius Mägiste and the avant-garde poets known as the “Soothsayers”—Heiti Talvik, Bernard Kangro, Betti Alver, and Uku Masing. Uku Masing though never technically a member Veljesto, moved in the same circles.

August Annist (1899–1972) was born and grew up on a farm in Southern Estonia near Viljandi, attending various provincial schools and fighting in Estonia’s War for Independence in 1918-19. Thereafter, he attended Tartu University on scholarship, where he studied Estonian philology and comparative literature with Estonia’s leading national literary scholar and poet, Gustav Suits, a leader of the Young Estonia movement who had coined its slogan (used as an epigraph for this chapter). After obtaining masters degrees in these subjects studied abroad on a Tartu University scholarship at the Universities of Helsinki, Paris (the Sorbonne), and Bonn from 1924-27.406 He would become known as an Estonian poet and literary scholar, who wrote extensively on Estonian mythology, taught at Tartu University, and translated into Estonian the

405 From an internet archive of Jewish student life in interwar Tartu and the website of the Ugala fraternity respectively.
406 See “August Annist” in Eesti Kirjanike leksikon (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 2000), 35.
Finnish national epic, *Kalevala*, (1939). Later, under Soviet rule he would translate, Homer’s *Iliad* (1960) and *Odyssey* (1963). But when he wrote the words above, he was still a young Tartu University student and a member of the vaguely left-leaning co-ed Veljesto student society, a source for several important cultural figures, scholars, and Estonian translators of the Western canon in the humanities and social sciences. Other Veljesto notables included the archeologist Harri Moora, the historian Peeter Tarvel, the philosopher Alfred Koort, and many of Estonia’s most prominent literary and linguistic scholars, including Johann Aavik, Paul Ariste, Valmar Adams, Julius Mägiste, Ants Oras, Oskar Loorits, and the couple Rudolf and Aino Põldmäe, as well as most of the writers associated with the modernist-mystical poetic circle *Arbujad* ("Soothsayers"), Betti Alver, Heiti Talvik, Bernard Kangro, and Paul Viiding. Even the poet and Lutheran theologian with a penchant for Eastern thought, Uku Masing (see chapter 6), often celebrated as Estonia’s greatest scholar and deepest thinker, was a fellow traveler. In interwar Estonia he completed the first translation of the Bible into Estonia directly from Hebrew.

Veljesto even provided a home to moderate Marxist sympathizers like Ott Kangilaski and Leida Loone. But it opened its doors to others as well. The biologist Harald Haberman belonged to the Raimla Fraternity, and joined the Communist Party in 1938 when it was still an illegal underground organization in Tartu. Shortly before his death in 1987, he remembered a Veljesto seminar he had attended in the late 1930s on the subject of “Dictatorship and Democracy”:

The speaker, [Rudolf] Laanes, compared the Nazi and Soviet dictatorships, while praising democracy from Athens to Sweden. A. Valsiner and I used the examples of class conflict and historical development to show the social divide between them, the very absurdity of the comparison. A lively discussion ensued, from which the director of the meeting, H. Moora, was supposed to draw some conclusions. ‘The meeting has fulfilled its function as a serious discussion. I thank the participants. Don’t expect “a judgment” from me. History will decide.’ And that it did.

History apparently changed its mind again with the collapse of the Soviet Union barely four years after Haberman wrote these words.

The Idyllic representation of Estonian national life before the Second World War is a matter of Estonian national pride, marked by the stark contrast to everything that followed. An Estonian film about a beloved Estonian singer and song-writer, Raimond Valgre, from 1991 (*Those Old Love Letters*) even reversed the typical cinematic device of representing the past in...
black in white and the present in color: in this film the more recent Soviet period was represented in stark black and white, while the more distant interwar Estonian past was in vibrant color. If an appreciation of the limitations of this point of view was possible anywhere in Estonian society in the 1930s it was from the vantage point of Tartu University, from student societies like Veljesto. If Estonia’s ethnic minorities lived lives apart from the national discourse, owing largely to Estonia’s cultural autonomy law of 1925, ethnic Estonians squabbled amongst themselves. By the end of the decade, the Estonian intelligentsia was Babel. The Amnesty Law of 1938, signaling a partial return to parliamentary democracy, after the years of dictatorship, only added more divisive voices to the mix. Eight Estonian Communists, released from prison, promptly arrived in Tartu and established their own secret Party Organization led by Paul Keerdo, which began proselytizing for new members. This is how the biologist Harld Haberman got recruited into the Communist Party in Tartu in the first place.410

But with societies like Veljesto, Tartu University also remained one of the best observatories upon the state, offering a perspective—which has since disappeared from most nationalist Estonian accounts of history—with their insistence upon remembering the unity of the interwar intelligentsia. In Power and Culture [Võim ja vaim] (1940), a sequel in some sense to Thoughts of an Emerging Intelligentsia (1923), many of the same Veljesto members, now twenty years older and wiser, provided some of the most widely read internal critique of interwar Estonian society and politics and its dynamics of dictatorship and democracy, challenging the false universalism of Tallinn with the particularism of the “Tartu Spirit.” On the eve of Second World War in the Tartu-based journal Akadeemia, August Annist summed up the fissures that had reached from the halls of Tartu University to the halls of Parliament in Tallinn and threatened the National Republic with Babel long before the arrival of Nazi or Soviet troops:

The Estonian intelligentsia is more divided now than ever before. There is bad blood between the students of the university societies and fraternities; “directed” and “undirected” professors glower at each other; ‘Tallinn’ and ‘Tartu’ writers are at each other’s throats; and in Parliament the two tiny factions representing the “working people” are like two growling dogs tugging at a rope.411

410 The Tartu University biologist Harald Haberman “converted” to Communism in 1938 already. He was recruited directly by Paul Keerdo and proceeded to convert others. Haberman, Tagasivaatamisi, 64.
Interlude. World War Two and Europe at “Zero Hour”

No, I don't remember anything. My memory is giving up the ghost. Partly it is age, but partly it is also all the idiotic struggling of these past few years. Almost everybody complains of a loss of memory these days.

- Juhan Aul, 1950.412

In an interwar American classic F. Scott Fitzgerald evoked the defamiliarized world seen by someone who had lost everything that gave meaning to his life:

…he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about.413

This spirit of estrangement and defamiliarization became a defining feature of European intellectual and artistic life around the time of the First World War, with the emergence of the modernist avant-garde. The Russian Formalist, Viktor Shklovsky, brought the idea of “defamiliarization” into currency—as a theoretical definition of the function of art—with his term “priem ostranenia” (technique of estrangement) in 1917.414 It was practiced in the stream-

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412 “Ei, midagi ei mületa. Mälu hakkab üles ütlema. Osalt vanadus, osalt aga ka too idootlik rabelemine viimastel aastatel. Mälu kaotuse üle kurdavad nüüd ju pea[gu] kõik.” Juhan Aul, Tartu University Library Manuscripts Section (Tartu Ülikooli Raamatumu Käsikirjadeosakond). TÜRK f. 147, s. 14. Aul was born in 1897 and died in 1994. His life and career in Tartu spanned all the changes of the 20th century. Born into twilight of the Russian Empire, he studied biology at Tartu University in the early years of Estonian independence after 1919. His mentor at Tartu was Alexander Lipschutz, a Jewish professor with whom he exchanged letters in German and Russian, and who emigrated to Chile in the late 1920s. Aul headed the University's department of «Race Studies» during the Nazi Occupation, and following the Soviet occupation published a monograph in Russian on the particularities of the Estonian Race based on data collected during the 1930s. He congratulated Lipschutz on the occasion of his retirement from the University of Chile in the 1960s, and a warm exchange of letters, photographs, and memories followed. Evidently, despite what he wrote in his diary in 1950, Aul had not forgotten everything. Aul died shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union at the age of 97.


414 In “Art as Device” (1917), Victor Shklovsky defined defamiliarization (sometimes translated as estrangement) in opposition to the claims of one of the leading Russian literary scholars of the second half of the 19th century, Alexander Potebnya (1835—1891). Shklovsky wrote that “[the purpose of an image] is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object—it creates a ‘vision’ of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it.” Defamiliarization, thus, is a way a work of art forces the reader to stop “recognizing” something and start “seeing” it, as if for the first time. On some level there is no contradiction here between modernist and romantic aesthetics. Douglas Robinson argues that defamiliarization was a common trope of German and English Romantic poetry and theory. He cites several uses of the idea, including one from Shelley's famous “Defence of Poetry” (1821): “Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar” (81). Robinson even notes that Shklovsky returned to the concept of “ostranenie” himself at the age of 73 in a late essay, “Osnovenie pomyatiya” (1966), observing that since he had learned German, he discovered that his idea was not as original as he thought, that Novalis had superceded him in his Fragments. Douglas Robinson, Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature: Tolstoy, Shklovsky, Brecht (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008). Still, Shklovsky’s definition of art—even if intended as a way of overcoming habitual and automatic perception, can as easily (as the passage from the Great Gatsby attests)—slide into a way of
of-consciousness narratives of James Joyce, William Faulkner, and Marcel Proust. Berthold Brecht translated the term into German and adapted it for theatre as “Verfremdungseffekt.” The work of the futurists, surrealists, Dadaists, and primitivists—even Camus’s and Ionesco’s preoccupation with the “absurd” or Jean Paul Sartre’s encounter with the meaningless materiality of a tree-root (a thing-in-itself) in Nausea, or the cacophonic sounds and strident rhythms of Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring—all attest to a fascination with making the old, familiar world strange, different, and new.

This fascination was both celebrated as a source of reinvigorated and rejuvenated meanings and lamented as the very source of alienation itself. After all of Jay Gatsby’s failed attempts at self-reinvention in Fitzgerald’s novel—a new name, a new home, a new past—we find the narrator imaginatively returning to roots in search of what went wrong, to the original, defamiliarizing displacement of European colonists, and “the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors’ eyes” several hundred years ago, before the “fresh, green breast of the new world” became New York City: “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”316 The American Self-Made Man and the New Soviet Man are brothers in the Zeitgeist of early 20th-century Europe. Never has defamiliarizing self-transformation—the promise that one might find fulfilment and happiness and social worth by forgetting one’s past and becoming someone who one is not—seemed so tantalizing, or been so vigorously celebrated as in the years before the outbreak of the Second World War.

While many popular and academic studies have sought the birth of modern language and consciousness in the distorting and defamiliarizing effects of the First World War, no comparable literature or interpretive language exists for the Second World War.318 Instead, World War Two is left to a Babel of area-studies specialists, each speaking his own language and more narrowly focused on the fate of his particular chosen people, than on its pan-European implications for modern consciousness.319 Where cultural studies of World War One seem to

producing alienation itself, losing all sense of the meaning of something. Indeed, it is in this latter, unintended—defamiliarized—sense that Shklovsky’s idea of defamiliarization seems to stand at the root of the new way of knowing so basic to late-20th century thought and experience: the idea that “intuition” is less the first step toward scientific or scholarly “knowledge,” than a concealment or falsification thereof, that we can only know something by severing our connection to it, achieving “distance.” There is something self-defeating in this peculiar vision of objectivity; knowledge is born of indifference—i.e. we know when we no longer care.

315 For a wonderful description of the befuddled commotion caused by the debut performance of Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring at the theater of the Champs-Élysées in Paris on May 29, 1913 see the first chapter of Modris Eksteins’, Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1989), 10.
316 Fitzgerald, Gatsby, 189.
317 In December 1999, during America’s longest presidential election in history on the eve of the new millennium, Frank Rich wrote of the impulse to “become someone else” as the deepest and most disturbing feature of the American national character, reminding his readers of the extent to which Jay Gatsby embodied it: “In the library rotunda of the $100 million mansion he built near Seattle, Bill Gates has inscribed not a triumphal captain-of-industry epigram but a yearning quotation from, of all books, ‘The Great Gatsby.’ At the turn of our century, even the man by whom most Americans measure success finds romance in a mythic charlatan who rubbed out his past, then built a fortune and a mansion, all in the mistaken faith that he could find happiness by being someone else.” (“American Pseudo” New York Times Magazine. December 12, 1999).
318 See for example Paul Fussell’s The Great War in Modern Memory (1975), Peter Sloterdik’s Critique of Cynical Reason (1983), and Modris Eksteins’s The Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age (1989).
319 Some of the boldest claims about the cultural impact of the Second World War are made in the context of a study of World War I. Jay Winter writes that “1945 [was] the real caesura in European cultural life,” for it was only after 1945, that older forms of mourning, revived after the First World War, disappeared and that “the language of the
look forward from 1914, studies of World War Two seem to look backward from 1945. Thus, while joining Primo Levi and Theodor Adorno in placing the horrors of the Holocaust “beyond representation,” World War Two historians have contributed to the prevailing view that the Second World War was indeed a “Great Patriotic War” (as it was explicitly called in the Soviet Union)—a battle between good and evil—that served in the long term to confirm and deepen, rather than question and defamiliarize commitments to traditional categories of social and political meaning—like nation, state, church, ideology, and family.

One reason for the discrepancy in treatments of the First and Second World Wars of course is that nearly opposite moral lessons are sought in them: where the lesson of World War One lies in the futility of all war, the lesson of World War Two lies in the necessity of fighting the good fight. Thus, historiographically World War One is explained by stepping back from the fray to read the conflict against the grain, to show how little human intentions mattered in the final outcome when faced with the grim realities of impersonal mechanized warfare. By contrast, World War Two is understood historiographically by stepping into the fray to analyze and cross-examine the personal choices and intentions of all involved. The “truth” of the Second World War lies in its heroes, villains, and martyrs, whereas the “truth” of the First World War lies—as in Remarque's *All Quiet On the Western Front*—in its annihilation of all those categories of meaning.

With the advantages of hindsight and the historiographical double standard it permits, there is no place for the study of “collaboration” in First World War historiography. To pose the question is not only naïve but also uninteresting; on the other hand, in the study of World War II there is little else. Similarly, scholars laugh at the failure to understand the “atrocities” (a twentieth-century neologism) of the First World War for the fabrications of propaganda they actually were, while condemning those who refused to believe in the reality of even more outlandish-sounding “atrocities” of the Second World War for the falsifications they were not.

In compartmentalizing the violence of the Second World War this way into studies of the fate of various ethnic victims and ethnic perpetrators we lose a sense of defamiliarizing effects of the Second World War upon European society as a whole. For of all the great disorienting upheavals of the twentieth century, it did more than any other to change the social and demographic face of Europe or to underscore the sinister side of defamiliarization. If the majority of the sixteen million casualties of the First World War were soldiers, the majority of the forty million European casualties of the Second World War were civilians—even before we take the victims of the Holocaust into account. If the First World War turned the narrow strip of no-man’s land between the entrenched armies on the Western Front into a surreal, defamiliarized, grey moonscape, the Second World War brought no-man’s land to the rest of Europe, with bombs that rained down on civilian homes from London to Dresden to Stalingrad. Prague, which survived the war virtually intact, was the exception. Warsaw, which had to be rebuilt from scratch, was closer to the rule, especially in Central and Eastern Europe.

In the aftermath of the War, Europe briefly turned nomadic, as tens of millions of uprooted, displaced, homeless people—more than ever before or since—wandered hundreds of miles across the continent, many on foot. With a few details, historian Marc Wyman brings the chaos and strangeness of that historical moment to life: a family moving across the Rhineland on the back of a camel “liberated” from a German zoo; some 24,000 displaced Cossack men, women, and children moving raggedly along the Gail river through the Austrian Alps; a swarm

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of starved piranha-like refugees descending upon a collapsed cart-horse on a crowded road removing hunks of flesh while the animal still lived—leaving nothing but a “skeleton” with the head untouched “in less than an hour.” It was the end of the old world.

The London Times reported on May 18, 1945 that “Europe is on the move. The exiled peoples are going home. The roads are filled with men and women of a score of nations trudging back hundreds of miles.” Those who could—most of the seven million refugees in Western Europe—returned to lost homes or rebuilt them. But most of those in the East were obliged to look for new ones. In the single most dramatic case of post-war social engineering and resettlement, some twelve million ethnic Germans (Volksdeutschen) expelled from Poland, Russia, Czechoslovakia, and other parts of Eastern Europe poured into Germany. In a single week, the bomb-crat-ter-cavities of Berlin saw the influx of 200,000 wide-eyed immigrants, some of whom spoke no German and many of whose forefathers had lived in the East for the better part of the last millennium.

Overshadowed by the violence of the Second World War itself—the imperative to mourn its victims, condemn its perpetrators, and rejoice in the victory over Nazism—the unprecedented scale of the social upheaval in its aftermath and its disorienting effect on European consciousness is turned into a footnote. What in retrospect is remembered and continues to be represented in films, novels, and historical studies as one of the few moments of absolute moral clarity in European history, was at the time one of the moments of greatest confusion and uncertainty. These upheavals have only a secondary place in most historical narratives, and even where accorded a more prominent place, they are given little power to inform the questions historians pose to the twentieth century. Treated more often as the last chapter on the Second World War, they ought to be seen as the first chapter on the foundation of a new social, political, and cultural order that rose from the rubble of Europe’s obliterated homes at “zero hour” (Stunde Null). For it was at this time, that an unprecedented number of homeless Europeans found themselves adrift, confronting new neighbors, the strangeness of old ones, uncertain destinies, and a deep scepticism about the all modernizing promises of the twentieth century, while still grasping at shards of their lost homes and identities.

The Second World War defamiliarized Europe. All of a sudden every Eastern European nation had an exiled diaspora yearning for its lost homeland. Displaced Persons (DPs) became the new men, women, and children of Europe as the very idea of nationality was defamiliarized. Hannah Arendt wrote at the time that “Citizenship is no longer regarded as something immutable, and nationality is no longer necessarily identified with state and territory.” Europe’s people were scattered across the globe as refugees (a category adopted for the very purpose of describing them by the United Nations in 1951), rather than merely emigrants. Firebombing had reduced many of Central Europe’s great cities to a fraction of their former selves. Europe was a blank slate for the reinvention of politics, society, and humanity. Tony Judt has evoked the architectural horror that came to fill the void in the postwar decades, including the invention of the modern ghetto—with anomy, a-sociality, and urban violence—from Sarcelles in Paris to the outlying neighborhoods (mikroaeto) of Leningrad: “In the physical history of the European city, the 1950s and 1960s were truly terrible decades. The

420 Wyman, DPs, 18, 19, and 20.
422 Wyman, DPs, 18, 19.
423 Wyman, DPs, 18, 19.
424 “Stateless People,” Contemporary Jewish Record 8, no. 2 (April 1945), 137.
damage that was done to the material fabric of urban life in those years is the dark, still half-
unacknowledged underside of the ‘thirty glorious years’ of economic development.”

Occupied by the armies and economies of three new Empires, the Third Reich, the Soviet
Union, and the United States of America—three self-proclaimed imperial “liberators”—postwar
continental Europe in the aftermath of the War is best understood according to the logic and
dynamics of decolonization. European elites attempted to chart a third path between partially
uprooted traditional authorities and the agents of new, transformative ideologies and political
power in the Nazi, Soviet, or American spheres of influence. For the first time Europe became
the object rather than the subject of global politics, divided between NATO and the Warsaw
Pact, the Marshal Plan sponsored European Economic Community and Soviet sponsored
Comecon. Not all aspects of its transformation derived directly from the War, but the War
nevertheless marked a turning point in European identity. Following decolonization, its empires
of production turned into empires of consumption. Its predominantly agricultural population
turned into a predominantly urban one. “In 1945, most of Europe was still preindustrial.”
By 1970, less than 20% of Europe’s population lived off the land, and this transformation was
particularly pronounced in almost all parts of Europe, except for England, which had undergone
the transformation before. New words and acronyms like GDP and GNP populated the new
quantitative language of social progress and development as the postwar world fulfilled the
enlightenment dream of translating every aspect of social welfare into numbers. New, rapidly
advancing technologies of transportation and communication—airplanes, cars, telephones,
televisions, and eventually computers—brought populations closer together even as the Iron
Curtain held them apart. Even the very nature of capitalism was transformed. Managing teams
of bureaucrats rather than individual entrepreneurs ruled The New Industrial State first observed
by John Kenneth Galbraith. In some sense Soviet Union was nothing more than a Capitalist
corporation writ large, trusting in numbers to plan its profit-margins in a manner reminiscent of
Wall Street, with the same obtuse indifference to the more qualitative aspects of experience.
The Second World War defamiliarized economics, politics, and society. In a post-war world
where intellectual elites thought in terms of modernization theory, world-systems theory, and
cybernetics, the categories of Marx, Weber, and Lenin began to seem increasingly irrelevant.

The Second World War put an end to nearly 500 years of European global imperialism,
from the division of the world between Spain and Portugal, approved by the Pope in the Treaty
of Tordesillas in 1494 until the USA and USSR returned the favor to Europe with the Iron
Curtain. Seen from the inside, however, the story of Europe was the disintegration of the
linguistic, intellectual, and political coherence of Latin Christendom punctuated by four pan-
European total wars, each of which saw the rebirth of Tartu University in a new, increasingly

425 Tony Judt, Postwar, 388.
427 Judt, Postwar, 327.
428 Of course Europe’s relative levels of urbanization and industrialization vary greatly across the continent, though
a much larger portion of Europe’s population was rural than is conventionally thought: the Mediterranean countries,
Scandinavia, Ireland, Eastern Europe were primarily rural. Half or more of Europe’s population in Yugoslavia,
Romania, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Hungary, Poland were peasants. Even in Italy, Austria, and France—more than
30% of the total population was peasantry; even in West Germany the population was 23% agricultural. The
United Kingdom was the great exception to Europe. It had a negligible agricultural population of 5% before 1945
which was further reduced to 3.3% thereafter. See Tony Judt, Postwar.
429 For a criticism of the cult of the GDP in assessing economic progress see Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, Jean-Paul
Fitoussi, Mismeasuring Our Lies: Why GDP Doesn’t Add Up. The Report by the Commission on the Measurement
particularist spirit: the Thirty Years War confessionalized Europe’s states, universities, and languages; the Napoleonic Wars put the nation at the heart of university curricula as the fundamental unit of European cultural life; World War I made the nation into Europe’s fundamental political unit as well with the League of Nations and the principle of “national self-determination”; World War II extended this principle to the rest of the world through decolonization and the United Nations. But if the story of Europe and its universities is one of disintegration into national fragments, it is equally one of repeated attempts to restore political, intellectual, and linguistic unity to the world. In the century of the nation-state, three ideological empires—Nazi, Soviet, and American—promised the “end of history.” All have been called un-European, but all derived their ideology from Europe. The unprecedented violence of the twentieth century owes just as much to the millenarian universalism of its fraternal (Nazi), egalitarian (Soviet), and liberal (American) ideologies as it does to national particularism.430 The Nazi, Soviet, and American occupations of Europe during and after the War “defamiliarized” the continent and its nations from within while redefining their relationship to the world.

Tartu lost about half its buildings and people in the War as the Red Army and Wehrmacht laid siege to the city in 1941 and 1944. Its population fell from 60,000 to 34,000: hundreds took to the woods or were mobilized into one army or the other; thousands fled to the West; thousands were deported to Siberia; thousands perished in Tartu’s Concentration Camp; but with Tartu’s dwindling Jewish population, tiny to begin with, only 158 of these (less than 5% of its 3500 victims) were actually Jewish.431 On closer inspection the vast majority of both the killers and the killed were Estonian. A saying arose that was apparently already present in other regional languages (Finnish, Russian, Ukrainian, Latvian), but became especially popular in Estonian translation: “Eestlase lemmik toit on teine eestlane!” (An Estonian’s favorite food is another Estonian). The social fabric came unraveled: some of Tartu University scholars turned against one another. In July 1941, during the first month of the Nazi Occupation, Paul Ariste heard Mihkel Toomse (an Estonian philologist) say about Andrus Saareste (another Estonian philologist): “‘Where is Saareste? If I get ahold of him, I’ll shoot him dead on the spot.’ He wasshouldering a gun. Fortunately, professor Saareste had gone into hiding somewhere in the country.”432 The defamiliarization of the Estonian nation was complete when the main building of Tartu University became the German Military Headquarters, a large sign that read “Feldkommandatur” hung over the entrance. On January 29, 1942, half a year after the German occupation began, the University held its opening ceremony as a Nazi institution. In his opening speech in the neoclassical Aula of the University, Brigadeführer Aster demanded that the scholarly work of the University “play a role in helping to decide the destiny of our continent in

430 In a seldom read or simply ignored part of Imagined Communities, Benedict Anderson stresses that nationalism is inspired more by love than hate. He underscores the idea that racism actually got its start with class. “Blue-blooded” aristocrats, like the Count de Gobineau, not petit-bourgeois shopkeepers, were the true fathers of racial hierarchy. If nationalism became a vehical for racism in the twentieth century it was only because nationalism was a vehical for everything else as well, including socialism and liberalism. Nationalism and racism had a profoundly uneasy relationship of convenience, every bit as inorganic ideologically as the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939, which from the perspective of Tartu University, nonetheless, was the defining political moment of 20th-century modernity.


the spirit of our Führer, Adolf Hitler.”\(^{433}\) All the speeches at the ceremony were delivered in German, and the ceremony ended with a rousing rendition of “Deutschland Deutschland über alles” and the “Horst Wessel Lied,” as reported by an Estonian eyewitness.\(^{434}\)

But ultimately, even in World War Two, the University of Tartu did more to keep Europe the same than to transform it along Nazi Ideological lines. The Third Reich promised more change than it delivered. During three brief years of Nazi rule, Tartu University did not become a German-speaking University as was intended, but remained an Estonian-speaking one. And though Estonians were regulated to entering through a makeshift side entrance (a sign of their humiliation), lectures continued to take place in the main building, taught by and large by interwar Professors. The rooms of the interwar Estonian Academy of Sciences in Tartu were converted into a New Department of Race Science. Funded by Berlin, they nonetheless came under the direction of an interwar Estonian, Juhan Aul. He had little interest in Aryan superiority and still less in Jewish inferiority, but a lot in Estonian ethnic identity; and this is what he studied, much as he had done before the War in interwar Estonia, and would continue to do afterward under Soviet rule, writing to Alexander Lipschütz, his original (Jewish) advisor at Tartu University in the 1920s who had long since emigrated to Santiago Chile, to congratulate him upon his retirement in the 1960s. Their warm exchange suggests the total irrelevance of the political upheaval in between—or any state ideology for that matter—to his worldview. The main difference between the letters of the 1920s and the 1960s after a 40-year hiatus was the shift in language: in the 1920s their correspondence had been in German, and for Juhan Klein—before he Estonianized his name to Juhan Aul—Lipschütz was the very embodiment of German science, a professor who had taught in Berne, Zürich, and Berlin alongside the likes of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. The racial category in Aul’s thought derived to some extent from Lipschütz, who had praised him in the 1920s when he was still an undergraduate as a “very useful member of the human race” for his undergraduate thesis on the development of frogs in an alcoholic environment (implying of course that there were other less useful members of the human race). Now their correspondence shifted to Russian, and Lipschütz referred to Aul in his letter as “Tovarish” (Comrade), recalling events forty years past now as if they had happened yesterday.

Under the Nazi Occupation (1942-1944), Tartu University’s Department of Race Science still used the stationary the Soviet Union had imposed on the University in 1940, crossing out the Soviet letterhead by hand or by typewriter. This small fact suggests how much less the Third Reich cared about what actually happened at Tartu University than the Soviet State. All things considered, Tartu University scholars enjoyed more academic autonomy—the right to pursue research agendas of their own making—under the regime of Nazi indifference than they did under the regime of Soviet micro-management, when both curricula and the structural organization of University Departments were imposed from abroad with the help of “Russified” ethnic Estonians from Moscow and Leningrad. In 1940-41 a Russian-born, Moscow-educated Estonian linguist, Kristjan Kure led the initial Sovietization of Tartu University as the first Prorector of Science. Kure was an ardent apostle of the New Soviet Language Theory of Nikolai Marr.

Among those lost to the demographic upheavals of the Second World War, were the few thousand remaining members of Tartu’s 700-year-old Baltic German elite, the most significant

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\(^{434}\) See for example the 1977 memoirs of Anatoli Mitt, Meenutusi, 23.
national minority in Tartu University’s interwar professoriate and student body. Throughout the nineteenth century they had been something of a buffer and intermediary between Tartu’s Russians and Estonians: if nineteenth-century Russians and Estonians barely noticed each other, it was because there were always Germans in between. Now they were gone, though several trilingual (German-, Estonian-, and Russian-speaking) interwar Baltic Germans from Tartu University continued to serve as cultural intermediaries from abroad, arguing for the Europeanness of the Baltic, and translating Baltic particularism and strangeness into more universal terms the rest of Europe and the world could understand. Two interwar Tartu University alumni stand out in particular: The legal scholar, Boris Meissner (1915-2003) formulated the Soviet Occupation of the Baltic States as a question of International Law in 1956 in his doctoral dissertation and accompanied the West German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, on his first visit to Moscow in 1955. The historian Georg von Rauch (1904-1991) wrote a popular history of the interwar period, The Baltic States: The Years of Independence, and called attention to the arrival of the European Enlightenment at Tartu University under Swedish rule in the 1690s. At the same time, with many books on Russian history, the Communist Party, and the Soviet Union, Meissner and Rauch each subjected the alleged universalism of the Soviet experiment to the critique of Baltic German particularism they had learned speaking Estonian at the interwar University of Tartu.

Meanwhile, back in Tartu, everything had changed. Or so it seemed. For the newly acquired national republics of the Soviet Union, the Baltic States, the Second World War and its aftermath marked the end of the old world and the advent of a new one more starkly perhaps than anywhere else in Europe. Six million people is not many by which to mark the meaning of a century, but for these six million people homelessness was the human condition and it came in four forms. Some (200,000) fled to the West; others (200,000) were deported to Siberia; still others (170,000) took to the woods to join the partisan resistance, the “Forest Brothers,” in the belief that Western aid was forthcoming. They held out, most successfully in Lithuania—where they controlled several towns—until 1956, about the same time surviving deportees started trickling home from Siberia. But even those who lived in buildings that had survived the bombs of the War, and that the new Soviet authorities had not given to someone else, discovered that home had turned into something foreign. They faced new neighbors and social hierarchies, since the collaboration between the Nazi and Soviet regimes under the terms of the Hitler Stalin


437 metsavennad in Estonian; meža brāļi in Latvian; miško broliai in Lithuanian
pact in 1939 had purged the region of its age-old German population and elites. Required to learn a new language—both figurative and literal—they had to transform themselves self-consciously to sever their ties to the past, to speak, think, and behave as new people. At the vanguard of their respective societies, the question of self-transformation or self-preservation was especially acute for intellectuals and the institutions all across Eastern Europe.

These internal adjustments and self-transformations are the subject of the Captive Mind, written by the Lithuanian-born Polish author, Czeslaw Milosz in the safety of his Western exile in 1953. Milosz chronicled how those intellectuals who remained at home became internally divided as they swallowed the pill of “Murti-Bing” (embracing the comforts of ideology) on the one hand, while playing the game of “Ketman” (concealing what they really thought) on the other. But in his last chapter, the “Lesson of the Baltics,” the emphasis shifts away from Poland, and Milosz imaginatively returns to his lost home: “My account of the Baltic states is not derived from books or manuscripts. The first sunlight I saw, my first smell of the earth, my first tree, were the sunlight, smell, and tree of these regions; for I was born there, of Polish-speaking parents, beside a river that bore a Lithuanian name.”

For Milosz, the “Lesson of the Baltics” for Europe and the world was the cautionary answer of “home”—with its unreformed human beings, who just want to be left alone—to the violence and defamiliarizing scientific projects of the twentieth century. Curiously eliding the distinction between town and country, Milosz’s Baltic might as well have been early-modern Flanders, and to the extent that the Hanseatic league and Niederdeutsch connected these two worlds, perhaps it was. He wrote that “The little world that was the Baltic states is known to us from Brueghel’s country scenes: hands clutching jugs, cheeks red with laughter, heavy, bear-like kindness. There lived peasant virtues: industry, thrift, diligence; and peasant sins: greed, stinginess, constant worry about the future.” These, of course, were not really peasant virtues and vices but small town virtues and vices, for the Baltic—like Flanders—with its Hanseatic towns dating back to the Middle Ages was one of the Northern European centers of medieval and early modern urbanization. In a striking analogy plucked from Flaubert’s novel, Madame Bovary, Milosz compared the Baltics in the Soviet Union to club-footed Hippolyte, whom the charlatan Monsieur Homais tries to cure of his deformity using “scientific” methods. In the novel, the operation goes awry. Milosz noted that the patient “shrieks and struggles to get away” and the leg develops gangrene in the process and has to be amputated out of medical (or by analogy, historical) necessity. Ultimately, Milosz represented the disorienting deformation of the Baltic after the upheavals of the Second World War as a problem of re-education: “the inhabitants of the Baltic states became Soviet citizens. In the eyes of the new authorities this mass of people, who were so well off that they put the rest of the Union to shame, represented a scandalous relic of the past. They had to be educated.”

As one of the premier educational establishments in the Baltic, Tartu University was supposed to become one of its premier sites of Soviet re-education. When it came in 1944, the Bolshevik Revolution brought many changes to Tartu. It brought the architectural transformation of the city with the construction of new buildings and streets and monuments and the renaming of old ones. It brought the reformation of Tartu’s “human material”—to use

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438 For an interpretation of the social upheaval and transformation of the Western borderlands of the Soviet Union, see for example Kate Brown’s study, A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland.
440 Milosz, Captive Mind, 231.
441 Milosz, Captive Mind, 243.
442 Milosz, Captive Mind, 229.
Lenin’s phrase—through expulsion, deportation, immigration and reeducation. And it brought the reorganization and fragmentation of the institutional structures of the University itself as the teaching of theology was replaced by a new department of Marxism-Leninism. A new statue of Lenin appeared in what the Soviet authorities had declared would be the new town square, in front of the new Academy of Agriculture, while the old statue of the Swedish King, Gustav Adolphus, the University’s founder, quietly disappeared from his pedestal behind the Main Building of the University. It was whispered that he had been melted down to make Lenin.

But there is another side to the fate of the Baltic States in the Soviet Union that Milosz could not see because he was too far away in his Western exile and wrote his book too soon. Despite all the changes wrought there, within the Soviet imagination at least, the Baltic became a symbol of a foreign, quintessentially European world (with its capitalist farmers and small town sensibilities), marked less by Sovietization, than its comparative independence, sophistication, and above all its legitimate, alternative European claim upon modernity. As the only surviving German University town in the Soviet Union, Tartu became a special locus and symbol of that atmosphere. In contrast to Tartu, both Königsberg and Vilnius underwent a total social transformation after the War, which amounted to a change in national identity. Polish-Jewish Wilno became Lithuanian Vilnius, while German Königsberg became Russian Kaliningrad. The interwar faculties of both Universities were expelled and resettled in Poland and Germany, to be replaced by Lithuanian and Russian newcomers respectively. Meanwhile, Estonian Tartu kept over half its faculty, students, and buildings, and—most importantly perhaps—its national identity. But if Tartu became the Soviet Union’s pre-eminent European University town, it was not only by remaining Estonian. It was also as a reminder of pre-Soviet, European past.

These continuities with the past, the memories they evoked, and the multilingual endeavors they inspired and legitimated, helped make Tartu a unique symbol in the Soviet Union of a foreign, quintessentially European world. How did Tartu become a typically Soviet university, populated with Soviet people despite its European pedigree? How did it remain European or return to Europe despite Sovietization? Any meaningful answer to these questions requires a much closer look. The Soviet story of Tartu University began with the bilingual cultural encounter of two uprooted worlds—Soviet and interwar European—regarding each other suspiciously across the vacated German cultural space of a half-demolished European university town.
PART II: SOVIET TARTU

“Transformed beyond recognition,” Tartu nonetheless remained what it had always been, a small German university town and an “oasis” of European cultural life. To some extent after the War, the new Baltic elites (the Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians) even took the place of the old Baltic elites (the Baltic Germans) in the Soviet cultural imagination. This can be seen in the disproportionate number of German roles played by Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian actors in Soviet cinema. Of the fifteen Soviet National Republics, Estonia was the only one that did not have its primary Institution of Higher Learning in the national capital. For like Basel in the Age of Burckhardt and Strasbourg in the Age of Bloch, Tartu in the Age of Yuri Lotman remained a German university town. Each exhibited a profound skepticism about the languages of state power. Each in its own language (German, French, and Russian) developed a critical approach and interpretive school for understanding the world that stood aloof from the state, but also in some sense as an intermediary between the particular and the universal, the national and the European.

Burckhardt published his work on the Renaissance at the time of Italian unification (1860), but from his perch at the University of Basel refused to define his subject in one-sided national or political terms, stressing instead the emergence of the “multisided man” and defamiliarizing the state in the process by treating it as a “work of art,” and making the elucidation of “backgrounds” both the stated method and the goal of all his observations on World History (Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen). He rejected the highest paid and most prestigious chair of historical studies in the world at the time (that of his advisor, Leopold von Ranke) at the University of Berlin, in order to retain the right to speak his mind in Basel, alongside Friedrich Nietzsche, Hans Overbeck, and Jacob Bachofen. Further down the Rhine, at the University of Strasbourg, recently acquired from Germany in the First World War, Marc

443 The phrase, “transformed beyond recognition,” expressing the Soviet aspiration to make Tartu into something totally new, appears repeatedly in Soviet sources ranging from the documentary film in honor of Tartu University’s 150th anniversary in 1952 to a German-guidebook to Tartu (written and published in Soviet Estonia) in the 1970s, to the monograph of the Russian-born Estonian, Viktor Maamägi on the interwar Estonian diaspora in the Soviet Union, Building a New Life (1981). It is worth noting how certain clichés (like this one) transcended all the intervening changes.

444 See for example the Estonian actress Veltei Linei as the last German-born Romanov Tsarina, Alexandra Federovna, speaking with a distinct “Pribaltiski” (Baltic) accent in Agonia, a 1975 film depicting the decadence of the final days of the Russian Empire. See also the countless Nazi roles played by Baltic actors like Tõnu Aav, Uldis Lieeldeldidz (38 Nazi roles), Algimantas Masiulis, Ervin Abel, Juozas Budraitis, Ants Eskola, Olev Eskola, Gunnar Kilgas, Eve Kivi, Harijs Liepins, Viktor Lorents, Jüri Lumiste, Heino Mandri, Bruno Oja. According to some of these actors, audiences in Moscow confused them with their characters and treated them in kind. The long-term consequence of Baltic actors in embodying absolute evil in Soviet cinema is explored in Arbo Tammiksaar’s documentary film, Fritsud ja blondiinid [Nazis and Blondes] (Kuukulgur Film and Subjectiv Filma, 2008).

445 Mae Ngai has written that “broadly conceived, transnational history follows the movement or reach of peoples, ideas, and/or things across national (or other defined borders).” Perspectives (12/2012). This is all very well—transnational history is about movement. But all movement is relative. What if the people, ideas, and things stay put, but the national borders are themselves what move? And what if both are moving at once. Or rather, what if these two kinds of movement provoke each other? In this sense, the Baltic world—like many other parts of the world that are difficult to define or label—is doubly transnational: transnational because of the movement of its people, ideas, and things, provoked by the movement of its borders and constantly shifting political allegiances.

446 See, for example, Burckhardt’s Force and Freedom in which he opposes cultural freedom and political power.
Bloch and Lucien Febvre founded their journal the “Annales” in 1929, and with it perhaps the most universal movement of the French historical imagination of all time; like Burckhardt they too focused principally on the continuities of the historical background, with such concepts as *mentalités*, the *longue durée*, and “total history,” but ultimately ended up moving from the periphery back to the center of the French Historical establishment shortly before the Second World War.

Employed to bring Russian culture to the Soviet Union’s newly conquered Baltic territories in 1950, Yuri Lotman ended up making Tartu his home. He held aloof in the periphery like Burckhardt, rather than returning to the metropole like Bloch and Febvre. But like all of them, he became obsessed with the continuities and backgrounds of historical experience—defining that background in the explicitly linguistic terms that obsessed late twentieth-century academia, while remaining attentive to the limits of any kind of historical transformation. This kind of skepticism and reserve rendered him profoundly different from the other most important linguistically-inspired Soviet literary philosopher of the day, Mikhail Bakhtin. It was in Tartu that Lotman completed his dissertation in the 1950s in the old German library in the ruins of a 13th-century Gothic Cathedral on the wooded hill at the center of town; it was under the auspices of Tartu University that he founded the first academic journal of semiotics in the world in 1964 on the basis of his lecture notes; and it was also from the vantage point of Tartu in the 1960s and 70s that he came to see the great Russian national poet, Pushkin, as a deeply conflicted, self-fashioning stranger to the nation he later came to symbolize; it is hard to escape the similarity between Lotman’s view of Pushkin and his own predicament as a Professor of Russian Literature in Tartu (I use the term “self-fashioning” here, not because it is fashionable but because it is Lotman’s own language in describing Pushkin). In Part Two of this work, I examine the cultural encounter between Tartu and the Soviet Union to see how Tartu University clung to its German past—even without its Germans—to remain an “oasis of Europe” both for its Russian and Estonian speakers under late Soviet rule.

Tartu’s peripheral position and transnational, multilingual European past makes it an excellent observatory upon the Soviet story. It also makes it an excellent observatory on Soviet historiography, and especially the tension at its core between linguistic multiplicity and uniformity. Since 1991 the old Soviet historiographical debate between the Totalitarian and Revisionist schools—with their vertical top-down and bottom-up orientation, debating how much politics controlled society or vice versa—has given way to a new horizontal, center-periphery orientation. However, this orientation is less a debate than a divide. On the one hand,

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447 “Generally belonging to one circle precludes belonging to another. Pushkin is among them like a seeker among the found. It is not only a question of his youth, but his lifelong striving—not yet conscious—to avoid one-sidedness. Having entered some circle, Pushkin learned its dominant style and manner of behaving and speaking with the same ease that he made Russian poetry’s special style his own while still a schoolboy… There is something similar in how Pushkin during the years 1817-1820 fashioned his personality. Having adopted with special ease the rules of the game of a given circle, Pushkin does not drown in foreign personalities or norms. He is seeking himself.” / “Tavaliselt välistab ühesseeringi kuulumine osavõtu teisest. Puskin on nende hulgas nagu otsija keset leidnuid. Asi pole mitte janult Puskinini nooruses, vaid talle kogu elu vältel omases ühekülgsuse vältimises, mis ei sõna veel teavustamata. Sisenenud mõnesse ringi, õppis Puskin seal valitseva stiili, käitumis- ja kõnemaneeri ära samasuguse kergusega, nagu ta lüüseumiaja luules võtis omaks vene luule eri stiile…. Midagi samast on selles, kuidas Puskin aastail 1817-1820 oma isiksust kujundas. Võttes erakordse kergusega omaks mõne ringi mängureeglid, mines kaasa vestluskaaslasementi poolt pakutud sõpradevahelise suhtlemise stiliga, ei ugu Puskin võõrastesse iseloomudesse ega normidesse. Ta otsib iseennast.” Juri Lotman, *Aleksandr Sergejevitš Puskin* (Tallinn: Kirjastus Eesti Raamat, 1986), 32-33.
scholars have discovered Soviet Nationalities, noticing the enormous commitment of the Soviet state to cultivating its internal multinational diversity, sometimes even forcing people to speak their “native” languages against their own will. On the other hand, scholars have grown interested in Soviet discourse, marvelling at the extent to which Soviet society internalized the ideological message of the state and began to speak a common universal language, unprecedentedly uniform in its grammar and diction. “Soviet Subjectivities”—led by Jochen Hellbeck and Igal Halfin—is an important research program here, though it does not exhaust the realm. Whether this language is understood in Stephen Kotkin’s terms as “speaking Bolshevik” or Alexei Yurchak’s terms as “Authoritative Discourse” (Yurchak borrows this concept from Mikhail Bakhtin), what marks the uniqueness of the Soviet Union in this view was Soviet consciousness, profoundly shaped (or at least enabled) by the language of the state, its capacity to set the limits of the thinkable by the limits of the sayable.

In one linguistic investigation of the relationship between Soviet life and consciousness after the Second World War, Slava Gerovitch showed the power of Soviet Discourse to absorb alternative languages. In From Newspeak to Cyberspeak: A History of Soviet Cybernetics, Gerovitch chronicled the encounter between the explicitly ideological language of Soviet life (Newspeak) and the ideal of an objective universal language of science (Cyberspeak). In the end, however, the story Gerovitch told was not a story of liberation by language, but a story of the “subtle ways in which language controls its ‘masters.’” Gerovitch showed how the vocabulary of cybernetics infected official language only to become a tool for the status quo: “It became very difficult … to step outside the cybernetic discourse and critically examine its limitations. Hailed as a language of truth and objectivity, cyberspeak eventually became a shadow of its formal object of ridicule, newspeak.”

In another sophisticated analysis of the fate of Soviet language and consciousness after the Second World, Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More, Alexei Yurchak showed how “Authoritative Discourse” of the Soviet Union became increasingly formalized and “ritualistic” after Stalin’s death. Paradoxically, argued Yurchak, it was the hyper-normalization of this discourse, which led to the efflorescence diverse forms of Soviet cultural life under Late Socialism, not in any oppositional sense, but in the “determinitalized” spirit of living “beyond” (vnye) the discursive formulas of authoritative discourse in an “imaginary West” together with others (recognized as one’s own—svoi), who were neither pro-regime activists or anti-regime dissidents. In the end the defining cultural movements of late Soviet socialism did not oppose or even question the legitimacy of the state; rather they were enabled by it and expressed a consciousness that included many of its values, accounting for the nostalgia that many Russian speakers feel for those times today (speakers of

448 See Suny, Slezkine, Martin, Hirsch, etc.. Cut and paste list of works from Chapter 1.
449 The “limits of the thinkable” is what Lucien Febvre set out to discover with his study of Religion and Atheism in the Age of Rabelais. In an early version of his work, published in article form, Jochen Hellbeck explicitly refers to Lucien Febvre’s study to help define the project of “Soviet subjectivities.” In later incarnations, however, references to Febvre disappeared as Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck came to rely increasingly on Michel Foucault and the concept of governmentality in setting the theoretical parameters of their investigation. Hellbeck, “Fashioning the Stalinist Soul, 1931-1939,” Sheila Fitzpatrick, Stalinism: New Directions (London: Routledge, 2000). For “Authoritative Discourse” see Yurchak, Everything was Forever, 284.
451 Gerovitch, Cyberspeak, 10.
452 Gerovitch, Cyberspeak, 295.
other languages feel this nostalgia less or differently). For all the differences between their studies, both Yurchak and Gerovitch show how Soviet discourse shaped Soviet consciousness.  

What is missing from both directions of research—Soviet Nationalities and Soviet Discourse—is serious consideration of the role of the Russian language in the Soviet experiment—i.e. the role of the Russian language in facilitating the multinational and multilingual Soviet Friendship of the Peoples, or the role of the Russian language in generating universal Soviet consciousness. On the one hand, Russian is taken for granted as the Soviet language (this is a fundamental assumption of studies of Soviet Discourse); on the other, the political uniqueness of the Soviet state is said to lie in its Leninist refusal to have an official language (this is the fundamental assumption of studies of Soviet Nationalities). Like Europe, only more acutely so, the Soviet Union was caught between its particularizing and universalizing tendencies, between Babel (with its experience of the ineluctable uniqueness of every particular language) and Pentecost (with its faith in the perfect translatability of all languages). This tension between universalism and particularism was sometimes even a matter of life and death, emerging in the Communist Party’s periodic attacks on “national chauvinism” (excessive particularism) and “rootless cosmopolitanism” (excessive universalism). What remains hidden in plain view in Soviet history—and Soviet historiography as well—can be seen from Tartu: the dual role of the Russian language as a language of Russian national culture on the one hand and as a language of transnational communication on the other. These roles were in constant tension with each other everywhere, but it was a tension that was especially pronounced to Estonian speakers with their alternative historical experience of interwar Europe. Tartu had both the linguistic difference and the European cultural capital necessary to render the transparency of

453 In one sense, Yurchak’s narrative takes Soviet life back full circle to the vision of the earliest years of Soviet life in the 1920s as proposed by Richard Stites in Revolutionary Dreams, as a time of many different communities of thought, artistic expression, and fellow-feeling, (though now in a less creative and more consumerist spirit) each interpreting the meaning of Socialism and the Soviet experience for itself on its own terms, but ultimately bound less by state institutions or the Communist Party than a common language of Soviet Socialist aspiration. Both Stites and Yurchak set out to save the Soviet Union from its Cold War critics, by “humanizing” (Stites) or “rehumanizing” (Yurchak) it. Stites writes: “By focusing on the utopian motif in the emerging revolutionary culture (including those currents in the Revolution that were defeated), I hope to advance the study of this remarkable phenomenon and to help humanize the subject which has often been the analysis of an enemy.” Richard Stites, Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in Russia (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 4. Similarly, Yurchak writes that “By showing the realities of actually existing socialism—where control, coercion, alienation, fear, and moral quandaries were irreducibly mixed with ideals, communal ethics, dignity creativity and care fore the future—this book attempts to contemplate and rehumanize Soviet socialist life.” Yurchak, Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 10.

454 Daniel Collins uses these Biblical categories explicitly to make sense of the literature of the First Five Year plan: “The pentecostal vision of language is evident in production novels of the First Five-Year Plan, which present a world where zeal for labor overcomes all obstacles to cross-linguistic understanding … and where the apostles of the collective can speak, as it were, in other tongues.” Thus, production novels often feature a motley collective of ethnic groups who find a way to speak to one another across (rather than through) languages. In Il’in’s the Big Conveyor, for example a crowd of “Germans, Blacks and other foreigners” includes an American, who “turns to a Russian stranger and says loudly and happily in English, Hello [Xelou]! Moscow is still Moscow!” obviously expecting to be understood.” Daniel Collins, “The Tower of Bael Undone in a Soviet Pentecost: A Linguistic Myth of the First Five Year Plan,” The Slavic and East European Journal, vol. 42, no. 3 (Autumn, 1998): 423-443.

455 Language is the element that confounds every theory of nationalism and ethnicity. Language is the hidden ethnic element in civic nationalism; dividing the world into regimes of monoethnic, multiethnic, and antiethnic nationality does little to predict how a state will use language to consolidate power and define the relations of its inhabitants to each other.
the Russian language opaque within the borders of the Soviet Union, even for Russian-speaking cultural elites like Yuri Lotman.

The most prominent professors at the top of Tartu’s bilingual linguistic hierarchy were the chairs of the Department of Russian Literature, Yuri Lotman (1958—1977) and the Department of Finno-Ugric Languages, Paul Ariste (1945—1977). Each has been seen as a victim and a martyr: Ariste tried to commit suicide while in prison immediately after a beating delivered by the NKVD in 1945 and was by many accounts a broken man. Lotman came under particularly intense KGB surveillance after 1970, when a blue car would follow him wherever he would go in Tartu, and park under his window whenever he was home. Still, both Ariste and Lotman were also enormously successful, prompting the admirers of each to regard the other with suspicion: not every scholar in Soviet Estonia chaired a Tartu University department, was elected to the Soviet Estonian Academy of Sciences (however belated in Lotman’s case), appeared before a popular audience on Soviet Estonian State Television, earned honorary doctorates from non-Soviet European universities, founded a Soviet academic journal with an international reputation, or became a governing member of the World Academy of Esperanto (Ariste) or a vice president of the International Semiotic Association (Lotman). Like Paul Abelard, the prototypical university professor, who turned the Cathedral School of Paris into a Mecca for students from across Europe in the 11th-century (and even managed to teach a course there against his own Bishop), Ariste and Lotman each turned Tartu into a Mecca for students and scholars from across the Soviet Union where they established scholarly circles and taught courses with a level of disregard for the Soviet state difficult to imagine at Institutions of Higher Learning in Moscow or Leningrad. At the top of the bilingual hierarchy of Tartu’s Soviet intelligentsia, in a heavily bureaucratic and ideological world where nothing moved without the combined approval of the State and Party (and the constant surveillance of the Secret Police and its informants), the very relationship of words to reality was always suspect and political. Tartu University enabled Ariste and Lotman to build their own third worlds in third languages of folklore and literature. The depoliticized “oases” they created became parallel worlds for themselves but at the same time critical, intellectual “observatories” for their students upon the cultural failures and limitations of the Soviet State.

456 See Ariste’s own detailed account of his beating in his memoirs confirmed by NKVD reports.
457 “In precisely this period of fear we lived in Tartu, and we saw, how on the streets of the town, wherever Yuri went, a blue car followed him slowly, but when he was home, the car was always parked just under his window (they lived on Kastani street on the second floor [at this time]).” “Just sellel varjamatu hirmutamise perioodil elasime me Tartus ning näälime, kuidas linnatänävival, kuhu iganes Juri ka ei läinud, sõitis tema taga aegalest sinine auto, aga kui ta oli kodus, seisis masin pidevalt akende all (Kastani tänav elasid nad teisel korrusel).” Viktoria Kamenskaja in Jalutuskäigud Lotmaniga, 301.
458 For Lotman’s apolitical attitude toward life and uniqueness of Tartu’s atmosphere that enabled this attitude, see Viktoria Kamenskaya, Jalutuskäigud Lotmaniga, 300.
Chapter 6. A Bilingual University: Speaking Bolshevik in Two Languages

Throughout the Soviet Period, Tartu remained a symbol of Europe. But in order to understand how (and for whom) Tartu remained European one must first see how (and for whom) it became Soviet, and that is the aim of this chapter. The ideology of the Soviet State demanded that its citizens see or at least express their understanding of the world in terms of clear binaries. Its official morality was Manichaean. Those who were not for the state were against it. There was no neutral middle ground. In a broader sense, this was what Tartu University’s foremost scholar of the Soviet era, Yuri Lotman, understood to be the distinguishing feature of Russian history in general. In Dante’s concept of purgatory Yuri Lotman and his colleagues found an intermediate—relatively neutral—European space between heaven and hell missing from Orthodox culture and Russian history more generally. Thus, on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Yuri Lotman looked to “ternary” (i.e. having three parts) Western Europe for salvation from what he called the binaries of Russian thought and historical experience. He noted how the great developments of Russian history, from Peter the Great’s ambition to “overtake and surpass” Europe to Stalin’s ambition to fulfill the “five-year plan in four years,” did not happen by chance, but according to the special logic of Russian history and its reliance on “explosive techniques” of progress:

This, however, is not the result of some lack of thought, but rather the severe dictates of a binary historical structure.

The radical change in relations between Eastern and Western Europe, which is taking place before our very eyes may, perhaps provide us with the opportunity to pass into a ternary, Pan-European system and to forego the ideal of destroying ‘the old world to its very foundations, and then’ constructing a new one on its ruins. To overlook this possibility would be a historical catastrophe.

Lotman’s frequent use of the word and concept “binary” as an organizing idea of his scholarship and worldview—indeed, it appears sixteen times in the last eight pages of the work quoted above—ought to be seen against the background of a more general tendency in Soviet Tartu to divide the world in two. While Sovietization in Tartu sometimes meant the adoption of Soviet ideology and values, it more often meant the adoption of Soviet patterns of thought and behavior quite independent of any specific ideological content.

What sets the historical particularity of Tartu scholars in the Soviet period apart from the historical particularity of Tartu scholars in Swedish Empire, Russian Empire, or the Estonian National Republic, was an especially acute tendency to see the world in terms of the clear opposition of heroes and villains, appearance and reality, self and other. In other words, the Soviet transformation of Tartu saw the unprecedented emergence of binary categories on every level of thought, language, and experience. There was the binary divide in Tartu’s new Soviet urban geography and iconography. Soviet guidebooks of the 1970s divided their walking tours

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of Tartu in two: (1.) Historical Tartu and (2.) Soviet Tartu, juxtaposing the “historical” medieval past and the space-age “Soviet” future with images of Tartu’s 13th-century Cathedral and the stainless steel paneling of the new Tõravere Astronomical Observatory on facing pages. 461 There was furthermore the Manichaean moral imagination and worldview of Tartu’s traumatized postwar inhabitants, and even psychological divides within individual consciousness that sometimes turned Tartu scholars against themselves, given poetic expression by Lotman’s own citation of Goethe: “Two souls, alas, reside within my breast and each one withdraws from and repels its brother.” 462 The strange case of Mikhail Makarov, discussed in detail, is an especially extreme example of divided consciousness in Soviet Tartu.

Above all, there was the official bilingualism of scholarship and everyday life, as Tartu newspapers struggled to reach both a Russian and an Estonian audience, generating endless reflection on the Soviet politics of language in the process: some issues appeared in separate Russian and Estonian editions; some included a one page “russkaia stranitsa” as a supplement (a one-page Russian digest of everything written in Estonian); some appeared in only one of the two languages. 463 That the perceived binaries of life in Soviet Tartu were inconsistent—indeed, what was celebrated in one moment could be exposed and condemned the next—or that they were multiple and self-contradictory, or that they did not belong exclusively to any one realm of experience or representation does not automatically turn them into “polyphony” (a term borrowed from the interpretive vocabulary of Mikhail Bakhtin) as some historians and cultural critics have argued. These critics often see binary categories in Soviet history as a symptom of Cold War politics and Western imposition. 464 I want to show instead how duality and dividedness arose from within. 465


462 Lotman, Culture and Explosion, 5.

463 The Tartu University newspaper Tartu Riikliku Ülikool and the Tartu municipal newspaper, Edasi, used all these various strategies at different times between 1945 and 1991.

464 For an example of the tendency blame the binary categories of Soviet life on the Cold War see Alexei Yurchak: “Chakrabarty’s call for a language that would decenter and ‘provincialize’ the ‘master narrative’ of Europe in postcolonial historiography is relevant to the writings on socialism; however, in the case of socialism, especially in Russia, the object of ‘provincializing’ would not just be ‘Europe’ but, more specifically, ‘Western Europe’—a post-Soviet ‘master narrative’ in the history of socialism that implicitly reproduced binary categories of the Cold War and of the opposition between ‘first world’ and ‘second world.’” Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, 9. This claim is a curious inversion of Lotman’s own. Where at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union Lotman appealed to a more universal and cosmopolitan European language to save Russia from the binaries of its own history, twenty years later Alexei Yurchak appealed to a more particular and “provincial” Third World language to save the Soviet Union from the binaries of Western European universalism and its historiography.

465 There are many Soviet accounts of the deep binary character of Soviet culture beyond those of the Tartu School of Semiotics. In the late 1970s, Vladimir Paperny wrote a brilliant book about Stalinist architecture. In it Paperny did not so much explain as observe two radically opposed and conflicting internal tendencies, not just in architecture, but in every arena of Soviet culture. Each of his three chapters was based on a set of binary opposition between the values of “culture one” (the culture of the 1920s) and “culture two” (the culture of the 1930s): where one valued what was horizontal, uniform, and in motion, two valued what was vertical, hierarchical, and fixed; where one was obsessed with defining the good, two was more interested in rooting out evil; while one aimed to destroy the old order, two aimed to create the new; where one was broadly cosmopolitan, two was narrowly nationalistic. And though each had its own decade of dominance, these two tendencies were shown less to be a uniquely Soviet phenomenon, than a deep Russian opposition that could be traced back to Peter the Great. Vladimir Paperny, Paperny, Vladimir. Culture Two: Architecture in the Age of Stalin, trans. John Hill and Roann Barris in collaboration with the author (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). One of the advantages of seeing Sovietization from the perspective of Tartu is that the opportunity it provides to explain the origins of Soviet patterns of life and thought in something other than Russian national history.
For what was striking about the way people wrote in their diaries, letters, and memoirs, composed scholarship or literature, and remembered their intimate social circles and greatest achievements in recorded interviews (some with me between 2005 and 2011 and some with Tartu University’s Historian Hillar Palamets as far back as the 1970s) was the extent to which their worldview was a fundamentally divided one, based on stark binary oppositions, not on subtle gradations of hue. On some level, these were typical of the Soviet experience everywhere, and to this extent Tartu State University might be seen as a microcosm and internal observatory on the Soviet Union. Good and evil, true and false, right and wrong, Russia and Europe—had (and continue to have) great power in structuring the imagination of Tartu residents and scholars in particular. In the thirty-five formal interviews I conducted (mostly in Tartu and Tallinn) along with hundreds of informal conversations on the topic of Tartu’s Soviet past with Tartu inhabitants, I gradually became aware of the extent to which my interlocuters carried around in their heads two different visions of Tartu that never seemed to meet, but nonetheless structured their worldview: when asked how something that seemed distinctly un-Soviet became possible in Soviet Tartu they would refer me to the “Tartu Spirit” (Tartu vaim) and speak of Tartu’s European past; when I asked them why something else nearly identical had proved impossible at that exact moment in time they would smile knowingly and refer me to the Soviet present: “This was, after all, the Soviet Union.” It was very hard to get beneath or beyond this internalized binary, which explained everything and therefore nothing at all. Binarism seemed to be—and had been since the 1940s at least—a kind of coping mechanism for dealing with memories that did not—or could not—add up to any kind of coherent whole.

Thus, dividing the world in two was not only an official demand of Soviet ideology, but also an integral part of the Soviet experience. This dividedness was especially pronounced in Tartu owing to the official bilingualism of Soviet Estonia. Indeed, in the Estonian language the word for bilingualism—“kahekeelne”—is itself ambivalent: (1) it can be a neutral variant of kakskeelne (expressed in two languages), where the emphasis is on the equivalance of the two statements and the transparency of one language to another; or (2) it can be a synonym for hypocrisy and telling lies, where the emphasis is on the opacity of any particular language and the extent to which any translation transforms an original meaning into something else. The double meaning of the word in popular usage today owes something to the Soviet experience.

6.1 Armageddon and its Aftermath: Losses and Survivals

...architectural ensembles, city rituals and ceremonies, the very plan of the city, the street names and thousands of other left-overs from past ages act as code programmes constantly renewing the texts of the past. The city is a mechanism forever recreating its past, which then can be synchronically juxtaposed with the present. In this sense the city, like culture, is a mechanism which withstands time.

- Yuri Lotman\textsuperscript{466}

\textsuperscript{466} Yuri Lotman, \textit{The Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture} (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990), 191.
Tartu may have withstood “time,” but it only barely withstood the Second World War. It was “occupied” twice, by the Red Army (1940-1941) and the Wehrmacht (1941-1944), and also “liberated” twice in the summers of 1941 and 1944 when it became a battleground on the Eastern Front. The massive scale of the destruction left in Tartu by the clash of these titans was unprecedented.

In September 1944 when the smoke cleared about half of pre-war Tartu lay in ruins. Of 5217 buildings, 2288 had been utterly destroyed in the War; of 711,000 square meters of living space, only 326,000 were left. Gone was the main city theater Vanemuine, Tartu's most photographed turn-of-the century piece of Art Nouveau architecture. Gone were eleven different school buildings, ninety-four cultural establishments, and ninety-three different industrial buildings. Gone too was the most important repository of national memory since 1920, the ethnographic Estonian National Museum, housed in the old Raadi Manor just beyond the city’s main graveyard, where the Baltic German Liphart family had established a salon with a fine collection of European art and its own resident string quartet in the 1830s. For their quartet the Lipharts had recruited the cellist and composer Bernhard Romberg and a student of the renowned Louis Spohr in Leipzig, the violinist Ferdinand David, together with his Guarneri violin. Robert and Clara Schumann and Franz Liszt had performed in the Aula of Tartu University and most likely spent time at the Raadi Manor house as well in the latter half of the nineteenth-century. Now three mass graves were dug facing the smoldering ruins as the newly Sovietized city newspaper Uus Postimees (New Postman) reported on November 19, 1944.

Gone were all three bridges linking the banks of the Ema river, including Freedom Bridge (Vabadusild) and the Stone Bridge (Kivisild or Steinbrücke), built by Catherine the Great in the late 18th century. The Stone Bridge had been “a symbol of the city” and one of its most photographed monuments, featured on many old postcards going back to the turn of the twentieth century and popular engravings a hundred years before that. On the morning of July 9, 1941 the retreating Red Army had set dynamite to its foundations to waylay the German advance. The explosion that destroyed the bridge left a lasting imprint upon the town’s

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467 By the 1980s these numbers and this account of the destruction of Tartu in the Second World War had become a Soviet Estonian cliché. With the tendency toward the rhetorical standardization of a uniform authoritative discourse in Late Socialism, these statistics were reported almost verbatim in many different sources, including Soviet histories of the town of Tartu and its university. They also appear in a nearly indistinguishable language in the private memoirs of Arnold Matteus, who had served as Tartu’s main town architect from 1920 to 1960. Here it is hard to tell whether the Soviet discourse was echoing Arnold Matteus or Arnold Matteus echoing Soviet discourse in this enumeration of the destruction World War II inflicted on Tartu. Arnold Matteus (1897—1986), Tartu—minu linn [Tartu—my town] (Tartu: Tartu Linnamuuseum, 2008), 27; Kodulinn Tartu, 76.


469 Hillar Palamets, Lugusid Toonasest Tartust. ,

470 See engraving: Johann Christoph Brotze, Die Dorpsche Steinerne Brücke. Ein Denkmal der grossen Wiederherstellerin Dorphats. 1800; Karl Taev calls the bridge the symbol of the city in his interview with Hillar Palamets, Tartu, September 10, 1983.
collective memory. Reaching for comparisons in a 1983 oral interview conducted by Tartu historian Hillar Palamets, the University’s first Soviet Estonian prorector in 1940-41, Karl Taev, compared the “mushroom cloud” that rose from the ruins to “Hiroshima.” Tartu’s first Estonian town architect, Arnold Matteus, later remembered: “on the early morning of July 9th when the Stone Bridge was blown up, I was by the Catholic Church [almost a kilometer away]. The explosion was so strong that some pieces of stone reached [me]…. The blowing up of the bridge shattered all the river-side windows of the town hall." Even at the time, the explosion attracted considerable attention, and acquired a larger than life, almost spiritual significance. The very next day Tartu’s daily newspaper, Postimees, reported that a several-ton stone from the explosion flew half way across town in the direction of the University’s department of Marxism-Leninism, but was stopped by an age-old birch. This “guardian angel” then “redirected the stone into the neighboring street, preserving the University from even the slightest damage.”

Tartu University did not in fact survive the War unscathed. It lost some twenty buildings, including classrooms, lecture halls, and laboratories. As a repository of European cultural memory, Tartu and its University also sustained heavy losses. The University saw the demise of 50,000 books, significant archive materials and many unpublished manuscripts. All together the town lost 465,000 books and 2500 works of art. Among the 135 private libraries lost, twenty-two belonged to Tartu University professors and lecturers: some of the most significant were those of the Estonian literary scholars Gustav Suits (10,000 books), Johannes Šemper (6000 books), and Karl Taev (4500 books), and the historian Peeter Tarvel (5000 books). And yet, despite the shattering of all its windows, the elegant classical main building of Tartu University, with its small museum of ancient Greek and Roman statues and six Doric columns, dating back to the first years of the nineteenth century, had survived the War basically intact. This was a fact pregnant with meaning for all observers. Despite the bombardment and street fighting that took place in Tartu between the Wehrmacht and the Red Army in the summers of 1941 and 1944, the one thing the Nazis and Soviets could agree about (though they would never have admitted it) was the cultural significance of Tartu University.

The official Soviet story—repeated in several different sources afterward—was that the University had been spared thanks to a division of sensitive scholars from the University of Kazan, the 146th Rifle Corps led by Major-General Sergei Karpetian. They understood the value of education, and therefore arranged their bombardment of the city in such a way as to spare the University unnecessary damage. In so doing they successfully sabotaged Nazi plans to blow

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471 Karl Taev interview conducted by Hillar Palamets (Tartu: Tartu University Library Cassette Recordings, September 10, 1983).
474 Niina Raid, Tartu Ülikooli Peahoone (Tartu: A/S Rahkoi, 1993) 26; according to the official history of Tartu University prepared for the 1982 anniversary the University lost 22 buildings in the summer of 1941. TÜA III, 171. Twenty-two is also the number cited in Hillar Palamets, Lugusid Toonasest Tartust, 222.
475 TÜA III, 171.
476 “Formeeritud 1942 Kaasanis kuhu kuulisi Kaasani Riikliku Ülikooli õppejõud ja aspirandid, kellele vana ülikooliklinn Tartu tähendas kaugelt rohkem kui tavalist asutust punkti divisi pikal sõjateel. Et ülikooli keskus pääseks võimalikult väikeste purustustega, laskis divisi juhtinud kindralmajor Sergei Karapetjan moodustada
up the main building. Whether such plans actually existed or were a fabrication of Soviet propaganda or the spontaneous rumors that sprang up in the following months cannot be definitively verified.477 The history of Tartu University published in 1982 for its 350th anniversary summed up the official consensus. As usual, polyphony amounted to speaking in unison: “As all of Tartu’s liberators note in their memoirs, the combatants felt special concern for the main building of Tartu University, and attempted to take this temple of knowledge whole.”478 In a ceremony organized in 1980, a veteran soldier-artist from the 146th Riflemen, Y. Tsishevski, decked out in his Red Army medals and surrounded by other decorated Red Army veterans handed over his painting of the liberation of the main building of Tartu University to the University itself.479

In the summer of 1940 Tartu had approximately 60,000 residents. But when the Red Army “liberated” Tartu from the Nazis in August 1944, there were only 1926 people to crawl out of the rubble to meet them. On August 30th, the Red Army registered 634 men, 908 women, and 384 children still residing in the ruins.480 The future president of the Soviet Estonian Writer’s Union from 1953-71, Juhan Smuul, was working as a special correspondent for the Bolshevik Estonian Newspaper Rahva Hääl (People’s Voice) in Leningrad. He followed the Red Army to Tartu, arriving by truck from Võru on August 26th:

We are in Tartu. Out of habit the driver begins to turn from Võru street to Riga street, but then jerks the steering wheel back and pulls to a halt before the Workers’ Building, engulfed in flames. Riga Street, where we were supposed to turn, reminds one of the Gates of Hell: underneath everything is dark, a smokey gap, since from the street the flames all paw at one another, leaving the impression of an undulating ceiling of fire….

There is something horrible in this empty, burning city, in the lifeless streets, in the evil silence lacerated by sudden explosions. I began to feel that this old town, the heart of Estonian cultural life, was dead. Locked doors have been broken down in many places; shattered windows have holes torn into their coverings. But there where fire reigns an all-encompassing palsy spreads across the entire town, lifeless with its empty streets and deathly immobility.481
Smuul was not the only one to see in Tartu’s fate something akin to the end of the world, the Last Judgment, or at least the end of Estonian national and cultural life as he knew it. Smuul stood on the outside looking in; but for those caught up in the maelstrom themselves, the experience must have been even more frightening. The Tartu University Professor Voldemar Vaga was hiding in the University’s 19th-century Botanical garden while the front passed through Tartu. Later he remembered that “on the 24th of August the town seemed completed dead. Not a single person on the streets. The silence was horrible.”482 The Estonian literary scholar Karl Taev, one of the original five members of Tartu University’s Communist Party organization in 1944, also remembered the eerie emptiness of the town upon his return from Leningrad. He did not see a single soul. “The ruins of the Vanemuise Theater were still smoking... and the mortars still flying overhead.”483 For the Germans had not yet completely given up hope of retaking the city, and had moved their battery just beyond the Raadi cemetery on the edge of town.

Even after the much of the rubble had been cleared away a few months later, the impression left by the devastated town weighed heavily upon all those who had known it before the War. The biologist Harald Haberman arrived in Tartu from Tallinn. Haberman had joined the Communist party at Tartu University in 1939 when it was still dangerous to do so, and spent much of the War in the Estonian Communist Party organizations of Russia, where he had experienced the Leningrad blockade firsthand. In memoirs published the year after his death in 1986, he wrote poignantly of the fragility of life, the suffering of children, and the ubiquity of starvation in Leningrad. But even here he remembered the fate of Tartu as something still more pitiful:

[Tartu] presented an awful picture. A cold and sharp wind knocked at the burnt and shattered tin-roofs. From the ruins all kinds of ash blew about. I was prepared and hardened for this by my memories of Leningrad, but I must say, Tartu left a much more forelorn impression. Proportionally the damages here were far greater than in Leningrad.484

One of the last Estonian Bolsheviks to leave in 1941, Karl Taev was also one of the first to return in August 1944. He described the scene that greeted his eyes when he first stepped across the threshold of the main building of Tartu University: it had been violated and defiled; the stench of rotting chicken on an upper floor overwhelmed him (it had been used as storage space), and the remains of food and fires in the ceremonial neoclassical Aula spoke to the denigration of this Holy space of learning that had been converted into a military command center and temporary barracks for the soldiers of the Wehrmacht.485 Alma Selge, the first

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librarian for Tartu University’s Department of Marxism-Leninism, who had spent the war teaching Estonian to her countrymen in the Communist organizations of Yaroslav together with the future First Secretary of the Estonian Communist Party, Ivan (Johannes) Käbin, remembered that to get inside, she had to step past “a corpse lying on the front steps.” The building was totally empty and in the main corridor everything was in hopeless disarray: “torn paper, books, wine bottles” covered the floor.\textsuperscript{486} For Anatoli Mitt, a teacher of physics and founder of an atheist circle as a student at the interwar University of Tartu, the current state of the Main Building spoke to the suffering of the national soul, as he remembered it more than thirty years later:

\begin{quote}
The Main Building. There she stands, the pride of our nation, towering monument to the life of the mind. Asleep, silenced by the clamor of war. Cradle of our culture and our learning. The blackened window holes. The six pillars, wounded by explosions, guarding the entrance… The building seemed dead.\textsuperscript{487}
\end{quote}

Mitt took responsibility for the physical restoration of the building in the fall months of 1944 when he was appointed assistant to the first administrative prorector (\textit{haldusprorektor}) of Tartu State University, mathematics professor Gerhard Rägo.

The Communist Party Organization for the Tartu region was reestablished already in August, headed by two ethnically Estonian Communists, Max Laosson (1904-1992) and Edgar Tõnurist (1920-1992), one born and raised in Estonia, the other in Russia. They sent Karl Taev on a mission to locate as many University faculty members as he could find in Tartu. His search turned up only five. There was law professor Elmar Ilus (1898-1981), art historian Voldemar Vaga (1899-1999), who had been hiding in the botanical garden, and his biologist brother August (1893-1960), and the eccentric Estonian-Russian literary scholar and poet, Valmar Adams (1899—1990). Taev also managed to find zoology Professor Heinrich Riikoja (1891-1988), who had very briefly served as the rector of the University for a month or two during the beginning of the First Soviet Occupation in 1940, before the Estonian historian, Hans Kruus took over the post. Riikoja was hiding on his nearby family farm on the edge of town in Ropka.\textsuperscript{488} But this was scarcely an adequate contingent with which to begin rebuilding Tartu University let alone building socialism in the ruins of this half-demolished European university town.

Where had all the people gone? And what became of those who returned over the course of the coming weeks, months, and years? It is impossible to speak of the cultural transformation of Tartu University under Soviet rule without calling attention to the deep gash World War Two left in the population of Estonia and the unprecedented transformation it effected in its intelligentsia and its memory. In 1939 Estonia had an estimated population of 1,134,000 following the last national census in 1934. At this time the population of the territory that would become the ESSR after Stalin trimmed the interwar borders of the republic in the East and South,

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{486} “…võtsin kõik jõu kokku… ülikooli ees oli üks laip kindlasti oli siruli… tulin peaeksse sisse… ma ei näinud ainsat hinge, peale enese…. Ülikooli ajalooline koridor oli kirjeldamatult rämpsu täis…. rebitud pabereid, muidugi ka raamatuid ja muidugi ka veini pudeleid…. Aula Kateedri raamatukogu oli ka samasuguses olukorras.” Alma Selge and Lydia Roots, interview with Hillar Palamets. \textit{Alma Selge ja Lydia Roots meenutused} (Tartu: Tartu University Library Cassette Recordings, October 22, 1979), minute 4:20-6:22.
\textsuperscript{488} Karl Taev, interview with Hillar Palamets, Tartu, September 10, 1983.
\end{quote}
was 1,107,059. By the time of the first Soviet census in Estonia in 1959, the population of the ESSR had grown to 1,196,791. These numbers alone suggest stability and slight growth over this period. Even the Jewish population of Estonia showed a slight demographic increase from 4,434 people in 1934 to 5,436 in 1959. But these statistics conceal the magnitude of the upheaval in the interrum: hundreds of thousands of people ran away, were killed, deported, or otherwise made to disappear; and hundreds of thousands came to take their place. Even those who returned—from deportation to the camps or evacuation to the Russian interior—came back as new people, rendered strange by the war and its aftermath. All had to reinvent and redefine their relation to their homeland and their neighbors in the context of a new state with a new ideology. The history of the Baltic world is full of illusory ruptures and false continuities.

6.2 Two Sides of Tartu’s Bolshevik Transformation

6.2.1 The New Bolshevik Order and Its Limits: Reinventing the Past, Present, and Future

Tartu University reopened its doors in 1944 as a bilingual Soviet university, charged with the Sovietization of the Estonian elite and the integration of Estonia into the Soviet “Friendship of the Peoples.” From an initial Communist Party organization consisting of only five members in 1944 (four out of five were interwar Estonians), Communist Party cells began to proliferate. By the 1960s nearly every University department had its own, and 50% of the faculty belonged to the Party, just like any other Soviet University. In the 1970s and early 80s Tartu State University was awarded the “Order of the Friendship of the Peoples” and the “Red Flag of Labor” for its scholarly service to the State and Soviet society. At its 350th anniversary celebration in 1982, Rector Arnold Koop proudly announced that since 1944 Tartu University already had awarded some 26,000 degrees to “specialists,” more degrees than it had awarded in all of the previous periods of its history combined.

In 1978, Tartu’s student body consisted of 4137 Estonians (80%), 681 Russians (13%), 74 Jews, 67 Ukrainians, 33 Georgians, 32 Lithuanians, 32 Finns, 30 Latvians, 24 Belarussians, 13 Tartars, and 11 Armenians (7%). These were more or less the same nationalities that had attended the University in the late imperial period. It is also worth pointing out that despite all the demographic upheavals of the Second World War and Sovietization, in purely statistical terms the ratio of ethnic Estonians (80%) to ethnic others (20%) in Tartu University’s student body remained exactly the same as it had been in interwar Estonia. The most dramatic demographic transformation of Tartu University was the massive influx of women. They had gone from total exclusion in the last decades of the nineteenth century, to a significant presence in the interwar period, to the vast majority under Soviet rule after the losses of the Second World War. Between 1945 and 1991, women constituted more than 60%—in some years more than

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489 January 1, 1939 census estimate as cited in Raun, Estonia, 129; Mereste and Saarepera, Rahvastiku enesetunnetus (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1978), 58.
490 Raun, Estonia, 165; Mereste and Saarepera, 193.
492 TUA III, 386.
493 TUA III, 378.
494 TUA III, 207.
70%—of Tartu’s student body. The commemorative history published in 1982 stated the reconciliation of national and international goals: “Today Tartu State University sees itself as a national higher school and institution of scholarship with an international composition, which together with its students integrates some 11,000 people into a singleminded Soviet collective (üksmeelseks Nõukogude kollektiiviks).” Thus, the double Soviet ideal of national diversity and ideological uniformity was given clear expression in the official commemorative history of Tartu University published in 1982. The radical Bolshevik transformation of Tartu in all of its bilingual optimism (and its limits) can be observed in total transformation (or at least its aspiration) of Tartu: (1) the transformation of material and symbolic space (the present); (2) the transformation of ideological consciousness (the future); (3) and the transformation of national memory (the past).

1. Transforming the Present: the New Urban Space

Das ehemalige Tartu ist nicht mehr wiederzuerkennen [The former Tartu can no longer be recognized].

—A. Suur, Tartu Reiseführer, 1970

From 1928 to 1950 a statue of the Swedish King, Gustavus Adolphus, capped the marble pedestal behind the main building of Tartu University. Designed by the Swedish sculptor Otto Strandman, it was a gift from Estonia’s Swedish-Estonian community to honor Tartu’s first ten years as an Estonian National University. Gustav Adolphus had defied all the bombs of the Second World War. A photograph taken shortly after the War shows the bronze figure of the Swedish King still standing on his pedestal, overgrown with weeds, and framed by piles of rubble. But on May 15, 1950, in the months following the most intense and concentrated Soviet purge of the Soviet Estonian intellectual elite at the Eighth Plenary Session of the Estonian Communist Party in March of that same year in Tallinn, King Gustavus Adolphus disappeared from his perch.

According to many contemporary and later accounts Gustavus Adolphus was melted down and remolded to make a bronze statue of Lenin. In any case, as Tartu State University prepared to celebrate the 150th anniversary of its origins as an Imperial Russian institution in 1952, a new bronze figure of Lenin appeared in a much more prominent location, facing out from the eight-columned façade of the new Agricultural Academy (Tartu University only had six columns) at the intersection of Riga and Tähe streets, surveying the newly designated Soviet city.
center still in the throes of construction after the devastation of the Second World War. The new centerpiece of “Lenin Square” replaced the concrete-iron statue of a “seated Lenin” designed by the Moscow sculptor S. Merkurov and unveiled in November 1949. Apparently, Lenin was not about about to oversee the Sovietization of Tartu sitting down. No gesture grasps the transformation of Tartu University into a legitimate Soviet University town with more symbolic resonance than the act of melting down Gustavus Adolphus to make Lenin. Whether this actually happened or not seems to matter less than that this is what was talked about and widely believed. The myth grasps important aspects of the Sovietization of Tartu’s urban space and University in the first decade after the Second World War, including the delay, uneven pace, and patchwork quality of Sovietization. Not everything changed, certainly not at once. Some of the names and icons of the Estonian national past were absorbed and incorporated into the Soviet present. But on the whole, the institutionalization of a new attitude toward the future together with a new attitude toward the past can be read in the lines of Tartu’s transformed urban space.

Not far from the Lenin Monument, the NKVD set up shop in the “Gray House” on Riga Street. A bit closer to the old town square (now called “Soviet Square”), the Tartu’s municipal Communist Party moved into the tall building on University Street #8 on Barclay de Tolly Square just in front of the monument to the Great General of the War of 1812. The Soviet army also established its Estonian headquarters here. The Soviet military presence was further enhanced by the secret airfield for Soviet Tupolev bombers (already constructed in 1940) just beyond the Raadi Cemetery and the ruins of the interwar Estonian National Museum. The airfield contributed to Tartu’s isolation and mystique as a “closed city” since visitors from abroad were not allowed to spend the night. This was important after the Soviet Union changed its international policy in the 1960s and began admitting foreign tourists. Before then, Estonians who came back—there were a few like two 16 year-old boys lured back with promises of a promise of the Communist Utopia made at the Soviet embassy in Stockholm—usually ended up in Siberia. Some tried to come back on their own to rescue their families, who had been left behind during the war.

Along with a new “Department of War,” Tartu University acquired departments of Marxist-Leninist Ideology at University Street #16, in the building known as the “Marx House” (formerly the “von Bock House”). The six-columned white façade of the main building of Tartu University, which had survived the war pretty much in tact, was just a few doors down, at University Street #18. The entire length of University Street could be traversed in ten minutes, and none of the places mentioned above (with the exception of the Raadi Cemetery and the ruins

502 Today the building bears a trilingual—Estonian, Chechen, and English (Russian is conspicuously omitted) plaque to its last Soviet Military Commander, General Djokar Dudaev, the shortlived president of an independent Chechnya after the collapse of the Soviet Union.
504 Oskar Elliku and Mihkel Jalaka, who had escaped to Sweden during the War, left Gotland on October 11, 1946 with a motorboat in hopes of rescuing their families who had remained behind on the Estonian island of Saaremaa. They were caught by the Soviet borderpatrol and a Soviet War Tribunal sentenced them on April 14, 1947 to ten years in a labor camp. Since no evidence could be found in the case of Jalaka that would confirm that he was a spy, he was let go. In the case of Oskar Elliku, on the other hand, on account of his participation in the anti-Soviet partisan forces (Omakaitse) during the war, the sentence was carried out in full. Indrek Jürjoo, Pagulus ja Nõukogude Eesti: Vaateid KGB, EKP, ja VEKSA arhiividokumentide põhjal (Tallinn: UMARA, 1996), 81.
of the National Museum across the river) were more than a fifteen minute-walk from one other. For all the changes, Tartu remained a small, intimate European University town.

An important if delayed feature of the semiotic Sovietization of Tartu’s urban space was the renaming of the oldest streets at the heart of the Old Town (Vanalinn) and the reorientation of Tartu away from the town square and the university to a new city center. The feudal names of Tartu’s Old Town streets mostly dated back to Tsarist times. Estonian bourgeois capitalism had not cared enough to change them, though it translated them from German and Russian into Estonian. But the Soviet Union paid much closer attention to this kind of semiotics than the Estonia National Republic ever did. In 1949 the feudal names of Tartu’s streets skipped the capitalist stage in their development to become more appropriately Soviet socialist ones. At the cobblestone center of the Old Town, Alexander I Street (Aleksandri tänav) became Soviet Street, just as the Old Town Square now became Soviet Square. Meat Market Street (Lihaturu tänav) came to honor the Bolshevik Revolution as October Street, while Knight Street (Rüütli tänav) became 21st of June Street to commemorate the date of the alleged Estonian Communist insurrection of 1940. Crown Garden Street (Kroonuaia tänav) became Komsomol Street; Wide street (Lai tänav) became Michurin Street; Monk Street (Munga tänav) became Hachatur Abovian Street, named for the great nineteenth century writer and father of Armenian national literature, who had studied at the University of Dorpat in first half of the nineteenth century.505 A bit further afield, in another part of town, standing side-by-side on Viljandi Street were Miina Härma High School and the elegant brick building that was Tartu University’s oldest Estonian Student Fraternity (founded in 1870). Viljandi street pointed toward the Estonian town of Viljandi; under Soviet rule, however, the fraternities were closed and highschools lost their names and received numbers. Miina Härma High School became Tartu’s “Second Highschool.” And when the Soviet Union put a man in outer space in 1961 Viljandi street became Yuri Gagarin Street.

In the Tähtvere district, designed in interwar Tartu as the “Professor’s District,” the streets bore the names of the first and second generation of the nineteenth-century Estonian intelligentsia. The layout was the work of Arnold Matteus in 1929, shortly after he returned from his years abroad at the Technical University of Karlsruhe and became Tartu’s first ethnically Estonian town architect, replacing Anatoli Podchekaev in 1926.506 Taken together and seen from above the streets of Tähtvere form the pattern of a fish skeleton, capped at one end by the arcing head—Rainbow Street (Vikerkaare tänav)—and at the other by the flat tail, August Hermann Street, celebrating an Estonian composer and encyclopedist, who had studied theology at Tartu University and comparative philology in Leipzig. This was changed under Soviet rule to Johannes Lauristin Street for the martyred Estonian Communist and first secretary of the Estonian Communist Party, killed in 1941. Meanwhile Jakob Hurt street, named for another important Estonian national theologian and philologist, became Eduard Vilde street, paying homage to the Estonian writer, who dramatized nineteenth-century Estonian peasant uprisings against the Baltic German barons in novels like the Mahtra War (Mahtra sõda) (1902) and When the Men of Anja Came to Tallinn (Kui Anja mehed Tallinnas käisid) (1903). 505 Olev Soans, Tartu-Oppidum Universitatis: dedicata est anno jubilaco 350 Almae matris. Map. Tartu: Tartu Linna Täitevkomitee, 1982. From Tartu University Library. 506 “Of Podchekaev, Matteus had only good things to say. In later reflections he wrote: “He came to offer me his sincere assistance and advice. For I was a young architect and still inexperienced in the ways of the town.” “Ta tuli siiralt mulle kui noorele ja linna asjades veel kogenematuile oma nõu ja abi pakkuma.” Arnold Matteus, “Minu Tartu,” Meie Tartu, 31.
Despite these changes many of the these streets of Tähtvere retained their original names under Soviet rule, provided the Estonian writers and intellectuals to whom they referred were not overly theological and could not be construed as anti-Russian. J.V Jannsen Street, L. Koidula Street, C.R. Jakobson Street, F.R. Kreutzwald Street all kept their original names. These were the leading Estonian writers and journalists of the nineteenth-century “National Awakening.” The only woman among them, Lydia Koidula, was the daughter of the author of the Estonian national anthem, J.V. Jannsen, a muse to F.R. Kreutzwald, the author and compiler of the Estonian National Epic, Kalevipoeg, and a collaborator of the radical journalist, C.R Jakobson, who in fact was the first to start calling her “Koidula.” The name “Koidula” had a mythological ring to it, “The Dawn.” She founded the Estonian national theater and was an exceptional poet in her own right, more accomplished in many respects than the men she inspired. From one perspective she was entirely constructed by the men around her; on the other, she was the glue that bound them together into a national movement, since they did not get along with each other.

On the edge of Tähtvere A.H. Tammsaare Street also kept its original name under Soviet rule. It commemorated the author of the great interwar Estonian novel of peasant and urban life, Truth and Justice, which followed a single family from town to country and back again through successive generations spanning from the 19th century into the twentieth in five volumes published between 1928 and 1933. Tammsaare was known above all for giving the most concise expression to the Estonian version of the Protestant work ethic: “Do your work and take care, love will follow.” (“Tee tööd ja näe vaeva, siis tuleb armastus.”) The pagan roots of the Estonian intelligentsia were acknowledged under both national and Soviet rule with main boulevard of Tähtvere, Taara Puiestee (God’s Boulevard). The word “Taara” smacked of earth forces, the power of nature, ancestor worship. “Taara” was the old pagan Estonian word for God before Estonian speakers had been converted to the Judeo-Christian tradition, when God became “Jumal.”

Tähtvere became the home to a good portion of Tartu intelligentsia. It was where Paul Ariste had made his home since at C.R. Jakobsoni 7a. As a professor in interwar Tartu, Uku Masing had purchased an apartment around the corner on the second floor of a newly built house at Jacob Hurt Street #9 in 1938 (which became Eduard Vilde Street under Soviet rule); Valmar Adams moved downstairs immediately after the War, before forcing the Masings to exchange apartments with him. The Tartu University rector Feodor Klement moved into a house just across the street at E. Vilde #5 in 1952. In the 1950s already, Juhan Aul began building his own home in Tähtvere with stolen materials, as reported in extensive diary entries on the subject reveal. Jaak Põldmäe, one of Yuri Lotman’s very few Estonian students, came to live at Kreutzwaldi 20-2. The Lotmans themselves lived in several different apartments in nice parts of Tartu on Kastani Street and Burdenko Street, finally moving to an apartment on the edge of Tähtvere in the 1980s. It is worth noting that while Tartu had a part of town identified with Tartu’s interwar European professoriate (Tähtvere), there was nothing comparable in the urban geography for the elite of the Communist Party, who remained scattered throughout town.

Tartu’s new street names expressed the Soviet order of things in a variety of ways. Some paid homage to the achievements of Soviet science (Michurini tänav). Others evoked Tartu University’s contribution to the Soviet multiethnic “Friendship of the Peoples” (Hachatur Aboviani tänav); the streets of Tähtvere still celebrated the achievements of a national Estonian

507 For a take on her life see Madli Puhvel, Symbol of Dawn: The Life and Times of the 19th-Century Estonian Poet Lydia Koidula (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 1999).
508 See Aul’s diary for a chronicle of his efforts in building his own home.
intelligentsia (Kreutzwaldi, Vilde, Jakobsoni, Koidula, Jannseni tänav). Still others evoked specific Revolutionary events, while a few referred to specifically Soviet forms of intellectual and social organization like the Komsomol. A few expanded Tartu’s horizons beyond the nation, by replacing the names of Estonian towns with more distant Soviet ones, by turning Narva highway into Leningrad highway and reorienting Viljandi Street to the conquest of the cosmos by Soviet rocket science with the name of Yuri Gagarin.

More radical even than renaming of city streets or the installation of new monuments and museums were efforts to reorient Tartu around a new Soviet City-Center at the convergence of Tähe (Star), Võru, and Riia (Riga) Streets, where the new shining bronze statue of Lenin became the centerpiece of Lenin square in 1952. Under the aegis of Estonian Architectural Institute, responsible for restoring and redesigning postwar Tartu, Raul Levrot-Kivi drew up plans for the widening of Riga and Võru streets into majestic boulevards, to be lined with impressive 5-story marble-encrusted and columned Stalinist apartment buildings. They would converge just in front of Lenin Square and the figure of Lenin, who stood in front of the main building of the New Estonian Agricultural Academy (Eesti Põllumajanduse Akadeemia) with seven columns (Tartu University had only six). This was the site of the former “Workers’ Building” that Juhan Smuul had described so evocatively in his report from the front line of Tartu in late-August 1944 as the flaming “Gates of Hell.”

Meanwhile, the old town hall square would be turned into a parking lot. An attempted “transfer of sacrality” was underway in the rearrangement and redefinition of the sacred places of Tartu’s urban geography. Kivi’s article, “The Tartu of the Future” (“Tuleviku Tartu”) appeared in the Tartu Newspaper Edasi [Forward] on September 29, 1954. Here he optimistically laid out the project he was helping to design and implement as a leading town urban planner. In the very first lines he located the transformation of Tartu in the larger scheme of the transformation of all across the cities of the Soviet Union:

The cities of the Soviet Union are full of far-reaching activity. Residential buildings and urban ensembles rise up street by street and urban quarter by urban quarter. Everywhere we find ourselves—whether at Lenin Hills or Gorki Street in Moscow, Stalin-Prospect in Leningrad, or Kreshchatyk Street in Kiev—we are struck by the beauty and majesty that Soviet people (nõukogude inimesed) have brought into being in such a short period of time.

Tartu too is in the throes of brisk construction. Here all the conditions are right for the making of a socialist town with unique, interesting ensembles. In addition to its important institutions of higher learning that have had an important influence on shaping

509 Arial photograph from 1978 shows the old townsquare as a parking lot. Kivi, 58; a Tartu Guidebook from 1974 represents depicts the Old Baroque Town Hall in the background standing behind a town square filled with parked cars. J. Lott, Tartu (Tallinn Periodika, 1974)
511 Inspired by Durkheim, Mona Ozouf uses this term to evoke the purpose and function of the Festivals of the French Revolution—i.e. to effect a “transfer of sacrality… thus defining a new legitimacy and a hitherto inviolate patrimony, in which the cult of mankind and the religion of the social bond, the bounty of industry, and the future of France would coexist.” Mona Ozouf, Festivals and the French Revolution (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 282.
512 Tartu Newspaper, Edasi (Forward)—formerly Postimees -
its urban structures and its classical cultural inheritance, Tartu also possesses very good natural conditions.\footnote{“Nõukogudemaa linnades toimub laiaulatuslik tegevus. Kvartalite ja tänavate kaupa kerkivad elamute ja ühiskondlike hoonete grupid. Kuhu me ka ei satuks—kas Lenini mägedele või Gorki tänavale Moskvas, Stalini-nimelisele prospektile Leningrads või Kreštšatikule Kievis—kõikjal hämmastab meid see ilu ja suurejoonelisus, mida nõukogude inimesed on loonud lühikese aja jooksul./ Ka Tartus käib vilgas ehitustöö. Siin on olemas häid tingimusi selleks, et ülikooliliinast kujundada omapäraste, huvitavate ansamblitega sotsialistlik linn. Peale kõrgemate õppeasutuste kui tähtsate linna kujunduvate struktuuride ja klassistikliku kultuuripärandi omab Tartu veel väga häid looduslikke tingimusi.” Raul Levroit-Kivi, “Tuleviku Tartu” Edasi 29. September 1954 as qtd in Tartu planeerimisest ja arhitektuurist, 7.}

Novelty and newness were the order of the day. And Kivi’s article was full of these sentiments: “A few more years will go by and soon Tartu will be unrecognizable.”\footnote{“Mööduvad veel mõned aastad ning praegune Tartu muutub tundmatuseni.” Kivi, “Tuleviku,” 13.} This was the same expression used to introduce the town of Tartu in the 1952 documentary film, 150 Years of Tartu University: “Tartu has changed beyond recognition” (“Tartu on tundmatuseni muutunud”).\footnote{150 aastat Tartu Ülikooli.} From the ruined ashes of the Vanemuine theater Kivi promised, there would “rise in accord with the new plan a beautiful, much larger theater building.”\footnote{“Kerkib uue projekti kohaselt kaunis, oma mõõtmetelt suurem teatrihoone.” Kivi, “Tuleviku,” 13.} Soon under conditions that were only possible in “our society,” declared Kivi, “the Tartu of the future would become more harmonious and more beautiful than ever.”\footnote{…………muutub tuleviku Tartu terviklikumaks ja kaunimaks kui kunagi varem.” Kivi, “Tuleviku,” 13.} The exultation at total transformation, and the prospect of forgetting the past entirely can be found as late as 1970 in a German-language guidebook to Tartu published in Tallinn: “The old Tartu can no longer be recognized.”\footnote{“Das ehemalige Tartu ist nicht mehr wiedezuerkennen.” A. Suur, Reiseführer Durch Tartu (Tallinn: Verlag “Eesti Raamat,” 1970), 5.}

The most profound transformation of urban space—delayed a bit with respect to comparable transformation of Tallinn—was the construction of Annelinn, a typical Soviet “mikrorajoon” consisting of identical apartment buildings composed of prefabricated materials on the far side of the Ema River. While Tallinn had been transformed beginning in the 1950s already with three enormous and predominantly Russian speaking zones of prefabricated and identical apartment buildings (mikrorajooni)—Õismäe, Lasnamäe, and Mustamäe—which came to accommodate more than half the city’s population, and the vast majority of its imported Russian-speaking “proletarian workforce,” it wasn’t until the 1970s that Tartu got a comparable zone on the far side of the Ema River.

Still, over time the spirit of fundamental change was offset and complicated by growing attention to the past. In many ways, there were two Tartus, and they were growing apart. Emblematic of this growing division, the Tourist office at Magasin tn. 12, offered guests two separate walking tours of the town: (1) Historical Tartu and (2) Socialist Tartu.\footnote{Suur, Tartu Reiseführer, 134.} The cover of an Estonian guidebook to Tartu in 1974 features parked cars in the foreground and the old baroque 18th-century town hall in the background. It is divided into two sections addressing first “Past Tartu” and “Present and Future Tartu,” which is full of representations of modern technology, even a section devoted to Tartu’s participation in the Soviet Friendship of the Peoples, noting that Tartu has special ties with its sister cities of Kaunas and Leninakan, and that
the automobile factories in both places have learned much from each other. The stark juxtaposition of ancient past and space-age future is best revealed in a picture of the red brick ruins of Dorpat’s ancient Cathedral (dating back to the thirteenth century) with the sleek aluminum domes of a new Tõravere observatory out in the Tartu countryside on facing pages.

At the time his first article was published, Kivi was still a relative newcomer in Tartu. He moved his family from Tallinn to Tartu in 1951. He celebrated the plans for transformation; later articles reflected frustration at the inability to effect meaningful change; and over the years the growing influence of the Tartu spirit seemed to exert itself: such that within a decade or two, he too had become a Tartu patriot defending the University town against those who were too eager to make it into something it was not, speaking out on behalf of preserving the organic coherence of the University even against some (like rector Feodor Klement—tahe hero of the Lotman circle) who were happy to see it dispersed.

Some of Kivi’s design for the environs of Lenin Square became a reality. The impressive five-story buildings were built, but only on one side of the street. They were more modest than the drawing, without all the classical columns and capitals in the drawings. And they did not have the symmetry and balance that would have made a coherent ensemble. Lenin Square, with its tall buildings and wide roads and sidewalks, remained too impersonal and big and open to replace the intimate Town Square at the old center of town, and remained largely empty. For some reason Tartu never managed to fulfill the Soviet plan, always falling short of the desired result. The apparent frustration of Tartu’s town planners in their failure to transform Tartu can be heard over the course of the following decade. Just six years after his article predicting total transformation in the “Tartu of the Future,” the architect Raul Levroit-Kivi wrote an article entitled “The Daily Worries of Tartu Architects” (“Tartu arhitektide päevamuredest”): “As an important center of scholarship and science and a growing factory town the difficulties and worries of building stem from the general plan which was prepared ten years ago. In attempting to implement it, it quickly became clear that actual life went its own way, and in many ways did not adhere to the plan. The Gen-Plan did not in reality become the documentary basis for the rebuilding of the city.”

2. Transforming the Future: New Ideological Consciousness

For Stephen Kotkin, the Soviet state is best understood as a “a kind of theocracy,” a Party-State where the Party was responsible for political and ideological guidance, overseeing and regulating the administrative institutions and functions of the State, but ultimately remaining separate from them. This was a division of labor that extended all the way down to the

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521 Lott, see glossy pictures between pages 32 and 33.
522 Kivi, 75-6.
524 “Because the party was not an administrative organ, this practice of duplication remained the case long after the notion of providing ideological guidance lost its luster. Binding decisions had to be issued and implemented, at least formally, in the name of the government or the state (soviet). In short, both parts of the party-state were functional, but their functions were different: whereas the state’s role was defined in terms of competent technical and economic administration, the party’s was defined in terms of ideological and political guidance. Such a bifurcated
organization of Soviet self-knowledge on the deepest institutional and epistemological level—the divide between the State (GARF) and Party (RGASPI) archives in Moscow. The Party’s role was to sacralize the State, to make it meaningful and legitimate. In a study of the Communist Party from 1968, T.H Rigby observed that its “basic function […] is one of transformation, the creation of new institutions, new techniques and a new man, with a new morality and new beliefs” and “at any particular point in time it is an integrating function, giving meaning to the parts and coherence to the whole.”\textsuperscript{525} In the 1920s, it “was party schools—more Marxist, more communist, and more proletarian than the old [universities]—which claimed the mantle of revolution,” and took the leading role in producing a new, specifically Bolshevik intelligentsia and science.\textsuperscript{526} They spread their ideas and graduates across the educational institutions of the realm, helping to strengthen the Party as both a body of people and a body of ideas. By 1968, however, when Rigby’s study appeared, the Party’s future as the intellectual and social vanguard of Soviet society seemed uncertain:

[W]hat changes in the way the party exercises its ‘leading and directing’ role are required by the transformation of the Soviet Union into a complex industrialized society? In more and more areas of Soviet life, effective decision making is coming to mean professional decision making, and this is clearly incompatible with detailed supervision and control by party officials or by the “party masses.”\textsuperscript{527}

Nowhere was the power of the Party to integrate society, sacralize the state, and give meaning to the world less self-evident and under greater strain than in the Baltic States: Europe’s last Christians would also be Soviet Union’s last Bolsheviks. Of all the national republics in the USSR, Soviet Estonia had the fewest “titular nationals” (i.e. Estonians) as Party cadres in both absolute and proportional terms, the worst competence in Russian (which actually declined between 1970 and 1980 according to the official Soviet census), and the best claim on an alternative vision of universal culture embodied and symbolized by the Soviet Union’s least Soviet and most European University.

The tension between national multiplicity and ideological uniformity at the core of the Soviet experiment—which Tartu University continually provoked—cannot be overstated. In the spirit of medieval European scholasticism—which was also in some sense the spirit of Soviet intellectual life—the particular served the universal, not the other way around. The words of Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), grasp the Soviet orientation to knowledge with remarkable self-reflexive clarity: “I believe in order that I may know, I do not know in order to believe.”\textsuperscript{528} Whatever people actually thought, this was the official Soviet attitude and orientation toward knowledge from beginning to end. Just as there was no knowledge without the Church in Medieval Europe, in the Soviet Union there was no knowledge without the political system, with the party analogous to a church, resembled a kind of theocracy.” Kotkin, Magnetic Mountain, 287.


\textsuperscript{526} “There is a reciprocal relationship between institutions and revolutions: “Just as revolutionary missions may lead to the creation of new institutions, those new institutions may in turn shape revolutionary missions, channeling and, in a sense, re-creating them”” For a discussion of the role of Party schools in general, and these three institutions in particular, in making the thought and people of the Bolshevik intelligentsia see Michael David-Fox, \textit{Revolution of the Mind: Higher Learning Among the Bolsheviks, 1918-1929} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 25.

\textsuperscript{527} T.H. Rigby, 525.

\textsuperscript{528} Haskins, \textit{Universities}, 70.
Everybody has something to learn at the University. Here is a discussion of Marxist-Leninist philosophy. The auditors are professors and lecturers. They are aware that no scientific branch of learning can successfully progress unless it is founded on the unshakeable foundation of dialectical materialism. The teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin have become the worldview of the people, our vital guiding force. No previous generation has shown this level of interest in philosophy.\(^{529}\)

In other words, the Soviet scholar—like the medieval scholastic—believed in order to know; he did not know in order to believe. There was nothing scholarship could teach anyone—and this was established \textit{a priori}—that could possibly shake the intellectual foundations of the Soviet state in all the depths of its Marxist-Leninist faith.

The vexed relationship between national-particularism and the international-universalism in the Soviet periphery reveals itself in a close reading of this documentary film. The true Marxist-Leninist faith that had arrived in the newly acquired Baltic periphery after the Second World War was an international and universal phenomenon without any kind of national coloring. There was no suggestion in the excerpt quoted above that Marxism-Leninism had a specifically Russian national character. But the historical process by which this universal faith had come to Estonia owed much to the Russian nation. For Marxism-Leninism was not something that Estonians had learned on their own. The confident overvoice of the Estonian narrator stressed the historical role of Tartu University’s Russians—long before the arrival of Marxism-Leninism—in importing universal Enlightenment knowledge that liberated Estonia from the shackles of Baltic-German serfdom; thus both good and evil were nationalized in the Soviet narrative of 1952 and the arrival of Marxism-Leninism followed a pattern exhibited by other universal ideas at Tartu University: they were first introduced and advocated by Russian-speaking scientists. The ones emphasized in the film included Nikolai Pirogov, Alexander Burdenko, and some students of Ivan Pavlov. The particular national greatness of Russia was its status as the foremost missionary of universal science, which had been enabled by the universal faith of Marxism-Leninism. Without Russia there would be no Communism in Tartu—or the world for that matter. And without Communism—as was stated in the excerpt quoted above—there could be no scientific knowledge and no progress.

The Soviet story has generally been told from the perspective of the State and Party archives (GARF and RGASPI) in Moscow. When provincial archives are used—as they are in other postcolonial studies—they seldom speak in their own languages or pose their own questions. They are rather used to answer questions that have already been formulated at the center. One of the aims in this study is to let the Soviet periphery speak in its own voice (and language), and formulate its own questions of the Soviet experiment, without having those questions and research agendas approved and vetted by the center. But first it would be important to see the ways in which the center changed the periphery. Thus, the guiding question of this section is how was the Soviet experiment translated from Russian into Estonian?

\(^{529}\) 150. aastat Tartu Ülikooli, directed by Nikolai Dolinski (1952; Tallinn, Estonia: Tallinn Kinostuudio, 2007), DVD.
The official story of Tartu State University—like the story of the Estonian SSR itself—was one of fraternal unity and relentless progress in the service of the Soviet bureaucratic and ideological goals. And some of the most ardent and articulate spokesmen for these goals in the Estonian periphery were Russian-born and Soviet-educated ethnic Estonian scholars at the Academy of Sciences in Tallinn. The most prominent Russian-born Estonian at the Academy of Sciences in Tallinn after the War was the Estonian philosopher and physicist, Gustav Naan (1919—1994). Born in Vladivostok, to a family of Estonian émigrés, he fought during the War in the Red Army and joined the Communist Party in 1943. He served as Director of the Institute of History at the Estonian Academy of Sciences for one year (1950-1951), before becoming the Vice-President of the Academy as a whole from 1951-1964. He took over the editorship of the Estonian Soviet Encyclopedia; he wrote of cosmology, cybernetics, and demography, and published some of the first Stalinist histories of Estonia. For a while in the 1960s and 70s he was admired as a progressive figure by Estonia’s youth, but in the 1980s he appeared as a reactionary again. In Russia he achieved a certain degree of All-Union recognition Soviet state in the 1940s, when he published a few controversial articles on philosophy in the Moscow journal (Voprosy Filosofii).

Viktor Maamägi (1917-2000) was another one of the Russian-born Estonians employed to translate the intellectual and linguistic goals of Sovietization into Estonian. He had studied history at Leningrad University with Evgenii Tarle and came to Estonia after the Second World War—like many other Leningrad Estonians who survived the Great Terror—to participate in the Sovietization of the Soviet Union’s newly acquired national territory. From 1951 to 1968 he took over leadership of the Institute of History at the Soviet Estonian Academy of Sciences in Tallinn from Gustav Naan (the two were never on good terms), and remained an important Soviet Estonian Academic thereafter.530 In a 1981 monograph on the Estonian ethnic minority in the Soviet Union from 1917—1940 (the minority to which he and Naan both belonged) Maamägi explained the relationship between national identity and Soviet internationalism in Soviet Estonia:

Like the river, which upon arriving at the sea and takes on its qualities, character, and strength, so too the Soviet minorities, who lack their own territory, in a different national environment will lose over time and naturally, freely, without force their particular character and will make the language and manner of life of the surrounding inhabitants their own. This phenomenon, which affected the Estonian minority after the October Revolution, is the product of transnational merging and national assimilation, which is born “only of the free and brotherly union of proletarians of all nations and the proletarian masses.”531

530 He is remembered sympathetically by the interwar Estonian historian Ea Jansen (1921-2005), as someone who did his best to defend others from the violence of the Soviet bureaucratic system. However, as a Bolshevik missionary he remained foreign to the nation he tried to convert. See Marika Mikli, “Vestlus Ea Janseniga,” Vikerkaar 1995, nr. 5/6, 153-162.

In other Soviet Republics, the majority of the descendants of the Estonian diaspora had gone over entirely to using Russian, though some Estonian-language publications still existed in the Caucasus.\textsuperscript{532} Even in contemporary Estonia, home to 90% of the Soviet Union’s one million ethnic Estonians, Russian was gaining ground as the transnational glue that held the Soviet Union together and led to international progress in science and knowledge:

The Russian language dominates right now as a transnational medium of communication. This makes communication possible between all the nations of the USSR. With the help of the Russian language, knowledge is acquired and enriched, while the Estonian language is used in the family circle, sometimes too in conversations among fellow workers from our nation.\textsuperscript{533}

Ultimately, the achievements of the Soviet Union were the achievements of the multinational Soviet state, not the achievements of any one of its nations (this seemed in some ways like a return to the internationalist Soviet rhetoric of the 1920s). As Leonid Brezhnev stressed at the 25\textsuperscript{th} Party Congress in 1976, the greatest achievement of the Soviet Union in the last sixty years had been the creation of a new “Soviet person,” somebody who would not be defined by ethnicity, at least not in Viktor Maamägi’s Estonian translation of this Russian ideal. This was

a person, who, having taken freedom in hand, managed to protect it in the most difficult of battles. A person, who, having survived all trials, is changed beyond recognition, has combined in himself the intellectual conviction and incredible life-energy, culture, and knowledge and capacity to use them. This is a person, who is a sincere patriot \textit{[of what? The entire Soviet Union or Estonia?} Official Soviet discourse in Estonia from the 1980s did its best to avoid the question —DB], and at the same time has always been and will always be a committed internationalist.\textsuperscript{534}

The celebration of “change beyond recognition” was a leitmotif of postwar Sovietization in Estonia. It appeared in documentary films from the 1950s, Estonian travel-guide from the 1970s, even in scholarly monographs like this one from 1981. At the same time the ideal of a “new Soviet person” revived in Brezhnev’s speeches, were translated here by Maamägi into Estonian.

\textit{i. Proselytizing the New Bolshevik Faith in Soviet Estonia}


\textsuperscript{534} “Inimene, kes, olles võtnud käte vabaduse, suusis seda kaitsa kõige raskemates lahingutes. Inimene, kes on rajanud tuleviku, süüatud jõudu ja kartata mis tahes ohvriid. Inimene, kes, olles teinud läbi kõik kasumused, on ise tundmatuseeni muutunud, ühendunud endas ideedel veendumuse ja tohutu eluenergia, kultuuri, teadmised ja nende rakendamise oskuse. See on inimene, kes olles tuliühingeline patriot, on alati olnud ja on ka edaspidi järjekindel internatisionalist.” Maamägi, \textit{Uut elu ehitamas}, 181.
In the first years of Sovietization the neoclassical University Chapel, just behind the main building was poured full of concrete and secularized as the University archive. But religion did not die so quickly in Soviet Tartu. In 1967, Lembit Raid, an instructor at Tartu University’s Department of Marxism-Leninism published a report summarizing the struggle with traditional forms of Christian religiosity in Soviet Estonian in the transactions of Tartu State University:

So strong was the influence of church confirmation in [the late 1940s] that even some ideologically insecure members of the Komsomol, as well as a few students at institutions of higher learning, participated. Some young newly appointed teachers, graduates of pedagogical institutions, only recently appointed to their posts, also let themselves be pulled along.

Vello Salo—an Estonian refugee to Rome and a convert to Catholicism—speculated from abroad that statistically speaking in the 1970s, “[a]lthough it is impossible to give an exact figure for the number of believers, we may be sure that Christianity, not communism, is the largest popular ideological movement in Soviet Estonia, embracing at least one-fourth of the population.” Statistically, at least, this was true, since less than 10% of the population belonged to the Communist Party.

From 1953 to 1957 annual participation in Lutheran Confirmation rose from 3,500 to 9,200. Still, the state found ways of combating rising religiosity. Komsomol “Summer Days”—Lutheran in form, Atheist and Socialist in content—were instituted in 1958 to help spread state ideology among youth. They borrowed the form of traditional Lutheran Confirmation coming-of-age ceremonies, down to the white dresses and elbow length gloves worn by the young women at the closing ceremonies. Teenagers were given certificates, written in elegantly illuminated red-gold-and black Caligraphy announcing their entry into the brave new world of Soviet adulthood and made aware of their civic responsibilities as newly minted Soviet citizens. Just such a certificate issued in Estonian from the Kingisepp Region near Narva can serve as a representative example:

Dear Friend!

You have become an adult. From now on you have all the rights of a Soviet citizen and you carry all responsibilities of a Soviet citizen as well. You are one of those, who with your own hands is building Communism.

You are taking the reins from the previous generation. On this festive day remember that good fortune never comes without effort. Find your rightful place in the constructive work of our people, in our struggle for happiness. In your studies as well as your work be a worthy successor to those who have opened for you all doors to tomorrow.

If your heart remains eternally young, if you love your Soviet homeland unconditionally, if you are honest and brave – then you will triumph over all hardships.

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In 1958 there had been 8,400 participants in Lutheran Confirmation, but only 2,299 attended the Komsomol Summer Days. Over the next decade the statistical trend toward greater religiosity was reversed. In 1971, there were only 500 Lutheran Confirmations, but 10,000 participants in the Soviet Summer Days. Indeed, between 1958 and the collapse of the Soviet Union nearly 100,000 youths attended these Soviet Estonian Youth Summer Camps.

The concerted effort to combat traditional religiosity by appropriating Lutheran ceremonies, methods, and paraphernalia preoccupied Tartu University as well. In January 1968, the University’s Communist Party Organization discussed the difficulties they faced in spreading atheism among the student body. The Agricultural Academy on Riga Street and Tartu University had established a joint “Atheist Club” in 1967. But it was not particularly popular. One of the problems, observed B. Maiste, in gauging the power of traditional religious beliefs was that “the believer does not openly reveal his worldview.” The head of Tartu’s Department of Marxism-Leninist Philosophy, Mikhail Makarov, observed that when Anatoli Mitt had offered an obligatory lecture course on atheism, nobody actually showed up to the final exam. Jaan Riiv, from Tartu’s faculty of medicine, proposed the following solution:

We need to find new forms of approach. Abroad they organize dance evenings at church, to pull in the youth, and so on. We need to find new approaches too. For example the various faculties could organize atheism evenings. This would bring the university students together. Every faculty has its own dance bands.

3. Transforming the Past: The Role of National Memory in Bolshevik Piety

The binary character of the Soviet experiment is especially pronounced in official attitudes toward the past. The absolutism of Bolshevik interpretations was coupled with absolute changes of mind. Thus, the heroes of one moment became the villains of the next, and sometimes disappeared from the narrative entirely. The most dramatic case in point might be the 1974 edition of the Short History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Somehow the authors and editors managed to write a 350-page history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union without a single mention of Stalin or Nikita Krushchev, as if they had never existed. The villainous Trotsky and heroic Lenin were very much in evidence by contrast, and Leonid Brezhnev was quoted directly. The first edition of this work had been first published on the
initiative of Nikita Krushchev in 1962 to replace Stalin’s famous *Short Course* of 1938, a kind of “Bible of Communism” as some contemporaries called it, translated into sixty-six languages, with nearly forty-four million copies printed in Russia alone. With the repudiation of Stalin, these forty-four million copies of absolute truth suddenly became forty-four millions copies of absolute error and falsity. Another important feature of the 1974 *Short History* was its tendency, like many of the first works of the Soviet experiment, to refer to humanity in the singular. One subsection bore the title: “Education of the New Man,” another, “All for the good of Man.”

The internal multiethnic character of the Soviet Union was almost invisible in its account of the present moment, even though the international aspect of national struggles against imperialism in other parts of the world occupied a prominent place. There was little room for national memory in this particular expression of Bolshevik piety. National memories mattered wherever there was injustice. Wherever injustice had been overcome nationalism was irrelevant to the higher ideological purpose of the Soviet Union.

This was the view from the center in 1974. In the periphery, of course, nationality mattered more in official histories of the Communist Party, but only as form, never as content. And the challenge for any Latvian, Georgian, or Uzbek Soviet historian was to inscribe his nation into the Soviet experiment in such a way that it might become an indisputable part of the ideological project, in the spirit of Victor Maamägi’s metaphor, quoted above, of tributaries combining and intermingling as they flow down to the sea.

Some of the monuments and figures of Tartu’s past were absorbed into the Soviet present and vision of the future; others were adapted or replaced to make them more suitable to Soviet sensibilities. The statue of the muscular hero of the Estonian national epic, Kalevipoeg, leaning upon his sword, was removed from his pedastel on the banks of the Ema river. Apparently he had been facing in the wrong direction, antagonizing Russia. This would not do. But the national hero was an important part of the form of the Estonian nation. So he was replaced with a new statue of his author, Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald, installed near the same location. A photograph taken in 1952 shows the professor of Finno-Ugric languages, Paul Ariste, delivering a speech at the ceremonial unveiling of the new monument. Tartu’s new and transformed museums included the State Ethnographic Museum of the ESSR on Burdenko (formerly Veski) Street #32 and the Tartu State Art Museum. One of the last and most explicitly Soviet shrines to be established in Tartu was the apartment museum of Lenin’s little brother, Dmitri Ulianov. He had studied at the medical faculty of Iur’ev (Tartu) from 1900-1902. His former rooms at Burdenko street #61 were restored to their earlier state and pronounced a museum. The ceremonial unveiling of a plaque took place at 3pm on September 15, 1982 in connection with the larger celebration of the 350th anniversary of Tartu University.

For Tartu University, August 1944 was zero hour, the end of the old world, the beginning of the new. And memoirs published in the 1960s, 70s and 80s recorded how Tartu scholars gave their lives and their university world-historical purpose in the context of the Bolshevik transformation of Tartu University and Estonia. The act of writing memoirs and recording oral histories and interviews to be published or preserved to this day in Tartu University’s Library

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543 *A Short History*, 309 and 310.
545 “At 3 p.m. [on September 15, 1982] an apartment-museum was officially opened in the house in Burdenko street where V.I. Lenin’s younger brother Dmitri Ulyanov lived when he was a student of the University.” *History of Tartu University, 1632-1982* (Tallinn: Perioodika, 1985), 272; *Tartu Reiseführer*, 77
and archives were professions of piety. The official focus, especially for those Estonian Bolshevik-Intellectuals who went on to make careers in Tallinn remained the Soviet state, sacralized by its world-historical purpose. This forward-looking spirit and attitude can be heard in a 1965 collection of memoirs, *From Yesterday to Today*, published to honor the twenty-fifth anniversary of the incorporation of Estonia into the Soviet Union. Several of the featured writers were former “June Communists,” that is members of the Estonian intelligentsia who had joined the party around the time of the Soviet takeover in June 1940, moved from Tartu to Tallinn, and played an important role in the first phases of the Sovietization of Estonia. The literary scholar, translator of German literature, and first Soviet Estonian Foreign Minister, Nigol Andresen (1899-1985), wrote his own account of his experience of the June days of 1940, quoting the words of the first Soviet Prime Minister, Johannes Vares: “We feel now, that in the course of a few days we have grown into adults, that we too are making history.”

A similar tone can be found in the memoirs of Johannes Semper, the literary scholar and translator of French literature, and first Soviet Estonian Education Minister. He looked all the way back to February Revolution of 1917 to find the break with the past, stressing the failure of the overly refined scholarly types and politicians of the previous regime to grasp the simple truth of the momentous change happening before their eyes:

I remember from among these figures, the last bourgeois Prime Minister [in 1940, Jüri Uluots]. [Before the 1917 Revolution] he had received a scholarship to study at the University of Saint Petersburg. At the time of the February Revolution he spent all his time estranged from the outer world digging through Roman law alone in his room. He did not go outside; he had no clue about the Revolution. One day when he finally ventured into town he saw the courthouse on fire. The surrounding area was strewn with acts and documents. Some people were angrily trying to throw them into the fire.

As he later confessed to me, he was very deeply shaken. How is this possible? What will become of law and right if documents are destroyed this way? Very well, this is a revolution, but what is the legal basis of this revolution? There will be disorder, anarchy, chaos…

Semper was overstating the distance between the old and the new. Both the last Prime Minister of interwar bourgeois Estonia (the lawyer-journalist, Jüri Uluots) and the first Prime Minister of Soviet Estonia (the gynecologist-poet, Johannes Vares), had been members of his own highschool class in Pärnu in 1910. But Semper took the opportunity to practice Bolshevik piety in singing the praises of the untutored masses, who understood what remained impenetrable to

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546 “Meie tunneme nüüd, et mõne päevaga oleme meie kasvanud suureks, et meiegi teeme ajalugu.” *Eilsest tänasesse: Mälestuste kogumik [From Yesterday to Today]* (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1965), 64.


the more refined legal intellect of Jüri Uluots: “But what about the people? They greeted the turn with enthusiasm. They understood the law of revolution very well.”

Some of the boldest expressions of Bolshevik piety came from Hans Kruus (1891–1976), Estonia’s first professional national historian and first translator of Marxist literature (from Russian) during his student days at the Tartu Teacher’s Seminary in 1905. Kruus became the first Soviet rector of Tartu University in 1940, and at the same time the acting-deputy Prime Minister of Estonia’s first Soviet Government under the Prime Minister Johannes Vares in 1940. He had followed the Bolshevik retreat to Moscow during the Nazi Occupation in 1941–1944, and in 1971 he published a collection of his wartime writings under the title: *Together With the History of My People in the Great Patriotic War* [Koos ona rahva ajalooga Suures Isamasõjas] (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1971). In his introduction, he went even further than Semper and Andresen in attempting to embed Estonian history in Soviet history. He noted that he had lectured in many different places during the War—Iaroslav, Sverdlovsk, Cheliabinsk and Egorevski—mostly to Estonian Party and Workers Organizations of Russia on Estonian history. He took special pride in the part he had played in raising Soviet awareness of the great events of Estonian national history, like the 14th-century Saint George’s Night Uprising, when peasants had risen up against their Baltic German landlords. The 600th hundredth anniversary of the Saint George’s Night uprising found its way onto a Russian Wall calendar on April 23, 1943. Five million copies of the calendar were printed. A piece of Estonian national history thus became a piece of Soviet international history. Of this and other such moments, Hans Kruus remarked: “All these revelations raised the awareness of other Soviet nations about the Estonian nation, popularized it, and increased its authority.”

In the 1970s and 80s the memoirs embedded the story of Tartu State University as well in the story of the Soviet State and its promise of Communism. When he was appointed assistant to the University’s new Administrative Pro-Rector (haldusprorektor), Gerhard Rägo, after the War, Anatoli Mitt took responsibility for the physical restoration of Tartu University. The concluding lines of Mitt’s memoir, composed in 1977 shortly before his own death show the extent to which he tied the meaning of his own life to the small, but important role he played in the salvation of Tartu University in the autumn months of 1944. It is emblematic of many of the memoirs composed at the time, that he dedicated them even as committed Bolshevik to Tartu University:

> The university student who in 1944 walked among the blackened ruins of the dark Tartu streets, where wind blew fine ash into his eyes, the student who clattered about in cruelly burned houses and piles of debris, could not then imagine under what nice and favorable circumstances one day his children would study at the University.


549 *Eilsest tänaseesse: Mälestuste kogumik* [From Yesterday to Today] (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1965).


A prosperous future to you, alma mater Tartuensis!  

Similarly, the historian, Hilda Moosberg, who arrived in Tartu from Leningrad for the first time in 1945 to oversee the Sovietization of Tartu University’s department of history, dedicated the memoirs she composed shortly before her death in 1985, *From Neva Town to Ema River Town*, “to the History Department of Tartu State University.”

Thirty years after the ceremonial inauguration of Tartu State University on November 17, 1944, Tartu’s first Bolsheviks assembled together one last time in the *Aula* of the University to be commemorated by their successors in Estonia’s current Communist elite. Mitt evoked the scene:

On the 16th of November 1974 the University of Tartu celebrated the 30th anniversary of its reopening. The student orchestra played and the women’s choir sang on the balcony of the *Aula*. An honor guard stood at attention wearing their university student caps, keeping watch over the memorial plaque in honor of the faculty, students, and staff fallen in the Great Patriotic War and the years of [Nazi] Occupation.

It was in some ways a ritual repetition of the ceremony on November 17, 1944: the same songs, the same poses, the same list of martyred victims of Nazi terror. It was the meeting and intermingling of two generations, past and present, a transfer of symbolic authority, a gesture of ideological and academic continuity. To be honored were the three surviving members of Tartu University’s first Communist Party organization from the Fall of 1944: the Estonian historian and first rector of Tartu State University, Hans Kruus, the biologist and first Prorector of Pedagogy, Harald Haberman, and the Soviet historian and first Party Secretary of Tartu State University, Lydia Roots. They were joined at the front of the *Aula* by leading members of Estonia’s current Communist elite, the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party, Johannes Käbin, the first secretary of Tartu’s Town Committee Party Organization, Johannes Lott, the current rector of Tartu University, Arnold Koop, the University’s Party Secretary J. Reimand, and the secretary of the Komsomol, T. Koldits.

The memoirs of the 1970s and 1980s, like the anniversary celebration of the reopening of Tartu University in November 1974, demonstrate the persistant and even growing cultural power of the events of 1944 in the decades to come. The act of writing memoirs and recording oral histories and interviews preserved to this day in Tartu University’s Library and archives were professions of piety. And together with public events and ceremonies, they deserve to be considered among the rites of cultural transformation by which Tartu University’s first

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Bolsheviks attempted to effect a “transfer of sacrality” from the age-old memories and practices of Tartu’s European past to the Soviet traditions of the present. But interspersed and interwoven with this story was very different one.

6.2.2 The New Bolshevik Disorder and Its Extent: Violence, Chaos, Fear, and Horror

There is another story one could tell about the Sovietization of Tartu. Behind the official optimism of the Bolshevik transformation of Tartu lurked the hidden fact of state-sponsored violence out of proportion to anything that Tartu had ever experienced before. This violence touched everyone: in a country where one tenth of the population was deported and one tenth fled abroad, almost every family had at least one relative (and most had more) who had fled to the west or ended up in the Camps. Either fate was enough to make one an “enemy of the people.” In March 1949, some 700 Estonian “kulaks” were deported to Siberia from Tartu, and 3200 more from the surrounding countryside. (This social purge was the direct sequel to the political purge of 1941, which resulted in more than 1000 deportees). The deportations were a taboo topic in Soviet discourse, so absent from the official narrative of the Bolshevik transformation of Tartu, which blamed everything unpleasant on the Nazis.557 Another major purge in 1950 at the eighth Plenum of the Estonian Communist Party in Tallinn eliminated seventy-six Tartu professors and lecturers from a faculty of only 400. Tartu University was the hardest hit of all the educational establishments in Soviet Estonia: purges of other institutions led to further losses.558 Thus, in the course of ten short years from 1940 to 1950, Soviet Estonia recapitulated the three great purges with their corresponding bouts of violence—political, social, and cultural—that had produced Soviet Russia over the course of the first twenty years of the Bolshevik Revolution: (1) the political purge of military and political elites and Red Terror in the first years of the Revolution; (2) the social purge of collectivization and dekulakization in the late 1920s; and (3) the purge of cultural and national elites in The Great Terror in the late 1930s. In Soviet Tartu this violence was an integral part of the more general chaos and confusion of the 1940s and 50s and deserves to be situated in this wider context to see its profoundly disruptive nature.

For most of Western Europe World War Two ended in 1945. For the Baltic World it dragged on into the mid-1950s. The incorporation of Tartu University into the Soviet Union was the most radical and violent, if also most explicitly bilingual episode in its long history of facilitating the intellectual and cultural exchange of mutually foreign worlds. It was also the most ambiguous legally. Most Western States and the European Court of Human Rights never formally recognized the political incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union, a fact underscored by the endurance of partisan resistance to Soviet rule long after it had died out everywhere else.559 Thus, by international law as well as social experience, the Baltic world

557 For a comprehensive analysis of the demographic and social aspects of the deportations from Tartu town and county in March 1949 see Aigi Rahi-Tamm, 1949. aasta märtsiküüditamine Tartu linnas ja maakonnas (Tartu: Kleio 1998), 7.
558 Lembit Raid, Vaevatee, 265; TÜA III, 196.
559 “Apart from the Baltic States, opposition was scattered and ineffectual.” Mark Mazower, Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century (New York: Random House, 1998), 254. See also Ineta Ziemele, State Continuity and Nationality: The Baltic States and Russia (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2005); for a wonderful discussion of the dynamics of the War on the Western Front of the Soviet Union with the various combatants involved see
became the Soviet Union’s preeminent liminal space. One of the earliest members of the Estonian dissident movement, Tartu-born Kalju Mätik (b. 1932), remembered his first trip to Russia in 1951 shortly after finishing highschool, where he overheard two young Russians in Kazan discussing future career options: one mentioned to the other that he was considering the possibility of enrolling at the KGB school. The other discouraged him: “They might send you to Lithuania. There is a war going on there.”

ii. Ongoing Upheaval and Social Trauma in the Soviet Wild West

Though it was most effective in Lithuania, Baltic armed resistance from within led by Baltic partisans (metsavennad) continued until 1954 in Estonia and Latvia as well. Less than a year after November 1944, when three mass graves were dug near the ruins of the Raadi Manor in Tartu, the monument of a Soviet soldier, machinegun in hand, was be installed to stand watch over them. The Forest Brothers blew up this symbol of Soviet “liberation” or “occupation” (depending on one’s perspective) on the evening of November 5, 1949. This was not the last time this monument would be destroyed by Estonian partisans. But each time, the Soviet authorities ordered a new and still larger one to take its place. To combat the Forest Brothers, the Soviet Union relied on its own vigilante fighters, known as the Destroyer Battalions (Hävituspataljonid), composed mostly of pro-Soviet locals. They adopted a scorched earth policy, sanctioning the execution of anyone suspected of agitating against the state. This policy was stated explicitly in a Tartu propaganda leaflet distributed in town in 1941:

The destroyer battalions have no mercy for our enemies – bandits and other fascist cankers. They shall be not just destroyed, but buried under ground, which is their rightful place.

In every village and settlement, the destroyer battalion has a number of tasks besides the task of breaking the enemy. With Bolshevik grimness, everybody who imparts provocational rumors or generates panic, must be eliminated. Everybody, who directly or indirectly helps the enemy, must be found out and exterminated.

Formed originally by decree of the Soviet Central Committee of the Communist Party on June 24, 1941 to recruit local partisans to combat the Nazi Occupation in the Baltic, Belarus, and Ukraine, their numbers swelled to 328,000 across the Western frontier of the Soviet Union at their peak toward the end of the War. The fact that they were not formally disbanded in the Baltic until 1954 speaks to the difficulties the Soviet Union faced in trying to gain control of its unruly Baltic periphery and the frontier atmosphere that prevailed there for more than a decade. The decision by the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party to continue their use was reached on April 20, 1944. A kind of “forgotten army” of the postwar Baltic world, they were to be composed of local volunteers (unlike the organs of the Soviet military and NKVD), charged with the task of fighting Estonian partisans, relying on local knowledge that imported


562 “What is the Destruction battalion and what are its tasks” in Tartu Kommunist, July 22, 1941
agents of state authority generally lacked and were slow to acquire. The first Secretary of the Estonian Communist Party, Nikolai Karotamm, doubled as the Chief of Staff of the Destroyer Battalions, proposing in January 1946 that they be renamed “Rahvakaitse” (People’s Defense). Indeed, after 1945 they became narodnaia zaschita (People’s Defense) in many places across the Soviet periphery in the West to avoid association with high-profile atrocities committed during the War.\(^{563}\) Still, in their own internal correspondence they kept their original name: “Battalions for the Destruction of Bandits” (bandiitide hävitajate pataljonid).\(^{564}\)

Secret agents from abroad further contributed to the confusion in the Baltic. The most highly decorated Estonian in the Wehrmacht, Alfons Rebane (1908—1976), one of only three Estonians to reach the rank of “non-Germanic Waffen SS colonel” (Waffen-Standartenführer), took to the woods after the Nazi retreat and fought the Soviet Occupation for a while as a metsavend.\(^{565}\) After the war he fled to Britain where he became an MI6 agent, leading the Estonian portion of “Operation Jungle,” the clandestine insertion of intelligence and resistance agents into Poland and the Baltic States between 1948 and 1955.\(^{566}\) Occasionally, the clash between the Soviet Union and the West over the Baltic States became global news. There were prominent (if mysterious) scandals like the “Catalina Affair,” when Soviet fighter jets in June 1952 shot down two planes over the Baltic Sea. The first was an armed Air Force Tp 79, carrying radio and radar signals intelligence; the second aircraft was Swedish air force Catalina flying boat, engaged in a search and rescue mission for the first plan.\(^{567}\) The incident remained a state secret and the Soviet Union denied involvement until its dissolution in 1991. But within ten days reports and rumors began circulating on the ground in Soviet Estonia. The story changed a bit in the process. In a diary entry from June 24, 1952, the itinerant Estonian illegal, Jaan Roos, wrote: “Russian fighter jets shot down two Swedish planes, including one passenger plane, killing many Swedish passengers. Swedes beat down the door of the Soviet embassy in Stockholm. The relationship between the two states is intensifying. England asks ironically if Sweden still intends to keep up the pretence of neutrality after this.”\(^{568}\)

The story of Jaan Roos (1888-1965) was remarkable. Afraid of deportation to Siberia, like so many of his friends and former classmates after the War, this Tartu University graduate, teacher, and bibliophile abandoned his house and library—the largest private library in interwar Tartu with some 10,000 volumes—and went into hiding for nine years and three months, wandering the Estonian countryside as an “illegal,” keeping a diary every day until he was finally caught in the town of Viljandi in 1954 by the KGB. His diary, successfully concealed in

\(^{563}\) “Some 1850 deaths have been attributed in Estonia to the Destroyer Battalions, most of whom were unarmed civilians.” Eesti Rahva kannatuste aasta (Tallinn, 1996), 234; the atrocities with which they were credited included dousing the son of the Independence War Veteran Karl Parts in acid, burning people alive, and crushing the hands and bayoneting children who raised the Estonian flag. The Destroyer Battalions massacred all residents of the village of Viru-Kabala down to its two six-month old babies. For these and other horrific details of the atrocities committed by the Destroyer Battalions in the name of the Soviet state see Mart Laar, War in the Woods (Washington: The Compass Press, 1992), 10.


\(^{565}\) Nigel Thomas, Germany’s Eastern Front Allies (2): Baltic Forces (Osprey Publishing, 2002), 16.

\(^{566}\) For a personal account of these operations see the autobiography of one of the Estonian MI6 agents sent to Estonia and captured by the KGB, Mart Männik, A Tangled Web. A British Spy in Estonia (Tallinn: Grenadier Publishing, 2008).


a farmhouse in Southern Estonia, was only recovered and published—in five volumes—after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He stopped keeping it shortly after he was “legalized” in the summer of 1954. The last entry, recorded on December 31, 1954 reads: “I will not write in this diary any more, it is too dangerous.” His nomadic wanderings and writings were in a deeper sense typical of Tartu’s predicament and a testament to the peculiar nature and degree of the Sovietization of the Baltic made possible by the state of the Baltic as a frontier borderland between two worlds.

Jaan Roos was a unique voice in Post-Soviet Estonia. But he was not the only one, and he was emblematic of all the wandering nomads who filled the Estonian woods after the Second World War. Their numbers surged and receded over the course of the coming decade. Around the time of the Soviet Deportations of March 1949, Roos estimated that there were as many 35,000 illegals like himself wandering the countryside with false papers seeking to avoid detection by the state. The most extensive wanderings were those of Eldor Traks (1927-); he had fought as one of several “Estonian boys” in the German airforce (Luftwaffe). After the War he also turned nomadic for several years from 1945 to 1948, wandering across European borders from Denmark, to Dortmund, to Prague, to Moscow, to Leningrad, across the sea to Liepaja (Latvia), recording his wanderings in a third person narrative long after the fact in 1988 under the pseudonym “Elmar Vanakaev” (Elmar Old-Well)—because it was “dangerous” to do otherwise, and “simpler to see the world through the eyes of another.” He lived rather openly in Tallinn until the Deportations of March 25, 1949, and was finally apprehended by the agents of State Security on June 15, 1951 when he was betrayed by “one of his countrymen,” who received 6000 rubles for turning him in (like a bounty-hunter from the American Wild West). He spent the better part of the next decade in a Siberian prison camp in Vorkuta until his release in 1958. But legally he was forbidden from settling in Estonia until 1988.

Another Estonian Post-War nomad and border crosser, more active in the armed resistance to Soviet rule was the “Forest Brother” Johannes Eerman, who left his life story at Tartu University’s literary museum shortly before his death in 2005. He too had served in the German Luftwaffe, and fought with the Estonian partisans against Soviet Occupation. He hid in the woods for several years until his arrest on September 6, 1947 when he was apprehended and taken to the Paide Prison. He tried to deceive his captors by passing himself off as a simple village boy—there were plenty of these—who had not dared to come out of hiding for the first few years after the war. The moral dilemma he faced upon his apprehension was typical of the moral dilemmas faced by nearly everyone in Estonia in the immediate aftermath of the war in some form or another:

They offered me a deal, that I would not be punished and that I would have my documents if I fulfilled their demands. This meant I should go work as a spy for the NKVD and go back into the woods to betray my former forest brothers, and also the owner of the farm, where they caught me. I remembered comparable stories from 1941.

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569 “Edaspitid ma päevikut enam, ei kirjuta, on ohtlik” December 31, 1954—Jaan Roos IV, 341.
570 Jaan Roos V, 253.
571 Eldor Traks published his life story in 1992, dedicating it to “Estonian boys” who had served in the Luftwaffe. After the War, Eldor Traks wandered across all of Europe and Russia for several years. In the late 40s and early 50s his wanderings became confined to Estonia. Eldor Traks, Sõja keerises ja vangi laagris (Tallinn: Olion, 1992).
572 Johannes Eerman (1926-2006). He wrote his life story, chronicling his nomadic wandering across Estonia after the Soviet Occupation as a Forest Brother, and submitted it to the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu in 2005, a year before his death. See EKLA f. 350,s.1598.
There was practically no chance of escaping from prison. If I accepted the offer, I would be free, and I could then act however I saw fit. I could also simply disappear from the sight of state security. The threat that if I did not follow their orders then I would be subject to the death penalty did not frighten me. And this is how I got back to my home village, with the legend that I had managed to escape from prison.\textsuperscript{573}

For all the chaos and upheaval in the Baltic world, nobody managed to avoid detection for as long as Jaan Roos and nobody kept as thorough an ongoing account of his peregrinations. Even his interrogators were astounded, and joked at his interrogation that he must have set a record by staying out of sight for for nine years and three months.\textsuperscript{574}

Roos’s diary is a unique source for the interpretation of Soviet life, which may say as much about the first decade of Soviet rule in the Baltic States by its form as by its content. From the state’s point of view, Jaan Roos was a vagrant, who intermingled equally with townspeople and villagers on the one hand and with the anti-soviet partisan resistance on the other. But there was another cultural model for his behavior: that of a Baltic German Knight-errant of old Livonia, a true “Free-Lancer” (in the original feudal sense of the term). This motif even entered mainstream Soviet cinema in the late 1960s in the most internationally successful Soviet Estonian film of all time. \textit{The Last Relic} (1969) had 45 million viewers across the Soviet Union and worldwide. Set in medieval Livonia and filmed in the medieval Parts of Tallinn and in the Estonian Wilderness of Taevaskoja it romanticized the wandering Knight-errant with its main character and catchy tune, “Põgene vaba laps!” (“Escape, Child of Freedom!”), sung in the Russian version by the Estonian baritone opera singer, Georg Ots. And that is just what Jaan Roos became for nine years and three months, wandering the Soviet Estonian countryside and its towns, living off the support of a network of interwar friends and acquaintances for whom he performed manual labor. He repaired farm equipment and harvested potatoes. In exchange he received food and clothing and they preserved his anonymity and concealed his identity from the authorities. In his diary he stressed that in all those nine years—while he rarely spent more than a week in any one place—he never went a single night without shelter.

Writing in his journal a few days after his interrogation by the NKVD, on August 10,\textsuperscript{575} 1954, Jaan Roos estimated that after the deportations of 1949 there as many as 35,000 people like him hiding in the Estonian forests; many joined the metsavendi.\textsuperscript{575} The various demographic upheavals of wartime and postwar Baltic world had also brought other populations to Tartu. Itinerant Soviet people flooded over the border. A new word entered the Estonian language at this time: “bag people” or “bag boys.” It was used to describe the suspicious vagrants looting homes in Southern Estonian. Covered head to toe, almost nothing was certain about their identities, whether they were men or women, only the fact that their language was Russian. In January 1947, Jaan Roos wrote: “In the Võru region there is news that some 15,000 ‘bag people’ are nearing the border from Russia. People are scared.”\textsuperscript{576} Two weeks later he added: “Until last summer it was still possible to stop the flow of Russians into Estonia. Now

\textsuperscript{573} “Püüdsin esineda tavalise vaikselt debiilse külapoisina, kes 1946. a amnestiaga ei julgenud välja tulla. Minule tehti nüüd ettepanek, et mind ei karistata ja antakse dokumentid kui täidan mõned nende tingimused. See tähendas asuda NKVD muki ja reeta metsavendi, ka selle talu peremees, kus mind arreteeriti.” Johannes Eermann, “Sõda ja minu pere” (2005), EKM.

\textsuperscript{574} August 10, 1954—Jaan Roos V, 258.

\textsuperscript{575} August 10, 1954—Jaan Roos V, 253.

this is no longer possible or it is done on purpose. Russians flow across the border in a never-ending stream."\(^{577}\) As a counterpoint to the narrative of the transformation of Tartu into a bright new shining city of the Soviet experiment was the story of its complete and utter physical and moral collapse. Staying with a friend on Gustav Adolf street in 1947—it would soon be renamed Viktor Kingissepp street after the Estonian Bolshevik Martyr—Jaan Roos noted that the ultimate outcome of Sovietization was the transformation of Tartu into a drunken brothel: “Every street in Tartu has its pub. This is why people are calling Tartu ‘Pivograd.’ Proletariat has become synonymous with ‘the market of half-wits’ (poolearulaat).”\(^{578}\)

In the 1950s some of the deported and imprisoned members of the interwar Estonian intelligentsia started trickling home from their Siberian exile. But most—even the ones with the lightest sentences—came back thoroughly traumatized and transformed. In his diary on September 12, 1951, Jaan Roos hiked with a friend (“Mr. N.”) across the Estonian countryside to Leie village to seek out Dr. August Annist a few months after his release from his 5-year incarceration in January 1951. Annist was the vociferous literary scholar and member of EÜS Veljesto, who had celebrated the Tartu Spirit in 1923 as a kind of antidote to the indiscriminate internationalism of the national capital of Tallinn and translated the Finnish national, Kalevala, into Estonian. Like several other members of the interwar Student Society Veljesto, he had been interrogated and imprisoned. He had had the good fortune of spending his entire sentence in various prisons in Estonia rather than in Siberia. But to Jaan Roos, Annist seemed totally transformed: “I scarcely recognize him at first, he was so changed, totally grey-haired and very old, even though he is only 52.”\(^{579}\) He had not escaped torture at the Pagari [Baker] Street Prison in Tallinn where he “had even been interrogated about me. His ordeal is evident not merely in his physical condition but in his soul and spirit. Like all those who have been released from incarceration he is embittered, suspicious, and fearful. It is very hard to get any kind of deeper contact with him.”\(^{580}\) What made things worse was that even after a few months, Annist was forbidden any kind of work in his field (Estonian literature). Eventually Annist would return to the faculty of Tartu University, where he started translating the Homeric epics (the Iliad and Odyssey) into Estonian, but these kinds of literary and linguistic endeavors are the subject of the next chapter. Roos also noted several other Estonian literati who returned home around the same time: August Palm, Herman Evert, August Tõllasepp, and another Veljesto member, the literary scholar, Rudolf Põldmäe.\(^{581}\)

Even those scholars and professors who refused political allegiance with the Bolsheviks, but held on to their posts at Tartu University, were now tainted, seen as complicit for their participation in the University in the eyes of the town. According to Roos, the entire Estonian

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\(^{577}\) “Kuni läinud suveni oli ikka võimalik pidurdada venelaste sissevoolu Eestisse, nüüd ei ole seda enam võimalik teha või ei tehta seda meelega. Venelasi voolab siia alatasa vabalt.” January 18, 1947—Jaan Roos II, 19


\(^{581}\) Jaan Roos IV, 100.
intelligentsia had lost touch with Tartu, and in some sense its moral compass. Writing from Tartu on September 1, 1947, Roos observed:

No matter whom you speak with in Tartu, everyone seems furious with the university lecturers, who with their salaries of tens of thousands [of rubles] are living in luxury and plenty, while servants and workers do not have anything to eat or to wear. The difference between the salaries of the highest and lowest paid is as much as 100 times. The worst thing is that the university instructors have a complete lack of social conscience. This applies to prof. Linkberg, prof. Vadi, instructor Kleis, prof. Sõber, prof. Kipper, etc. They buy up all gold and diamonds, hasten to build houses, amass clothing which they can sell with the help of imposed limits at fairytale like prices. Prof. Linkberg’s conscience permitted him to steal another’s piece of land and build a house there. But far be it that any of these university folk should actually help with sending packages to the poor prisoners in Siberia.\textsuperscript{582}

Thus, in Roos’s account the arrival of Bolshevism had ironically made people more bourgeois—individualistic, acquisitive, and indifferent to one another’s collective fate—than they had been under the conditions of the interwar national republic. At the same time, in other diary entries Roos found that some kind of national conscience had survived that bonded and united the Estonian people against the most horrific features of Sovietization imposed from Moscow. For one thing, it seemed like the Estonian Party Leadership was doing its best to prevent the deportation of the entire nation in the manner of the Chechen-Ingush people: “The Party members say that right now in Moscow the Estonian people will be deported to Siberia. Karotamm is said to be fighting against this, but what does it help? Vares fought as well but in the end he was shot. This is one version of his death.”\textsuperscript{583} Karotamm attempted to convince Stalin that if the Estonian Kulaks were to be deported, they should be deported (in keeping with Soviet nationalities policy) within the Estonian nation, not to Siberia which would be tantamount to de-nationalization. The fact that most Estonian deportees ended up in Russia and not Estonia was consequently interpreted as evidence of the bad faith of the Soviet nationalities policy. Karotamm paid for his opposition to Stalin by being relieved of his post and banished to Moscow, where he spent the rest of his life, an important reminder that one man’s upward mobility may be another’s internal exile. Indeed, the purges of the Estonian elite in 1950 are generally understood as a response initiated at the center to the failure of Moscow to pursue its political agenda through the indigenous Estonian national elite.

Thereafter more cadres would be imported from Russia. In the end a massive influx of immigrants—78% from the Estonian countryside and 22% from other parts of the Soviet Union—raised and at the same time further defamiliarized Tartu’s population from 34,000 in


\textsuperscript{583} “Parteilased könelevad, et praeugu valmistatavat Moskva nõudel ette eesti rahva küüditamist Sibiris. Karotamm võitlevad küll vastu, aga mis see aitab. Vares võitles ka, aga lõppes sellega et ta lasti maha. See on üks versioon tema surma kohta.” September 1, 1947—Jaan Roos II, 136
1945 to 50,000 just two years later and 104,000 by 1979. In interwar Tartu there were some 2950 Russians (5%) of the total population. This number surged to 18,000 by 1970, with Russians now accounting for 20% of the total. These figures were of course imagined to be even greater. Jaan Roos wrote in his diary of the defamiliarized world of Tartu after the War in 1947:

> This Tartu leaves a very depressing impression with its deteriorated picture of life. There are almost no familiar faces. During my walk down the length of Gustav Adolf street to the market I encountered only a few familiar faces, whereas in earlier times I encountered them at every step. People have heavy faces and are weighed down. They are new inhabitants and very poorly dressed. Nearly every person has some kind of small bag in hand or on his back. For every Estonian one encounters two Russians.

Binary categories were used to make sense of the traumatic experience and aftermath of the Second World War. They became a way of structuring and remembering experience in the throes of the ongoing demographic upheaval. Even in Jaan Roos’s diary, a figure like Nikolai Karotamm could be in one entry a villain and henchman of Muscovite power, in the next an Estonian nationalist resisting Stalin. More than ever before, with the upheavals of the War and Sovietization, Tartu became—and remained—a city of strangers, who held aloof and regarded each other with suspicion. It was a binary world as the Soviet Union intended, having internalized its Manichaean worldview of clear friends and clear enemies, even if its people kept on being shuffled back and forth between those categories in both official and unofficial discourse.

Anti-Soviet Estonian partisans remained active in the region until the mid-1950s, blowing up Soviet monuments and exacting reprisals against “collaborators” with the Soviet state. Often the violence seemed random. Two local men sold firewood to some people from Novgorod. Later they pursued them and stole it back. On April 13, 1947 the mother of two children whose husband had disappeared in the War was visited in her Elva home by two Estonians with German automatic weapons. They told her they were from the NKVD. They took her outside and shot her dead. For almost a decade these kinds of events and their retelling were part of everyday life on the Baltic frontier of the Soviet Union. Jaan Roos noted in his diary only days before the death of Stalin on February 23, 1953 how the campaign against the “Forest Brothers” was intensifying: “The Forest Brothers are pursued especially aggressively in their bunkers. And they are taken, some dead, some wounded, among those, who fight back. It’s frightening to be

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585 Kodulinn Tartu, 119.
on the roads these days, because there are security guards everywhere. Whoever seems in the least bit suspicious is taken in for questioning.\textsuperscript{588}

But the level of expectation and uncertainty of rumor amplified the psychological effect of these battles. Sometimes Estonian names were found to conceal Russian identities. In the summer of 1947, one of the oldest Estonian scholars at Tartu University, old enough to have played a major role in the emergence of the modern Estonian language, Johannes Voldemar Veski (1873-1968), informed Jaan Roos of the general state of mind at Tartu University. Veski served as the head of the Department of Estonian from 1946 to 1955:

He says that all the university people are extremely frustrated and tired of the present situation. They are actually quite desperate. He has interesting information. In newspapers and especially in the journal \textit{Estonian Bolshevik} certain unknown names like Jaan Sepp and J. Mark have come to the fore with their Russian-minded writings and falsifications of the Estonian past. Now it has become clear that these are not really Estonians, but Russians with Estonian pseudonyms. For example, J. Mark is actually Markov. This is how they conduct their business!\textsuperscript{589}

Postwar Estonia was full of the confusion of identities and speculation about them. Jaan Roos noted how “The German POWs have fallen into a terrible state in Russia. A lot of them are wearing women’s skirts, because they cannot get ahold of mens’ clothing.”\textsuperscript{590} People began to look for the true identities hidden behind false names.

There was a growing cynicism about global politics as well. Once again Jaan Roos captured the spirit of popular opinion when he overheard the following anecdote in Tartu: “In the eyes of the people International Conferences have lost all authority. A little boy asks his father: what is a Conference? The father answers: a conference is a meeting for the purpose of determining the time of the next meeting.”\textsuperscript{591} It was enough to drive many to despair. In his darkest entry, written on April 7, 1947, Roos had all but given up hope:

The mood is heavy and confused. There is a great emptiness within and all around. There is the feeling, that there is not anything any more to hold on to. Whatever one grabs, disintegrates and tears in ones hand. A grey, damp fog envelops all of being in its revolting threads. Neither soul nor spirit can find its way. How can one live this way! Happy are those, whose time it has come to die.\textsuperscript{592}


\textsuperscript{592} “Meeleolu on mul raske ja segane. Tühjus on mu sees ja mu ümber. On tunne, et ei ole enam kusagi liiti hoida. Millest kinni haarad, see puruneb ja rebeneb käes. Hall niiske udu mässib kogu olemuse enda vastikusse
ii. Rumors, Myths, and Horror Stories

The relationship between objective facts and subjective experiences is complicated. Neither can be taken at face value. Just because a fact can be proved on the basis of archival evidence does not make it real for the people who remained convinced of the opposite. In this sense rumors and expectations were just as real as any event, maybe more so. A rumor everyone believes is in some ways more historically significant than a fact that nobody knows: and post-War Tartu teemed with rumors and speculations. Whatever the aims and intentions of Soviet policy, the reality of the Soviet experience lay less in official proclamations or statements of intent than in the way those statements and proclamations were understood by the population at large, and the facts they were thought to conceal. The Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian SSR, an interwar Estonian poet and doctor, Johannes Vares, came under investigation by the NKVD in 1946 for his activities during Estonia’s War of Independence (1918-1920) and committed suicide in the Kadriorg Presidential Palace in Tallinn on November 29, 1946. Referring to this fact one month later on January 1, 1947 Jaan Roos wrote a detailed account of an assassination attempt on a few members of Estonia’s new Communist government in his diary:

A Tallinn driver informs me that almost a week after the death of J. Vares there was an attempt to murder Nikolai Karotamm [First Secretary of the Estonian Communist Party] and Veimer [Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the ESSR]. They had apparently been driving to Kose to the farm of K. Päts in three cars. A very fast car approached from behind. When the road turned, the three cars came under fire. In one car the driver was killed and the passenger N. Karotamm was wounded. In the second car Veimer was gravely wounded and his companion was killed. The car that had pursued them is supposed to have turned around and sped off. The one car that was left unscathed by the attack gave chase, but did not catch up. The fleeing car disappeared into town. Karotamm and Veimer are said to be in hospital now. Veimer’s chances of survival look grim. Now it is also clear why we haven’t heard anything from these two men in the course of the last two weeks. It is thought that the responsible party in the attack are either the Metsavennad (“Forest Brothers”) or Russians. This same driver informs me that there was an attempt on J. Vares’s life and that he was wounded. He was then brought to hospital. After this he shot himself.593

The range of speculation in this diary entry attests to the confusion and fear of the day: Who were the attackers—Russians or Estonian Partisans? Had this event actually transpired or was it entirely a fantasy? Who could be trusted to tell the truth? Roos’s words grasp the traumatized

mindset of postwar Baltic World that gave rise to rumors, myths, and horror stories in all areas of life. In the postwar chaos of Soviet Estonia and the speculation it spawned everything was possible; and everything was likewise a possible lie. This is an important part of the background to the linguistic preoccupations and experimentation of Tartu University in the next decade, with their aspiration to find a mutually intelligible and universally meaningful truth in a world where nothing was certain and nobody could be trusted, and your closest friend could turn out—on closer inspection—to be your worst enemy.

For more than a decade after the war, Tartu teemed with rumors and horror stories. On Valentine’s Day 1948, Roos noted in his diary that Tartu’s insane asylum was as full as it had ever been since it was constructed in the late 19th century on the far side of the Ema River; “it is said to have some very prominent figures—a Chinese emperor, a Hitler, six or seven different Stalins, etc.”594 The myth of a “human sausage factory” on the downtown corner of Turu (Market) and Soola (Salt) Streets not far from the main market made its way into an NKVD report on February 28, 1947. In his letter to the Tartu’s Communist Party Secretary Eduard Brandt, the Russian Security Colonel Starikov blamed the rumor on anti-Soviet locals: “During the investigation it was found that the rumours were spread by several persons of Estonian ethnicity—by local people.”595 It was said that a local peasant woman from Kohla village, Linda Lentsius, had been dragged into the ruins of a building at the aforementioned address by unknown attackers, who had tried to kill her. According to Starikov, she later turned out to be alive and well. The alleged perpetrators were a Jew, a gypsy, and an Estonian.596 Other accounts of the rumor sometimes specified a “foreign” Estonian—i.e. Russian-born ethnic Estonian. Starikov arrested a couple eye-witnessesses, Kai Petrovna, living at 110 Võru Street and Leia Petrovna, at 48 Kesk Street. They claimed to have seen “burnt bones of children” and “human skulls.” Starikov vowed “to prosecute persons who spread provocative rumours.”597

But the myth spoke to the traumatized nature of the times, and outlived all attempts to suppress it. Quite often it was turned back on the Soviet authorities themselves. A few days later on March 2nd Jaan Roos wrote in his diary:

People are once again aghast at the terrifying news from Tartu. As incredible as it may sound, many claim that it’s true. About 2-weeks ago, a factory making sausage out of human meat was discovered at the corner of Soola and Aleksandri streets in Tartu. People crowd to see this place. They saw schoolchildren’s notebooks, women’s stockings, strips of cloth and hair. When it was revealed, a huge number of human bones were found in there. At least fifty people have been reportedly killed and boiled into sausage. It is said that this monstrous business was run by six people: two Jews, two Russians and two Estonians from Russia. The sausage business was located in the ruins because the entire town district had been burnt down.598

596 “odin evrei, tsigan i odin estonts, pri etom—tam-zhe v razvalinax iakoby byli obnaruzheny chelovecheskie golovy i kosti,” ERAF f.148,l.5,23.
597 “Reshetia voporos o privlechenii lits, rasprostraniaiushikh provokatcionnye slukhi k otvetstvennosti”
598 Jaan Roos as quoted in Eda Kalmre, Myth of the Human Sausage Factory, 54.
A few weeks later Roos noted that people were still “swarming to see the place where the sausage factory used to be.” By the end of the month, the story shifted a bit: “In general the inhabitants of Tartu are certain that a human sausage factory existed—on the corner of Soola and Turu streets, not the corner of Alexandri and Soola.” He had gone to the see the market place himself, full of sellers and onlookers, but no buyers. Everybody was too poor.599

Five years later, Roos found the myth of the Human Sausage Factory alive and well once more upon his return to Tartu, though this time ethnically specific foreigners had disappeared from the story. It was blamed squarely on the organs of state security. His entry from December 14, 1952 provides insight into the traumatized mindset of that moment:

It is said that people have started to disappear from Tartu without a trace, as happened a few years ago. There is talk again of the human sausage factory, where people are made into sausages. This time the whole thing is said to have gotten its start from Riga. The security police are said to be directing the whole operation. There are three aims in these captures: first to fill arrest quotas for the year, in which they are said to be behind; secondly to get blood for the sick members of the ruling elite; and third, to make sausages out of human meat. Apparently 200 people have disappeared already from Tartu, mainly children and the young. There is information about several concrete events. On Jõe [River] Street a 6-year-old and an 8-year-old have disappeared without a trace. At the train station a girl from Puhja was approached by a “Moskvits” [a common brand of Soviet car, associated for Estonians with the idea of Moscow and Russification—DB], in which there were two men. One man leapt out and told the girl that she was arrested and ordered her to get into the car. The girl protested and started to scream. A Russian officer came by to whom the girl told her story. The officer demanded to see the documents of the man who got out of the car. He jumped back into the car and drove away. This is how the girl escaped. There is much talk of stories like this. Tartu is ruled by panic and fear. Nobody dares to go outside anymore at twilight or in the dark. How much truth there is in all this is difficult to say. But there must be something to it. In these times anything is possible.600


December 14, 1952—Jaan Roos IV, 257.
A “fear of the dark” in Tartu in mid-December when there are only four or five hours of daylight to begin with would have meant a fear of the entire day. Two months later Jaan Roos wrote again in his diary of the mysterious disappearance of people from all across Estonia, especially from Tallinn and Tartu. And the myth of the human sausage factory kept on resurfacing in the coming years and decades. Several other Baltic towns experienced something comparable. Eda Kalmre’s doctoral dissertation, a study of this myth in Tartu, is based in part on interviews with Tartu Estonians still convinced of its reality today.

iii. Myths of Deliverance

In Tartu in the 1940s and 50s the dividing line between reality and imagination seemed incredibly thin. The human sausage factory and other tales of confusion, Babel and horror were not the only index of the traumatized mentality of the newly Sovietized Baltic periphery. Religious attendance actually went up, not down, for both Russian Orthodox and Lutheran Congregations. The 1940s and 50s even saw an unprecedented rise in Roman Catholic observance, and the emergence of other confessions as well: Adventists, Baptists, Methodists. The return to religion was palpable in the first year of the Soviet takeover: from 1945 to 1946 Christenings rose from 4,897 to 7804, Confirmations from 3215 to 8039, Church Marriages, from 993 to 2096, and religious burials from 12,535 to 13,228. Religion had an especially important role to play in sustaining the resolve of the anti-Soviet armed resistance through the coming decade. Jaan Roos noted in his diary in 1947 that “Among the Forest Brothers one can find many, who have started to take a special interest in the Bible, combing it for interpretations of the present moment. One of the most meaningful parts in their opinion is the eleventh chapter of the Book of Daniel. The fall of both Hitler and Stalin is said to be foretold there.”

Living in a state of perpetual fear and expectation, many listened to the Voice of America and kept abreast of the developments around the globe. These broadcasts were more accessible in rural and Southern Estonia than in Tallinn.

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602 Kalmre provides detailed accounts of four interviewees (2000s): (1) “a female engineer with Christian views” born in the early 1930s, whose father had fought in the Estonian War for independence; (2) a “farm girl and town official,” also born in the early 1930s; (3) Kalju Leib, a “construction worker and chronicler,” born in 1937; and (4) Heldur Elbe, a “chauffeur and bookseller with an interest in culture,” born into a multigenerational Tartu family, whose father and uncles had been mobilized into the German army during the Second World War. Each had his/her own version of the story; a few were convinced that it had been a conspiracy of the Soviet secret police. The first interviewee reported to Kalmre that “the story of the sausage factory on Soola Street is, unfortunately, true, just like the human hair hanging from hooks and the brown stains on the walls, which I saw with my own eyes”; Eda Kalmre, The Human Sausage Factory: A Study of Post-War Rumour in Tartu (New York: Rodopi, 2013), 116-123.
603 “The only Methodist church within the Soviet Union is in Estonia; thus it has some significance in terms of foreign policy. A. Kuum, the superintendent, was able to participate in the Wrodl Conference of the Methodisit Chruch in August 1971. According to Kuum, at that time there were fourteen Methodist congregations active Estonia under the leadership of sixteen ordained ministers; membership growth for that year had been 155. Total membership in Estonia was about 2,200, fo whom 1,153 were in Tallinn.” Salo, 206 and 207.
606 Interview with the Art Historian, Jaak Kangilaski, who grew up in the 1950s in Nõmme, Tallinn, and remembered that broadcasts in the national capital were consistently jammed. “Only a sentence or two would get through.” He learned Finnish by listening to the radio long before he learned Russian, a language in which he had
After the upheavals of the last decade they had every reason to expect that more such upheavals were forthcoming. The millenarian hope and expectation of imminent change ran deep in Estonian society. Roos noted in his diary how “Tartu people are all certain in their hope and belief [of change], but they do not believe it will come right away. It will take time.” These hopes gave rise to myths of deliverance particularly prominent in coastal communities where it was said a “White Ship” would come from Sweden to save Estonians from the Soviet Occupation. According to some, the 1940s and 50s were a time “when nearly the entire Estonian people was waiting for the White Ship.” This may be an exaggeration, but the story was familiar all across the land. It even entered the Russian-speaking world through the interactions of children, who were not as divided linguistically as their parents. A single anecdote will illustrate the power of this myth to define social identities and interactions. Liudmilo Alehno, who was born in the coastal town of Haapsalu in 1949 remembered what an important role it had played throughout her entire childhood in the 1950s and early 60s, how “everybody knew, that the ship had to come.” But for her the expectation was a source of fear, given her ambiguous ethnic identity. Her father was Ingrian (a Finno-Ugric ethnic group from the border of Finland) while her mother was a Leningrad Russian with distant Polish roots, and consequently she had trouble finding her place: “my Estonian girlfriends knew, that the white ship would bring them freedom, while the Russian girls knew, that they would have to run and hide, and it turned out that I was the only one who did not know what would become of me.” So she ran every day to the seashore to see if the ship had come, and heaved a sigh of relief each time she saw there was no sign of it upon the horizon. Thus, the polarization of Estonian society extended down to the games and mental world of children throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, causing consternation among all those who did not know their place in this binary, divided world.

iv. Lingering Memories and Outbursts of Violence

Even after the extreme violence of the 1940s and 50s receded into the background, it still lingered on in memories and prophylatic threats (potentially dangerous members of society were taken aside and terrorized in KGB interviews with reminders of what had happened to their

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608 The Motif of the “White Ship” reached from the games of children in coastal communities of Saaremaa and Haapsalu to the halls of Tartu University as well. The power of the motif can be seen in the title of a collection of Post-Soviet Essays devoted to Uku Masing, Tartu’s most important unpublishable and unemployable scholar of the Soviet period: Inimese Poeg Viigel Laeval [Child of Humanity Aboard the White Ship]. Widely regarded as a Saint and Martyr for his almost total exclusion from the Soviet system, his relationship to the Estonian nation was idiosyncratic. But he inspired a following among the younger generation of the Estonian intelligentsia at Tartu University, including some of its leading poets and philologists like Hando Runnel, Jaan Kaplinski, Linnart Mäll, and many others in an age where symbols and signs of deliverance were sought (and found) almost everywhere.


parents’ generation) and ongoing arrests of the members of the dissident movement throughout the 1970s and 80s. Echoes of the frontier atmosphere of the 1940s and 50s could be felt in Tartu as late as 1983 when a string of robberies culminated in the murder of a University History Student, Tauno Pukk. His body was cast into the Ema River and found floating by Victory Bridge. The perpetrators turned out to be two of the Soviet soldiers stationed in Tartu, Patishinski and Korneiev. Patishinski had actually robbed and attempted to kill a few other people in Tartu, but this was the first time he had actually succeeded. In one case the victim had been stabbed in the chest with a knife but his life had been saved by a button there; in another case, the victim was a mentally handicapped person, who had been thrown into the Ema River from the bridge, but into shallow water, and he had survived as well. While standing trial at the courthouse in Tallinn on Lai Street, the Russian-speaking judge (this fact was noted by the Estonian observers) asked them why they had done it. Korneiev responded: “partly because the locals have such a negative attitude toward Soviet soldiers.” The judge retorted: “And you think this will improve it?” Korneiev shrugged his shoulders.611

Lauri Vahtre, a friend of the deceased, was in the Courthouse together with his classmates Mart Laar (another student of history and a future prime minister of Estonia) and many others. The initial sentences were light: four years for “robbery.” Tauno’s father appealed for something more severe and got the Soviet death penalty; but further appeals resulted in an eleven-year prison sentence, which was later reduced to nine years. “So the murderer has run free free again. And from Tauno’s grave the bronze vase designed by Mati Karmin [who more recently designed Tartu’s Lotman monument—DB] has been stolen.”612 Vahtre wrote:

I ... thought about how my mother on one icy winter day had given away her gloves to a freezing Russian soldier. I am sure my mother acted correctly; not even the two sitting in the room could shake my conviction about this, as much as I would have liked to dispatch them then with my own hand into the next world.613

The funeral brought Tartu together: “The entire History Department was there and many friends, acquaintances, and relatives in addition. It turned out that half of Tartu knew and loved Tauno. This was some consolation, but little.”614

Along with Mart Laar and Heiki Valk, Lauri Vahtre was one of the principle agitators in the “Young Tartu” movement (1980-1991), echoing the “Young Estonia Movement” (1905-1919) of Gustav Suits that led to the first Estonian National Republic. For a while they were even formally tolerated, and occupied their own rooms sanctioned by the University where they organized debates and talks on interwar Estonian history. But their principle activity—a tactic to allow for sociability while avoiding explicit politicization—was to care for gravestones in

611 The victim was Tauno Pukk (1957-1983), who studied history and participated in the young Tartu University students the “Young Tartu” movement. He was a close friend of Lauri Vahtre, who describes the episode in his memoirs, 238.
612 “Nii et mõrtsukas on ammu taas vabaduses. Ja Tauno hauakivilt on varastatud pronksist vaas, Mati Karmini töö.” Vahtre, Meenutusi, 238.
613 “Istusin saalis (see oli Tallinnas Laial tänaval), nagu ka Vanamart, Heiki jpt, vahtsin tapjaid ning mõtlesin sellele, kuidas mu ema ühel jäisel talvepäeval andis ära oma sõrmkindad külmetavale vene soldatile. Kindlasti tegi mu ema õigesti, seda arvamus ei kummutanud minus ka nood eks, kelle oleksin meeledi oma käega ja kohapeal teise ilteru saanud.” Vahtre, Meenutusi, 238.
Tartu’s Raadi Cemetery. They devoted special attention to the graves of the heroes of Estonian independence and the nineteenth-century intelligentsia. The murder of Tauno Puuk in 1983 was neither a cause nor consequence of national consciousness and agitation, but it was part of the everyday life of Soviet Tartu in the era of late socialism, a sign of the asymmetrical relationship between the Soviet center and the Baltic periphery, and a reminder of the frontier atmosphere that had prevailed here for more than a decade after the Second World War, with its confused and random deaths, disappearances, and traumas that gave rise to a divided consciousness.

6.3 Tartu’s Bilingual Bolshevik Intelligentsia: Making New Soviet People

*How to label a man as an Estonian when he himself is not one, and does not want to be one? But with the Communists anything is possible...*
—Jaan Roos in his diary, February 8, 1952, Lustivere, Estonia

For all the Bolshevik transformations of Tartu chronicled above, Tartu exhibited remarkable inertia and resistance to change. With the arrival of Andrei Zhdanov in Tallinn in the Summer of 1940, Bolshevik demonstrations and meetings were organized all across Estonia in hopes of educating the Estonian public into an appreciation of the new Soviet world order. A large meeting was organized in Tähtvere Park in Tartu. The young scholar of Finno-Ugric languages, Paul Ariste was called to attend by the pharmacologist, Alma Toomingas (1900—1963), Tartu University’s first woman to be appointed professor just a few months before. Ariste recorded the episode in his memoirs in 1981:

Huge portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin were leaned up against the trees. Some people were standing, others sitting on the grass. We passed a group of working-class women. One of them, who was better informed than the rest explained: “Listen up. That one’s Marks, that one’s Leenin, and that one’s Talin.” But she did not seem to recognize Engels. Another woman thought that Engels was “Raspudin.” Rasputin after all had a vigorous beard and he had been mentioned in the newspapers before the Revolution. The better-informed woman clarified: “Yup, that’s Raspudin. He was also a big revolutionary.” This little episode shows how little our people knew at that time of the classics of Marxism-Leninism. We moved on toward the podium. There, a Russian-born Estonian in military uniform was pontificating. He was just speaking of the enormous opportunities that the Soviet system had created for women. “We even have women as

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615 “Kuidas meest eestlaseks tembeldada, kui ta seda ei ole ja olla ei taha. Aga kommunistide juures on kõik võimalik.” Jaan Roos, *Läbi punase öö IV [Through the Red Night]* (Tartu: 2004) 153-154. In this quotation Roos mocks Communist efforts to demonstrate the friendship of the Estonian and Russian people by declaring the early nineteenth century self-proclaimed Swedish-German writer, O.W. Masing, a Russian-loving Estonian. He goes on to write, “At the same time as O.W. Masing is made into an Estonian, they throw out a whole row of truly Estonian writers, whose position in Estonian literary history until now seemed relatively assured. Among them are writers like J. Pärn, A. Saal. K.E. Sööt, A. Kitzberg, Jak. Liiv, M. Metsanurk, etc., to say nothing of the still more recent ones. I don’t believe that this business with O.W. Masing is really going to succeed. But ultimately, Moscow will decide.” [“Samal ajal, kui püütakse O.W. Masingut üle võtta, visatakse terve rida uuemaid eesti kirjanikke eesti kirjanikudest välja, kellel seni seal on olud kõikumatu kindel koht, säärased kirjanikud, nagu J. Pärn, A. Saal, K.E. Sööt, A. Kitzberg, Jak. Liiv, M. Metsanurk jne, rääkimata uuematest. Aga ei usu hästi veel, et O.W. Masing läbi läheb. Seda otsustab ju lõplikult Moskva.”], February 8, 1952—Jaan Roos IV, 154.
Ariste’s account reveals the two obstacles the state would face in its attempted Sovietization of Tartu—the utter ignorance of the general Estonian public about Soviet leaders and the Soviet system, but also the sense of cultural superiority of the Estonian cultural elite at Tartu University, who felt they really had nothing to learn from the Soviet Union.

Indeed, in many ways Tartu seemed remarkably resistant to change. In 1947 two senior Moscow Inspectors from the “Central Administration of Universities” (Glavnogo upravleniya universitetov), G.F. Iudin and N.V. Zhiromskii, arrived in Tartu. Their task was to file a report on the Sovietization of Tartu State University. They were shocked by the extent to which the Soviet presence could scarcely be seen or felt. They had trouble finding anyone who spoke Russian, lamenting that “teaching at the University is conducted only in the Estonian language; there is no Russian group at the University. There are only forty-eight Russian students, and all of them know Estonian.” Tartu State University seemed to be out of sync with Soviet Institutions of Higher Learning in other respects as well. Here the inspectors noted “another characteristic feature of Tartu University.” Classes began at quarter past hour, though on the schedule it was clearly marked that they should begin on the hour. The inspectors were incensed. Everyone—professors and students alike—seemed to accept this fact, which appeared to have the status “an old university tradition” (drevneishei traditsiei universiteta). In fact, the “Academic Quarter” was an old European University tradition, dating back to the days when time was ordered by the ringing of church bells on the quarter hour, a practice which could still be found as late as 1947 in many old European University towns from Heidelberg to Uppsala. But these inspectors had never heard of this. For them it was a tiresome loss of time to be remedied by Soviet efficiency.

In their conclusion, the inspectors damned Tartu State University with faint praise, noting that while it “possessed some good traditions,” (nemalo khoroshikh traditsii), it failed to meet its educational and scholarly objectives—i.e. “to train highly qualified experts” who “know their profession” and who are “deeply devoted to their Soviet homeland” (znaiushikh svoe delo i do

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618 “Mozhno lish’ otmetit’ odin xarakternyi dlia Tartuskogo universiteta moment: po raspiisman zaniatia dolzhny nachinat’sia v 8 chas. Utra, no professor, dotsent, ili prepodavatel’ nepremno ivitsia s opozdaniem na 15 minut. Studenty eto xoroshko znaiut i poetomu i sami iavliautsia na zaniatia ne k 8, 10, 12, i.t.d. chasam, a k 8:15, 10:15, i.t.d. e.t.c. s p i a t n a z a t i m i n u t n y m o p o z d a n i e m , kotoretoe iavliaetsia drevneishei traditsiei universiteta. Poteri vremeni v dannom sluclae ne imeetsia t.k. lektsia ili seminar, praktikum…” GARF f. P-9396, o.2, d.41, s16
Among their recommendations they stressed the need to “improve student discipline” and “drastically improve the teaching and learning of the Russian language.” Singling out “ideological” and “political” shortcomings of both the faculty and the student body, they recommended that the university receive serious assistance in the strengthening of the sociological-economic departments, including the Department of Marxism-Leninism, and procure from among the graduates of the best universities of [Soviet Union] a new Head for the Department of Russian Language and two or three more teachers of the Russian language.

In Estonian historiography the period between 1945 and 1949 has a contradictory reputation. It has been called the “Post-Independence” period, a period in which the full effects of Sovietization could scarcely be felt. The report of the two Moscow inspectors, quoted above, is clear evidence for this perspective. At the same time it was an era of massive change, both in the production of a new ideological discourse in many spheres of cultural life and the unprecedented chaos, fear, and confusion, as revealed in the detailed diary entries of Jaan Roos. For the local Estonian population, Soviet state-sponsored violence did more to intensify and exacerbate the atmosphere of upheaval than it did to restore order. The new Soviet cultural policy of Zhdanovshchina (the Zhdanov doctrine) declared in 1946 reestablished a hardline ideological policy on questions of culture, beginning with the persecution of Soviet composers like Prokofiev and Shostakovich. It was inspired and intensified by the emerging Cold War division of the world into two camps, which from the official Soviet perspective meant the “imperialist” West and the “democratic” Soviet Union. Domestically Zhdanovshchina renewed many of the ideological struggles of the 1920s and 30s—against “formalism,” “bourgeois nationalism” and “cosmopolitanism.” Andrei Zhdanov had special relevance for the Baltic as first high-ranking Soviet official from the Central Committee to come to Tallinn to oversee the Sovietization of the Baltic States in 1940. But Zhdanovshchina outlived its architect, who died in 1948. Between 1946 and 1951 some 4176 Estonian teachers lost their jobs, mostly for their ideological failings. Tartu University itself lost seventy-six instructors; more than half of the 126 fired from Estonia’s six institutions of higher learning all together. 1949 saw the largest deportation during the dekulakization of the same year and 1950 saw the greatest purge of the original Soviet Estonian elite at the Eighth Plenum of the Estonian Communist Party. For a while at least, bronze proved more malleable than Lenin’s “human material” seemed teachable.

In the early years of the Soviet period in Estonia, what put Estonians and Russians in such intimate proximity and quite literally on common ground was Tartu’s German past. In official commemorations, the recently departed German occupiers were the invisible glue that

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619 “Uchebnaia rabota universiteta, neposredstvennoi tsel'yu katoroy iavlaetsia podgotovka vysokokvalititsirovannykh i ideino stoikikh spetsialistov shirokogo profilya, liudei, znaishchihkh svoe delo i do kontsa predannikh Sovetskoi Rodine, nuzhdayetsya v dal'neyshem ser'eznom uluchshenii.”

620 “Ukrepit' dissiplinu studentov” and “Reshitelnol uluchshit' postanovku v sego dela prepodavania i izucheniiia russkogo iazyka.”

621 “Odnako, universitetu neobkhodimo okazat' ser'eyznuyu pomoshch' v chasti ukrepleniia sotsial'no ekonometsheskikh kafedr, v chastnosti kafedry marksizma-leninizma, a takzhe komandirovat' v universitet zav. kafedroy russkogo iazyka i 2-3-kh kvalifitsirovannykh prepodavateley russkogo iazyka iz chisla okekhivayushchikh aspiranturui pri luchshikh universitetakh strany.”

622 The other institutions (accompanied by the number of instructors they lost to ideological purges) included the Tallinn Polytechnical Institute (12), the Tallinn Conservatory (12), the Tartu State Art Institute (12), the Tallinn Teachers’ Institute (9), and the Tartu Teachers’ Institute (5). Lembit Raid, Vaevatee, 264 and 265.
sealed the “Friendship of the Russian and Estonian Peoples.” One of the first monuments erected in postwar Soviet Tartu in 1950 was the bronze statue, “Viatchko and Meelis at the Defense of Tartu.” It depicted two figures—an Estonian and a Russian—crouched shoulder-to-shoulder, their eyes fixed upon an unseen common enemy, brows furled.623 Prince Viatchko of Novgorod, his arm extended, instructs the Estonian Vallavanem (Estonian Tribal Chieftain), Meelis, on how to defend Tartu, the last bastion of Estonian Independence, from the invading German Teutonic Knights in 1224.624 Meanwhile, the Estonian, son of national folk hero Lembitu, reaches into his quiver and prepares to aim his crossbow wherever Viatchko might tell him to shoot. A picture of the statue figured on the cover of the first History of the Estonian SSR published in 1952. It was even the first image in a history of Tartu University published in Russian in Leningrad to commemorate its 150th anniversary as an Imperial Russian institution in 1954. It set the tone for the whole work, which stressed the role of Tartu’s nineteenth century Russians in teaching Estonians how to be free of their Baltic German oppressors.625 And in 1980 this representation of Estonian-Russian relations was still sufficiently in vogue to be ceremonially installed in front of the town museum on Oravi street in honor of the 950th anniversary of the town of Tartu.626

The statue grasps the official moral clarity of the Soviet bilingual predicament. The Sovietization of Tartu University and the creation of a new bilingual Soviet Estonian intelligentsia was accomplished partly through the “conversion” of Estonian-speaking locals, but also through importation of Russian-speaking cadres from Soviet Russia. Each was supposed to learn the language of the other. But until the mid-1960s non-Estonians outnumbered Estonians in the Estonian Communist Party.627 This section looks more closely at the human dimension in the making of New Soviet people in Tartu, and especially the relationship between locals and those who arrived to implement Soviet norms from abroad. The binary dynamics of the “Friendship” between Estonians and Russians was intensified in Soviet Tartu by the idea—evident in the statue of Viachko and Meelis—that they faced a common enemy.

6.3.1 Converts: Learning Bolshevik

623 The statue can still be found in Tartu today and is occasionally represented in guidebooks, like Malle Salupere, Tuhandeaastane Tartu: nooruse ja heade mõtete linn (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjast, 2004), 64a.
624 In her 2004 guidebook, Thousand Year Tartu, [Tuhande Aastane Tartu] Malle Salupere explicitly states that the sculpture was “supposed to symbolize the friendship of the Estonian and Russian people” but finds an irony in that Viatchko is claimed by Belorussians as their own national folk hero, Malle Salupere, Tuhandeaastane Tartu, 12. Misunius and Taagepera find a still greater albeit entirely different irony in the symbolism of the statue. In The Years of Dependence they write, “The expected behavior of the Balts toward the Russians is well expressed by a much-reproduced bronze statue by Olav Männi (1950), with the detailed title ‘Prince Viachko of Polotsk and Lembitu’s son Meelis defending Tartu in 1224. The statue shows a sophisticated Russian feudal prince pointing something out to an eager but not too bright peasant boy. The boy is supposed to be the son of Lembitu, the chief leader of Estonian resistance to the Germans, who in his spare time pillaged the Russian city of Pskov—a fact ignored by Stalinist history,” Misunius and Taagepera, The Years of Dependence, 119.
626 Salupere, Tuhandeaastane Tartu, 12.
Not everyone in the intewar Estonian intelligentsia was a passive observer of the new regime. Many took a more active role in the conversion of Tartu to Bolshevism and its ideological language. Though for those who had grown up in interwar Estonia, learning to speak Bolshevik was like learning to speak a foreign language, and those who learned to speak it best inevitably found themselves alienated from their former friends and colleagues. Representing the new Bolshevik Government in Soviet Tallinn, the newly appointed Estonian Commissar of Education, Professor Jüri Nuut (1892-1952), formerly a Tartu professor of physics, took a stab at the new ideological language in his first address to the assembled congregation at the opening ceremony of Tartu University in November 1944. One listener reported that “from Jüri Nuut’s speech I remember his contention that the term ‘impossible’ must disappear from the lexicon of a true Soviet worker, because when something needs to be done, it will be done!”

The pedagogical work of the University began on November 20 with the first lectures in Party history and Russian. But the University got off to a slow start. For the most part students did not know where to go or what courses were required of them. There were no Estonian translations of the required Soviet textbooks. The interwar “European” subject-based system (ainesüsteem) in which students chose their own courses individually in consultation with their advisors needed to be replaced with the Soviet course-based system (kursusesüsteem), where the course of study, down to the approved textbooks, was preordained in Moscow, and students attended class together with a constant group of classmates, strengthening the bonds of the group (but isolating them from students enrolled in other disciplines and faculties). On December 2nd Jüri Nuut issued a rebuke from Tallinn to the handpicked successor of Hans Kruus as the newly appointed Rector of Tartu University, the interwar philosopher, Alfred Koort, for the slow implementation of Soviet educational standards:

Send word immediately why pedagogical work at Tartu University has stalled. Explain measures taken to avoid the halt. Until the situation is under control send word every day by telegraph of the number of lectures and auditors. The names of stragglers should be erased from the lists and given over to the War Commissariat. NUUT People’s Commissar.

In a national republic as small as Estonia, even the most bureaucratic affairs of state were also intimate matters. Anatoli Mitt, a physics teacher and assistant to the Rector observed: “If the telegram hadn’t born his signature, I would still have recognized the inimitable style of my former teacher. After all, I had passed a fifth of my university exams with him.”

628 Mitt, 67.
629 See Lembit Raid on the difference between the Soviet “course system” (kursusesüsteem)—with their international departments (kateedrid) and required courses including Marxism-Leninism, political economy, military training, and physical education, as opposed to the traditional European “subject system” (ainesüsteem)—with their chairs (õppetoolid), and voluntary lectures and few if any stipulations on universally required courses, Vaevatee, 10.
631 "Kui telegram olnukski allkirjata, oleks ikkagi oma endise õpetaja Juri Nuudi stiili ära tundnud. Tema juure olin ma ju sooritanud viendiku kõigist oma üliõpilaspõlve eksameist,” Mitt, 70.
interlocuters who knew them from other times and other places. Many never mastered the art of “speaking Bolshevik” to the satisfaction of the Moscow, hence the repeated purges of the Soviet Estonian intelligentsia in the years to come in 1949 and 1950 in particular.

Those who had joined the Communist Party in June 1940, have acquired the designation in Estonian historiography “June Communists.” The term suggests a kind of careerism in their choice, though most, like Hans Kruus had sincere left-leaning credentials well-before the War; but unlike Harald Haberman, they only became members of the Communist Party after the Soviet Union Occupied Estonia and were some of the first beneficiaries of the Soviet State: awarded with positions high in government, providing a kind of ethnic Estonian legitimacy to the new regime in the new Soviet government of Johannes Vares (a poet and gynecologist from Pärnu) in 1940: Johannes Semper, an expert on French literature and Andre Gide, especially became the first Soviet Estonian Minister of Education; Nigol Andresen, another literary scholar, became the new Soviet Foreign Minister; Hans Kruus, the most important interwar Estonian national historian, became the acting Soviet Estonian Prime Minister.

Those who insisted most vehemently that Sovietization need not be tantamount to Russification—Hans Kruus, Johannes Semper, and Nigol Andresen—often found themselves alienated and purged from the Party elite and eventually punished for their presumptuousness. But for about five years they played an essential role in the ruling elite of Soviet Estonia and Soviet Tartu in particular. The variety of “third” options politically open to members of the Estonian intelligentsia in interwar Estonia disappeared: and the moral dilemmas of Soviet life imposed themselves upon people in increasingly stark and binary terms. There was a widespread perception that the “June Communists” were a kind of “fallen intelligentsia”: indeed, they lost their authority within the Estonian intelligentsia at the same time as they acquired it within the Soviet intelligentsia. Most were purged and imprisoned in 1950, though for a while they seemed to be the material beneficiaries of siding with “the Russians.” The French literary scholar Johannes Semper and the archeologist Harri Moora had both been interwar members of Veljesto. On September 8, 1947, Roos wrote in his diary: “J[ohannes] Semper is on vacation right now with his family in the Caucasus. This is the kind of thing the big man can do. Prof. Moora is said to have gone over entirely into the Communist Confession. This is publically proclaimed. This man has been lost to us.” But deeper rifts in society began to appear as well. The problematic nature of Estonian conversion to the Bolshevik cause appears especially clearly in the example of Hans Kruus, the first Soviet Rector of Tartu University in 1940 and again in 1944-1945. From 1945 to 1950 he moved to Tallinn—this move was itself a sign of his increasing estrangement from the national Estonian intelligentsia—to become the First President of the Soviet Estonian Academy of Sciences. At around the same time Harald Haberman returned to Tartu from Tallinn to assume the post of Prorector of Pedagogy and assist in the conversion of Tartu State University to Bolshevism.

Harald Haberman: Tartu’s First Estonian Bolsheviks

In December 1944 Jüri Nuut appointed a new Prorector of Pedagogy, the biologist Harald Haberman to help with the administration of Tartu University. Now there would be two academic prorectors: the prorector of scholarship, who dealt with questions of publications and scholarship, and the prorector of pedagogy who would deal with matters of teaching. Haberman was a felicitous choice. On the one hand he was born and raised as an Estonian scholar. He knew the local world of Tartu intelligentsia inside out—both politically and academically—since he had come of age intellectually in interwar Tartu. But he was also a convinced Bolshevik. He joined the Communist Party in Tartu in 1939 at a time when it was still dangerous to do so, and had spent the War following the Soviet retreat in 1941 in the Soviet Union. He had vivid first-hand memories of the Leningrad Blockade. Moreover, he was articulate enough as a native Estonian speaker to defend Soviet interests and perspectives in the Estonian language without turning them into a laughing stock among his Estonian colleagues. Harald Haberman, it seemed, believed in the capacity of the Communist Party to bring Tartu University back to life and restore order and purpose to its curriculum. But for all his optimism about the Soviet future, enshrined shortly after his death in 1987 in his memoirs, Looking Backward (Tagasivaatamisi), Haberman remembered his arrival at Tartu University in late 1944 as a time of Babel, when “chaos reigned” (valitses kaos) in the town of Tartu and its University.

Harald Haberman (1904-1986) had always been a left-leaning biology student and instructor at Tartu University, but in the twenties and thirties he had been deeply embedded in Tartu’s interwar civil society as the member of several Tartu University social and academic organizations. He belonged to Tartu University’s Raimla Fraternity, the Estonian Nature Society (Loodusuurijate Selts), and the editorial board of the Journal “Estonian Nature.” He was also a leading figure in an organization devoted to the study of local Estonian regional history and culture (literally: “home study”—koduuurimine), where several prominent Estonian scholars were also members, like one of the fathers of the modern Estonian language, J.V. Veski, the folklorist, O Loorits, historian, R. Kenkmaa, and many others. Most importantly, he was a member of the “Free Thinkers Society,” Humanitas, founded in 1930 by a convinced Marxist, Aleksander Audova. Audova left Tartu for Moscow State University in 1932 where he promptly passed away. Thereafter, leadership of Humanitas fell to the well-respected Estonian atheist and Mathematics Professor, Jaan Sarv, and Harald Haberman. Sarv was the chair, Haberman the vice chair.

Sarp (1877-1954) and Haberman (1904-1987) held many leftist values in common. But for all their similarities Sarv drew the line when it came to Bolshevism. Haberman was one of Tartu’s first interwar converts to the faith. At first it was a secret affiliation. An amnesty declared in 1938 freed several Estonian Communists from prison, several of whom came to Tartu. The founder of Tartu’s Communist Party Organization, Paul Keerdo, found work at Tartu’s Literary Museum with the folklorist Oskar Loorits. He was the one who recruited Harald Haberman into the Communist Party in the first place. Haberman in turn began recruiting others, like Aadu Hint, who had hitherto been a devotee of Friedrich Nietzsche. Others followed: A. Jakobson, A. Alle, U. Urgart, M. Raud, E. Hiir. All this took place in the utter secrecy. Even Tartu’s Communists largely remained unaware of one another’s activities and existence for

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633 Mitt, Meenutusi, 71.
634 “Kui köige lühemalt iseloomustada 1944. aasta lõppu Tartus ja ülikoolis, siis võin julgelt kinnitada, et seal valitses kaos.” Haberman, Tagasivaatamisi (120).
635 Haberman, Tagasivaatamisi, 48.
636 Haberman, Tagasivaatamisi, 67.
tactical reasons. (Decades later, Tartu dissidents would use the same strategy to protect each another from detection by the state.\textsuperscript{637})

Haberman’s Bolshevik affinity did not become common knowledge in Tartu until the Soviet takeover in June 1940, when he promptly received a state appointment as the Director of Internal Defense (\textit{sisekaitseülem}), a kind of Head of Police. When Haberman left Tartu for Tallinn to begin his new government job in the fall of 1940 he found many letters of congratulations waiting for him, including one from Jaan Sarv:

\begin{quote}
Esteemed Mr. Haberman. Until now I was convinced you were an honest free-thinker. I worked together with you in the interests of furthering the human spirit. Now I see, that you are nothing but a Communist Politician, and our work together is finished. Never again your J. Sarv.\textsuperscript{638}
\end{quote}

This kind of principled severing of ties when faced with Bolshevism was stereotypically Estonian. To one of his former Mathematics students, Ülo Lepik (1921-), Jaan Sarv was a model of the Estonian virtues of “simplicity” (\textit{lihtsus}) and “honesty” (\textit{ausus}).\textsuperscript{639} Sarv did all the labor on his farm in Nõo and would often receive students who came to take their exams with him at his home with the words, “Wait till I haul away this pile of manure here, then I’ll deal with you! (“Oodake, ma viin selle sõnnikukoorma ära, siis võtan Teid ette!”). He was known for walking to town barefoot, and demanded this of his sons as well. One of his sons was apprehended for taking arms against the Soviet Destroyer Battalions in 1941 near their home in Nõo and for this crime was sent to a prison camp in Vorkuta. According to Lepik, Sarv blamed himself for his son’s sad fate: “I have told my children time and again always to speak the truth, no matter what happens to them!” In this case his son had admitted to crimes for which there was no evidence. Later Professor Sarv tried to go visit his son in Siberia. He waited for three days outside of the camp at Vorkuta, before giving up and returning home without ever seeing his son. It had never occurred to him that the Soviet officer in charge might simply have been waiting for him to pay a bribe.\textsuperscript{640} This kind of deceit, so fundamental to Soviet life, was not yet part of his cultural repertoire.

But eventually Soviet life taught even the principled Jaan Sarv to compromise. After the War, Haberman and Sarv found themselves together in Tartu again. Haberman received an invitation from Jaan Sarv to his birthday. Haberman reminded Sarv of his earlier letter, asking whether he was truly still “never again your” Harald Haberman:

\begin{quote}
You know, Haberman, a person has the opportunity to reevaluate some things. I have now seen both the Fascists and the Communists. We both love human beings and want to help them. Please understand also that making mistakes is only human, and I, old man that I am, confess my mistakes. Let’s consider my telegram annulled. Let’s make up.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{637} Haberman, \textit{Tagasivaatamised} ,64.
\textsuperscript{639} Lepik, \textit{Tartu Ülikool}, 94.
\textsuperscript{640} Lepik, \textit{Tartu Ülikool}, 94.
This was Haberman’s retelling of the event. Ülo Lepik had heard the tale directly from Haberman as well. Apparently, Haberman was proud of his gesture of magnanimity. For it had been entirely within his power to make life miserable for Jaan Sarv.

The break between Harald Haberman and Jaan Sarv is emblematic of a deeper rift within the Estonian intelligentsia, revealing another crucial element of Soviet binarism, the way in which Estonian beneficiaries of the Communism destroyed their relationships with former friends and allies contributing to the atmosphere of distrust, fear, suspicion and humiliation after the war. As a biologist, even Haberman fell out of favor with the Party briefly in 1950 during the Lysenko controversy. Of the trials and tribulations of 1950, Haberman noted, “even I had for a while to give up my Party card.”

The isolation was partly self-imposed, partly imposed by the Party. He found himself sitting with another interwar Bolshevik convert, the director of the Vanemuise Theater, Kaarel Ird, musing on their strange fate and trying to understand why the state to which they had sworn their undying allegiance had—for a while at least—turned against them. In his memoirs, Haberman quoted Kaarel Ird’s account of their common predicament:

And then all of a sudden we found ourselves with a lot of time on our hands. Haberman was cast out [of the Party] a bit earlier and with much greater theatricality than my own expulsion from the Theater. We no longer had very many people with whom we could communicate. We held aloof from our former colleagues, since we did not want to cause them discomfort, such that they would be forced to avoid us…. And this is how we spent some very long evenings together and discussed the strange turn which 1950 brought into our lives and those of many of our friends. And we had something to talk about. We had both tied our fate to the Party already at a time when the most likely outcome of Party membership was imprisonment.

Haberman had had many friends in his youth. In later life he lamented together with Heinrich Riikoja, another interwar convert to Bolshevism, that he did not have almost any. This was one of his last reflections on the last page of a memoir composed less than a year before his death in 1986. Some of his friends had died of natural causes. But he had also lost a great many to the political upheavals, compromises, and violence of the Soviet experiment.

641 This incident is reported both in Haberman’s memoirs and the memoirs of the Mathematics Professor Ülo Lepik, a student of Jaan Sarv. Lepik, Tartu Ülikool, 94.
643 “Ja siis jõudsid kätte need ajad, kus meil mõlemal oli järsku aega väga palju. Habermanil jõudsis see suurest ühiskindlikust tõöst väljalülitamise aeg veidi varem kätte ja toimus ka paljuvereema teatreaalse efekti dna kui minu teatritööst eemalejätmine. Meil polnud enam kuigi palju neid, kellega võiks veel suhelda. Oma vanadest ametiallastest tuttavast hoidsime ise eemale, kuna me ei tahtnud neile tehda seda ebasumiugavust, et nemad meist oleksid pidanud hakkama eemale hoidma… Ja nii istusime nii mõneks pika õhtu kahe keskmist sest, mis viiekümnes asasta tõi meie ene ja paljude meie sõprade ellu. Ja meil oli, mida arutada. Olimme mõlemad oma saatusse sidunud parteiga juba siis, kui partides olemise kõige reaalsemaks lõpptulemuseks võis olla vangla.” Kaarel Ird as quoted in Haberman, Tagasivaatamisi, 144.
Hans Kruus: the Socialism of an Estonian Nationalist

Like Harald Haberman, Hans Kruus (1891-1976) “went Bolshevik.” His life story—with its pronounced, dual commitment to socialism and nationalism—is worth examining in detail, since it embodies so many of the contradictions, not only of the Soviet-Estonian intellectual and political elite, but of the Soviet Union in general, with its double commitment to the international and national identities of its citizens. Kruus was born near Tapa in Northern Estonia on October 22, 1891 to a poor family of farmers and artisans. Believing education to be the key to success and upward mobility Hans Kruus Sr. sent his son to Tartu to enroll in a teacher’s seminary. Kruus never looked back. He enrolled as a history student at the Imperial University of Tartu (Jurjev) in 1915. Among his teachers his first year there were Evgeni Tarle, whom he praised as a thrilling lecturer and personality:

The other lecture course I decided to attend in my first semester at Tartu University was that of professor Evgeni Tarle. His topic this semester was the history of the Great French Revolution… I had heard from the older students of his tremendous capacities as a lecturer, of his sparkling wit and utterly convincing oratory. Already in my first semester I came to see that this view of him was justified.

Professor Tarle’s figure and behavior had special influence…. The Professor’s living, thoughtful eyes were always in motion, when from his somewhat large lips flowed a river of words, presenting new facts, painting pictures and short descriptions and surprising reflections…. Toward the beginning of the semester I had the good fortune to hear him lecture in the aula [the main ceremonial auditorium] of Tartu University, at a “patriotic” meeting arranged by the Rector in connection with the war effort. There were many speeches by the University’s best orators. Tarle was the best of all. From his speech rung out the following message: Russia is just as indefatigable now as she was at the time of Napoleon’s invasion. His main argument was Russia’s vast size.

While still a student, Kruus edited the newspaper “Vaba Sõna” (The Free Word) and joined the Blue-Black-and-White National Estonian Fraternity that gave its colors to the Estonian Nation State in 1919. Kruus joined the Tsarist army in 1917 and happened to be in Petrograd for the outbreak of the February Revolution where he founded the Estonian Branch of the far left agrarian Socialist Revolutionary Party together with Estonian poet Gustav Suits. Suits and Kruus returned to Tartu together, earned their doctoral degrees (in 1930 and ), and chaired the new Estonian Literature and History departments at the newly nationalized University of Tartu, representing the poetic voice and historical consciousness of the Estonian nation respectively.


“Professor Tarle kuju ja käituminegi mõjusid isepäraselt....Professori elavalt mõtlikud silmad olid alati liikuvad, kui tema pasuvõitu huultelt voolas lakkamatu sõnajuga, esitades uusi fakte, haaravalt maailmuli pille ja lühikesi kirjeldusi ning ‘latavaid mõtisklusi....Semestri algupoole oli mul juhus kuulata professor Tarlet ka ülikooli aulas, kus ta esines rektoraadi poolt seoses sõjaga korraldatud piduliku ‘patriootilise’ kokkutulekul. Sõnast kõik oli mitmetel ülikooli paremaltk kõnelehel. Tarle ületas neid kõiki. Tema kõnest jää kõlama viide: Veneema on niisama võitmatu, nagu ta oli seda Napoleon I sissetungi ajal. Autori peaargumentiks oli Venemaa tohutu territorium.”

Thus, one might say that the Estonian national identity of interwar Tartu (though not necessarily interwar Tallinn) was born in Revolutionary Petrograd.

As Estonia’s first indigenous professional historian, Hans Kruus sought to establish Estonia’s place in the world through his scholarly research. As much as his work was about cultivating scholarly and popular national self-awareness (teaching Estonians what it meant to be Estonian), he was attentive to and interested in a wider scholarly world, and consistently sought to frame his studies of Estonia in global terms. An early study of village and town in Estonian history from 1920 is a wonderful case in point. For this was not just a provincial study of the towns and villages of Estonia, but a Weberian concept-driven enquiry into the very nature and meaning of urbanization for Western Civilization. Kruus began with Ancient Mesopotamia, charted the growth of cities through medieval and early modern Europe, looked to the implications of Charles Fourier and Robert Owen for urbanization, all as a way of contextualizing and providing a background for the last 100 years in Estonian history, attempting to define the cultural transformation wrought by the growth of cities for education and culture more generally. But however triumphalist his narrative, he was not immune to complexity. On the one hand he quoted Schmoller on the city as the source of all the progressive impulses of society: “The country-dweller is backward, old fashioned, while the town-dweller is a free-thinker, a progressive, a social democrat.” On the other hand, he conceded that “the city creates antagonistic forces for democracy, gathering all parasitic and privileged social-strata into itself.”

In the 1930s Kruus became a Prorector of the University (though he resigned in protest after the dictatorial seizure of power over the Estonian State and University by Konstantin Päts in 1934), and his meteoric rise to national prominence continued into the early years of the Soviet Occupation. He was the first Soviet Rector of Tartu University in 1941 and followed his leftist compatriots to Moscow during the German occupation in 1942, where he became a key figure in the Moscow-based Estonian intelligentsia. In 1944 he returned to Tartu and briefly resumed his post as Rector of Tartu University. In 1945 he moved to Tallinn where was appointed the First President of the Soviet Estonian Academy of Sciences.

Kruus was purged together with the rest of Estonia’s “bourgeois nationalist” elite, including 1st Secretary of the Estonian Communist Party Nikolai Karotamm and Kruus’s hand-picked successor in Tartu, University Rector, Alfred Koort, at the Eighth Plenum of the Estonian Communist Party in March 1950, making room for new blood in the Soviet Estonian Intellectual establishment, both in Tartu and Tallinn. This is the socio-political context for the arrival of figures like the new Russian-Estonian rector Feodor Klement (who replaced Alfred Koort), Russian-Jewish professors of Russian literary culture like Juri Lotman and Zara Mints, and Russian-Jewish professors of Marxist-Leninism like Leonid Stolovich and Rem Blum, as well as several ambiguously Russian scholars in other fields, like the Dean of Sciences, the paranoid and embattled Stalinist biochemist, Eduard Martinson, who also became Tartu State University’s first historian in 1952.

After his arrest and exile Hans Kruus lived quietly in Tallinn, corresponded with Karotamm, who was forced to remain in Moscow, and sought rehabilitation until his death in 1976. Stories of the beatings he had received at the hand of the Soviet secret police during the period of his incarceration were legendary, and circulated in whispered rumors down the halls of.

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Tartu University. In fact they were known as far away as Finland. Naturally reclusive, Kruus withdrew even more from society after his arrest, though a few of his former colleagues had even seen the scars of his abuse in trips to the sauna. The sauna has always been a private affair in Estonia, and the much more public Russian “bania” never caught on (though the Soviet municipal government installed a bania in Tartu on the far side of the Ema River). The bania remained a symbol for many Estonians of the endemic collectivism of Russians in contrast to Estonians’ proverbial (and stereotypical within the world of the ethnic clichés of the Friendship of the Peoples) endemic individualism.

To this day Hans Kruus remains Estonia’s most conflicted and tragic national figure—Estonia’s most ardent nationalist, who also happened to be an ardent socialist, and whose hamartia was that he could be both, that the one need not exclude the other. So he ended up a stranger both to the socialist state he helped to create in Estonia and to his former nationalist friends. The diary of one of Kruus’s former fraternity brothers, Jaan Roos, recorded Kruus’s attempt to return to the terms of his former intimacy with some of their mutual friends in EÜS (Eesti Üliõpilaste Selts). On the 27th of March 1947, Roos wrote in his diary:

Hans Kruus is in Tartu on account of the up-coming elections. What is more, he took part in prof. Hiie’s birthday party. He is very eager to make contact with his former companions in the Estonian Student Society, but this does not go over well. Nobody trusts him. There is only mutual provocation. The exchange between prof. Bernakoff and Kruus became especially tense. Kruus had apparently told off Bernakoff with the words—what kind of scholar are you? You have only one published scholarly work! To this Bernakoff retorted: ‘At least I have one, but you don’t have any. Those, which you had before now have gravestones on them.’

The author of these words, Jaan Roos, a member of the National Estonian Student fraternity, had fled from his Tartu home toward the end of the war together with his extensive library, and spent nearly eight years as an illegal, wandering through the countryside in Soviet Estonia taken in by a wide network of friends and acquaintances and hiding when necessary in abandoned farmhouses from 1945 to 1954. With the help of some friends and relatives he hid his diary in a barn, where it was kept until after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Toward the end of his peregrinations, when he had all but given up hope of Estonian independence, he succinctly summed up the tragedy of Kruus’s life in a diary entry from April 30, 1954:

647 Turku University’s professor of Finnish history Pentti Virrankoski never succeeded in visiting Tartu in the course of his many visits to Estonia in the 1970s and 80s, even though he was part of a Finnish-Soviet “friendship” project. In Tallinn he met Hans Kruus, who showed the Finns “the wounds on his back during their sauna evenings, an eternal reminder of the NKVD.” (“saunaöhtute käigus näitas soomlastele oma armilist selga, igavest mälestust NKVD-st”).

H. Kruus was the most important Estonian historian and professor of history, enormously self-confident and principled, and in his own time a serious Estonian. But then he became the worst traitor of the Estonian people when Communism was brought to Estonia. He sat for three years in prison. One of those years he was very sick and in the nerve clinic.

This was a common Estonian attitude toward the social and psychological impact of Sovietization. Going Bolshevik had destroyed a Kruus’s psyche in the end, rendered him internally divided. The entry says as much about Roos as about Kruus, suggesting the categories and values by which behaviors were evaluated and judged in Soviet Estonia.

Of all figures in the national pantheon, Kruus is the figure that Estonia scholars have been least inclined to investigate. Still, he remains one of the most consistently cited. In search of an authority on Estonian history for the opening lines of a 1939 British guidebook to Estonia, Ronald Seth turned to Hans Kruus, who had translated his own history of the Estonians into German to make it more internationally accessible: “An Estonian historian, Dr. Hans Kruus, in his foreword to his History of Estonia, says: ‘The surprise was bound to be great in Western Europe, when in the year 1918, the indigenous nations of the Baltic, the Estonians and Latvians, nations up to that time little known, living in the shadow of a flourishing Baltic German culture, and lost in the gigantic political organism which was the Russian Empire, abruptly constituted themselves independent States” (35). More than sixty years later, addressing the Estonian nation in the newly reconstituted Republic of Estonia in 1996, Estonian president Lennart Meri turned to Kruus to show the importance of Estonian national character in Estonian history: “Estonia has managed to survive down through the centuries because the cornerstone of our foreign policy—to use the words of historian and statesman Hans Kruus—has been the common sense of the peasant» (71). A collection of his essays before 1941 recently appeared under the title, “Eesti küsimus” (The Estonian Question) in 2005.

While still a student in the early 1970s, Rein Ruutsoo (now an Emeritus Professor of Sociology and Politics in Tallinn) interviewed Kruus for a study of Alfred Koort, Tartu’s most important interwar philosopher, translator of the Western philosophical canon into Estonian, and Tartu University’s second Soviet rector after Kruus. Ruutsoo remembered Kruus’s charismatic presence. No one mastered a room like Hans Kruus: “When Juhan Kahk stepped into the room, Juhan Kahk stepped into the room. But when Kruus stepped into a room, it was an event. Everyone stood up, at least this is how it was in 1970.”

In many ways Kruus might be seen as a legitimate late Soviet socialist. After several decades of silence, Tartu University started commemorating Kruus’s birthday again when he

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650 Juhan Kahk was an Estonian historian, whose compromises with the Soviet Regime put him in charge of VEKSA (Väliseestlastega Kultuursidemete Arendus Ühing—Organization for the Development of Cultural Ties With Foreign Estonians) the KGB bureau responsible for collecting intelligence on Estonians living in the West. He used his connections to travel to Paris, meet with Eric Hobsbawm, Emmanuelle Le Roy Ladurie, and to this day remains the only Estonian to have published in the French journal of the Annales. But nothing was more suspect in Soviet Tartu than scholarly success. And Juhan Kahk—like Yuri Lotman and Paul Ariste—had plenty of it.

651 Interview with Rein Ruutsoo by author, Tallinn, August 2011.
turned 80 in 1971. And after his death in 1976 he was one of only ten Estonians to be featured in the commemorative painting, *Universitas Tartuensis* (1982). Late Soviet Estonia experienced a “memoir boom” between 1970 and 1990—when aging Estonian Bolsheviks (and other historically significant individuals) began to look nostalgically back upon the exploits of their youth in building socialism. Kruus’s memoir was also published posthumously in the spirit of the times, an account of his earliest years (1910—1917), where he offered his own life as an emblem for that of his whole generation. In his introduction to *Ajaratta uutes ringides* [Koleso istorii vospominania], he wrote:

> For my generation, whose life on the face of the earth began in the last decade of the nineteenth century, and who has lived past the halfway point of this century, cannot help but feel and judge that it has lived at a great time. It has survived four wars and just as many revolutions. In the course of its lifetime it has seen a great event, which is a great symbol and will show the way for all history to come—the Great Socialist October Revolution.

In other ways Kruus remained a legitimate late Soviet nationalist. Kruus’s words (above) together with a facsimile of his autograph appeared on the title page of the memoir above (the illusion of intimacy). This same stamp of his autograph appeared behind a quotation on the title page of a history of Estonian Kodu-uurimine (Home Studies) put out by the Soviet Estonian Academy of Sciences:

> A person’s earliest and to a great extent later life experiences are tied to his home. They build up as memories and play a central role in shaping his consciousness, his general attitude toward life and work, they accompany a person from the cradle to the grave.

> A great force rises from each person's childhood home—the sense of home, which evolves, enriches and becomes a powerful influence in his work and creation in all his subsequent homes, where he comes to live and work. Out of the feeling of home, a person's nourishing roots grows his great feeling, his great love for the homeland, patriotism.

> In order for a person to live fully, to fulfill his responsibilities in work so that he might be able to enter into spiritual sympathy with the life and interests of his entire people [nation? Soviet or Estonian?—the difference is ambiguous in nearly all late Soviet-Estonian texts ], with their fears and happiness and make his own contribution to carrying society forward on the path of progress—for all this it is necessary that everyone should know the environment in which he lives and works, that he should know the world of his home.

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652 Tartu Riiklik Ülikool, the University newspaper publishes for the first time an article commemorating Kruus’s birthday when Kruus turns 70.


654 “Koduga on seotud inimese kõige varasemad ja tohutul määral ka hilisemad elukogemused. Nad ladestuvad mälestustena ja etendavad üliolulist osa inimese teadvuse kujunemises, tema üldise eluhoikku ja tööpraktika arenemiskäigus, nad saavad inimest nii-öelda häältest hauani.
Together these quotations embody the two ambiguously intersecting directions of his thought and life—socialist and nationalist—the combination of which ultimately proved his undoing.

Kruus understood himself to be an exile in his own home. The Soviet Union and Soviet Tartu may have made its peace with Hans Kruus, but Hans Kruus never made his peace with the Soviet Union. Shortly before his death in 1976, he said to his closest friends: “The Communists have ruined my life three times. The first time was in 1921, when they did not accept us into the Comintern, the next time was in the 1940s, when things did not go as we hoped, and the third was in 1950.”

Rein Ruutsoo was struck by Kruus’s emphatic alienation from the regime: the man, who had once done more than any other to legitimate Soviet rule in Estonia in the 1940s, serving as the Soviet Estonian Republic’s first Acting Prime Minister in the Government of Johannes Vares, would refer scornfully in his last days to the Soviets as “them”—spiritually homeless, trusting no-one, an exile in his own home.

From the 1940s onward, Kruus was equally estranged to his former friends as well. Daniel Palgi wrote of the transformation and estrangement of Hans Kruus—along with many other figures—to Estonian society in memoirs composed in the early 1960s:

His political development seems to have progressed. All his speeches at the meetings of the presidium or at other official functions were well constructed. He never fell into exaggeration, but spoke with conviction. In the fall of 1940 I had the impression that H. Kruus was somehow in disguise. By the beginning of 1941, I had the impression that he had completely given himself over to Marxism-Leninism. And in 1947 to the extent that I had contact with his speeches and heard his remarks, I was confident of my impression of him: H. Kruus was definitely a Bolshevik. Some particular things reveal this as well. In April 1947 following a scholarly session we had an informal gathering amongst ourselves. The table was impressively arrayed: there was food and drink. In addition there were also Russian comrades from Leningrad and Moscow, who all disappeared before the end; they went to catch the train perhaps. We were among ourselves, and felt ourselves relatively at ease. The gathering moved toward the side of the room where Kruus was sitting. He told jokes and was drinking fairly heavily. Before the very end, director Toomre took leave along with his wife. Kruus gave him a gentle ribbing; there is nothing to be helped, you have to take the wife back home. He also said one or two other things, but even from this it was clear that he was Bolshevik through and through.

“Lapsepõlve ja noorusea kodust tõuseb igale inimesele suur jõud—kodutunnetus, mis areneb edasits, ristikab ja saab viljastavaks kodude kaudu, kus inimesel tuleb elada ja töötada. Kodutunnetusest kui toitvast juurkonnast kasvab otseselt välja suur kodumaatunnetus, avar ja sügav kodumaa-armastus, patriotism.”

“Et inimene saaks elada täisverelist elu, et ta saaks edukalt täita oma tööülesannet, et ta oleks suuteline hingestatult kaasa elama kogu oma panuse ühiskonna edasiviimisel progressi teedel, selleks on vaja, et igäiks tunnuska seda keskkonda, milles tal tuleb elada ja töötada, et ta tunnaks oma kodumaatunnetus.”


656 “Ta ise näis olevat politiilises hariduses hästi arenenud. Kõik ta sõnavõtud presidiumi koosolekul või teistel nõupidamisel või sessioonidel olid ideoloogiliselt hästi üles ehitatud. Seejuures ei sattunud ta liialdustesse, vaid räägis veendumusega. 1940.a. sügisel jäi mul mulje, nagu H. Kruus oleks
Even after the Russians had left the party, Kruus continued behaving like a Bolshevik. Bolshevism was no longer a show he merely put on for the benefit of others. It had become part of his identity. He drank heavily, made vulgar jokes, participated in party camaraderie—all of this “progress” was alien to Estonian national sensibilities. His friends and relatives locked and hid the key to their liquor cabinets whenever he came to visit, for Kruus was quickly getting a reputation as an alcoholic.\(^6\) Often criticized for his vanity, came to be understood by many Estonian nationalists in the language of self-serving opportunism.

The fall of Hans Kruus in 1950 from his position as President of the Estonian Academy of Sciences was the necessary background and prerequisite for understanding the comparative success of both Paul Ariste and Yuri Lotman as heads of their respective departments in Soviet Tartu. Each of these men belonged to a different generation; each spent at least part of his student days at a different political incarnation of Tartu University: Hans Kruus at the Russian Imperial University of Iur’ev, Paul Ariste at the National Estonian University of Tartu, and Yuri Lotman at Tartu State University. All three of these generations played a crucial role in the making of the intellectual culture of Soviet Tartu. And in many ways these three men were the most prominent intellectual representatives of their respective generations at the university. Each integrated in his life and academic work both socialist and national currents in a way that allowed him to rise to prominence in the Soviet system. Similarly, all three were also—and understood themselves to be—victims of a state of which they were in some ways the beneficiaries. The failure of Hans Kruus to integrate his identities as a cosmopolitan socialist on the one hand and an Estonian national on the other in 1950 is a good place to begin considering how Paul Ariste and Yuri Lotman accomplished this synthesis much more successfully in the years and decades thereafter.

6.3.2 Imports: Teaching Bolshevik

Soviet imports played a major role in the Sovietization of Tartu University. There were many Russians and members of other nationalities among these newcomers. But many of the new Soviet imports were also ethnic Estonians. Ethnic Estonians raised and educated in the Soviet Union, with variable proficiency in the Estonian language, like the Crimean-born Estonian historian Lydia Roots (one of the 5 founders of Tartu University’s Communist Party organization), the head of Tartu’s history department, Hilda Moosberg, and the physicist and University Rector Feodor Klement. All three—Roots, Klement, and Moosberg—had been educated in Soviet Leningrad. Some struggled with the Estonian language, and all remained foreign in the eyes of the local Estonian community, rendered strange by their accents,
sensibilities, and Soviet education. Their mistakes while trying to speak Estonian became the stuff of anecdotes. While lecturing on Poland in the 18th century, for instance, Lydia Roots was remembered to have said: “Poland did not have an outhouse to the sea,” confusing words väljapääs (access, or literally “exit”) and väljakäik (outhouse). Such unintentional humor made it difficult for local Estonians to take Soviet ideology or history seriously. To varying degrees the newcomers saw their task as a missionary one, bringing the new faith to the Estonian periphery. Most spoke better Russian than Estonian and remained eternally foreign to the world they helped to transform. Without local loyalties to begin with their predicament was a simple one when compared to local converts, who were torn between their former friends and new Bolshevik allegiances.

The “Foreign” Estonians

**Hilda Moosberg**

Hilda Moosberg (1903-1985) arrived in 1945 to Sovietize the department of History, which she chaired from 1952 to 1963. She had studied at the Estonian section of Marchelewski University for Western Minorities at Fontanka #27 in Leningrad, and later—once she was already established in Tartu—wrote her Doctorate on the 1905 Revolution in Estonia at Moscow State University under the direction of Anna Pankratova. Her memoirs, written shortly before her death in the 1980s, suggest how foreign she remained to local Estonian sensibilities even forty years after her arrival in Tartu. The somewhat militant, missionary tone of her memoirs, published on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union, was something worthy of the 1930s. In them she recounted her surprise at the political and ideological naivete of her Estonian colleagues when she first arrived:

> In the Spring semester in 1945 we decided to implement a political seminar for instructors. I made this suggestion, since I had heard instructors making rather curious remarks, and found that we with our Party Organization needed to get a handle on the situation. They knew their specialties well, though their political grounding was weak, and they knew very little of Marxism-Leninism. They took their cues from Nietzsche and from every other kind of philosophical theory. They asked me: “Why do you talk only of Marxism-Leninism and not of other philosophical currents?” I answered: ‘Because Marxism-Leninism has been tested and proved in practice.’

Answering questions as if they belonged to some Marxist-Leninist cathechism kept her alienated from her new colleagues. To many it seemed as if there were no problems in Hilda Moosberg’s life for which she could not find the answers by citing Marx or Lenin.

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658 Lecturing on Poland in the eighteenth century, Lydia Roots was heard to say: “Poolal polnud väljakäiku merele.”

This should have been: “Poland did not have access to the sea.” Instead, what she actually had said was “Poland lacked an outhouse to the sea.”—Helmut Piirimäe, Tartu University Estonian interview with the author.

One of Moosberg’s classmates at the Estonian Section of Marchelewski University for Western Minorities in Leningrad had been “the infamous Vilhem Reiman,” described by Mathematics Professor Ülo Lepik as someone “known especially for his excessive demands and pedantry.” Together Moosberg and Reiman took the ideological reeducation of the faculty upon themselves, organizing obligatory political-ideological seminars in the first few years after the Second World War. Reiman directed the ideological seminar for senior professors, Moosberg for junior faculty. Befuddled by the silence that met her efforts to make anyone talk in seminar, she pulled several participants aside to ask: “Why don’t you answer in seminar?” She could scarcely believe her ears at the response: “There is a lot we do not know. In everything that concerns the Soviet Union, we have been hearing for many years now how the Soviet Union is an enormous state with a low level of culture that can barely sustain itself…. “

Her reaction gives a good sense of the nature and extent of the divide that separated interwar Estonians from Soviet Estonian imports from Leningrad:

Sometimes this almost drove me to despair. How to overcome their opposition, their superstition? Sometimes I even could understand them, since I had worked for a while at the Academy of Material Culture and History and there I had come across some old scholars who had had their old worldview taken over by the side of the Soviets. They were not touched. After all, they had their old worldview and it was difficult for them to change it. When people would say of H. Moora [Estonian Interwar Archaeologist and member of the Veljesto Fraternity—DB]: “He is a typical bourgeois historian after all, what business does he have coming over to our side!” I argued back: “We need people like him to come over to our side!” It was a bit easier for me, after all, to assess these things than those who had been in Estonia the whole time. I had read many of Lenin’s works when I was writing my dissertation and earlier as well. And this had given me an unbreakable faith in the historical inevitability of building socialism. At that time it was very important to us at the university that the faculty would reach step-by-step in the course of their pedagogical work and research an understanding of the necessity of the Marxist-Leninist methodology.

Silence was the general response by which Estonian scholars confronted these attempts at reeducation. Moosberg noted the silence of the Estonian professors and lecturers required to take her seminar. But silence was the attitude of the faculty more generally whenever new ideological demands were imposed upon them. Palgi—who was asked to observe and take notes at the meetings of Rector with faculty—observed the silence of the Estonian professors who

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660 “kurikuulus Villem Reiman, tuntud oma liialdatud nõudmiste ja tähenärimise poolest.” Ülo Lepik, Tartu Ülikool, 184.
belonged to the Learned Council of Tartu State University, which debated all questions pertaining to the life of the University.662

There were quite a few silent members in the Learned Council. Only under duress would professors Veski, Vaga, Jaakson, Kangro, Riikoja, Rootsmäe, Hiie, and Tomingas open their mouths. As long as Alma Tomingas was dean she spoke as much as necessary, but no sooner had she escaped from this position then she fell silent. She would converse quietly with her neighbor, but that’s where she drew the line.663

In fact, silence was precisely how Palgi explained his own strategy for dealing with difficult or uncomfortable situations, the safest (and most Estonian) way to navigate the newly imposed Soviet system. Silence was the best strategy, especially when faced with the unpredictable temper of Prorector Eduard Martinson. In 1952 while making arrangements for the celebration of the 100 birthday of Nikolai Gogol he avoided sharing a piece of logistical information with Martinson: “I now thought that Martinson will become obsessed with this fact and I remained silent: there was no point to apologize. My guiding thought was: in these kinds of unpleasant moments the less talk, the better.”664

Fedor Klement

Perhaps the single most respected ethnic Estonian import from Soviet Russia was rector Fedor Klement. He was a devout, if idiosyncratic Communist, who had spent his youth in various Party organizations, teaching the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism to the unconverted. As a Leningrad-Estonian, he was thoroughly russified and initially had no desire to return to Estonia. But ultimately Communist piety, a sense of missionary purpose, and high-ranking friends like chemistry professor, Yuri Zhdanov, son of Andrei Zhdanov and husband to Stalin’s daughter, Svetlana convinced Klement to give up his research position and laboratory in Leningrad and accept a post in the provinces as rector of Tartu State University in 1951. A leading figure at the Soviet Ministry of Higher Education in Moscow reminded him: “You are an Estonian and a Communist. Do not argue. You have to serve the people of your tribe (hõimurahvas). Your task is to do everything you can to restore the old University to its former glory.”665 Little by little Klement recovered his “native tongue,” and at his retirement ceremony in 1970 spoke competent, if unenthusiastic, Estonian.666

662 TRÜ Õpetatud Nõukoug arutas kõiki ülikooli eluga seotud küsimusi.” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 366.
665 “te olete eestlane ja kommunist. Ärge vaielge vastu. Peate teenima oma hõimurahvast. Teie ülesandeks jääb teha kõik, et taastada vana ülikooli endine kuulsus.” Klement describes his profound reticence to move to Estonia in his memoirs, where he writes that he had to be convinced by Ivan Käbin, first secretary of the Estonian Communist Party, and the Russian Academic, J. Zhdanov, who later became rector of Rostov University, to accept the post as Rector of Tartu State University. Feodor Klement, Templid Teaduse Teedel (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1983), 111.
666 An audio recording of the speeches and concert at Fedor Klement’s retirement ceremony in the Aula of the University from April 28, 1970 is preserved in the archive of audio recordings at Tartu University’s Library’s Phonotek. F. Klementi lahkumist tähistav aktus aulas (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli helisavustused, April, 28, 1970).
In posthumous memoirs, prepared for publication by his son in 1978, Klement explained how he had reconciled his commitment to Communism and Science, conflating morality with intelligence, appealing to the ancient unity of the good and the true:

I repeatedly reached the conclusion that someone, who stands against the Soviet people and way of life, might become a Communist, if only he is sufficiently intelligent. Stupid people can never be made into intelligent people, let alone into Communists. I always kept this in the back of my mind, when I had to choose members for my group. I began with talent, and thereby earned groundless blame from people of the second category.667

The conflation of morality with intelligence was a classic Soviet view, though most took the opposite view, seeking intelligence in morality rather than morality in intelligence. Indeed, Klement had conducted important research into luminescence in Leningrad. Nonetheless, he came to Tartu not as an academic but as a Party ideologue. Daniel Palgi stressed this in his memoirs: “Klement did not come to Tartu as a scholar and researcher but as a loyal Party member. This is important. Up until this point the Party presence at Tartu University had been weak. The prorectors had been Party members but not particularly active political agitators. Tartu lacked the strong Party axis around which the institution might have turned. But now one could hear everywhere: Klement is a major Party-member. And he has strong hand,”668 Klement was part of the Bolshevik transformation of Tartu University and its academic culture along Soviet lines, imposing his rule on everyone:

He controlled, criticized, demanded. He made himself count. And it must be said: everybody obediently listened to him. The independent and brave professor, who did what he deemed right, had disappeared from Tartu. Many kinds of dictatorship and violence had chased him away. One no longer said what one believed but rather what one thought would appeal to one’s superiors.669

Russians and Other Ethnic Others

Russified Estonians, born and raised in Soviet Russia played a vital role in the Sovietization of Tartu University. Still, the Bolshevik transformation of Tartu would not have been possible without the use of Russians and other ethnic groups. In their writings, Jaan Roos and Daniel Palgi kept track of the appointment of Russians to leading ruling and administrative positions. When Vsevelod Amplip. Generalov was named the Building Minister of the Estonian SSR in February 1953, Jaan Roos wrote in his diary: “Yet another Russian. The majority of

Soviet Estonia’s ministers are already Russians.”

Though embattled isolation was a common feature of the Soviet predicament for everyone, it was especially pronounced for the most ardent Soviet ideologues, who were all imports from the Soviet Union. Paul Ariste remembered the ethnic divide that emerged at Tartu University in response to news of Stalin’s death. He passed by a relatively large lecture hall where the Russian philologists held class. One young Russian woman was beside herself with grief, wailing and beating her head against the wall, and shouting: “Kak my budem teper’ zhit’?” [How will we live now?]. In general reactions were split along national and linguistic lines: Russians wailed and moaned, while Estonians remained silent and indifferent. “The Russians were truly at a loss. What to do or not to do now that Stalin was no longer at the helm?” reported Ariste. Estonian Party members, born and raised in Russia proved their temperamental Russification by acting like Russians: Ariste noted that Vilhelm Reiman was also crying. Like nothing before, this moment in history made the two linguistic communities realize that they belonged to two fundamentally different worlds, with a conflicting sense of history and historical belonging.

Standing in main hall of the University in the ponderous seriousness of the moment, Ariste found himself in front of an instructor from the Department of Russian Philology, who whispered a joke into his ear about Stalin’s failure to make it into heaven because he lacked anyone to recommend him: Lenin would not recommend him: “I gave the Russian people freedom, you took it away.” Peter the Great would not recommend him: “I opened a window to Europe. You slammed it shut.” Catherine the Great would not recommend him: “What a horrible looking old man! He looks so much better in his photographs.”

One prominent Russian was the head of the Teaching Division (Õppeosakonna ülem): Rozoila Issakova. According to Palgi she was “also a Party member, [and] also said to be a Jew.”

She was an intimidating figure:

When she moved it was always in a fury—quickly, spinning, looking in every direction. When she began to speak, it was as if from an automatic weapon, loudly fast, and always giving orders. [...] Every student and teacher who went to speak with her had to speak Russian or would so thoroughly put down and shamed, that you might as well go bury yourself. All that Issakova said was authoritative and correct. It was almost like talking to one of Stalin’s wives. In fact she was the wife an important man. Her husband was

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673 Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 320
the Hero of the Soviet Union, General Isakov (who ran Tartu’s Department of Military Instruction for many years).\textsuperscript{674}

It is worth noting that both Russian and Estonian memoirs reveal the impression that they are in the position of the embattled victims. Tartu’s authority figures in Russian accounts—like that of Yuri Lotman’s colleague in the department of Russian literature, Boris Egorov—tend to be Estonian-speaking; the authority figures in Estonian accounts are Russian-speaking. The sense of victimhood and martyrdom at the hands of the other was common to both accounts.

The aloof vantage point that Jaan Roos provided as a Tartu University graduate turned itinerant wanderer through the Soviet Estonian countryside for nine years and three months from 1945 to 1954, is almost matched for the 1950s by the detailed memoirs—in some case converted diary entries—of Daniel Palgi (1899-1988). He shared much of Roos’s nationalism, and view that there was something fundamentally Russian about the Soviet experiment, lurking behind all its slogans of internationalism. They knew and respected each other. Roos mentions several encounters with Palgi in his diary, and Palgi writes of Roos as well. Palgi claimed in his diary that what really interested him was how he could under Soviet conditions “remain a true Estonian.”\textsuperscript{675}

A voice from the following decade (and generation), Palgi provided a unique, perspective, detached from state power (like that of Jaan Roos), though in many ways even more intimately committed to Tartu University and its higher intellectual and spiritual purpose. Palgi had studied Estonian literature in interwar Tartu, and like Roos had served as a teacher in a parish school. He knew the emerging Estonian intelligentsia of the 1920s and 30s intimately as his teachers and colleagues. In the chaotic months after the war he was shuttled between ministries—rising to great heights and plummeting to great depths (at one point his salary was 6000 rubles a month; at another it was barely 500)—before he finally ended up as a special Estonian secretary to the new Prorector of Tartu University, Eduard Martinson. In this secretarial position his salary was a meager 830 rubles. If Roos provided a perspective on the atmosphere of Tartu and its university from the outside during the first decade of Sovietization, Palgi provided a perspective from deep inside the administrative core of the University that spanned the 1950s. Though he was officially employed as an assistant to Eduard Martinson, his job interview was conducted by the University Rector, Feodor Klement. In fact, it seemed the rector was looking for someone with some kind of academic credentials, competent in Estonian, who could assist them both in drafting letters and assist them in their interactions with the predominantly Estonian-speaking student body and the faculty, since neither Martinson nor Klement spoke much Estonian when they first arrived in Tartu from Leningrad in 1949 and 1950 respectively.

**Prorector of Science Eduard Martinson**

Next to the Rector the most powerful person in the administrative and academic hierarchy of Tartu State University was the Prorector of Science. Tartu’s most infamous prorector (1950-1954) was another immigrant from Leningrad, Eduard Martinson (1900-1963), who eventually managed to alienate almost everyone at Tartu University—Russian and Estonian

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\textsuperscript{675} „Mind huvitas, et ma saaksin olla õige eestlane.” Palgi, *Murduvas maailmas*.
alike—with his paranoia. Born in Liepaja, Latvia, into the itinerant family of a ship’s captain, he spent a relatively itinerant youth in the Baltic—including a little time in Tallinn in 1913. When the family settled in Petrograd in 1917 Russian became the language in which Martinson formed his identity. He joined the Bolshevik Navy and fought in the Civil War against the Whites, before beginning his studies at the medical faculty in Leningrad in 1920. He worked in various medical Institutes in the Soviet Union—in Omsk, Smolensk, Rostov-on-don—earning his doctorate in 1937.

He arrived in Tartu by decree of the Soviet Ministry of Education in 1949 as the director of the Biochemistry Department. His scientific research was always held in high regard. And he received requests for copies of his work from places as far away as the Department of Poultry Husbandry at UC Berkeley in 1960. His ethnic origins and identity remained enshrouded in mystery and subject of speculation for locals. He claimed to be ethnically Estonian. But Daniel Palgi knew better: “in his Tartu documents he wrote “eestlane” (Estonian); maybe he did this in Leningrad already, since if he was known not to be a Russian and was considered to be Jewish, then maybe it was better to be a ‘jeestlane.’” He was born in Latvia and told me that his mother was an Estonian.*

Paul Ariste, for his part, claimed that Martinson was “a half Estonian, half Latvian. He was from Strenčis, where there was a famous psychiatric hospital. If it was said then (or is said now) about someone that vinš ir no Strenčiem [., he comes from Strenciem“—in Latvian—DB] that meant that he was half crazy, wrong in the head.” Whatever Martinsons’s ethnic origins, Ariste’s sense that he suffered from some kind of mental illness was nearly universal in Tartu, and most Tartu instructors and administrators did their best to minimize their contacts with him in everyday life.

According to Palgi, Martinson had no concept of the particular uniqueness, interest, or value of the place where he had ended up: “He did not understand Tartu University instructors and did not understand Estonians. He did not value Estonian-era professors or dotsents. He was friendly only to those instructors who spoke Russian and engaged in anti-Estonian ‘willow Estonian’ (‘pajuvenelase’) talk.” He never became comfortable in Estonian (or Latvian for that matter), though after more than a decade in Tartu he did make an effort. He studied Estonian with the half Latvian-half Estonian Karl Aben. At one point he even attempted to lecture in Estonian, which according to Daniel Palgi appeared as an unintentional comedy. Palgi, who was employed as an administrative aid to Eduard Martinson, noted Martinson’s bellicose nature and tendencies along with his general indifference to the local particularities of Tartu: “He truly left the impression of rooster, who scratches with his foot and is looking for a fight.” Nonetheless, Palgi managed to remain on outwardly good terms with him personally:

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676 See for example letter from S.E. Feldmannis at UC Berkeley’s Department of Poultry Husbandry. April 14, 1960—TÜRK f.160, s.110.

* jeestlane = Yestonian. This is a reference to the Russian accent in Estonian, a term for residents of Estonia whose first language is Russian and speak Estonian with difficulty, if at all.

677 “Tartus kirjutas ta oma dokumentides rahvuseks ‘eestlane’; võib-olla ta taegi seda ka Leningradis, sest kui venelaseks ei peetud ja juudiks loeti, siis võib-olla oli parem juba olla jeestlane. Sündinud oli ta Lätis ja mulle rääkis, et ema oli eestlane.” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 308.

678 See memoirs of Daniel Palgi, Paul Ariste, and others. Ariste on Martinson, “Ülikooli prorektoriks oli tollal E. Martinson, pool eestlast, pool lätlast. Ta oli pärast Strenci, kus on Läti kuulus vaimuhaigla. Kui kellegi kohta öeldi (või öeldakse praeegugi) vinš ir no Strenčiem, that means that he is half crazy, wrong in the head.” Mälestusi, 296-7.

679 “Ta ei tundnud Tartu ülikooli öppejõude ega tundnud eestlasti. Ta ei hinnanud eestiaegseid professorid või dotsente. Sõbralikkust kniks ta üksnes neile öppejõududele, kes rääkisid vene keelt ja ajasid eestivastast pajuvenelase juttu.” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 308.

680 “jättis tõepoolest mulje, et on kukkan, kes kaabib jalaga ja otsib riidu.” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 308.
The Prorector recognized very quickly that I was useful to him: I was an interpreter, I would answer Estonian letters in Estonian—if need be, I was a good intermediary between him and the other instructors, like some kind of transformer, I could do all kinds of work—except for performances. He wanted to perform himself. I must say that he was always respectful of me. He never shouted at me and never said anything insulting or in a dismissive tone. A few times he rolled his eyes and then sat for a long time behind the table fidgeting, as if he were trying to get a grip on himself, but no explosion ensued. I must say, that on several occasions I made a point of remaining silent and did not feed the flames.681

Rector Fedor Klement did his best to make Martinson feel at home in Tartu. For Martinson’s 60th birthday on September 10, 1960, Klement prepared an elegant photoalbum for the rector of Tartu University, with the photographs of Martinson’s colleagues and Tartu University in 1960.682 But Martinson still suspected everyone of conspiring against him, and this proved a self-fulfilling prophecy. Martinson fell increasingly out of sync with the atmosphere of the times after Khruschev’s secret speech. In 1960 he was forcibly committed to Tartu’s psychiatric ward and repeatedly threatened to call Moscow on his colleagues. On October 16, 1960 he addressed a letter to the First Secretary of the Estonian Communist Party Ivan (Johannes) Käbin protesting his treatment at the hands of Tartu University and his colleagues. He followed this with a letter to the General Procuror of the Soviet Union in Moscow, in which he denounced the circumstances of his arrest on October 14th by a group of policemen and the Tartu University Estonian dotsent in psychiatry, Sulev Maramaa.683

For many years he was confirmed in his position as Departmental Chair in Biochemistry by decrees from above. His unpopularity was widely known. But in 1963, for the first time there was an open competition for the post of Departmental Chair. The election was held on April 26. The voting began at 3pm. Fifteen minutes later—well before the results of the election were known—Martinson emerged from his office and announced that he had taken poison. He died before the results were known. In the end, it turned out that he had received only one vote. Forty of his colleagues had voted against him.684 Heino Noor happened to be the doctor on duty who treated him and was the last person to see Martinson alive. Noor had taken a few courses with Martinson in the previous decade when he was a student. He remembered how Martinson had died, apologizing for speaking incoherently and spitting blood. Whatever the particular pathologies of Eduard Martinson, Heino Noor understood him at least partly as a symptom of his times and the regime. The mere fact that someone as paranoid as he could rise as high and stay as long in the upper echelons of the administrative hierarchy of Tartu University—despite the

682 Photoalbum prepared for Eduard Martinson by Rector Klement—TÜRK f.160, s. 9.
683 Letters written to Central Committee of the Communist Party of Soviet Estonia and the General Procuror of the USSR, Rudenko, TÜRK f.160, s.46.
684 TÜRK f. 160.
universal opposition of the Tartu faculty—spoke to the politics of science and scholarship in the Soviet Union and the colonial relationship between the center and the periphery.\textsuperscript{685}

6.3.3 Fissures at the Ideological Core

There were several “all-university subdepartments” at Tartu State University. These subdepartments offered obligatory cross-disciplinary instruction to students from different faculties. While other disciplines each had their own speciality, these were the departments most closely affiliated with the idea of state power, universal knowledge, and Soviet citizenship. The Subdepartment of Pedagogy prepared future instructors from all disciplines. The Subdepartment of Military Training, run by Red Army officers, like the 1943 “Hero of the Soviet Union” Georgi Isakov, who had fought at Stalingrad, provided compulsory military training for all male students. Compulsory instruction was briefly ended from 1961-1965, but reestablished and expanded thereafter at Riga Street #23 as its faculty grew from eight lecturers in 1948 to twenty-two by 1981.\textsuperscript{686} By the early 1980s, Tartu University students were no longer exempt from military service. In other words, the military intrusion into civilian life—and into Tartu University in particular—became more prominent, not less, over the course of Soviet rule under late Socialism.

Among the all-university subdepartments of Tartu State University were also the four explicitly ideological departments located in the “Karl Marx House” at Ülikooli #16, whose “primary task” was to teach “students the theory of Marxism-Leninism in the integrity of all its components and to develop the scientific communist world outlook of the students.”\textsuperscript{687} These “Red” subdepartments included (1) History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (established in 1944); (2) Political Economy (1945); (3) Philosophy (1950), (4) and Scientific Communism (1964).\textsuperscript{688}

Most of the instructors who taught at these subdepartments were born or at least educated outside of Estonia in the Soviet Union, many at the Party Schools of Moscow and Leningrad. Even its ethnic Estonians tended to speak better Russian than Estonian as a result of their Russian upbringing and education, and were regarded with suspicion by the local population. Both of the original instructors at Subdepartment of the History of the CPSU, for example, were Soviet-born and -educated Estonians. The Crimean-born historian, Lydia Roots (1906-1997) belonged to the nineteenth-century Estonian diaspora. She had studied history at the Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad and became Tartu University’s first Party Secretary, one of the five founding members of the organization in 1944. In a recorded interview from the early 1980s she recalled her own difficulties with the language upon her arrival.\textsuperscript{689} These difficulties were remembered by others as well in numerous anecdotes concerning the mistakes she would make while lecturing to Estonian students on European history, confusing the words for exit

\textsuperscript{685} Heino Noor was the doctor who treated Martinson after he poisoned himself and was the last person to see him alive. For Noor the Soviet experience in Estonia is best explained by the “Stockholm Syndrome” as he repeated to me upon four separate occasions when I recorded interviews with him in his home in Tartu: the victim comes to identify and protect his oppressor. Interview by the author with Heino Noor, February 24, 2008. Martinson’s own point of view in these matters are preserved for posterity in various written diatribes and letters in his personal archive at Tartu University’s library, TÜRK f.160.

\textsuperscript{686} History of Tartu University, 243.

\textsuperscript{687} History of Tartu University, 241.

\textsuperscript{688} History of Tart University, 241-242.

\textsuperscript{689} Interview by Hillar Palamets with Lydia Roots and Alma Selge in 1981. Tartu University Fonotek
(väljapääs) and outhouse (väljakäik) for example. Vilhelm Reiman (1903-1977), who headed the department from 1944 until 1961, had attended the Estonian Section of the Marchlewski Communist University for Western Minorities in Leningrad at Fontanka #47 in the 1920s, and defended his Candidates degree in Moscow in 1949 on the theme of Estonian Bolsheviks from 1917-1918.

The Communist Party was supposed to be a source of unity and singleness. But nothing turned out to be more fractured in Soviet Tartu then the subdepartments of Marxism-Leninism. Thus, the binary divisions, which led to mutual suspicion in Tartu’s intellectual and social environment all throughout the town and university, extended all the way down to the core of the ideological establishment as well. The Department of Philosophy (founded in 1950) seemed especially prone to internal divides. Like the other Departments of Marxism-Leninism, initial chairs of the department were almost all Russians like Dmitri Shardin (1950-1951), Grigori Sapozhnikov (1951-1953 and 1954-1957), and Russian-born Estonians, like Otto Stein (1958-1960). Stein had grown up in Russia and fought in the Civil War, but still managed to lecture in Estonian. The most ardent Communist there, the Russian Jewish immigrant from Leningrad, Rem Blum, was curiously also one of its most isolated and embattled figures, as remembered by his long-time friend Leonid Stolovich: “What a curious thing! Despite Rem Blum’s sincere Marxist convictions the leadership of the University and the agents of All-Union ideological purity did not veil their suspicion of him.” His predicament might be compared to that of the German pietists of the seventeenth century Swedish University of Dorpat, who were frustrated with state sponsored Lutheran Orthodoxy and wanted to return Luthernism to its spiritual, intellectual, and emotional origins. Blum emphasized the early Marx. Upon one occasion in 1969 he alienated himself from the mainstream Party even further when he came to the defense of certain young Estonian writers—Mati Unt and Arvo Valton—who had been subjected to an ideological attack by Eduard Päll. Päll had accused the young writers of having fallen under the corrupting influence of Western ideology. Stolovich suspected that Päll’s attack had been “ordered” from above since very soon thereafter he was elected to the Soviet Estonian Academy of Sciences, despite having few if any academic credentials for such a promotion. The question in essence was whether it was anti-Soviet to talk about alienation under Soviet conditions. Blum argued that under the conditions of “really existing socialism” alienation was still going on.

But the very nature of the debate suggests the extent to which binarism was built by the Soviet state into the intellectual discourse of its universities.

Leonid Stolovich joked in his memoirs that one might divide the history of this Department where he taught himself from the mid-1950s until the collapse of the Soviet Union into three periods: “Pre-Hysterical, Hysterical, and Post-Hysterical.” The hysterical period came at the turning point that was the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, when internal divides within the department turned its members most vociferously against each other. Its leading figures in this period were Jaan Rebane (1924-1993), Eero Loone (1935-), and Mikhail Makarov. They did not see eye to eye on almost anything, despite the fact that all three had grown up in interwar Estonia, were almost perfectly bilingual speakers of Estonian and Russian. Makarov (1934—) was the son of a “White” officer who had sought asylum in Estonia after the Bolshevik Revolution and Civil War, and spoke Estonian from Childhood. Jaan Rebane (1924-1993) was

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690 Interview by the author with historian Helmut Piirimäe.
691 Stolovich, Kohtumised, 76.
692 Stolovich, Kohtumised, 95.
693 Stolovich, Kohtumised, 94-95.
694 Stolovich, Kohtumised, 88.
born into a family of physicists and mathematicians, who fought in the Red Army during the War. Eero Loone (19) was the son of Leida Loone, a Veljesto member from the 1930s who had denounced her former teacher, Hans Krues, during the great ideological purge of Estonian Academic establishment in 1950. 695 But all had been educated at the Party Institutions of Moscow and Leningrad after the Second World War.

One of the most pronounced divides here as between the Continental Marxism of Jaan Rebane (Department chair from 1971), and British style analytic approach to Marxism of Eero Loone. Thus, the Department that should have been the most singleminded, turned out in fact to be the most divided. But there was also the divide between Loone’s reputation at home and his reputation abroad. After completing his studies at Moscow State University in History in 1958, Loone continued his studies in Moscow for two years at the World Economy and International Relations Institute. He taught history at Tartu University from 1963 and joined the Philosophy Faculty in 1966, where eventually he became head of the Department in 1986. Together with the other members of his faculty—Jaan Rebane, Rem Blum, Leonid Stolovich, Mikhail Makarov—he worked on a collection of articles on Historical Materialism, published in 1970. 696 In 1980 he published a monograph in Russian on the Philosophy of History. It would be hard to imagine a more glowing review for Loone’s book than that penned by the Czech-born British social anthropologist, Ernest Gellner, who has been called one of the world’s “most vigorous intellectuals” of the twentieth century. 697 Gellner’s review in the Times Literary Supplement from March 16, 1984, made it clear that Tartu was special for more than just semiotics and Yuri Lotman. The Soviet Marxist scholarship emanating from Tartu University was also cutting edge:

Estonia is one of the smallest, but also one of the intellectually most active and most prosperous, republics of the Soviet Union. The contribution of its ancient university of Tartu (founded by Gustavus Adolphus shortly before he fell on the field of Luetzen) to the development of Russian literary structuralism is fairly well known. Less well know is an active group of philosophers, who apparently play a major part in the cultural life of their country, and receive regular allocations of time in the mass media…. Eero Loone is one of these Estonian philosophers. A historian by training (and ancestry), he has turned to the philosophy of history, which he practices in what can only be described as an impeccably analytic style. His sense of the distinction between conceptual and factual issues, between descriptive and evaluative ones, between substantive, theoretical and meta-theoretical ones, certainly could not be improved or sharpened, were he a product of one of those Anglophone institutions, either side of the Atlantic, which pride themselves on their fastidiousness in these matters. … it constitutes evidence of great intellectual independence, and of the capacity to master a style of thought not endowed with immediately obvious local bases. I am not saying that this book should be judged by relaxed standards because of its provenance: it would be an outstanding book by any standards. I am saying that the formal skills it displays deserve special note. The substance on which they are deployed is the Marxist theory of history. 698

695 Loone responded to 1950. ERA f.R-2343.n.2.s.67
696 Jaan rebane, Mikhail Makarov, Eero Loone, Aleksandra Gorjatshova, Rem Blum, Ajalooline materialism (Tallinn: Eesti raamat, 1970)

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Loone did well in England, better in some respects than Estonia. He was appointed a life member at Clare Hall Cambridge, where he delivered the Ashby Lecture in 1995, an honor more recently bestowed upon the renowned Oxford historian Ian Kershaw.

But at home in Tartu, there was another side to Loone. One of Loone’s colleagues in the department of philosophy, Leonid Stolovich, quoted a letter he had received from Yuri Lotman about Eero Loone barely two years later after Gellner published his glowing review:

March 1, 1986

Dear Leonid Naumovich,

I have a favor to ask of you. The bearer of this letter, Mihhail Lotman (my son) recently wrote an article on the Renaissance for a Tallinn collection. For some reason it was sent to Loone for a review. He wrote a withering review, accusing the author and Averintsev and everybody who came to mind, of anti-Marxism and other such things. The review seemed so lacking in objectivity, that the editor of the collection, the director of the Pedagogical Research Institute, Nilson, didn't believe it, and asked that it be sent to you. You should not enter into polemics with Loone and probably should forget what I have written you. Just state your opinion on Mikhail's article.699

To Ernest Gellner, writing from abroad, Loone was a careful, measured fastidious philosopher in the best Anglophone tradition. To Yuri Lotman, writing on behalf of his son from just down the street in Soviet Tartu, Loone was a ranting Marxist ideologue, lashing out at the world in irrational anger.

That Soviet Tartu should have given rise to both versions of the man speaks to yet another aspect of the strange duality of Tartu social and intellectual life under Soviet rule: Scholarly success was itself suspicious, for it smacked of double-dealing and compromise. A zero-sum game, success was nearly always at someone’s expense. The historian Juhan Kahk (1928-1998) traveled abroad, met Eric Hobsbawm and Emanuelle Le Roy Ladurie and became the only Estonian historian to publish (on the subject of Estonian peasants) in the French journal the *Annales*. But in order to get these privileges he became the head of VEKSA (VälisEestlastega KultuuriSidemete Arendamise ühing—The Union for Culture Contacts with Foreign Estonians), the KGB subsidiary organization established in 1964 and dedicated to spying on contacts between Estonians at home and abroad.700 No wonder then, that some looked askance at the scholarly success not only of Eero Loone and Juhan Kahk, but also Yuri Lotman and Paul Ariste. Success and falsehood were deeply intertwined in the Soviet system, at least as it was understood in Tartu. Honors and recognition were never freely given.

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6.3.4 The Strange Case of Mikhail Makarov: A Scholar Divided Against Himself?

Soviet Tartu was deeply divided, prone to inexplicable reversals of attitude, behavior, and fortune. Sometimes these division and fractures extended all the way down into individual consciousness, and individuals turned against themselves as well as the world around them. Indeed, Soviet Tartu was full of narratives of psychological trauma, of loss of faith, and nervous breakdowns, suicides, and divided selves. One such tale was the strange case of Tartu Philosophy Professor, Mikhail Makarov. One of the few truly bilingual ethnic Russians at Tartu University, he chaired the “Red” Department of Philosophy from 1954 to 1956 and then again from 1960 to 1971, before he was forced to leave for Tallinn and eventually Leningrad. Born into the family of a White Officer fleeing persecution in the Russian Revolution, he grew up bilingual in interwar Estonia in the Baroque borderland town of Narva, and spent the most of his Soviet life (like many others) running away from his ideologically questionable past and parentage.

After the Second World War, Makarov studied Philosophy in Leningrad together with Leonid Stolovich and Rem Blum, two of his future colleagues in Tartu University’s Department of Philosophy. As a Russian who already spoke good Estonian, there was no question of where he would go to work after he received his degree. Even after he received his appointment in Tartu, he returned to Leningrad to defend his Candidates Degree in 1960 and then his Doctoral degree in 1967, both on the “category of the ‘goal’” in Marxist-Leninist Philosophy. Extremely self-critical during his dissertation defense, Leonid Stolovich recalled how his official respondents—whose task it was to challenge the author—found themselves compelled to defend Makarov against self-criticism.  

Stressing Makarov’s “strong Russian accent,” Mathematics Professor Ülo Lepik remembered Makarov as a perfect embodiment of state ideology. To gain their ideological accreditation at Tartu State all University instructors had to pass certain courses and exams in Marxist-Leninist Ideology delivered at a night school known as the “Evening University.” The most feared instructor there in the 1950s was Mikhail Makarov: he was rigorous and relentless in his demands. Lepik was made to renew his ideological accreditation three times in three separate decades. 1950-52, 1974-76, and 1984-86. The last two times the course seemed a mere formality, but when he took it with Makarov in the 1950s, it was serious business. Makarov was known for his ascerbic and often unpleasant utterances, crude and direct.

Once Makarov accosted Lepik on Toomemägi (the wooded hill at the center of town) with the greeting: “Hello, Bourgeois!” (Tere, kodanlane!). At the time the greeting was tantamount to an accusation of ideological subversion. Lepik was taken aback and asked for clarification. Makarov explained: “You are building a house and hope to achieve Communism!” One of the distinguishing features of the Estonian intelligentsia in Soviet Tartu (e.g. Paul Ariste, Juhan Aul, Ülo Lepik, and many others) was that they often built their own homes—whenever possible in Tähtvere—rather than applying for apartments through the state. Upon another occasion Makarov was known to have said to a young woman in the department, making her blush: “I would like to use you as a woman!” Perhaps something was lost in translation in his use of this expression in Estonian. What he meant, in any case, it turned out, was that the students had played a prank on him, hiding his briefcase in the women’s bathroom. Makarov wanted her to go retrieve it.

701 Stolovich, Kohtumised, 77.
702 “Ehitad maja ja tahad jõuda kommunismi!” Lepik, Tartu Ülikool, 182.
703 “Ma tahaksin kasutada Teid kui naist.” Lepik, Tartu Ülikool, 182.
Though he was feared, Makarov was respected as a truly devout Communist, somebody who believed in the state and the system of which he was the ideological apostle in Tartu. But after the death of Stalin, Lepik began to question his original impression of Makarov. Perhaps Makarov was a political opportunist after all? Indeed, Stalin’s death turned many true-believing Russians into ideological opportunists in the eyes of their Estonian observers:

When Stalin died, then there was a meeting of mourning in the Chemistry auditorium, where one of the speakers was Makarov. He sobbed and wiped the tears from his face, and told us how our father and teacher had died. A few years later in one seminar Makarov spoke of the three classics of Marxism-Leninism. He was asked why there were now only three classics, not four as had been said up until the present moment. ‘How can a person be a classic, who makes grave mistakes?’ retorted Makarov. All this was before Khrushchev’s secret letter to the party, and the subsequent attacks on Stalin. Apparently, Makarov sensed the Party line was about to change and adjusted his own statements accordingly.704

Ülo Lepik summed up the circumstances that led to Makarov’s departure from Tartu University around 1970: “Makarov was an anti-semite. This is why he ended up in perpetual conflicts with the Jewish instructors; he left TSU and went to Tallinn.”705 And there too, he managed to make enemies and alienate people.

The Professor of art history, Jaak Kangilaski, remembered the eruption of the scandal that led to Makarov’s departure somewhat differently and in greater detail. It all began with an article by a student of Leonid Stolovich and Rem Blum, Marju Lauristin, on the question of existential purpose of art. She had basically argued that life has no meaning, but the purpose of art is to give it meaning. For Makarov this was “fascist” nihilism. And Lauristin’s advisors Blum and Stolovich were to blame. (Note: in the binary dynamics of Postwar Soviet Society where all enemies were cut from a single cloth it was not uncommon for Jewish scholars to be accused of perpetuating Fascism or Nazism). The entire faculty was called together to debate the question, and in the end Makarov’s argument was carnivalized and he was humiliated. He left Tartu shortly thereafter.706

But the most elaborate if incomprehensible version of the story of Makarov’s departure from Tartu University was told by one of the people who knew him best, his colleague in the department of Philoloophy, Leonid Stolovich. For Makarov had not always been an antisemite. In fact, quite the opposite. Stolovich remembered how he had even stuck his neck out for his Jewish friends and colleagues:

705 Lepik, Tartu Ülikool, 183.
706 Interview by author with Jaak Kangilaski, August 14, 2009.
I knew him from my studies at the Philosophy Department of Lenigrad University, where he was two years ahead of me. His classmates were Rem Blum and Alexandra Goriachova, later Makarov’s wife. Blum and Makarov were great friends and it was Makarov who helped Blum to find a refuge at Tartu from his Leningrad unemployment. Misha Makarov and I often appeared together at the Student Scholarly Association Conferences. He was one of the hardest working and most talented students in the Philosophy Department, and always behaved according to the highest ethical standards. During the period when “Cosmopolitan Instructors” were being discussed and condemned he spoke out so loudly [against the Party line] that he lost his Lenin (or was it Stalin?) scholarship.\textsuperscript{707}

To Stolovich, Makarov seemed to be an entirely “just and ethical person.” At Tartu University through the 1960s he had many friends on the faculty: he was on close and informal terms of address with Yuri Lotman; he was also on quite friendly with other leading members of Tartu University’s Communist Party, both Jewish and Estonian: Mikhail Bronshtein, Viktor Palm, and of course Rem Blum.

But then something changed around 1969. He turned against his former friends, and developed anti-semitic views. He began speaking out against Yuri Lotman. But the strangest symptom of his transformation was the withering, condemnatory review he wrote of an article in the Estonian Encyclopedia on the subject of the “Dialectic.”\textsuperscript{708} Since the articles were without authorial attribution, Stolovich had to investigate who had written the article that so provoked Makarov’s ire. On closer inspection the author turned out to be Mikhail Makarov himself!\textsuperscript{709}

A ridiculous predicament. This kind of divided personality! Self-criticism is of course possible, but not in this form. Perhaps Makarov wrote the article, but then the editors changed it so much that he no longer recognized it as his own? The Academic Gustav Naan, who was the chief editor of the Estonian Encyclopedia, told me later, how he had been taken to task at a Meeting of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party on account of the first volume of the encyclopedia. In his own defense, he showed the drafts of the article on the “Dialectic” which was signed by Makarov himself. The Central Committee’s First Secretary, Johannes Käbin, had nothing to do but throw up his hands.\textsuperscript{710}

Stolovich offered the following explanation for Makarov’s transformation:

After this story I began to feel sorry for Makarov—What could possibly bring a person to a point where he begins to attack himself? Later I was told that all these inexplicable

\textsuperscript{707} Stolovich, \textit{Kohtumised}, 76.
\textsuperscript{708} \textit{Eesti Kommunist}, (10) 1969: 60.
\textsuperscript{709} Stolovich, \textit{Kohtumised}, 83.
changes which took place in Misha Makarov began after Käbin had sworn he would pound him into a pulp for some of his earlier more free-spirited remarks.

So in the end, everything here—like the inscrutable transformation of Bartlebly the Scrivener in Herman Melville’s short story of the mid-nineteenth century—boiled down to a vague and unverifiable rumor, as if this were adequate to explain the befuddling transformation in Makarov’s character. Perhaps the changes in Mikhail Makarov could be traced even further back to the fact that his father had been a White Officer who had taken refuge in interwar Estonia? Either way, the point is not to dismiss simplistic and reductionist explanations to which Tartu scholars were prone, but to show where and how they acquired their power and force and plausibility in a social environment markedly different from our own. In Soviet Tartu, ambiguities were understood to be only apparent. They concealed clear truths, and if one scratched the surface for long enough, the truth would reveal itself. Sergei Dovlatov’s distinction between clear truths and deep truths notwithstanding, clear truths were the ones that mattered and gave order to people’s lives.

6.4 Binary Categories in Tartu’s Soviet Experience

6.4.1 True and False: Hypocrisy, Dishonesty, and Distrust

The contradiction between appearance and reality in the Soviet Union was explained away and made palatable in the 1930s by means of the Marxist-Leninist dialectic in ideology and the Socialist Realist master plot in literature. After the War, this contradiction increasingly came to be understood in static terms as pure hypocrisy. This was especially the case in Soviet Estonia, where there had never been a powerful indigenous movement to build Communism in the first place. From the very beginning, the ideological and political arrival of the Soviet Union in Estonia was seen as the product of a hypocritical compromise between Nazism and Communism (the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939). The compromises only deepened and proliferated later on.

In his famous collection, The Compromise, Sergei Dovlatov juxtaposed articles he had written for the Russian-language newspaper Sovetskaina Estonia, with the memory of the experience that accompanied and underlay their creation, resulting in the binary opposition between a shimmering surface and the polluted depths: “You can never step into the same river twice. But looking down through the thickness of the water you can make out the river bottom covered with tin cans. And behind magnificent theatrical decorations you can learn to see the brick wall, the ropes, the fire-extinguisher, and the drunken stagehands.”

Most of the book focused on Tallinn, but the eleventh and last compromise of Dovlatov’s collection recounted a trip he had taken to Tartu to cover a Reunion of Prisoners of Fasist Concentration Camps in the Second World War in Tartu’s Vanemuine Theater in October 1976. The article in Soviet Estonia


712 Dovlatov, The Compromise, 4.
told a tale of unity, epic heroism, and the Friendship of the Peoples: after two days of “reminiscence, friendship, and loyalty” the “delegates and guests will then disperse, having replenished the precious and eternal archive of human memory. And we, following their lead, solemnly and sternly utter as a warning, as an oath and precept for the entire world: ‘No one is forgotten, and nothing is forgotten!’” Dovlatov’s personal recollection of the everyday details of the event told quite a different story. Three former prisoners—one Jewish, one Estonian, and one Ukrainian—squabbled among themselves. The Estonian “all but declared his loyalty to the Germans” while the Ukrainian acknowledged the colonial predicament of the Soviet periphery: “And what should they love us for?” Gurchenko butted in. “For the brothel we’ve made out of Estonia?”

A tendency of memoirists to describe their life under the Soviet regime in stark binary terms can be seen in repeated references to the fundamental hypocrisy of Soviet life, i.e. the divide between appearance and reality, and the widespread view that nothing could be taken at face value. This was not an incidental byproduct of the system, according to Daniel Palgi, writing in the early 1960s; it was actually inscribed into the very functioning of the Communist Party. There was the life that transpired on the level of the Party and then there was the life that transpired on the level of everyone else. And one of the most peculiar features of Soviet life was the concerted effort made to keep these two levels separate, reinforcing the prevailing impression that Soviet life was split in two:

All of life was carried out on two levels: on one moved the Communists, discussing their own matters, devising plans; everyone else had to work on the other level, and the Communists directed them, blowing all kinds of lies into their ears to match plans that were kept secret.

One had to wonder at this mania for secrecy! After the Party meeting, over the course of the week, it was possible to find out what questions were discussed. These were the same questions discussed in public, along with personal matters like adultery, falsifying forms, disobedience, etc. It seemed as if these general topics should have been open to everyone. But no! What was important was what was said on the side. This was not something that mere mortals were allowed to know. Ordinary citizens had to content themselves with falsity. That was the great difference.

If Party membership was akin to political adulthood, then average Soviet citizens (like Daniel Palgi) understood themselves to be politically infantilized. The internal conversations of the Party were kept behind closed doors in the same way that parents hide the truth about sex and Santa Claus from their children. Why keep these realms in such open and artificial isolation from

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713 Dovlatov, The Compromise, 145.
714 "Kogu elu oli viidud kahele pinnale: ühel liikusid kommunistid, arutasid oma asju, septisesid plaane, teisel pidid töötama teised inimesed ja kommunistid juhtisid neid, pulkudes igasugust valet kõrva kooskõlas nende plaanidega, mis salajas peetud.

one another? This pattern was repeated on every level of experience, contributing to the impression that everything that was stated openly was a veil for something else.

Time and again Tartu writers and observers from all generations, fields, and persuasions noticed the fundamental hypocrisy of Soviet life: the wanderer and bibliophile from Tartu, Jaan Roos, characterized the Soviet system in the following words: “Everywhere disorder and slovenliness reigns. Only in words is everything good.” This was a sentiment recorded in 1947. It was more or less identical to what Daniel Palgi wrote in his secret memoir composed in 1963: “hypocrisy, double-dealing [literally in Estonian—‘two-languagedness’], deceit. Talk was one thing, behavior another. And if you wanted to get through without any trouble, you also had to use false words, to engage in double-dealing [literally act ‘bilingually’], to deceive others.” This was not a retrospective Post-Soviet, Cold War assessment written from abroad; it was an assessment born from direct experience of the bilingual administrative core of the academic establishment of Tartu University at the height of what would come to be known as the “Thaw.” In order to get away from it all, Palgi retired from his position as a special unofficial bilingual aid to Tartu University Rector Fedor Klement (translating Russian cultural codes into Estonian and vice versa) as soon as he was eligible for a pension, a post he had held from 1951 to 1959. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, duality is also what members of Tartu’s Russian-speaking intelligentsia, like Leonid Stolovich, remembered as the defining feature of Soviet life: “This society was based hypocritically on ‘divided consciousness’: truth was celebrated in words (even the voice of the Party was called Truth [Pravda], which was divided and made more concrete in the form of ‘Leningrad Truth,’ ‘Komsomol Truth,’ etc.).”

Just how far this hypocrisy extended down into family life and intimate friendships varied. But everyone had to be vigilant and distrustful, just in case. And the bilingual character of Soviet Estonian society, where Russian and Estonian cultural codes often came into conflict, required special vigilance. There was nothing more suspicious than a smiling stranger. Leonid Stolovich remembered how the Estonian art historian, Professor Voldemar Vaga (1899-1999) had turned to him to request his opinion about an article on the old Fortresses of Riga on April 23, 1960 with the words: “You are the only scholar at the University, who understands art.” In 1974, Vaga had inscribed his book, Estonian Art “To the good memory of Professor Leonid Naumovich Stolovich.” But in an article published in the journal, Eesti Eskpress nr. 25(290), June 1995, after the collapse of the Soviet Union he finally got a chance to express what he really felt, condemning Leonid Stolovich for “coming here to spread his socialist aesthetics…. You can write of anything if you have Marxist horseshoes. Marksistski podvokan.”

Stolovich had a similarly two-faced impression of Hilda Moosberg (1903-1985), who was a Leningrad-born Estonian, and according to Stolovich, had “built up her scholarly career upon the bones of Anvelt and Pöögelmann,” two leaders of the Soviet Estonian Communist Party executed in Stalin’s Great Terror in 1937. She accused them of Trotskyism in her doctoral dissertation defended in Moscow in 1954 under the direction of Anna Pankratova. Pöögelmann

718 Stolovich, Kohtumised, 73-74.
had actually been one of her teachers at the Estonian section of Marshelewski University for Western Minorities, in Leningrad, in the early 1920s. In 1951 she began attending Stolovich’s lectures on aesthetics in the History Department of Tartu State University, where she served as Department Chair from 1952 to 1963. To his face she praised them highly. For this Stolovich was “sincerely grateful.” Later he discovered that she had, at the same time, also denounced him to the Party Committee. In fact, it seemed she had been looking for a position on the faculty for her daughter Nelli, who was just Stolovich’s age. Stolovich was bitter that Nelli—who never managed to finish her degree—became regular faculty member, while it was several years before Stolovich, for all his superior qualifications, got a permanent position. Sometimes Soviet hypocrisy remained concealed for more than half a century (as it had in the case of Voldemar Vaga). Sometimes, it revealed itself right away (as in the case of Hilda Moosberg). Almost everyone I met at Tartu University had stories of this kind, many recounted to me under the promise of confidentiality.

The memory and anticipation of hypocrisy and distrust structured everyday social interactions. Denunciations led to counter-denunciations. Friends turned into—or turned out to be—enemies. And everyone learned to be vigilant and pretended to be someone he was not.

Paul Ariste spent most of 1945 in the infamous Battery Prison in Tallinn. On the train to Tallinn he overheard the guard singing to himself in Yiddish, and since he too spoke the language too engaged him in conversation: “He looked at me: ‘Zaid ir oich a jid?’ [Are you also a Jew?]—I replied to him: “Take” [Yes]. I lied.” Ariste wrote of this episode later in life, in memoirs composed in the early 1980s. In the aforementioned case, postulating an ethnic bond with the prison guard earned the Estonian prisoners the right to talk amongst themselves. In prison Ariste was beaten severely to the accompaniment of lively dance music. Over the course of the year of his incarceration, through several interrogations, Ariste got the sense that what the Soviet state demanded of him—like everyone else—was to confess to lies and deny truths, and more often than not, there was a pronounced national dimension to these interrogations in the Estonian periphery.

At first he was quite polite. He accused me of bourgeois nationalism. I responded honestly: ‘What is bourgeois nationalism? Explain this to me!’ The answer was terrible: ‘Vy khotite unichtozhit’ nas russkikh.” [You want to destroy us Russians]. The thought of this made the young interrogator quite upset, and he grabbed me by the hair and started to pull. Still he did not hit me. I heard from others inmates that one of the female interrogators took off her shoe to pound people over the head with it when the desired answer was not given. Every night somebody was interrogated. Those who returned to the cell had either been thoroughly beaten or psychologically tortured. There was one boy from Elva. I don’t remember his name. When he was brought back, he fell half-conscious on the floor. We went to console and help him. We lifted up his bloody shirt. His back was covered with blue and red welts. The interrogators had forced him to confess to things he did not even understand.

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719 Stolovich, Kohtumised, 72-73.
720 Ariste, Mälestusi, 263.
Ariste writes in his memoirs about how another young interrogator reported, with a smug expression, that at “[Tartu] university people seemed to be generally quite happy about the apprehension of an enemy of the people like me. I argued back: I said that there was no one there [at Tartu University] who would call me that.” Ariste thought he recognized the handwriting. Before the interrogator could stop him, Ariste reached across the desk (an unheard of act at an interrogation) and grabbed the papers, where he saw “at the end of the text written in large and elegant letters Э. Эритс [E. Erits].” Ariste replied to his interrogator: “I am still confident, that no proper (korralik) person would say what I am accused of here. E. Erits is well-known for her intrigues and denunciations.”

After his release he came across “Madame Erits” walking her dog Bobby in the Tähtvere Park not far from their respective homes in Tartu. She came up to him and smiled: “How happy I am, that you are back in Tartu. Once again there is someone here with whom one can have an intelligent scholarly conversation.” Ariste replied: “You denounced me. I read your denunciation. But I got out nonetheless.” She went white as a sheet, muttering “shameless.” On her deathbed several decades later, Madame Erits sent her husband to fetch Ariste so she could beg his forgiveness. Ariste did not go, but sent her his forgiveness anyway: “I am not angry. I forgive her.” There was no point in remaining angry in a world that was structurally designed to provoke these kinds of denunciations. Denunciations made, remembered, or merely suspected from the 1940s, 50s, and 60s—and nursed in silence for thirty or forty years—undermined the feelings of trust and social solidarity in Soviet Tartu until the collapse of the Soviet Union and well beyond.

Even Tartu’s last Soviet generation grew up with the understanding of hypocrisy as the fundamental Soviet background for everyday life. Half a century younger than Daniel Palgi, Mihkel Mutt (b. 1953) echoed Palgi’s generally pessimistic view of hypocrisy and deception as the ubiquitous cultural background for the behavior of all his teachers. It lent a kind of tragic aura to many of his professors in the 1970s like Paul Ariste (Finno-Ugric Languages) and the former Stockholm-based KGB-spy turned Tartu University linguist, Juhan Tuldava (German). But nobody seemed more tragic to him than his teacher of Russian literature, Valerii Bezzubov (1929-1991). Bezzubov was well loved by just about everyone, and well-respected for his courage and honesty. He was especially well-loved in the Department of Russian literature. Shortly after his death, Yuri Lotman wrote of his extraordinary capacity for empathy, and his fairmindedness; he had even taught Solzhenitsyn’s One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich in his course on Soviet literature at a time when it was dangerous to do so after Solzhenitsyn’s expulsion from the Soviet Union. For Mihkel Mutt, the best way to describe Bezzubov was as “an honest member of the old Russian intelligentsia,’ except for the fact that his mother was Estonian.” But still there was some kind of tragic duplicity in Bezzubov’s life he could not put his finger on, but its mystery and uncertainty only amplified its magnitude for him:

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Ariste, Mälestusi, 262.

723  “…ülikoolis oldavat väga rahul minusuguse rahvavaenlase vahistamise pärast,” Ariste, Mälestusi, 267.

724  Ariste, Mälestusi, 267.

725  Ariste, Mälestusi, 267.
Sometimes in the evenings he could be seen dancing shyly and awkwardly with his male students in the Old University Café. All his students loved him. But for me there was something in Bezzubov’s character that was thoroughly tragic. Maybe this came from the double-morality that this time demanded of everyone, but which some people found easier to adjust to than others. Bezzubov was undoubtedly an extremely sensitive and delicate soul. Who knows, maybe the cultural and national divide in his identity played some role in this as well?

Born to a Russian father and Estonian mother in “Estonka,” a village founded by the nineteenth-century Estonian diaspora in Abkhasia, Valerii Bezzubov had grown up far from Tartu, against the mountainous backdrop of the Caucasus, in a no-man’s land between the Estonian and Russian languages and cultures. In Tartu, the bilingualism that should have given him access to two different worlds, held him aloof form both. Mutt remembered that “he lectured in Estonian, almost without an accent, but still somehow with difficulty, looking for words, as if casting about with his tongue. If some especially important expression proved too difficult to translate he would just say it in Russian.”

According to his daughter, there was a divide between him and his colleagues in the department of Russian literature as well, however much they loved him. He held aloof, and preferred to retreat alone with her into the woods where they had a cabin.

Secrecy and deception pervaded all aspects of Soviet life in Tartu—even urban planning: Tartu buildings had to be fewer than six stories in height so that the secret Raadi military airfield on the edge of town, with its long-range Tupolev nuclear bombers, concealed in bunkers hidden beneath grassy mounds, would not become visible to observers. Distrust was also present in Tartu’s relations with the wider world. The heightened state of secrecy was particularly intense in the first ten years after the war. Daniel Palgi observed, “We lived as if in a corked bottle: nobody managed to get out into the world, and nobody from abroad managed to get in.”

About a decade before Tartu came to the attention of the Western world as a center of progressive learning and scholarship (and the home of Yuri Lotman), it reached the pages of American and Western European periodicals as a symbol of Soviet backwardness. One of Tartu’s first dissidents, Mart Niklus, a Tartu University biology student in the 1950s and translator of Charles Darwin, became an enemy of the state in 1956 for sending some photographs of Tartu abroad that revealed the “true” dilapidated state of buildings on Turu Street: cracked, supported by an external scaffolding, about to fall down. These photographs were published in 1957 in the *Chicago Herald Tribune* and in several Western European

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728 Interview with Katrin Raid, May and August 2009.

729 This is a piece of common knowledge that can be found in most contemporary guidebooks to Tartu now. Daniel Palgi refers to it in his memoir as well. Palgi, *Murduvas maailmas*, 464.

newspapers as well.\textsuperscript{731} And for exposing the truth about Tartu—which was understood to be the truth about the Soviet Union in general—Niklus spent most of the “Thaw” in Siberian Prison Camps (1958-1966).\textsuperscript{732} Meanwhile, in an action organized by another one of Tartu’s first dissidents, Enn Tarto and eight of his high-school classmates were caught disseminating 300 leaflets on Cathedral Hill by the University Library, protesting Soviet repressions in Hungary. For this they also spent the better part of the next decade in the Gulag.

The Soviet state practiced deception not only in policing the images of Tartu it let out and the opinions it allowed to circulate within. It also practiced deception in policing the people it let in from abroad. The first foreign visitor allowed into Tartu arrived more than ten years after the Second World War, on October 11, 1955. This was the Greek Pianist Temelis, who came to give a concert in the auditorium of the main building of Tartu University—the same place where Franz Liszt and Robert and Clara Schumann had performed in the nineteenth century on their way to Saint Petersburg. “I do not know if he was a red or a white or something in between,” noted Palgi, “but he was blind. Yes, at this point it was finally safe for Tartu to receive the blind!”\textsuperscript{733}

With its rituals of civility and politeness, all civilization is based to some degree on concealment, mendacity, and hypocrisy (or repression, to follow Freud in \textit{Civilization and Its Discontents}). But to internal Estonian commentators, Soviet civilization seemed uniquely pathological in its attempt to hide local realities from foreign eyes, turning black into white in the process, and forcing its citizens to play along and do the same. A Soviet person, for Daniel Palgi, was a person who had come of age when lying, deceit, and hypocrisy had become his second nature:

As later became clear to me, state power followed the following criteria in controlling the movement of foreigners: Has the Republic or town evolved so far that foreigners can be allowed in to take a look. Are the houses sufficiently pretty and big; are the streets in order; is there something to buy in the stores, is there something to eat in the restaurants; do people go about respectfully dressed; have people been raised to act in the Soviet manner—for example, if some foreigner should stop by and ask them, are you satisfied with your life, then even though in his heart a person would like to say, get lost, he will still say the words: yes, here we lead happy lives.\textsuperscript{734}

In the 1950s, however,

Tartu was not yet so far along. [At first] only a blindman, who did not see anything and could not go anywhere on his own was admitted to Tartu..... In the Soviet state the material goods were not distributed evenly—one lived best in Moscow. That’s where

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\begin{footnotesize}\textsuperscript{731} For a reproduction of the offending photograph see Niklus, \textit{Mind ei tapetud õigel ajal} (Tartu: Iseseivus, 2004), 12. \\
\textsuperscript{732} Mart Niklus, interview by author, Tartu, May 10, May 17, and July 17, 2009. \\
\textsuperscript{733} Palgi, \textit{Murduvas maailmas}, 460.\\
\textsuperscript{734} “Nagu hiljem mulle selgus, oli riigivõimel väärtuslikum, et üksüks võis mõnedalt parima hulgas juhiseks ka see põhimõte: Kas vanavõim ei paagi linn on näilitud jõudnud, et sinna üksüdend jääb veel lahti. Kas majandus on kujunenud ja suured, tänapäev onuvatatud, kauplustes kaupu, restoranis süüa; kas inimesed käivad juba kõvalt hästi rida; kas inimeste käivad on nii kaugel, et nad käivad nõukogukindlalt, näiteks kui üksüdend jääb veel lahti peatama ja küsib, kas olete oma eluga rahul, siis kui üksüdend jääb veel lahti, ütleb ta sõnadest õppelikult: jah, meie elamine õnnelikult.” Palgi, \textit{Murduvas maailmas}, 460. \end{footnotesize}\end{flushright}
you could get everything. Leningrad, Stalingrad, and Kiev etc. were already a bit worse off. And Tallinn was yet another rung lower: food and other goods were distributed according to the importance of the place.\footnote{Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 461.}

In October of 1956, Tartu had finally become sufficiently Soviet to receive its first group of foreign visitors: some university students from Finland. What they saw of Tartu was in Daniel Palgi’s opinion a Potemkin village, an illusion constructed for their benefit. The Tartu Municipal Party Committee, the Komsomol, and Tartu University all worked together tirelessly to make sure of this. To begin with, “Russians were kept at a distance (or maybe they kept themselves), because it was not prudent for the Finns to hear too much of the ryssä [Russian in Finnish—DB] language, which normally filled the surroundings of the university and its corridors.”\footnote{Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 461.} This way, Palgi implied that the Finns would go back home and talk about how the Estonian language was alive and flourishing in the Soviet Union (while in fact it was struggling to survive). Then there was also the fact that the Finnish guests were taken to Tartu’s finest restaurant, which had been Russified as the “Volga.” In interwar Estonia it had been—as it became again after the collapse of the Soviet Union—the “Athens.” The guests were told that this was where Tartu students ate regularly (another lie; according to Palgi only high ranking Party members could afford to eat there). A special menu was prepared for these purposes where prices were listed as cheaper than they ever were actually. On this day anyone who went to Volga could order a meal for 45 kopeks and wine for 1 ruble for a bottle, “though the actual price was ten times higher for a meal at the Volga and wine was still more expensive.” Despite the best efforts of the Communist Party organizers, one Finn strayed from the group and ducked into a Tartu clothing store where he found some cheap Polish fabric for a suit, which was being sold at 430 rubles per square meter. “The Finn was said to have been so shocked at this impossible price that he burst out laughing…. Surely the unhappy seller behind the counter got punished later, for the fact that she happened to be standing in the wrong place at the wrong time.”\footnote{Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 461.}

Finally there was the ceremonial meeting in the main auditorium of Tartu University. Palgi noted the exclusion of one of Tartu’s most free-spirited thinkers, Villem Ernits, from the festivities because he was an unpredictable and “inappropriate person!” (“Ebasõiv isik!”). Finnish statements in their speeches that seemed controversial and provocative (because the Finns did not know any better) were greeted with thunderous applause from the Estonian audience: “Some may see you as Communists and us as Capitalists (hõimlased),” Thunderous applause. Anything slightly off or provocative in light of the prevailing Soviet discourse was greeted enthusiastically, evoking the enduring tension between state and society that defined the social consciousness of Soviet Tartu. One of the Finns referred to the fact that the University was 300 years old. This too met with thunderous applause since the Communist Party had spent the greater part of the
1952 trying to prove that the University was in fact only 150 years old in 1952. In the evening there was a dinner at the Park Hotel, and a dance in the course of which several women at Tartu University, including the German teacher and Party member L. Tint-Otsmaa (who was herself married) attempted “in a very temperamental way to fall into the arms of the Finns.”

A few days later the Tartu University Party Secretary, Johannes Kalits, was furious at the failure of Tartu University to follow the Soviet script, claiming at the Komsomol Conference on October 21, 1956, that the Finns had come here attempting to spread “bourgeois nationalist” ideology and that it seemed that in the end they had to a great extent “succeeded.” Perhaps the significance of Tartu University in the Soviet story was in part the fact that it never did follow the Soviet script, which could be understood at various times both a sign of its uncivilized, unruly backwardness and its sophisticated, independence of mind and membership in an alternate civilization. This tension reveals the deeper contradiction at the root of all Enlightenment civilization: the idealization, on the one hand, of citizenship as a kind of independence of mind, stressing political consciousness as the backbone of any mature political culture, and at the same time the idealization of civility, with citizens made docile through propaganda and advertising molded into a quiescent and predictable social body that dutifully trusts in the structures of the prevailing political and social order. Those who refuse to accept the contradictions they see at the root of their experience are in equal measure celebrated in the past as intellectual engines of social progress and the founding figures of every enlightened state, ideology, and national tradition, while pathologized in the present for their inflexible naivety, for refusing or failing to understand the compromise necessary for all political and social practice.

6.4.2 Good and Evil: Heroes and Villains

Another aspect of Tartu’s Soviet binarism was a tendency to view the world in Manichaean terms, dividing it into clear categories of heroes and villains, good and evil, us and them. Sometimes heroes proved to be villains or villains heroes, but the felt need to identify who was who, to establish clear moral identities and boundaries was an enduring feature of Tartu’s Soviet identity—not just for Tartu’s Communist Party activists and dissidents, but pretty much everyone else as well. So much ink has been spilt dismissing these kinds of statements and views in Soviet historiography as inadequate projections of Western Cold War historiography, that such statements arising from within the Soviet experience have been ignored or dismissed as clichés, leaving one of its most interesting problems hidden in plain view: why did so many people in Soviet Tartu, like Yuri Lotman, Paul Ariste, Leonid Stolovich, Daniel Palgi, Uku Masing, Mihkel Mutt, Jaan Kaplinski, and countless others of all political persuasions and ethnic identities, come to understand their own lives in clearly binary terms—epistemologically, morally, and linguistically—if these were nothing more than the retrospective projections of Cold War politics? One of the clearest expressions of this kind of moral binarism can be found in a memoir from Tartu’s own “last Soviet Generation.” The following words were composed in the late 1990s:

In that time it was as if there were two separate worlds. One was the world of the KGB, in the other, there were honest people and there were many more than just our community of friends. It was for each one to decide in which world he would live, though in either

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738 “...mõned Tartu daamid, nagu TRÜ saksa keele õppejõud parteilane L. Tint-Otsmaa, kes ise abielus, olla taotlenud väga temperamentsest soomlastele kaela langeda.” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 463.
739 Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 463.
case it was impossible to completely avoid contact with the neighboring realm. The first of these worlds turned increasingly surreal, while the other silently gathered force.740

The author of these words, Lauri Vahtram (b. 1960), attended Tartu’s Second High School, where many Tartu University Professors sent their children. Lauri was himself the son of Sulev Vahtram, one of the most highly respected History professors on the Tartu University Faculty and one of only two who never joined the Communist Party. But Lauri’s classmates at Tartu’s Second High School—where instruction in English was especially strong—also included Inga Koop, the daughter of the University rector, Arnold Koop, and the youngest son of Yuri Lotman, Aleksei or “Lodu” as his Estonian friends and classmates called him. According to Vahtram, “Lodu” was famous for giving their highschool Russian teacher, Holomenkova, a former student of Zara Mints and Yuri Lotman, a hard time, carnivalizing her inadequate treatment of Russian literary classics to the delight of his Estonian classmates. When asked why he was so hard on her, Aleksei responded: “I hate to see Russian literature turned into soap.” Vahtram tried to console him by observing that Estonian translations of Chekhov were quite good.741

Later at Tartu University a few of these high-school friends would found the “Young Tartu Movement” (1980-1991), modeled explicitly on the urban “Young Estonia Movement” of Gustav Suits of 1905 and dedicated to the rehabilitation of Estonian history by means of discussing forgotten (and forbidden) figures of Estonian history and literature and by caring for the graves of fallen national heroes in Tartu’s Raadi cemetery. A confrontation between Lauri and Rector Koop, connected with Lauri’s leading role in this organization, led to his temporary expulsion from the University. Lauri Vahtram soon became a household name. But he was back a year later to finish his degree. A final photograph of his memoir under the caption “Kaval Ants ja vanapagan” (“Clever Hans and the Devil”—an allusion to an old Estonian folk tale of the same name—DB) shows Lauri looking up skeptically from beneath raised eyebrows at Rector Arnold Koop, as he shakes the Rector’s hand and receives his Tartu University diploma in 1985.742

Manichaeanism was pervasive in Soviet Tartu, extending deep into the work and thought of its various intellectual circles. In the introduction to an Estonian translation of reminiscences of Yuri Lotman’s closest friends and admirers, Lotman’s eldest son, Mikhail (b. 1952), observed the widespread tendency in memoirs of his father’s friends and colleagues to oppose the Tartu University Rector, Arnold Koop (1970-1988), to his predecessor Fedor Klement (1951-1970) in just these terms: “If Klement was a wise, intelligent, and friendly person, then Koop was his polar opposite.”743 Such binary thinking permeated Tartu school structuralism of course, but life and thought in Soviet Tartu more generally. Indeed, the Koop-Klement binary became a general structuring device for organizing memory in late Soviet Socialism in Tartu. Both Koop and Klement were ethnic Estonians and members of the nomenklatura; but the Tartu intelligentsia

742 Vahtram, Meenutusi, 240.
seemed to agree that Russian-speaking Klement was not only a “true scientist” but also a sympathetic human being, while Estonian-speaking Koop (born in Pskov) lacked education, culture, and was in essence a crude Soviet functionary. Thus, already in his own lifetime, Koop became a symbol of repression and stagnation era politics.

While acknowledging some truth in these impressions, Mikhail Lotman intervened to correct this image a bit, noting first of all how Tartu had changed Koop, how upon his arrival from the Ministry of Education in Tallinn he came “to understand what it meant to run a university and to appreciate the values of higher education.” Moreover, Mikhail observed how Koop even came to appreciate the Tartu School, which gradually became for him “an object of pride—especially in his contacts with the outside world,” and how he “to the extent of his abilities did what he could to protect Yuri Lotman and his department against pressures from Tallinn and Moscow and the antagonism stemming from the University itself.” If Lotman’s famous semiotic journal *Trudy po znakovym sistemam* [*Sign System Studies*] survived at all, even in the most difficult years of the late 1970s and early 1980s, it survived partly because it received the protection and endorsement of Arnold Koop. In conclusion, Mikhail contrasted Koop to the Tartu University Prorektor Valter Haamer: “Here one should not neglect the TSU [Tartu State University] Prorektor Valter Haamer, who, while representing himself as an important KGB-agent (whether he actually was, cannot be verified), did his best to shut down the publication [of the work of the Tartu School].” Ultimately, it should be noted that Mikhail Lotman’s way of correcting the general impression of Arnold Koop was not to debunk the binary model itself, but to displace it, locating the evil previously attributed to Arnold Koop in Valter Haamer.

In my own interview with Valter Haamer in the Tartu University Library in the summer of 2009, he of course told a very different story of how “the people of Tartu University had worked together for the good of the University.” In his own retelling, he had stood together with Arnold Koop against the vaguely defined agents and organs of state security, so that now the binary was displaced further still, to a divide between the patriots of Tartu University on the one hand and the organs of the Soviet establishment on the other. He even emphasized his own role in making sure that Lotman’s publications would continue to appear in print: “And then—we understood this much—that [*Sign System Studies*] was an important publication, so we tried

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744 Hillar Palamets has also observed the inadequacy of this distinction: both Koop and Klement were Soviet functionaries. But Hillar Palamets, who is himself perceived as morally suspect for his Party membership, however, is widely dismissed as an intellectual authority and his his writings criticized for their lack of objectivity. Still, in many respects he writes more engagingly and interestingly on the history of Tartu University, and has done as much (if not more) for the salvation of its memory—the oral histories of Tartu preserved at the University Library’s phonotek are entirely the outcome of his efforts—than many moralists who like to flaunt their ideological purity.


747 “Siinkohal ei saa mainimata jätta tollast TRÜ prorektorit Valter Haamerit, kes tähtsa KGB-agendina esinedes (kas ta seda ka tõepoolest oli, pole teada) tegi suuri jõupingutusi Tartu semiootikaväljaannete sulgemiseks.” Jalutuskäigud, 15.

748 “Eesti rahvas töötas südamega ülikooli jaoks.” As a former Tartu University Prorector in charge of Publications, Haamer stressed that Tartu University professors had a better per capita chance of seeing their works in print than the professors of any other Soviet University, including Moscow. In many cases, to increase their allotted publishing rights they worked out deals with the main state publishing house in Tallinn—“Valgus”—such that Tartu University would do all the work and Valgus would get the credit. Valter Haamer interview with author, Tartu, June 1, 2009.
to arrange things so that they would appear by letterpress printing (kõrgtrüksis) [a higher quality and more expensive form of print than was used for other university publications—DB].” According to Haamer, there were occasionally problems and misunderstandings because Lotman and Mints, who were always pressed for time, never bothered to edit their pieces sufficiently, and changed their mind at the last minute after they had received the first proofs. These tiny changes—a sentence here a paragraph there—of course, “were a huge problem for us,” explained Haamer because it meant that the whole journal had to be scrapped and printed a second time, and for this “we had to pay double.” And this was a significant price to pay in an era when paper was a rare commodity and many Estonians already felt that Tartu University’s Russian-speaking departments were getting the lion’s share of the University’s material resources.

My aim here is not so much to verify who is right—Mikhail Lotman, Valter Haamer, or Lotman’s friends and admirers—as to observe the collective predicament that seems to have been such an important feature of late Soviet culture and its style of thought: the difficulty of assessing what was what, and who told the truth, and how to make sense of these diametrically opposed evaluations and judgments. Added to this was the presentiment of a dark if clear truth—some KGB agent—hovering an arm’s length away, just beneath the surface of everyday life. Quite often he was there, though just as often he was not; and even when he was there, he was rarely there in the sense that he was imagined to be present. The attempt to identify heroes and villains intensified with the collapse of the Soviet Union as the names of KGB leaked out of surviving KGB files. (The vast majority for the period from the 1960s to 1991 had had not been sent back to Russia in 1991). But what did this really prove? Mihkel Mutt (b. 1952) was skeptical. He remembered how he himself had been called away out of nowhere to an interview in the main building of Tartu University at one point at the beginning of his third year in Tartu University’s Department of Estonian Philology, in the mid-1970s. The two men locked the door and started asking him about his fellow students. He played dumb. Later he was told that if they needed to get in contact again they would leave an envelope at the front desk with the words “Tõru” on it. In other words, without agreeing to anything, Mihkel Mutt had suddenly become an archivally verifiable KGB agent. “What to do? How to crawl out of this predicament? It was not in my nature to tell those two men in the office to their face to get lost. And I am no ‘Tõru.’” He received a few envelopes, but did not respond to them. Later when they tried to force him to sign a paper in which he swore “to help State security and to keep its secrets,” he refused: “For this reason I have always taken a skeptical attitude whenever the media from time to time exposes some agent merely on the basis of the discovery that the person had an agent codename, as if this very fact already proved that someone had been hooked. A name can be

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749 “Ja nüüd meil olidki see semiootika, Lotmani semiootika lugu. See hakkas ilmuma 60. aastate alguses. Ja seal oli siis autorit mitte ainult ülikoolist, vaid väljaspoolt ülikooli… ja Moskva ja üle Nõukogude Liidu oli autoreid. Ja siis, kuna saime niipalju aru, et see on oluline väljaanne, siis püüdsime niiviisi teha, et need lasksime teha kõrgtrükiks, suures trükikojas, tellimistööna […] ja need siis levisid üle maailma, tõid kuulsust Lotmanile ja Mintsile ja teistele ülikooli õppejõududele kes semiootikaga tegelesid. Tõid aud ja kuulsust Tartu ülikoolile. Me olimme seda nii tahtnud ja nii me seda tegime.” Valter Haamer interview with the author, Tartu University Library, June 1, 2009.


applied at any stage in the process, and the ultimate success or failure of this kind of recruitment has nothing to do with this.”  

In a larger sense, the uncertainty and suspicion that led Tartu’s students and teachers to their bifurcated Manichaean world view was an integral part of the Soviet mentality of Tartu University, the social and intellectual world that gave birth to the Tartu School and all of the University’s intellectual endeavors under Soviet rule. All this was particularly pronounced in a borderland world like Tartu, where binary divides were exacerbated and intensified by bilingualism and the presence of competing national historical narratives and worldviews. The search for villains went hand in hand with the search for heroes. But on closer inspection the heroes often turned out to be just as compromised, divided, and tragic as the villains, even within the bounds of any given national narrative. Far from uniting Tartu, their memory in light of revelations leaked from the archives of state security drove a wedge between Tartu’s most deeply committed dissidents. One of the most tragic cases of compromised heroism was the case of the partisan “Forest Brother,” Theodor Reinhold. What follows is a reconstruction and analysis of Reinhold’s story, based on the retellings of two of the most famous Tartu dissidents, Enn Tarto and Mart Niklus. Like elsewhere, the aim here is not so much to establish the truth about Theodor Reinhold as it is to show how the perpetual uncertainty about the truth was part of the cultural background of Soviet Tartu, how it could become a polarizing force, even dividing the most like-minded figures of Tartu’s Estonian nationalist intelligentsia. Many of the documents cited here—including Enn Tarto’s defense of Reinhold’s character, Niklus’s attack upon it, and a transcription and Estonian translation of the incriminating evidence allegedly from Reinhold’s “criminal file”—were re-published together by Mart Niklus under the title “From Metsavend to a KGB collaborator” in a collection of his writings. The other source is an appreciation of Theodor and Gertha Reinhold written by Enn Tarto’s wife, Piret. 

In 1993, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of Estonian Independence Theodor Reinhold (1909-1996) was celebrated as a national hero for his uncompromising resistance to the Soviet regime. His story was exceptional. Like many other Forest Brothers he had participated in the uprising against Soviet rule that transpired on June 10, 1941. He and his wife, Gertha (1917-2011) had both been Tartu University students; he had belonged to the Sakala Fraternity and was a recently appointed Instructor in the University’s Department of Law; she had studied English, joined the Indla Sorority, and spent a year abroad in London in 1938. He went into hiding during the War and continued fighting the Soviet forces for more than a decade, seeing her only occasionally, but still keeping up with his reading and working on his doctorate; after the war she kept teaching English at a Tallinn high school, but under increasing pressure and suspicion from the state eventually gave up her position and joined him in the forest (here one might compare Yuri Lotman’s Decembrist wives, who followed their husbands into exile out of principle), remembering how at this time “Theodor had firmly believed that something had to change… Nobody knew how long we would have to remain in hiding.” After all, noted their family friend Piret Tarto, “at this time, nearly the entire Estonian people were still waiting for the White Ship,” which would bring them deliverance from Soviet occupation. From the decade of their internal exile, Gertha remembered one perfect summer night in particular: “they had sat

753 Mart Niklus, “Metsavennast KGB koputajaks,” in Mind ei tapet ud õigel ajal (Tartu: Kirjastus Iseseisvus, 2004).
755 “Sel ajal veel ootas peaaegu kogu eesti rahvas valget laeva.” Piret Tarto, “Gertha ja Theodor.”
beneath a towering haystack, and Theodor swam across a river to fetch a boat from the other side. A full moon shone in the sky. . . . in 1950 their son, Rein Reinhold, had just been born."

This idyll could not last forever. Rein Reinhold only lived to be one month old. And a some years later on the evening of March 2, 1955, Theodor looked out the window to see their home surrounded by shadowy figures who turned out to be state security agents. Upon catching a glimpse of them his wife remembered that he had uttered only one word—"Käes!" (Caught!)—before they became streaming into the apartment.

Like many other Forest Brothers, Theodor Reinhold was sent to a Prison Camp in Mordoviana Republic. Unlike most others he served his entire 25-year sentence. He had several opportunities to request amnesty. But this would have meant “confessing to crimes against the regime.” This he would not do, as reported by the Tartu dissident Enn Tarto: “He sat out his entire sentence honorably.” The two became acquainted in the camp during Enn Tarto’s first incarceration. He was sent there in 1957 already as a Tartu high-school student for distributing leaflets protesting Soviet Repressions in Hungary. According to Tarto, “The Mordva prison camps have often been called a school for open resistance. From an educated man like Theodor Reinhold, who befriended the younger generation, we young nationalists had a lot to learn.”

Indeed, Reinhold was something of an inspiration to other Estonian inmates. Valdur Raudvassar remembered Reinhold as a “a man of independence-era Estonian culture, who would call him out to walk on the camp soccer field and discuss the future of Europe and the world.” While many Estonians believed at the time in De Gaulle, Reinhold knew that the only world power that could make any difference in the fate of Estonia was the United States of America. When the Estonian poet Enn Uibo died in the camp, the prisoners organized a commemorative evening in his honor, where Reinhold gave a speech. The camp subscribed to the Estonian Communist Newspaper, Rahva hääl [People’s Voice]. At one point they even found an article there on the state’s war with the Forest Brothers in which some quotations from Reinhold’s diary were set in print. Reinhold had written: “It is 1951 the Year of Our Lord and Communist Terror still rules over Estonia.” Seeing their fellow-inmate vilified as an enemy of the state this way only added to his legend and increased his authority among them.

Reinhold had been at the prime of his life when he was arrested on March 2, 1955; he was an old man when he got out exactly twenty-five years later on March 3, 1980. The world had changed, but he had kept his honor for twenty-five years. Or so it seemed. The following week called everything into question. For just as Theodor Reinhold was being celebrated, in 1993 for his principled opposition to the Soviet regime, a document leaked from his KGB “criminal file” began circulating in the Estonian media. Dated March 11, 1980, it purported to be a letter he had written to the State Security Committee the week after his release:


759 “läbi ja lõhki eestiaegset haritlast, kes tõöst vabalajal kutsus teda ikka ja jälle laagri jalgpalliväljakule jalutama, et arutada Euroopa ja maailma tuleviku ja arengu üle.” Piret Tarto, “Gertha ja Theodor.”

760 Piret Tarto, “Gertha ja Theodor.”
I got out of Mordovian Camp on March 3, 1980 and arrived in Estonia on March 4th. It was most likely on the afternoon of March 5 when a former spy for America, Robert Hamburg, together with the former prisoner Hergog Randla, drove up to my place in their car. They both knew, like Mart Niklus, that I had for a while in the prison camp been a staunch enemy of Soviet power. Later I changed my views and came to understand that I had been mistaken and was now loyal to the Soviet system. Hamburg and Randla were interested in finding out what living conditions were like now in the camp, and said that they had come to see me. On March 8 together with Mart Niklus and Enn Tarto, Hamburg came to visit me again. Mart Niklus had the July 13, 1972 issue of Rahva Hääl [The People’s Voice], where my actions at the time of the German Occupation were described, including the attack on the Ulilaa Power Station by bands of Forest Brothers, where I was the commander, described as a henchman of the Fascists. Without my permission Mart Niklus began asking me all kinds of provocative questions about this article and my life story, taking notes and trying to show how I had suffered in vain at the hands of Soviet power. I came to understand from his questions, that I was understood to be just as antagonistic to the Soviet system as I had been before. I did not ask why he posed all these questions to me, and I do not know what kinds of notes he took. But I did not say anything anti-Soviet and I did not give my permission for sending these notes abroad for publication, and he did not ask my permission. It seemed to me that Mart Niklus’s behavior was strange and I want to say that I have justly carried out my punishment and I do not want to do anything bad to the Soviet Government, just to join together with the Soviet Estonian people to work honorably like all people.

I inform you that I have nothing in common with a man like Mart Niklus.

What to make of this? What did it mean? What is clear is that Tartu’s two leading dissidents, who had both come to see Reinhold after his release—Mart Niklus and Enn Tarto—drew opposite conclusions based on their personal connection to him. For Tarto, who had known Reinhold since 1957, when they had been camp inmates together, Reinhold remained a hero, who could be forgiven his momentary lapse of resolve. Tarto even speculated that the KGB

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letter from his criminal file might be a forgery, or if not a complete forgery at least doctored. But even if it were not, he argued that it would still be wrong “to consider him an agent of state security” (“teda pidada koputajaks”). In an article published in *Eesti Aeg* on July 7, 1993, entitled “Think First, Then Speak” Tarto explained:

One can understand that after forty years of struggle, of which the last twenty-five were spent in a Russian prison, Theodor Reinhold was simply tired. He was still being repressed. He was not given permission to settle in Estonia. Since Mart Niklus and I announced our visit to the Reinholds, then Theodor Reinhold was threatened by another ten-year prison sentence. No one can force an old man to continue the fight.762

Moreover, times had changed, and Tarto speculated that the quarter century Reinhold had spent in a Soviet prison put him out of touch with the prevailing attitudes, dangers, codes, and material culture of Soviet life. He did not know what was dangerous and what was not; he had not learned how to behave at an interrogation. After all, “It could happen, that an aged prisoner [released from prison] had no idea how to open a milk bottle, unaware that all one needed to do was to press on top. So much time had gone by.”763 Theodor’s wife, Gertha, remembered that “if before going to prison Theodor had been self-assured and decided everything himself, then when he returned, and they went to the Tartu department store to purchase a coat after his release, Theodor had told Gerta that she needed to be his eyes.”764 He did not know how to see anymore in everyday life outside the camp. In many ways, Reinhold returned to his home outside Tartu from Vorkuta in 1980 a stranger in a strange land. Tarto concluded: “Theodor Reinhold’s heroic struggle and tragic life deserve to be honored with a medal for his fight for Estonian independence.”765

Mart Niklus drew the opposite conclusion. For Niklus, a man who considered his punishment at the hands of the Soviet system to be entirely justified could never be a hero: “It seems instead that in the course of carrying out his punishment T. Reinhold did not fight to the finish, but ‘reconsidered,’ ‘drew the necessary conclusions’, ‘renounced his criminal past,’ ‘chose the path of rehabilitation’—in short—that he went over to the side of Soviet power.”766 Moreover, his behavior did not merely reflect upon himself; it had affected other people as well. It was partly because of Reinhold’s denunciatory letter, Niklus explained, that he had been arrested on April 29, 1980, and spent the next eight years of his life in a Soviet prison. He was

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764 “Gertha on meenutanud, et kui enne vangiminekut oli Teodor enesekindel ja otsustas kõik ise, siis pärast vanglast tulekut, kui nad läksid Teodoriite Tartu kaubamaja pintsakut ostma, ütles Theodor Gertala, et ole sina nüüd mulle silmade eest.” Piret Tarto, “Gertha ja Teodor.”


not released until 1988. Thus, the tragic case of Theodor Reinhold drove a wedge, not only between Mart Niklus and Theodore Reinhold, but also between two of the first and most prominent Tartu dissidents, Mart Niklus and Enn Tarto. One forgave Reinhold, and offered an empathetic interpretation of his behavior, preserving Reinhold’s honor almost entirely intact; the other insisted that Reinhold’s actions were those of a turncoat forever estranged to the Estonian nation. So who was Theodor Reinhold—a national hero or a traitor? Not even the leading Estonian dissidents could agree. But the need for clear heroes and clear villains gave a kind of special moral urgency to these kinds of questions that endures to the present day and for which the categories of cultural studies and poststructuralist analysis—like “negotiation” or “performativity”—developed in a fundamentally different social, cultural, and academic environment at Western European and American universities provide precious little help or guidance.

6.4.3 Russian and Estonian: The Theory and Practice of Soviet Bilingualism

As late as 1986 the inspector of the Soviet Ministry of Education stressed that Russian language teachers were “front line soldiers on the ideological front.” For non-native speakers the ideal was that “Russian should become a second native language.” But the postwar Soviet Union also celebrated the idea that “all Soviet people would receive the benefits of harmonious bilingualism.” The Estonian language changed in subtle ways to accommodate the Soviet experience with new vocabulary and idioms, making those who had fled to the West in 1944 and those who had remained behind almost instantly recognizable to one another even in the absence of a clear accent. In the meantime many Estonians observed a contradiction between the lip-service paid to the idea of promoting the Estonian language in all spheres of life and the extent to which the Russian language was imposing itself in practice in areas that were allegedly Estonian. In 1963, Daniel Palgi wrote:

768 Both these terms appear frequently in Soviet studies since the 1980s. The term “negotiation” occupies a central place as a metaphor both in Katerina Clark’s analysis of the relations between the state and the literary establishment in The Soviet Novel and between the “grand strategies of the state” and the “little tactics of the habitat” of Stephen Kotkin’s Magnetic Mountain. The term “performativity” has a similarly central place in Alexei Yurchak’s Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More. The problem with interpretive metaphors transplanted from Western legal, business, or political contexts (“negotiation” is a prime example) is that they impose a foreign logic on things that were understood quite differently by the participants. In the case of my story, the sophisticated categories of Western cultural analysis render the moral earnestness of people like Mart Niklus, Enn Tarto, and Theodor Reinhold—whose lives were all based to some extent on a studied refusal to “negotiate” or to “perform”—invisible, laughable, or just irrelevant.
769 Russkii iazyk i v estonskoi shkole, No. 2 (1986): 17.
772 I came to notice this with my own grandmother Taimi (1922-2012), who came to America in 1949 from the DP camps of Germany, and her own brother Ilmar (1923-), who remained in Estonia. I met him when I visited Soviet Tallinn for the first time with my parents in 1983. At the time Tartu was something of a closed city, and off-limits to foreign visitors, so our Tartu relatives had to travel to Tallinn to come see us. In watching Taimi and Ilmar converse when they came to visit us in California in 1990 it was poignant to see the extent to which Estonian they spoke was foreign to one another, full of cultural references and idioms that belonged to alien cultural worlds.
There was the Russian-speaking Estonian Republican Government, there was the Russian-Speaking Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR and there was the Russian-speaking Estonian University in Tartu. The Russian language only grew. The break happened only after the death of Stalin, but even then the break was only in minor areas.  

Both in theory and practice, the Soviet experience at Tartu University must be sought in translation between Russian and Estonian.

The aim of this chapter has been to survey the various aspects of the Sovietization of Tartu University and make sense of what Soviet bilingualism meant, both as state policy and as a practice and experience of everyday life. Of all the binaries of everyday life that isolated people into separate life worlds in Soviet Tartu—and sometimes even divided them from within—none was greater than language. For very few people were truly bilingual and what bilingualism meant for the state, as expressed by such Russian-born and Soviet educated Estonians as Viktor Maamägi or Gustav Naan, i.e. a Pentecostal faith in the perfect translatability of the Marxist gospel according to Lenin from Russian into Estonian, was not what bilingualism meant for Estonian society, especially not in Tartu. Here bilingualism meant the recognition of the Babel of untranslatable and incommensurable values, experiences, and memories contained in the Russian and Estonian languages. This was the fundamental tension of the Soviet experience, at least the one that mattered most in Soviet Tartu. It would also become the fundamental tension of Yuri Lotman’s academic work. The relationship between “translatability” and “untranslatability” surfaced repeatedly in his writings. On one occasion he wrote, “Translation is a primary mechanism of consciousness. To express something in another language is a way of understanding it.” On another he wrote, “The combination translatability-untranslatability (each to different degrees) is what determines the creative function.” Ultimately, the power of language resides not merely in its structural form, as a means of communication in the present, but also as a repository and generator of cultural memories from and for the past. This too became part of Lotman’s understanding of language, which is applied here to help to illuminate the particular dynamics of Tartu in a Soviet conext:

The essence of culture is such that the past contained in it does not ‘depart into the past’ as in the natural flow of time; it does not disappear. It becomes fixed in cultural memory, and acquires a permanent, if background, presence. The memory of a culture is constructed not only as a store of texts, but a certain mechanism for their generation. Culture, united with the past through memory, generates not only its future, but also its past, presenting in this sense, a mechanism that works against natural time.

Lotman’s model of culture was language, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that his idea of culture grew out of his notion of language as such. But no one knows “language as such.” The universalism of Noam Chomsky “generative grammar” and Austen’s distinction between the “performative” and the “constative” are just as firmly grounded in the English

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774 Yuri Lotman, The Universe of the Mind, 127 and 15.
language (and English and American national/imperial contexts) as Lotman’s notion of the “semiosphere” was grounded in the Russian language and its political contexts, inspired by Vladimir Vernadsky’s “noosphere” and “biosphere,” rather than Jakob von Uexkull’s Baltic German concept of “Umwelt” or environment. (Estonian appropriations of Lotman’s semiosphere like those of Kalevi Kull are much more interested in Umwelt than Russian ones tend to be). But in a world that increasingly speaks international English, Anglophone thinkers working within monolingual cultural environments—producing analytic philosophy at Cambridge University or Generative Grammar at MIT—rarely encountered the limits of their own native tongue in everyday life, whereas Yuri Lotman encountered the limits of the Russian language almost every day of his life.

The most deeply felt poetic memories expressed in one language often seem ridiculous, comical, or just downright wrong when translated into another. It took more for Lotman to make Pushkin come alive for Estonian students than for his Russian ones; that which is transparent or self-evident to a Russian speaking audience is opaque to an Estonian-speaking one; but at the same time the Estonian-speaking audience discovers Pushkin fresh, without the heaped-up clichés of Russian literary culture. This predicament was especially pronounced in the recently incorporated Baltic States of the Soviet Union, after the Second World War. The mere fact that there is no single word in English—or Russian or German for that matter—to denote a “Tartu inhabitant” (the very attempt to invent one sounds silly—“Tartuan” or “Tartuite”) implies in some sense the absence of the concept in any of these languages, while in Estonian a “tartlane” is just as natural (and important) a player on the stage of world history as any Roman, Parisian, Berliner, Londoner, Leningrader, or Muscovite. Moreover, only someone for whom a “Tartu inhabitant” like the “Tartu spirit” (Tartu vaim) is a serious cultural concept—and therefore a potential background for any cultural investigation—could see Yuri Lotman in these defamiliarizing, non-Russian terms.

Ultimately, all works are limited and enabled in this way, by the hidden logic of the author’s language, but it takes the speaker of a small language to recognize the hidden particularism of supposedly universal concepts, to provincialize the most cosmopolitan elements of the Soviet experiment, just as it took the particularism of scholars at the small-town German University to notice the limitations of the “universal” pronouncements of French Civilization at the turn of the nineteenth century, or that of their colleagues in metropolitan centers like Berlin a few decades later. It took a Burckhardt to recognize the limits of Ranke; it took a Nietzsche to see the limits of Hegel, and not by engaging in pedantic polemics, but by taking advantage of the academic freedom afforded by the small town university environment to invent their own conceptual vocabulary for the world. It helped that in all three cases, Basel, Strasbourg, and Tartu the emphasis was on teaching rather than scholarship. Most of Burckhardt’s most original works, after all, began as lecture notes. The same might be said for Yuri Lotman: his original groundbreaking work in semiotics, published as the first issue of the world’s first semiotic journal, was originally a lecture course taught to a single student, a member of the local Russian community, Igor Chernov. The impact of Lotman’s work in the world today is as much a social as an intellectual one: the students he trained and the colleagues he inspired, who can be found at almost any major research University in the Western World from Tel Aviv to Chicago, Columbia, and Berkeley, are as important as any of his particular ideas. Bakhtin’s influence in the West, by contrast, has been—ironically considering his emphasis on the lower body—a more

776 The argument I am making here was made in very similar terms by some Tartu scholars themselves in the Soviet period. See the discussion of Uku Masing and Tartu’s other “peripheral polyglots” in the next chapter.
purely cerebral one by comparison, a disembodied and purely discursive theory to be picked up outside of its local cultural context. The most important and immediate way in which language mattered in Soviet Tartu was the way it matters anywhere—as a “lens for experience”—and the stark difference between impressions of Tartu expressed in the Estonian and Russian languages will be dealt with in the next chapter. But the importance of language in a Soviet context was enhanced by the linguistic politics of the Soviet state, which turned its constituent national languages into constant objects of concern.

**Language as an Object of Concern**

The question of language and national identity did not diminish but intensified over time for Tartu’s last Soviet generation. The relationship between philology and ideology was always vexed, and the Communist Party acknowledged the sensitive nature of philological questions. In 1981 Advig Kiris (b. 1935), the head of Tartu University’s Communist Party Organization expressed concern that several dates (e.g. birthdays for important writers and literary figures) had passed by uncommemorated: “I would like more initiative from the philologists. The faculty is very complicated when it comes to ideological education. Here the questions of concern are national and cultural ones. It was worrisome that the department of journalism started to create problems for us. Also in Russian philology education has lacked a clear ideological-political direction.”

The question of the Estonian language surfaced and resurfaced in every decade of late socialism on every level of society and politics, which in turn forced consideration of the Russian language as well.

**i. The Russification of Estonian Orthography?**

One of the most sensitive areas of Estonian national life where Russification was observed and condemned in the 1950s, was in the realm of language, and more specifically, the Estonian orthography of foreign words. Though he occupied a peripheral position on the outskirts of Tartu society as a wandering illegal, even Jaan Roos noticed this. Some of his harshest words for the Soviet experiment were saved for this incident. Characterizing Sovietization as an anti-cultural movement Jaan Roos claimed that the movement to reform Estonian orthography was attempting to dumb down the language by making it resemble Russian in its treatment of foreign words:

> The longer we live under Soviet Russian occupation, the further we are distanced from Europe in our life and culture, and the faster we will be destroyed. The destructive Russian force intrudes everywhere. At the present time there is talk of reforming Estonian orthography for foreign names. Even totally reasonable linguists like E. Elisto are starting to demand that in Estonian, foreign names be spelled the way they are pronounced. This is done on the Russian model, such that instead of writing Bordeaux we would write “Bordoo,” instead of Shakespeare “Shekspiir.” There is no reason to doubt that Russians are ordering this and that we have to obey. Further from the cultural sphere of Europe, and into the stinking lap of Russia. Poor Estonia, Homeland Estonia,

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777 January 5, 1981—ERAF f.151, n.12, s.172, l.3.
quo vadis! In my opinion this whole reform of writing foreign names would seem tactless at the very least. But people have lost their minds.\textsuperscript{778}

If anything came close to provoking an anti-Soviet rebellion among the ranks of the Estonian intelligentsia in Tartu before Stalin’s death, it was this movement to Sovietize Estonian orthography. One of Paul Ariste’s first graduate students in the 1950s, Huno Rätsep (b. 1927)—who studied Hungarian and later became an important Professor in the Estonian Language Department, introducing structuralist methods into Estonian language study in 1964 with his departmental journal *Keel ja struktuur (Language and Structure)—*had been at the crucial meeting in the chemistry auditorium between advocates of change and those opposed to it in 1952. According to Rätsep, the initiative to transform the Estonian orthography of foreign words had actually come from within (it had not been imposed from abroad), but it was quickly taken over by the Russian-speaking establishment, and the polarizing effect it had such that Jaan Roos could record in his journal (quoted above) that it was an imposition “ordered from Russia” is a further testament to the binary divide in Tartu consciousness between its Russian and Estonian elements. The initiator was Karl Aben, an Estonian scholar who also had Latvian roots and spoke Latvian, and was attempting to apply Latvian norms to the Estonian language. The whole affair began, according to Rätsep, because Aben wanted to make his mark in language study and get some kind of scholarly attention and recognition. In the end, in Rätsep’s retelling it was the idiosyncratic Estonian polyglot, Villem Ernits, who saved the day by carnivalizing the endeavor, and the meeting dissolved in laughter: Villem Ernits spoke up and diffused the tension by making up a story of someone whose name changes in every country he visits—turning language into a complete impediment to understanding—because of the combination of Russian norms of orthography with foreign norms of pronunciation.\textsuperscript{779}

As usual, it was Daniel Palgi who provided the most precise minute-by-minute account of exactly what actually transpired, stressing the surreal absurdity of Sovietization just like Jaan Roos in his diary and Huno Rätsep in his interview. The proposal to transform Estonian orthography along Latvian (which were also Russian) lines was endorsed by the Russian members of Estonia’s Communist Party and first became a subject of an intense discussion on June 20, 1952. The binary divide between Russian and Estonian Tartu is also underscored in Palgi’s account, even as he notes the complexities of the situation (i.e. Russian-speakers who stood against the change and Estonians who were for it): “So: the Russians as the older brothers had decided to take the question of Estonian orthography into their experienced hands.” (“Niisiis: eesti keele kirjaviisi otsustamise olid võtnud venelased kui vanemad vennad oma kogendu kätesse”).\textsuperscript{780}

In the course of the meaning, someone suggested that Prorector Martinson might make a telephone call to Moscow to see what the leading linguist there, V. V. Vinogradov, might have to say about the matter. Next to Stalin himself, in 1952 Vinogradov was the ultimate Soviet


\textsuperscript{779} Interview by author with Huno Rätsep, Tartu, October 27, 2010.

\textsuperscript{780} Palgi, *Murduvas maailmas*, 390-394.
authority on all questions of language after the formal repudiation of the new linguistic theory of Nikolai Marr in the summer of 1950. Martinson was incensed, as reported by Daniel Palgi: “‘Does Tartu State University really not have the capacity to resolve the question of the Estonian language itself? This is our (!) question and not the question of some Vinogradov!’ blurted out prof. Martinson in self-confident Russian and held his head high.” Of course, what Martinson said was exactly right. But hearing this opinion expressed by someone regarded as a loyal agent of the center (not a patriot of the periphery) and in Russian, was disconcerting and ironic for Palgi (hence the exclamation point). After all, Martinson barely spoke any Estonian himself: who was he to speak for the Estonian establishment of Tartu University on the question of the Estonian language?

**ii. The Linguistic Russification of the Estonian Nation?**

In 1968 members of Tartu’s University’s Party Organization expressed consternation at all the Estonian nationalist and anti-Soviet slogans that had appeared on the town square in Tartu during demonstrations against the Soviet suppression of the Prague Spring: “Clean up the Estonian language!” (“Rookida puhtaks Eesti keel!”) and “Long live the citadel of the Kalevs!” (“Elagu Kalevite kants!”). The Central Committee of the Party Organization at Tartu University devoted quite a bit of time and energy to interpreting these slogans and attempting to determine what kind of attitude they expressed toward the state. The young historian Karl Siilivask suggested: “It seems that they are referring to weak command of Estonian among several of our Party members. But I personally think that this is an artificial link. Quite the opposite—comrade Lentsman’s Estonian is perfectly correct—he can speak in both languages and so there should not be any basis for this interpretation.” Leonid Lentsman (1912-1996) was a high-ranking Russian-born ethnic Estonian in the Estonian Communist Party, educated in Leningrad. He served as the Second Secretary of the Republic from 1954 to 1964.

The bilingual divide became especially intense in the late 1970s and early 1980s when the threat of Russification seemed most acute. In 1980 forty Estonian cultural figures and scholars—about half with direct ties to Tartu University (many of the others were actors and directors or otherwise affiliated with the Estonian theatrical establishment)—signed an “Open Letter from the Estonian SSR” protesting the failure of the state to resolve its nationalities question. Better known as the “Letter of the Forty,” it was dated October 28, 1980 and addressed to three Soviet newspapers, two in Tallinn (Rahva Hääl and Sovetskaia Estonia) and one in Moscow (Pravda). The letter was ostensibly written to protest was the harsh repression of youth protests following the banning of a public performance by the Estonian punk rock band, Propeller in Tallinn. But the letter made much more far-reaching claims and demands as an indictment of the dismissive attitude of Soviet officials and the official discourse to the growing divide and antagonism between the Russian and Estonian communities of Estonia:

> It seems to us that problems occurring in the sphere of nationality questions have only been pigeonholed under the label of hooliganism up to the present. Therefore, we are focusing in this letter, above all else, on the national aspect of social conflicts. Conflicts

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782 “Nimelt olevat sellega viidatud mõned meie parteitegelaste vähesele eesti keele oskusele. Mina isiklikult arvan, et see seos on kunstlik. Otse vastupidid—sm. Lentsmani eesti keel on täiesti korrektne, ta võib vabalt rääkida mõlemas keeles ja see pärast ei tohiks sellel tõlgendusel alust olla.” 18.november 1968—EKP komitee protokoll nr. 19. ERAF f.151, n.12, s.172, l.5.
developing out of nationality questions are particularly grave in nature, owing to the fact that their causes have not been discussed publicly with adequate candor .... In our opinion, the insecurity and, in some cases, even the fear about national identity that exists in the two largest nationality groups in Estonia, the Estonians and the Russians, is the source of the conflicts and stresses between nationalities in Estonia. Fear motivates irrational, frequently overt and aggressive behavior.\textsuperscript{783}

Much of the letter was couched as a measured appeal for the Soviet Union to respect the spirit of its own laws and give the same support to the cultivation of the Estonian language and culture as to the Russian language. There was nothing revolutionary about this rhetoric; but then again most Revolutions—from Martin Luther’s Reformation to the French Revolution—do not start out as attempts to overturn the existing order of things with a new one, but rather to clean up the existing one, to return to its fundamental spirit:

Since the revolution, the Estonian language has been backed by constitutional guarantees, and it has been used throughout Estonia as the official language in all aspects of civic life. Every Estonian within the boundaries of the Estonian SSR possesses the self-evident right to an Estonian-language secondary and higher education and to use Estonian in spoken or written form in the conduct of business. We think that a legislative confirmation of this principle by the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian SSR would go a long way towards normalizing the present unhealthy situation.\textsuperscript{784}

But ultimately, for all its conservatism this rhetoric proved inflammatory. Despite the measured language it was read very much as it was written—as a condemnation of Russification.

In the end, none of the three Soviet Newspapers to which it was addressed published it, but it gained notoriety when it was leaked out of the Soviet Union (to this day the exact channel remains a mystery) and appeared on December 10, 1980 in Eesti Päevaleht, an exile Estonian newspaper in Stockholm. Already the next day, Radio Free Europe picked up the letter, read it aloud in full in Estonian and translated it into other languages, and it quickly spread from there across all of Western Europe and the United States of America. The ensuing scandal was a major Baltic embarrassment to the Soviet Union. Among the Tartu signatories were the two figures suspected of having written the letter in the first place, Jaan Kaplinski (b. 1941), who had studied French philology at Tartu, published at least one article in Yuri Lotman’s famous semiotic journal, Sign System Studies, and Marju Lauristin (b. 1940), who had graduated from Tartu with a degree in Journalism and Mass Media Studies (under the direction of Professor Juhan Peegel); she defended her doctorate in 1976.

The KGB staged a search of Jaan Kaplinski’s Tartu apartment barely two weeks later, on November 9, 1980.\textsuperscript{785} Six months later the Tallinn academic, Gustav Naan (1919–1994) took up the cause of the state, calling the signatories the “gang of forty” and sending a letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party demanding harsh reprisals against their action.\textsuperscript{786} Naan was an interesting and controversial figure in Soviet Estonia. Born in Vladivostok, and raised in the Soviet Union, his reputation was that at times that of a hardline Stalinist in the

\textsuperscript{784} Letter of the Forty.
\textsuperscript{785} Valdur Ohmann, Gustav Naani kaebekiri EKP Keskkomiteele,” Tuna 3/2005: 97.
\textsuperscript{786} Valdur Ohmann, Gustav Naani kaebekiri EKP Keskkomiteele,” Tuna 3/2005.
1940s and 50s and again in the 80s (when he resolutely opposed the independence movement); but in between, for a while in the 1960s and '70s he came to be known as a free-thinking reformer; according to Mihkel Mutt (b. 1953) Naan represented to the young Estonian intelligentsia what Herbert Marcuse or Marshal McLuhan were to the radical youth in the United States of America at the same time. Even Jaan Kaplinski admired Naan: “I respected Naan and read with great eagerness his free thinking analysis of bureaucracy and intelligentsia, his foerward to Norbert Wiener’s book and other things. [Wiener was the leading figure in American cybernetics.] But apparently, after a heart attack, something changed in Naan and his public appearances became banal, and he focused only on topics like sex, marriage, and divorce.”

Late Soviet Socialism in Estonia was full of narratives like this: tales of sudden reversals of opinion implying nervous breakdowns, that seemed to culminate in a total transformation of character. Mikhail Makarov’s sudden and apparently inexplicable anti-semitism, after having helped his Jewish friend and colleague in Leningrad, Rem Blum, onto the faculty of Tartu State University in the 1950s in the first place, was one case; the case of Gustav Naan was another.

A few months later, Tallinn-based Naan turned Tartu-based Jaan Kaplinski into something of a scapegoat for the entire Tartu intelligentsia, turning cybernetic and semiotic vocabulary to the purposes of the state, and unleashing all his venom on Jaan Kaplinski’s recent article “Eksimine on inimlik” [“To Err Is Human”] in the cultural journal Looming. In an article published under the Latin title “Homo Mutans” (“The Changing Human”), Gustav Naan stressed the Soviet ideal of progress as constant and total change and transformation, lambasting Jaan Kaplinski for the stress he put on eternal and permanent human nature: “It is generally known and recognized that ‘history is not anything more than the constant transformation of human nature’ (Marx). But Jaan Kaplinski claims, that humanity has ‘basically remained, what it was in the Paleolithic.’ According to Naan: “Jaan Kaplinski apparently does not understand what is amplification, what is entropy, information and modulation…. [he] has a great desire to teach us about things, of which he has scandalously little understanding himself.” For all its particularity, this conflict embodies a much older pattern: the small-town university and its scholars—Burckhardt, Blok, Febvre, even Yuri Lotman—skeptical about millenarian promises of far reaching and total change, appealing to universal and eternal human values to offset the a

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787 See memoirs of Mihkel Mutt for this positive assessment of his reputation. Naan’s positive reputation, according to Mutt, derived from 1969 he wrote a famous essay, “Võim ja vaim” (Power and culture) in which he drew upon the cybernetic vocabulary of the day to spell out the relationship between bureaucracies and intelligentsias (the former limits change, the latter stimulates it; both are necessary for a society to achieve equilibrium). The argument was supposed to be about bourgeois societies, but could easily be read as an analysis of the Soviet predicament as well. Mihkel Mutt, 188-191.


commitment to unlimited progress and total transformation advocated by modernizing state authorities.

The KGB and Gustav Naan dealt with Jaan Kaplinski and other signers of the letter. In the meantime, Tartu University’s Communist Party organization also called Marju Lauristin to give account of her role in drafting and disseminating the letter. Unlike Kaplinski, who had never been a Party member, Marju Lauristin had joined in the 1960s. She was the daughter of two lifelong interwar Estonian Communists and political activists. An important figure in the first Soviet government of Estonia (1940-1941), her father became one a prominent Estonian Communist martyr when he was murdered in 1941. She was questioned aggressively on January 19, 1981 at the meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party Organization of Tartu University by Johannes Kalits. Old enough to be her father, Kalits had first chaired the University’s Communist Party Organization in 1954. Indeed, there was a generational dimension to this conflict. He noted that previously it was thought that she was merely a signer of the letter; now it turned out she was one of the authors: “In the letter is hidden a deep double-think (kahemõttelisus), which at times becomes single-think (ühemõttelisus).” (The implication here seems to be that the letter is sometimes ambiguous, to allow for anti-Soviet sentiments; at other times, it becomes expressly anti-Soviet). He condemned its choice of vocabulary, noting the absence of approved Soviet expressions like “Soviet Estonia” and “Socialist Revolution.” Rather, she claimed that national rights and relations were out of joint in Estonia. (“Rahvusõiguslikud suhted on Eestis korrastamatud.”) The parallels the letter attempted to draw between “human rights” and “national rights” were unjustified: “The claim about giving preference to Russians at the expense of other peoples is an evil claim. The Russian people have a right to be proud of their past and their present accomplishments” (“Väide venelaste esiletõstmisest teiste rahvuste arvel on väga õel väide. Vene rahval on õigus olla uhke oma minevikule ja tänapäeva saavutustele.”) Moreover, insofar as “bilingualism” is concerned, Estonian is not the language of cross-cultural communication, while Russian is, so that it is more important for Estonians to learn Russian than vice versa. We have to consider the practical side of things. The claim that our cultural leaders lack any interest in Estonian culture is without basis.\(^{792}\)

He insisted that the alleged national divisions to which the letter alluded were a fabrication, concluding, “The letter deforms reality, disparages Soviet society. It is an expression of national narrowness, an incitement to nationalism.”\(^{793}\)

Retreating on some points in her appearance before the Committee of the Communist Party, Lauristin nonetheless defended herself and the letter, claiming that Kalits had misstated some claims (she had never claimed that Estonians should not learn Russian), but that relations between the two nationalities were so lopsided that they needed to be addressed, and that the Communist Party had done nothing to address them, preferring to hide them from view. But what really provoked the Communist Party was less the existence of the letter, as the intended audience, and the international embarrassment it had caused by getting leaked abroad and

\(^{792}\) “Eesti keel ei ole liidvabriikide vahelise läbikäimise keel, vene keel aga on seda ja selle õppimine eestlastele on tähtsam. Tuleb arvestada praktilist külge. Põhjendamatu on väide, etkultuurijuhtidel puudub huvi eesti kultuuri vastu, see oleks ülekohtune väide.” ERAF f.151, n.12, s.402.

\(^{793}\) “Kiri moonutab meie tegelikkust, kannab nõukogud eühiskonda laimavat iseloomu. Olemuselt on kiri rahvusliku piiratuse väljenduseks, õhutab nationalismi.” ERAF f.151, n.12, s.402

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exposing Soviet hypocrisy, referring to and revealing widespread national discontent in a society where none was supposed to exist.\footnote{Several Party members asked her about the intended audience, trying to determine whether they letter was intended for an internal Soviet or an international audience. Ultimately, Marju Lauristin admitted her mistake in not bringing the letter to the Communist Party first, before sending it. This, of course, was something she had to say. To this day, the exact channels by which the letter arrived in Sweden have not been verified.}

6.4.4 Depths of the Linguistic Divide: An Anti-Russian “Friendship of the Peoples”?\footnote{A Soviet report from 1988 notes that literacy rates in the Baltic, led by Estonia, far exceeded the rest of the Russian Empire and many parts of Western Europe as well already at the time of the 1897 census (Estonia 96.2\%, Latvia 79.7\% and Lithuania 54.2\%). At the same time, literacy in Russia was 29.6\%, Ukraine 27.9\%, Belarus, 32\%, Moldavia 22.2\%, and Georgia 23.6\%. The parts of the realm that became the remaining national republics of the Soviet Union (Armenia, Azerbaidzhan, Uzbekistaan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Tadzhikistan, and Turkmenistan) all had literacy rates under 10\%. Uno Mereste ja Andres Root, Rahvastik Loensuspeeglis: 1989. Aasta üleliidulise rahvaloenduse andmed (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1981), 19-20.}

The Baltic provinces had the highest literacy in the Russian Empire, according to the imperial census of 1897 (Estonia 96\%, Latvia 80\%, Lithuania 54\%, Russia 30\%), surpassing many Western European countries at the time.\footnote{NSV Liidu rahvastik: 1979. Aasta üleliidulise rahvaloenduse andmed (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1981), 19-20.} However, Estonia had the worst competence in Russian of any national republic in the Soviet Union. In fact, according to official census reports, Estonia was the only Soviet national republic to see a significant decline in proficiency between 1969 and 1979 (from 29\% to 24\%). This was a statistic some Estonians liked to interpret as anti-Soviet resistance.\footnote{See for example Lauri Vahre, Meenutusi.} Whatever their actual proficiency in Russian, it was a point of pride for Estonians to profess incompetence, since the question about proficiency in Russian was filled out on a basis of self-assessment. In the same period, competence in Russian for most of the nationalities of the Soviet Union (including Latvians and Lithuanians) increased between 5 and 30 percentage points to nearly 50\%, which was conversely interpreted as cultural accommodation with the Soviet state.\footnote{“The ardent striving of our people for German education and culture, a striving which appears to have deadened them to all indigenous national feelings. The Estonian is like the crow in the well-known fable who tears out his own glossy black feathers and struts about in mottled, alien plumage without being at all aware of the ridiculous spectacle that he presents to the world: his own valuable belongings he deludedly regards as nothing, but only the foreign is considered beautiful and precious, merely because it is foreign. The most absurd scribblings of Germanized Estonians, written in an idiom which ranks among the funniest abnormal distortions of the beautiful forms of that language have been flooding the marketplace of Estonian literature for a considerable time and have been eagerly swallowed by the native people only because of the inviting label, ‘translated from the German,’ on the cover. Under such conditions it has become the urgent duty of the Learned Estonian Society to gather the available remainder of Estonian national poetry and to preserve it from complete destruction even if the local people themselves will be entirely assimilated by the two strong polarities. [German and Russian and language and culture are referred to here – translator’s note],” F.R. Kreutzwald, Kalevipoeg: An Ancient Estonian Tale. Translator. Jüri Kurman. (Moorestown: Symposia Press, 1982), 293.}

Estonians who spoke overly fluent Russian stood out in everyday life, and tended to be regarded with suspicion by their neighbors as traitors, careerists, or sycophants, like the kadakasakslased (literally, “Juniper Germans,” meaning would-be Germans) of the previous century, whom Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald had parodied in the forward to the Estonian national epic, Kalevipoeg, as crows, strutting about in “alien mottled plumage.” In Tartu, Russian could never be the transparent medium of universal communication or upward mobility.
that it was in Russia or even in Central Asia, where Russians were Europeans and Russian thus became an undisputed language of European culture. In Soviet Estonia, choice of language—Estonian or Russian—was always a semiotic act. They signified two competing models of culture, rather than two different points on the path from backwardness to civilization. The University, insofar as it was regulated by the State, only added to this segregation by dividing its classes into native-Russian and native-Estonian groups who rarely met, even though they were required to study each other’s languages. Though the vast majority of the student body over the course of the Soviet period were ethnic Estonians (80%), the University had several departments which served a wider pan-Soviet student body where instruction took place in Russian. In some cases—like Physics, Medicine, and Applied Mathematics—the University offered parallel departments in Estonian and Russian. In others—like Finance and Credit (1966-1981), Accounting (from 1981 onward), and Sports Medicine—it offered unique or experimental Russian-speaking departments, several of which (like Sports Medicine) did not exist anywhere else in the Soviet Union.

A common Soviet mantra, appearing with growing frequency in the age of “official bilingualism” that was the 1970s and 80s, was that the Russian language was to play an “invaluable role in bringing the peoples of the Soviet Union closer together, strengthening their brotherly friendship and unity.” The specific quotation cited here comes from an Estonian-language brochure explaining the aims and purposes of the Soviet census to Estonians in 1981. But this is the opposite of the way things worked in practice. For Estonians in everyday life the Russian language became associated with state power and the Estonian language with resistance to it, sometimes even for Communist Party members. Daniel Palgi stressed already in the 1960s that “the leadership of the Estonian SSR was Russian-speaking” (“Eesti NSV oli tippudes venekeelne”); and when he caught two ethnic Estonians (Liidia Roots and Jenny Ananjeva) conversing in Russian between themselves on June 25, 1959 in the hallways of Tartu University, this was not a sign for him of the integration of Estonia with a higher sense of moral purpose, but evidence of the Russification of Tartu and the end of the Estonian way of life, which is what prompted him to date the event so precisely in the first place; the fact that he was able to notice and date in the first place can be interpreted as a sign of its rarity.

Estonian voices from Tartu University writing in every decade from the 1950s to the 1990s carnivalized official Soviet attitudes about the possibility of integrating socialist universalism with national particularism—and at the crux of almost all these debates was the question of language.

Over the course of World History wars and their memory have served as the ultimate source of unity and identity for states and their society, the prime meaning-maker and an important source of cohesion. The prominence accorded to the statue of 13th-century Viachko and Meelis defending Tartu against a German attack in Soviet Estonian propaganda was a powerful example of the attempt to use the “Great Patriotic War” (as World War Two was officially called in the Soviet Union) to cement the Friendship of the Estonian and Russian Peoples in Tartu’s new Soviet iconography. Prominent Soviet Estonian writers also tried to use

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the War to inscribe Estonia into the Soviet experiment. Vladimir Beekman (1929–2009) wrote his 1978 novel, *And a Hundred Deaths (Ja sada surma)*, about ethnic Estonian Red army martyrs and heroes—Russians and Estonians fighting together for a common Soviet cause. Beekman was a Tallinn-based secretary and chairman of the Soviet Estonian Writer’s Union, and a member of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party. But from the perspective of Tartu—even its leading Red Army veterans—the meaning of the Second World War was anything but self-evident.

When Tartu State University celebrated its 350th anniversary in 1982 eighty-eight Tartu university Red Army veterans had their names carved into the marble plaque just inside the main building, with pride of place given to sixteen professors in recognition of their combined academic achievement and military service: M. Bronshtein, J. Kalits, P. Kard, A. Koop, M. Kotik, R. Looga, Y. Lotman, V. Palm, J. Peegel, L. Päi, K. Püss, I. Rebane, P. Reifman, I. Sildmäe, A. Uustal, E. Vasar. Here we find together the names of some home-grown Estonians (like Juhan Peegel) together with several Soviet-era imports, like Mikhail Bronshtein (a professor of economics), Pavel Reifman (a professor of Russian literature), and Yuri Lotman himself. The names on this wall came from a few different nations, political persuasions, and faculties, with varying degrees of proficiency in Russian and Estonian. Most had little to say to one another in everyday life. Many came from mutually incomprehensible—Estonian and Russian—narratives of the Soviet experience and the Second World War.

In their writings, some of these scholars even cast doubt upon the patriotic narrative that filled Soviet history textbooks. Attentive always to the way in which culture preserves and perpetuates itself, Lotman coined the concept of the “semiosphere” in the 1980s—a semiotic counterpart to Vernadsky’s “biosphere”—to describe the cultural domain in which meaning becomes possible, just as the biosphere is the domain in which life becomes possible. One of the organizing metaphors of Lotman’s semiosphere is the distinction between speaking within a language and speaking between languages; Lotman was very interested in the nature and possibility of cross cultural communication. However, for Lotman, the “semiosphere” was ultimately bounded, while war was not. War did not generate meaning, but defeated it; it was a source of division, and this is what he stressed in memoirs composed toward the end of his life around the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yuri Lotman had served in the 437th Artillery Division of the Red Army, under an ethnic German by the name of Dolsk, who called himself a “Latvian” though “everybody knew better.” This is what Lotman wrote:

> It is difficult to write of war, because the only people who can say precisely what war means, are those who have never been there. It is the same as trying to describe an endless room, that lacks both distinct boundaries and internal consistency. Winter brings one war, summer another. Retreat is one thing, but defense or attack something completely different; there is the war of daytime, and that of night. One in infantry, another in artillery, a third by air attack. The war of a soldier is completely different from that of the journalist at the front.

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802 TÜA III, 187. Pictures between 176 and 177 for image of the Marble
The journalist can spend many days in a war, be at the front or behind enemy lines, show great bravery and live exactly the same way, but his war nonetheless will be completely different. For one day he too, will depart from the front. The soldier is always there. From my own experience I know the following versions of the War—in ’41 and ‘42 on the Southern Front, in ’43 on the South-Western front, and thereafter on the Western Front, during times of attack—on the Baltic Front, in Poland, and in Germany.805

To Lotman’s list of incommensurable experiences of the Second World War, one might add the “Great Patriotic War” of the Soviet citizen and the War of Resistance for the small peoples of Eastern Europe, whose main aim was to maintain their independence (both from Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union).

Many of the Estonians who fought in the Red Army did so reluctantly. The number of deserters was very high. One Estonian Red Army veteran was the Tartu University professor of journalism, Juhan Peegel. He recorded his own interpretation of the War in a bestselling 1979 novel, *I Fell in the First Summer of the War*. It was turned into a play and performed at Tartu’s Vanemuine theater, and translated into several other languages, and generated a minor scandal because it seemed to argue against—or at least ignore—the official Soviet line. Ten years before Yuri Lotman composed his memoirs, Peegel stressed the role of War in defeating meaning rather than making it. His novel was much more like Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*, than Vladimir Beekman’s *And a Hundred Deaths*, with one great exception: Peegel’s War did not dissolve his sense of national solidarity. A few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Juhan Peegel wrote: “It must be counted an achievement of great historical importance that [Tartu] University was not entirely Russified.”806 With this attitude toward language, it is hard to see what common ground or common narrative of the Soviet experience the chair of the Department of Russian Literature, Yuri Lotman (1922—1993) might have shared with the Professor of Journalism, Juhan Peegel (1919—2007). They were roughly the same age; they fought in the same War in the same army; both defended their dissertations in Russian (in Leningrad and Moscow respectively); each was preoccupied with the meaning and dynamics of a national literary tradition (Lotman wrote on Pushkin and the Romantic origins of Russian literature, Peegel on the original Estonian folksongs or *Reegilaulud*); both were concerned with global communication and a higher, more universal and objective standard and language of truth (Lotman founded an informal school of semiotics, Peegel an informal school of mass-media studies where he lectured on Habermas and Marcuse, well before these names were discussed in the rest of the Soviet Union); both organized informal schools for the study of culture with an intimate collective of scholars near the town of Ottepää in Kääriku; and like nearly everyone

805 “Писат’ о воине трудно. Потому, что такая воина, анааит тол’ко те, кто никогда на неи не был. Так же, как описывать огромное пространство, о котором нет четких границ нет внутреннего единства. Одна воина зимой, другая—летом. Одна во время наступления, другая—во время обоюдействия и наступления; одна днем, другая ночь. Одна в пехоте, другая в артиллерии, треть в авиации. Одна в солдатах, другая в пьесах на фронт журналиста.

“Журналист может превести многие дни на воине, быть на перепылке или в тылу противника, может проявлять боевую смелость и знат и совсем как, но все-таки и того, кто никогда на воине. Потому, что, в конце концов, есть на обициательно уходи. Он в ремиенном на фронте. Солдат на фронте посвящен. Я знаю по личному опыту воина в таком деле: в 41-m I 42-m гадах на иззном фронте, в 43-m на иззном и в Западном, затем на Западном, а в период наступления—на Прибалтийском, в Пол’ше и Германии.” Yuri Lotman, “Воспоминания” in Egorov, 297-298.

the poisonous duplicity of the social world in which they lived and worked under late Soviet socialism. Both belonged to the Communist Party, but no one would describe either—first and foremost—as a Communist. They venerated the same university, but they did not speak the same native tongue or grow up in the same state.

For those who can read between the names, the invisible fissures in the marble plaque commemorating veterans of the “Great Patriotic War” in Tartu University’s main building serve as a reminder of the deep divide in the Soviet “semiosphere” of Tartu State University and sealed those fifteen professors into two separate, parallel linguistic worlds in the intimate, bilingual space of Tartu. Despite the enormous divide between them, Juhan Peegel and Yuri Lotman seemed to agree on at least one point in their retrospective assessment of the War that flew in the face of all the official textbook histories to emerge from the United States, Soviet Union, or any other state. From their perch in skeptical Tartu, each argued that the only people for whom World War Two could be a source of clarity, identity, or universal meaning, were those who had never been there themselves. Ironically, in their common declaration that World War Two dissolved all meaning and produced Babel, these utterly separate figures—writing in Russian and Estonian respectively—produced a common anti-Soviet Tartu dialect.

The official demands of Soviet bilingualism only deepened the divide in lived experience by provoking greater awareness of the alienation of two separate Russian- and Estonian-speaking worlds. Of course there were important intermediaries between these worlds, like the perfectly trilingual Estonian, Russian, and German-speaking Valmar Adams (1899–1990) in the department of Russian Literature. He was imprisoned as a “collaborator” by all three—Estonian, Nazi, and Soviet—regimes, and professed an ever-changing, ethnically flexible identity. During the Nazi occupation of Tartu (1941-1944), some remembered how Adams had gone around telling everybody: “Ich bin ein Deutscher. Ich habe eine deutsche Mutter.” He served as a translator and interpreter for the Nazi occupiers just as he would later serve as a translator and interpreter for Lotman’s Department of Russian Literature. So he got caught in the transnational no-man’s land in between: Russians, like Egorov, were convinced Adams was basically an Estonian, who happened to speak fluent Russian, while Estonians, like Daniel Palgi, tended to see him as a Russian in disguise.

But the very need for intermediaries and translators bespeaks the alienation and isolation of the linguistic worlds they tried to bridge. To his colleagues in the Department of Russian Literature Adams explained that the talk among Estonians in Tartu’s venerable old European coffee house, Café Werner (est. 1895), was that Yuri Lotman wore his moustache in honour of Joseph Stalin and were quite surprised when he did not shave it off after Khrushchev’s Secret Speech in 1956. Whether or not this story actually reflected a widespread belief in the Estonian community in the late 1950s, the fact that Adams would tell it and Boris Egorov would repeat it is a testament to the wide gulf of cultural misunderstanding that kept these barely

807 “I am a German, I have a German mother.” Paul Ariste, Mälestusi, 243.
808 What Dona Marina was Cortes and the Spanish Conquistadors in the Conquest of New Spain, Valmar Adams was to Yuri Lotman and the Department of Russian Literature in the Sovietization of Tartu University.
809 “Adams… rodiska v Peterburge, no visi soznatel’nuiu Zhizn’’ byl sviadan s Estoniei…. Adams, chelovek estonskoi kul’tury, tesno obshavshisya s krugom mestnoi intelligentsii, mnogo raskazyval nam o nastroeniakh sluakhakh, konfliktakh v universitetskoi srede,” Egorov, Zhizn’, 67 and 69; Daniel Palgi offers multiple takes on Valmar Adams throughout his memoirs, generally noting his moral flexibility, Murduvas maailmas, 455–458.
810 See Boris Egorov, Zhizn’ i tvorchestvo Y.M. Lotmana (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1999), 69.
overlapping worlds of language apart, each with its own values, historical memories, and self-evident truths.

The symbolic depth and enduring power of the linguistic divide in Soviet Tartu between the Estonian and Russian lifeworlds can best be appreciated in the black marble plaque on the entrance to the Barclay Hotel at Ülikooli [University Street] #8, where both the Communist Party and Soviet military had their Tartu headquarters until 1991, a few doors down from the main building of the University. It appropriates, in its linguistic form at least, the official multilingual ideal of the Soviet Friendship of the Peoples, commemorating the last Soviet General to be stationed here in three languages:

SELLES MAJAS TÖÖTAS 1987-1991 TŠETŠEENI VABARIIGI ITŠKEERIA ESIMENE PRESIDENT KINDRAL DŽOHHAR DUDADEV.

OU CA ÇOX NOXÇIYN PAÇXALOAN ISKERIYN DÜXXARLERAÇU PREZIDENTA DZOXAR DUDAYEVS BOLX BINA 1987-1991s.


From this trilingual—Estonian, Chechen, and English—commemoration of General Dzhokhar Dudaev, the Russian language, which would have been the Estonian and Chechen lingua franca in everyday life, has been conspicuously omitted. Born just days before the Soviet deportation of the Chechen and Ingush nations in 1944, Dudaev had spent the first thirteen years of his life in internal Soviet exile in the Kazakh SSR, only returning to his homeland in 1957; he joined the Communist Party in 1968, enrolled at the prestigious Gagarin Air Force Academy (1971-1974), and married the daughter of a Russian Officer, Alla Kulikova, rising rapidly through the ranks of the Soviet Air Force. After participating in Soviet bombing raids (1986-1987) in Western Afghanistan, he assumed command of the nuclear long-range bombers of the 326th Heavy Bomber Aviation Division concealed at the secret Raadi airfield on the outskirts of Tartu, located near the ruins of the Baltic German manor that had housed the interwar Estonian National Museum until its destruction in the Second World War.

Estonia was the only Baltic Republic that did not suffer a single casualty during its “Singing Revolution” (1988-1991). In the popular imagination this was due in part to General

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811 Interview with Lagle Parek, a leading Estonian dissident and candidate for the Estonian Presidency in 1994, who spent several years in prison in the early to mid 1980s for her dissident activities. Since then she has converted to Catholicism and lives in a convent in Tallinn. I conducted two interviews with her. One at the convent itself; another at Pierre, a new café on Tartu’s Town Square. During the 1970s she worked for a restoration company that was also based in this same building as the Party and Military Headquarters in Tartu. And at one point she was employed to fix the doorhandle. She recounted to me how she found herself standing in the doorway together with Indrek Toome, a long-time head of the Municipal Party Organization of Tartu. He would later become the last Communist Prime Minister of Estonia. A delegation from abroad had come to visit Tartu, and happened to arrive at precisely the moment when she was fixing the door handle. There they stood side by side: The leading Communist Political Figure in Tartu and a simple worker, and each member of the delegation, assuming that she was also part of the reception committee shook her hand upon entering the building.

812 This trilingual inscription appears on a plaque affixed to the entrance of the Barclay Hotel in Tartu at Ülikooli #8, which was the site both of Tartu’s military headquarters and municipal Communist Party Organization under Soviet rule.
Dudaev’s sympathy for the Estonian national movement and his refusal to take measures to crush demonstrators as happened in Riga and Vilnius at the same time. The prominent Estonian nationalist and dissident, Mart Niklus, made this point explicitly in 1995: “Dudaev deserves much of the credit for the fact that Estonian independence was restored without armed conflict.” Niklus went on to propose commemorating Dudaev whether by naming a street in his honor or by installing a “plaque, in two or three languages, on the house where he had lived.”

During his three years in Estonia, Dudaev, according to one of his former officers, an ethnic Bulgarian raised in the Ukrainian SSR, “started learning Estonian, and could even express himself in this language after a fashion,” insisting that “we must respect the customs of the people of the land where our Soviet military units are stationed.” Instead of organizing a parade to show off Soviet military might in Tartu on Victory Day (May 9th) 1988, Dudaev opened the doors of the military establishment to all Tartu citizens, giving anyone who wanted access to the barracks, the cafeteria, and the cockpit of a supersonic Soviet aircraft.

Meanwhile, Dudaev’s

813 This view has also been a widespread in the Caucasus: “V 1987-1990 godakh byl komanduiushchim diviziei tiazhelykh bombardirovshchikov v g. Tartu (Estonia). Osen’iu 1990 goda, buduchi nachal’nikom garnizona goroda Tartu, Dzhokhar Dudaev otkazalsia vypolnit’ prikaz: blokirovat’ televidenie i parlament Estonii. Odnako etot postupok ne imel dlia nego nikakikh posledsvii.” Kavkazki Uzel, June 25, 2007. See also John Dunlop: “From 1987 through March 1991, Dudaev commanded a division of nuclear-armed, long-range bombers from a base located in the Estonian city of Tartu, and also served as the chief of that citys military garrison. His tenure there coincided with a sharp upsurge in Estonian nationalism (‘the Estonian revolution’) which eventually prepared the way for that republic’s full political independence.”

814 The author of these words was the Ukrainian-born Bulgarian, Dmitri Hristov, an Officer in the Soviet airforce stationed in Tartu under Dudaev. With permission from Dudaev, Hristov took courses by correspondence at Tartu State University, eventually earning a Masters Degree in Philosophy in 1994 with a Thesis on the Aesthetic-Ethical ideas of the Bulgarian thinker, Dmitri Gatchev. His memories of Dudaev, “Dudaev, as I knew him” first appeared in the Ukrainian newspaper Vetshernyi Kiev and also in the Odessa Newspaper Jug. An abbreviated version was reproduced in Estonian translation in Postimees only a month before Dudaev’s assassination by a Russian laser-guided missile in Grozny: “We met the day after Dudaev arrived in Tartu as a Division Commander in September 1987. It was a Sunday. Polkovnik Konev came to my home and proposed that I take the new commander to Lake Peipus, to show him Estonia. Dudaev was interested in everything: the cleanliness of the villages, the beauty of the nature. We spoke of [Anatoli] Pristavkin’s short story ‘Inseparable Twins’ [‘Nochevala tuchka zolotoia’], which told of the deportation of the Chechens in 1944. Dudaev had read it and gave it high marks for its accuracy in depicting these events .... He had a singularly negative assessment of Stalin. He called Stalin the greatest criminal of the 20th century. Working in the Political Department of the Division, I got a chance over the course of three years to see Dudaev every day....

“Since in 1988 the Baltic States started agitating for independence and stopped commemorating Soviet holidays, some people suggested that Dudaev should organize a May 9th parade in Tartu to show off Soviet weaponry and power. Dudaev did not do this, but responded that we must honor the customs of the people, where our Soviet military units are stationed. By the way, he started learning Estonian and was able to some extent even to express himself in this language. Instead of a demonstration of power, Dudaev organized a day of “open doors.” On Victory day and the Day of the Soviet Airforce the gates were open. Anyone who wanted could visit the barracks, the cafeteria, the airfield, or even sit in the cockpit of a supersonic aircraft. Dudaev welcomed contacts with those below him and with journalists. In 1989 he met with the readers of the town newspaper Vpered [Forward]. Most of those who came to the meeting were Russian-speaking readers, but there were some Estonians as well.

“We had the opportunity to take part in many discussions held in the town and at Party Conferences and elsewhere. Like all Caucasians, Dudaev was known for his hospitality. On the way home from work, he would
daughter Dana enrolled at Tartu State University.816 The Estonian independence movement in turn inspired its Chechen counterpart, culminating in Dudaev’s election as the first president of the Independent Chechen Republic Ichkeria in 1991 and his assassination on April 21, 1996 by a Russian laser-guided missile. Dudaev’s widow, Alla, remembered the important role of the family’s contacts with Linnart Mäll (1937-2010) in her husband’s political development.817 Mäll was one of the only Estonians in Yuri Lotman’s Tartu School of Semiotics. An informal student of Alexander Piatigorski, he had spent a good deal of time studying in the Eastern periphery of the Soviet Union. The first to apply semiotic methods to Buddhist texts—translated into French by Julia Kristeva together with a few essays by Yuri Lotman in 1966—he was also the organizer of the Dalai Lama’s first visit to Estonia (Otepää and Kääriku) in 1991 and the founding Chairman of the UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization) based in the Hague. Alla Dudaeva remembered:

In Estonia in 1990 Dzhokar made the acquaintance of Linnart Mäll, the leader of the Organization for Unrepresented Peoples based in the Netherlands. In the future he would become a great friend of our family. This good-natured, tall, large man, a giant with expressive features, was often a guest at our home, and often spoke of politics: “The Organization of Unrepresented Peoples should be a counterweight to the politics of the United Nations, which only protects the rights of the members of the family of powerful states.” The Baltic States were members of the UNPO, and their recognition might help. Dzhokhar was happy as a little boy when Linnart Mäll invited him to the extraordinary Congress of the organization in the Netherlands, where the Chechen-Ingush Republic was initiated into the ranks of the members of the UNPO.818

In the end, with General Dzhokar Dudaev making a sincere effort to learn Estonian and taking his political cues from the leading Estonian Buddhologist of the Tartu School, and Estonians paying homage to a Chechen hero in the Chechen language, it seems the “Friendship of the Peoples” worked after all, even in the Estonian SSR, just not in the way that Moscow intended. The periphery appropriated the form, but turned it back against the center. This is
precisely how Yuri Lotman defined world historical progress in the concluding lines of his essay on the “semiosphere” first published in 1984:

On the frontiers of China, of the Roman Empire, of Byzantium, we see the same thing: the technical achievements of the settled civilization pass into the hands of the nomads who turn them against their inventors. But these conflicts inevitably lead to cultural equalization and to the creation of a new semiosphere of more elevated order in which both parties can be included as equals.\(^{819}\)

What Lotman meant politically by “equalization” or the “creation of a new semiosphere” was very vague: was this a celebration of the Soviet “Friendship of the Peoples” or a call for the dissolution of the Soviet Union? Lotman’s work rarely had clear presentist political implications. William Mills Todd III has underscored the difference between Lotman’s own backward-looking scholarly work and the studies of his presentist post-colonial French contemporaries: “In Mythologies (1957) Roland Barthes could offer a bold anticolonialist analysis of a Franco-African soldier saluting the French flag; the mind boggles at the thought of Lotman doing something similar with a Chechen soldier in Soviet uniform.”\(^{820}\) With General Dzhokhar Dudaev stationed in Tartu from 1987 to 1991, one did not have to look far in Tartu for a Chechen soldier in Soviet uniform. The path that led from Yuri Lotman’s Keeltemaja (“House of Languages”) at Ülikooli [University street] #18b, past the main building of Tartu University and its Departments of Marxism-Leninism, to Dudaev’s Military headquarters at Ülikooli #8, was barely a three-minute walk.

Ultimately, Lotman’s friendship with the Russian literary scholar and historian Dmitri Likhachev suffered on account of the explicit support he gave to the Estonian independence movement. If anything, Jewishness worked in Yuri Lotman’s favor in Soviet Tartu by making him seem—in the eyes of local Estonians at least—just a little bit less Russian, and therefore, a little bit more like us. Another Jewish immigrant from Leningrad, and Professor of Marxist-Leninism and Aesthetics, Leonid Stolovich writing well after the collapse of the Soviet Union remembered that in 1967, while the official Soviet line on Israel’s victory in the seven-day War was unequivocally condemnatory, “many Estonians … took courage in the example of a small state defeating its adversaries, however numerous they might be.”\(^{821}\) And the feeling was mutual.

Not all ethnic minorities are created equal. The distinction between ethnic Russian and Jewish minority in Estonia has become ever more pronounced since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the March 2011 nationally televised Parliamentary debates the biologist Aleksei Lotman (b. 1960), Yuri Lotman’s youngest son and the national spokesman for the Estonian Green Party, came to the defense of the Estonian nation against an accusation of ethnic discrimination launched by Dmitri Klenski, the spokesman for Estonia’s Russian Party and a former colleague of Sergei Dovlatov on the Tallinn newspaper Sovetskaia Estonia: “I would like to correct a very small thing. Like Mr. Klenski here, I am not of Estonian parentage, and I

\(^{819}\) Lotman, The Universe of the Mind, 142.


\(^{821}\) “Paljud eestlastes käsitlesid israeli võitu kui näidet sellest, et üks väikerik on võimeline aлистama vastaseid, sõltumata nende suurust.” Stolovich, Kohtumised, 85.
categorically protest against the notion that there is any ethnic discrimination in Estonia.” Klenski, also speaking impeccable Estonian, tried to interrupt to specify that he was only talking about the persecution of ethnic Russians, not all ethnic minorities, but it was too late. For the room had already erupted in applause for Aleksei Lotman.

The Soviet Union began its Soviet transformation of Tartu by formulating the “Friendship of the Estonian and Russian People” in terms of a common German enemy, the invisible third figure implied in the 1954 statue “Viachko and Meelis at the Defense of Tartu” in 1224. Pressed shoulder to shoulder, the Slavic Prince Viachko points his finger, while the Estonian tribal elder Meelis, the mythical son of the Estonian national folk hero Lembitu, prepares to aim his crossbow wherever Viachko directs him to shoot (presumably at a German). Tartu returned to Europe in a similar spirit in 1991, but this time commemorating the Friendship of the Chechen and Estonian people in terms of a common Russian enemy, implied in the invisible third language of Russian (replaced by English) on a black marble plaque dedicated to General Dzhokar Dudaev, the first—and last—president of the Chechen Republic Ichkeria.

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Chapter 7. Babel: Linguistic Alternatives to Bilingual Bolshevism

Tartu is a place where culture is perpetually reborn. It is the intellectual center of the nation. And at the center of this center resides the University with its perpetually changing and thus always one-and-the-same student body. […] And if Tartu is for me a sign that symbolizes culture, then the University is the symbol of this symbol. It seems to me that even the air in Tartu is thoroughly imbued with culture, and this is the reason why it is very painful for me every time I encounter something that challenges the idea that Tartu is indeed a town of culture.

—Yuri Lotman, “Tartu as a Sign of Culture” (1987)

The story of Tartu and its University after the Second World War has now been told as a story of cultural transformation and a “transfer of sacrality,” the making of a new world. But it was equally a story of the cultural salvation and rebirth of an old world. If Soviet Tartu became a particularly good observatory upon life, language, and literature for the Soviet intelligentsia, this was because it remained something of an oasis from the dominant currents of Soviet life. It seemed to stand for traditional European values, mores, intellectual preoccupations, and modes of interaction even as the world changed around it and the Communist Party worked to convert it from within.

This chapter examines what it meant for Soviet Tartu to remain European or return to Europe after the Second World War: (1) “A Tale of Two Tartus: Oasis and Observatory” discusses how official bilingualism and the traumatic conflict between the European past and the Soviet present encouraged its scholars to seek other ways of understanding the world beyond those officially endorsed by the state. (2) “Third Worlds in Third Languages: Tartu’s Linguistic Landscape” looks more closely at the variety of intimate circles and “oases” of Tartu’s intellectual life, focusing especially on the role language, both as a universal model of communication for understanding the world and as a form of expression of particular groups. (3) “A Tale of Two Departments: Finno-Ugric Languages and Russian Literature” looks more closely still at the two most significant centers of instruction and scholarship in this linguistic landscape and the organizing role of their charismatic leaders, Paul Ariste and Yuri Lotman; they competed with each other for prestige and priority in the bilingual mission of the state to cultivate a society with two different national languages and literary traditions; at the same time each managed to turn his department into an oasis of relatively independent academic endeavor, which offered its own cultural vision of the world somewhat at odds with official Soviet discourse. (4) Finally, “A Tale of Two Scholars: Paul Ariste and Yuri Lotman” interweaves the life-stories of the two charismatic chairs of these departments as tales of continuity and change.

823 Tartu on minu jaoks ‘kultuurilinn’ ning see teadmine on taustaks kõigele, mida ma selles linnas näen…. Kultuur pole minu arusaamist mööda passiivne hoiuksamber, pelk raamatukapp, sisaldagu see siis pealegi mulle kõige kallimaid raamatuid (mõistagi on raamatud tähtsaimaid asju elus!), vaid generator, masin, mis kogu aeg enda taastoodab, konkureeris nimoodi elu endaga. Seega on ka Tartu koht, kus kultuur pidevalt taastub. See on rahva intellektuaalne keskus. Ning selle keskuse keskmes asub ülikool oma aina uueneva ning seemetu alati üht ja sedasama iga säälitava ülikooliastumisoskonna. […] Ja kui Tartu on minu jaoks märk, miss sümboliseerib kultuuri, siis ülikool on selle sümboli sümbol… Mulle näib, et Tartus peab isegi õhk olema kultuurist läbi imbunud, ning seejärel on mul väga valus iga kord, kui puutun kokku tõikadega, mis vastanduvad Tartu kui kultuurilinn olemusele.” Yuri Lotman, “Tartu kui kultuurimärk” in T. Matšulevits, Meie Tartu (Tallinn: Perioodika 1987), 51-52.
in exploring the national and cosmopolitan dimensions of their life and thought within their local social and cultural context.

In the 1980s, Yuri Lotman stated what he saw as the fundamental historical difference between Russia and Europe as the difference between a “binary” and “ternary” structure. Lotman argued that “even revolutions themselves take on a different character depending on whether they play out in binary or ternary structures.”  

Ternary structures make room for a third neutral space, are inclined to gradualism, even when they undergo the explosive experience of revolution. In binary structures, by contrast, “conflicting tendencies are forced to confront each other face to face, without there being any third alternative. In these conditions, change acquires an inevitably catastrophic character.”  

Thus, Lotman contrasted the disproportionate violence and ongoing radicalism of Russian national and Soviet history to the comparative gradualism of European history. With its old European university town, Tartu belonged to the “ternary” cultural space of Europe as much as it belonged to the “binary” cultural space of Russia. Thus, the context in which Lotman conceived his binary opposition between Russia and Europe in the first place was in some sense a European one.

Around the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, one of the somewhat dissident voices within the Tartu School of Semiotics, Boris Gasparov, returned to Tartu to address his former colleagues and explain why he had given up on the binary categories of analysis so fundamental to their study of culture. He also tried to explain why a few years before he had subjected them to their own semiotic mode of critique in an essay first published in Wiener Slawistischer Almanach in 1989 entitled “The Tartu School of the 1960s as a Semiotic Phenomenon” (“Tartuskia shkola 1960-x godov kak semoticheskii fenomen”). The essay provoked a small scandal, eliciting a flurry of responses from former colleagues, students, and fellow-travellers in Tartu and around the world.  

In a talk delivered in Tartu and published locally in 1991, Gasparov answered his Tartu School critics:

… and I categorically and vehemently object to the idea that with such binary models Tartu turns out to be …. merely a place for the merger of these two traditions: it is not a halfway point on the road from Petersburg to Moscow nor from Moscow to Petersburg (I have heard this notion more than once). No!—Estonia (to which I owe a personal debt, like many others) has a direct relationship to WHAT transpired and HOW it transpired at our semiotic schools, and a wish to say something about that was part of what prompted me to write the essay.

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827 See the essays collected by Sergei Nekliudov, Moskovsko-Tartuskaia semioticheskaia shkola: istoria, vospriminania, razmyslenia (Moscow: Shkola iazyki russkoi kul’tury, 1998).
828 “I uzh s chem. Ia kategoricheski i rezko ne soglasen—eto s tem, chto pri takoi dual’noimodeli Tartu okazyvaetsia—u odnikh avtorov vpolne opredelennym obrazom, u drugikh vse to zhe ritoricheskih siloiu veshchei—kak by lish’ mestom sliania etikh dvuh traditsiyi: poldorogo ne to iz Peterburga v Moskvu, ne to iz Moskvy v Peterburg (mne etu idei prikholo’ ne raz slyshat’ i v ustnykh vyskazyvaniakh). Net!—Estonia (kotoroi ia lichno obizan tak mnogim) imeet samee priamoe otnohenie k tomu, CHTO i KAK proishkhodilo na semioticheskikh shkolakh, i zhelanie skazat’ ob etom bylo odnim iz stimulov, pobudivshikh menia napisat’ stat’iu.”
This chapter attempts to answer Gasparov’s call to look for the nature and significance of the Tartu beyond the binary models of Tartu School analysis, and the uniquely Soviet bilingualism (explored in the last chapter) that transfigured the cultural milieu of the town after the Second World War. In many ways it was the clash between Tartu’s Europeanness and Sovietization that turned it into an “oasis of Europe,” generating a Babel of “third worlds in third languages”—beyond Russian and Estonian—in the process.

7.1 A Tale of Two Tartus: Oasis and Observatory

Long before Yuri Lotman argued that the minimum standard of representation for any reality is two languages, or explained his technique of cultural study as a matter of triangulating two points to divine a third, Tartu University’s most famous scholar of the nineteenth century, the biologist Karl Ernst von Baer, was saying something very similar.²²⁹ A marvelous flight of fancy embedded deep in a serious scholarly monograph from 1828, Entwicklungsgeschichte der Thiere [The Developmental History of Animals], carried cultural relativism to its biological extreme. Baer challenged human chauvinism by inviting his readers to imagine the condescending attitude a bird might take to human development. Baer’s avian alter-ego (tongue-in-beak) judges lack of feathers and inability to fly as signs of human inferiority:

Let us only imagine that birds had studied their own development and that it was they in turn who investigated the structure of the adult mammal and of man. Wouldn’t their physiological textbooks teach the following? “Those four and two-legged animals bear many resemblances to embryos, for their cranial bones are separated, and they have no beak, just as we do in the first five or six days of incubation; their extremities are all very much alike, as our are for about the same period; there is not a single true feather on their body, rather only thin feather-shafts, so that we, as fledgelings in the nest, are more advanced than they shall ever be… And these mammals that cannot find their own food for such a long time after their birth, that can never rise freely from the earth, want to consider themselves more highly organized than we?”²³⁰

Baer’s sensitivity to other perspectives derived from his experience growing up in the Baltic, and his awareness of the possibilities and limitations of the three different languages he knew from childhood (German, Estonian, and Russian). In an autobiography commissioned and published by the Baltic German Knightly Order of Estonia in 1864, he traced his sensitivity in this respect to a memory of the contrasting impressions that his native land left upon a Finn and a Rhinelander. Each made sense of what he saw against the background of his respective homeland:

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²²⁹ As a former artillery man in the Second World War, Yuri Lotman sometimes described his own method of scholarship as “triangulation”—i.e. calculating the position of two points in order to divine a third. See an eyewitness account of Lotman’s use of this trope in a lecture in Moscow in 1991 in Maxim Waldstein, The Soviet Empire of Signs: A History of the Tartu School of Semiotics (Saarbrucken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008), 14.
In May 1817, I set out for Estonia, using the ordinary mail coach, and traveling via Memel, Mitau, Riga and Dorpat [Tartu]. Of the journey itself my memory has retained only the fact that I undertook it again in 1819 but with a different companion, a Finn, the first having been a Rhinelander. Starting from the border of Courland, the Rhinelander was amazed by the many coniferous forests, while the Finn expressed similar wonderment about the many deciduous trees. For me, these differing utterances have always remained a striking proof of how differently one and the same object may be assessed from different standpoints.\footnote{Karl Ernst von Baer, \textit{Autobiography of Dr. Karl Ernst von Baer}, ed. Jane M. Openheimer, trans. by H. Schneider (Canton: ScienceHistory Publications, 1986), 120-1.}

Applying Baer’s experience to the Soviet period, one might ask: was Soviet Estonia a land of coniferous forests or deciduous trees, of communists or dissidents, of Soviet people or Europeans, of Russians or Estonians? Had Tartu been “transformed beyond recognition,” as leading Communists proudly declared from the 1950s to the 1980s, or had it been left virtually untouched by the Soviet Union and the Second World War, a unique “oasis” of European cultural life in the “desert” of late socialism, as many post-Soviet memoirists would later recall?

The fate of Tartu in the Second World War enabled both narratives; and traces of each can be found both in Soviet and post-Soviet sources. Tartu emerged from the Second World War, a half-demolished European University town. The town-hall square typified its fate. All the eighteenth-century buildings on one side of the square were obliterated (and had to be rebuilt from scratch) while all the houses on the other side escaped more or less intact. Standing at the center of the square in 1945 and facing in one direction it would have seemed as though practically nothing had changed about the town; turning around to face in the other direction it would have appeared as if there were nothing left. Today the casual observer would have a hard time determining which side dates back to the eighteenth century, and which is the product of a long, Soviet restoration project. For those who look closely, the small, ornamental white stucco hammers and sickles adorning an otherwise 18\textsuperscript{th}-century frieze might provide a clue; but like most things in Tartu culture they are hidden in plain view: almost nobody notices them until they are pointed out. The question remains, what did Tartu’s identification with the Soviet Union and with Europe owe to one another?

7.1.1 Language As a Lens For Experience: Two Tartus in Two Languages

The wildly contrasting interpretations of Tartu’s fate after the Second World War owed something to timing. Soviet-era interpretations tended to stress Sovietization, whether understood as something positive or negative; post-Soviet interpretations were more inclined to stress the enduring European qualities of the town. But the divide between these views of Tartu also had an essential, if often overlooked, linguistic dimension. The last chapter introduced several examples of Tartu’s heightened awareness of language, from the campaign in 1950 to reform the orthography of foreign words in Estonian to the defense of the Estonian language taken up in protests and appeals by Tartu students and scholars in the early 1980s. But the most profound and subtle way in which language mattered in the Soviet Tartu was as a lens for experience. Russian speakers and Estonian speakers each saw Tartu against the background of the other’s language: what was transparent to one was opaque to the other; while Estonians fixated on the temporal divide between Tartu “now and then,” Russians stressed the spatial...
divide between “here and there.” In other words, Russian-speaking newcomers were more inclined to notice how Tartu and Estonia remained different from the rest of the Soviet Union, while Estonian-speaking locals noticed how much of the old interwar world of Tartu had disappeared. For the diarist Jaan Roos, who had spent much of his life before Second World War in Tartu, Sovietization was synonymous with Russification. On September 26, 1954, Roos wrote in his diary:

In the morning I took the omnibus with my friend J. Konsin from Vedu to Tartu, we rode openly and unabashedly. In Tartu our paths diverged. I went to visit my acquaintances. I moved around freely in the town. I went downtown for the first time in nine years. All this has undergone a major transformation. In those places where there were formerly houses, there are now green spaces and squares. It is rather difficult to recognize the center of town, in comparison to that which it formerly was. Also the people of the town are fundamentally different. Former acquaintances have almost disappeared. If in former times one would encounter acquaintances at every step, now it is an unusual occurrence. Everywhere there are foreign faces. The majority of the inhabitants are now Russians, but not to the same degree as in Tallinn. All in all, the town has become foreign to me.”

Nine months earlier, on January 8th, 1953, Roos wrote even more explicitly about the Sovietization of Tartu as a synonym for Russification, stressing in his diary the absurdity of the favorite Soviet formulation of the official Soviet nationalities policy:

The Communists are constantly stressing the point that present Estonian culture should be national in form and socialist in content. This is nonsense. For content and form in culture, especially in literature, cannot be separated so easily. If a work of Russian literature, for example, is translated into Estonian, it still remains a work of Russian literature both in form and content, the expression of the Russian spirit, a Russian cultural product. Or if for sake of argument we accept that the claim is true, then it would be more appropriate to say that Estonian culture is at present Russian in form and absurd in content. This can be seen in Estonian literature, scholarship, journalism, theater, cinema, radio, school, and [Tartu] University. In the theater mostly Russian plays are performed; radio programs are mostly Russian; newspapers mostly print translations from Russian, etc. The result is that Estonian culture is destroyed, the people are spiritually and morally depressed, and robbed of all material sustenance.
Two days later he added more gloomy reflections on the transformation and defamiliarization of Tartu’s urban geography: “All the streets are getting new Russian names. Veski [Windmill] Street has been rechristened Burdenko Street. Lai [Wide] Street has become Michurin Street, Kroonuaia (Crown Garden) Street has become Komsomol Street, etc.” Driving home the point about the complete and total Russification of Tartu, Roos added the anecdote of an Estonian peasant—a little bit like Rip Van Winkle waking up twenty years after the American Revolution—who came to town for the first time since the War only to discover that he did not recognize a single street name. He went off to sit sadly on the banks of the Ema River and make peace with the new Tartu, convinced that he was now sitting on the banks of the Volga.

Six months earlier, on June 24, 1952, Roos noted the ubiquity of the Russian language in local bureaucracy: “Train stations have received new rules and regulation, for example the traffic regulations. All are in Russian. It is forbidden to translate them into Estonian anymore. The train-station officials must pass all their exams in Russian. The Estonian language is fast disappearing behind the Iron Curtain.” Roos found further evidence of Sovietization as a veiled form of Russification when the new Soviet Estonian flag was introduced on February 12, 1953. The new colors of Soviet Estonia, it turned out, were exactly the same “as those of the [old] Russian Empire.”

If Jaan Roos became an anti-Russian chauvinist—like many other Estonians—it would be worth noting the role of the Soviet experiment in making him this way. Earlier, Roos had held Russian high culture in high esteem. To some extent, Roos was self-consciously aware of the deepening divide in himself, a growing antagonism for all things Russian (which grew gradually stronger over the decade of his diary from 1944 to 1954). In 1953 even Anton Chekhov fell victim to the Friendship of the Peoples: “I started to read A. Chekhov’s collection of novellas. But I abandoned it. I couldn’t finish it. I cannot stand Russian literature anymore. Not even the greatest works from the previous era. Even this author seems too Russian now. His stories lack any deeper analysis of the life of the spirit or artistic form.”

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1945. Still, he was not too much of an Estonian nationalist to use “true” Russian culture to make jokes at the expense of Sovietization. In one of his last journal entries before he stopped keeping a journal in 1954 he noted the strange pride that the Soviet state took in technical progress at the expense of cultural achievements: “Nowadays it is a point of pride to point out that people write with metal pens while in the past they wrote with goose feathers [quills]. But who cares about the pen? In his own day, A. Pushkin wrote marvelous verses with a quill pen, while today goosefeather-worthy verses are written with metal pens.”

Impressions of Tartu expressed in the Russian language often seemed to be describing a completely different town from the one just evoked above. A visitor to Tartu from Moscow, who had studied at the Institute for Oriental Languages and came to attend Lotman’s semiotic summer schools in 1966 and 1967, wrote shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union that his “trips to Estonia [were] some of the dearest experiences of [his] student years,” an encounter with a foreign world. The Estonian language formed for him an important part of the background of that impression:

It was my first trip to Estonia, and my first trip—at least the first I was old enough to remember—to the West. For then it was understood that Estonia was a different country. One of my strongest and most memorable impressions was of the Estonian language. It was completely different (since I did not understand a single word) and sounded like strange and wonderous music. The nature of Kääriku made no less of an impression, a marvelous image of expansive freedom combined with peaceful beauty. And in the background, or rather above all this – there was the “luxury of genuine human contact.

Another member of Lotman’s semiotic circle, the Russian literary scholar and critic, Georgi Lesskis (1917–2000), recalled his own experience of Tartu with similar wonder:

Estonia was the West, Europe, a borderland, a frontier world about which my father had spoken. It seemed to me like a lost paradise. Twenty years before I had come to this country as a soldier and fell in love right away with its nature and clean towns, its independent people, its silence. Then I invaded this world, in order to seize and distort it. Now I myself awaited liberation, although not political but spiritual.
Alexander Solzhenitsyn had similar impression of Estonia and specifically of Tartu, noticing and appreciating its linguistic otherness:

I arrived in my beloved Tartu on a snowy and frost-covered morning when the medieval features of the university town were particularly prominent, and the whole city seemed to be a part of Europe, entirely beyond Soviet borders. The effect was magnified by the fact that the Russian language was avoided here, and I, clutching a little phrase book, did not force it on anyone. My accent gave me away, of course, but a Russian trying to master Estonian is such a rarity that he is always greeted warmly.842

Sometimes Russian-speaking visitors saw—or imagined they saw—things that were not actually there. Solzhenitsyn remembers how he was convinced that there was no KGB presence in Tartu and had to be reminded by his Estonian hosts that he should behave more cautiously.843 Some of the Muscovites who attended Lotman’s semiotic summer schools, like Vladimir Toporov and Georgi Lesskis, believed interwar Tartu University student fraternities and sororities had survived Sovietization.844 In fact, they had been among the first institutions closed in Tartu in 1940 and membership in these organizations had often served as a pretext for arrest and interrogation. The first thing mentioned in Paul Ariste’s investigative security file from 1945 was his membership in the interwar Tartu student society, Veljesto.845

This section seeks the points of contact and overlap between two common views of Soviet Tartu—as an “oasis” that stood apart from Soviet reality (a place for internal émigrés to pretend the Soviet Union did not exist) and a critical, internal “observatory” upon Soviet life. In a celebrated account of the collapse of the Soviet Union composed in the 1990s, David Remnick argued for the second view:

[Arseny] Roginsky took his university degree in Tartu, a university town in Estonia that had about it the air of the Berkeley academic underground in the sixties. The most influential teacher there—and Roginsky’s mentor—was the cultural historian Yuri Lotman. While it was impossible to conduct courses and draw up reading lists on subjects considered anti-Soviet, Lotman and his students looked at the structure of literary texts and cultures in a way that they all understood as a thinly veiled critique of the society they were living in. Their refusal to use Newspeak and channel everything into Marxist-Leninist categories was a form of dissidence. At Tartu, Roginsky’s classmates included Natalya Gorbanevskaya, who joined Pavel Litvinov on Red Square for the 1968 demonstration, and Nikita Okhotin, another future leader of Memorial.846

This is an overstatement: Yuri Lotman was no dissident; Tartu was no UC Berkeley; and Natalia Gorbanevskaya was never a Tartu University student. But Lotman—whose behavior stands out more against a Soviet-Russian background than a Tartu-Estonian one—did contribute to the Babel of tongues and perspectives that questioned the universalism of the Soviet language and state and indirectly challenged its legitimacy from within.

842 Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Invisible Allies (LLC Counterpoint, 1997), 53.
843 Solzhenitsyn, Invisible Allies, 54.
844 Maxim Waldstein, The Soviet Empire of Signs, 36.
845 ERAF f. 130SM, n. 1, s.3090.
By Lotman’s own semiotic analysis of cities as texts, the relationship of a town to the surrounding world it inhabits can be one of two kinds: it may be “isomorphic with the state, and indeed to personify it, be it in some ideal sense (Rome the city is also Rome the world); but the city can also be an antithesis to the surrounding world.” In the Soviet context, Tartu was more a town of the second type, an “oasis” that stood aloof from and against the Soviet experiment. At the same time it remained close enough to the metropole, infected with many of the same dynamics that transformed Moscow and Leningrad. As examined in the last chapter, Tartu’s bilingualism deepened the ubiquitous binarism of late Soviet Socialism, isolating its Russian and Estonian speakers from each other and dividing those communities and even individuals from within. But at the same time it provided refuge as it had always done, insulating its groups and individuals against each other, permitting them to form communities of imagination and fellow-feeling that were all the more tightly knit for the suspicion with which they regarded the people beyond their borders. Thus, the two phenomena were organically related: Tartu was an observatory because it was an oasis. It provided the necessary balance of proximity and distance, of empathy and estrangement for Russia and the Soviet Union as it had for Europe throughout its history.

7.1.2 Tartu as an Oasis for Russia’s Persecuted Cultural Elites

Over the course of the *longue durée* of Russian history, Baltic Livonia and Estonia have served as an oasis, refuge, and incubator for untimely beliefs, dissident thoughts, and persecuted members of Russian society and its intelligentsia. Three major historical ruptures in Russian history stand out in particular, when the Russian state suddenly turned against the members of its own traditional spiritual and cultural elite: the Petrine Reforms, the Russian Revolution and Civil War, and Stalin’s anti-Cosmopolitan campaign.

1. OLD BELIEVER REFUGEES FROM THE PETRINE REFORMS

In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, following the Church Reforms of Peter the Great, Russian Old Believers fled persecution to many parts of Northern Europe. Some came to Swedish Livonia, especially to the Western shores of Lake Peipus. They established villages (Varnia, Krasnye Gory/Kallaste, Kasepeli, Kolki, and Chernyi Posad/Mustvee), building their homes as close together as possible along the narrow road that ran the length of Lake Peipus. Estonian peasants from the same region, who built their homes as far apart as possible, would marvel that some of the Russian houses there were even touching. The Old Believers built their old-style churches, practiced their old-style beliefs, buried their dead in own old-style churchyards, and continued to speak their old-style Russian, and became known for the fish and onions they brought to market in Dorpat (Tartu). In colloquial Estonian they came to be known as *sibulavenelased* (“Onion Russians”). Over the course of the centuries, they were not absorbed and assimilated into the prevailing currents of Baltic society, but left alone, and
allowed to retain particular customs, beliefs, and ways of life that were much actively repressed in metropolitan Russia.  

Under Nicholas I in the 1840s tsarist rule caught up with them and forced the closure of their houses of worship, though they preserved their identity as a cultural phenomenon much better in Baltic Livonia and later Estonia than they managed to do in Russia. At the same time they incurred the interest of Russian visitors in the 1830s and 40s as representatives of a lost if more “authentic” Russianness. Ekaterina Avdeieva was a 19th-century visitor to Dorpat, who stayed with the Dorpat professor M. P. Rosenberg, and went to see the Russian villages of “Prichudie.” She wrote: “I have not seen such a purely-Russian generation for a long time: they have preserved their language, customs, and clothes; they are almost all tall, strong, with light-brown hair; children’s hair is flaxen; all their movements are agile thanks to an active life.” The Old Believer communities of Baltic Livonia elicited the curiosity of Faddei Bulgarin as well, who occupied a manor house on the outskirts of Tartu, Karlova. Some Orthodox writers, like Nikolai Leskov took up their cause, and even came to see their persecution as the great Russian national tragedy. What the Saint Bartholemew’s Day Massacre had been to France, the persecution of the Old Believers was to Russia. Leskov wrote: "Dorpat Old Believers have neither legal preceptors nor a house of worship, nor wives, nor children, nor rights, nor duties! Old Believers want to have their own schools. But they wish their own teachers to teach in these schools, Orthodox priests not to be allowed to intervene into the school life. As a result, secret Old Believer schools appear.”

The Jõgeva and Tartu Counties served as incubators for ways of life and forms of language that had largely vanished from other parts of Russia. Under Soviet rule, the Old Believer Communities of Lake Peipus inspired interest as subjects of linguistic and ethnographic research by students in the Department of Russian Language at Tartu State University and graduates of its Departments of History and Archaeology. Helle Heiter defended her Candidates dissertation in Minsk on the topic of the archaic dialect still spoken on Isaku island. The Historical and Archaeological Institute of the Soviet Estonian Academy of Sciences sponsored studies by the Tartu-University educated ethnographer Alisa Moora (1900-1996) on the ethnic history of the Lake Peipus region in 1964. The Leningrad Estonian, Elisabeth Richter (b. 1919) produced a monograph on the Russian population there in 1976, mapping the relationship between Estonian, Orthodox, and Old Believer Communities. The Russian population of the

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850 See Tatiana Shor and Galina Ponomariova on the Old Believers of Estonia.
852 Helle Heiter became a student in the department of Russian Language in 1965. She defended her dissertation in Minsk on “The Isaku Dialect, Phonetics, and Morphology.” Her study was based on the eighty remaining members of the community of Vot Finno-Ugrians, who continued to speak a very archaic form of Russian current at the time of the Petrine reforms in late 17th-century Russia. Helle Heiter, interview by author, June 28, 2005.
853 The sector of archeology and ethnography at the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR over the course of many years has worked on the question of the problem of Slavic-Baltic-Finn-Ugric relations. With this aim the given work, in which the traditional culture of the Russian population on the western banks of the Lake Peipus, living in the Jõgeva and Tartu regions of the Estonian SSR, from the village of Loksu to the village of Varnia, including two small towns—Mustvee and Kallaste.” / “Sektor arkeologii i etnografii Instituta istorii AN ESSR na protiazhenii mnogix let rabotaet nad problemoi slaviano-pribaltiisk-finskikh otnoshenii. V etom plane vypolnena i dannaia rabota, v kotoroi rassmatrivaetsia traditsionnai kul’tura russkogo naselenia zapadnogo prberezh’ia Chudsogo ozero, zhivushche v predelax Iygevaskogo I Tartuskogo raionov Estonskoi SSR, ot derevnii Lokusu to derevnii Varn’ia, vkluiushha i dva neploshchik goroda—Mustvee i Kallaste.” E.V. Richter, Russkoe naselenie zapadnogo prichud’ia (Ocherki istorii, material’noi I dukhovnoi kul’tury) [The Russian population on the western banks of lake Peipus: ] (Tallinn: Valgus, 1976), 10.
region had grown from from 811 in 1782, to 2700 in 1820, and 4600 in 1846.\textsuperscript{854} \textquote{Today there are some 15,000 members and eleven congregations of the Union of Old Believers in Estonia, mostly still living along shores of Lake Peipus. Modest ethnographic museums dedicated to Old Believer culture can be found in three of its villages: Kolkia, Mustvee, and Varania.}\textsuperscript{855}

2. CLERICAL AND ARISTOCRATIC REFUGEES FROM THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

During the Russian Revolution and Civil War the newly Independent Republic of Estonia became a refuge and oasis for members of the \textquote{White} Russian aristocracy driven from their homeland. White officers, Orthodox clergy, and their families became a visible presence in the interwar Estonian population. A daughter of Russian aristocrats, Tamara Miliutina (1911-2004) grew up in interwar Tartu, which she explained was a unique environment and a special kind of oasis for Russian refugees from the Russian Revolution, at a safe distance from the upheavals in Russia, but also (unlike other parts of Europe) uniquely familiar:

In the early 1920s most European states became home to elements of the Russian diaspora. For many, life in a foreign land for so many years merely meant unhappiness and physical drudgery. The Baltic, however, where there was already a native Russian element to the population, acquired a very special place—was perceived as an \textit{oasis}—where Russian life could continue in barely changed conditions.\textsuperscript{856}

They too held on to their own traditions and beliefs in Estonia even as these were systematically eradicated in Russia in the name the new man, appreciating the elegant, uncorrupted Russian speech of those old Estonians—like Arnold Susi, Konstantin Ramul, and Richard Kleis—who had had studied in imperial Saint Petersburg, before the Bolshevik revolution \textquote{ruined} the Russian language with its crass familiarity. At the same time, Estonia and Tartu were connected to a wider European world. Miliutina noted the three possible interwar paths for graduates of Russian Orthodox seminaries in Tallinn, Narva, and Pechori: (1) some went to to Prague University (which had a special scholarship for Russians); (2) others went the Russian Theological Institute in Paris; (3) but many also studied at Tartu University. They maintained contact with each other, forming and reforming a pan-European network of anti-Soviet Russian Orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{857}

3. JEWISH REFUGEES FROM STALIN’S ANTI-COSMOPOLITAN CAMPAIGN

After the Second World War, Tartu became an oasis for yet another suddenly persecuted element of the Russian-speaking Soviet elite during Stalin’s anti-cosmopolitan campaign in the early 1950s. Unlike the towns of Latvia and Lithuania, Tartu had never been an important center of Eastern Europe’s Baltic Jewery. Where interwar Lithuania had a Jewish population on the

\textsuperscript{854} Richter, 21.
\textsuperscript{855} http://www.visitestonia.com/en/holiday-destinations/cultural-treasures/old-believers; see also http://www.starover.ee/.
\textsuperscript{857} Miljutina, \textit{Inimesed}, 45.
order of hundreds of thousands, and Latvia on the order of tens of thousands, Estonia’s Jewish population—all but non-existent until the second half of the nineteenth century—briefly peaked at 5000 at the turn of the twentieth century, mostly concentrated in the urban centers of Tallinn and Tartu. In interwar Estonia, Tartu’s ethnic Jewish population was 1000 (1.6%). It was proportionally even smaller in the Soviet period, hovering around 0.5%. At Tartu State University, Jews accounted for only 1.4% of the student body. But at the height of Stalin’s “anti-cosmopolitan” (anti-semitic) campaign in the early 1950s, Tartu provided refuge for several young Jewish scholars denied posts in Leningrad, Moscow, or anywhere else, much as it had to Lazar Gulkowitsch in the 1930s, when he lost his position at the University of Leipzig due to Nazi racial laws.

With the sudden influx of many Jewish scholars to the Tartu University faculty in the 1950s, Tartu’s Estonians came to refer to the “Red Departments” of Marxist-Leninist Ideology and the Department of Russian philology as “a new Jerusalem.” Here is how one of these new arrivals characterized the situation:

The attitude toward Jews in Estonia was much more liberal than in the other Soviet Republics. In the early 1950s this brought many people from Leningrad, so-called “invalids of the fifth-line” [with the institutionalization of internal passports for all Soviet citizens in 1932, ethnicity was listed on the fifth line—DB], as was later said. These were Yuri Lotman and his wife Zara Mints, the political economist Mikhail Bronshtein, a future member of the Estonian Academy of Sciences; the philosopher Rem Blum, the philologists Pavel Reifman and his wife Larissa Volpert—an international chess master and three time champion of the USSR; the economist Viktor Fainshtein, who had managed to graduate from the Institute of International Relations, to which Jews were not usually permitted access, and was sent thereafter to Tartu to work in the archives. Your humble servant joined this group.

These were the words of Leonid Stolovich (1929-2013), a Professor of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy and Aesthetics at Tartu University.
Stolovich arrived in Tartu in 1953 and stayed for the rest of his life. Like many others he managed find a Russian-speaking community, and never really needed much Estonian to get by. Though he is a controversial figure, his personal story, retold in detail in his memoirs, might serve as a representative example since it included so many of the typical elements of the life stories of Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants to Tartu in the 1950s: how his parents spoke nothing but Russian at home; how he had composed his first poems in Russian at the age of sixteen; how he had never even thought to conceal the fact that his mother and father were Jewish until after the Second World War; how he had tried very hard to gain admittance to the Communist Party as a trade union organizer at Leningrad University (profsoiuznyi organizator), but was denied on account of “concealing his race” after the War; how he completed his degree in 1952 and looked everywhere for work; how there were forty different institutions of higher learning in Leningrad that could have accepted him but did not; how he even applied to academic positions all across the non-Russian periphery of the Soviet Union in Tashkent (Uzbek SSR), Chisinau (Moldovan SSR), and Lvov (Ukrainian SSR); how everywhere he wrote or called, available and advertised spots disappeared as soon as he introduced himself.

In the end, after hundreds of inquiries only one place offered him employment—Tartu University. Stolovich barely got thirty-six hours of teaching at first, spread out over the course of a single semester. It was not enough to live on, but that paltry sum exceeded the generosity of the rest of the entire “Friendship of the Peoples” combined. “In February 1953 I taught my first lecture course [in Aesthetics]. There were not many students. They spoke poor Russian, but I received a warm reception.”

Like the others, Stolovitch felt there was something special about the social atmosphere in Estonia:

The situation in Tartu is unusual. In everyday life there is no anti-Semitism among the Estonians, even though during the German Occupation Estonia was the first place to report to Hitler that its territory was judenfrei—“free of Jews.” For Tartu University’s Rector, a former Leningrader, Fedor Dmitrivitch Klement, anti-Semitism was foreign. He was after all the only one who invited me to teach a course on aesthetics…. [But] Klement, who had been deeply frightened by earlier repressions (many Estonians who lived in the USSR had fallen victim to them), and who concealed the fact that his brother lived in England, was very scared of the Party leadership. These figures were anti-Semitic. Neither Stalin’s death nor the rehabilitation of the Jews could guide Klement’s actions. He had to submit to the direction of the Party… At the same time, on a personal level he was always supportive, gave me books as gifts and sometimes invited me to his home.
It was not until 1956, after he defended his “Candidate’s” (kandidatskaia) dissertation at Leningrad University on “Some Questions about the Aesthetic Nature of Art” [Nekotorye voprosy esteticheskoi prirody iskusstva] that he received regular position on the Philosophy Faculty. In the meantime, he taught some individual lecture courses in Aesthetics. In 1955 Boris Egorov, the head of Tartu University’s Department of Russian Literature, offered Stolovich the opportunity to teach introductory courses in Russian Literature and Literary Theory. Stolovich remembered Egorov as “a person deserving of the utmost honor.”

Still, in most ways Stolovich remained foreign to his adopted home, even in his own eyes. For like most other Leningraders, he never really left Leningrad in his heart. To the extent possible, he recreated Leningrad in his own Tartu home. Writing a few years before his death he noted:

I have now lived in Tartu for more than half a century—two thirds of my life—and this town has become very dear to me. But Leningrad, which has since become Saint Petersburg again, and which I myself call Peter [Piter], I love more than all the cities of the world. In every room of my Tartu apartment can be found something that evokes the city on the banks of the Neva River. In one room there is A.P Ostroumova-Lebedeva’s colorful lithograph “Frosty Summer Garden,” prepared on the basis of her own watercolor in 1929 (the year of my birth), which shows Fontanka [the left branch of the Neva River] and Michael’s Palace as seen from the Summer garden. In the second there is an engraving featuring a silent view across the Neva to Peter-Paul Fortress. In the third, there is O. Potshennyi’s black and white linocut “Moika,” where in the background of a moonlit night can be seen the silhouette of Yusupov’s castle.

The essential point here again is that Tartu’s particularity lay in its function as an incubator. It did not force assimilation to the prevailing currents in the manner of metropolitan Russia (or metropolitan Europe for that matter) but preserved the ideas, people, and practices who entered it as themselves, allowing for a kind of idiosyncracy and particular otherness that was systematically eradicated in the name of cosmopolitan universality.

Despite the comparative lack of anti-Semitism noted by most Jewish immigrants to Tartu, there was a still a linguistic and cultural divide that separated the newcomers and lifelong Tartu inhabitants. Along with the “Red Departments” of Marxist-Leninist Ideology and the Department of Russian philology, the term “New” or “Little Jerusalem” was sometimes applied in the 1960s to the nearby resort town of Elva—where Yuri Lotman and many members of the Moscow intelligentsia rented rooms in close proximity to one another, and spent their summers...
in their own separate Russian-speaking world, untouched for the most part by the dilemmas and concerns of Tartu’s dwindling interwar Estonian intelligentsia, its ranks thinned by the Second World War and subsequent ideological repressions. A member of Lotman’s semiotic circle, Vladimir Uspensky noted: “In the 1960s, the town of Elva, near Tartu, was not only a summer destination for Tartu inhabitants, but also for many Muscovites. In 1964 I sent my 5-year-old son Volodia there together with his grandmother, my mother in law, Natalia Brukhanenkoga. They rented a room.”

A few years later in the summer of 1968, the Russian poet and dissident, Natalia Gorbanevskaya left her 6-year-old son with the Lotmans at their dacha in Elva. This would later come up in Lotman’s KGB interrogation in 1970, and was one of the reason he came under particularly intense surveillance thereafter and was denied permission to travel abroad.

As one of Yuri Lotman’s friends from Leningrad observed, the spirit of the Russian intelligentsia could flourish in an atmosphere and environment “which was less oppressed in Tartu than with us [i.e. in Leningrad].” Thus, if Tartu became a uniquely powerful “observatory” upon the Soviet experience, it was partly because it also remained something of an “oasis”—keeping a balance between proximity and distance, contributing to the impression that Tartu may have been in the Soviet Union but was not entirely of it. The tension between two views of Tartu can be found equally in the memoirs of Russian and Estonian speakers. Similarly, the view that the 1970s were a turning point and transitional period, away from Europe and into Sovietization can be found in both. Writing in Russian about the transformation of Tartu in the 1970s, Leonid Stolovich (1929-2013) noted how the state cracked down on various forms of academic autonomy, but how Tartu held out against these attempted transformations: “The era of ‘really existing socialism’ was a period of sharp class conflict between Homo Sovieticus and Homo Antisovieticus,’ but the final victory had not yet been achieved. Tartu and the surrounding land was still a relatively free oasis, which had not yet been buried in the desert sands of the socialist nomenclatura.”

For Stolovich the intimate sociological circles that met at Tartu University’s sports facility in the Southern Estonian wilderness of Kääriku during the summers of 1966, 1967 and 1969 were the key expression of this freedom. However, by the 1970s “the desert absorbed the oasis ever more resolutely into its embrace.” The Manichean worldview explored in the last chapter that structured (and continues to structure) the narratives and identities of Tartu inhabitants emerges here as well.

On the Estonian side of Tartu’s linguistic divide, the writer Mihkel Mutt (b. 1953) used the same metaphor and narrative for his own memories of Soviet Tartu. He remembered the atmosphere at Tartu University when he first matriculated in 1971 as a student of Estonian Philology. It was a “Transitional Period,” away from Europe and into Sovietization, but still

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869 See KGB interrogation of Yuri Lotman in 1970 where he speaks of the summer he spent in Elva in July 1969, playing host to Natalya Gorbanevskaya’s young son. Dissidentlik liikumine, 496. See also Vladimir Uspensky: “In the 1960s, the town of Elva, near Tartu, was not only a summer destination for Tartu inhabitants, but also for many Muscovites. In 1964 I sent my 5-year-old son Volodia there together with his grandmother, my mother in law, Natalia Brukhanenkoga. They rented a room.”

870 “…mida Tartus summutati tunduvalt vähem kui meil,” Viktoria Kamenskaia, Jalatuskäigud Lotmaniga, 394.

871 “‘Arenened sotsialismis’ pidas Homo Sovieticus teravat klassivööntest Homo Antisovieticus’e, kuid lõpliku võitu polnud veel saavutanud. Tartu ja selle ümbrit olis esialgu veel suhteliselt vaba oasas, mis polnud mattrunud nomenklatuurse sotsialismi kõrbeliiva” Stolovich 146.

872 “[K]õrb haaras oasas aina tugevamalt oma embusse.” Stolovich, Kohtumised, 147.
some of the old spirit survived, thanks in large part to the old professoriate, who had not yet disappeared from the scene:

Thanks to those teachers there was a kind of grandeur in the old main building and the surrounding streets one could feel the *aura* of a true *universitas*. They expressed links with the past. They carried in themselves and served as intermediaries to—in many cases unaware and sometimes even despite their intentions—an entirely different university from that, which the Soviet state intended, and may even have succeeded in creating (if only immediately before the collapse of the empire). Until then the brilliance of these old, true professors protected the university, since their mentality had been passed on to many younger instructors, who had been their students or colleagues. But of course not forever. By the mid-1980s it was already clear that the humanities at TSU [Tartu State University] had turned into a real bureaucratic Russian Institution of Higher Learning, with only a a few “oases,” like semiotics or journalism.873

On further reflection, Mutt added a few other “oases” to his short list: “Lotman’s department together with the lectures of Tõnu Luik in philosophy were considered to be the oases of the humanities in those days. There were probably other oases as well, for example the Oriental Institute [of Pent Nurmeekund] and the Art Institute, but I did not have any personal contact with those and cannot speak of them from personal experience.”874

### 7.1.3 Tartu as an Observatory for Soviet Dissidents

The idea of the Tartu Spirit was used to to talk about a local independence of mind that stood apart from or even in opposition to the Communist Party and the Soviet state. However, in their interactions with Tallinn and Moscow, even Tartu’s leading Party members could occasionally become infected with the Tartu spirit, at least as they were remembered in Post-Soviet writings. Leonid Stolovich referred to the Tartu spirit in invoking the special atmosphere that prevailed in Tartu in the late 1960s:

> It is no secret that the masses, including even Party members, were hoping for reform in the direction of ‘socialism with a human face.’ A unique phenomenon appeared in Tartu, which came to be called “Tartu vaim” (the Tartu Spirit). The University leadership with its Party and Komsomol organization stepped out against the Estonian Communist Party’s Central Committee. Central Committee secretaries came to Tartu Party meetings

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as if to a cage where the lions had turned on their tamers, where (oh, a never before heard of occurrence!) they were made to endure direct criticism. 875

If Tartu Party members could occasionally represent Tartu more than they represented the Party, figures on the other end of the political spectrum, the Baltic dissidents, could also fall under the influence of the Tartu Spirit.

Indeed, the dissident movement in the Baltic world always had a somewhat different character from the rest of the Soviet Union, given coherence by its language and national identity and the Tartu spirit. The dismissive criticisms of the movement by Sergei Oushakine and Alexei Yurchak—who never consider its non-Russian-speaking element—do not apply in the Baltic. In the “Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat” Oushakine has written that unlike earlier intelligentsia figures and movements in Russian history (Radishchev, Chaadaev, Herzen, and Belinski) the peculiarity of the Soviet dissident movement was its singular lack of imagination—its inability to come up with “an alternative view of development,” its inability to do anything more than appeal to “legality” within the framework of the established discourse, demanding that the Soviet regime respect its own Constitution. 876 It is scarcely fair to ask about the possibility of a latter day Radishchev or Herzen under the conditions of Soviet history. Soviet dissidents experienced a level of surveillance Radishchev and Herzen never knew, including paralyzing restrictions on foreign travel. Radishchev studied at the University of Leipzig. And the “ground” (to borrow Oushakine’s own term) for much of Herzen’s critique was Paris and London, not Moscow or Saint Petersburg. They had genuinely European observatories upon Russia, while most Soviet dissidents (unless they were expelled from the Soviet Union entirely) had only “imaginary” ones, with the partial exception of the Baltic States, where people lived on recent memories of interwar Europe. Benjamin Nathans provides a more nuanced and contextualized assessment of the dissident appeal to legal norms in the Soviet Union under Brezhnev, as samizdat publications used “human rights” as “techniques for constraining the Soviet state.” 877 The globalization of the language of “human rights” in the second half of the twentieth century is important and worth noting, as is the particularism of the Soviet reception of it, but so is the particularism of the way


876 “In his pioneering study of Soviet dissidents, Marshall Shatz defines the dissidents as a ‘neo-intelligentsia,’ which repeated the strategy of the ‘old intelligentsia’ of the previous two centuries by questioning the principles of the existing political and social order. However, despite this apparent resemblance to the old intelligentsia’s strategies, the rhetoric of the Soviet dissidents cannot be located within this tradition of never-ending opposition of the Russian intelligentsia to the power holders. Contrary to the practice of resistance performed by their apparent predecessors, the so-called neo-intelligentsia never succumbed to open and at times violent confrontation with the authorities. Nor did it offer an alternative view of development, as the old intelligentsia usually did: the rhetoric of dissent of such charismatic Russian intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as Alexander Radishchev, Piotr Chaadaev, Alexander Herzen, and Vissarion Belinskii was rooted in a symbolic ground radically different from that of the regime, be this rhetoric anti-slavery, pro-Catholicism, or prosocialism.” Sergei Oushakine, “The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat,” Public Culture 13(2): 198; for a more judicious take on the role of Human Rights and Soviet rights in the dissident movement, see Benjamin Nathans, “Soviet Rights-Talk in the Post-Stalin Era,” Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, ed., Human Rights in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 166–190.

in which different language communities within the Soviet Union came to understand these ideas—i.e., the extent to which human rights was understood to mean the same thing in Estonian that it meant in Russian.

An important Estonian dissident martyr was the Tartu University Chemistry Professor, Jüri Kukk (1940-1981). Like Radishchev and Herzen, his dissidence was part and parcel of his European experience. Having performed his compulsory Soviet military service in Turkmenistan (1963-1965), where he achieved the rank of sergeant, he joined the Communist Party in 1965. His year of apostasy was a year abroad in Paris in the late 1970s. This was a privilege accorded to him partly owing to his Communist Party membership. Indeed, in the 1960s foreign travel became possible for trustworthy members of the Soviet Estonian academic elite, almost exclusively for Party members; non-Party members who were permitted to travel abroad (like Paul Ariste) were suspected of having compromised themselves in other ways, as agents of state security. The KGB established an organization in 1964 to monitor contacts between Estonians and Foreign Estonians, VEKSA. Unable to accept the contradictions and duplicity of the Soviet system thereafter, Kukk gave up his Communist Party Membership in 1978 and announced his desire to leave the Soviet Union. Together with another life-long Tartu dissident Mart Niklus, who spent nearly twenty years of his Soviet life in the Gulag, Kukk was sent to a forced labor camp in Archangelesk Oblast. Kukk died on March 27, 1981 while being force-fed on a hunger strike. His death was reported two days later in the *New York Times*.

But Kukk was in many ways an exception to the story of Estonian dissident experience; a tale of a loss of faith that was much closer and more familiar to the sensibilities of Russian-speaking Soviet dissidents. After all, most of the leading Russian dissidents—Andrei Siniavski, Yuli Daniel, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Andrei Sakharov—had started out at least as loyal citizens of the state, if not outright members of the Communist Party. They had to be turned against it.

By contrast to Russian dissidents, most Baltic opposition to the state grew out of sympathy with the armed resistance of the partisan Forest Brothers, formed during the Second World War and still active in the mid-1950s. Anti-Soviet antagonism was deeply embedded in Baltic society from the start. The prominent Estonian dissident Lagle Parek (b. 1941) expressed a common Estonian point of view on dissidence when she wrote:

> From the time I became friends with Enn Tartoga I knew that my place was in the resistance (*vastpanuliikumises*). I have tried to explain why. I cannot speak of an “awakening” or a period of awakening in my life. I have always known the history of our land, I have always been interested in it. And I was never been reconciled to its fate. The desire to resist came to me with my mother’s milk. And now [in 1978] I had been given the opportunity to do something!879


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Leningrad had always been a foreign world to them. Niklus was first arrested and imprisoned as a Tartu University biology student for sending photographs of Tartu abroad in 1956, which depicted the dilapidated state of some buildings on Turu Street in Tartu, which put the Soviet Union in a bad light. It is ironic that Tartu should have been a symbol of the backwardness of the Soviet Union, considering how it later became an internal symbol of its anti-Soviet Western Europeanness.\textsuperscript{880} These photographs were published in 1957 in the Chicago Herald Tribune and in several Western European newspapers as well.\textsuperscript{881} Tarto’s first oppositional action was undertaken around the same time while he was still a Tartu highschool student in 1956. Together with several classmates, he distributed more than three hundred leaflets on the night of November 4\textsuperscript{th} 1956 on Cathedral Hill (Toomemägi) by the Tartu University Library in protest against Soviet repressions in Hungary, an action that resulted in the imprisonment of eight boys from Tartu’s 3\textsuperscript{rd} Highschool (several were later commemorated for this action by the Hungarian National Republic). From the perspective of most Estonian dissidents, the Soviet state had always been a foreign, imperial other, imposed from the outside, rather than an outcome of any kind of indigenous effort or agitation. Indeed, immediately after the War, monuments commemorating Soviet “liberation” were blown up in several different Estonian towns including Tartu, Rakvere, and Tallinn. The Estonians responsible for destroying the Tallinn monument in 1946 (the predecessor to the infamous Bronze Soldier that inspired the riots of 2007 when it was removed to a military cemetery) it turned out were two teenage girls—14-year-old Aili Jürgenson and 15-year-old Ageeda Paavel. They spent the next decade of their lives in the Gulag for what they did. Paavel later explained her action as revenge against the systematic Soviet destruction of Estonian monuments and history.\textsuperscript{882} Oushakine claims that the Soviet dissident movement was marked, above all, by its law-abiding character, its inability to imagine an alternative discourse to that of the state. Situated at the center, Russian-speaking dissidents aimed to liberalize the existing system, seeking the fulfillment of the promises of the Soviet Constitution, freedom of speech, print, and assembly, without really addressing the social or economic problems at the heart of the Soviet experiment.\textsuperscript{883} This interpretation is ungenerous, to say the least. The evidence Oushakine uses

\textsuperscript{880} Mart Niklus, interview by author, Tartu, May 10, 2009.
\textsuperscript{881} Niklus, Mind ei tapetud õigel ajal (Tartu: Iseseivus, 2004), 12.
\textsuperscript{882} In the words of Ageeda Paavel herself: “Our beloved monuments started to disappear one after another. They had to be paid back somehow and the so-called Liberators’ Monument on Tõnismägi was chosen. It was situated in the square of the current bronze soldier on the side facing the church. It was a wooden pyramid, about a meter high, only about 20 centimetres in diameter; it was of a plain blue colour and its top was decorated by a red tin pentagon. /.../ Juhan [Juhan Kuusk] gave us the explosives and instructions. There was nothing really difficult about it. The important thing was that the fuse had to be long enough to give us a safe distance for running away. It was. We set the materials in place for the blast with Aili; we had no supporters. The fact that a militia officer who was on duty was flirting with a girl at a distance and did not notice us made it easier for us. Although this girl did not belong to our group, she was also later arrested.” (“Meie armsad ausambad hakkasid üksteise järel kaduma. Kuidagi pidi neile tagasi tegema ja valik langes Tõnismäel asuvale nn vabastajate ausambale. See asus asus praeguse pronksmehe platšil kirikupoolses servas. See oli umbes meetrikõrgune puust tüvipüramiid, mille paksust oli vast paarkümnend sentimeetrit, ilmetut sinist värvi, tipus plekist punane visinurk. /.../ Lõhkeaine ja õpetuse saime Juhanilt (Juhan Kuusk). Ega seal midagi keerukat polnudki. Tähtis oli, et süütenõör oleks meid päästvaks jooksusks piisavalt pikk. Oligi. Paugu materjalid panime paika koos Ailiga, toetajaid meil ei olud. Meile tegi asja kergemaks see, et valvemüüts flushis eemal oma tõdrukuga ja ei märkanud meid. Kuigi too tõdruk meie rühma ei kuulunud, vöeti temagi hiljem kinni.”) Ageeda Paavel as quoted in Peeter Kaasik, Tallinna Tõnismäel asuv punaarmeelaste ühisaud ja mälestusmärk. Ajalooline öend (Tallinn: 2006).
\textsuperscript{883} “In terms of political views, the Russian dissidents and Estonian (Baltic) independent thinkers (teisitimõtlejad) had little in common. The aim of the Russian dissidents was above all to democratize the Soviet system; they hoped
could just as easily be interpreted as a tactical maneuver, and turned back against his own conclusions to show that the peculiar nature of Soviet dissidence (in relation to intelligentsia movements of the nineteenth century) was the extremely repressive—even totalitarian—nature of the Soviet state. But his argument is also wrong when it comes to dissidents outside of the Russian-speaking world. For the concerns he claims were absent from the movement, were at the heart of the Estonian dissident movement, which defined its goals in alternative national and linguistic terms. A lifelong opponent of the Soviet state and author of a book on the subject, Viktor Niitsoo, underscored the gap, arguing that the language of the center has made it difficult to understand what was being said in the periphery: “It would be a mistake to lump Russian human rights activists and dissidents together with the Baltic resistance movement.”

For the predicament of the Baltic was fundamentally different from that of the rest of the Soviet Union. The Baltic territories had not been incorporated into the Soviet Union like the rest of its Republics—as the legally ambiguous imperial provinces of a decaying Empire—but as independent and sovereign nation-states and members of the League of Nations. The break between Estonian dissidents and their Moscow compatriots had everything to do with this difference.

From their position in the periphery, Estonians could not help but notice and call attention to things Russian-speakers at the center could not see or self-consciously ignored. But Russian-speakers who lived in the Baltic and collaborated with Baltic dissidents also came to formulate their demands and vision in more radical terms than those expressed in Moscow or Leningrad. Artem Juskevits, for example, was a Ukrainian immigrant to Estonia (he had an Estonian wife) and one of the leading figures in the Estonian dissident movement together with Kalju Mätk, Viktor Niitsoo, Erik Udam, and many other Estonians. Perhaps the single most prominent figure in the early Estonian dissident movement was actually an ethnic Russian, born and raised in interwar Estonia in Narva. Sergei Soldatov (1933-2003) served as an important link between Estonian and Russians, while also underscoring the differences between them.

In his memoirs, Soldatov stressed his frustration with Moscow dissidents. The divide appeared as early as 1968, provoked by Andrei Sakharov’s famous address: “Progress, Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom.” As soon as it was translated into Estonian, it led to a call to arms. The polemical Estonian response, “To Hope or to Act?” was signed anonymously by “Many members of Estonia’s technical intelligentsia” and in its last line called for the very thing that Oushakine claims the Russian dissident movement failed to provide: an ideological program to fulfill the promises of the Constitution, to achieve freedom of speech, print, and assembly. Nobody asked for the destruction of the system. Rather, they wanted liberalization and an adherence to domestic laws and foreign treaties. Very seldom did they deal with economic or social problems.” / “Poliitiliste vaadete poolest oli Vene dissidentidel ja Eest (Baltikumi) teisitimõtlejatel vääb ühist.” The Estonian term teisitimõtleja is a literal Estonian translation of the term coined in German by Rosa Luxembourg, Andersdenkenden (the one who thinks otherwise). Arvo Pesti, ed., Dissidentlik liikumine Eestis aastatel 1972-1987: Dokumendid kogumik [The Dissident Movement in Estonia 1972-1987: A Collection of Documents] (Tallinn: State Archive, 2009), 30.
for action. 887 Frustrated with his efforts to inspire a Democratic Movement for the Russian metropole, Sergei Soldatov took comfort in more local agitation in Estonia, and became in fact one of the founding figures in the Estonian Democratic Movement in the early 1970s.

Organized dissidence emerged in Estonia in the early 1970s under the partial leadership of Soldatov in the form of the “Estonian National Front” and The Estonian Democratic Movement.” A samizdat publication of 1971, entitled “The Soviet Russian Invasion, Occupation, and Colonialism in Estonia,” invited Moscow to see Sovietization in national and imperial terms: “Our people will never agree to assimilation and Russification, in the same way that the Russian people will never agree to Germanification or Sinicization.” They went on to predict the emergence of an anti-Russian Friendship of the peoples, while still stressing their sympathy for Russia’s own “Democratic movement”:

The Russian people themselves will pay a heavy price for the aventuristic expansion undertaken by their leaders. Every year it becomes more intolerable. Every occupied territory is developing its own opposition movement and the Estonian people are not alone. Together with Estonia are other occupied peoples. Links have emerged between the independence movements of various peoples and these links grow stronger day-by-day. Stronger ties emerge as well with the Russian Democratic Movement, which acknowledges in full the fundamental principle of every nation’s sovereignty and right to national self-determination. 889

In 1972, frustrated with the tentative claims and aims of their Moscow counterparts, they called for an “alternative discourse.” They applied pressure, but unsuccessfully, and so eventually distanced themselves from the Moscow group. They were also suspicious of the Helsinki Groups (1975) formed in many other Soviet Republics (Moscow, Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, Lithuania), suspecting—on the basis of the heightened dualism and hypocrisy of Soviet life (rightly it turned out)—that the magnanimity of the state in tolerating their existence was not in good faith, but a kind of bait to lure the “teisitimõtlejad” (Andersdenkenden) out of hiding and a precursor for a purge. At the same time they realized that they needed to attract a wider social base before pursuing collective action. 890

Nonetheless, many of the leading figures in the Estonian National Front and the Estonian Democratic Movement were caught and put on trial in late October 1975, following hundreds of

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887 Dissidentlik liikumine, 31.
888 “Meie rahvas ei nõustu assimileerimise ja venestumisega, nii nagu vene rahas ei nõustu kunagi saksastamisega või hiinastamisega.” Samizdat publication put out by the Estonian National Front and Democratic Movement.
KGB interrogations. The backlash sent ripples all through Soviet Estonia well beyond the
Estonian dissident movement that shook all the ranks of Soviet Estonian Intelligentsia and
reached deep into the heart of Tartu University. Kalju Mātik (b. 1932) and Sergei Soldatov
(1933-2003) each got six years; Mati Kiirend and Artem Jusketvits got five years, Arvo Varato
three. All were sent to the prison camps of Perm and Mordva Oblast. Tunne Kelam lost his
position as an editor of Estonian Encyclopedia, Helju Tauk his position at the Tallinn
Conservatory, Oleg Tiutriumov was fired from the symphony orchestra, Malle Kiirend from her
position as an editor at the Tallinn publishing house “Valgus,” Erik Udam (1938-1990) from the
Forestry Institute; the Tartu esoteric and conspiracy theorist Jüri Lina (b. 1949) was forbidden
any further publications, and was eventually expelled from the Soviet Union; Jaanus Paal was
thrown out of Tartu University for a second time; Tartu University instructors Úlo Vooglaid,
Pikkar Joandi and Paul Mötsküla were thrown out of the Communist Party, and Tartu University
Sociology Laboratory (for which Vooglaid was the chief organizer)—sometimes mentioned in
the same breath as Yuri Lotman’s Semiotic Summer schools as an “oasis of freedom”—for its
innovative approach to mass media studies (e.g. one of the first places in the Soviet Union
where Herbert Marcuse was read and discussed) was effectively abolished.891

The most famous and important acts of specifically Baltic criticism of the Soviet state
was yet to come. Once again, it was not merely a call for the Soviet Union to respect its own
laws and live up to the spirit of its Constitution, but an appeal to an alternative historical
narrative and a specifically Baltic view of the Soviet past. The Baltic Appeal of 1979, signed on
the fortieth anniversary of the Molotov Ribbentrop pact, called for the Soviet Union to
acknowledge the Secret Protocols of the Non-Aggression Pact that led to the Soviet annexation
of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. While this fleeting moment of good feeling between Hitler
and Stalin is generally explained away as a tactical move and downplayed as a historical
aberration in both Russian and American narratives of history—which prefer to stress the
fundamental ideological differences between these two states—it was the culminating and
defining moment of Soviet history for the Baltic States and the Baltic languages, the moment that
ended twenty-years of independent statehood. Most of the 45 signers were Lithuanians, but there
were also four Estonian dissidents (Erik Udam, Mart Niklus, Enn Tarto, and Endel Ratas). The
Appeal achieved wider legitimation when it was signed by a few prominent Muscovites
thereafter, including Andrei Sakharov. But here again the inspiration to see the Soviet Union in
this defamiliarizing light came not from the center but from the Baltic periphery of the Soviet
Union. If the Baltic Appeal of 1979 threatened to hollow out the ideological core of the Soviet
experiment and expose the historical bad faith of its international relations and politics of history,
the “Letter of the Forty” was a more inward directed revolt against the bad faith and hypocrisy of
its nationalities policy, a cultural protest signed barely two years later by forty Estonian
intellectuals, half of whom had some affiliation to Tartu University. In this case some of the
signers were even members of the Estonian Communist Party. The “Letter of the Forty” decried
Brezhnev’s policies of Russification and was sent to Pravda in Moscow. Two of the suspected
authors were the Estonian poet Jaan Kaplinski and the sociologist Marju Lauristin, both Tartu
University graduates and prominent figures in Tartu’s linguistic landscape and intelligentsia.

Oushakine’s dissidents lacked imagination, “mimicking” and inverting the discourse of
the state; Yurchak’s dissidents lack any kind of wider appeal. With his focus on Leningrad, and
a few letters from the Russian speaking Eastern peripheries of the Soviet Union, Alexei Yurchak
has described the dissident movement as “ne interessno” (uninteresting) to the vast majority of

891 Mait Raun, “Eesti Demokraatlik liikumine ja Eesti rahvusrinne” Akadeemia nr. 6,7 2002; Lagle Parek, 117–118.
members of the Last Soviet Generation. In everyday life, dissident as well as “dissident-like”
(dissidentsvuiushchie) people and behaviors were considered “not only strange but also
potentially dangerous, threatening the stability of normal life.” Activists, who expressed
excessive enthusiasm about the regime, and dissidents who demanded that people reject it and
“live in truth” (Vaclav Havel) or at least “without lies” (Alexander Solzhenitsyn) were equally
shunned. They did not belong to “svoi” in the sense of “normal people.” One of Yurchak’s
interviewees, born in 1961, described a dissident-like classmate she encountered at her university
in the 1980s:

We all thought he was a fool…. Listening to him was an intense experience—it caused
not fright, but repulsion [ne strakh, a otrvashchenie]. It’s one thing to read Dostoyevsky
and quite another to interact with his heroes. You may enjoy reading about them but you
wouldn’t enjoy meeting them. When a real person is standing in front of you constantly
saying skeptical things, it is unpleasant.

So dissidentsvuiushchie were shunned because they called attention to moral compromises that
most people found inconvenient or “unpleasant.” Listening to them was not “enjoyable.”

However, these were precisely the kinds of people that were most interesting to most
Estonian scholars at Tartu University, including Yuri Lotman. Yuri Lotman may not have been
a Radishchev himself (as if anyone could under Soviet conditions), but he wrote a monograph on
Radishchev. And very few people in Soviet Tartu—least of all those in its various literature
departments—saw literature as a purely hedonistic, escapist pursuit, without any wider
implications for present life in the manner of the Leningrad University students quoted by Alexei
Yurchak. Indeed, it would be hard to find a moment in world history where the impulse to read
between the lines for hidden meanings and presentist allegories was more a part of everyday life
than it was in late Soviet culture.

Lotman also wrote on the behavior of Decembrists in everyday life. This was essentially
a study of dissident behavior, of the inversion of texts and action, a kind of early 19th-century
version of Havel’s dictum that one must “live in truth.” With some irony Lotman recounted an
episode from his own life in Tartu where he had enacted the Schillerian behavioral codes of the
Decembrists to retrieve the lost manuscript of Mikhail Bulgakov’s yet unpublished masterpiece,
The Master and Margarita (yet another text rife with allegorical presentist meanings and
applications). Bulgakov’s widow, Elena Sergeevna, had paid a visit to Tartu in the mid-1960s
and its Department of Russian Literature. At the time, Lotman’s wife, Professor Zara Mints was
Teaching a course on Soviet literature. She had started reading Bulgakov together with her
students. Lotman stressed the novelty of her course: “The course on Soviet literature quickly
became very interesting. They managed to limit the inclusion of ‘laureates’ [or approved
authors] and get ahold of emigrant literature by many repressed writers. All this was entirely
new. Neither Leningrad nor Moscow offered had anything comparable to offer.” They
introduced one of their students to Bulgakov’s widow, a promising young man from the local
Russian population, but an alcoholic and kleptomaniac ever since childhood,” it later turned

892 Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, 107.
893 Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, 108
894 “Kurs sovetskoi literatury bistro delalsia interesnym. ‘Laureatov’ udalos’ potesnit’ i za ix schet chastichno vvesti
emigrantskuuiu literature i represirovannyx pisatelei. Vse eto bylo soversheno novo. Ni v Leningrade, ni v Moskve
nichovo podobnogo ne bylo.” Lotman, “Vospominania” in Egorv, 316.
A little while later, Elena discovered that Bulgakov’s manuscript had gone missing. This put Lotman in a rather awkward position with respect to Bulgakov’s widow and the rest of the Russian intelligentsia.

Shortly thereafter Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s showed up Lotman’s doorstep: “I don’t remember exactly how he presented himself, but from his words and gestures, it was clear that he had come to punch my face in.” But by his own account, Lotman had already performed a Schillerian script in order to retrieve the manuscript from his student, paying a visit to the young man in his apartment on the edge of Tartu:

The first thing I noticed on his shelves were many of my own books. I acted theatrically, in the spirit of the Marquis de Posa, which it is now embarrassing to recall … I made a theatrical gesture and pronounced in the tone of Schiller’s hero: you need these books? Very well. I give them to you!” I could have behaved more simply but this is how I acted; and apparently this theatricality had an effect.) Upon this I turned around and again in the voice of the Marquis de Posa said something along the lines of—if you have in your soul even a kernel of honesty, then you will bring to me this very evening Bulgakov’s manuscript….”

The young man showed up that very same evening at Lotman’s home on Kastani Street and returned the manuscript averting a scandal. Having explained all this to Solzhenitsyn,

The conversation took a new turn. I don’t remember what we talked about, but at the center was of course One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich and also the question whether it would be possible to find a place at Estonia’s observatory or physics institute for the great astronomer NN, who after his release from prison camp wanted to test his theoretical equations about air (or some gaseous) elements and their separation on the moon and the possibility of the emergence of simpler forms of life—he was unemployed at the time.

A walk together through Tartu’s old-town put Lotman and Solzhenitsyn on much friendlier terms they had been in than they had been earlier that morning when Solzhenitsyn had shown up on Lotman’s doorstep. They found common ground—and a common language—in the shadow of

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895 “Odin iz nix, podavavshii bol’shie nadezhdy paren’, iz mestnyx russkikh, ochen’ sposobnyi moldoi chelovek, no s detsya algolik i kleptoman (chto nam bylo neizvestno), byl uchastnikom etix zaniatii”.” “Vospominaniia” in Egorov, 316.

896 “Ne pomniu kak on predstavisia, no i iz slov, i iz zhestov vytekalo, chto on priexal bit’ mne mordu.” Lotman’s “Bospominania” in Egorov, 316.

the nineteenth century observatory of a town they both loved: “We departed on good terms and on the same day I went to see him at his hotel and we went for a walk together through Tartu. Later we exchanged a few letters. Unfortunately we did not meet again.” In a small intimate town like Tartu, where dissidents and non-dissidents were much less clearly demarcated from one another than in metropolitan Russia, where everyone came into contact with everyone, and the lingering memory of an interwar Estonian Nation State was only a few years in the past, Yuri Lotman and Alexander Solzhenitsyn found an affinity in Tartu that would not have been possible in Moscow or Leningrad. Lotman and Ariste may not have been dissidents themselves, but both had dissident friends and students, who were inspired (however unintentionally) by the teachings of their advisors, for each in his own way imagined himself to be a moral force—trying to do with his words what more dissident figures did with actions.

The local environment in Estonia was significant for how it transformed relations, even among Russian-speaking members of the intelligentsia like Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Yuri Lotman. But it was also significant for the segregation it maintained between the Estonian and Russian speaking worlds of Tartu. Upon one occasion in the late 1960s Yuri Lotman entertained the 6-year-old son of the dissident writer, Natalia Gorbanevskaia, in Elva for several weeks during the summer. It was for this that Lotman fell under KGB scrutiny, where he was questioned of his knowledge of Estonian dissident activities. The interrogation was very brief. It only lasted an hour on January 30, 1970 from 5pm to 6pm. Zara Mints had been interrogated just before him in an even shorter interview from 4:30pm to 5pm. While Lotman acknowledged his contacts with Gorbanevskaia, spoke of his colleague Pavel Reifman, and students Elena Valdimirovna Dushetshkina and Gabriel Superfin—whom he characterized as a student “with great talents but little discipline”—when it came to Niklus and Tarto, he said: “I do not know NIKLUS and TARTO and I am hearing these names for the first time.” Zara Mints also claimed to be unfamiliar with the names. Assuming that they told the truth in their interrogation, their lack of awareness of Tarto and Niklus is remarkable considering how prominent they were at the time in the Estonian-speaking circles of Tartu. It is a testament to the cultural isolation of Tartu’s Estonian and Russian-speaking worlds. While Russian and Estonian dissidents may have known each other, the names of local Estonian dissidents remained confined to the boundaries of the Estonian language, just as the names of local Russian-speaking dissidents (beyond international celebrities like Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn) remained confined to the boundaries of the Russian language. To a great extent this is still true today. In a recent collection of documents on the Estonian dissident movement, only two non-Baltic names appear with any regularity on the open letters of protests drafted and signed by Baltic dissidents: Boris Gasparov and Irina Paperno.

899 “Rasstalis’ my uzhe sovershennno spokoino, i v tot zhe den’ ia zashel k a nemu v gostinitc i my dovol’no dolgo xodili po Tartu. Pozshe my obmenialis’ neskol’kimy pis’mami. K sozhaleniu, bol’she vstrech u nas ne bylo.” Lotman, “Ne memuary,” in Vospitianie dushe, 47.
900 “NIKLUS ja TARTO on mulle tundmatud ja ma kuulen neid perekonnanimesid esimest korda.” ERAF f.129 SM, n. 1, s. 29155, k. 2, l. 18-19. Archival reproductions and translations into Estonian in Dissidentlik liikumine, 497.
901 See for example the signatories of the (1) “Protest Against the Abuse of Academic A.D. Sakharov” (Tallinn-Tartu, February 3, 1980); (2) “Protest Letter to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian SSR” (March 27, 1980); (3) “Collective Public Letter of Estonians and Lithuanians” (Tallinn-Tartu, July 27, 1980) (4) “Telegram to Lech Walesa” (September 11, 1980) in Arvo Pesti, ed., Dissidentlik liikumine Eestis aastatel 1972-1987 (Tallinn: Riigiarhiiv, 2009), 84, 85, 93, 94.
The importance of Tartu as a social and intellectual environment for producing alternative perspectives upon the world emerges in Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s account of the role of Tartu and the surrounding countryside in Southern Estonia in the composition of the *Gulag Archipelago*. In a memorable passage he evoked Tartu in the 1960s as a place that seemed to exist outside Soviet borders in Europe. That a Russian nationalist like Alexander Solzhenitsyn could enjoy the fact that “the Russian language was avoided here” seems indicative of the powerful meaning Tartu and its linguistic distinctiveness had for many members of the Russian intelligentsia, maybe especially for those who did not speak any (or much) Estonian. The Soviet identification of Tartu with Europe was often overstated and sometimes even an illusion. Solzhenitsyn imagined that he was free of KGB surveillance in Tartu, and had to be gently reminded by his Estonian hosts that he ought to behave more cautiously. But it was a culturally productive illusion. Tartu and its environs in Southern Estonia came to play an important role in the Soviet Union as a place of untimely meditations in a variety of languages on forgotten cultural themes and occasionally even forbidden political memories. Solzhenitsyn wrote: “The overall structure of the complete *Gulag Archipelago* was conceived on this hillside near Võru [in Southern Estonia, not far from Tartu], along with the methodology that allowed me, in an orderly fashion, to incorporate all the chaotic materials in my possession.” Southern Estonia, in and around Tartu, served the function of bringing independent intellectual order out of chaos for the Estonian- and Russian-speaking intelligentsia alike. Yuri Lotman’s Tartu School of Semiotics, with its summer schools in the Estonian wilderness at the University sports complex at Kääriku in the 1960s was only the most famous example of this. But Tartu and its University also provided a home to various other communities of thought and fellow feeling, which stood apart from if not against the dominant currents of Soviet reality.

To some extent, all of Estonia was perceived this way, as an “oasis” in the cultural geography of late Soviet socialism. This view was particularly pronounced among outsiders. Solzhenitsyn devoted an entire chapter of his post-Soviet memoirs, *Invisible Allies*, to “The Estonians,” whom he called a “decent, honest, peaceable people,” the only “allies” to receive a separate chapter as a national group.

Virtually everyone in Estonia had read [*One Day In the Life of Ivan Denisovich*], and I felt very much at home there, engulfed by an atmosphere of cordiality that I had never experienced in the Soviet world. Of course the weak manifestation of the Soviet spirit was precisely what made Estonia so attractive at the time. (In the Russian part of the Soviet Union, this spirit will need years and years to die out.) I felt psychologically at ease and realized that a part of me would forever remain in this place.

Estonian was the first language into which *One Day in the Life* was translated in 1963. It was also the first language—even before Russian—in which any part of *The Gulag Archipelago*  

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appeared in print within Soviet borders in 1989. And Solzhenitsyn stressed the role of many different “invisible” Estonians in the protection, transport, and salvation of the original manuscript.

Solzhenitsyn stressed the anti-Soviet coherence of the Estonian nation. Tartu stressed the divide between Tallinn and Tartu. For all the cultural changes Tartu underwent after the War, many Estonians continued to see it as a center of cultural authenticity, the deep, intellectual antidote to the insincere, political correctness of Tallinn, in the same spirit that August Annist had expressed the divide as far back as 1923. The endurance of this trope into the Soviet period can be found in the memoirs (published in 2010) of the writer Mihkel Mutt, trying to explain what Tartu meant to his father, Oleg Mutt, the head of Tartu University’s English Department from 1961 to 1977:

Tallinn was the place where the Reds grabbed power and ‘everything fell apart.’ Tallinn was the cave from which the robbers and rabble emerged. Even now it was the residence of false authority. Tartu-centrism for my father meant above all University-centrism, for Tallinn did not even have any real professors! This was not a very rational argument, but very important nonetheless. True, one could respect the Tallinn Polytechnic Institute as the successor to Tallinn Technical University. But this was the exception; everything else in Tallinn was superficial and insubstantial. Especially, of course, the department of foreign languages at the Pedagogical Institute, where there was no depth and no scholarship, and students were taught to mouth-off carelessly. It was from Tallinn that figures like rector Arnold Koop, who had no education and no culture, were sent to Tartu. (My father never spoke about the rector, only sighed and batted the air helplessly with his hand).

Mihkel Mutt was himself a student of Estonian Philology at Tartu University in the 1970s. A little piece of wordplay from the times showed his father was not alone in his preference for Tartu over Tallinn: “The word on the street was that while Tallinn may have been the head-city [i.e. capital], Tartu was a city with a head.”

If this is how Tartu saw Tallinn in the Soviet period (as Moscow’s hand-maiden), Tartu’s regard for the Soviet capital was one of even greater skepticism. In the wider Soviet context, some of Estonia’s charm and uniqueness derived from the very fact that its university and the center of its cultural life was in a small, provincial European town rather than the national capital in the style of the fourteen other Soviet national republics. Tartu elicited comparisons—both

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908 “An Estonian literary journal has published the first chapter of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s banned epic ‘The Gulag Archipelago,’ a newspaper reported. It is believed to be the first publication of the work in the Soviet Union.”


909 Solzhenitsyn, Invisible Allies, 53.

910 See chapter 4 for a discussion of the emergence of this divide in interwar Estonia.


912 “Tollane tavatarkus kõlas, et Tallinn on pealinn, aga Tartu peaga linn.” Mutt 123.
within the Soviet Union and without—to more famous (often German-speaking) European University towns like Tübingen, Heidelberg, Freiburg, or Göttingen. It was also compared to Cambridge. All these comparisons are revealing (though sometimes more of the observer than the town observed or its inhabitants), but one in particular deserves closer inspection.

In its peripheral position, old-fashioned small-town dynamics, and even in its extraordinary intellectual veneration of culture and philological studies, Tartu in the age of Yuri Lotman resembled Basel in the age of Jacob Burckhardt. As evoked in Lionel Gossman’s important study of the hometown of the father of cultural history and the Renaissance, nineteenth-century Basel was “An Archimedian point outside events,” removed from political trends in academic scholarship as practiced in Paris and Berlin. It was a place where idiosyncratic and untimely thinkers, including the sons of the Basel elite (like Burckhardt himself and the author of an account of the matriarchal origins of human civilization, Jacob Bachofen) crossed paths with foreign imports (like the theologian Hans Overbeck and his room-mate, the philologist-philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche). Basel was a place of refuge from modernity and the homogenizing and politicizing force of the German empire. It was a place where these scholars could pursue their own cultural agendas and approaches to knowledge, and observe the political establishment from a safe and comparatively objective distance.

The achievement of the Basel scholars was surprising, considering the ensconced provincialism of their cultural position and their skeptical and pessimistic attitude toward centers of political power. Much more than their better paid, state-oriented colleagues in Berlin, Basel’s intellectual misfits spoke to pan-European concerns and global themes, united for all their differences by their common refusal to accept the state (or the nation for that matter) as either the focus or the fundamental legitimizing unit of their historical and philological investigations. The intellectual life of Soviet Tartu stood in a similar a-political, critical, culturally productive relationship to Moscow. As a social space, Burckhardt’s Basel and Lotman’s Tartu also exhibited many of the same small-town characteristics, which served as the background to their eminently European preoccupation with culture. What Gossman wrote of Basel, could easily be said of Tartu as well:

Its inhabitants lived out their lives in self-enclosed groups, shut off from each other yet observing each other suspiciously and critically. The composer and musician Louis Spohr [whose student, Ferdinand David moved to Dorpat (Tartu) and established a Quartet at the Raadi Manor for the Liphart family] was warned by friends in Alsace that the Baslers were ‘cold and ungracious, given to receiving strangers on their doorstep and terminating the visit before they could cross the threshold.’ There were few public spaces, and there was little public life, despite the neohumanist’s dream of refashioning the city on the model of the ancient polis. Each social group lived in its own sphere.

Tartu also had its Greek aspirations to become (as it was often called in the nineteenth century) “The Athens of the Ema River.” Here too, especially under Soviet rule, there was little in the way of public life; Tartu’s citizens had reputation for reticence and reserve, rarely opening their homes to strangers (this Soviet stereotype was indiscriminantly applied to Estonians in contrast to the warm and effusive hospitality of the Georgians, with their obligatory banquets and toasts and displays of generous abundance). And various intimate social groups and intellectual circles

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lived “shut off from each other, yet observing each other suspiciously and critically.” Petty envy, jealousy, and the inability to forget the past or remain anonymous—these were the less pleasant sides of small-town university life, exacerbated by the fact that Soviet Estonia (pop. 1,465,000 in 1979) was the smallest Soviet national republic. The next in line, Soviet Latvia, was larger by more than a million inhabitants. This aspect of the Tartu’s experience is a necessary corrective to the warm collegiality remembered by visitors—like Solzhenitsyn, Thomas Sebeok, and Roman Jakobson—whose brief time in Soviet Tartu was so deeply embedded in the language and thoughts of like-minded intimate groups that they did not notice the walls of silence that sealed off those groups from each other.

Still, in comparing Basel to Tartu one should not lose sight of the most important political and linguistic difference between them: politically Basel observed the making of the German Empire from outside the borders of the state. Tartu, on the other hand, always belonged to the larger states it observed. From the very beginning, its University was founded as a tool of integration into the Swedish Empire, and each state that revived and funded the University—the Russian Empire, the Estonian National Republic, and the Soviet Union—sought to refound it in the spirit of Stockholm, Saint Petersburg, Tallinn, and Moscow respectively. In the meantime, while Basel citizens spoke their own distinctive municipal dialect of Swiss German, the intellectual culture and language of the University was unproblematically Hochdeutsch, even as the neohumanist agenda intensified the study of Latin and Greek at German-speaking universities all across nineteenth-century Europe. The independence of mind that Basel earned by political separation from the homogenizing and integrative forces of German state-building, came to Tartu instead through language. Tartu was rendered strange to all the states it served by its various languages and dialects, usually at odds with each other as well as the language of state power.

7.2 Third Worlds in Third Languages: Tartu’s Linguistic Landscape

Soviet Tartu’s inordinate preoccupation with language and literature must be set both against a pan-European and a pan-Soviet background. Throughout the nineteenth century, European nationalism and cosmopolitanism stood in a reciprocal and mutually reinforcing relationship: the emergence of Goethe’s concept of “world literature” (Weltliteratur) in the 1830s would have been unthinkable without the rise of national literatures around the same time. Ultimately, “the national literature department gradually [came] to replace the philosophy department as the center of the humanities, and a fortiori as the spiritual center of the

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915 According to the 1979 Soviet Census Soviet Estonia had a population of 1,465,000 in 1981 of whom 948,000 were ethnic Estonians and 409,000 were ethnic Russians. The next smallest Soviet national republic was Latvia. Its overall population was 2,503,000, of whom 1,344,000 were ethnic Latvians and 821,000 were ethnic Russians. NSV Liidu Rahvastik (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1981), 23 and 24.
916 See Gossman’s chapter: “‘To Reconcile Progressive Tendencies of the Time with Resistance to Them’: Neohumanist Ideals and Modern Reality,” which observes the task of universities all across German-speaking Europe to meet the economic challenge of growing industry and commerce on the one hand and the threat of revolutionary upheaval on the other: “The means of achieving this goal was the transformation of the traditional study of the ancient languages from a rhetorical and grammatical exercise into an immersion in the entire life of antiquity in the spirit of the new humanism or study of antiquity that had developed in Germany in the second half of the eighteenth century.” Gossman, 69.
Various studies have made this claim for Germany, England, and Spain independently, even for the imperial legacy of British rule in India. By the end of the nineteenth century chairs and departments of national literature could be found at universities all across Europe, though the West lagged significantly behind the East: the first chair of Russian literature in Moscow was established in 1835, while the first chair of English literature (at University College, London) was not established until 1852.

The preoccupation with language and literature in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union was further intensified by the absence of an indigenous philosophical tradition outside of theology. Galin Tihanov has observed that “the intelligentsia in [Russia, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia] lived after World War I on borrowed philosophical capital, mainly of German-Austrian provenance; and it was intellectuals from these four countries who were most active in the process of bending traditional German philosophy in the direction of aesthetics and literary theory.” Thus, the linguistic and literary movements of interwar Eastern Europe—like Russian Formalism and the Prague Linguistic Circle—did the universalizing work of philosophy, and in the flow of cultural capital back to Western Europe, contributed even to the rise of French structuralism that replaced the humanistic existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre with the structural anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss at the head of the French academic establishment.

There were also good Soviet reasons for the prominence of language and literature among the Soviet humanities. Mikhail Bakhtin, Dmitri Likhachaev, Vladimir Propp, Yuri Lotman, Alexander Piatigorskii, Mikhail Gasparov, Viacheslav Ivanov, Vladimir Toporov, and Lidiia Ginzburg were just some of the most eminent scholars in the Soviet humanities. Elsewhere they could have been philosophers, cultural historians, sociologists, or anthropologists. But in the Soviet Union all found their intellectual and institutional home in the study of language and literature. Despite periodic ideological attacks leveled against

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919 Galin Tikhanov, 77.
921 Galin Tikhanov, “Why Did Modern Literary Theory Originate in Central and Eastern Europe? (And Why Is It Now Dead?),” *Common Knowledge* 10:1 (2004); going further to stress the debt of Eastern Europe to German philosophy, the historical linguist, Patrick Sériot has observed how much easier it is to translate Heidegger into Russian, Czech, Hungarian, and other Eastern European Languages (where one-to-one lexical correspondences exist) than French or English (where translation requires the cumbersome adaptation of one philosophical tradition to the needs of a distinctly different ontology). Seriot made this observation in a his lecture “Splitting and Binding: the Unexpected Origins of Russian Structuralism (Jacobson) in Russian Religious Philsophy.” It was delivered to a seminar of Estonian graduate students headed by Mihhail Lotman and Kalevi Kull, May 21, 2009. I was in attendance.
922 Too often read out of national context, Pierre Bourdieu’s study, *Homo academicus*, is really about the institutional peculiarities of the French academic establishment in the 1960s and how the academic revolution of 1968 resulted in an academic regime change, replacing Jean-Paul Sartre with Claude Lévi-Strauss.
“formalism” on the one hand and “bourgeois nationalism” on the other, literary studies and linguistics (these two were never far apart in the Soviet Union) were some of the most exciting and least ideological disciplines in the Soviet humanities; Stalin’s repudiation of Nikolai Marr’s linguistic theory in 1950 only further freed the intellectual content of language and literature from clear standards of ideological orthodoxy. It also raised their status in Soviet ontology: if languages were not in fact subject to class identities (as Nikolai Marr had contended), but characteristics of whole societies (as Stalin revealed in 1950), then it followed that they were in some sense more real and more permanent than classes, more important observatories upon the nature of the world. After the Second World War, there were fewer Party members in Philology than pretty much anywhere else in the Soviet humanities or social sciences. Tartu University typified this Soviet pattern: of Tartu University’s 770 instructors in 1980, 47% belonged to the Communist Party. But while Philology had the second largest faculty (142 instructors) and the second most professors (17) after Medicine, it had the lowest percentage of Party membership of all ten faculties at Tartu State University (28.9%).

There was, of course, more to intellectual independence than the question of Party membership, though Party membership remained the most common index of Bolshevik mentality in Soviet Tartu, more so perhaps for Estonians than Russian speakers. In observing the lack of serious philological scholarship at the Pedagogical Institute in Tallinn, Oleg Mutt had stressed the absence of “real professors” there. For Mutt what was at stake was the question of the professor as a cultural type, a person who might embody the values of a true intelligentsia. Mihkel Mutt tried to explain his father’s position:

Since my father had helped to translate the abstracts for many scholars traveling to foreign conferences into cultivated English, he had a very wide circle of acquaintances even beyond his department and faculty. He was very reserved in the opinions he expressed, especially when it came to criticizing someone’s lack of ability (on these occasions he typically sighed, ‘well, what did we expect?’). But in regard to a few colleagues he did not hide his admiration. He had a pretty definite image of what a professor, a true university instructor, should be. For example, [the biologist] Viktor Masing, [the biologist] Eras Parmasto, and Helmut Piirimäe [one of the few non-Party members in the history department] he would say, “These are true professors!” Of Yuri Lotman (whose appearance he good-naturedly compared to Einstein) this went without saying. Arthur Hone had been a professor in spirit. There were surely a few more, but not many. From this it followed _eo ipso_, that quite a few who bore the title of professor, were not professors on the inside, but only according to some kind of external criteria. First and foremost of course, they were careerists and party members, best represented by rector [Arnold] Koop.

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923 The remaining nine faculties had the following percentages of Communist Party membership in ascending order: Mathematics (29%), Biology-Geography (32%), Physical Education (38.6%), Chemistry-Physics (42.9%), Medicine (44%), Economics (46%), History (61%), Marxism-Leninism (86%), and Law (87%), TÜA III, 200.

“True Professors” vs. “Party members and careerists”: this formula expressed the binary divide in academic life that structured experience and memory for much of the Tartu intelligentsia. But on closer inspection most versions of this Manichaean worldview were riddled with exceptions, ambiguities, and internal contradictions. One person’s villain was another’s hero. Tartu patriots were very far from reaching a general consensus on the question of who did and who did not embody the “Tartu spirit” (*Tartu vaim*), though just about everyone agreed that the “Tartu spirit” was a very good thing.

The deep social and intellectual divisions in the bilingual world of Soviet Tartu and their common veneration for Tartu’s cultural capital as a German University town and “oasis of Europe” helped contribute to the emergence of a Babel of informal scholarly collectives, each generating its own “third world” in a literal or figurative “third language.” They ranged from an Esperanto Society to an informal Institute for the Study of Oriental Languages, to Yuri Lotman’s own “Tartu School of Semiotics,” whose members used Russian, but developed their own academic “dialect” to avoid detection by Soviet bureaucrats: their stated objective—just as opaque to the average Russian scholar as to the average Estonian—was to investigate “secondary modeling systems.”  

The use of the term “third world” here is not by chance. It is meant to evoke the original spirit of the Third World as it was intended at the Bandung Conference in 1955, where the leaders of various decolonized nations formed a “Non-Alligned Movement”—i.e. to avoid being forced to choose between the ideologies of Communism and Capitalism. They aspired to remain independent of the binary dynamics of the Cold War and live on their own terms. In third languages beyond Estonian and Russian in Tartu—sometimes the languages of the Third World Nations alluded to above—Estonians and Russians sometimes even learned to speak to and trust each other, though this was the exception rather than the rule. The topography of Tartu’s “Linguistic Landscape” consisted of many different individuals and groups at varying degrees of remove from the establishment. They ranged from Holy Fools—like the free-spirited Villem Ernits—to salaried professors, each contributing in a small way to the “Tartu Spirit.”

### 7.2.1 Villem Ernits: Living Symbol of the “Tartu Spirit”

*Tartu vaim* (the “Tartu Spirit”) was a term coined in the 1930s during the “Era of Silence” under the rule of Estonian President Konstantin Päts to evoke Tartu’s simultaneously national and cosmopolitan independence of mind, its cultural refusal to conform to the politics of Tallinn or the demands of the state. The greatest embodiment of *Tartu vaim* and the defining figure of the public contours of Tartu’s linguistic landscape under Soviet rule was the idiosyncratic Estonian polyglot, Villem Ernits (1891–1982): (1) With his prodigious linguistic talents he saw the world through a lens of language like many other more prominent scholars at the university ranging from Paul Ariste to Yuri Lotman; (2) as Tartu’s most energetic,
outspoken, and fearless public figure, he became a kind of informal mascot for the Tartu intelligentsia, a common reference point for its isolated linguistic communities and individuals, someone who was equally at home and admired on both sides of the Russian and Estonian-speaking divide; (3) finally, as a poor Estonian peasant boy, born in 1891 in the village of Nõva, who had travelled the world but whose entire life at the same time had been tied to the history of Estonia and Tartu University, Ernits was a kind of living link to the pre-Soviet past in all of its national particularity and cosmopolitan universality.

By one account Villem Ernits spoke seventeen languages. By another he spoke ten fluently and had a reading knowledge of thirty or forty.926 At Tartu University under Soviet rule he taught Russian, Old Slavonic, Polish, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Sanskrit, and Esperanto.927 Like other Tartu polyglots—especially mathematics professor Jaan Sarv (1877-1954) and the professor of Lutheran theology Uku Masing (1909-1985)—he had even theorized about “language as such” in an old eighteenth-century Herderian or Rousseauian vein that was already considered old fashioned by the first decade of the nineteenth century.928 An essay he scrawled in pencil in Russian around 1955 bears the title: “On the origins and development of language” (V proisxozhdenia i razviti iazyka).929

He never managed (or was not permitted) to defend his Doctoral Dissertation, composed in German in the 1930s and inspired by his childhood experience on the banks of lake Peipus where he grew up within walking distance the Russian Old Believer Communities there: “Die estnische Sprachelement im Russischen. Einleitung und allgemeine Übersicht” [The Estonian Linguistic Element in Russian. Introduction and General Overview].930 But the theme of cultural contacts and influence between Slavic and Finno-Ugric languages and peoples—composed in this case neither in Russian nor Estonian, but in the more neutral, value-free, “third language” and cultural space of German—preoccupied and fascinated him throughout his entire life. It also became one of the defining links between Tartu’s Soviet and European identity and experience.

Writing in 1963, Daniel Palgi remembered that there had still been talk of a doctoral dissertation defense for Ernits as late as 1946 (when he was already 55 years old); but by 1951 when Palgi became a kind of private secretary to Rector Fedor Klement and Prorector Eduard Martinson (employed in part to help them with their deficient Estonian), no one talked about Ernits’s dissertation any more. The intellectual problem, explained Palgi, was that “V. Ernits attempted to deal with all questions at once, not one at a time. And he dealt with everything in his own way. There was nothing systematic or routine about his work.”931 A 24-page brochure he published with Tartu University’s Estonian Student Society in 1917 attests to the scattered and idiosyncratic nature of his thought as well as the philosophical breadth of his concerns: On

927 Universitas Tartuensis 1632-2007, 638.
928 The habit of asking about the origin of language was an 18th century question best represented by the essays of Herder and Rousseau.
929 For the sake of comparison one might consider Herder’s 1772 essay “On the Origins of Language” and Rousseau’s 1781 essay. Villem Ernits “V proisxozhdienia i razviti iazyka” TÜRK f.83,s.19.
930 Aleksander Elango interview with Hillar Palamets, TÜRK f.141, s.86.
Causal and Normative Worldviews: An attempt at an Analysis of the Revolutionary Spirit.

Invoking a distinction between sciences that investigate causation and sciences that assign value (in the spirit of Wilhelm Dilthey), and between subjective (normative) desires that inspire action and objective (causal) possibilities that limit outcomes (in the spirit of Karl Marx), Ernits looked for Estonia’s particular place in the universal currents of world history:

We are living in a time of upheaval. In Russia the old forms of life became constricting…. In a future Estonia we will find the same conflict between capital and work, between the bourgeoisie and workers that have become the main content (pääsisu) and inspiration for the future of the entire developed world. There is no way to avoid this conflict. We can only hope and do our best to ensure that it will be conducted in an honest and cultural (kultuuriline—sic) way, so that it will not demoralize those who fight for change or get in the way of cultural progress.

This appeal to “honesty” and “culture” as a way to weather the inevitable storms of revolutionary change and progress might be seen as a typical small-town Tartu trope, echoed seventy-five years later in Yuri Lotman’s own memoirs on the brink of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

There were social and ideological problems with Ernits as well, which explain why he never managed to achieve his childhood dream of becoming a university professor. According to Palgi “Two things obstructed his career: his habit of wearing shabby clothes and his provocative remarks at the expense of Marxism-Leninism (for he was fundamentally a social democrat).” These were related phenomena. Everyone agreed that Villem Ernits was a little “off” psychologically. His strange behavior was the folklore of the Tartu intelligentsia. The head of Tartu University’s Pedagogy Department and one of the last surviving veterans of the War for Estonian Independence, Alexander Elango (1902-2004) told of how Ernits had walked nearly sixty kilometers cross country barefoot to spare a pair of boots from wear on his way to court the daughter of pastor Villem Reiman (1861-1917), one of the leaders of the nineteenth-century Estonian national movement. The ethnographer Aliisa Moora (1900–1996) told of how Ernits had dropped in upon the Estonian ambassador in Finland, Oscar Kallas, in 1918, only to disappear into the bathroom, where he was discovered some hours later taking a bath. Ernits did

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932 Villem Ernits, Kausaalsest ja normatiivsest ilmavatest: Revolutsiojooniline hingeelu analüüsi katse (Tartu: Eesti Üiõpilaste Seltsi kirjastus, 1917).
935 He announced his dream to Aino Kallas in 1911, one of Finland’s most beloved poets, who had married the Estonian diplomat to Finland Oskar Kallas. She encountered him as a young, sharp-witted man with a surprisingly good command of the Finnish language. See Ott Kurs, “Villem Ernits—120 Karsket keeletarka meenutades,” Kultuur ja elu, (4) 2011.
936 “Ernitsa karjäär oli suuremaid takistajaid oli kaks: halb riides käimine ja torked marksismi-leninismi pihta (ta oli põline sotsiaaldemokraat).” Daniel Palgi, 371.
not attempt to hide his strangeness. He told Elango how he had been to see a Tartu University psychiatrist, Maximilien Bresowsky in 1923 and found the word “psychopathy” written after his name in the patient registry.\footnote{Aleksander Elango and Aliisa Moora. Transcription of interview recorded with Hillar Palamets in 1990. TÜRKF.141.s.86.}

From 1944 to 1949 Villem Ernits was a formal member of the Department of Russian Philology; between 1949 and 1959 he was still allowed a few courses.\footnote{Universitas Tartuensis 1632-2007, 638.} But increasingly he was denied any work at the University. On June 25, 1952 Jaan Roos—the itinerant wanderer across Soviet Estonia—wrote in his diary:

Ernits came and sought me out. At the University he is not given any lectures because he is not trusted. He is used in the Central Archive, where he is working through materials in connection with the University [in preparation for the celebration of Tartu’s 150th anniversary that same year]. He gets 250 rubles in salary. See what is done with a man who can speak seventeen languages! Let it be added that the director of the archive is a Russian.\footnote{“Siin käis ja otsis mind üles V. Ernits. Ülikoolis talle loenguid ei anta, sest teda ei usaldata. Ta on rakendatud tööle Keskarhiivis, kus ta töötab läbi Ülikoolisse puutuvaid materjale. Palka saab ta 250 rubla. Vaat, mis tehakse mehega, kes valdab 17 keelt. Olgu mainitud, et Keskarhiivi juhatajaks on venelanna,” June 25, 1952—Jaan Roos IV, 201.}

According to Elango—and here the divide between history and legend grows especially thin—it was a combination of his outspokenness and shabby dress that forced him into retirement in 1959. Ernits had recently attended an All-Union Conference of Slavicsists in Minsk. This was entirely on his own initiative and at his own expense. Once there, taking matters into his own hands, he addressed the assembly in the name of Tartu State University: classic Ernits. But when word got back to Tartu, Rector Fedor Klement was livid: “Who gave you the right to speak on behalf of the University? With your shabby appearance at the All-Union Conference you actually brought shame upon Tartu. Since you misuse your position as a university instructor it is time for you to retire.”\footnote{“Kes teid volitas ülikooli nimel tervitama? Oma räpase väljanägemisega tegi üleliidulisel kongressil Tartu ülikoolile hoopiski häbi. Kuna te tarvitate kurjast oma õppejõu staatust, tuleb teil loobuda õpetööst ülikoolis ja minna pensionile.” Aleksander Elango. Transcription of interview by Hillar Palamets recorded in Tallinn on April 3, 1990. “Meenutused Villem Ernitsast.” TÜRKF.141.s.86,l.16.}

Ernits lived most of his retirement in a small room with a stove in Tähtvere, the part of Tartu most deeply identified with the interwar Estonian intelligentsia.\footnote{Hillar Palamets, “Veel Villem Ernitsast,” Tartu Ekspress, February 13, 2014.} Reduced to utter poverty, he survived with the help of collections taken up for him in various University faculties. A letter he wrote in Estonian in September 1979 to Zara Mints, Yuri Lotman’s wife, reveals the desperate state of his finances. He begged her for a little money to tide him over another two weeks until he would receive his 52-ruble pension: “Tonight I saw you in my dreams” (“Täna öösel ma nägin Teid unes”), he opened, thanking Mints for her past generosity.\footnote{“Väga lugupneckat Saara Grigorjevna! // Täna öösel nägin Teid unes, kuna eile mõtlesin Teist, ühenduses sellega, et Teie olete mulle väga tänuväärel komel kauemat aega abiks olnud minu majanduslikus kitsikuse leevendmisel, ilma milleta oleks mult mõnigi elumoment küllaltki raske olnud. Selle eest Teie suurem tänu! // Praegu on mul jällegi majanduslik kitsikus kuni 12. oktoobri, kus saanoma järjekordse 52-rublalise pensioni, võib olla sellegi mõne rublase maha arvamisega. Jutustada põhjustest kirjas läheks liiga pikale—suuliselt võiks seda Teile teatud

At the end of
his life he moved into “a room furnished to him at the Old Pälson student dormitory, adopted by the history students there as a living symbol of the pre-War Estonian intelligentsia.” One of those students remembered later how it “was said in the era of stagnation [c. 1970-1985] that he was the only person in the Soviet Union who made full use of his constitutional right to free speech.”

In a world composed of mutually suspicious and isolated linguistic communities, Villem Ernits was the glue that bound them together, a common reference point for several different generations of scholars and an index of their relationship to the world and the state. He was the exception that proved the rule of Tartu’s social dividedness, a good-natured gadfly without inhibitions or boundaries, without care or concern for the opinion of others or for his material welfare (he spent all his money on books), loved by Russians and Estonians equally for his fearlessness in the face of authority. He did not conceal what he thought from anyone: in a 1979 interview with the historian Hillar Palamets he still remembered the joy he had expressed to Max Laosson, the head of Tartu’s Communist Party Organization in 1944, that Estonia unlike the rest of the Soviet Union would not undergo collectivization. This news, of course, turned out to be a lie. His disregard for Soviet norms, conventions, for his own external appearance, even for personal hygiene was legendary.

A latter-day Diogenese, Ernits was desperately earnest, principled, and up-to-date; he practically lived on the town square in Tartu, and this was the spirit in which he played the part of the Holy Fool in Tartu, attending every dissertation defense, speaking out at every public gathering, making himself heard and felt wherever it was least comfortable for authority figures to hear and feel his presence, pointing out logical inconsistencies and carnivalizing official attitudes. During a campaign in the early 1950s to reform Estonian orthography of foreign words along Russian lines, it was Ernits who carnivalized the entire endeavor by standing up at a rather intense gathering in the Chemistry Auditorium of Tartu University and parodying the Babel of confusion that would arise by attempting to implement Russian norms in the Estonian language.

At Tartu University he acquired a strange title: (a third) unofficial respondent (oponent) [for dissertation defenses]. He was still able to make some pretty sharp attacks against
Marxism-Leninism as late as 1955, but a few times he was taken aside afterward, and he was not allowed even the slightest bit of work. This subdued him considerably.  

Daniel Palgi wrote this assessment of Ernits in 1963. But Ernits never disappeared from the public scene; if anything, his reputation as one of “Tartu’s most independent men” only grew thereafter. The geographer, Ott Kurs (b. 1939) vividly remembered Ernits’s unofficial questions at his own dissertation defense in 1971 (better than those of the official respondents), and was relieved that he managed to give satisfactory answers to them. Kurs suggested that over time Ernits did not so much learn to conform to the state, as the state learned to conform to Ernits. The prevailing powers found they could not “change his ideas” or “reeducate him”: “At first he was ‘called to order,’ but when this did not deliver any results, they gave up on ‘trying to shape’ this bizarre man, because he did not seem to pose any kind of direct threat.”

Ernits attended dissertation defenses for all faculties. At one point he noted that works in the field of mathematics had become especially difficult to read in recent times. Asked by the historian Hillar Palamets, whether he understood all the dissertations he read and criticized, he answered: “I don’t always understand the content. But the dissertations are written in Russian and as a Slavic philologist I always have something to say about the expressions they use.” Then after a moment of silence, he added:

But I have another reason. When I have spoken at the defense, then I have been an active participant, which gives me the moral right to take part in the banquet that follows. On my 54-ruble pension it is pretty hard for me to make ends meet. At these banquets then I can actually get a full stomach. If need be—I will raise my glass, but of course only with fruit juice or mineral water. And I always leave early, because I don’t care for drunkenness.

Slovenly in his appearance and indifferent to all outward forms of propriety, Ernits nonetheless was scrupulous and principled in his behavior and adhered to his own rigorous moral code, and—unlike Alexei Yurchak’s alcoholic Last Soviet Generation—was not afraid of inconvenient or uncomfortable political confrontations, or calling attention to the moral gap between the merely formal (i.e. “performative”) and substantive (i.e. “constative”) elements of any given reality.

In Alexei Yurchak’s version of Late Soviet Socialism, a person like Ernits would have been a paraiah. But in Tartu he was loved and celebrated. As a student of Estonian philology in the mid-1970s, the writer Mihkel Mutt (b. 1953) encountered Ernits in the twilight of his life, a somewhat diminished figure—though still a legend—who could thrill Soviet Tartu simply by opening his mouth:

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In my University years the legendary Villem Ernits was still up and about, a one time leader of Estonia’s Temperance movement and a polyglot. Short, raggedly dressed, with his thin blond unkempt hair and weathered profile the old man could often be seen—toddling about (tutsa-tatsa)—around the old Pälson university dormitory (where he lived at one point) and downtown. He would appear at all kinds of events—at Tartu’s literary festivals, at public lectures, at dissertation defenses and elsewhere, where he sat in the first row and and often spoke up. What he said was never in my own opinion especially intelligent, but still, to hear this kind of university mascot—indeed of all of Tartu—opening his mouth was an experience in and of itself. When he rose to speak at some conference at the Vanemuise theatre, then a wave of excited whispers ran through the entire audience—"Ernits!"  

For all his idiosyncratic peculiarity, a good part of Ernits’s symbolic appeal had to do with his connection to a lost and wider world. In an age where most Soviet citizens lived in an “imaginary west,” Ernits had actually visited most of the countries of Europe and the United States of America. His insatiable curiosity had taken him to interwar France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, England, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Hungary (including future parts of Romania and Yugoslavia), Poland, and Switzerland. He had even peered with his own eyes—though not stepped he specified in an interview conducted (and preserved among the audio recordings of Tartu University’s phonotek) shortly before his death—into Italy and Ireland. 

He had spent the better part of a decade as Tartu University’s Estonian lector at the University of Warsaw in Poland (1931-33 and 1934-39) where he taught Estonian and Finnish, edited a journal on Polish and Finno-Ugric cultural contacts, and barely got out before Hitler’s invasion of the city. He had traveled (twice) to the United States of America as the President of Estonia’s Interwar Temperance Society; for a while his salary was paid in American dollars. He identified with what he called the American sense of irony and love of sports, crediting America with his decision to shave off his moustache.

After the War, he travelled extensively through the Soviet Union as well: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Karelia, even the Udmurt Autonomous Socialist Republic, since he was vitally interested in the fate of his fellow Finno-Ugrians. He visited the American Exhibition of 1959 in Moscow “several times,” and even by his own account managed to strike up a conversation on

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953 Audiorecording and transcription of Villem Ernits, interview with Hillar Palamets 1979, TÜRK f.83, s.6.

954 “I have to say that spending time in America had a big impact on me. For the sake of appearance I had previously worn a moustache. Now I shaved if off, because Americans were clean-shaven and now my face also was clear. But also psychologically. The Americans attitude toward the world is ironic and athletic. And in my character this also quite a bit of this.” “Ookeani taga olen olnud kahel korral ülemaailmsetel karskuskongressidel. Pean ütlema, et Ameerikas käimine avaldas mulle küllaltki suurt mõju. Kui välimuse poole pealt varem kandsin vunts, nüüd lasin vuntsid maha ajada, sest ameerikal olid näod lagedad ja ka minu oma muutus lagedaks. Aga ka psühholoogiliselt. Ameerilaste sutumine maailma on üldse irooniline ja sportlik. Minu karaktereeris leidub seda ka õige palju.”
Red Square with a future American President. Unable to get a ticket for the demonstration of a “circular screen” movie theater (the latest in American technology), he turned to Richard Nixon, the “Commissar of the Exhibition” for assistance, introducing himself in English and bemoaning the fact that all the tickets had gone to important “fat cats” [literally in Estonian “big noses”—suurtele ninadele—DB]. As Ernits himself told the story: ‘Nixon responded: ‘I can’t promise you anything, but let’s see what we can do.’ We went up to the entrance of the cinema and Nixon explained that ‘my friend’ from Tartu University wants very much to check out this thing, and couldn’t you let him in.’ And they let me in on the spot.”

At the same time Ernits was a uniquely local and national phenomenon, whose life story was inextricably intertwined with the intellectual and political history of Tartu and Estonia. He never lost contact with the village of his birth, Nõva, which celebrated his 120th birthday in 2011. Older folk shared memories of Ernits as a vigorous sauna goer, the last to come down from the highest and hottest bench, remembering how their parents had sent them to show off their skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic whenever Ernits came to town, because his opinion in matters of learning was so important to them.  

956 Jaan Roos was most impressed when he learned in 1954 that the young Ernits had actually met the great Estonian poet Juhan Liiv (1864—1913) only shortly before the latter’s death of cold and poverty.  

957 A founding editor of Tartu University’s first Estonian Language Student Newspaper (Üliõpilaste leht), Ernits also edited the first Estonian journals dedicated to links between Finno-Ugric nations (Fenno-Ugria 1927-1930) and Estonian ethnic identity (Eesti Hõim [Estonian tribe], 1928-1931). In the 1930s, even a young Paul Ariste (1905-1990) deferred to the authority of Villem Ernits on the subject of the Setu people (a Finno-Ugric ethnic group with its own distinctive dialect and folk culture in Southern Estonia).  

958 In addition to Slavic and Finno-Ugric languages and cultures, Villem Ernits was also fascinated by Eastern cultures and languages and became one of the founding members of Estonia’s first Oriental Society, established together with Law Professor Leo Leesment, Lutheran Theology Professor Uku Masing, and one of the world’s leading polyglots, Pent Nurmekund—with competence in some seventy different languages—in 1935 dedicated to the study of Eastern languages and belief systems. When Oriental Studies was revived at the initiative of Pent Nurmekund in 1955, Ernits taught Sanskrit and attended as many other language classes as he could.

Ernits had even been a major figure in the realm of interwar Estonian politics: a founding figure in the Estonian Socialist Revolutionary Party, a member of Estonia’s Constitutional Convention, an elected member of Parliament. Alexander Elango remembered how there had even been talk for a while in the 1920s in the Estonian Newspapers of making Villem Ernits the


958 “Villem Ernits was known as the ‘Setu apostle.’ He had been gathering family names and doing ethnographic research there. In the eyes of the young he was then a very big authority. I asked him where I should go. He directed me to Vilo county, where the oldest customs were said to be best preserved.” Paul Ariste, Mälestusi, 145.
Estonian Minister of Education. But his outspokenness and nonconformity earned him as many enemies as friends and admirers. The poet, literature professor, and a fellow SR, Gustav Suits—often cited as the single most important Estonian professor in interwar Tartu—spoke rather ironically and dismissively of Ernits from the start. Once elected to Parliament, Ernits had abandoned the Socialist Revolutionaries for the Social Democrats. But he frustrated the Social Democrats as well with his ragged dress and refusal to “conform to Party discipline.” He contradicted the Party platform when he proposed at one point that religious instruction in the schools might “continue but not as the confessional propaganda [of any one faith] but rather a more universal introduction to religious beliefs, a kind of course in the philosophy of religion.”

Under Soviet rule, his untimely interventions could provoke frustration and anxiety even from those most sympathetic to him. Paul Ariste would not let him into his home apparently, because his wife, Erna, was afraid he would wreak havoc on the domestic order of their house. Ott Kurs, remembered seeing the two of them conversing on the front step of Ariste’s home for this very reason. But Ernits frustrated Ariste intellectually as well. The latter famously blurted out during one dissertation defense that Ernits was doing more to impede than advance the cause of knowledge and scholarship with his untimely questions and criticisms. The head of the Department of Russian Literature in the mid-1950s, Boris Egorov remembered Ernits fondly in his biography of Yuri Lotman as “a legendary linguist and a polyglot,” who “owing to the chaos of his everyday life and thought never managed to publish a single scholarly work, but was a lively and intelligent participant at conferences on all kinds of questions.”

According to Daniel Palgi, however, if Ernits failed to publish anything, then Boris Egorov and his colleagues in the Department of Russian Literature bore at least some of the blame themselves. Palgi remembered how Ernits had come to him in the Rector’s office in 1958 inquiring about the new journal of Slavic Studies long after articles by Lotman, Adams, Mints, Egorov, Isakov had gone to print: “One man fell victim to these delays—Villem Ernits… His drafts were not entirely finished, since he—poor man—did not know of this opportunity: the others had kept him in the dark—they did not want him in their group. So Ernits got left out.”

Villem Ernits was larger than life. This uninhibited, enigmatic, outspoken individual is worth considering at length because he was a mascot, inspiration, and at the same time a source of anxiety for so many different members of the Tartu intelligentsia. Like Valmar Adams, another outspoken, idiosyncratic Estonian in Tartu’s Department of Russian Philology, who

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959 “Meenutavad filoloogid” TÜRK f. 141.s.86.
963 “Villem Ernits, legendarnyi lingvist, tozhe polyglot, znaiushii spetsialist, on iz-za neveroiatnoi khoatochnosti bytovogo povedeniia i myshlenia ne napisal ni odnoi nauchnoi raboty, no vystupal n a konferentsiakh po chastnym vorososam del’no i zhivo.” Boris Egorov, Zhizn’ i tvorchestvo Iu. M. Lotmana (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1999), 84.
964 “Maadeldi mitu kuud, lõpuks saadeti siiski trükikotta. Õksmees jää ka nende venimiste kiuste hiljaks—Villem Ernits. Tema hakkas oma käsikirjade pärast jooksmi siis, kui käisid juba korrektuuriid; käsikirjad polnud tal aga täiesti valmis, sest ta vaene mees ei teadnud trükkimise võimalustest: teiseid hoidsid tema eest kõike salajas—ei tahtnud teda kampa võtta. Ernits jäägi välja.” Palgi, 453. On the publication itself see Egorov, Zhizn’; 82.
contribution to the public contours of Tartu’s linguistic landscape, Villem Ernits was equally comfortable on both sides of the Estonian and Russian divide and provided a link to the pre-Soviet past. But in the binary moral imagination of Soviet Tartu, they were polar opposites. Of Adams, Daniel Palgi wrote:

I was somewhat repulsed by all of these changes of color in V. Adam. A Red Vladimir Aleksandrovski-Adams until 1919. Then a liberal principled university student, the Estonian poet vilmar-valmar Adams, who did not speak Estonian, Red in 1940-1941, on the side of the Germans during the war, once again a Red trying to curry favor with the Communists in the years after the War.965

Where Adams was a symbol of unscrupulous moral compromise and flexibility Ernits was a symbol of having the courage of one’s convictions, the standard by which everyone measured his own relationship to the Soviet state, and assessed the temperature of the political environment. When a delegation of Finnish students came to visit Tartu in 1956—the first group of foreigners allowed in since the Second World War—Palgi noticed the exclusion of Villem Ernits from the festivities in the auditorium of the main building of Tartu University: “And poor Villem Ernits was not given a ticket. An inappropriate person!”966

On June 10, 1981, Yuri Lotman wrote to his friend and colleague in Leningrad, Boris Egorov: “On July 16 we will celebrate the 90th birthday of Ernits (I too will give a speech). Good for the old man—if only we were as vigorous as he!”967 It was a major—if unofficial event—which brought many Tartu scholars out of the woodwork, celebrated not in the main auditorium of Tartu University, and without the presence of Rector Arnold Koop. Ernits was too marginal and too controversial a figure for that degree of formal recognition. But nearly every faculty had a representative there. Yuri Lotman spoke on behalf of the Department of Russian Literature. Paul Ariste also came on behalf of Finno-Ugric studies. The young Peeter Olesk, an independent-minded idiosyncratic philologist—who provided reviews and translations of Estonian literature for Yuri Lotman and traveled with Paul Ariste on his expeditions to the various Finno-Ugric peoples of the Soviet interior—delivered a particularly long-winded address. Asked to explain his speech several decades later, Olesk stated that he considered himself to be a social democrat and as such the spiritual grandson of Villem Ernits.968

Others tried to claim the mantle of Villem Ernits as well. Shortly after his death, the long-time director of Tartu’s Vanemuise Theater, Kaarel Ird (1909—1986) announced his desire to become the “next Villem Ernits.” Ird had certain credentials for this. He had staged many controversial plays in Tartu, defending them against attacks by the University’s own Komsomol organization and the Ministry of Culture in Tallinn.969 Of particular note was Cinderella Game [Tuhkatriinu mäng] (1969), a play by the Tartu University student of Estonian literature, Paul Eerik Rummo, widely interpreted as a veiled critique of the Soviet experiment, translated into

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965 “Mulle see V. Adamsi värvivahetus iga olukorra järgi oli üsna vastumeelne. (Punane Vladimir Aleksandrovski-Adams kuni 1919. A., siis liberaalse aateline koolitaja, liberaalse üliõpilane; eesti luuletaja vilmar-valmar Adams, kes ei osanud eesti keelt, punane 1940.-1941. aastal, sakslaste poolel sõja ajal, jälle punane ja kommunistiks trügija sõjajärgseil aastail jne.)” Palgi, 458, 459.
966 “Ka vaesele Villem Ernitsale ei antud piletit. Ebasobiv isik!” Palgi, 463.
969 Stolovich, 104.
English by the émigré Estonian community and staged Off Broadway in New York City shortly thereafter. In the play, set ten years after the fairytale, the Prince begins to question his marriage to Cinderella (allegorically interpreted as the Proletariat) and wonders how he ended up with her in the first place. “But Ird did not become an Ernits,” explained Lauri Vahtre (b. 1960), who was a Tartu University history student at the time of Ernits’s death. “For people remembered all too well an episode from the Spring of 1949, when the young Ird arrived at the theater one morning and announced: ‘we hauled a lot of manure.’—Questioning glances.—‘Bourgeois manure,’ specified Ird. He carried this stain all the way to his grave.”970 The widespread recognition that Ird had actively participated in the Soviet deportations—Lauri Vahtre wrote of March 1949, but other voices speak of June 1941—haunts his reputation to this day. On April 3, 2008, the Estonian newspaper Postimees reported the decision of the Estonian Monument Commission: “Theater Director and Deporter Ird will not have a Monument erected in his honor in Tartu.”971

The example of Villem Ernits offers an important corrective to Alexei Yurchak’s account of the atmosphere and dynamics of late Soviet Socialism. Yurchak stressed the “ubiquitous and open-ended” nature of “obshchenie” (conversation or communication): “[a]nyone could become svoi [part of the in-group] through obshchenie, and, conversely, was not svoi if they refused to participate in obshchenie.”972 As the case of Kaarel Ird attests, this was definitely not the case in Tartu; present sociability was always limited and checked by past memory. For all the division in Soviet Tartu, discrete generational groups did not live in isolation from one another the way they do in Yurchak’s book. Not all Tartu citizens could become “svoi,” no matter how much they wanted it or how hard they tried, just as not everyone could be a Villem Ernits. And so—like almost everybody else—Kaarel Ird became a divided—binary figure, celebrated and condemned in bifurcated narratives for his good and his evil: an agent of the Tartu spirit at times, but an agent of the violence of Sovietization at others.

A central figure in the folklore of the Tartu intelligentsia, and a myth and legend himself, Ernits was at the same time uniquely free of myths. He had no dark secrets. His life was an open book—even if in the retelling it seemed like a collection of tall tales. His power lay in his example rather than in his manifestos and proclamations. Villem Ernits was Tartu’s preeminent Holy Fool. He was something of a joke; but at the same time a kind of moral compass for Soviet Tartu and maybe especially for its last Soviet generation.


972 Yurchak, 149.
7.2.2 Peripheral Polyglots: Translators of Europe and the World

European languages had an especially important place in the cosmopolitan aspirations of Estonia’s interwar cultural elite. Born in Latvia, Isidor Levin had come to Tartu to study folklore and theology with Lazar Gulkowitch and Uku Masing before the Second World War and learned perfectly fluent Estonian and German in the process. Later he would learn Russian as well and even settle in Leningrad. He recalled how Jaan Sarv, the first Estonian professor of mathematics, would make a practice of speaking a different language to his sons at home each day of the week. On one day they would speak only Estonian, on the next only Russian, then German, and then French. In this, claimed Levin, surely exaggerating, they were “typical” members of the interwar Estonian cultural elite. Jaan Sarv (1877–1959), who was a lifelong atheist and socialist, remained an important cultural figure in Soviet Tartu. He kept his post in the Department of Mathematics, despite the fact that one of his sons was in the Gulag (Vorkuta) for taking up arms against Soviet rule during the Second World War. Sarv wanted to invent a more perfect international language by which to unite the world. His student Ülo Lepik remembered all the time and energy his teacher devoted to this pursuit:

His aim was to invent a language of signs on the order of the lingua of Leibniz, which would be comprehensible to the people of any nation. Sarv had been making preparations for this for a very long time: among other things, he had started taking Chinese lessons from a Chinese student and got to the point of translating Koidula [an important Estonian poet and muse to the author of the national epic—DB] into Chinese.

A few years before, during the Nazi Occupation of Estonia, Sarv had requested a text from Lepik he could translate into his new world language. Lepik proposed the part of Goethe’s Faust devoted to the translation of the Biblical passage—“In the beginning was the word.” And for the next three days, according to Lepik, Sarv locked himself into his office at Tartu University, busy translating Goethe into a more universal, world language of his own making, while the Second World War raged all around.

There were many polyglots in Soviet Tartu who fantasized about a more perfect language in which to converse with the world at large, or at least called attention to the limits of the Estonian and Russian languages in adequately representing reality by themselves. They looked askance upon the prevailing order of things through the lens of many different third languages beyond Estonian and Russian. One of the most famous peripheral polyglots in the cultural imagination of the Tartu intelligentsia was the paleographer, engineer, and map-maker Jacob

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974 “Professor Sarv tegeles sel ajal veel ideograafiaga. Tema eesmärk oli luua Leibnizi lingua characterisa’ga sarnanev märkide keel, mis oleks arusaadav mis tahes rahuvesest inimestele. Selle keele loomiseks oli Sarv teinud juba pikajalisi ettevalmistusi: muuhulgas oli ühel hiina üliõpilaselt võtnud hiina keele tunde ja jõudnud öpingutega niikaugele et tõlks Koidula luuletuse Esmasüda’ hiina keeled. Kui ta soovis tõlgida näidata oma hiina keele õpetajale, selgus tema suureks kurvastuseks, et see üliõpilane oli juba Tartust ära sõitnud.” Ülo Lepik, Tartu Ülikool minu elus, 40.

975 Ülo Lepik, Tartu Ülikool minu elus, 40.
Linzbch (1874–1953). Though he never lived in Tartu nor had any formal ties to the University, he drew one of the most beautiful maps of Tartu for the interwar Estonian government. He lived in Tallinn and provoked the interest of the Anatoli Lunacharskii in the early years of the Bolshevik Revolution with one of his universal languages. He submitted another proposal for more perfect form of human communication to Stalin and the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Moscow in 1950. His place in Tartu was as a memory and object of concern for the independent investigations of various linguistic groups and circles in Tartu, ranging from the Tartu School scholar Isaak Revzin, who published a paper on Linzbach in Sign System Studies, to the future head of the Department of Russian Language, Alexander Dulichenko, to a few Estonians like Boris Kabur and Rein Kruus. That his personal archive resides in Tartu University library’s Rare Document Collections alongside the collections of established Tartu Professors testifies to his place in the memory of the Tartu intelligentsia.

Thus, Villem Ernits was not the only peripheral polyglot in Tartu, just the most active, vocal, and visible, a common thread that stitched its various circles together. On the whole, Tartu’s linguistic landscape was defined more by its silences than its speech, and many of its most prominent figures were known as much by the fact that they could not be heard openly, as by what they said. Born well before the Second World War, and many before the First World War as well, they held aloof, but for those who sought them out they became links to the wider world and Estonia’s European pre-Soviet past. They became destinations of scholarly pilgrimages and spiritual questioning for the inquisitive members of Tartu’s younger generation. Jaan Kaplinski (b. 1941), one of Estonia’s best-known postwar poets, intellectuals, noted the role of several of Tartu University’s most revered prewar instructors in his education:

In 1958 I matriculated at the institution of learning, which at that time bore the name Tartu State University. One could say many bad things about TSU, but I think that despite all this we can be grateful for its existence, that we could learn from figures like Paul Ariste, Villem Altoa, Huno Rätsep, Yuri Lotman, Pent Nurmekund, Arthur R. Hone and from many others, who did all they could, to ensure the endurance of culture/spirit (vaimsus) in Estonia.

For Kaplinski, however, these figures on the Tartu University faculty did not exhaust the terrain of Tartu’s linguistic landscape or the Tartu Spirit. In addition, Kaplinski identified several figures of an “alternative university”—from whom he personally “learned just as much as from his university instructors.” For Kaplinski these alternative Tartu gurus included Ain Kaalep, Elmar Salumaa, and Uku Masing. Each in his own way represented an escape from the prevailing currents of Soviet life.

**Ain Kaalep**

Of these three, Ain Kaalep (b. 1926) was the youngest, and along with Elmar Salumaa deeply associated with Estonia’s interwar European identity. For many Estonians, German culture was synonymous with European culture. Ain Kaalep was placed by his parents in a German-speaking kindergarten in interwar Estonia. Though his father had fought against Germany for Estonian independence in 1917–1919, he still held German culture in high esteem and wanted it for his son.  

The German idea of culture, claimed Ain Kaalep, was much more relevant for Estonian life in Soviet times than the works of many indigenous Soviet Estonian writers like Juhan Smuul or Rudolf Sirge, who had given themselves over wholeheartedly to the Soviet experiment. Ain Kaalep fought for the right to found a Goethe Society in Soviet Tartu devoted to Goethe’s concept of World Literature. But according to the prevailing “Soviet ideologues”—Kaalep’s term—“the already existing Goethe-Society in the Soviet Republic of Georgia was deemed quite sufficient for the entire Soviet Union.” It was not until Perestroika that Ain Kaalep’s proposal for a Tartu Goethe Society became a reality. It was established in 1988 under the leadership of a former Tartu University student of German philology, Linnar Priimägi, who expressed its aims in the following terms: “the Re-Europeanization of the Cultural Life in Estonia through the discovery of the historical and cultural connections between Estonia and Europe, and above all Germany as the actual point of origin for the integration of Estonia into the ‘Spectrum of Europe.’”

In the meantime, Ain Kaalep founded and led a semi-formal “Übersetzungzentrum” (Translation Center) by which he finally acquired his first minor institutional affiliation with Tartu State University since his graduation in the 1950s:

In the 70s the University had many many so-called “centers” (the best-known of these was the Oriental Studies Center), a small but very active group of young philologists with a burning desire to do something decided to found a “Translation Center”; I was the only one in this group who came from outside the University. The aim of the Center was to awaken young people to an interest in literary translation, to discover talented translators and to support the translation of the most beautiful world literature into Estonian. The Center was founded in 1978 in connection with the department of German Philology, where I remained the leader and only real employee until 1983 (then called a “Laborant”—i.e. a term for a non-scholarly assistant—DB). In 1983 the writer Jaan Kaplinski took over reins of the Center.

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980 die Reeuropäisierung des Geisteslebens in Estland durch die Aufdeckung der historischen kulturellen Beziehungen zwischen Estland und Europa, und vor allem Deutschland als dem eigentlichen Ausgangspunkt der Integration Estlands ins ‘Spektrums Europas.’” Ain Kaalep, “Mit Goethe in die Welt,” 113.
981 "Da es in den 70er-Jahren an der Universität schon zahlreiche so genannte Zentren gab (das bekannteste war das Orientalistikzentrum), beschloss eine klein, aber active und tatendurstige Gruppe junger Philologen, das Übersetzungszentrum zu gründen; ich kam als Einziger in dieser Gruppe von ausserhalb der Universität. Der Zweck des Zentrums sollte darin bestehen, bei jungen Menschen das Interesse fürs literarische Übersetzen zu wecken, talentierte Übersetzer zu entdecken und zu fördern und die Übersetzung schönggeistiger Weltliteratur ins Estnische
For Kaplinski, Kaalep represented an escape: “In a society which was based on an ideology of intolerance, which acknowledged only black and white and saw as enemies all those who did not think exactly in the way that was proscribed, Kaalep was indeed a very alternative teacher.”

In fact, Kaplinski credited Kaalep with teaching him to appreciate the idea of Tartu University and his university education in the first place:

Ain Kaalep taught me the importance of a university education and the problematic nature of the times. He would himself have undoubtedly been a major professor if the ruling regime had not placed so many obstacles in his way. But still he managed to finish his degree—despite imprisonment, ex-matriculation, and other forms of repression.

Kaalep had studied with Paul Ariste and graduated from Tartu University with a degree in Finno-Ugric languages in 1956, but had trouble advancing further academically for he had been a Soomepoiss (“Finnish Boy”)—i.e. he was one of those Estonians who had crossed the Baltic Sea to fight with the Finns against the Red Army during the Second World War. Nonetheless, like several other older figures he also became an important translator and guru to Tartu’s youth.

What Kaplinski most appreciated in Kaalep was his simplicity and openness. Kaalep’s “alternativeness was not opposition, a stiff and angry antagonism. He gave everyone an opportunity to speak and did not condemn anything without listening to it first.”

Kaplinski had even found a copy of Hitler’s Mein Kampf on Ain Kaalep’s bookshelf in the small town of Elva, where many Tartu scholars and some Muscovites liked to spend their summers. Like many other peripheral polyglots, Kaalep lived at some distance from Tartu. Kaalep had actually read the book. And therefore his criticism and condemnation of it were much more convincing than the “official University antifascism that was force fed to us.” Indeed, Soviet ideology often undermined itself by devolving into performative rituals. In a world where nearly everything that did not conform to the dictates of state ideology was labelled fascist, the term lost its intended meaning and effect.

For Kaplinski, there was something saintly about Kaalep, and like Villem Ernits, Kaalep also became a kind of moral compass for some members of the Tartu intelligentsia, an antidote to the duplicity of the world they saw all around them:
The expression “to be above one’s fate” sounds nice. But the quotidian existence that lurks behind it is seldom so. In an era when established writers in Estonia served the regime loyally, built themselves homes and sometimes went abroad, Ain Kaalep—translator of some dozen languages, innovator of Estonian poetic translation, midwife to the rebirth of freeverse, tireless propagator of world literature—lived in a poor wooden shack in Elva, where the stench of the outhouse revolted many a guest, from which libraries and publishers were irritatingly far away, and where this father of a large family was always plagued by financial difficulties. Sometimes he was helped by Edasi [Forward, the Soviet Newspaper in Tartu—DB], where he managed to get some translated poems published; sometimes the money came from Tallinn. And still I never heard him bemoaning his fate, condemning those, who were better off, complaining that there was no money. We do not know what Kaalep might have felt in his heart; most likely no human emotion has been totally foreign to him. But his students and friends have never heard him enviously speaking ill of someone behind his back. Kaalep has managed to live without envy or at least to be above it.986

What Kaplinski describes in Kaalep was a more general predicament by which the importance and uniqueness of Tartu University under Soviet rule might be understood.

Rein Sepp

Another spiritual destination in Tartu’s linguistic landscape, even further removed from Tartu than Ain Kaalep’s home in Elva, was the home of Rein Sepp (1921–1995). Rein Sepp had been born in the family of lawyers in interwar Tartu. He graduated from Treffner gymnasium (Tartu’s leading highschool) in 1940 and in 1940-42 studied German Philology at Tartu and joined the Sakala Fraternity before he was mobilized into the German army; he hid in the forest from the Soviet state until 1946, when an amnesty was declared. But in 1949 he was arrested anyway and spent most of his incarceration in the Siberian prison camp of Vorkuta. In 1956 he returned from the Gulag, and lived for some years in a spare room above a pharmacy in Western Estonia in Pärnu County. He acquired his scholarly reputation as a translator of Northern European—German, Celtic, and Norse—mythology, like the Nibelungen Lied (1977), Parzival (1989), and Beowulf (1990). In fact it was the honorarium from his translation of the Icelandic epic, the Poetic Edda in 1970 that enabled him to purchase the farmstead he finally made his home near Mõisküla, on the Estonian-Latvian border. This is where he lived from 1971 until his death in 1995. It was a place he knew from his childhood. He decorated it with images form the

Norse myths drawn by himself, and labeled it with Nordic runes. Most of his translations were of verse epics and drew upon his poetic talents and sensibility. He also translated Goethe, Schiller, Shakespeare and William Blake, and some more contemporary Dutch and English literature as well. Despite his position on the fringes of the Soviet scholarly world, he was awarded a state prize of the ESSR in 1977 for his achievements as a translator, the Juhan Smuul Prize, named for the Soviet Estonian writer and long-time head of the Soviet Estonian Writer’s Union (1922-1971), himself a recipient of the Stalin Prize (1952) and Lenin Prize (1961).

As a person and cultural figure, Sepp became a destination for Tartu students and scholars, curious about the mythological origins of Europe. In 1981 one of Yuri Lotman’s very few Estonian students, Peeter Torop conducted an interview with Rein Sepp “On the Theory and Practice of Translation,” which he published in the Soviet Estonian literary periodical, Sirp ja Vasar in 1981. Torop sought Sepp's help in formulating a global theory of translation, something that had begun to preoccupy him already as a student of Lotman. Torop’s side of the interview is laced with references to new concepts of literary theory—Bakhtin’s notion of the relationship between text and context and the idea of intertextuality as perpetuated in the work of French poststructuralist critics at the same time. Sepp’s answer to Torop’s universalizing and globalizing questions, ultimately, was a particularizing one: to avoid formulating laws and rules of translation. Rather he demanded respect for the particularities of any given text. Some have pointed out that Sepp’s translations actually took great liberties with epic texts to make them more accessible to the reader. But this too was part of his meaning and value in the periphery Tartu’s linguistic landscape. He was as important for his personality as his academic achievements.

In some ways, Sepp was as much a generator of myths as he was a scholar of them. It was entirely consistent with the spirit of the oral-tradition of the epic poetry he had made his life’s work that it should remain a living and supple form, not a rigid piece of academic accuracy. Indeed, as one insightful Estonian commentator has put it: “The times called for an inspiring epic, not a learned treatise worked out to the last detail (Kuid ajastu vajaduse kasutades eepost, mitte pealsestest laskuvat traktaati).” Indeed, the fact that Sepp was difficult to reach and required a pilgrimmage—an entire day’s journey with Soviet transportation—made him all the more venerated. News of Bacchanalian gatherings at his home, reaching from one day through the night into the next, thrilled Soviet Tartu. He became a cult figure. For those who knew him, his home became a “place for identity creation, a destination for pilgrimages of the Estonian cultural elite, many of whom even reported mystical and visionary experiences in the company of their teacher. The longing for a true mythology, a true epic, and a fascinating Nordic landscape were incarnated in the Ipiki landscape and made flesh in

the personality of Rein Sepp." His death just four years after the collapse of the Soviet Union precipitated a “Fellowship of Friends of Rein Sepp” (Rein Sepa Sõprade Seltsing) and a documentary film devoted to his life and folkloric pursuits. *Teejuht mütoloogiasse* [A Guide to Mythology] (1996).

### Uku Masing

Sometimes overlapping, the circles that defined Soviet Tartu were just as often isolated from one another. Membership in each was a separate affair; quite a few were even oblivious to one another’s existent. What Ain Kaalep was to Jaan Kaplinski, Rein Sepp was to many others, though these two figures at least were well aware of one another’s existence. In honor of Rein Sepp’s 60th birthday in 1981, Ain Kaalep published an appreciation of Sepp in bringing Europe’s mythological past to Tartu and Estonia.

In addition to Ain Kaalep, Jaan Kaplinski identified two other unofficial professors of an alternative Tartu University who played a vital role in his intellectual development, Elmar Salumaa and Uku Masing. Both stood apart from the Soviet state. Salumaa (1908–1996) and Masing (1905–1985) had been professors of Theology in interwar Tartu, and therefore were unemployable under Soviet rule except as translators, which is how they supported themselves. Each one was in some way deeply associated with Tartu University, while being at the same time formally excluded from it. To inquisitive youth each provided an alternative education to the one offered by the state. As a Lutheran theologian Elmar Salumaa embodied for Kaplinski the spirit of the interwar national Estonian intelligentsia, with all the moral imperatives of Estonian nationalism, Scandinavian identity, and the aspiration to be part of Europe. Elmar Salumaa was remembered for his interwar writings on Sören Kierkegaard, Karl Barthes, and work on the history of philosophy and theology. He was arrested as soon as the Soviets came to power in 1945 and spent six years in the Gulag, where he made the acquaintance of Arnold Susi (Solzhenitsyn’s main Estonian contact) among many other figures of an alternative Estonian intelligentsia. He spoke of his incarceration and its impact upon him in a documentary film produced for Estonian Television in 1995, shortly before his death. But the most important of all the peripheral gurus in Soviet Tartu—the greatest polyglot and most influential Tartu scholar outside the corridors of Tartu University—was the poet, Lutheran Theologian, and polyglot Uku Masing, often remembered in Estonia as the greatest Estonian thinker of all time. More than any other Tartu figure perhaps, Uku Masing’s vision of the world was a profoundly linguistic one.

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7. In an interview conducted with Elmar Salumaa shortly before his death he talks about Uku Masing as an incarnation of the Tartu Spirit, noting the importance of a higher cultural sensibility to balance a merely practical and administrative one. In this vein he represents the relationship between the two political rivals Konstantin Päts and Jaan Tõnisson—and Tallinn and Tartu—in productive terms: “Masing oli väga tark. Narrisime ja naersime
Uku Masing (1909–1985) was born into a family of Moravian brethren, the oldest Protestant sect, dating back to the rebellion of Jan Hus in Prague in the fifteenth century. This gave his devout Lutheranism a particular, archaic accent from the very start. He discovered Eastern languages and cultures at a very early age through an Estonian translation of a work of English Assyrology published around 1900, and from there onward, his intellectual journey carried him to the East. Masing already became a professor of Theology in interwar Tartu at the age of thirty. He began his studies of the classical languages of the European University in 1926 (Latin, Greek, and Hebrew), delving into the Semitic languages, psychology, and antique literature as well. He made his mark early with a translation of the Hebrew Bible, which appeared between 1938 and 1940. This was the first direct translation of the Bible from Hebrew into Estonian. By 1933 he was already teaching the Old Testament and Semitic languages at Tartu University alongside his advisor, Professor Alexander von Bulmerincq (1868-1938). Born into a Baltic German family in Saint Petersburg, Bulmerincq had studied at Leipzig and at Tartu University, where he joined the NeoBaltica Fraternity. His son, Alexander Georg von Bumerincq (1909-1945), just Masing’s age, also became a noted orientalist, and served as Erwin Rommel’s translator and interpreter during the Nazi campaign in North Africa during the Second World War. Both of Bulmerinqua’s most important students were ethnic Estonians. There was the New Testament Scholar Arthur Võõbus (1909-1988), who fled to the United States in 1944 and eventually became a Professor of Theology at the Universities of Chicago and Toronto. And then there was Uku Masing, who inherited Bulmerincq’s chair at Tartu University.

Two years abroad at the Universities of Tübingen and Berlin in 1932 and 1933 gave Uku Masing a much greater skepticism about all things German than was shared by most of his Estonian compatriots. Ironically, it was also in Germany in the throes of the Nazi rise to power that he discovered—or at least deepened— his understanding of the cultural world that he imagined as an alternative to Indo-European hegemony: Ethiopian studies; Arab Studies, Jewish Studies; the Old Testament; Assyriology; Sumerology, as well as the languages and belief systems of India and Polynesia. These areas and languages would preoccupy him for the rest of his life and inform the deeply linguistic vision of reality which he passed on to his informal students and admirers. Indeed, he had little personal experience of the places and cultures he claimed to prefer to Indo-European—or to use his own idiosyncratic vocabulary, “Igerman”—ones. The idiosyncracies of Uku Masing’s personal use of the Estonian language have elicited much interest and speculation in Estonia. Aside from a brief trip to Crimea with his wife Eha, most of his experience of the world outside of Estonia came from Germany. One of the great ironies of his intellectual life was that he condemned what he knew from first hand experience, and celebrated what he did not.

Situated on the far side of the Latvian border from Estonia, Rein Sepp looked beyond Russia to reclaim German and Scandinavian cultural roots for Estonian history. In a similar vein, Uku Masing looked beyond Russia in the other direction to free Estonians from the homogenizing effect of what Masing, following Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf called SAE: “Standard Average European.” For Masing, the Russian language and Soviet life were equally expressions of SAE in its worst homogenizing forms. In his writings on Buddhism, Polynesian Belief Systems, and other Eastern languages and religions, and his more theoretical speculations on the relationship between language and belief, Masing sought the roots of Finno-Ugric and Estonian identity in the features of its language and the ritual culture of its long-lost pagan past.

But like so many other figures of the Tartu intelligentsia who were divided between a commitment to particulars on the one hand and universals on the other, Masing also had a certain soft-spot for ideals of progress and technology and the perfectly clear language of science. Indeed, his preoccupation with the particulars of Finno-Ugric culture might be said to have grown out of this tension. Written on the eve of decolonization in 1939 but not published until 1989, Masing’s novel, *Rapanui vabastamine, ehk Kajakad jumalate kalmistul* (*The Liberation of Rapanui, or Seagulls upon the Graveyard of the Gods*) is a curious and in some ways an orientalizing work. It is the fantastical tale of a scientist of Estonian origins, Vari Marama, who has discovered the meaning of the ancient Polynesian script on Rapanui island (aka Easter Island), and abandons his career to go study it. His teacher, an important bureaucrat, provides him with the necessary funding, a ship and crew to carry him from Chile to Rapanui. He reaches the island, falls in love with a Polynesian beauty named Reri. The rest of the book is an evocation of the colonial predicament of the island on the eve of decolonization. It reveals some of the complications of his own sense of Estonian identity, caught between Europe and Asia. But for all of Masing’s love of science fiction (he was a fan of H. G. Wells) and devotion to the idea of a universal language, one of the main currents in his thought was a deep antagonism toward the hegemony of European languages in the world.

He offered the following linguistic history of the world, charting the rise of European arrogance in the nineteenth century:

> Until the beginning of the XIX century the ancient belief prevailed: humanity once had some common Hebrew, and all other languages are its “mixed,” degenerate, and contaminated descendents. With the rise of the Anglosaxons and the leadership of DARWIN the guiding force of Capitalism, these beliefs changed fundamentally. It seemed normal to claim, that language had evolved from the simple to the complicated and highly refined; the dumb forest dweller’s language became the special tool of the English colonizer, industrialist, and banker. Then it became common to conclude: the isolative languages (Chinese), the agglutinative (Turkic), Flectionated (Indo-German) and the last of these came to be known as the epitome point of humanity.999

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As an antidote to the arrogance of Western Civilization, Masing focused on the languages of small and forgotten peoples. The best example of this was a long essay he composed in 1971, “On the Mentality of Reindeer People or Commentaries Upon Northern Behavior” (“Taevapõdra rahvaste meelest ehk juttu boreaalseest hoiakust”). There is much anger in Uku Masing’s writing, most of it directed Standard Average European (SAE). The linguistic vision of Uku Masing was that every language creates its own reality, and that the world has largely been colonized by the European languages and their forms of thought. In a talk delivered on June 18th and August 27th 1963 at the shortlived Soviet Institute of Religious Belief (established in 1946) in Tallinn, Masing spoke of the restricting effects of SAE on human consciousness, the need to find a linguistic observatory upon the world that would see beyond SAE:

The speakers of great languages cannot arrive at metalinguistics, because to them it is self-evident that only their language is worthy of consideration. The languages of Europe’s small peoples are so under the influence of SAE (Standard Average European) that they are incapable of appreciating their own peculiarities. Only when the speaker of a great European language learns a language which does not belong to SAE, or a speaker of SAE starts to take interest in a totally different language and no longer assumes that everything in that language has to be just the same as it is in his own, awakens the question: why is every language in its own way a fork in the road in a forest of facts, or more strictly: how do this fork in the road determine the person’s psyche who is walking along it—what does he see in the forest and what remains invisible to him?  

On the deepest level, Babel with its diversity of tongues and the the identification of each one with a different system of belief, was at the root of Uku Masing’s worldview.

As the most important peripheral polyglot and guru in Tartu’s linguistic landscape this is what Masing taught. While Villem Ernits was nearly ubiquitous in Soviet Tartu (everyone seemed to have a personal anecdote about him), Uku Masing was all but absent from it (most Tartu-dwellers had never met him). But he became a destination for scholarly pilgrimmages. The fact that he had been a member of the most important poetic avant-garde circle in interwar Tartu, the Arbujad (“Soothsayers”), gave him added credibility. Most of the arbujad had fled to Sweden at the end of the War. Masing was one of the few who did not, and his identification with this group enhanced his literary and scholarly authority. During the Nazi Occupation of Tartu he sheltered his Jewish student, Isidor Levin, who would later call Masing his savior.  

As a social force and phenomenon, Jaan Kaplinski characterized Masing in the following terms:

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1001 Uku Masing and his wife, Eha, are honoured as “Righteous Among the Nations” at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem.
Masing was somewhat awkward and strange in his being, and around him there emerged almost as if of its own accord the aura of a guru—he inspired reverence and many young people received his words as gospel whether the professor and poet wished for this or not. In interactions with him the hierarchy was clear: the Teacher taught, others sat before his feet and listened to him. Around Masing there was a certain “Masingness.”

For many of his self-appointed apostles he became a model. There is a certain dissatisfaction and distaste with all forms of existing power they inherited from him, even as they broke with him or found themselves estranged from him for refusing to accept his particular ideas. He inspired Estonian poets like Hando Runnel and Jaan Kaplinski, and students of Eastern languages and religions, like Linnart Mäll and Haljand Udam, among many others. Hando Runnel has also emphasized Masing’s “otherness,” claiming he was a “person from a different world.”

Another idiosyncratic Estonian intellectual and writer, Ilmar Vene (b. 1951), who formally studied German Philology at Tartu State University, made one of the first attempts to define the social and intellectual dimensions of Uku Masing’s position in Soviet Estonia in a long essay under the title Trotzija: Katse mõista Uku Masingut [Man of Defiance: An Attempt to Understand Uku Masing] (2001). In this work, Vene evoked Masing’s nihilistic, misanthropic opposition to everything that is current or accepted, comparing him to Tolstoy, Rousseau, Herder, Nietzsche and many other figures of Europe’s counterculture since the eighteenth century in the process. To some extent Jaan Kaplinski shared this vision of Uku Masing. And several critics have observed that what Vene writes of Masing might also be applied in more recent times to Kaplinski himself.

Uku Masing was not much of a performer. His recorded lectures are all but inaudible and delivered in a monotone. Given his quiet, meek, and understated bearing on the fringes of Estonian society (both literally and figuratively), his stance of opposition was purely intellectual. It is hard to imagine Masing colliding with people in the street merely in order to flout predictive statistics, science, or social convention in the manner of Dostoevsky’s Underground Man, or standing up to voice his opinion at a dissertation defense in the manner of Villem Ernits. In their social bearing, Villem Ernits and Uku Masing represented two extremes among the peripheral polyglots of Tartu’s linguistic landscape. Villem Ernits sought out his interlocutors; he was unavoidable. It was impossible not to know him. But many people who spent their entire lives in Tartu never encountered Uku Masing. After being forced to exchange apartments with his neighbor, Valmar Adams—on threat of deportation to Siberia—in 1945, he and his wife occupied the bottom floor apartment of a house in Tähtvere. And whenever possible they would escape to their cottage in Taevaskoja in the Southern Estonian wilderness. To meet Uku Masing, one needed to seek him out; his vaguely mystical manner inspired reverence and awe, even among those most eager to know him.

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For Jaan Kaplinski, Uku Masing (1909—1985) embodied the double opposition and alternative to the prevailing reality: he stood not only against the current regime but the previous one as well:

Masing embodied the counter-culture at the highest level—he always saw things differently from the public understanding of them, whether Soviet or Estonian. In the light of this countercultural thinking many things became visible, which would otherwise have passed by unnoticed; shadows revealed the light, just as light revealed shadows. In those days his double-opposition exceeded the capacity for comprehension of most of his admirers and listeners: his protest was not merely a protest against the Russian government, but also against that Estonianness and Europeanness which most of us saw as the only alternative to Sovietness.1005

Masing was the most intellectually ambitious, productive, and influential of all peripheral polyglots of Tartu under Soviet rule, who embodied better than any other figure—both in his life and his thought—an idea by which one might define Tartu’s significance for the Soviet Union more generally: the idea that every language creates its own reality, and that there is something insidious and scandalous about the way in which colonial languages of power (including Russian, English, and French) have obscured the subtle variety of particular languages and cultures of the world by imposing their own order in the name of universal truths and universal values.

Both Europe’s Barbarian tribes and the indigenous peoples of the Americas had a prominent place in the European cultural imagination of Soviet Estonia. And nowhere were they more prominently represented than in the life and thought of Uku Masing and his various followers. Masing’s critical perspective on the hegemony of great languages and states, emerges especially in the works of Jaan Kaplinski. In the 1960s, Kaplinski got the first line of his most famous poem, “Vercigentorix Spake,” from Uku Masing: “You may take from us the land where we live, but you may not take from us the land where we die.” Many decades later in his essay “Finno-Ugric Languages and Philosophy,” Kaplinski followed Masing’s thought to its logical extreme, insisting on the Herderian idea so dear to Tartu—that every language forms its own world, and every language family must have a different sense of the world. He opened his essay with an epigraph from Nietzsche’s Beyond Good and Evil:  “Philosophers of the Ural-Altaic Language Family (in which the subject-concept is the least developed) will in all likelihood see into the world otherwise and proceed down other paths to find themselves than the Indo-Europeans or the Muslims.1006 From there, Kaplinski proceeded to contrast the Estonian tendency to define things by their interiors to the Indo-European tendency to demarcate borders. For example, Kaplinski observed that when an Estonian wants you to set the table he tells you to put the “knives-forks” (noad-kahvlid) on the table, knives and forks being used by a kind of


synechdoche for everything, instead of reaching for an abstract, all-encompassing word like “dishes.” The larger point, with enormous implications for cartography and politics, was that the speakers of Finno-Ugric languages see the world by enumerating contents, while the speakers of Indo-European languages see the world by establishing clear boundaries and borders, hence the peculiarity of the European state system born at Westphalia in 1648 that has since been used to colonize the world. In contemporary Estonian society Kaplinski has assumed the position of his Soviet-era guru, standing critically aloof from the prevailing currents of culture and politics. A 2010 article in the Estonian daily, Päevaleht, reported on Kaplinski’s decision to abandon the standardized Estonian language entirely, keeping his blog in various foreign languages instead—Russian, English, Finnish, and sometimes even the southern Tartu dialect of Estonian.  

Celebrating small peoples and indigenous societies, Jaan Kaplinski echoed Uku Masing when he wrote: “The Indian is the one who refuses, who opposes, who represents an alternative. He represents a different understanding of life, its values and the world. What is sacred to him is not only some abstract theological Jehova crowned in the cosmic heights, but many things and beings on this earth here. Trees, bodies of water, stones, animals, the Earth itself.”  

Ain Kaalep wrote something very similar. Appealing to Uku Masing’s statement from the 1930s that “Europe means death, Asia means life,” Kaalep proclaimed: “We are Europe’s Indians—Estonians, Finn, and Hungarians.” On the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kaalep reinterpreted the old slogan of Gustav Suits’s “Young Estonia” movement of the first decade of the twentieth century (Let us be Estonians, but become Europeans), changing it to “Let us be Europeans, but Remain Asians” (“Olgem eurooplased, aga jäägem ka asiaatideks!”). This line appeared in an article published in the Soviet Estonian newspaper, Rahva hääl on January 14, 1990. One of the things he called for in the article was for Tartu University to found not only a new, more European Department of Classical and Romance Languages, but also to sponsor more fully than had been done under Soviet rule, the Oriental Studies of Pent Nurmekund.

7.2.3 Pent Nurmekund and Tartu’s Semi-Formal Oriental Studies Institute

The most resonant example—and symbol—of the character of Tartu University as an Ivory Tower of Babel, holding aloof from the state and offering a kaleidoscope of foreign languages and collectives through which to see and make sense of the world, was Tartu’s semi-formal Oriental Studies Institute. Uku Masing’s power and influence in Soviet Tartu was largely in the power and influence of his personality and his ideas upon his committed followers. But the wider appeal of Eastern Languages and other ways of life and thought came to the general student population by means of Pent Nurmekund (1906–1996). It was Nurmekund, more than anyone else, who carved out an institutional niche at Tartu State University for third worlds in third languages. In a less self-conscious or philosophical vein than Uku Masing, Nurmekund made Eastern languages and ways of life accessible to all Tartu students.

Born into a simple peasant family in rural Estonia, Pent Nurmekund became one of the great polyglots of all time. His prodigious linguistic talents were second to none. Over the course of his lifetime, he acquired a speaking knowledge of somewhere between seventy and a hundred different languages. He taught several of them in Soviet Tartu. His autobiography was compiled from interviews conducted at Tartu University in 1990 by Hillar Palamets, and published under the title *A Millionaire’s Story*. Late in life, just a year or two before his death, he came into quite an inheritance. The title was especially ironic since, more than most of his Tartu colleagues, he had struggled all his life with poverty, just as he had struggled for acceptance and recognition in Tartu University’s scholarly community. Pent Nurmekund was born Arthur Roosmann, a poor country boy in 1906, whose letters to his mother still show evidence of the local dialect. By his own account the only two languages he heard there in everyday life were Estonian and the Mulgi dialect. He did not Estonianize his name to Pent Nurmekund until 1936, at around the same time that Paul Berg became Paul Ariste and many other ethnic Estonians changed their names at the behest of Tartu’s *Emakeeleseelts* (“Mother Tongue Society”). He studied Germanic and Romance Languages at Tartu University and defended a Masters Degree, written in Spanish, on the Grammatical peculiarities of the Provençal Ballad. Like so many other Tartu scholars and polyglots—Paul Ariste, Uku Masing, Villem Ernits, and Juhan Aul among them—Nurmekund went abroad to study in interwar Europe. His destination was the School of Oriental Languages in Paris. He shared a room and received guidance from another Estonian there, Leo Leesment (1902–1986), Estonia’s first professor of Criminal Law, who was to become Estonia’s first translator of Chinese in the Soviet period.

The interwar tensions among Tartu scholars should not be overlooked in making sense of the dynamics of the town in the Soviet period. Paul Ariste compared Nurmekund insultingly to Villem Ernits, marveling at his inadequate grasp of low German, in memoirs written in the early 1950s. This was occasioned by a pedantic debate that erupted between the two in 1939 already on the question of the etymology of the name of one of the Estonian islands (Kihnu). Nurmekund had proposed that the name of the island came from the word “küna” (trough or manger). Paul Ariste could not understand how Nurmekund could possibly write something so ridiculous:

This I could not in any way believe and I wrote my own etymology for the word. I thought that the question was resolved and that Nurmekund would give in. But Nurmekund scratched together all his philological and linguistic knowledge and wrote a very sharp rebuttal in *Estonian Language* (1939). With this response, however, he did not manage to convince anyone that Kihnu was künasaar (Manger Island). One had to wonder at his ignorance of low German, though he had officially studied German philology. I could gather from our colleagues that their conviction in his Ernits-like quality had grown.

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1010 Pent Nurmekund, *Ühe miljonääri lugu* (Rakvere, 2003), 19
This episode is worth recounting as a reminder of the divisions between the various scholarly groups and collectives of Tartu’s Linguistic Landscape and their charismatic leaders. The divides and resentments that alienated Estonian scholars from each other were often more emotionally intense than those that isolated Estonian and Russian speakers from each other. For his part, Pent Nurmekund had a rather dim view of many other figures at Tartu University, the obstacles they had placed in his path, and their incredulous refusal to believe in his linguistic talents.

He had a very difficult time convincing anyone in Soviet Tartu that he was actually qualified to teach Chinese. They sent him to Leningrad to have his knowledge of Chinese tested. He was never as successful as Paul Ariste—barely publishing any scholarly works of his own—and never lost many aspects of his simple peasant sensibilities, which emerge clearly in a letter to his mother from Central Asia in 1959, where he marveled at the relative freedom of the steppe, when compared to the collectivization of Estonian agriculture. He wrote enviously: “Life is more pleasant here in Kazakhstan than with us in Estonia: people are permitted to keep a horse, two cows, and sheep, goats and as many pigs as they need. All run around freely in the steppe. People even have oxen.”

In Tartu he lived in a small apartment with his wife, Salme Nigol, another philologists, also the daughter of a farmer, who studied and published on the dialects of Southern Estonia, and especially those of the Tartu region. Both were thus fascinated by the linguistic multiplicity of the world—one by looking at the local region in which they lived and worked and the other by looking to the furthest reaches of the globe. The one time Nurmekund expressed genuine interest in one of the classic figures of Marxism-Leninism, was when he discovered Friedrich Engel’s writings on the nature and peculiarities of the “Frankish Dialect.” The extensive notes he took on this one text are preserved in his personal archive at the Tartu University library.

Formally an instructor in the Foreign Language Department of Tartu State University, Pent Nurmekund used this platform to to generate the Oriental Institute (Orientalistika Kabinet in Estonian, or “Kabinet Vostokovedeniia” in Russian). Eventually, he would be appreciated for his “enthusiasm” in bringing African and Asian languages and cultures to the attention of the Tartu University student body and professoriate in the official history of Tartu University composed in 1982. But it was a long road to this level of recognition. The Institute was established in 1955 to revive an earlier Oriental Society of the “bourgeois” Estonian University of Tartu in the 1930s. There was even a degree of continuity and overlap in its membership. Leo Leesment had been the original president of the society in 1935. Stripped of his professorial title by the Soviet Union, Leesment remained an instructor at Tartu University and an active figure in the Oriental Institute producing some of the first Estonian translations of Chinese mythology into Estonian. Ultimately, like Yuri Lotman’s “Tartu School,” the Oriental Institute was tolerated rather than sponsored by Tartu University and the Soviet State. It never had a room—let alone building—of its own, and was forced to occupy the halls and classrooms of the Chemistry department next to the main building of the university.

But for all of its makeshift informality (or rather because of it), the Institute was a great hit. The popularity of its language classes, attracting hundreds of students and scholars from all

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1013 TÜRK f. 71, s.95.
1014 TÜA III, 287.
departments and disciplines (as attendance records attest) is all the more remarkable, considering that it could provide no upward (only lateral) mobility in the Soviet system. At no clear material benefit to themselves, they participated in language courses ranging from Bengali to classical Arabic. Participants in these voluntary gatherings ranged from dissident activists, like Gabriel Superfin, to free-spirited critics like Jaan Kaplinski, to clear Bolsheviks, like the original head of Tartu University’s Communist Party organization in 1944, Lydia Roots. For many, it provided an escape by means of language into a more meaningful world, a reprieve, as it were, from political correctness and state ideology.

The institute bore a makeshift paper sign, posted by the door of the chemistry auditorium where it organized its meetings, with the name of the institute written in three languages in elegant calligraphy: Estonian, Chinese, and Russian. One way to appreciate the tremendous breadth of its linguistic reach is to look at the schedule of instruction for one semester. Occasionally the Institute could rejoice over a native speaker, but for the most part the teachers and students were native Estonians, with a few native Russian-speakers as well. Written in Nurmekund’s refined if quivering hand on yellowing, low-quality paper, was the schedule for the 1964 Fall Semester. It was posted on September 28:

**Notice**

The TSU Oriental Studies Institute’s Program for the present semester is as follows:

1) Classical Arabic
   Monday, 18:00–20:00;
2) African Studies Circle
   Tuesday, 16:00–17:00;
3) Chinese
   Tuesday, 12:00–13:00;
4) Turkish
   Wednesday, 12:00–13:00;
5) Vietnamese
   Wednesday, 18:00–19:00;
6) Hindi
   Thursday, 16:00–18:00;
7) Japanese
   Friday, 16:00–18:00;
8) Bengali
   Thursday, 18:00–19:30;
9) Farsi
   Friday, 18:00–19:30;
10) Indonesian
   time to be decided in consultation with teacher (teacher: G. Klaasen)
11) Georgian
   time to be decided in consultation with teacher (teacher: K. Bachmann)
12) Swahili
   time to be decided in consultation with instructor (instructor: R. Voosalu)

At the request of auditors, lecture times are subject to change. Instruction begins: 1 October 1964.

By 1967 news of Tartu’s fascination with languages reached the Eastern periphery of the Soviet Union, when a Pravda Buriati noted the existence of this remarkable institute in Tartu Estonia.

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1015 See informal attendance lists from Pent Nurmekund’s archive. TÜRK f. 71, s. 73.
1016 TÜRK f. 71, n.73, s.70
1017 September 28, 1964—TÜRK f.71, n.73, s.40.
A headline in the Buriat Newspaper Pravda Buriati on December 27, 1967 read “Do you speak Swahili?”:

This question would not sound strange at Tartu State University, though there is no formal Eastern Studies department here. Here it is possible to encounter a physicist or chemist, who can speak Japanese, a mathematician, who knows Tibetan and translates from Arabic, a geographer who is a specialist in Turkish. In the small auditorium, where oriental enthusiasts gather every week, you might even hear ancient Sanskrit or the African language of Swahili.1018

Nurmekund organized two All-Union Conferences in Tartu for Eastern Languages in 1965 and 1975, in honor of the 10th and 20th anniversaries of his Institute. In the process he founded another important Tartu University Journal: Works in the Field of Oriental Studies (Töid orientalistika alalt/ Trudy po vostokovedenije), which published collections from the conference also attracted All-Union recognition and contributors.

One important service of the institute was to cultivate some of the first Estonian orientalists. It capitalized on the Soviet Union’s policy of the “Friendship of the Peoples” to send its most precocious students to study and conduct research in the East—to places like Dushanbe, Alma-Ata, and Tashkent—even though it never received special state funding as an institute or earned the right to award degrees. One of the most prominent figures in the Institute was Haljand Udam (1936–2005), who earned his formal degree in Geology. Udam stressed the intellectual atmosphere that Nurmekund helped to create at Tartu University: “He was a man of the Estonian era, and with his efforts brought into the gray quotidian life of Tartu University the free academic spirit of the previous period, stimulating the study not only of Eastern but also Western languages.”1019 Udam also noted the practical efforts that Nurmekund undertook on his behalf:

Despite the uncertain status of the Oriental Studies Institute at Tartu University, Nurmekund succeeded in getting the Dean of the Faculty at that time, Juhan Peegel, to procure for me a graduate position at the official Oriental Institute at the Academy of Sciences in Moscow. I do not know how much trouble this caused them, because these kinds of positions were strictly regulated, and officially Oriental Studies was not supposed to be something for Estonia.1020


1020 “vaatamata ebamäärasele staatusele ülikooli orientalistikakabineti juures önnestus Nurmekundil ja tolleaegsel dekaanil Juhan Peegilil saada minu jaoks aspirantuuriikoht Moskvas NSVL TA Orientalitikainstituudis. Ma ei oska
The skepticism came equally from establishment Estonians and Russians, who saw little practical benefit to be from expending state resources to train Estonian experts in oriental languages. But by appealing to the ideal of the Friendship of the Peoples and the idea of “Literature of Our Brother Nations,” Udam and Nurmekind found a legitimate Soviet way to justify their curiosity.1021

With the help of his contacts at the Institute, Udam traveled to Dushanbe and Tashkent and became interested in Sufism. He learned Arabic, Farsi, and Tadzhik, translating various literary and religious texts into Estonian as he gained a mastery of these languages, and eventually defended his Candidate’s dissertation in Moscow in 1971 “On the Special Semantic Aspects of Persian Sufi Terminology.” Ironically, Udam’s journey to the East led to the West (as he put it) and his discovery of the writings of René Guénon (1886–1951)—a French scholar also known as Shaykh Abd al-Wahid Yahya, who celebrated the “universal character” of Eastern metaphysical doctrines. Udam came to identify with Guénon’s deep cultural conservatism.

Even more prominent than Udam as a beneficiary of the institute was Estonia’s leading Buddhologist, Linnart Mäll, who used the contacts he acquired to travel to Moscow and become an informal student of Alexander Piatigorskii. His dissertation treated Eastern themes, but was still written in the context of the history department of Tartu University: “Ashtasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā as a Historical Source.” He took over leadership of the Institute from Pent Nurmekund in the mid-1980s, prompting speculation about a feud or rivalry between the two, and arranged the visit of the Dalai Lama in 1990 to Southern Estonia, to Ottepää and Kääriku. He also became one of the founders and first chairman of the UNPO (Unrepresented Peoples and Nations Organization) at the Hague in 1990. Both Mäll and Udam published some of their first papers in Sign System Studies, Lotman’s semiotic journal founded at Tartu University in 1964. Indeed, the study of Eastern languages and religions was one of very few points of contact between the mostly Russian-Jewish members of the Tartu School, who came to Tartu from Moscow and Leningrad, and local Estonian scholars. Pent Nurmekund carried on a correspondence with the leading Tartu School orientalist, Alexander Piatigorskii, even helping to organize a series of six lectures for the latter in Tartu between November 27th and December 3rd 1965 on Indian Philosophy and Tamil Literature.1022

The first Estonian translation of the Koran from Arabic by Haljand Udam was not published until December 2007. It was an instant national bestseller and sold out within days of its release. But the scholarly institute that turned this geology student into an expert on Sufi texts and Arabic literature, and made the history student Linnart Mäll Estonia’s leading Buddhologist, a correspondent of the Dalai Lama, and first president of the UNPO dates back to 1955 in Soviet Tartu when Pent Nurmekund established the Oriental Studies Institute.

7.2.4 Tartu’s Foreign Language Departments: English and German Philology

Closer to the center of the establishment, though still peripheral when compared to the bilingual—Estonian and Russian (or Finno-Ugric and Slavic)—core of Tartu State University were Tartu’s various departments of Foreign Languages. Foreign languages were taught in a few

1021 Udam, Orienditeekond, 6-7.
1022 EKLA f.319, n.27, s.6.
different contexts over the course of the Soviet period. Classical Philology had its own
department form 1944-1954, led by Karl Reitv, where the venerable old Richard Kleis, educated
in pre-Revolutionary Saint Petersburg and editor of the interwar Estonian Encyclopedia, still
taught Greek and some courses on the ancient Greek heritage of Western Civilization. Later it
was incorporated into the Department of Western European Philology, established in 1944, under
the direction of Johannes Silvet. For a while during the darkest period of Bolshevik repressions
in Estonia, between 1949 and 1954, no students were admitted to study Germanic-Romance
Languages and Literatures at all. But eventually they were revived and in 1961 English and
German Philology emerged with separate Departments of their own: the Department of English
was Directed from 1961 to 1977 by Oleg Mutt. The Department of German, which subsumed
the teaching of French, was directed from 1961-1963 by Kallista Kann, then Felix Kibberman,
and finally from 1970 onward, one of the most controversial if colorful figures of the Tartu’s
Soviet intelligentsia, Juhan Tuldava.1023

These were serious academic departments, devoted as much to research as to teaching
and produced their share of interesting studies and works. In the meantime, an overlapping
Department of Foreign Languages (established in 1971) began teaching English, German,
French, and Latin to the students of all the other faculties in the interests of producing Soviet
Estonian citizens—not merely Soviet specialists—with cosmopolitan linguistic abilities and
sensibilities.1024 Several of the scholars of Western European languages were reputed to have
direct ties with the KGB. Indeed, why else would anyone bother to specialize in English,
French, or German? This was a common Soviet train of thought. Of Jaan Sontak, who chaired
the Foreign Language Department from 1973 to 1981, it was “spoken ‘with grammatical
certainty’, that he had ties with the organs of state security.”1025 Mutt’s father, the English
Instructor Oleg, said of Jaan Sontak that he was “a talented person, but self-destructive.”1026 He
had a very wide range of contacts, could often be found in the bars of Tartu speaking with
everyone. Moreover, he lacked traditional Estonian reserve, and was in many respects a man of
the new system. Mutt noted that “he engaged in jovial gossip with humorous cruelty,” and died
as might be expected given his lifestyle in middle age.1027

Arthur Robert Hone and Oleg Mutt

There were a few instructors of Western philology, especially English and German, who
managed to turn these Departments into a home, or else make their homes part of the
Department. Their classes came to be seen as an oasis of lost cultural life and memory. Arthur
Robert Hone was an instructor here already in the Spring of 1945. Both Arthur Robert Hone and
Yuri Lotman made Oleg Mitt’s list of “true” Tartu Professors, though Lotman was formally a
Party Member; and Hone, who was also a Party member was technically not even a professor.
Arthur Robert Hone was a bohemian Englishman. He had read Spanish literature at Cambridge,
joined the Communist Party as a young man, and followed his first wife, the Estonian writer and

1023 TÜA III, 286.
1024 TÜA III, 286-287.
1025 “‘Tema kohta räägit päris ‘kindlas kõneviisis’, et tal on sidemed julgeolekuga.’” Mutt, 45.
1026 “andekas inimene, aga hukas.” Mutt, 45.
1027 “Kõrtsides kohtas teda üsna tihti ja ta ei hoidnud kunagi keelt hammaste taga, oli siis teemaks mõni konkreetne
inimene või riigivõim—ikka klatsis ta joviaalselt või lustliku õelusega. Aga ju osutus temagi tiibade kandevõime
ühel hetkel nõrgaks.” Mutt, 45.
Communist Aira Kaal, back to Tartu in the late 1930s. She had spent some time working in Wimeldon as an *au pair* girl. It was there that she met her future husband. They were evacuated to Moscow during the war, where they found work in a publishing house translating into English and Estonian respectively, and returned to Tartu thereafter. Hone never saw England or his parents again, though he sent them photographs of their granddaughter (by his second wife, Laine Võsamaa, one of his students of English philology).

He taught English (and occasionally Spanish) literature at Tartu University and music at Tartu’s Conservatory. He also learned to speak fluent Estonian, competent Russian, and passable Italian, French, German, and Chinese. He was fondly remembered by his students for the lively evenings at his home, where he would accompany rousing renditions of Irish and Scottish ballads on the piano. Several of his former students composed odes and poems to Soviet Tartu’s only Englishman, and the bohemian and idiosyncratic details of his deportment helped to bond the internal circle of his students and admirers. Many remember how he would ride about Tartu on his bicycle at night with a flashlight. He had come to Tartu as a Communist in the first place, and his first wife, Aira Kaal, was seen as a figure of the Communist establishment. But in the intense atmosphere of distrust of Tartu University, he was even suspected sometimes of being a foreign agent. (What was an Englishman doing in Soviet Tartu?) Eventually, he learned Estonian well enough so that some people did not even notice his accent. And he managed to inspire an interest in Spanish literature in some of his students, like Jüri Talvet, who eventually traveled to Cuba on a Tartu University exchange. On January 1, 1980, Talvet wrote to Yuri Lotman from Havana at the request of Luiz Alvarez, an instructor of Greek and Latin languages in the Department of Spanish and Classical Languages at the university there, who was planning to come to the Soviet Union and was hoping to work with Lotman, adding that Lotman was well known and his works were widely read in Cuba. Thus, the global reach of Lotman’s work and reputation and network was facilitated in small ways by various Estonian scholars from other circles and collectives in Tartu University’s linguistic landscape. In this case, at least, that landscape reached as far as Havana.

For others, Oleg Mutt was himself the ideal model of the true professor—more academic, more reserved, more serious in his comportment (in a word, more Estonian)—than Arthur Robert Hone. The son of an interwar Estonian Diplomat to the United States, who was sent to a Gulag Camp in Kirov Oblast’ in 1941 and shot there two years later, Oleg Mutt had spent several of his formative years in Washington DC. He was remembered as being reserved, cultured, polite (but not overly familiar), an engaging speaker with respectable scholarly publications. He too, like his English counterpart, Artur Robert Hone, was remembered by his students as a “native speaker” of the English language. Some claimed he felt more at home in English than in Estonian. He made a concerted effort to live as much of his life as Soviet Tartu would allow in

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1028 Interviews by the author with Mall Tamm, Ilmar Anvelt, Leili Kostabi, Mira Kandilaski. See also reminiscences of Arthur Robert Hone collected and compiled by Hillar Palamets including those of Laine (Võsamaa) Hone, “Võõrfiloloogiat õppinas sõjajärgses ülikoolis” and “Kui Schubert oleks teadnud” (mälestuskiilde A.R. Hone’ist” and Mall Sarv, “Arthur Robert Hone’ist, muusikast ja muustki” in “Filoloogid meenutavad, filolooge meenutatakse,” TÜRK f.141.86.
1029 TÜRK f. 135, s. 1409.
1030 This is how he was remembered in an interview I conducted with one of his former students from the 1960s, Mall Tamm. She also observed. Interview conducted with three Tartu trained philologists from the departments of English and German. Mall Tamm ; also Leili Kostabi and Ilmar Anvelt (Oleg Mutt’s right-hand-man), who worked as a kind of departmental secretary, Tartu, June 28, 2008
this language, conducting even the administrative affairs of his department in English. One of his former students, Ilmar Anvelt, remembered: “He always spoke English to everyone who could understand at least a little, even to his dog (‘Danny, be quiet!’).”

In 1976 he published a textbook intended for domestic consumption, i.e. for “students majoring in English language and literature in the Estonian S.S.R.” Published in a print run of only 400 copies under the auspices of Tartu University’s English Department—in curiously good (considering its provenance) and self-consciously American English—a copy nonetheless made it as far as the University library of UC Berkeley. Mutt explained: “an attempt has been made to give the wording of the booklet an American flavor. For the same reason American English spelling is used throughout the text.” In most ways it is a typical Cold War work of Soviet anti-Americanism. The image of America that emerges here is the mirror image to the US representation of the Soviet Union: the hysterics of Senator Joseph McCarthy, Barry Goldwater, and the looming threat of nuclear proliferation: “this suicidal policy comes from the ultra-Right”; the mass media as “a powerful and flexible propaganda tool which the ruling classes use skillfully to mold the views and world outlook of the masses of the population”; the exorbitant price of American education (“Only about 13% of all full-time students receive some financial help from the institution at which they are studying”); the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and other secret para-military formations like the “John Birch Society” and “White Citizens Councils” the “Minutemen” and “Armed Rightists”, the “American Legion,” etc.; the legacy of slavery and racial discrimination (“the blacks have remained inferior citizens up to the present. Racial discrimination has continued in the social, economic and political fields”).

Yet in places, even here there are lightly veiled parallels to the Estonian predicament in the Soviet Union, and thus a reminder of the similarities between great Imperial Powers like the United States of America and Soviet Russia. Oleg Mutt wrote of the linguistic particularity of the American Indians—“with their 200 distinct languages” at the time of the arrival of “the white man” and the disappearance of their languages, and their inability for all of the multicultural rhetoric and propaganda of the United States to find political expression:

In March 1973 the town of Wounded Knee in South Dakota became familiar all over the world as the scene of a prolonged armed confrontation between Indian activists fighting for their rights and the police. Since then there have been several more incidents which show that the American Indian is no longer willing to resign himself passively to social injustice and poverty. In 1974 several Indian tribes (the Navaho, Cherokee, and Sioux) launched a campaign demanding their admission to the United Nations. The Indians claim that they are not citizens of the U.S., that the U.S. government which has signed well over 350 treaties with them is not living up to these treaties and is committing genocide against the Indians. This campaign is another expression of the awakening and self-assertion of a people that has long been ruthlessly oppressed and exploited.

A passage like this could not help but draw attention to the similarities between the predicament of America’s Native Americans and Soviet Estonians, and the extent to which state power had

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1032 Oleg Mutt, American Life and Institutions (Tartu: Tartu State University, Dept. of English, 1976), 3.
1033 Oleg Mutt, American Life, 16, 17, 43,
1034 Oleg Mutt, Oleg Mutt, American Life and Institutions (Tartu: Tartu State University, Dept. of English, 1976), 16.
been abused in both cases: both of these multiethnic empires professed great love for humanity and national self-determination for their various peoples, but refused their constituent nationalities the right to join the United Nations independently.

The use of the plight of the native Americans to draw attention to Estonia’s plight in the Soviet Union, had already become a trope in the poetry of the Tartu poet, Jaan Kaplinski and Uku Masing in the 1960s. Kaplinski’s famous prose poem, “We have to tread very quietly,” was published in his collection *Tolmust ja värvidest (Of Dust and Colors)* in 1967:

We have to walk very quietly, our eyes to the ground. You don’t have to ask, what we are looking for. Long ago this land became your land and the shattered shards of our state fell into the large and empty world. Why do you shy away, why are you afraid? We will not bear witness. Speak what you will to your children. The court will believe you most likely. You have nothing to fear. If sometimes the ax beneath the chicken coop looks red, know that it is only rust. Those before whom you should be ashamed are dust. Those, who should be ashamed are dust. David Williamson. Andrew Jackson. Buffalo Bill. But you can still be happy. Don’t be afraid, as we have far too much to remember. …. We have to tread very quietly, our eyes to the ground, because sometimes the tractor ploughing the dark ground unearths the bones of children. But witnesses there are none…

For a while even Native American Languages acquired a place in Tartu University’s Linguistic Landscape, when they were studied and discussed by figures like Jaan Kaplinski and Uku Masing.

For his part Oleg Mutt, used Tartu as a linguistic observatory on the particularities of various English and American dialects, defamiliarizing the English language with this Estonian study of the social and regional varieties of present-day English. He stressed the vexed relations of the American ghetto and the tension between standardized English and various forms of American counter-culture, an observation incredible merely for the fact that it came from Tartu, Estonia:

The distinguishing phonological, lexical, and grammatical features of this English dialect persist for social, educational and economic reasons. The discrimination against black Americans has created ghetto living and segregated schools. Where social isolation exists dialect differences grow more marked. Moreover, in recent years, many blacks no longer consider their dialect to be inferior and they actually take pride in it as a means of black identification.

Oleg Mutt was perhaps the best and most important scholar of the English language in the Baltic States, who turned Tartu into a linguistic observatory upon the United States of America.

Clearly, there were many ways to be a “true professor” in Soviet Tartu, just as there were many ways to be a member of the Communist Party. But one thing both Arthur Robert Hone and Oleg Mutt shared with all those, like Yuri Lotman and Paul Ariste, who came to be seen by their students and colleagues as embodiments of the “Tartu spirit,” was their capacity to generate

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1036 Oleg Mutt, *Social and regional varieties of present-day English* (Tartu: Tartu State University, 1982)
their own environment on their own terms in their own—literal and figurative—languages. And for this the European University of Tartu was the absolutely essential structural and cultural background.

Juhan Tuldava

The most important and controversial scholar in the departments of English and German was Juhan Tuldava (1922–2003). Like so many other leading Tartu scholars, he had a prodigious knowledge of foreign languages, many of them learned already at an early age, thanks to his upbringing in the family of an interwar Estonian diplomat (like Oleg Mutt): he knew German, English, and French from childhood. Though they generally spoke Estonian at home his father, Arthur Tuldava, had practiced French with him in the manner of the rest of the interwar Estonian intelligentsia in order to ensure the cosmopolitan upbringing of his son. With his father appointed to the Estonian embassies in interwar Denmark and Sweden, Juhan had also learned Danish and Swedish at an early age. These almost became like second native languages to him. Later he learned Russian in Russia, Latvian in Latvia, and Lithuanian in Lithuania. In the course of his German studies in Stockholm, he mastered ancient Greek, Gothic, and Sanskrit; Slavic studies had further brought him Czech, Polish, and Serbo-Croatian. Thus, by the time he arrived in Tartu from abroad in 1963 he was one of Tartu’s great polyglots with a practical and academic knowledge of at least fifteen very different European languages both dead and living. But of all the paths that carried various scholars to a place in the linguistic landscape of Tartu State University, Tuldava’s path was most circuitous and enshrouded in mystery.

As the 18-year-old the son of an interwar Estonian diplomat, Juhan Tuldava was arrested together with his family in the first year of the Soviet Occupation of Estonia in 1940. His father was shot and he, his sister, and his mother were deported to a forced labor camp. In the camp near Kirov, Juhan Tuldava began his education and transformation into Estonia’s most notorious KGB agent and linguist of all time. He proved his loyalty as an agent-provocateur, first organizing and then exposing a conspiracy among eight of his fellow Estonians at the camp. Afterward he was allowed to move to the city and matriculated at Kirov’s Pedagogical Institute, where he wrote his bachelor’s thesis in Russian (a language he had only started learning a few years before) on the English language of Chaucer.

He moved back to Estonia for a short while, spent time in Latvia and Lithuania, and then all of a sudden turned up in Sweden on the far side of the Iron Curtain. In Stockholm in 1960 Tuldava claimed to have escaped to Sweden across the Karelian-Finnish border, and wrote an

1039 “Having returned from Kirov, Juhan started organizing his eight fellow Estonians into an anti-Communist oppositional group. One member was the son of another member of the Foreign Ministry, Juhan’s friend from Estonia. This was evidently his first test assignment in Juhan’s career as an agent./ The following year all the members of the group were arrested and what became of them thereafter is unknown.” [“Kirovist naasnult hakkas Juhan varsti organiseerima oma kaheksa saatuskaaslase osavõtul antikommunistliku vastupanugruppi. Selle üheks liikmeks oli ühe teise Välisministeeriumi endise ametniku poeg, Juhani sõber juba kodumaalt. Grupi organiseeriminnie oli ilmselt esimeseks kateülesandeeks Juhani agendikarjääriis./ Järgmisel aastal arreteeriti kõik grupi tegevust osavõtud noormehed ja nende edaspide saatus on teadmata…”] Sanden, 23.
1040 Tuldava’s bachelor’s thesis from the Pedagogical Institute at Kirov is among the various crumbling papers brought by his widow to the Manuscript and Rare Documents Archive of Tartu University Library. I thank the archivists there for providing me with unrestricted access to the as-of-yet unsorted Babel of documents (in more than fifteen different languages) of Juhan Tuldava.
account of his deportation to Kirov oblast’ for the Swedish-Estonian journal Rahvuslik Kontakt (Ethnic Contact). Ending on a rather crude, vituperative note, it appealed to the nationalistic sensibilities of the Estonian émigré community in evoking his experience of the labor camp during the War:

The spirit of the harsh school of the slave labor camp was later brought back to Estonia as well. In the hell of Russia the only ones to survive were the strong, the weak were buried in unmarked graves. The spirit of these strong people, be they men or women, is the spirit of Estonia’s youth today. The idols of the younger generation are not the official heroes, whose pictures hang on every wall. Rather, a young person’s hero is a father, uncle, or grandfather, or some other relative who sits in the evening hours and tells tales of how in Siberia they thumbed their nose at the Russians and how there they remained strong, and what is more, remained strong Estonians.1041

 Barely three years later he was singing a very different tune when he appeared in print behind the iron curtain on October 16, 1963, this time under the name Artur Haman, with an article in the Moscow journal Izvestia, which also appeared in Estonian in Tallinn. His article, entitled “Harsh Lesson” (“Karm õppetund”), chronicled all the ways in which the CIA had tried to force him to work for the American secret service, noting that “more and more often I found my thoughts turning back to the place where I could breathe freely and without fear for my life could deal quietly with my academic labors.”1042 Like many others, only more dramatically so, Tuldava was rendered homeless, on the boundary between two worlds as two superpowers vied to bend the Baltic world—and its people—to their purpose.

 Over the course of his years as a spy, Tuldava went by many names: Arthur-Johan Haman, Artur-Juhan Haman, Juhan Tuldava, Arthur Tuldava, Janis Jugans, Arthur Haman, Arturo, Hanns Quecke. In the early 1970s samizdat excerpts of a vitriolic book, with various documentary fragments began to circulate in Tartu, Mitme näo ja nimega (With Many Names and Many Faces). The author was Einar Sanden (1932—2007), one of the refugees who had fled from Estonia in 1944 as a child with his parents (his father was an Estonian officer). In Sanden’s account of his own encounters with Juhan Tuldava—in Stockholm, London, Tallinn, and even in Tartu in 1965—Tuldava was almost always in an alcoholic haze. Sanden wrote,

The Tartu University dotsent who now goes by the name of Juhan Tuldeva has been the most talented spy and traitor to his nation we have ever encountered. The harm resulting from his acts between 1942 and 1963 in the loss of human life and in everything else cannot even begin to be measured.1043

1041 “Ja seda orjalaagrite karmi kooli kasvatust on hiljem palju importeeritud ka Eestisse. Venemaa põrgus jäädi ellu ainult tugeva, nõrgad maeti kusagile jäljetusse hauda. Nende tugevate inimeste vaim, olgu nad siis mehed või naised, on ka tännapäevase eesti noorsoo vaim. Noorsoo idoolikdeks ei ole mitte ametlikud kangelasnukud, kelle pilt ripub igal seinalehel. Noorte kangelaseks on mõni isa, onu, vanaisa, või keegi teine sugulane, kes õhtutunnil jutustab lugusid, kuidas Siberis vankadele ninanipsu mängiti jakuidas seal tugevaks, ning tugevaks eestlaseks jäädki.” “This is how we were deported” (“Nii meid küüditati”), Sanden, Mitme näo, 20.


1043 “Praegu juhan Tuldev nime kandev Tartu ülikooli dotsent on olned kõige andekam ja suurema potentsiga oma rahvuse reetur-spioon, keda me senijani tunneme. Tema tegevuse tagajärjel tekkinud kahjude suurust aastatel 1942-1963 eesti rahvale nii imineludes kaotuses kui ka kõiges muus ei ole umbkaudseltki määratletav.” Sanden, 8.
The clarity with which his story is now told hardly does justice to the mysterious aura and silent whispers that surrounded his person and reputation for several decades at Tartu University under Soviet rule. Upon his death in 2003, he was remembered in the Estonian newspaper Päevaleht by one of his former students as a teacher who “loved [language] and knew how to inspire others to love it as well,” though at the same time “an object of speculation, his personality was enshrouded in a mysterious veil or shadow.”

He was something of a legend, though remembered above all—by nearly everyone who had personal contact with the man—for his honesty, dependability, and charming politeness. “As I have often said before,” he told Einar Sanden when they met in Tartu in 1965, “my life’s greatest dream is to become a Tartu University professor.”

In 1985, Juhan Tuldava’s dream finally came true. As late as 1996 he still denied any involvement with the KGB. In response to accusations launched against him by Pekka Erelt, he wrote a rebuttal: “I never was a KGB agent.”

After his return to Estonia in 1963, Tuldava spent his days in Soviet Tartu in perpetual fear. Many Estonians knew of his role in foiling an operation organized by Western Secret Service to insert intelligents agents into Soviet Estonia in the late 1940s, especially after samizdat versions of Einar Sanden’s book began circulating in Tartu in the late 1970s and early 80s. He was in any case perpetually on the lookout for reprisals against him. A story under the title of “Leaves are Falling” had appeared in the Tartu youth magazine Noorte Hääl, which had made allusions to this event. And it was further echoed in the 1959-propaganda thriller produced by the Tallinn Film studio under the title Uninvited Guests (“Kutsumatu külalised”). Mihkel Mutt remembered how in a rare unguarded moment when a guest at their home, Juhan Tuldava had confessed to Mihkel’s father Oleg how for many years he had been afraid to take the train from Tartu to Tallinn for fear of being thrown under the wheels of the train. And when he had reached his destination in one piece then his shirt would always be soaked in sweat. Why did he mention this to my father? I do not know, but I can say that as a person he did not seem like a thug (äpu) or villain (nurjatu). And as a scholar he was well above average.
Whatever his crimes, Mutt remembered him—like many of his other teachers at Tartu University—sympathetically: “In any case in my opinion Tuldava was still a tragic figure, a victim of the times and its conditions.”

Tartu and the study of language and literature saved Juhan Tuldava from his past. Shortly after his return in 1963, a friend of his father, Professor Richard Kleis, recruited him to take a position at Tartu University. At the time Kleis was the Vice Dean of the Historical-Philological Faculty, and proposed a position in the Foreign Language Department. The need for competent foreign language instruction and Tuldava’s prodigious qualifications expedited his appointment. He taught many of the languages he had learned in his youth and abroad, including Swedish and Danish. Language itself became for him a kind of oasis where he could escape from his memories and moral compromises and make significant scholarly contributions, attracting a faithful group of students, who remain loyal to his memory to this day.

He taught Lessing’s famous Enlightenment morality play, Nathan the Wise, and gained international renown as a founder of the innovative field of quantitative linguistics. Tuldava eventually became the head of the Department of German in 1970. Thus, like so many other scholars in Tartu’s linguistic landscape, Juhan Tuldava found his scholarly identity both in a national literary tradition but also in the promise of a higher linguistic order for understanding life. As he explained to one of his former students, Siret Rutiku, in an interview conducted and published in German shortly before his death: “In Tartu, I could devote myself to scholarship.” (“Ich konnte mich in Tartu der Wissenschaft widmen”).

### 7.3 A Tale of Two Departments: Finno-Ugric Studies and Russian Literature

Two charismatic professors, Paul Ariste and Yuri Lotman, stand out against the background of the various linguistic and literary scholars and endeavors in Tartu’s new Soviet environment (1) for their success within the administrative hierarchy of the Soviet University of Tartu as the chairs of their respective departments, (2) for their success in generating a self-reproducing collective of colleagues and students committed to their ideas and research programs, and (3) for their success in reaching out to a wider scholarly world, finding international support and enthusiasm for their ideas in their respective fields, inside the Soviet Union and out. Indeed, the volume of letters in the personal archives of Paul Ariste and Yuri Lotman attest to a level of contact with the outside world which would do credit to any Western scholar: more than 2000 correspondents in the case of Yuri Lotman; more than 1500 in the case of Paul Ariste; at least a third of these in each case were beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. Even more embattled figures like Estonia’s leading polyglot, Pent Nurmekund, managed to amass some 1500 correspondents from around the world: Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and China.

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1048 “Igal juhul oli Tuldava minu meelest ikkagi ka traagiline tegelane, ajastu ning olude ohver.” Mutt, Kandilised sambad, 44.
1051 See archival registers for Ariste and Nurmekund at the Estonian Literary Museum and for Lotman at the Tartu University Library.
Moreover, both were successful family men, who by the end of their lives came to live comfortably in houses in the most respectable part of town (Tähtvere), with devoted and accomplished wives (both Zara Mintz and Erna Ariste were scholars in their own right) and model families, which would no doubt be called “bourgeois” if this were not the Soviet Union. Lotman had three children: Mikhail (b. 1953), Grisha (b), and Aleksei (b.1960), or “Lodu” as he was affectionately known by his classmates at the Estonian highschool he attended.\footnote{Lauri Vahtre was one of Aleksei’s classmates, and remembered “Lodu” fondly as someone who would always give a hard time to their Russian teachers, who usually happened to be Yuri Lotman’s former students. As the great Professor’s son he knew his Russian literature backwards and forwards and did not let them get away with anything.} Paul Ariste had two: Marju-Ilona and Andri (1935-1995), one of Tartu’s first computer scientists. But Ariste also became a father and grandfather figure to the entire neighborhood. He was famous for dispensing unsolicited advice on childrearing to his neighbors. The teacher, Ireen Toomla (1953-2012) recalled how she was already nearing puberty by the time she found out that Ariste was not her real grandfather. At one point he took the neighborhood children on a tour of his house based on the Estonian National Epic Kalevipoeg. It was full of books and things connected to the hero of Estonian folklore. But the most exotic exposition—which really captured the imaginations of the children—was a bottle in the basement, which Ariste explained contained a fart of the hero of the Estonian national epic, Kalevipoeg. “What kind of epic smell this fart may have carried remained a mystery to the children, since they were forbidden to remove the cork from the bottle.”\footnote{“Millise vägislisliku lõhnaga see punks oli, jäi lastel teadmata, sest korki ei tohtinud pudeli pealt ära võtta,” “Paul Ariste pradis härjasilma triikrauaga,” Postimees, February 3, 2005.} When he died in 1990, he was buried in the spirit of the Russian Orthodox faith, and Toomla remembered that it seemed as if Ariste, an inveterate trickster, were playing a final joke on the Communist Party: “I got the feeling in the auditorium of the University, that this was grandfather’s final prank: the entire Party and Leadership stood there for about two hours by the coffin, holding candles.”\footnote{“mul oli aulas tunne, et see on vanaisa viimane vemp: kogu partei ja valitsus seisis seal penaegu kaks tundi viirukisuitsu sees, küünlad pihus”}

Naturally charismatic, both men had the ability to strike up a conversation with almost anyone (though a certain endemic reserve or shyness and the rules of engagement in Soviet Tartu kept them from doing so as much as they might have in another town or place). They became the embodiment and figure-heads for the Russian and Estonian intelligentsia of Tartu respectively. It did not seem to matter that Paul Ariste was known for “preferring men” (the term gay would be anachronistic in this social and cultural context) and an adherent of the Russian Orthodox faith or that Yuri Lotman was Jewish; in postwar Tartu Paul Ariste could represent Estonian family values and the Finno-Ugric spirit just as easily as Lotman could be a latter day Pushkin representing the values of an authentic aristocratic Russian literary culture.

Posthumously each of these scholars came to embody the essence of Tartu University as a whole for his admirers, and each in his own way was remembered as a tragic victim of the Soviet state. (KGB searched Lotman's apartment in 1970; Ariste had been arrested by the NKVD in 1945 and he tried to commit suicide while in prison). In their lifetime, they competed for priority at the head of Tartu University's bifurcated philological establishment, which—in the absence of a meaningful form of Marxist-Leninist spirituality—came to embody, for the Soviet period at least that elusive nineteenth-century Tartu value—at once more provincial and more cosmopolitan than that of any nation or state: Tartu vaim (the Tartu spirit).
7.3.1 The Divide Between the Estonian and the Russian Departments

The polarizing divisions that structured life in Soviet Tartu were especially apparent in the divide between the Departments of Russian and Estonian Philology at Tartu University. For the Department of Russian Literature, Rector Fedor Klement (a Russified Estonian from Leningrad and Professor of Physics) was a great hero, even something of a saint.\textsuperscript{1055} Two series of publications in the Transactions of Tartu University helped to create the Soviet and eventually global reputation of Yuri Lotman’s Department of Russian Literature: (1) *Trudy po russkoi i slavianskoi filologii* (a journal of Russian and Slavic Studies) established in 1958, and (2) *Trudy po znakovym sistemam* (*Sign System Studies*), Lotman’s famous journal of Semiotics, established in 1964 with the publication of Lotman’s first semiotic monograph, *Lectures in Structural Poetics*. It was largely through Klement’s support that these publications became possible in the first place. And Klement, who seemed to value important scholarship above all else, encouraged and promoted Lotman’s department in any way he could. However, as Yuri Lotman’s close friend and predecessor as the chair of the Department of Russian Literature, Boris Egorov, observed in his biography of Yuri Lotman, local Estonians never really warmed up to Klement. Egorov provided a concise account of Estonian culture and its cool reception of Rector Fedor Klement:

The local University community by and large did not, alas, embrace Klement with open arms. They appreciated his fast progress in the Estonian language, and his mastery of local customs. Having been raised on German formality, Estonians scrupulously follow the pettiest rules and regulations, a fact that can sometimes be very nice (for example, it is impossible to imagine a collision at the door or a crowd storming a bus), sometimes painfully funny (for example, if you happen to encounter someone even three minutes after first making his acquaintance, you must say hello again, lowering your hat to your belt, up to a thousand times in a single day), and sometimes disgustingly bourgeois and hierarchical (I was told, for example, that it is not seemly for a dotsent to be seen entering a store with a shopping basket: household purchases are women’s business). Klement’s pedantry in matters of everyday life pleased the locals, but they did not like his Saint Petersburg ancestry and upbringing, his complete lack of anti-Russian nationalism, or the scholarly and human support he gave our department. Klement remained for them a “foreigner.”\textsuperscript{1056}

\textsuperscript{1055} Klement arrived in 1951 to take over the reins from Hans Kruus’s hand-picked successor, the interwar Philosopher, Alfred Koort (1945-1950). Like Valmar Adams and Paul Ariste, Alfred Koort had belonged to the Tartu University’s interwar Estonian Student Society Veljesto. He was Estonia’s leading philosopher, known more for his translations of Western philosophy—from Dewey to Dilthey—than for any original work of his own; nonetheless, he had played a crucial role in cultivating an Estonian vocabulary for Western philosophy. Never a member of the Party himself, Koort had been forced to humiliate himself by publishing retractions of his earlier views in the late 1940s. Klement had largely positive impressions of his predecessor and many Estonians respected Klement for his humility in asking for local guidance in running the University, rather than heavy-handedly imposing the will of Moscow.

\textsuperscript{1056} “Mestnaia universitetskaia publika v masse svoei otnosilas’ k Klementu, uvy, sderzhanno. Otsenila ego bystrooe vxozhdenie v sfedu estonskogo iazyka, da i mestnyx obychaev. Vospitanie na nemetskom, estontsy skrupuleznno sleduyl samym melochnym reglamentatsiyam, kotoryye inoga ochen’ udobny (naprimer, tam nevozmozhno predstavit’ stolknovenie vstrechnykh v dveriakh ili tolpu, shturnuushchuiu avtobus), inogda tiagostno smeshny (naprimer, dazhe esli tri minuty spustia posle pervogo privetstvii ty vsretel’sia s chelovekom , nada opiat’ zdorovat’ia, opuskaia golovnoi ubor do poiasa, tak khot’ tysyachu raz v den’), a inogda otvratitel’ny meshchanskoj
While moderately critical of some of the specifically Estonian aspects of Klement’s character (his rule-bound pedantry, for example), Egorov’s hagiographic biography of Yuri Lotman was peppered with equally hagiographic expressions of “eternal gratitude to Klement” for the support he gave the Department of Literature.  And as Egorov aptly observed, while Klement may have been respected in the Estonian speaking community for his modesty, scholarship, and lack of arrogance—indeed many Estonians remembered how he had respected the local spirit of the University by asking locals how things were done in Tartu (instead of heavy-handedly imposing the will of Moscow)—he was never really loved.

For “fairness sake,” Egorov drew up a list of the exceptions - i.e. “good” Estonians, who did not get in the way of the Department of Russian Literature, and even proved somewhat helpful at times, like the Dean of the Faculty, Andres Pärl. Pärl, the author of a “slim book” on Aesthetics, was a man also praised as “good-natured” in the memoirs of Leonid Stolovich. Then there was the Librarian E. Vigel, and the old psychologist Konstantin Ramul (1879-1975), who had been educated in pre-Revolutionary Saint Petersburg, and impressed the members of the Department of Russian Literature with his old-fashioned, refined command of the Russian language. To Tartu’s newly imported Soviet intelligentsia he seemed the relic of a lost though familiar world. Another such figure—almost twenty years younger—was the member of the editorial board of the Publications of Tartu University, Richard Kleis (1896-1982). He had also studied in pre-Revolutionary Petrograd and had edited the interwar Estonian Encyclopedia. Under his direction, the Estonian Encyclopedia had been a work “without a single typographical error.” Egorov introduced this point as yet another example of Estonian pedantry, adding that “[Kleis] was a true nationalist, but without any arrogance or malice towards ‘foreigners.’”

By contrast, the associate professor (dotsent) of Estonian literature and folklore, Eduard Laugaste—who ran the editorial board for the Transactions of Tartu University—was one of the great villains of the Soviet Estonian establishment. According to Egorov, Laugaste did his best to thwart their efforts to get any of their works into print:

Not particularly productive himself, he clearly hated our department, and greeted every article for the faculty collection with antagonism and reservations, taking time to read and obsess over details, sending our texts back for revisions. It seems he was distinguished by his nationalistic anti-Russian temperament…. One can imagine his surprise and anger when he learned that we had been allocated an entire volume!
The tensions between the Estonian and Russian Departments surfaced several times in Yuri Lotman’s correspondence with Egorov as well. On September 18, 1966, Lotman wrote to Egorov in Leningrad about the recent summer school of Russian philologists at the University’s rural athletic complex in Kääriku, a favorite academic getaway for many different departments and scholarly circles. They vied for the right and opportunity to organize conferences there. Lotman reported: “Kääriku caused a major explosion of envy and bad humor from [Paul] Ariste and others. God be with them.”

Half a year later in February of 1967 Lotman sent Egorov an account of a the meeting of the editorial board of the Transactions of Tartu University that had taken place that same day. It had “practically given him a heart attack.” He went into detail: “Our friend Laugaste brought all our publications to one meeting and put on a show on the theme of how all the university’s paper is being consumed by the venelased [Russians].”

Summarizing the outcome of the struggle, Lotman counted the department’s losses: several plans for publications came to naught. “In the midst of the struggle [Paul] Ariste [had] blurted out: ‘What are we fighting about anyway—Lotman will just go to the rector and everything will go his way!’” In the end, a few articles and publications currently in the works got put on hold or eliminated. Lotman worried that it was going to be embarrassing to inform the professor Russian literature at Moscow State University, Marietta Chudakova (b. 1937), that she was not going to see her article in print; plans for the publication of works by more controversial Russian voices like Pasternak and Natalia Gorbanevskaya’s got dropped as well. “So that’s the way it is… These are our losses.”

The idea that Ariste might be a KGB agent was hinted at subtly in Lotman’s correspondence with Egorov when he mentioned that “the noise, caused by Ariste and S, is slowly diminishing.” But after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Egorov could spell out these suspicions more explicitly, providing this 1995 gloss to Lotman’s letter from 1966:

Ariste, a famous Estonian academic-linguist, was envious of Yuri [Lotman] in connection with the attention he received for his semiotic studies and the collections with linguists from around the entire world; it is not impossible, that his 'ironic' conversations on the verge of denunciations were connected to a desire to humiliate [Lotman] and the department of Russian literature of TSU, on behalf of the non-academic organs [of the University and State].

otlichalsia natsionalisticheskim antirusskimi nastroeniami, no, vprochem, prizimal svoikh nauchno produktivnykh soplemenennikov.” Egorov, Zhizn’, 82.

1062 “Kääriku vyzvalo ogromnyi vzryv zavisti i nedobrozhelatel'stva so storony Ariste i dr. Nu, da bog s nimi.” Lotman letter to Boris Egorov September 18, 1966—in Pis’ma, 196.

1063 “Nash drug Laugaste sboral na odno zasedanie vse sborniki … i ustroil spektakl’ na temu: vsiu bumagu universiteta sozhrali venelased.” February 23, 1967—Pis’ma, 201

1064 “Ne udalos’ ostoiat’ Chudakova i Pasternaka, xotia ia i leg na puzo! … Uzhas’no neudobno pered Chudakovoi, kotoraiia i tak na nas duetsia.”

1065 “V samyi razgar draki Ariste brosil: ‘Da chto my tut sporim—vse ravno Lotman skhodit k rektoru i vsego dob’et’sia!’ Tak-to… Takovy nashi poteri. Uzhasno neudobno pered Chudakovoi, kotoraiia I tak na nas duetsia. .” Pis’ma, 201.

1066 “Shum, vyvzvanny Ariste i s0, potixon’ku smolkaet.” Lotman, Pis’ma, 476.

1067 “Ariste, izvestnyi estonski akademik-lingvist, ‘revoval’ k Lu. M. v sviazi so vnaniem k semioticshkim sshtudiam i sbornikam lingvistov vsego mira; ne isklucheno, chto ego ‘ironicheskie’ razgovory na grani donosov byli sviazany i s pozhelemi unizit’ Lu. M. i kafedru russkoi literatury TGU, iskhodivshim so storony nekikh nenauchnykh organov.” Pis’ma, 477.
So this is how things looked from the perspective of Tartu’s Department of Russian Literature: a few ethnically Estonian (but linguistically Russian) allies like Fedor Klement supporting the Department in its Summer Schools and innovative publications; a few overtly nationalistic Estonian professors and instructors of Estonian Philology, like Eduard Laugaste, doing their best to foil their efforts; and a few bitter and envious establishment figures like Professor Paul Ariste lurking in the wings as KGB agents, seeking to humiliate Lotman and his embattled department at the behest of the organs of State Security.1068

Things looked a bit different when viewed through the lens of the Estonian language. Some of the villainous agents of the state in the Russian narrative suddenly turned in translation into Estonian into symbols of resistance and independence. A journalist and graduate of the Tartu’s Department of Estonian Philology, Pekka Erelt (b. 1965) remembered two of his Instructors with particular fondness:

In the Summer of 1984, when we boys were taken from Tartu and forced into military service, two professors accompanied us [to the train station]- Ariste and the scholar of Estonian folklore, Eduard Laugaste. Ariste wrote me letters throughout my two year ordeal. In his first letter he wished me patience, but stressed: ‘Bear in mind, that you are an Estonian from Estonia,’ just as he had born this in mind his entire life, even in the most difficult of times.1069

Even the English instructor, Oleg Mutt, who esteemed Yuri Lotman as a “true professor” (a term he reserved for precious few), remembered Eduard Laugaste fondly. Oleg’s son, the writer and student of Estonian philology Mihkel (b. 1953), had been in Laugaste’s course on Estonian folklore in the 1970s: “He was relaxed, a bit resigned, sometimes he was prone to irritated outbursts. My father knew that he was a wonderful mimic. Unfortunately, this was not something I ever got the opportunity to see. He took us, like all freshman, to the Kreutzwald house museum in Võru.”1070

Daniel Palgi’s extensive, precise, and sober account (filled with exact figures, dates, times, and sums) of his relations with the Russian-speaking establishment of Tartu University composed mostly in the early 1960s provides an interesting counterpoint to Boris Egorov’s hagiography of Fedor Klement. Daniel Palgi (1899-1988) had been a former student of the Estonian poets Gustav Suits and Friedeberht Tuglas in interwar Estonia. After the War he avoided

1068 Absent from this vision of the department were the hidden acts of support and generosity for Lotman and his scholarly endeavors: While in Tallinn, Ariste sent Lotman several telegrams informing him of the arrival and wearabouts of various scholars, like the Hungarian-American Semiotician, Thomas Sebeok. In fact, it was Ariste, who put Sebeok in contact with Lotman in the first place, and by Sebeok’s account at least, staged an elaborate ruse to help smuggle various articles of Lotman and his colleagues out of the country in Sebeok’s suitcase. 1069 “Suvel 1984, kui poisse järjekordselt Tartust kroonitse viidi, tulid meid saatma kaks professorit—Ariste ja rahvaluuleteadlane Eduard Laugaste. Ariste saatis mulle ka kirju kogu selle kaheaastase sundpuhkuse väljel. Oma esimeses kirjas soovis ta kannatlikku meelt, aga rõhutas: ‘Pea meees, et oled eestlane Eestimaalt.’” Pekka Erelt, “Mees, kes sai nime maakaardilt,” Eesti Ekspress, February 3, 2005.


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membership in the Communist Party, though for a few years in the late 1940s he had been the acting director of Tartu’s *Keele ja kirjanduse instituut* (Language and Literature Institute), which sought to bring Estonian literature into line with Soviet literary standards. In this capacity, he participated in a few tepid attacks on bourgeois Estonian literature, and these may have been on his conscience, and part of the inspiration for writing his memoirs a decade later as a very precise chronicle of Soviet absurdities and the Russification of Tartu University. His aim, in his own words, had been to remain “a good Estonian,” despite the vexed nature of the times. Like a great many other figures of his generation in the Estonian bureaucracy and intelligentsia, Palgi lost his well-paid position as the head of the Language and Literature Institute in the purges of 1950. These were the same ideological purges that created places in the upper echelons of the academic and administrative hierarchies of Soviet Estonia and Tartu University for Russian-speaking imports from the Soviet Union like Boris Egorov, Fedor Klement, Leonid Stolovich, Rem Blum, and Yuri Lotman himself.

Palgi finally found employment as an informal assistant to Tartu University’s Prorector of Science Eduard Martinson, but also to Martinson’s immediate superior, Rector Klement. Formally he was made a researcher (*laborant*) in the Department of Chemistry, where he never set foot. Part of Tartu’s uniqueness in a Soviet context was its capacity to get away with deceptions and manipulations of this kind. But the fear of being found out led to Palgi’s formal transfer to the Department of Estonian Philology the next year, where nobody would know that the job he was getting paid for did not match the job he was actually doing. According to Palgi, a Moscow University Prorector got caught and punished for precisely this kind of ruse a year or two later. Working as an assistant to the Russian Prorectors of Science at Tartu University—first the paranoid Eduard Martinson and later Alexander Moskvin—but at the same time to Fedor Klement for nearly a decade, he had the opportunity to observe the interactions of the Russian-speaking leadership of Tartu University first hand. He was every bit as precise, nationalistic, and aloof from official Soviet discourse as the itinerant wanderer Jaan Roos in his chronicle of Sovietization as Russification. But just as Jaan Roos was the eyes and ears of the periphery and background of Tartu’s social and intellectual environment in the first decade after the Second World War, Daniel Palgi was the eyes and ears of the center and foreground of academic power in the 1950s.

Palgi got his job in the Rector’s office when he answered an announcement posted on October 7, 1951 in the Tartu Newspaper *Edasi* (formerly *Postimees*). From the moment of their first encounter Palgi was suspicious and skeptical of Klement. He recorded his first impressions of Klement in detail:

> From behind the desk a tall, gangling man heaved himself up, and stepped several steps to greet me by the outer corner of the table. This is Leningrad courtesy, I thought. The way he rose to his feet made me think that he did this despite himself, showing it to be

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1073 Officially Palgi was with the Chemistry Department. Later this position was shifted in 1952 to the Estonian Philology Department out of fear that the organs of state, party, or security would catch up with this deception as had happened in Moscow: “Aasta või hiljem karistati sihukese teo pärast Moskva Riikliku Ülikooli teadusala prorektorit ja ta pidi omast taskust vanemlaborandi palga riigile tagantjärele tasuma.” Palgi, *Murduvas maailmas*, 307.
degrading to him, but still at the same time demonstratively making a show of his effort. But the number of steps he took to come greet me was a surprise. This was indeed Leningrad courtesy it turned out, and it was part of F. Klement’s nature: he would do this time and again, I would see over the course of several years and it became an object of conversation among the university instructors.

Palgi added: “Our conversation of course transpired in Russian. The Estonian University’s new rector had arrived that same summer from Leningrad) was according to his papers an Estonian, but did not speak the language.”

It became clear at the time of his interview already that Klement was looking for a native speaker who could help culturally and linguistically with the Estonian community.

And Palgi’s suspicion and skepticism only deepened over the long decade of their professional acquaintance. Over the years, for the sake of appearances, Klement made some kind of effort to learn Estonian, but Palgi was not impressed: “In the beginning F. Klement was entirely a monolingual Russian-speaker.” In his first public address to the University he promised that “in the future he would address the University in Estonian.” Still, when he issued a statement a year later on June 7, 1952 in the University Newspaper it was still written in Russian—which could not help but attract attention as a foreign intrusion into this otherwise Estonian-language newspaper. While Palgi noted that Klement’s competence improved considerably, “Klement never really made much of an effort to become an Estonia speaker.” What bothered Palgi, it seems, more than Klement’s competence was his attitude: “He emphasized a few times the importance of the Russian language: this would bring us to the top level of world of scholarship. Let us learn! But the Estonian language? Well, this was more for the sake of keeping up appearances.”

For all his nationalism, Palgi was not indiscriminantly antagonistic to all Russians or Russian-speakers. Indeed, he was quite fond of Alexander Moskvin, the Professor of Chemistry and later Prorector of Science who replaced Eduard Martinson in 1954, after Martinson’s Stalinist paranoia forced him to withdraw from the administration of the University. (Martinson stayed on as professor of biochemistry but committed suicide in 1963 in his office during a departmental election, convinced that everyone at the university had turned against him; he was probably right. Like most paranoia, this one turned out to be something of a self-fulfilling prophecy). Palgi developed an immediate bond with Moskvin: “We spoke of anything and

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1076 “Meie jutuajamine toimis vene keeles. Eesti ülikooli värskre rector (ta oli samal suvel Leningradist tulnud) oli muidugi paberite järgi eestlane, kuid eesti keelt ta ei rääkinud” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 306.

1077 Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 331.

1078 “Ei olnud märgata, et F. Klement ise oleks pingutanud, et eesikeelseks sada. See polnud nähtavasti mingi eriti tähtis küsimus. Ta rõhutas mõnikord, kuivورد tähtis on vene keele valdamine: see viib maaima kõige väärtuslikumaa teaduselavade juurde. Õppigem! Kuid eesti keelt? Noh, see oli rohkem väljanägemise pärast.” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 368.

1079 Interview with Heino Noor by the author, the doctor who treated Martinson and was the last person to see him alive. Noor had taken classes with Martinson before. Noor understands Estonia’s relationship to Russia in the Soviet Union in terms of the “Stockholm Syndrome”—the traumatic identification of a victim with his oppressor. June 2009.
It helped that unlike Klement or Martinson, Moskvin was not a Party member. It helped that he was an eminent scientist but not a careerist: he had grown tired of heading secret laboratories in Moscow with armed guards standing at the door, and had applied for a place in Tartu through his friend and colleague Fedor Klement. But unlike Klement, Moskvin had a generally skeptical attitude toward the Soviet Union. He had even lived, studied, and worked in the United States in 1937 (a good year to be away), gave Palgi to read the American “Russian-language” journal about the United States—the existence of which “most ordinary citizens were not even aware”—and explained the culture of Soviet Moscow to Palgi as a great big casino; apparently three-fourths of the inhabitants speculated with their earnings. None of these facts about Moskvin elicited the slightest suspicion for Palgi (how for example did Moskvin get to the United States in 1937?). Rather they earned his trust. For what mattered most of all—and trumped all the other considerations—was Moskvin’s attitude toward Estonian language and culture:

When Moskvin arrived in Tartu, he already knew a little Estonian; he had learned the language. And he continued his studies. He even seemed genuinely interested in the language. Every month he spoke better, and within a year he even conversed with some in Estonian. He made an effort. In this he would be a good example to our pajuvenelased (“Willow Russians”—i.e. Russified ethnic Estonians—DB).

This last line was direct criticism of Fedor Klement. What was most frustrating about Klement was his lack of regard for the Estonian language as a language of culture or science. Palgi was not the only one to notice this. The Mathematics Professor, Ülo Lepik, remembered going to Klement to see about getting two assistants to help develop precise Estonian-language scientific and scholarly terminology: “The Rector refused: for such an empty thing like Estonian-language terminology he was not about to waste good minds.”

Indeed, one of the deepest rifts between Russian born and educated ethnic Estonians and their Estonian-born counterparts was their attitude toward the language of the future: Russian-born Estonians seemed to have no fear of the idea that Estonian language would disappear one day. Indeed this attitude can be found in the writings of several other Russian-born members of the titular Estonian Soviet elite as well (see for example, Gustav Naan, Viktor Maamägi, and Hilda Moosberg). In the grand scheme of the universe, the Estonian language was a temporary ethnographic oddity. And though Rector Fedor Klement may never have expressed this point of view in so many words it could easily be extrapolated from his attitudes and behaviors in everyday life:

The language the Rector spoke at home was Russian. He brought his son from Leningrad but there was a Russian section in TSU’s medical faculty, and he studied among Russians. Klement was very affectionate with his little grandson and spoiled him, but only spoke Russian to him and did not even try to teach him Estonian. It was,
furthermore, known, that some Estonian Bolsheviks had taught their children Russian and even put their children (on purpose) in Russian schools: so that they would later have it easier in life and could make a career. Exactly like the Juniper Germans (kadakasaksasd) [i.e. Estonians trying to become German—DB] of the XIX century!)1084

The fact that Yuri Lotman and Zara Mints put their children in Estonian-schools (Lauri Vahtre and Alexei Lotman were highschool classmates at Tartu’s 2nd Highschool, an Estonian school with an English-language bent), probably did more than any other single act to earn the belated respect and admiration of the Estonian intelligentsia.

For all his skepticism about Klement as a Russifier, Palgi could still respect Rector Fedor Klement as a defender of the idea of the high culture of the University. He recorded one episode in detail concerning the University’s own series of scholarly publication:

The Rector became curious about what had happened to the Estonian-era Transactions of Tartu University. He even sent me to investigate. And that is when we discovered their sad fate: [the Librarian Mikhail] Syshchikov [1911-1980] had let them be chopped up by ax and then sent to the paper factory. The Rector was furious. Unable to contain himself at the next meeting of the Learned Committee he exclaimed: ‘And in our midst is someone, who sent the Transactions to the chopping block!’1085

The destruction of interwar Estonian culture was an act interpreted by most Estonians in national terms as evidence of the low level of Russian-Soviet culture, and intolerant radicalism when it came to all alternative modes of life and thought from those explicitly endorsed by the state. Klement had behaved like a Russian in his inability to contain himself (lack of self-discipline was a feature of Russian national character according to Estonian national stereotypes), but he had at least shown himself to be an advocate of true culture here. He earned the respect of locals for his commitment to true culture, even if he had no great interest in specifically Estonian-speaking high culture, and even if this act did not cost him (or Syshchikov) anything and did nothing to change the situation. After all, as Palgi explained “Syshchikov was a State Security Agent and nobody could budge him. He had fulfilled his assignment, end of story. Syshchikov’s job in the Library was just as secure as Klement’s position as University Rector.”1086

But there were limits to Klement’s culture. Palgi had it from Alma Kurg, the head of the Rector’s staff (Kantsileiülem), that Klement’s doctorate had been awarded last-minute in Leningrad, so that he could assume the post of Rector in Tartu, all for the sake of keeping up

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1086 “Sõstsikov oli julgeolekus ja mujal teenetega mees ning teda ei kõigutanud keegi. Ta oli täitnud ülesannet, mis riik temalt ootas, ja kõik. Sõstsikov oli pearaamatu kogus niisama kindlasti tool kui Klement rektoraadis.” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 343.
appearances: this too was part of the deep hypocrisy of the Soviet experiment as understood by its newly incorporated Estonians. The Soviet Union needed Klement, because he was “an Estonian on paper, but a Russian in truth.” If the Soviet Tartu was in essence a Potemkin village, as many believed it to be (Palgi used this metaphor explicitly), then its nationalities policy was also part of the deception by which appearances were used to conceal the truth. Klement was just part of the overall hypocrisy of the state.

This sense of hypocrisy was further deepened by the personal scandals surrounding Klement’s character. Indeed, the Estonian-speaking world of Tartu also had serious reservations about him on the basis of his behavior in everyday life. He had a history of romantic entanglements (naistega seiklusi—literally: “adventures with women”—DB). And these entanglements followed him to Tartu. Indeed one of these “young Russian women could be read from her outward behavior at least as Klement’s lover. She visited him in his office at strange hours in the evening. Made scenes. She waited for him in the hallways of the building and when Klement arrived they left together. These were the facts that inspired all the talk.” According to local Estonian-language rumors (for the world of local rumors was somewhat segregated by language), the situation had even led to censure by the Party: “This too was investigated. Klement apparently had four women and for this the Party had called him in to give account of himself, and afterward to discipline him. The woman, with whom he lived in Tartu was the first: the Party had put him back together with her.” In other words, Klement personal life was so out of control that he needed the Communist Party to arrange his morals for him.

Nor did it help that he could be heavy-handed, demanding and even brutish; treating the University as if it were his personal kingdom according to Palgi: “He was unkind to his inferiors: several times he drove his female assistants to tears.” According to Mathematics Professor Úlo Lepik (1928) he was by nature “choleric. He angered easily and spoke harshly,” and had a reputation for the firm belief that “it is impossible to make progress without cursing.” Upon one occasion Lepik remembered falling victim to Klement’s bad temper and strident outbursts; he had come to the defence a secretary Klement was telling off in his office, only to be told by Klement: “Shut up while I am talking with my employee! (Te olge vait, kui ma oma töötajaga räägin).” Klement took advantage of his power over his secretaries and assistants, especially a certain M. Põdra. Once when she had dared to suggest that it might be difficult to get ahold of all the Estonian Philologists at that moment because they were attending a Conference in town, Palgi remembered how Klement had “drawn himself up [like a bull]…, and lowering his head (as if preparing his horns for a charge) and said between clenched teeth in a threatening tone… : ‘well get them yourself or send your mother—they have to be here.’” This was a painful reference to Põdra’s 83-year old mother, who was on her deathbed at the time. M. Põdra and her husband had been arrested during the Soviet repressions; he had been executed and she and her child had been deported somewhere beyond the Caspian Sea. Klement had

1087 “paberite järgi oli eestlane ja tõelislt venelane.” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 322.
1088 Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 324.
1089 “Ka see uurivälja, et Klementil oli olnud neli naist ja parties oli ta seepärast laua ette aru andma kutsutud ning pärast aurandmist korrale kutsutud. See naine, kellega ta Tartus oli, olevat olnud ühtlasi ka esimene: partei oli ta sellega jälle paari pannud.” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 225.
1091 Lepik, Tartu, 112.
1092 Lepik, Tartu, 113.
1093 Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 325.
taken her into employment because she spoke both good Estonian and Russian (on account of her life among Russians during her internal exile). Moreover, she was “a refined lady—intelligent, with good manners, quick. The Rector did her a good turn. And for this he could exploit her. And the mere fact that he was dealing with an enemy of the state, well, for this he had to squeeze her a bit from time to time.” This passage, like so much of Palgi’s narrative is composed in an free indirect style, i.e. speaking from a particular point of view of a character without explicit attribution (like the text of Flaubert’s Madame Bovary).

If Boris Egorov found Estonian attitudes about gender relations “disgustingly bourgeois,” Estonians found Russian attitudes toward women highly uncivilized: “There were those who had heard and seen how [Klement] treated his own wife like a brute—would curse her for the slightest infraction. Like a great master.” All this, as Daniel Palgi explained, was part of a venerable old Russian tradition: “Already the old Domostroi [16th century Russian guide to running a household] teaches us that a man must be a severe master to his wife, and sometimes needed even to ‘sokrushat’ rebra,’ i.e. beat her so as to crush her ribs. Otherwise she’d go bad.” Reports from eyewitnesses that Rector Klement would curse his wife over the phone from his office in the presence of strangers, telling her to “shut up, and do as you are told!” did not improve his standing in the Estonian community. This was not something that Boris Egorov or the Department of Russian Literature seemed to notice. Or maybe the Russian language insulated them against this side of Klement’s character? What really mattered to them, after all, was that Fedor Klement was so supportive of Yuri Lotman and his Department of Russian Literature, never mind how he treated anyone else.

But the most important source of discontent on the Estonian-speaking side of things was the double-standard when it came to publications in the Estonian and Russian languages, the comparative ease with which Russian publications made their way into print and the extensive obstacles faced by anything in the Estonian language. To the newly Sovietized Estonians, still learning how to speak Bolshevik in the 1950s, ideological obstacles often came as a surprise. Palgi remembered how a modest volume of student writings (Transactions #47) was delayed significantly and eventually cancelled, because of an article that bore the title, “Dining Services for University Students in Tartu and Their Recovery.” This article turned out to be inappropriate and ideologically incorrect “because it was not permitted to show that there was anything wrong with the dining services at Tartu University. Everything had to be going well at the very least.” For Palgi, this was yet another piece of evidence for the essentially hypocritical nature of Soviet state, using scholarship to conceal rather than reveal the truth.

Nothing was subjected to more intense scrutiny than Estonian national culture. And Palgí’s memoirs give a good sense of the way this inequality was perceived from an Estonian perspective. While Lotman’s Department managed to publish back-to-back journals in 1958 and 1959 with the sponsorship of Fedor Klement, the Estonian Departments had to fight tooth and nail over the course of four years to get even one publication in connection with the Estonian National Epic, Kalevipoeg, into print. The first attempt was made in connection with the 150th birthday of its author, Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald. Dotsent Eduard Laugaste was the principal initiator of the effort to publish an annotated edition of the Estonian National Epic. The

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1095 Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 325.

printing house had accepted it. The manuscript was ready in 1954. But then complications began to appear. The publication got hung up on account of two lines in particular in the original nineteenth-century manuscript. They inspired controversy because that is where “some critical things were written about Russians. That’s where the dog was buried! (kus räägitakse halvasti venelastest. Koer oli maetud just sinnal)”

All the forces of the state and university were mobilized to deal with these two lines: the Printing house debated the question; the University debated it; the Central Committee of Estonia’s Communist Party debated it. Finally it was decided that “these anti-Russian sentences had to be left out and the omission would be indicated by three dots.” At the same time, it was agreed that the revision should be made in such a way that nobody would know the real reason for which the omission occurred. And then after all these efforts, on January 15th 1955 came the decree from above: “to be destroyed, not to be published.”

A few years later in 1957 the Departments of Estonian Philology made a second effort to get something on the Estonian National Epic into print though not without a scene from Rector Klement. The heated altercation that ensued between Daniel Palgi and Klement brought all the tensions between the position of Russian and Estonian culture at Tartu University to the surface. This time the occasion was the 100th anniversary of the original publication of the epic. Back in the nineteenth century, getting Kalevipoeg past the German-Russian censors had been a major task. (This may explain why the villains in the epic are Finns and “mighty” Laplanders rather than Russians or Germans). And Palgi observed that the Soviet Union had only made life more difficult for Estonian national culture than it had been in the nineteenth-century.

Palgi needed to negotiate this publication with Klement in person. He waited for nearly an entire day outside Klement’s door while the Rector dealt with more important academic matters. (His scheduled appointment got skipped on account of an unexpected visitor from Tallinn). When Palgi finally got an audience, Klement was in a bad mood and immediately began voicing objections; to his relief, Palgi managed to answer them. But Klement would not sign the approval form until after he had conferred with Eduard Laugaste to make sure that the content of the volume was up to rigorous ideological Soviet standards. It was agreed that Palgi and Laugaste would meet with the rector the following day. Palgi would come first at 2pm to go over formal matters; Laugaste would meet him to discuss content thereafter. In the evening, however, Palgi and Laugaste saw each other and they decided to reverse their appointments. Laugaste would go first, and Palgi second. It was more convenient and made more sense that way: first to deal with substantive matters, then formal ones.

When Palgi stepped into Klement’s office the following day after Laugaste, Klement was livid: “It’s hard to work with a colleague, when you don’t trust what he is up to.” He wanted know why they had reversed their appointments without telling him and began dredging up incidents from the past, suspecting Palgi “of anti-Soviet activity.” Was this some kind of Estonian conspiracy? Indeed, now Klement brought up an earlier incident where Palgi had tried

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1097 “need venevaenulisid read jätta välja, märkida punktiiriga, samuti talitada paar ebatsensuurse sõnaga ja siis ei saaks keegi vääta, et just venelaste pärast on lühendadud. Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 450.
1099 “Mõlesin: ‘Kalevipoeg’ jääb jälle kitsasse väravasse kinni—100 aastat pärast seda, kui ta võtis sakslasest tsensori kitsas väravas.” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 452.
1100 “jutt algas nii, nagu mõni aeg tagasi, mil ta mind süüdistas riigivärvuses ja praegune ähvardav toon peaaegu ütles: lahti ma su sindri lasen. Peas käis moti läbi: seda ta ei unusta, varem või hiljem ta mu lahti laseb. Kas juba lähemal ajal?” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 450
to deceive him. Allegedly he had tried to change the wording in the Estonian translation of something that Klement had written in Russian:

[Palgi] asked: what is it that I have done that is so bad? [Klement] answered: you changed the idea. I tried to explain: that part was so awkward, I wanted to make it sound more natural. I didn’t dare say: he had spoken there like a Russian, and I wanted to make it sound more Estonian. …. But this was apparently a sneaky device, to dupe him. (By the way, the sentence was expressed in the affirmative, while any Estonian would have used a negative grammatical construction, even though the concept was positive.) I wanted to get back to the real issue at hand and explained that I hadn’t changed anything in the Kalevipoeg articles, that I had only made marginal comments, which the editor in charge and authors could take or leave as they deemed fit.\footnote{1101}

But the “rector was not about to give up.”\footnote{1102} And this time he brought up the issue of Transactions #47, which had been cancelled. Was it not strange that the review of the article on account of which the entire issue was cancelled had gone missing? “Somebody had set things up in such a way so as to ensure that a faulty and uncontrolled article should go to print. (This of course had to be me! Enemy of the State!).”\footnote{1103} But the Rector was relentless. Finally, he demanded:

“Do you swear that there is nothing ideological incorrect in the articles on Kalevipoeg?” (Almost as if: we’re going to hang you anyway!). What to do? How did I know? Confidently I answered: “Yes, I swear.” With a grand gesture he took the order form and signed it. As if he were doing me a favor:\footnote{1104}

During his tenure as the Rector’s assistant, Palgi felt like he was constantly on the brink of losing his job. But he held on to his position as long as was necessary to receive his pension. In dealing with the publication of the Russian philologists as well as Estonian ones, he got to observe the double standard first hand:

It was natural that in questions of Estonian culture there would always be problems. A wholly different attitude emerged, when we dealt with Russian cultural questions: in those cases nobody was afraid that there might be something ideologically incorrect—


\footnote{1102} “rektor ei mõtelnud järel e anda.”

\footnote{1103} “Keegi on nii seadnud, et halb ja kontrollimata artikkel läks trükkki. (See pidi olema muidugi mina! Riigivastani)” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 452.

Russian nationalism was allowed to appear, in fact it had to appear in the name of patriotism, Estonian nationalism, however, was the sworn enemy of the state.  

Here, once again Palgi found himself in an escalating altercation with Rector Klement that was in its essence a national struggle.  Palgi noted how Rector Klement approved the Russian journals without any of the tedious review he imposed upon Estonian writings.  He merely “wrote with his high and authoritative hand, ‘Prepare an order.’” He sent it to Palgi.  Appalled by the Rector’s high-handed attitude, Palgi drew the line and decided to take a symbolic stand by refusing to fulfill the Rector’s demands. This seemed to be the only kind of meaningful moral resistance.  So Palgi did nothing.  

On October 27th, 1959 Boris Egorov paid him a visit to inquire about the delay.  Palgi took full responsibility, explaining politely that he was merely following protocols, and that these were exact same protocols that the Soviet system had imposed upon the Estonian Departments.  Upon this, Egorov pulled rank:

Egorov gave me to understand that they were really going to arrange the thing in such a way that the Editorial Board would make the final decision and the Faculty would not decide the matter of the Collection.  So the Russians as a department of big brothers was privileged; they work on their own because they are above everyone else.  

If Soviet rules and regulations had rendered life intolerable and absurd in Tartu, it was not equally intolerable and absurd for everyone.  To many Estonians, Egorov and the Department of Russian Literature seemed the special beneficiaries of the Soviet system in Tartu.  Still, the enormous support accorded to the Department of Russian Philology by the Rector only confirmed this image for many Estonians:

The Rector raised his voice and started teaching me, that I do not have the power to override any of his orders…. He moved on to the conflict between the Estonian and Russian philologists.  The former were allegedly jealous of the success of the Russian philologists, this is what Dotsent Valmar Adams had apparently told him.  And the Rector believed him.  If Egorov had said this, then one could interpret this as nationalism, etc. Now I no longer needed to say anything.  The rector spoke and blurted all this out from his heart.  Among other things, he then said that he would support the Russian philologists with all his strength and that he will break his head (maybe he wanted to say

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1106 “Mina aga ei teinud.  Teadlikult ning tahtlikult just järgmistel põhjustel: 1) ühelgi TRÜ väljaandel ei olnd seni rektori käskkirja redaksioonikolleegiumi määratud, kuigi kõigil neil oli märgitud red.-kolleegium—asjaosalised liikmed teaduskonna redaksioonikolleegiumist; 2) käskkirja red.-kolleegiumi määramine näis sihtivat sinnapoole et saada võrdseks teaduskonna redaksioonikolleegiumiga, et saada iseseisvaks, pääsed teaduskonna kontrolli alt; see näis olevat separaatne akt, vähepõhjendatud errand; venelased kisklesid teaduskonna red.-kolleegiumiga ja tahtsid nüüd neile ninnapu mängida; et aga teaduskonna redaksioonikolleegiumi normised olid põhjendatud, siis seef ‘ähendas ka seda, et edasipidi pole kvaliteet tagatud.’” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 453.  
break his neck: or maybe he was thinking in Russian: I will break my head) of whoever
dares to get in my way.\footnote{1108} 

Once again Klement was shown in Palgi’s narrative to be loud, impulsive, irrational, and
generally out-of-control—the very embodiment of the Estonian national stereotype of Russians.
Though exacerbated by the peripheral and bilingual dynamics of the Soviet periphery, this
episode is revealing of an overlooked feature of the Soviet system in general and the internal
narratives it provoked: the extent to which nearly everyone—in his own narrative at least—felt
excluded and powerless. Power was always in the hands of somebody else: the Russians felt
excluded and disenfranchised by the Estonian-Soviet establishment; the Estonians felt excluded
and disenfranchised by a Russian-Soviet establishment. This episode also clarifies the
asymmetrical intermediary role of Valmar Adams. He was perceived as an ethnic Estonian by
Russian-speaking Tartu. Indeed, he spoke perfectly fluent Estonian, and knew all the cultural
codes. To Russian-speaking Tartu his linguistic facility rendered him a source of legitimation—
an impartial eyewitness, whom native Russian-speakers like Egorov and Klement could trust to
report what the Estonian community \textit{really thought}. For Estonians, Valmar Adams was a
syphophant, and the extent to which Russian speakers like Egorov trusted his assessments of
Estonian culture or anything else was a testament to their naivete or moral complicity with the
Soviet system.

Usually non-Party members were forbidden access to Party meetings and discussions.
Sometimes, however, they were invited—even encouraged—to attend. On February 15, 1952 at
a rare “open meeting” of the Party the Prorector of Science, Eduard Martinson and Rector Fedor
Klement called for a list of all the scholarly publications that had appeared in the previous year
in the historical-philological faculty. Palgi had done his own calculations. He counted at least
thirty-five publications in the Estonian language; granted some of these were insubstantial
articles and prefaces, but his list included five books as well.\footnote{1109} However, to Rector Klement
and Eduard Martinson all that mattered when it came assessing academic productivity were
publications in Russian; it was as if publications in Estonian “did not even exist.”\footnote{1110} As a
consequence, when Klement gave his verdict on the scholarly state of Tartu State University, the
“only productive author on the faculty” turned out to be “prof. Martinson. Everyone else got
criticized.”\footnote{1111} When asked for clarification, Klement gave Palgi to understand that “since we
were writing not merely for Estonia, but for the entire Soviet Union—we would print in Russian.
On this question the Rector was firm: the rector tried to make me understand, that Estonian

\footnote{1108}“Rektor tõstis järsku häält ja õpetas mind, et minule ei ole antud võimu tema korraldusi seisma panna. Õtles
veel midagi…. Jutt läks vastuolude peale eesti filoloogid ega vene filoloogide vahel. Teised olevat kadedad vene
filoloogide edu üle, nii olevat ütelnud dotts. V. Adams. Teda rektor selle koha pealt uskuvat. Oleks Jegorov ütelnud,
siis veel kuidagi võiks mõelda, et rahvuslik vaen jne. Nüüd ei olnud minul tarvis enam rääkida, rääkis ja puistas
siìdtant rector. Muu hulgas ta siis ütles, et tema toetab vene filolooge köigest jõust ja et ta murrab pea (tahtis öelda
vist kaela; või mõtles vene keeles: põrutan pea puruks) selles, kes julgeb seda takistada. Palgi, \textit{Murduvas maailmas},
455.

\footnote{1109} Palgi, \textit{Murduvas maailmas}, 342.

\footnote{1110} Palgi, \textit{Murduvas maailmas}, 342.

\footnote{1111} “Rektor oma ettekandes rääkis ainult neist venekeelseist töödest, eestikeelseid nagu poleks maailmas olnudki.
Ainus viljaka autor oli prf. Martinson, teised said laita.” Palgi, 342.
scholars have to write and print their works in Russian—that this is the only correct path.” So the aim of Sovietization turned out to be Russification after all:

Was not this the ultimate aim: Estonian scholars should write in Russian? In this way Russification would create the united Soviet family. In the USA there are tens of peoples (who have immigrated to the USA) and their common language is English. In the Soviet Union there are tens of peoples (whom the Soviet Union has conquered) and all of them need a common language—the Russian language. This had to be the aim of higher politics.\(^{1113}\)

Debates surrounding the revival of the publications of Tartu University—in which Klement played a crucial role—pitted Party members who seemed to want to turn Tartu University into a Russian-writing (if not speaking) establishment against non-Party members who were interested in keeping the Estonian identity of the University on all levels of cultural and intellectual expression. At least this is how things looked from the perspective of Daniel Palgi and the Department of Estonian Philology.

The Red Army Veteran and later Professor of Journalism, Juhan Peegel (1919-2007), was a student in the Department of Estonian Philology at this time. He also happened to be a Party member. After the collapse of the Soviet Union he would say—like many other members of the Estonian national intelligentsia—that “It must be counted an achievement of great historical importance that [Tartu] University was not entirely Russified.”\(^{1114}\) It might be argued from the perspective of Moscow and its nationalities policy that Russification had never been the aim of Sovietization; that if Tartu University remained an Estonian speaking institution, this was exactly what Moscow had intended all along, rather than the result of some kind of peripheral agitation against the center. But one cannot begin to understand the national dynamics of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s without understanding the extent to which the fear of Russification was one of the motivating fears of the Estonian national elite.

It would be important not to overstate the personal conflict between Yuri Lotman and Paul Ariste, as some of their disciples have done. These reports and rumors attest to the tense national dynamics of Soviet Tartu, and speak to the structural tension between the departments and their members. Ultimately, the relationship of these two incredibly talkative men was more one of silence than of speech. Each built his own world—in some sense an intellectual empire—that stood aloof from the other.\(^{1115}\) These two separate worlds are the subject of the next two

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\(^{1112}\) “Jaa-jaa, see on nii küll, ütlesid mõned targad parteilased nagu rector, kud kes käsiib meil kirjastada nii kitsale alale kui Eesti, kirjastame kogu Nõukogude Liidu jaoks—trükime vene keeles… rector püüdis mulle selgeks teha, et eesti teadlased peavad kirjutama ja trükkima vene keeles—see on ainus õige tee.” Palgi, 342.

\(^{1113}\) Kui siis ma mõtlesin ministeeriumi käsikirjale ja rektori vaimustatud tõestamisele ning partei keskkomitee leigusele teadusliku kirjanduse erikirjastuse asjus, siis pidid need olema kuidagi ühenduses, et eesti teadlased peavad kirjutama vene keeles? Nii peab olema üheline venekeele päevad kujundamist. USA-s on küünne rahvus (kes on USA-sse sisse ränanud) ja neil on ühine inglise keel, Nõukogude Liidus on küünneid rahvusid (keda Nõukogude Liit on vallutanud) ja köigil neil peab olema ühine nõukogulik keel—vene keel. Nii see kõrgem polititka pidi olema.” Palgi, 447.


\(^{1115}\) The title of Maxim Waldstein’s history of the Tartu School, The Soviet Empire of Signs, is an apt way of describing Lotman’s circle in the Soviet Union and their relationship to Soviet science as a parallel and to some degree competing set of values and scholarly preoccupations. I would use the same metaphor to describe Paul
sections. Still, there were a few intermediaries who moved between them. Peeter Olesk knew both Ariste and Lotman, corresponded with them both and performed various academic and social functions for each of them, publishing reviews in Russian for Lotman of Estonian scholarship and accompanying Ariste on his ethnographic expeditions to the various Finno-Ugric tribes of the Soviet Union. An individualist, he stood outside both circles and the dynamics of their intimates. Still, though he was far from a bridge between the two, an interesting attempt to interpret the one in the language of the other might be found in Olesk’s afterward to the published edition of Ariste’s diaries of multiple expeditions to the Vot People, entitled: “The Semiotics of Diaries.” According to Olesk, Lotman and Ariste were both men with short-tempers, inclined to make unpleasant comments about the other in the heat of the moment (as in Lotman’s correspondence with Egorov), but quick to forgive and forget what derived from the inevitable frustrations of their Soviet predicament.

The antagonism and tension remembered between Lotman and Ariste has been exaggerated of their followers, and may be a better index of the forces segregating and isolating Tartu’s various linguistic circles from one other than their personal or scholarly relations. It is worth noting that there is not a single mention of Yuri Lotman in Daniel Palgi’s memoirs, composed in the early 1960s, only Lotman’s predecessor as chair of the department, Boris Egorov. Their individual relations were more ones of silence than of talk. Of all the thousands of correspondents in the Tartu archives of Yuri Lotman and Paul Ariste (2000 and 1500 respectively) there was precious little interaction between the two. By and large, they lived in separate worlds. There are no New Year’s Greeting cards (the most common form of inter-Tartu correspondence), only one telegram from Lotman to Ariste. Ariste had informed Lotman from Tallinn about the arrival of some scholars from abroad. Lotman responded: “Thank you for the information and please provide clarification about whether Sebeok and Austerlitz can give talks on the August 20th at the Semiotic Summer School. The theme would be for them to decide=Lotman=”. It bears mentioning that in this instance at least Paul Ariste, an incredible polyglot, with competence in some thirty languages (and fluency in Russian), nonetheless wrote to Yuri Lotman in Estonian, and Lotman responded in kind.

At times Paul Ariste could even be useful to the Department of Russian Literature and the Tartu School of Semiotics. There is an episode recounted a quarter century after the fact by one of the foreign visitors to Lotman’s Summer School mentioned in the telegram above. A refugee from Hungary and product of the DP camps after the Second World War, the Hungarian-American professor at the University of Indiana, Thomas Sebeok (1920–2001), was a founder of “bio-semiotics.” He had come to Soviet Estonia in 1970 as an ethnic Hungarian, to attend the World Conference currently taking place for Finno-Ugric Studies in Tallinn under the leadership of Paul Ariste. But with Ariste’s help he and his wife also managed to visit Tartu and attend

Ariste’s Finno-Ugric as a “Finno-Ugric Empire.” In some ways it was antagonistic to the Soviet context in which it emerged, an alternative way of looking at the world with its own particular set of values. But at the same time it was also supported by it. The notion that Paul Ariste had founded a school of Finno-Ugric studies—in the same sense that Yuri Lotman had founded a “School of Semiotics,” was perpetuated within the internal discourse of the school. One of the late issues of Ariste’s Finno-Ugric journal from 1986 was explicitly dedicated to Paul Ariste’s “school.” See Paul Alvre, ed. Fenno-Ugristica 13. Paul Ariste fennougristikakoolkond ja selle sidemed. Tartu, 1986.

1116 See Peeter Olesk’s letters to Yuri Lotman, written between 1979 and 1982 in Russian and Estonian. TÜRK f. 135, s.1033.
1117 Peeter Olesk, interview by author, August 11, 2011.
1118 “tänan teate eest palun välja selgitada kas sebeok ja austerlitz saavad esineda ettekannetega kahekümmandal augustil semiootika suvekoolis ettekande teema nende äränägemsel =Lotman=“ August 18, 1970—EKLA f.330, n.53, s.11.

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Yuri Lotman’s Semiotic Summer School in Tartu: “I felt an urge to seek every opportunity…to get to know Professor Lotman in person, and preferably visit him in his adopted domestic setting, which was then a singular Mecca-like field for us ‘pilgrims’ laboring in the domain of semiotics.” On Tuesday morning, barely at dawn, the “KGB car” pulled up in front of his hotel in Tallinn and drove him straight to the front door of the main building of Tartu University—where he was besieged by various members of the Tartu school, including Petr Bogateyrev, one of the last surviving Russian formalists, who was introduced to him as “The President of the School,” (he died a few months later), Lotman (“the Secretary of the School”), Dmitri Segal (who served as Sebeok’s translator), Alexander Piatigorski and many others. He described his experience as an almost magical experience, in the spirit of the Tartu school reminiscences recorded by many of these figures themselves:

[Conversations] freewheeling and never less than rousing - continued through lunch, and, most productively, 'through the course of a leisurely, intimate amble outdoors, and finally during a farewell …. Indeed, confidential talks with our hosts took place typically in the course of leisurely strolls in the woods. They constituted the most productive, memorable, and cherished moments of our exhilarating (if exhausting) day.

In the end, several of these people gave Sebeok manuscripts they wanted him to smuggle abroad for publication in Western journals, but Sebeok was sure they would be confiscated at the border. Back in his hotel in Tallinn, Sebeok broached Paul Ariste about the matter:

What transpired on our departure, as recollected after more than a quarter of century of tranquility, takes on, in retrospect, the coloring of a farce. At the harbor, we noticed that all passengers ahead of us were ordered to pile their bags on a stand and open them. All were thoroughly searched. On being summoned by a Russian officer to step forward and submit likewise, I braced myself for serious trouble. At the very moment I placed our luggage on the counter, the entrance to the shed burst open and Ariste rushed in with a large bouquet of flowers, handing them to my astonished wife. At the top of his voice, he proclaimed what an honor it was for his country to have had two such distinguished and gracious American visitors in attendance at the [Finno-Ugric] Congress. While holding up the line behind us, the noisy hurly-burly fomented such befuddlement and delay that the impatient officers hurriedly waved us, with our untouched luggage, through to board the ship. I thanked Ariste warmly, saying goodbye. I never saw him again.

7.3.2 Paul Ariste and the Department of Finno-Ugric Studies

One of Paul Ariste’s students and successors in the Department of Finno-Ugric Studies at Tartu University, Ago Künnap (b. 1941), said of his mentor: “Nobody could imagine that Ariste would die. It seemed like he was eternal.” In Soviet Tartu it may have been easier to imagine the end of the Soviet Union than the end of Paul Ariste. In the end both died at around the same time. Even in death Ariste lived on and played a prank on the Soviet Union, recalled Ireen Toomla, who grew up partly in the Ariste household, and like several neighborhood

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children in Tähtvere imagined Ariste to be her grandfather. For Ariste was buried in the traditional Russian Orthodox fashion: “I had the feeling in the Old University auditorium that that this was grandfather’s last prank: the entire Party and Government stood there for almost two hours in aura of the burning incence, holding their candles.”

For Juhan Peegel (1919-2007), Tartu University’s first Professor of Journalism, who had studied Estonian Philology at Tartu in the 1940s, “our University’s international reputation” was “inseparable from Paul Ariste, whose name is intimately connected to our entire national history.”

With his department centrally housed in the main building of Tartu University, at the symbolic heart of the establishment, Paul Ariste (1905-1990) turned Tartu into a Soviet Mecca and world capital for Finno-Ugric languages and cultures. For many members of Tartu’s Last Soviet generation, like Pekka Erelt (b. 1965), who studied Estonian Language and Literature, Postwar Soviet Tartu was in all of its most positive aspects the “The Age of Ariste” (Ariste ajastu):

[Ariste] went ahead like an icebreaker, stimulating new endeavors, inspiring others, teaching young scholars. His aim was the unification of the Finno-Ugric peoples, at least in scholarship. Over the entire Soviet Union Finno-Ugrians began to flock to Tartu, whom Ariste taught. And not only in his own speciality: he taught them European customs, and if necessary, how to eat with a knife and fork. At the same time, he worked in the opposite direction as well in creating networks: for every Finno-Ugric language he attempted to train at least one local [i.e. Estonian] expert.

Indeed, in the 1950s Tartu became the capital of Ariste’s Finno-Ugric empire, an alternative world of ethnic, social, and political identity, which stood aloof from the state, even as it took advantage of its resources—and provided for their unification on the basis of something other than the Russian language and Soviet ideology.

In any case, it seemed that Ariste preferred his scholarship to administrative might and remained skeptical of the establishment in ways that do not fit with the prevailing image of him projected by Boris Egorov in the Department of Russian Literature. He even turned down a promotion to the position of Prorector of Science at Tartu University in 1954. Daniel Palgi was intimately involved in the process as an intermediary between Rector Klement and Ariste, and ideally situated to see the dynamics of the situation. As the Prorector of Science, Eduard Martinson was growing increasingly erratic, alienating everyone with his paranoia and suspicion—Russians and Estonians alike.

Rector Fedor Klement began to look for a successor. Tartu’s prorector of science was the single most important professor in the administrative hierarchy of the University, someone who would decide the scientific identity of the university, and what kinds of academic projects the University would undertake and sponsor. It seemed that Klement wanted a true Estonian, somebody who would represent the faculty as a

1122 “Mul oli aulas tunne, et see on vanaisa viimane vemp: kogu partei ja valitsus seisis seal peaaegu kaks tundi viirukisuitsu sees, küünlad pihu” Ireen Toomla as quoted in Raimu Hanson, “Paul Ariste praadis härjasilma triikrauga,” Postimees, February 3, 2005.


1125 For a highly detailed, minute-by-minute account of some of his behavior see an account of one day in the life of Eduard Martinson as recorded in the memoirs of Daniel Palgi, 307-318.
scholar and a teacher, not an administrator. His leading candidates for the position were all interwar Estonians: Professors August Vaga (Biology), Karl Orviku (Geology), Professor Paul Ariste (Philology), and Doctors Harald Haberman (Biology), Eerik Kumari (Biology).\textsuperscript{1126} And for the most part they had good Soviet credentials as members of the Communist Party. All were also members of the Soviet Estonian Academy of Sciences. But Klement’s top choice was Paul Ariste, and he gave his assistant Palgi the task of convincing Ariste to accept the post. Palgi was on good terms with Paul Ariste, and had a respectful—even high, though not uncritical opinion of him:

Ariste was a pretty good acquaintance, not exactly on terms of informal intimacy (sinasõbrad). He was blond and very active one must say: with even a very lively, creative thought. He had a special talent for languages. He picked up foreign languages with a certain ease, and managed after a bit to speak in these languages. He knew many languages, including Yiddish and the Gypsy language, and had good friends both in Jewish and Gypsy circles. His closest friends knew that he was a Believer, or at least that he had been a believer in the recent past. And it was true that when P. Ariste had attended a conference in Kazan, he made a point of visiting the Tatar mosques and acquainting himself with all the dimensions of the Tatar belief system.\textsuperscript{1127}

Many have noted Paul Ariste’s compromised position and links to the organs of state security. Though most have forgiven him this, or else seen it as a kind of inevitable compromise of participation in the Soviet system. In any case, Palgi believed that Ariste “became a professor, deservedly,” though some found him a bit too superficial, too inclined to leap from one idea to the next. “He had plenty of superficiality, but this did not contradict his talent and his knowledge. He was plenty thorough for work in the Soviet system, maybe even a little too thorough.”\textsuperscript{1128} Ariste was well aware, it seemed—something he had communicated to Palgi in conversation—that he owed his career to the Soviet Union. As Palgi noted, with prominent Professors like Andrus Saarest and Julius Mägiste at the top of the Finno-Ugric establishment in interwar Tartu, Paul Ariste really did not have much of a chance at promotion in this field: “He specialized in phonetics, but this did not mean a job.”\textsuperscript{1129} Palgi explained:

One time we had were talking about Professor Saarest and Professor Mägiste. This was Ariste’s thinking: If they had remained in Estonia, then there would not have been any opportunity for an academic career; the Soviet system at one point truly punished him, but destiny had still found for him a position, where he could do work in keeping with his abilities. He could not really be opposed to the Soviet system.\textsuperscript{1130}

\textsuperscript{1126} Palggi, Murduvas maailmas, 296.

\textsuperscript{1127} “Prof. P. Aristega olime üsna head tuttavad, kuigi mitte sinasõbrad. Ta oli blond ja elav ning peab ütlema: ka väga elava, leidlikku mõttetega. Keeltele oli tal eriline and. Üsna kiiresti jõudis ta nii kaugele, et teatud keelese natuke rääkida. Ta oskas palju keeli, muide ka juudi ja mustlaste keelt ning tal oli haid tutvus juutide ja mustalaste rääkis. Ta lähemad sõbrad teadsid, et ta on uslik, vähemalt on olnud uslik lähemas minevikus. Ja tõsi oli, et kui P. Ariste käis konverentsil Kaasanis, siis ta käis läbi a sealeded kirikud ja teadis, kuidas on lood tatarlaste ususjadega...” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 397.

\textsuperscript{1128} “Pinnalisust tal ju oli, kuid see ei varjunud andeklust ja teadmisi, nõukgoude korras töötamiseks oli ta veel küllalt, iseig liiga põhjalik.” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 398.

\textsuperscript{1129} Palggi, Murduvas maailmas, 397.

\textsuperscript{1130} “Kord rääkisime prof. Saarestest ja prof. Mägistest. Ariste mõttekäik oli umbes nii: kui nemad olesksid Eestisse jäänud, poleks temal, Aristel, olud ning teaduslik karjääri võimalust; nõukogude kord on teda küll karistanud,
Paul Ariste had asked: “tell me Palgi, what I should do? It seemed he had no desire to become prorector.” And after Palgi had explained the position to him and all its responsibilities, Ariste apparently lost what little interest he had professed earlier to rise in the administrative hierarchy of Tartu University. Instead he devoted himself whole-heartedly to his Department and its scholarly mission.


d. Ariste’s Finno-Ugric Empire: Estonian Experts and Tartu-Trained Finno-Ugric Elites

The rise of Ariste’s department of Finno-Ugric studies at Tartu University to a position All-Union significance as the most important center for Finno-Ugric studies was not self-evident. Shortly after his nearly yearlong incarceration in 1945, Ariste was reinstated as the head of the department. But the disruption at the center that accompanied Stalin’s anti-cosmopolitan campaign and the chaos it fomented in Finno-Ugric studies contributed to Ariste’s assent. In 1946 Ariste was called to Leningrad State University to learn how to take his cues from the leading specialist in Finno-Ugric languages there, Dmitri Bubrich (1890–1949), a corresponding member of the All-Union Soviet Academy of Sciences, who studied the Karelian, Finnish, Mordovian, Udmurt and Komi languages and cultures. They got along, and in 1947 Tartu’s department of Finno-Ugric studies received an invitation to send a delegation to attend the All-Union Finno-Ugric Congress in Leningrad. A special commission was established for coordinating Finno-Ugric language study all across the Soviet Union. Bubrich was the chairman of the commission. There were also three Estonians on it, including Paul Ariste. The aim was to establish a scholarly division of labor, in which Tartu University would be given the task of studying the Finno-Ugric languages closest (both geographically and morphologically) to Estonian. But Bubrich fell victim to harassment during Stalin’s anti-cosmopolitan campaign, and died of a heart-attack in 1949. The prevailing rumor was that he had committed suicide. Up until this point there was no graduate study at Tartu University in the fields of Estonian or Finno-Ugric studies. 1949 was also the year that Ariste and the head of the department of Estonian language, J. V. Veski, applied to procure the right for Tartu University to award candidate and doctoral degrees in the Estonian and Finno-Ugric languages. They were granted this privilege, and this was the most important turning point. Ultimately, Paul Ariste’s department took on the study of the Finno-Ugric peoples of the entire Soviet Union.

Huno Rätsep (b. 1927) was one of Ariste’s first doctoral students in the 1950s. He spelled out the specifics of Ariste’s plan and its implementation. Eduard Vääri became Ariste’s expert on the Livonians; Valdek Pall was sent to investigate the Mordvins. Paul Kokla went the Mari people, Anu Hausenberg was assigned the Permian languages. Tõnu Seilenthal studied the Khandi people and their language, though later came to specialize in Hungarian. In fact, Seilenthal defended his doctorate in Budapest (not in the Soviet Union), a sign of the changing times. The first gap in Ariste’s Finno-Ugric Empire emerged when his chosen Estonian expert

kuid saatus on ta siiski pannud kohale, kus ta võib teha tööd vastavalt oma võimetele. Ta ei või ju olla nõukogude korra vastane.” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 398.

1131 For details of these meetings and the emergence of Ariste’s department as told by Ariste himself see Ariste, Mälestusi; see also Ago Künnap and Helju Rajando, “Tartu Ülikooli fennougristide kontaktid Venemaa Soome-Ugri rahvastega,” Suri, 1997. http://www.suri.ee/hs/ago.html
for the Mansi languages, quit his degree program and went instead to work for a publishing house in Tallinn.\textsuperscript{1132}

Ariste was incredibly resourceful in finding opportunities for his students. Though Hungary was not yet accessible to his graduate students in the early 1950s, Ariste knew of a Hungarian community in the Carpathian mountains in Ukraine (and therefore just inside the borders of the Soviet Union), centered around three towns: Uzhhorod (Ungvar), Mukachevo, and Pereksaar. Of the three, Pereksaar was an almost exclusively Hungarian-speaking community, and that is where Ariste sent Huno Rätsep. In this way, Huno Rätsep got to spend the better part of the summer, funded by Tartu University, totally immersed in the Hungarian language, making friends and linguistic contacts in the Hungarian language, a network of relationships he brought back to Tartu. When it came time for him to return to Tartu, he realized when he arrived at the train station that he had forgotten how to request a ticket in Russian.\textsuperscript{1133} In later decades, two of Ariste’s most successful disciples, Tõnu Seilenthal (b. 1947) and Ago Künnap (b. 1941) each defended his dissertations outside the Soviet Union: Seilenthal in Budapest, Künnap in Helsinki. At Tartu, as Ariste observed in his memoirs, it was not permitted to defend dissertations written in the Russian language, which put his students at a disadvantage.

The Soviet Union also gave Ariste something scholars from Helsinki and Budapest lacked: direct access to the two and a half million Finno-Ugric peoples of the Soviet interior. If only three Finno-Ugric nations had achieved independent statehood—the Hungarians, Finns, and interwar Estonians—then the Soviet Union was full of about a dozen others waiting in the wings, who could take encouragement from the example of Estonia as their model of Europe: the Khanty, Mansi, Maris, Mordvins, Sami, Karelians, Udmurts, Komis, Vepsians, Izhorians, Votsex, and Livonians. For all of them, Tartu was a kind of Ivory Tower of Babel, where they learned to take pride in their national cultures and at the same time to question the legitimacy of the Russian language as an adequate basis for their integration into the Soviet state. And this is precisely how Paul Ariste understood his role. He attempted to reach out to them all, and to cultivate their national elites. He was inspired in this to some degree by his encounter in interwar Estonia with the first (and last) Vot intellectual, Dmitri Tsvetkov, who had come to study and learn his national identity at Tartu University in the 1920s and 30s and produced a grammar for the national language in the process shortly before his early death at the age of forty. On one of his first expeditions to the Vot communities of Ingravia in 1943, Ariste encountered Tsvetkov’s sister.\textsuperscript{1134} If the Finno-Ugrians were Paul Ariste’s chosen people, the Vots were his chosen Finno-Ugrians—and he knew all of them personally, there were only about two-dozen native speakers left by the time he got to them during and after the Second World War.

Paul Ariste and his successors made it their mission to inspire these groups with a sense of independent national self-consciousness. He encouraged them to take their universalist cultural cues from Estonia instead of Russia. The Finnish Academic, Pertti Virtaranta (1918-1997) remembered Ariste in embattled Cold War terms as the very embodiment of the “Tartu Spirit,” an attitude picked up by one of Ariste’s Estonian students, Ago Künnap, who quoted Virtaranta at length:

\textsuperscript{1132} Huno Rätsep, interview by author, Tartu, October, 27, 2010.
\textsuperscript{1133} Huno Rätsep, interview by author, Tartu, October, 27, 2010.
\textsuperscript{1134} One of Ariste’s informal student, Enn Ernits, has since written an excellent intellectual biography of Dmitri Tsvetkov in Estonian, \textit{The Vot Intellectual, Dmitri Tsvetkov [Vadja haritlane Dmitri Tsevetkov, 1890-1930]} (2009).
In the time of the Soviet occupation, when we were not allowed and did not know or did not dare to do anything for the good of our linguistic brethren, Ariste knew how to do something and dared. Studying with him in Tartu University’s graduate program, the specializations and spirit of those Finno-Ugric Autonomous Republics their elite humanities scholars, who returned to their homelands and with their activity there received the highest Soviet recognition—earned the title “fascist” (“Fascist” is an ideologically an extremely strong term of abuse, which means from this perspective a person with Western views, who also works for the rights of his people.).”

The Hungarian Professor, Péter Domokos characterized Ariste in 1985 as someone

who had no need for comforts, for high honors, for welcoming commissions. Addressing old Vot women in their native tongue (others have confirmed that for 50 years knew every Vot person personally) he has been able to achieve a good serious mood for work. The same way with the nomadic gypsies, to whom he did not feel the need to talk down (in his rich vocabulary this expression is probably foreign) and with whom he also managed to find a common language.

His success was due in large part, as remembered by his colleague Valve-Liivi Kingisepp (b. 1935), to his nature: he “was not jealous of the achievements of younger [scholars]. But rejoiced in them.”

His charisma was infectious. Lidia Vassikov, his first graduate student from the Mari People called the atmosphere Ariste brought to life in Tartu’s Department of Finno-Ugric Studies a “fantasy fairytale atmosphere” (võlumuinasjutu atmosfääriks). The students he sent back home often returned to their communities with European sensibilities and ideas about material culture. Ariste ended up training the national elites of several different Finno-Ugric nations, instilling in them national pride and skepticism about prevailing view among their people that Russian was truly an adequate language of high culture. Huno Rätsep remembered that this was exactly what happened with Lidia Vasikova herself. He and she had both been Ariste’s Doctoral students in the 1950s. When she returned home “she was severely criticized by her local Party Committee, for having become excessively Westernized” in Tartu. Indeed, she had bought furniture in Tartu, transported it back home, and remade her home in Yoshkar-Ola, Capital of the Mari Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, to resemble what it had been in

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1136 As quoted in Erelt.

“European Tartu.”

To the extent possible, Ariste made sure that his Finno-Ugric students would learn to use Estonian rather than Russian as their language of international communication, at least so long as they studied with him in Tartu: when Ariste took one of his Mari students on a tour of the village where he was born (Rääbise), a local inhabitant, Enn Roos, remembered how Ariste had encouraged his “student to speak Estonian while in Estonia.”

The lasting impact of Paul Ariste’s work has been expressed by one of his most important students, and successor as the head of Tartu’s Department of Finno-Ugric Languages. Tõnu Seilenthal (b. 1947) explained Ariste’s work—and the continuing work of his followers:

Intelligent is the person, who can adapt to his circumstances; great is the person, who can transform his own times. Paul Ariste was still greater: he was the times in Estonian human sciences. Despite the difficult nature of the era, through the entire postwar period he found ways to help the Maris, Mordvins, Udmurts, Komis, Carpathian Hungarians, Karelians, Veps, and many others. Now this is possible through the state-sponsored Tribal Nations Program. Tartu University has tried to continue the work of its Teacher, founding in the summer of 1999 the Tartu University Paul Ariste Finno-Ugric Indigenous Peoples Center, which has as its main goal to cultivate, teach, and educate national elites for all the tribal peoples of Russia, attempting to train them in specialized fields but also to honor and love their own native languages.

The ultimate goal now, as it was for Ariste, was to cultivate both a national and universalist identity for the Finno-Ugric Peoples of the Russian interior on the basis of something other than the Russian language and Soviet ideology.

On July 19, 2007, with the Finnish and Hungarian heads of state in attendance, Russian President Vladimir Putin opened the first international festival of Finno-Ugric Cultures in the Mordvin Autonomous Republic of Saransk with the words: “Every nation, every small ethnic group should feel comfortable in Russia, should understand that this is its birthplace and home, that another home of this kind does not and will not exist, and with this the stability and continued growth of our country.”

“Kazhdyi narod, dazhe kazhdaia malen’kaia etnichestkaia gruppa dolzhna chuvstvovat’ sebia v Rossi komfortno, dolzhna ponimat’ , chto eto ee rodnoi dom, drugogo takogo doma u nee net i ne budet, i v etom osnova stabil’nost’i i postupatel’nogo razvitia nawihe strany.” Vladimir Putin, speech at “Pervyi mezhdunarodnyi festival’ natsional’nyx kul’tur ‘Shumbrat, finno-ugriat’” Saransk, 2007.
was claiming for Russia a role that Tartu had played in the Soviet Union as a global capital of Finno-Ugric Culture with the Paul Ariste’s Department of Finno-Ugric Studies. The Unrepresented Peoples Congress founded by the Estonian Buddhologist in Lotman’s Tartu School, Linnart Mäll, and the Estonian dissident Enn Tarto imagined their goal in the same spirit of Paul Ariste, to confound and destabilize the Russian language as the language of a global empire. To some extent they all derived their inspiration from Ariste’s mission to Finno-Ugric Peoples of the Soviet Union. The same might be said for Lennart Meri—the future Estonian president—and an ethnographic collaborator with Ariste, whose voyages to Kamchatka, reproduced, in their form at least, the voyages of 19th century German and Scandinavian explorers, who brought order to the furthest reaches of the Russian Empire with their maps and ethnographic studies.

to some Jewish students in Tartu’s Department of Russian Philology. He accosted them: “Why are you speaking Russian? Speak Estonian or Yiddish!”

Another student, for whom Ariste was something of a guru, Peeter Olesk, noted how Ariste’s journals of his expeditions to the Vot lands in the vicinity of Leningrad in Ingria were an important chronicle of the ethnically destructive force of the Soviet Union. Like Yuri Lotman, Paul Ariste “disliked militarism and avoided politics.” But his withdrawal from politics did not keep him from expressing contempt for Sovietization, which many Estonians, following Ariste’s lead, saw as tantamount to Russification. Ariste’s first scholarly expedition to collect the folklore and study the language of the Vot people, a Finno-Ugric ethnic group on the brink of extinction, occurred during the Nazi Occupation of Tartu in the Second World War in 1942; but they remained his favorite destination of research for the rest of his life, and he led some twenty-one expeditions to the Vot lands between 1942 and 1980 (in the style of the German explorers of the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century). Writing on the content of the journals themselves, Olesk observed their value as a chronicle of the destructive force of the Soviet Union and not just in its “‘vague outlines,’ but in terms of specific people, families, villages, and ethnic groups.”

Around 1985 when Peeter Olesk suggested that Ariste might write an introduction or forward to a newly published collection of works by the great Russian literary scholar and folklorist, Dmitri Likhachev, whom Olesk, like many other Estonians, “greatly admired” before he “turned into a chauvinist,” Ariste lost no time in answering: “how can I write of how the Russians have destroyed the Vots?” I immediately saw my own naivete and did not press the matter.

Like Ariste himself, Huno Rätsep, had universalizing aspirations. He had discovered linguistic structuralism and Noam Chomsky around the same time as Yuri Lotman, and founded a series of publications in 1964 at Tartu University devoted to linguistic structuralism (though published in the Estonian language). So Rätsep and Lotman worked in total cultural isolation from one another. The similarity of some of their concerns is a testament to silence that held Tartu’s various oases apart. At one point in the mid-1960s Rector Fedor Klement had attempted to bring him together with Yuri Lotman in his office, Rätsep remembered, but nothing came of the meeting. They met, shook hands, and went their separate ways. Only later did he realize that they were dealing with many the same questions.

The first issue of Lotman’s journal *Sign system studies (Trudy po znakovym sistemam)* appeared in 1964, the same year as the first

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1144 Radio Interview with several of Paul Ariste’s former students and admirers on the occasion of his 100th birthday:


1147 Huno Rätsep, interview with author, Tartu, October 27, 2010.
issue of Huno Rätsep’s journal at the Department of Estonian, *Language and Structure (Keel ja struktuur)*.

### 7.3.3 Yuri Lotman and the Department of Russian Literature

With his department housed next to the main building of Tartu University on one of the top floors of Tartu’s *Keeltemaja* or “House of Languages,” Yuri Lotman (1922–1993) turned Tartu into a Soviet Mecca for the study of Russian literary culture and semiotics. Tartu’s first computer, URAL-1, occupied the entire first floor in the 1950s, and most of the other language departments the other floors. 1149 As a rootless cosmopolitan—born and raised in the international, urban world of the Russian intelligentsia in Petrograd—Lotman sought a national grounding and calling in the Russian language and its literary culture. Tartu may have been the one place in the Soviet Union where Lotman could pursue his universal language of science (semiotics) as a self-styled Russian aristocrat, with an institutional identity firmly grounded in Russian literary culture. Lotman was awarded numerous honorary doctorates during the Soviet period. He became a corresponding member of the British Academy of Sciences, American Semiotic Society in 1977, and a vice-president of the International Semiotic Organization from 1968 to 1985. Lotman ended his Soviet-Estonian career much as Paul Ariste began his, with late election to the Soviet Estonian Academy of Sciences in 1989.

The “age of Lotman” might be dated from 1958 when he became Yuri Lotman became the head of the Department. An All-Union conference of Slavicists, Moscow inaugurated the rise of the Department in 1958. Five Tartu University Professors were sent to attend by the Tartu University rector, three of them Estonians: Paul Ariste, Villem Ernits, Valmar Adams, Boris Egorov, and Yuri Lotman. They went to listen and learn rather than speak. But soon the entire Russian literary and linguistic establishment in the Soviet Union would be listening to Yuri Lotman and his department of Russian literature. He held his position as department chair until 1977, the same year when Paul Ariste retired from his position as chair of the department of Finno-Ugric studies. But like Ariste, Lotman remained the guiding force of the department until his death in 1993, and in some sense, well after as well. The department had several remarkable figures and teachers. There was the Sergei Issakov, a Narva born interwar Russian, who investigated inter-ethnic links between Russians and Estonians and all the other peoples of the Baltic periphery of the Soviet Union. Another important teacher and scholar in the department was Valerii Bezzubov, widely remembered as one of the most interesting and attractive figures there. He was deeply loved by both his students and his colleagues. Where Issakov’s teaching and research was concerned with the Soviet Union’s interethnic “Friendship of the Peoples,” Bezzubov taught the courses on Soviet literature. Zara Mints, Yuri Lotman’s wife, a remarkable scholar in her own right, turned the department into a center for the investigation of “Silver Age” writers and especially Alexander Blok.

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1149 From 1956 to 1957 Moscow was the leading center of computers and cybernetics in the Soviet Union. It had two, STRELLA and BESM (at the Academy of Sciences). Shortly thereafter Leningrad got its first Computer as well. And Estonian mathematicians Ülo Kaasik from Tartu University and Leo Võhandu from the Tallinn Technological Institute went to practice using it with the hope of bringing this technology from the center to the Soviet periphery in Estonia. On November 4, 1958, The Soviet Minister of Education signed order nr. 256 which permitted the establishment of the first Computer Center in the non-Russian Soviet periphery in Estonia at Tartu University. The computer, URAL-1, remained at Tartu university form 1959 to 1965, and was eventually demoted to highschool use thereafter. See Peep Uba “Nii see algas” [“So It Began”], in 40 Aastat Arvutuskeskust (Tartu: Trydy vychislitel’nogo tsentra, 1999).
One of Lotman’s identities was as a teacher of Russian literature and literary history and a coordinating figure as the head of the Department from 1958 to 1977 for all these students. Like Ariste, he was enormously successful at getting people positions at the University, recruiting from the outside, and ensuring the emergence and persistence of a unique atmosphere of his own making. The back-biting and intrigues that crippled several of the more ideological departments of History and especially the All-University “Red” Departments based in the “Karl Marx House,” discussed in the last chapter, were all but absent from the department of Russian literature, just as they were absent from the department of Finno-Ugric studies. Like Ariste, Lotman was also known as a charismatic authority figure. In Post Soviet memoirs they appear in contradictory terms both as uniquely democratic in their sensibilities—they could talk to anyone and were interested in what everyone—from crowned heads to street-sweepers—had to say. At the same time, they also single-handedly defined and determined the intellectual agendas of their respective departments. Dissenting or alternative views rarely emerged.

Tartu’s Department of Russian Literature had a universalizing side as well as its particularizing Russian side. It became an institutional platform for the emergence of the Tartu school of semiotics, which was generated in large part by the singular combination of Lotman’s social charisma and the possibilities of the local Estonian environment, from which this loosely defined and integrated collectivity of scholars from across many different disciplines got its name and identity. Thus, Lotman’s department and the Tartu School was another oasis of postwar Soviet life. In his essay, “The Tartu School of the 1960s as a Semiotic Phenomenon,” Boris Gasparov observed the isolation of the school, not only from wider global currents of scholarship and thought and social life, but also from the wider currents of Soviet life. They “even took pride in the inaccessibility of their work” (“no dazhe gordilis’ maloi dostupnosti’ izdaniia.”) Paradoxically, the extent to which its internal dynamics and practices cut it off from a wider Soviet and global reality rendered it an index or sign of the times, when so much Soviet cultural life in the 1960s turned inward and retreated to cultural oases like Tartu.

Among other ethnographic features of the social identity that produced and bonded the intellectual collective that became known as the Tartu School, Gasparov observed the importance its members attached to an ideal of scholarly “professionalism” and their knowledge of foreign and especially European languages, which was evidence of their pronounced western orientation. They were further bonded physically by the environment in southern Estonia at the University sports complex in Kääriku, where they staged their summer schools. This environment figures particularly prominently in Tartu School nostalgia. Above all Gasparov stressed the linguistic dimensions of their identity. Tartu-speak was a specific kind of “third language”—to use the guiding terms of this chapter—equally inaccessible to the bilingual Estonian and Russian communities of Tartu:

The hermeticism of the scholarly community also led to the adoption in the circle of esoteric scientific language. The language in which “Tartu” scholars spoke and wrote, was saturated with terminology unique to semiotic research, and not widely used outside of it. Many of the expressions of this particular ‘semiotic’ language were created by members of this group and were used exclusively in their communication with each other. Many words were direct transliterations of foreign terms, not used in the Russian

1150 Gasparov, “Tartuskaia shkola 1960-x,” 60.
1151 Gasparov, “Tartuskaia shkola 1960-x,” 58 and 60.
scholarly tradition, which gave this esoteric language a characteristically Western aspect.\textsuperscript{1152}

In Gasparov’s use of various ethnographic details to evoke the cultural isolation of the Tartu School, one might compare Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s mock ethnography of the newly discovered and created “Nation of Zeks,” Gulag prisoners in the \textit{Gulag Archipelago}. Like the language of the Tartu School described by Gasparov, Solzhenitsyn’s writings on the language of its Zeks were a product of the 1960s. And by his own account, Alexander Solzhenitsyn composed the bulk of the \textit{Gulag Archipelago} in the rural landscape of southern Estonia very close to the one that inspired and bonded the Tartu School gatherings at the Tartu University Sports Complex in Kääriku.\textsuperscript{1153}

Lotman, like most members of the Tartu School, strongly objected to Gasparov’s characterization of the Tartu School and his department’s isolation from the world in an ivory tower, stressing the urgency of their efforts and the instability of their environment, their awareness that every publication they put out might be their last. Ultimately, Lotman explained away Gasparov’s critical assessment of the linguistic dynamics of the school with a binary opposition between two attitudes toward scholarship, open and closed:

Against this background there emerged two cultural orientations. One, which was represented by B. Gasparov, seemed to continue Pasternak’s position—turning inward, attempting “not to open the window.” This “ivory tower” philosophy was Gasparov’s principled position (which, by the way, was contradicted by his great talents as a lecturer, for he loved to captivate an audience). But as far as Z. G. Mints, B. F. Egorov, and I were concerned, we became “enlighteners,” striving “to sow the reasonable, good, and eternal.”\textsuperscript{1154}

In other words, Gasparov’s criticism might apply to Gasparov, but not to Lotman, his wife, or colleague, Boris Egorov

\textbf{A Tartu Perspective Upon the Languages of Lotman and Bakhtin}

The members of Yuri Lotman’s Tartu School dedicated the 1973 issue of their semiotic journal, \textit{Trudy po znakovym sistemam}, to the Russian literary scholar and philosopher, Mikhail

\textsuperscript{1152}“Germetizm nauchnogo soobshchestva podderzhivatsia takzhe priniatym v ego krugu ezotericheskim nauchnym iazykom. Iazyk, na kotorom govorili i pisali ‘tartuskie’ uchenye, byl nasyschen terminologiei, immanentnoi semioticheskogo izucheniya i ne upotrebitel’noi za ix predelami. Mnogie vyrazheniia etogo osobogo semioticheskogo iazyka sozdavali- cheleny gruppy i imeli xozhdenie iskluchitel’no v izucheniye drug s drugom. Ochen’ mnogo slovo prestavialo soboi priamuiu transliteratsiu inostrannых terminov, ne upotreblivshihcha v russkoiazychnoi nauchnoi traditsii, chto pridavalo etomu ezotericheskogo iazyku kharakterno zapadnicheskii ottenok.” Boris Gasparov, “Tartuskaia shkola,” 62.

\textsuperscript{1153}See Solzhenitsyn, \textit{Invisible Allies}.

Bakhtin (1895–1976). They shared cordial relations. Lotman met Bakhtin after the latter was rediscovered living in internal exile in Saransk in the 1960s. He had been teaching at the Pedagogical Institute there and was brought back to Moscow to great acclaim, where he became an international celebrity for his writings on a wide variety of subjects and questions of culture, language, and literature. As the single most universal, most widely read, and most internationally cited Soviet figure in literary and linguistic studies, Mikhail Bakhtin is the intellectual foil against which Yuri Lotman’s achievements and department must be assessed in a Soviet context. Seeing their position with the Soviet Union from the perspective of Tartu can help to reveal some hidden aspects of the differences between their views on language and literature and contributions to theories of culture.

As an immigrant to the Russian Empire’s Baltic German periphery and Dorpat University’s first librarian and professor of rhetoric and aesthetics, Karl Morgenstern coined the term “Bildungsroman” to express—for the first time in literary history perhaps—the idea of the emergence of a new man, i.e. the development of the personality of an individual together with the historical evolution of the world around him. This, at least, was Mikhail Bakhtin’s interpretation of Morgenstern’s concept: everything in constant flux. Bakhtin’s “image of man growing in national-historical time” was a very Soviet appropriation of this German concept, perfectly in tune with Soviet aims and aspirations, where all literature was national by definition, while the state was transnational, based on Russian translations of German ideology.

Morgenstern delivered three lectures on the concept of the modern novel in the newly built neoclassical auditorium of Tartu University between 1810 and 1820. And the Baltic particularity of the Bildungsroman as Karl Morgenstern first uttered it was as much about continuity as change, an appeal to timeless and eternal values as well as to growth and progress. In Dorpat, Morgenstern was caught between two worlds, a national and international one. And consequently, like Goethe himself, the Bildungsroman was both a

1156 For this very Soviet definition of the originality and uniqueness of the Bildungsroman see Bakhtin, “The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel),” Speech Genres and Other Late Essays. Trans Vern W. McGee (New York: University of Texas Press, 1986), 23.
1158 See Morgenstern’s essays published in 1817, 1820, and 1824 respectively, based on lectures delivered in the auditorium of Dorpat (Tartu) University on December 12, 1810, December 12, 1819, and December 12, 1820. December 12th was the birthday of the reigning Tsar, Alexander I: (1) “Über den Geist und Zusammenhang einer Reihe philosophischer Romane”; (2) “Ueber das Wesen des Bildungsroman”; (3) “Zur Geschichte des Bildungsroman.” All three essays are reproduced in full in Rolf Selbmann, Zur Geschichte des deutschen Bildungsromans (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buches, 1988).
1159 Tobias Boes uses Morgenstern to question Bakhtin directly: “The idea that the novel of formation is a literary response to a changing conception of historical time isn’t new. Mikhail Bakhtin had already argued as much in the 1930s…. Karl Morgenstern’s lecture allows us to question some of the premises of Bakhtin’s argument, however. After all, what did Morgenstern really understand about ‘German time’ that Goethe was supposedly depicting? It certainly did not exist in any institution sense …. Morgenstern’s lecture is full of revolutionary fervor, and he was clearly unaware (or at least ignorant of the full impact) of the Carlsbad Decrees that had been imposed on the German Confederation three months earlier, stifling the intellect and voices of an entire generation.” Boes, 6
1160 Morgenstern has acquired significant attention from German literary scholars interested in both the national and international dimensions of the German Bildungsroman. He appears already in the second sentence of a book on the national dimensions of the genre: “Wie so oft existiert die Sache vor dem Begriff. Als der Dorpater Ästhetikprofessor Karl Morgenstern in den ersten Jahren des 19. Jahrhunderts den Terminus ‘Bildungsroman’
uniquely German national product and a cosmopolitan literary export. Tobias Boes has argued that the German “nationalist swagger” of Morgenstern’s text (where Wieland is described as an inferior writer to Goethe because he has not yet managed to break free of “meddlesome foreign influences”) must be read against the background of the internationalist context in which it was composed: “At the new University of Dorpat, which Alexander [I] was aggressively staffing with Western academics, Morgenstern reinvented himself as a universal humanist in the eighteenth-century mold, not only lecturing on rhetoric, but also founding the library, art museum, and botanical garden.” All three of his talks were delivered on December 12—in 1810, 1819, and 1820 respectively—in honor of the birthday of Tsar Alexander I. In Morgenstern’s life, like the life of so many other Tartu scholars through the ages, nationalism and cosmopolitanism were in a constant and productive tension with one another. As Tobias has put it:

Morgenstern’s life thus demonstrates the condition that we have nowadays come to refer to as globalization. Geographically, he (like an ever-increasing number of German intellectuals after him) belonged not to any nation, but what Arjun Appadurai has called the ‘transnation’: a community ‘which retains a special ideological link to a putative place of origin but is otherwise a thoroughly diasporic collectivity.’ Historically, he found himself swept up in revolutionary currents whose allure was impossible to resist, even as they hollowed out the foundations of the very life he had built for himself. Although he is sometimes depicted as a boring and out-of-touch pedant Morgenstern embodied the forces of global modernity to a greater degree than many of his more famous contemporaries.

Well before there was a word to express it, many different Baltic elites have identified with this transnational condition. Tania Alexander (1915-2004) was the Saint Petersburg-born daughter of the Baroness Moura Budberg, who grew up noticing her mother’s love affairs with Maxim Gorky, H. G. Wells, and the diplomat and spy, Robert Bruce Lockhart. Though she spent a summer with her mother and Gorky in Sorrento, she grew up mostly on the family’s Baltic estate, learning to read and write fluently in Russian, German, and English, but speaking mostly Estonian. She opened her memoir, An Estonian Childhood (1987), by identifying with another memoirist from the transnational Baltic aristocracy of the early twentieth century: “The Baltic philosopher Count Hermann Keyserling [1880-1946],” who “once remarked, ‘I am not a Dane, not a Swede, not a Russian nor an Estonian, so what am I—a little of all of these.’” She added of herself: “I share his sense of confused identity.” Something similar might be said of Yuri Lotman.


1161 For a specifically German national take on the meaning of the Bildungs Roman see Todd Kontje, The German Bildungroman: History of a National Genre (Columbia: Camden House, 1993).
1162 Boes, Formative Fictions, 2.
1163 Boas, Formative Fictions, 2.
Like Karl Morgenstern, Yuri Lotman was the Jewish-born apostle of a national literary culture in a transnational Baltic environment that did not fit comfortably into any political frame. It bears mentioning, moreover, that the cosmopolitanism of all these figures—Karl Morgenstern, Tania Alexander, Count Hermann Keyserling, and Yuri Lotman—was not formulated against nationalism, but through it. Yuri Lotman had his institutional and scholarly identity first and foremost after all as a professor of Russian literature (not Soviet literature). But like Tania Alexander and Count Keyserling, he found his identity not by rejecting national categories and languages but by multiplying them, concluding that the minimal standard for any expression of knowledge be two languages. The same impulse to find knowledge in multiplicity might be said of all of Tartu University’s Estonian polyglots from Villem Ernits to Uku Masing, Juhan Tuldava, Pent Nurmekund, and Paul Ariste.

As Marshall Berman observed several decades ago, the experience of modernity is not only about relentless flux and the accelerating pace change; it is also about yearning for something permanent, something that grounds humanity in the past and eternity as the world whirls incomprehensibly by: people “are moved at once by a will to change—transform both themselves and their world—and by a terror of disorientation and disintegration, of life falling apart.” The University has always embodied this tension, generating a Babel of mutually incomprehensible disciplinary languages and specialization on the one hand, while symbolizing their integration and the continuity of timeless and unchanging scholarly values on the other. Morgenstern’s “global” predicament in Baltic Livonia, like that of the Bildungsroman itself and the work of most Tartu scholars through the ages from Johannes Gezelius to Karl Ernst von Baer, Jan Badouine de Courténay, Paul Ariste and Yuri Lotman, was a heightened tension between the particular and the universal, nationalism and cosmopolitanism, between Pentecost and Babel, or to use Yuri Lotman’s own terms—“translatability and untranslatability.” This tension is especially apparent in the idea of the Bildungsroman itself: “the Bildungsroman is a genre connected more than any other to the rise of modern nationalism. But repeatedly and consistently, the knot that ties literature to politics comes undone in precisely those cases where the stakes are the highest.”

Bakhtin’s definition of the Bildungsroman—like most of Bakhtin’s definitions—dissolved differences and distinctions: both the protagonist and his world are in a constant state of flux: by contrast, Lotman’s definition of the novel—like most of Lotman’s definitions—insisted upon a binary divide between Europe and Russia. Vladimir Uspensky recalled how Lotman was prone to say that the “Russian novel can be distinguished from the Western European one in that in one the hero evolves over the course of the story, while in the other he remains who he is, but strives to transform the world around him.” The tension between change and continuity, a widespread Baltic concern all but absent from Bakhtin’s work, was a major preoccupation for Lotman.

As a theoretical lens upon culture, Bakhtin’s work has achieved much wider resonance than that of Yuri Lotman. To Western scholars in the 1970s and 80s it seemed to be more universally revealing and satisfying to prevailing First and Second World ideologies of capitalism and socialism. With the publication of The First Hundred Years of Bakhtin 2000,

1166 Boes, Formative Fictions, 3.
Caryl Emerson spelled out the dimensions of the Bakhtin cult that took Western and Russian cultural criticism by storm (albeit in very different ways) over the course of the last quarter of the twentieth century. Comparable efforts to turn Yuri Lotman into an important voice in global cultural studies have been more modest and less successful. Maxim Waldstein’s *Soviet Empire of Signs: A History of the Tartu School* attempts to understand Lotman and the Tartu school in terms of concepts and theories derived from Western sociology of knowledge, and is more interested in Lotman and his Russian colleagues as an object of discourse—or a participant in a scholarly structural system—than a voice in his own right who could challenge or suggest an alternative perspective to the prevailing assumptions and claims of Western literary and cultural theory. Lotman’s voice in Andreas Schönle’s 2006 collection, *Lotman and Cultural Studies*, is subordinate to that of his interlocuters: Antonio Gramsci, Stephen Greenblatt, Michel Foucault, and Michel de Certeau; together they tackle topics ranging from Dante and Iran to cinema and everyday life, but without the far reaching resonance with which Bakhtin has been applied to every aspect of contemporary intellectual life.\footnote{Andreas Schönle, *Lotman and Cultural Studies: Encounters and Extensions* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).}

With the hope of turning semiotics into a universal language of science in the 1970s, some Tartu school members, like Viacheslav Ivanov and Boris Egorov, exaggerated the intellectual affinity between Lotman and Bakhtin while western scholars, animated by the distinction between structuralism and post-structuralism, like David Bethea, Caryl Emerson, and Gary Saul Morson, focused on their differences (e.g. Lotman as a scholar of the poetry of Pushkin vs. Bakhtin as a scholar of the prose of Dostoevsky).\footnote{For a comparative takes on the uneven reception of Bakhtin and Lotman in the West see the Afterword of William Mills Todd III, “Lotman Without Tears,” *Lotman and Cultural Studies*, 345-349. See also Brian James Baer “Translater’s Prefaces” to Yuri Lotman, *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture* (Tallinn: TLU Press, 2013), 17-31.} Contrasted unfavorably to Bakhtin, Tartu School scholarship even emerged as a slightly sinister force through Morson’s concept of “semiotic totalitarianism”—i.e. the conviction that everything always has a meaning, emerging in the favorite Tartu school phrase—“it is not by chance that” (eto ne sluchaino, chto/pole juhus, et). Indeed, Tartu school analysis has always seemed more inclined to paranoia and conspiracy theory than the wonderfully tolerant and generous literary criticism of Mikhail Bakhtin.

Still, I would argue that Lotman offers something of value, not merely as an opaque artifact of a lost world, but also as a critical voice. Lotman offers a small-town, defamiliarizing Baltic European corrective to Bakhtin’s indiscriminantly inclusive polyphonic interpretations of Russian and European literary culture. Boris Gasparov has observed that “Lotman was always delightfully inconsistent,” both in “his theoretical claims, as well as in his concrete interpretation and findings.”\footnote{Boris Gasparov, “In Memoriam: Iurii Mikhailovich Lotman (1922-1993),” *The Slavic and East European Journal* vol. 38, no. 4 (Winter, 1994), 731-739.} Some of that inconsistency derived from the dynamics of his Tartu environment with all its irreconcilable, unassimilable elements, and the challenge it posed in everyday practice to Russian literary culture. As a general theorist of culture, Lotman has been used to make sense of the paradoxical and contradictory aspects of Soviet and Russian history. Drawing upon Lotman in his study of tsarist self-representation, *Scenarios of Power*, Richard Wortman showed the hidden logic of extremes in the autocratic Russian Imperial State, as each tsar attempted to reverse the “scenario” of his predecessor. Russian imperial history pendulated between the regimes of liberal—sometimes even radically reforming Tsars—and extremely
reactionary ones ever since the seventeenth century. Writing on the culture of the Terror, Igal Halfin used Lotman to understand what amounted to a Protestant Reformation in official Soviet autobiographies: tales of “Catholic” mistakes begging for forgiveness (in the 1920s) turned into “Protestant” tales of “evidence of election” in the 1930s as the new Soviet man turned increasingly infallible and inflexible. Here Halfin cited Lotman’s idea of the absent “third
space” in Russian Orthodox culture to explain the origins and escalation of Soviet violence.1171

It is surprising how many important Soviet cultural figures owed something to the Baltic world. As discussed in my introduction, three of the four protagonists—or “intermediaries”—of Katerina Clark’s Moscow the Fourth Rome, who helped to define cosmopolitanism of the Soviet Capital in the 1930s had their roots in (or close) to the Baltic.1172 Even Bakhtin, as Michael Holquist and Katerina Clark observed, derived some of the key concepts of his literary and linguistic philosophy (like heteroglossia) from his experience growing up in the Baltic Vilnius.1173 But where these figures owed at least part of their youth to the Baltic—and journeyed from the periphery to the center—Lotman’s Soviet life story traced the opposite path, from the center to the periphery, from metropolitan Leningrad (the birthplace of the Russian Revolution) to provincial Tartu. Thus, Tartu did not form his earliest memories of life, but offered a socio-cultural context for the expression of his mature late-Soviet studies of culture.

In the end, Bakhtin offered a much better expression of the official spirit of Soviet discourse than Lotman writing from his perch in Baltic Tartu. Lotman’s popularity in Estonia derived, at least in part, from his ability to draw distinctions—between the behavior of classes, between the proletarian work force flooding to newly-built apartment buildings in Tallinn (or across the river to Tartu’s Annelinn) and the high culture of Pushkin and the Decembrists. For all his erudition, Bakhtin’s chosen people (like those of the Soviet state) were the untutored folk; Lotman’s chosen people were 18th- and 19th-century Russian aristocrats. Bakhtin was interested in communication and “translatability,” Lotman much more in miscommunication and “untranslatability.” Bakhtin’s literary theory was about total and constant change and transformation. It was about breaking down walls, perfectly Pentecostal communication; Lotman was more interested in old-testament Babel than in new-testament Pentecost.

The very essence of Bakhtin’s work, according to Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, was his idea that “the word is a two sided act”; his entire oeuvre was a celebration of multivocal transformation and transparency, in all three areas (and the corresponding nations) of his concern, Rabelaisian France, Goethean Germany, and Dostoevskian Russia. These three areas of concern correspond to the key political and ideological questions of the official discourse of the Soviet state: (1) the question of the Bolshevik Revolution; (2) the question of the New Soviet Man; and (3) the Question of the “Friendship of the Peoples.”

(1) Bakhtin’s celebration of Rabelaisian “Carnival” and the “Grotesque” corresponds to the celebration of the totalizing transformation of the Proletarian Revolution with its reversals; it even serves as a justification of the Terror, with all its ambiguous and topsy-turvy violence and laughter. The Show Trials were full of laughter too, after all, infusing a hearty earthy, peasant element (e.g. Sheila Fitzpatrick’s Stalin’s Peasants) into staid bureaucracy and officialdom just

1171 “According to Iurii Lotman’s and Boris Uspenskii’s classic study, the life of the medieval believer in the West admitted three types of behavior: “the unconditionally sinful, the unconditionally holy, and the neutral, which permits eternal salva
1172 Katerina Clark, Moscow the Fourth Rome, 32-33.
1173 Clark and Holquist, Bakhtin, 22.
as Bakhtin’s Rabelais had brought a hearty, earthy, peasant laughter into the official canons of Renaissance humanism.

(2) Little has survived of Bakhtin’s writings on Goethe and the German Bildungsroman, most of it lost to the ravages of the Second World War, though enough to discover in Bakhtin’s writings on Goethe a kind of template for the making of the New Soviet Man, no stable constants, only variables: the world changes and humanity along with it in the spirit of the last lines of Trotsky’s *Literature and Revolution* (1923) where the New Soviet Man—who has no nationality—surpasses the heights of an Aristotle, a Marx, or a Goethe. However the nation was still reified in Bakhtin’s world (as it was in official Soviet canons), even as he promised the transformation of everything else. Bakhtin defined the Bildungsroman as offering an “image of man growing in national-historical time.”

(3) Finally, Bakhtin’s greatest love, Dostoevsky and the polyphonic novel, with many different voices speaking, but ultimately everyone saying the same thing, or never disagreeing with each other in any kind of important or fundamental way, was an easy reconciliation of Russian nationalism with Soviet universalism, approximating the Soviet ideal of the “Friendship of the Peoples,” an image of perfect harmony and consensus integrated by the Russian language, not merely as an anemic universal language, but also as the specifically Russian voice of the leading nation of the Soviet Union.

Bakhtin’s world was a bright, optimistic, and singing one that appealed equally to dominant American and dominant Soviet cultural sensibilities which may explain his long afterlife; there is a surreal similarity to the plastic smiles of Americans who “keep smiling!” and the manic joy of the Stalinist 1930s, “dizzy with success.” Both are expressions of Marshal Berman’s modernity. When Bakhtin wrote of Gogol in 1972, comparing him to Rabelais, it was Lotman who cautioned him (while deferring to his greatness) against the irresponsibility of such a one-sided, optimistic interpretation that seemed to elide by means of “ambiguity” the distinction between “humor” and “violence.” Bakhtin celebrated “unconstrained dancing,” arguing that “folk culture gives depth and a connection to the carnivalized images of collectives: to Nevsky Prospekt, to officialdom” and how “only within it can we understand the gay demise, the jolly deaths of Gogol” since ultimately “the grotesque contains the popular renewing and life-affirming idea.” What Bakhtin celebrated in Gogol was exactly what he celebrated in Rabelais and everywhere else: “a continuous dropping-away from the literary norms of the epoch and a correlation with other realities that explode the official, direct, ‘decent’ surface of the word.”

Lotman cautioned Bakhtin not to conflate (for Bakhtin was constantly conflating things) the peasant culture of 16th-century France with that of Gogol’s Ukraine and Russia, conceding that while there might be “gaiety and a dream about the utopia of the carnival world” in Gogol’s writings as Bakhtin had observed, “one also cannot forget that aspect of laughter which induced horror in Gogol” and which he tried to “neutralize” by the serious culture of utopia.

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1174 For this very Soviet definition of the originality and uniqueness of the Bildungsroman see Bakhtin, “The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel).” *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays.* Trans Vern W. McGee (New York: University of Texas Press, 1986), 23.


1176 Baran, *Semiotics*, 293.
and homily.” True to form, Lotman drew a binary distinction between Russia and Europe to elucidate the deep difference he saw between them:

From the inner point of view, the world of carnival gaiety could appear to be beyond valuation, to be ambivalent. In Western culture it could successfully impose its inner position on the culture as a whole, since it was permitted during specific calendrical periods as a form of obligatory social behavior, a humorous catharsis of the serious medieval world. In Orthodox culture of medieval Eastern Europe the opposite occurred: the official evaluation of carnival as demonic play-acting penetrated into its inner self-evaluation. Permission for carnival behavior at certain times was linked with the belief that at that time God permitted the Devil to rule the world. Thus the fact that participants in carnivals were engaging in legitimate behavior did not eliminate the fact that this behavior itself remained sinful. Whereas the tradition studied by Bakhtin abolishes fear, in our case laughter implies fear. The world of masks and mummers turned inside out was funny and frightening at the same time.

Where Bakhtin dissolved distinctions, Lotman insisted upon them. Where Bakhtin offered “ambiguity,” eliding the boundary between “humor” and “violence,” Lotman explored the asymmetrical inequalities and internal divisions of the semiosphere, where meaning arose more from that which could not be translated or understood than from that which could. Bakhtin’s theory of culture celebrates—or at least overlooks—bullying, humiliation, and abuse, the techniques by which the strong dominant the weak, and the imperial metropole imposes its will upon the national periphery. Scholars who rely on Bakhtinian models of interpretation also tend to overlook or condone these aspects of the Soviet experience as “ne interessno” (not interesting).

There is a hidden one-sidedness in critical works born under the star of Bakhtinian “multivocality” in all their celebration of change and indifference to pain, suffering, and memory in the gaudy optimism of the Soviet experiment. It was Lotman, not Bakhtin, who wrote on the cultural dimensions of fear, confusion, and witch hunts. If Bakhtin can show us how people talked; Lotman is much better at accounting for the silences between them (in Tartu they were particularly vast); if Bakhtin shows us how we are all the same; Lotman reveals us how we are different, and moreover, how and why those differences matter and are worthy of preservation: “We live” (My zhivem), he wrote, “because we are different” (potomu, chto my raznye).

Before it was published as an article in Izvestia on February 24, 1991 (Estonian Independence Day), this was a televised lecture intended not for the Russian intelligentsia, but an Estonian-speaking audience. If Bakhtin was a good cultural guide to how the Soviet Union worked, Lotman was a much better guide to how it did not. Like so many other Tartu figures through the ages, Yuri Lotman used his peripheral Baltic vantage point as an “oasis” and “observatory” upon the world to see what was hidden in plain view at the center, in the interpretations of Western

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1177 See Bakhtin’s essay “The Art of the Word and the Culture of Folk Humor (Rabelais and Gogol’)” and Lotman’s rebuttal “Gogol’ and the Correlation of ‘the Cuture of Humor’ with the Comic and Serious in the Russian National Tradition,” in Baran, Semiotics, 284-300.
1178 Baran, Semiotics, 298.
and Russian historians and cultural critics who based their interpretations on centrally located archives in Moscow and Leningrad and took their theoretical cues from Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Foucault.

**Postscript. Estonian Semiotics and Russian Literature**

This section has used Tartu University’s unofficial scholarly multilingualism as the cultural background against which to see the two departments at the heart of Tartu’s official bilingual establishment, juxtaposing the work of Yuri Lotman with his nearest Estonian counterpart, the chair of Finno-Ugric Studies, Paul Ariste. It has shown how the scholarship of both these professors and their departments—like that of so many of their colleagues and students in other areas, only more dramatically—moved in two opposite linguistic directions at once, which though financed, structured, and enabled by the Soviet state, looked beyond it in pursuit of a more universal and objective metalanguage by which to grasp the multiplicity of the entire world on the one hand, and a more intimate and personal language in which to find a meaningful form of individual and collective experience on the other. With Lotman and his department the divide was especially drastic and institutionally apparent. At the end of his life, Lotman quoted Goethe’s *Faust* (in German): “Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach, in meinen Brust!/ Die eine will sich von der andern trennen.”

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Lotman’s “two souls” got their wish and Tartu University institutionalized his bifurcated memory in two departments, each of which lays claim to half his legacy: the international Estonian- and English-speaking Department of Semiotics and the national Russian-speaking Department of Russian Literature.

One part of Lotman’s memory lives on at the Department of Russian Literature. Here the emphasis is on Lotman’s memory and the particularity of his character and his accomplishments. In *Vyshgorod*, a journal of the department devoted to Lotman’s memory and legacy, the bonds that bound Lotman’s Department are especially apparent. His birthday is celebrated here every February 28th with a trip to his grave, anecdotes recounted to the accompaniment of zakuski and vodka, and an international academic conference in Russian attended by his former students and admirers from around the world. The other half of Lotman’s memory lives on in a vision of a universal language of knowledge—several decades old now—in the Estonian Department of Semiotics, where Yuri Lotman briefly held a chair the year before his death. One of Lotman’s very few Estonian students, Peeter Torop, presides over the department. He carried the promise of a more perfect, more universal form of communication to its logical extreme in his 1996 monograph, *Total Translation* (*Total’nyi perevod*). Lotman's eldest son, Mikhail Lotman has also taught cultural semiotics here in perfectly fluent Estonian and Russian, though his main professorial post is at the newly established University of Tallinn, and most of his published writings are in Estonian. Meanwhile, biologist Kalevi Kull expanded the scope of the

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1182 I have personally attended two of these February 28th conferences and celebrations of Lotman’s life on his birthday (in 2008 and 2011) thanks to the warm welcome of Lotman’s student and current director of the Russian Literature department at Tartu University, Liubov Kiseleva.

1183 Mikhail Lotman’s office resides by the newly established Lotman archive. Large glass windows look in upon the small room containing Lotman’s library and some of his correspondence from within one of the large impersonal halls of Tallinn University, a cluttered intimate space, a kind of studied disorder, full of books and papers, dwarfed
department and its discipline, continuing the work of one of Lotman's correspondents from Indiana, the Hungarian exile and American founder of biosemiotics, Thomas Sebeok. By turning semiotic models upon questions of genetic “translation,” Kull continued Sebeok's biosemiotic colonization of the natural world. But in its ambitious colonization of all knowledge, semiotics has grown diffuse and gone the way of so many universal languages of truth before it. In a new state (The Estonian Republic), and a new universal language (English), Tartu semiotics sometimes seems quaintly old-fashioned, a little like yesterday's science fiction.

7.4 A Tale of Two Scholars: Paul Ariste and Yuri Lotman

Paul Ariste was born Paul Berg on January 21, 1905 on a Baltic German Manor in Torma Parish in Eastern Estonia, about fifty-five kilometers North of Tartu. He would change his name to Ariste in the 1920s during a national campaign to Estonianize people’s names undertaken by Estonia’s “Mother Tongue Society” (Emakeele selts), founded at Tartu University in 1920; his parents remained Bergs. The very same midwife who delivered him had a few hours earlier delivered Bernard von Walter, the newborn son of the Lord of the Manor. Paul’s father Alexander (b. 1875) was a good-humored carpenter. His mother (b. 1866), nearly ten years his father’s senior, was the proud daughter and widow of a school teacher, who had worked in Tartu as a seamstress following her first husband’s death and taken a course in the culinary arts. She arrived at the manor as a house-keeper and cook. Already at the age of six, Paul understood that his mother’s pregnancy had been the primary reason for the marriage of his parents (he had been born only seven months after their wedding). Both were Estonians but his father belonged to the Russian Orthodox faith while his mother was a “strict Lutheran” (range luterlane). In accordance with late Imperial religious policy toward mixed-marriages, Paul was christened into Russian Orthodoxy: “Later I have hovered between the two confessions. I have even sometimes been a formal Lutheran.” But his heart remained with Orthodoxy. Of the birth of his own daughter many years later in 1931 he wrote that his wife, “Erna wanted, the child to be christened into the Lutheran faith. I did not dare to object, though secretly I thought that later I would convince her to convert to apostolic Orthodoxy.”

Like many Estonian families the Bergs moved quite often from manor house to manor house, serving different patrons from the Baltic German aristocracy: like the von Walters of Rääbise Manor (1905–1906), the von Wolffs of Puurmani (1907–1910) and the von Oettingens of Kivijär (1910-1911). Often these manors had special quarters to accommodate their Estonian servants and staff. It was a world full of fine gradations of social status and class distinction. At Kivijär the carpenter’s wife was supposed to milk the cows. Ariste remembered how his proud mother—she was after all a school-teacher’s daughter and widow—had been humiliated by her responsibilities as a milkmaid: “Mother tried to earn enough through her

by the clean modernist lines and imposing stone structures of an impersonal one—a little like Lotman’s position Soviet Union.

1185 Ariste, Mälestusi, 8 and 10.
sewing that she could hire a milkmaid. The word milkmaid, at that time, was all but a term of abuse. Through their correspondence with relatives in Tallinn, Kronstadt and Saint Petersburg and their subscription to Tartu Postimees—the main Estonian language newspaper in Southern Estonia—they acquired some inkling of the wider world in the Estonian language. Paul attempted his first written correspondence at the age of four, upon seeing his mother writing letters to relatives in Baltic Livonia and more distant parts of the Russian Empire:

I wanted to write too. I did not yet know the letters of the alphabet. So I took a piece of paper and an envelope. I scrawled some hooks and took it to the Manor overseer. Mail was received at the overseer’s house. That is also the place from which letters and cards were sent out. I told the overseer: ‘I have brought a letter to Auntie Miili.’ The overseer examined my scribbles and replied: ‘This letter will not reach its destination. You don’t have a Russian address. Take it back home!’… And this is how my first episode of graphomania came to an end.

Paul Berg remembered his first trip to Tartu at the age of five as an entry into a larger, more meaningful, more cosmopolitan, multilingual world. It was at the same time his first national experience. The occasion of his visit was the Estonian National Song Festival of June 1910. (The first one had also been organized in Tartu in 1868). The speed was so overwhelming there was barely any time to sit up and look around. And when they arrived in town, he could scarcely keep track of the bewildering flurry of sights and sounds. For Tartu was the first “city” Paul Ariste had ever seen. A distant relative, “who was dressed in the German fashion, like a refined seamstress” met them at the train. “We were driven over the old Stone Bridge to Roos street. Aunt Eeva lived on the second floor…. For the first time I drank cacao, or as it was then called ‘chocolate.’” Paul also remembered how at Tartu’s marketplace his grandmother had bought some flowers: “Wonder of wonders. I had never heard that flowers could be bought and sold.” And then the next day there was the song festival. He stood in the old town square with his grandmother as the parade filed past. The Choir from Kronstadt stopped very close to us…. Grandmother saw uncle Peter and aunt Anna and went to them. I don’t remember, what they spoke about, but I remember aunt Anna’s question: “Where [kuhu] are you going?” In my opinion the word kahu was a refined word. I had grown up saying kohe. I too wanted to be refined, just like aunt Anna, who was wearing an elegant hat. From that time forth I would always ask: “Kuhu are you going?” whenever I could remember the word.
Paul very nearly became an adopted child of the Baltic German aristocracy. His mother told him later how the Count and Countess at Puurmani Manor had many sons and daughters, but one of their daughters had no children of her own, and took a quite a liking to Paul, who was a strikingly beautiful child. “She had asked my mother at one point, if my parents wouldn’t give him to her as a stepson…. My parents did not agree to this proposal. So I remained a Berg, and did not become a [von] Wolff.”1193

Paul’s encountered the limits of his own language before his first visit to Tartu. He discovered Latvian through the housekeeper for Visuti Manor, who was a frequent guest at the home of the Bergs: “She spoke Estonian strangely. My mother explained, that this old woman was a Latvian and spoke this way because of that.”1194 The big event at Kivijärvi in 1910 had been the arrival of the German “colonists” (i.e. Volga Germans), imported by the manor lords; they were mostly bilingual (Russian-German speakers), and had musical instruments and feather pillows: “I played with the German children. We did not have a common language, but we understood each other anyway. One German boy was a bit older than me. He had picture books, which he showed to me. Later in winter, the German children had to go off to school in Kurland. There was a German school there. He learned Estonian rather quickly, so that we could talk a bit later on.”1195 Also close by were the communities of Russian Old-Believers in Mustvee on the banks of Lake Peipus. And then there were the cosmopolitan languages of the count and countess at Puurman Castle, who kept their walls lined with portraits of their ancestors, and their home staffed with French-speaking servants. Sometimes they would even spend their summers in Italy and return with stories of the far-off coasts of Europe.1196

At an early age Paul Berg discovered that knowing foreign languages made him cosmopolitan and being cosmopolitan was very important to the young Paul Berg. Every language he heard opened a new and hitherto mysterious realm for him and Berg learned almost every language he encountered. By the time of his death in 1991 he spoke nearly thirty different languages, and belonged to the ranks of Tartu’s five or six leading polyglots.1197 His highschool experience in Tallinn on the eve of Estonian Independence was a multinational and multilingual one: “At School the smartest boys were the Jews. I became friends with the Pole Walkiewicz and the Swede Gineman. I did not get along with the Russians. They were too excitable and rough.”1198 The small provincial world of his youth expanded in fits and starts as he started learning languages:

1193 Ariste, Mälestusi 22.
1194 “Meeles on Visusti mõisa virtin, kes oli lätlane ja kes käis sageli meil. Ta rääakis imelikku eesti keelt. Mamma seletas, et see vanatädi on lätlane ja sellepuurast rääib nõndaviisi.” Ariste, Mälestusi, 11.
1196 Ariste, Mälestusi, 24.
1197 Most famous were Uku Masing (c. 15 languages), Juhan Tuldava (c. 15 languages), Villem Ernits (c. 17-30 languages) and especially Pent Nurmekund, who tried to get to know the world outside the Soviet Union with a competence in somewhere between seventy and a hundred different languages. His Farsee, Chinese, Danish, Arabic, and Tibetan courses at the University of Tartu were especially popular.
I was interested in everything that had to do with language. As a schoolboy I had learned to read and speak Finnish. Undoubtedly I knew more Hungarian then than I do now. In school I read Russian, German, English, and Swedish books and understood them. It is no wonder then that I was taken with Esperanto, just as soon as I heard of its existence. The year was 1920. I read an ad in the newspaper about a meeting to propagate Esperanto taking place in the “Estonia” Concert Hall in Tallinn.

Berg’s discovery of Esperanto was a revelation, a turning point in his self-transformation into a more refined and cosmopolitan human being. The first words he learned in the language were *Grando diferenco* [great difference]: “I began to believe, that between my earlier linguistic pursuits and my later ones there was indeed a *grando diferenco.*”¹²⁰ He stumbled into the Esperanto circles of Tallinn at the age of fifteen, taken under the wing of a surrogate mother-figure of Helmi Dresen, a leading Estonian Tallinn Communist whose home together with her sister Hilda Dresen became a gathering place for Esperanto enthusiasts:

I was inspired by the idea of Esperanto. The majority of Tallinn Esperantists, whose spiritual leader was Helmi Dresen, a later victim of fascist terror, did not engage with Esperanto merely for linguistic reasons. These people wanted a better society, they believed, that if humanity had a single language, then the antagostism between races and nations would disappear. Since I was just going through puberty, and was an impressionable youth in the multinational environment of Esperanto, internationalism left an imprint upon me. I have never felt that one nation was better and another was worse. The Jew and the Gypsy, the Russian and the German have always been for me fellow people as much as any fellow Estonian. And for this reason I have sometimes been called a “slavophile,” “germanophile,” “finnophile” or “judophile”, depending on the historical moment and the mentality.¹²¹

They began compiling the first comprehensive Estonian-Esperanto dictionary. Ariste enjoyed the acceptance he felt and his first acquaintance with the members of high society, its capacity to overcome traditional social distinctions, and the meaningful work he could do in the society already as a teenager.

In his first solitary international voyage at the age of sixteen in 1922—the year of Yuri Lotman’s birth—he traveled across the Baltic sea to Helsinki to attend his first Esperanto World

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Congress, packing enough food to last until his return to Tallinn a few days later for he knew he could not afford to buy anything in Helsinki. In Helsinki he met the widow of Ludwig Zamenhof, the Baltic-Jewish inventor of Esperanto, whom he asked for an autograph, which he kept with him until his death. Reflecting on the experience in his memoirs in 1980, he remembered his wonder at the multiplicity of tongues and nations he encountered at the Congress, and the capacity of Esperanto to overcome these differences. He believed that Esperanto had a glorious future as the true International Language (Lingvo internacia). Like most Estonian scholars who survived the maelstrom of Sovietization in the late 1940s and early 50s, Ariste clung to his earliest beliefs into the twilight of his life. On the ship back cross the Baltic Sea to Tallinn in 1922 he argued with a Slovakian, who claimed that his nation had been oppressed by the Hungarians: “It came as a surprise to me to learn that Finno-Ugrians could also be oppressors.”

The following year Ariste attended the International Esperanto Congress as well, this time in Nuremberg. He went with several Estonian Esperanto enthusiasts. They stopped in Prague on the way back, where Ariste was invited to write his impressions of the city for a student journal of Czech Esperantists. The article appeared in Czech translation in Esperantsky zpravodaj. Paul Ariste had been writing and publishing short articles in Esperanto for four years already by the time of his first Estonian-language publication appeared in 1926.

Ariste’s growing internationalism and cosmopolitanism was not contrary to but part and parcel of his growing awareness of his ethnic and national identity. International in form (written in Esperanto), his earliest scholarly efforts were at the same time national in content (written about Estonian culture). His very first publication appeared in 1921 when he was only sixteen in an Esperanto Triumfonta, a journal in Cologne, Germany, on the subject of the Baltic Livonians: “Pri la livoj: La plej malgranda popolo en Europo” [“On the Livonians: The Smallest Nation in Europe”]. He remembered February 24th, 1918, the day of the Declaration of Estonian Independence with special vividness. Next to his highschool in Tallinn was a church where he had gone with his classmates to hear the pastor read out the proclamation for the founding of the Estonian Nation State, and wrote of his impressions:

An unbelievable thing was born. Estonians now had their own state. In those days, even in Tallinn the Estonian language generally was the everyday language of simple folk. When I encountered some more refined-looking people speaking Estonian, I would turn around and look after them. Now Estonians were the ruling folk in their own country. This is what I thought. This I still remember.

With the birth of the Estonian nation state, the Estonian language had all of a sudden, for the first time itself become cosmopolitan, an equal member of the League of Nations as of 1921.
While still a highschool student in Tallinn, inspired by one of the founders of Finno-Ugric studies at Tartu University, Lauri Kettunen, a Finn who had undertaken the study of the Baltic Livonians, he decided that “I wanted to do something for the good of the Livonians.” He started organizing a collection for the support of Livonian children. A 20-year-old Paul Berg (on the eve of Estonianizing his name to Ariste) attended a Livonian benefit dinner in 1925, dating his own ethnic identity to the lively debates that erupted that evening: “At the dinner both Estonian and Livonian were spoken. Oskar Loorits spoke intelligently in both languages. That was the night I became a Finno-Ugrian. I swore it to myself internally.”

Two years later as a Tartu University student he was chosen to represent Tartu at the Estonian-Finnish student days in Helsinki in 1927. The eminent Finnish historian and member of the Finnish Academy of Sciences, A.M. Tallgren, who had only two years before still been a Tartu University Professor, invited him to his home: “He was a ‘Veljesto’ alum and I too was a Veljesto member. I stayed for two or three nights at his place…. In the evenings he talked of archeology and the distant past of the Finno-Ugrians.” For all his emerging ethnic interests, Ariste’s national consciousness was never translated into a distinct political program, and he remained a cosmopolitan internationalist, skeptical of Finnish nationalism:

In those days the Academic Karelian Society was a standard of measurement in the Finnish student body. It was a chauvinistic anti-Swedish organization that spoke of War with Russia. I was an Estonian nationalist, but did not like AKS’s bellicose attitude toward others. It was possible to be a good Estonian while honoring Jews, Russians, and Germans. The ideas of AKS infected several of our university youths, who found, that Finnish socialism and other left wing currents and tendencies might be damaging to us. I did not have a clear political identity.

Like many Estonian scholars from his generation, Paul Ariste’s national and cosmopolitan identity and map of Europe and the world derived not only from his studies at Tartu University but also from the exchanges Tartu enabled with interwar Europe in the 1930s (exchanges that were all but impossible for Soviet scholars at the same time). He sought out potential advisors in Helsinki, Uppsala, and Hamburg and noted: “Now looking back it seems unbelievable, the extent to which in those days [Tartu] University was dedicated to cultivating a generation of scholars, despite the fact that Estonia was experiencing a serious economic crisis. Many young people were sent to study in various countries in Western Europe and to the United States of

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In Hamburg, Ariste studied phonetics with Giulio Panconcelli-Calzia: “[he] was an Italian. When he said bei uns, this meant in Toscana. He had already lived in Germany for a long time and was a German citizen. As an Italian he was lively and lacked German imperiousness.”

Perhaps the foremost phonetician of the first half of the twentieth-century, Panconcelli-Calzia gathered an international array of students around him, whom Ariste encountered in Hamburg. He became good friends with a Finn, Erkki Vallit, and got to know one of Calazia’s most illustrious students, Otto von Essen. There was even a young woman from Liberia, Massakuaga. In Hamburg, Ariste learned German pronunciation; before, by his own account, he had spoken German with a Baltic German accent: everyone in Germany assumed he came from Iceland when he pronounced Estonia in the Baltic German way—which was also happened to be the Estonian way—with an elongated “E” (Eestland instead of Estland).

In Hamburg Ariste noted the widespread prevalence of Low German, and made the acquaintance of a Livonian—an Estonian patriot—who had been a merchant seaman, and made a fortune as the proprietor of several bars that catered to the sailors of Hamburg. Ariste saw the rise to power of the Nazis. Caught speaking Finnish with Erkki Valli, fat man in a Hitler uniform shouted at them: “Sie sind in Deutschland! Ich verbeite Ihnen in einer fremden Sprache zu sprechen!” They replied (in Finnish): “We do not understand.” (“Emme ymmärrä.”) Arriving early at lecture at one point, knowing that there were a few Hitlerites (Ariste’s term) among the students, Paul Ariste wrote on the board: “Mazal tov!” and left the room just to see what would happen. Later they all entered the classroom together and discovered the text. One got angry and erased the text, to which the others objected that he had destroyed all the “evidence.”

Ariste understood the historical contingency of his position and career as Estonia’s leading scholar of Finno-Ugric studies:

Hamburg made me into a phonetician [the study of the physical production of sounds in languages]. Professor Andrus Saareste directed my attention to phonology [the study of the how meaning is encoded in speech through sound]. Later I have tended toward phonology. Later I have departed even from phonetics to become something else. I have not rightly been anything at all. Circumstances and my nature have made me jump between several different fields. If the earlier contingent of Finno-Ugric instructors had remained in Estonia after 1944, I might have specialized in phonetics or general linguistic studies and Finno-Ugric languages would have remained a secondary field.

Ariste also studied Low German there with a professor of Jewish extraction, Agatha Lasche. In the late 1930s he almost succeeded in procuring a position for her at Tartu with the support and encourament of the Dean of the Faculty when Nazi racial policies deprived her of her

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1210 “Nüüd tagantjärele mõeldes näib laus imena, kuidas tollal püüti teadlaskaadri t kasvatada, kuigi Eestil oli suuri majanduraskusi. Suuri hulgi saadeti noori Lääne-Euroopa eri maadele ning Ühendriikidesse.” Ariste, Mälestusi, 179.


1212 Ariste, Mälestusi, 193.

1213 Ariste, Mälestusi, 195.

professorship in Hamburg. But the German ambassador to Estonia intervened to prevent her from accepting the post: promising to arrest her if she came to Estonia.\[1215\]

Throughout his life gypsies retained an important place in Paul Ariste’s imagination. In Tartu he even earned a reputation as “the white gypsy” (“valge mustlane”) for his ability to speak their language.\[1216\] One of his former students, folklorist Kristi Salve (b. 1941) remembered a prank Ariste had played with the help of some of his students in order to engage some gypsies in conversation on a train: he taught each of his students a phrase or two in the gypsy language and sent them off to say these phrases in their hearing. “When the gypies were already thoroughly befuddled and believed that everyone on the train spoke their language, then Ariste introduced himself.”\[1217\]

But of the non-Finno-Ugrians who sparked his special curiosity, nobody fascinated Ariste more than the Jews. He learned Yiddish from some of his college classmates in Tartu in the 1920s, and later some Hebrew. He was one of the very few Estonians in interwar Estonia who actively sought out contacts with its Jewish population. He gave several talks in Yiddish at various local Jewish University organizations in the 1930s and even traveled to Vilnius in 1938 to speak at one of the Jewish intellectual establishments there in Yiddish as well.

In many ways, the gentile philosemitic Paul Ariste was more interested in Jewish national culture than the Jewish Yuri Lotman, seeking it out even where it did not exist. Lotman’s former colleague in Tartu’s department of Russian literature, Boris Gasparov remembered that Ariste would occasionally address him in Yiddish, as if trying to catch him off guard, for Ariste believed Gasparov’s Armenian identity to be something of a ruse.\[1218\] Ariste took great pride in the status of “honorary Jew” or Ger conferred upon him for serving on one occasion as the tenth required male at the funeral of the mother of Idel Jakobson, a fellow Jewish classmate at Tartu University in the 1920s, who was a “secret Communist himself” though his parents were Hassidic.\[1219\] Tartu had a synagogue, but with Estonia’s famously low Jewish population, finding ten Jewish men for a funeral could be difficult. After all, Estonia fell just north of the frontier of Catherine the Great’s “Pale of the Settlement,” and at its peak the Jewish population of Estonia had never exceeded 5000. Jakobson himself, who came to study philosophy at interwar Tartu University, was a Riga rather than a Tartu native.

At a few key moments Paul Ariste played at being Jewish himself. He was imprisoned by the NKVD in 1945 on charges of bourgeois nationalism. In his memoirs, Ariste reconstructed the conversation with the guard on the train carrying Tatu prisoners to Tallinn. Ariste had heard him singing to himself in Yiddish, and so addressed him in this language:

— Are you Jewish? (“Zaid ir a jid?”)
— Are you also Jewish? (“Zaid ir oich a jid?”)
— Yes (“Take”).\[1220\]

With this invention of an ethnic tie based on their common language, Ariste and his fellow prisoners earned the momentary right to speak amongst themselves aboard the train.

\[1215\] Ariste, Mälestusi, 194-5.
\[1218\] Interview with Boris Gasparov at Cafè Strada, UC Berkeley, in October 2011.
\[1219\] Ariste, Mälestusi, 154.
\[1220\] Ariste, Mälestusi, 63
Ariste spent the better portion of the year in prison in Tallinn. In the end, his interwar relationship with Idel Jakobson proved important when he found himself on the opposite side of the NKVD interrogation table from his friend, whose mother he had helped to bury a decade before. He was released, and his confiscated research notes on the Vot language were returned to him. Thus, he avoided the fate that awaited so many of his colleagues at Tartu University. Jakobson became notorious as Soviet Estonia’s most severe NKVD interrogator. He was charged with signing off single-handedly on more than 1000 death sentences and 1000 deportations during and after the Second World War. There was talk of a War Crimes tribunal in the 1990s but he died before anything came of it.\footnote{Pekka Erelt and Tarmo Vahter, “Tundmatu sõjaroimar,” Eesti Ekspress 44 (1996).}  

As a 21-year-old undergraduate at Tartu University in 1926, before he Estonianized his name to Paul Ariste, Paul Berg published a review in Estonian of the Yiddish translation of the Estonian national epic, which had appeared in Kiev in 1922. After the appearance of his review, one of his advisors, Julius Māģiste, invited him out for coffee at Tartu’s famous Werner Café, where they saw the famous Estonian writer, Friedebert Tuglas sitting at the next table. Māģiste introduced Berg to Tuglas, who had read the review. Berg might as well have been a Jewish name, and Ariste remembered that Tuglas could barely contain his disappointment when he learned that Paul Berg was not in fact Jewish: “Pity you aren’t Jewish. I was already rejoicing that we were about to get our own Estonian-speaking Jewish intellectual. We don’t have any. Other nations have them. Jews are smart. George Brandes \textit{from Denmark}—DB\textit{] is Jewish. Have you read?”\footnote{“Kui kahju, et te pole juut. Mul oli juba hea meel, et saame eestikeelse juudiliteraadi. Neid meil pole. Teistel rahvastel on neid. Juudid on targad. Georg Brandes on juut. Kas olete lugenud?” Paul Ariste, \textit{Mälestusi}, 136.} This episode clearly left a mark on Ariste, for he wrote of it twice more than thirty years apart, first in 1949 and then again in the early 1980s.\footnote{Ariste’s 1949 version read as follows: “Expressing disappointment, Tuglas then said: ‘Ah, you are not even a Jew!’” / “Lausa kahetsedes ütles siis Tuglas: ‘Ah, teie polegi juut!’” Paul Ariste, \textit{Mälestusi}, 325.}  

After the Second World War, Tartu got Yuri Lotman. “Wearing my father’s only black suit,” Lotman wrote, “the only presentable piece of clothing I owned, I set out for Tartu, where I remained for the rest of my life.”\footnote{“Odevshis v slegka pereshityi ottsovskii chernyi kostium, edinstvennyi moi prazdnichni, ia poekhal v Tartu, gde ostalsia na vsiu ost’al’niu Zhiin’,” Yuri Lotman, “Ne-Memuary” in \textit{Vospitanie dushi} (Sankt Petersburg: Iskustvo-SPB, 2005), 43.} Like many other Russian Jews who came to Estonia from Leningrad, Lotman arrived at the height of Stalin’s anti-cosmopolitan campaign in 1950, with no chance of employment in Leningrad or Moscow or anywhere else. He taught Russian to the newly Sovietized Estonians at Tartu’s pedagogical institute a few steps from the manor house of Faddei Bulgarin (1789–1859). This multiethnic Russian writer of Polish, Bulgarian, and Albanian ancestry, a self-appointed propagandist for the authoritarianism politics of the Russian tsars, had been Pushkin’s nemesis. The delicacy of Lotman’s position on the Tartu faculty in the 1950s after his first arrival might be compared to George Orwell’s position as a British policeman in India: both were, after all, in some sense the reluctant colonial agents of an imperial state, charged with a civilizing mission and imposing the norms and language of empire on a newly acquired colonial periphery that preferred to live by its own laws and customs and speak its own language(s).\footnote{For Orwell’s sensitivity to his own delicate position in India as a colonial agent of the British State see his brief essay, “Shooting an Elephant,” in \textit{Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays} (London: Secker and Warburg, 1950).} But he became aware over time of the extent to which there was a second world in Tartu he did not see.
and did not understand because he could not speak the language, and his remarkable—even excessive—humility in noticing this fact, set him apart from many other newcomers:

My ignorance of the language and local conditions, but at the same time my unforgivable foolishness, which has accompanied me my whole life, prevented me from understanding the tragedy of the place where I ended up. I understood my predicament as a pure idyll: work with students was pure pleasure; a wonderful library allowed me to write the chapters of my dissertation, which was for the most part already finished; my tightly-knit friendship with a group of young literary scholars, who were living at this time in Tartu—all this produced in me a feeling of constant happiness. Four hours of lecture a day did not tire me, and the unexpected discovery that in the course of any given lecture I was capable of arriving at new ideas, and that at the end of teaching I had arrived at new and fundamentally unanticipated concepts—even inspired me.1226

As a traditional small-town university, Tartu served Lotman as a kind of “oasis” and refuge from the harsh realities of Soviet life. Academically it afforded a kind of scholarly intimacy and sociability missing from the metropolitan Soviet centres of Leningrad and Moscow, where teaching and research remained segregated from one another (on the French model) in separate institutions. But at the same time he came to recognize the limits of his own experience, and caught glimpses of foreign world he knew he did not know and could not understand, at least not at first.

A fine example of Lotman’s deeply empathetic disposition, his admiration for this quality in others, and his growing sensitivity to the vexed linguistic dynamics of the land was an appreciation he wrote of one of his first students (and later a colleague in Tartu’s Department of Russian Literature), Valerii Bezzubov (1929–1991). Lotman encountered Bezzubov in his second year of teaching at Tartu University already in the mid-1950s. He was struck by Bezzubov’s unparalleled sensitivity to others, his appreciation for emotional depth and nuance. While many “only feel pain when it strikes them,” claimed Lotman, writing shortly after Bezzubov’s death and a year before his own, “I would say that Valerii was a person with flayed skin. It is not by chance that his favorite writers were those with torn souls. Valerii was a man of extremes, of passions. From one strong emotional sympathy he easily went over to another.”1227

Moreover, Lotman noticed the national dimensions of Bezzubov’s sensitivity in Tartu, for Bezzubov had been born to an Estonian mother and Russian father in Abkhasia:


Valerii Ivanovich called himself an Estonian. He grew up in a village called “Estonka.” His stepbrother, a person to whom he felt very close, was an Estonian. It was important to Valerii to be in the place where there was suffering. Since for an Estonian in the Caucasus, and later in Tartu, where he arrived during the period of repressions, were very far from being warm and safe places, he—who still at that point spoke rather poor Estonian—felt like an Estonian. It was not even so much a question of the fact that he called himself an Estonian. I would put it this way: he experienced the soul and suffering of Estonia (on byl s dushoiu i bol’iu Estonii).\textsuperscript{1228}

This sympathetic portrait of Bezzubov’s national sympathies was written for a local Tartu audience. For a more distant Russian one, Lotman stressed Bezzubov’s universalism. Bezzubov had served the department of Russian literature in Tartu it seems by taking upon himself the course no one else wanted to teach, on Soviet literature, “a subject, which seemed in those days to be the most odious” (predmet, kazavshiisia v te gody odioznym). He had managed to turn it into something interesting. In this article as well, Lotman noted Bezzubov Estonian sympathies, how he had followed the debates of the late 1980s on the national question with great interest, but in this case Lotman concluded with an appreciation of Bezzubov’s capacity to rise above above local particularity: “[Bezzubov] considered these debates justified and natural, but any extremism or excess were alien to him. He always judged what was happening from a universal human perspective.”\textsuperscript{1229}

Lotman worked himself up to a lecturing position at Tartu University in the 1950s. Tartu provided many opportunities for upward mobility denied Soviet citizens elsewhere. He finished his doctorate on an obscure Tartu professor of Russian literature, Andrei Kaisarov, from the first decade of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. It was published in the transactions of Tartu University in 1958 under the title, “Andrei Kaisarov and the Literary-Social Struggle of his Time.” With this work, Lotman established a foothold in his new home, exploring both the social and intellectual dimensions of Kaisarov’s brief life and career—the dynamics of the Russian literary circles to which he belonged and the implications of being a Russian scholar at a German-speaking University—as a lens upon his time. It also fit perfectly with the prevailing ethos of the Soviet state, and the role that Lotman was formally assigned to play in Tartu as an apostle of the center, playing up the ideal of a multinational friendship Friendship of the Peoples. Justifying his choice of topic, Lotman wrote in the early pages of his monograph that Kaisarov had “played a prominent role in the strengthening of friendly relations between the progressive societies of Russia and the Baltic.”\textsuperscript{1230}

In some sense, Kaisarov was a convenient alter-ego for Lotman as one of the first Russian instructors in a Baltic German university town: “Kaisarov considered the


teaching of the Russian language at Tartu university not only to be an ordinary academic responsibility, but also a high social calling. Kaisarov understood that fulfilling this task would this would lead to a conflict with the Baltic 'knighthood.' It would be hard to imagine a clearer statement of the role Lotman himself was assigned to play in the newly conquered Baltic periphery of the Soviet Union after the Second World War, not just as a teacher of the Russian language, but an agent of Sovietization as well.

But having confirmed his position in Soviet Tartu’s department of Russian literature, and taken the reins from his colleague Boris Egorov in 1958, Lotman dispensed with Kaisarov and adopted Pushkin as his main literary-historical alter-ego, playfully destabilizing the official Soviet myth of the Great Russian Poet by representing Pushkin not as a confident national with a clear social mission (like Andrei Kaisarov) but a confused cosmopolitan—much like himself—profoundly uncertain of his own place in the world, engaging with many different kinds of people all at once, seeking his own identity. At least this is the way that Lotman came to write of Pushkin after more than twenty years in Tartu the 1970s. It was his first book to appear in Estonian translation in 1985:

Generally belonging to one circle precludes belonging to another. Pushkin is among them like a seeker among the found. It is not only a question of his youth, but his lifelong striving— not yet conscious—to avoid one-sidedness. Having entered some circle, Pushkin learned its dominant style and manner of behaving and speaking with the same ease that he made Russian poetry’s special style his own while still a schoolboy…. There is something similar in how Pushkin during the years 1817-1820 fashioned his personality. Having adopted with special ease the rules of the game of a given circle, Pushkin does not drown in foreign personalities or norms. He is seeking himself.

With these words, Lotman might as well be describing his own delicate position in Soviet Tartu, learning to to play the game, to speak the dominant discourse, but somehow maintaining his independence from it. Indeed, in Lotman’s biography, Pushkin gets in trouble with some of his friends by befriending too many different groups of people all at once, rather than limiting himself to the ideological program of any one. Some of the Decembrists—Russia’s first nineteenth-century revolutionary aristocrats—found Pushkin’s behavior infuriating:

Pushkin’s capacity to go from one circle to the another and capacity to find opportunities for interaction with very different people was not always regarded positively among the Decembrists. Even his close friend, I. Pushshin wrote: ‘Liberal-minded Pushkin had the wretched habit of betraying his broad-minded nature. Very often he infuriated me and all of us with the fact that he liked to spend time near the orchestra in the proximity of

1231 “Prepodavanie russkogo iazka v Tartuskom universitete rassmatrivalos’ Kaisarovym ne tol’ko kak obychnoe akademicheskoe poruchenie, no i kak vysoke obschestvennoe prizvanie. Kaisarov ponimal, chto dla osushchesvlenia etogo emu pidetsiq vstupit’ v or’bu s pribaltiiskim ‘rytsarstvom’,” Lotman, Kaisarov, 153.
According to Lotman, all three of the aristocrats mentioned above—Orlov, Kiselov, and Tshernyshov—eventually became successful bureaucrats under Tsar Alexander I. All things considered, the Russian soul that Pushkin came to represent in Lotman’s works—born in conversation among very different kinds of groups and individuals—was anything but a deeply primordial one.

In the very first episode recorded in his published memoirs, Lotman described his awakening to Russian literature and language in the seventh grade, when he was asked to read the role of the foppish civil servant Khlestiakov in Nikolai Gogol’s famous play *The Inspector General*. He got into the part and delighted the class with his performance, but was mortified when his teacher proclaimed afterward that the reason that Lotman read the part of Khlestiakov so well was that this was in fact his character. The question of the line between acting and authenticity emerges time and again in Lotman’s writings. With playful Pushkin, whose life finally ended in a duel on January 29, 1837 over a matter of honor and principle, this was an abiding question. Reflecting back on his Leningrad Professors after nearly forty years in Tartu, Lotman found another way in which he, like Pushkin, was caught between mutually exclusive ways of looking at the world. These were the two approaches to scholarship embodied by two of his professors in the Department of Folklore at Leningrad University, Vladimir Propp and Mark Azadovsky. Where Azadovsky had always sought the romantic particularity of the particular folktale and its particular performance—an artist who made the tale her own—against the background of universal patterns and expectations, Vladimir Propp did the reverse. His famous study of the “Morphology of the folktale,” examined the trees so that he could better see the forest. European Tartu was an ideal place to notice and seek a balance between their two mutually exclusive (if equally brilliant) perspectives. Like the divide in Paul Ariste’s scholarly fascinations between the particulars of Finno-Ugric languages and the universals of Esperanto, Lotman career in Tartu moved in two direction at once with his dual commitment to the particulars of Russian literary culture on the one hand and the universals of semiotic theory on the other. Each was supposed to illuminate something about the other.

In 1964 Lotman acquired his first international renown with his monograph, *Lectures on Structural Poetics*. Lotman’s discovery of semiotics and its promise of a perfectly clear scholarly language gave his studies of Russian literary culture a sudden global relevance. The summer schools he organized in and near Tartu (between 1965 and the early 1970s) with the help and permission of a few key Estonians for the free expression of ideas became legendary.

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1234 “Pusškin, 33.

throughout the Soviet Union and even the West, attracting specially invited high-profile guests who managed to penetrate the iron curtain—and Tartu’s especially acute isolation as a “closed town” with its secret military airfield on the outskirts—to attend them. Particularly eminent guests included Roman Jakobson, Umberto Eco, Thomas Sebeok, and Julia Kristeva. But if Lotman represented the making of a more universal and cosmopolitan language of science, it was a language he used for unlocking the particular mysteries of Russian romanticism and its literary culture (much as Paul Ariste had in a more limited and modest way composed his first studies of Estonian and Finno-Ugric national national culture in the universal language of Esperanto). Thus, Lotman came to represent two things at once in Soviet Estonia: he was the leading apostle of a universal semiotic language of science; but at the same time the apostle of an authentically humane Russian culture, a more meaningful kind of national spirituality than the “official nationality” demanded by Moscow. When he appeared on Soviet Estonian television in the 1980s, he spoke not of semiotics but Russian literary culture, teaching that there was more to Russia culture than the proletarian work force, who arrived after the War to take factory jobs in Narva, Tallinn, and Sillamäe. Most Estonians born before 1980 remember these lectures, for there was nothing else to watch on Estonian Television and Lotman spoke in such elegantly simple Russian that even Estonians who struggled with the language could understand it.

It was not until the very end of his life that Estonians recognized what they had gained in Lotman. Lotman’s scandalously late election to the Soviet Estonian Academy of Sciences in 1989 was a subject of much speculation about the small-mindedness of the Estonian cultural elite, who could not appreciate the achievements of the great scholar who wrote in the language of empire rather than the language of the nation, and refused him the honor that he was due. Not all Estonian nationalists were equally obtuse, and one of the most successful depictions of Lotman’s predicament was a cartoon by the Estonian caricaturist, Heinz Valk (b.1937), who was also a leading agitator of the independence movement; in fact Valk is credited with coining the term “Singing Revolution” in the first place. Valk’s cartoon depicted the difference between Lotman as seen by Estonian academics (a small nondescript figure) and the way he appeared to the international academic community (a towering colossus). It was first published in Tallinn on January 1st 1988—another example of how one and the same thing can change when viewed from different perspectives in the spirit of Karl Ernst von Baer. Valk’s cartoon remains the most concise and accurate expression of Lotman’s predicament in Soviet Estonia on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In death in October 1993 Yuri Lotman became an honorary Estonian, a transformation initiated by Estonia’s first President Lennart Meri (1992–2001) at Lotman’s funeral in 1993: “It seems to me, that some day in the future, we will be able to speak of the role of Lotman in the salvation of the Estonian spirit, and in the reestablishment of Estonian independence.” One can only wonder what Lennart Meri had in mind with the phrase about Lotman’s contribution to the “Estonian spirit,” unless of course it was by modeling a love of Russian national culture that he might serve as an example to the Estonian intelligentsia. Like most of the Russian-speaking immigrants from other parts of the Soviet Union in the 1950s, Lotman never became comfortable with the Estonian language (though he did speak). He spent almost the entirety of his intellectual life in Tartu in a Russian-speaking cultural sphere, dwelling as much as possible—and Tartu

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1237 Heinz Valk’s cartoon from January 1, 1988 as reproduced in *Jalutuskäigud Lotmaniga*, 484.
enabled him to do this—in the world of Pushkin, and in his correspondence with friends and scholars from around the Soviet Union and the wider world. His epistolary archive in Tartu (incomplete to be sure) includes some 2000 different correspondents, most of whom lived far from Tartu. He did not teach in Estonian or take any particular academic interest in questions of Estonian history, literature, or culture. When asked on his birthday in 1982 by the Tallinn Komsomol newspaper, Noorte Hääl, about his thoughts on the Estonian language and literature, he gave the appropriate, politically correct response, stressing the abstract and universal value of the practice of translation but did not make any specific references to Estonian culture:

What do you think about theorizing in small languages, including the Estonian language? What, in your opinion, could invigorate Estonian literary scholarship?

First off, I do not agree with the way the question is posed. There are no “small” languages, just as there are no “small” cultures. Every language in which statements can be made to enrich human culture, is a “great” language. In this sense every small nation’s language—like the Icelandic, Hungarian, or Estonian language—is a “great” language. Europe discovered Icelandic epic poetry for itself rather recently, but this does not mean that the Icelandic language was not a language of culture before it was “discovered.”

….The invigoration of the ideas of literary criticism is a great and important concern and it is difficult to speak of this in brief. I just want to point out, that in my opinion an especially important role could be played by the translation of works from Soviet and world literary scholarship [into Estonian]. Publishers have not shown much interest, apparently assuming that such books would not have a sufficient readership. This is a mistake: for one, there are many students, teachers, writers, and journalists in the republic, who would need these kinds of books. But more than this, I would like to emphasize the side of things that is linked for me with the stated question: the very act of translating scholarly classics is an irreplaceable school both for the translator and the reader and can itself raise theory to a new level.

Considering Lotman’s emphasis on the importance of translation as a key to knowledge, it should be noted that until his biography of Pushkin in 1985, translated by his son’s Estonian wife, Piret Lotman, almost none of his works appeared in Estonian in the Soviet period. When asked in the 1982 interview, he noted that he had had a few articles in the Estonian cultural journals, Looming and Keel ja Kirjandus and was working on a Russian literature textbook for the 9th grade, with the help of his bilingual colleague Sergei Isakov. His next book, a collection of articles under the title, Cultural Semiotics (Kultuurisemiootika), did not appear until 1990. But

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1239 A great exception to the rule of cultural isolation was the Tallinn-based art critic and historian, Boris Bernstein, who learned nearly flawless Estonian and became thoroughly integrated into the Estonian academic community and even published a monograph on Estonian art and the work of Enn Põldroos, the Estonian painter responsible for Universitas Tartuensis (1982), teaching courses in Estonian into the early 1990s. This may have had something to do with the fact that the atmosphere and life of metropolitan Tallinn was distinctly different from the atmosphere of small town Tartu.

until his appearances on Soviet Estonian state television in the mid-1980s, most Estonians had not really noticed Lotman.  

Lennart Meri’s own collaborations with Paul Ariste on the particular myths, languages, and folklore of the Finno-Ugrian peoples of Siberia were much more preoccupied with the question of the Estonian spirit than anything Lotman wrote. Lennart Meri (1929–2006) was the son of the interwar Estonian diplomat Georg Meri. He had grown up abroad in Europe in the 1930s, learning fluent English, German, and French. As part of Estonia’s interwar political elite, the family faced deportation to Sverdlovsk oblast during the first wave of Soviet repressions in 1941, where Lennart learned Russian and acquired an interest in Uralic languages and peoples. Like most interwar Estonian diplomats, Georg was slated for execution. But the order was never carried out. Upon their return to Estonia in the 1950s, Georg reinvented himself as a translator of Shakespeare (this is how he is remembered in Estonia to this day). Lennart studied history at Tartu University, but owing to his compromised past (as a deportee and the son of political enemy of the state) was refused the right to work as a historian. Like his father, he sought his Soviet identity in language and literature. With Paul Ariste, Lennart Meri collaborated on several ethnographic documentary films on the Finno-Ugrian tribes of Siberia, and Meri’s Hõbevalge: Reisikiri tuulest ja muinasluulest [Silver White: A Travelogue of Wind and Ancient Poetry] (1976) may have been the most visible and popular non-fiction Estonian text of the late Soviet period. It was a cross between literature and ethnographic scholarship. In an era where all history was suspect, Meri—like so many of the other figures in Tartu’s linguistic landscape (Rein Sepp, Uku Masing, Paul Ariste, and Yuri Lotman)—became a mythmaker, inventing his own past for the Estonian nation in a half-scholarly, half-literary vein, taking his scholarly cues from Paul Ariste. The intellectual relationship between the two reproduced in some ways the nineteenth-century dynamic of Friedrich Kreutzwald, author of the Estonian national epic, and Robert Faehlmann, Tartu University’s first Estonian Lecturer and one of the founder of Tartu University’s Learned Estonian Society. It was Faehlmann who had proposed collecting ethnographic material for the Estonian national epic in the first place. 

The man of the hour at Tartu University’s 350th anniversary celebration in 1982 was Paul Ariste. He was declared an honorary citizen of Tartu and awarded the Order of Lenin, the same honor bestowed upon Tartu University. That same year the inaugural issue of *Interlinguistica Tartuensis*, a new Tartu University journal founded to investigate the problem of a more perfect language of global and scientific communication, was dedicated to Paul Ariste as well. In the opening dedicatory article, Alexander Dulichenko noted Paul Ariste’s expertise in one of the smallest Finno-Ugrian languages (the Vot language)—a language with only about two dozen native speakers at the time—while at the same time representing the Soviet Union to the world as one of its leading esperantists.  

In the figure of Lennart Meri—a polyglot who conversed with

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1241 One Estonian reviewer of the recent collection of personal works by and about Lotman put out by his son in Estonian, *Jalutuskäigud Lotmani ga*, marvels that the extensive Estonian engagement with Lotman and his legacy only really began after his death. Alvar Loog, “Mees , kes leidis õige meetodi nii elus kui teaduses” [“The man, who found the right method in life as in scholarship”], *Sirp*, March 24, 2011.

1242 “the postwar growth of interliguistics in the USSR derives to a great degree derives from the efforts of professor E. A. Bokareva (who at the same time studied the smallest languages of Dagestan) and academic P. A. Ariste [“Poslevoennoe razvitie interlingvistikii v SSSR v znachitel’noi mere obiazano usiliiam professora E.A. Bokareva (kstati, odnovremенно zanimavshevosia takzhe i samymi malen’kimi iazykami Dagestana) i akademika P. A. Ariste”]. “Aktual’nye problemy sovremennoi interlingvistikii: sbornik v chest’ semidesiatipatiletiia akademika Paulia Aleksandrovicha Ariste,” *Interlinguistica Tartuensis* no. 1, 613 (1982).
various European heads of state in their own languages and studied and filmed tribal customs and languages of the Finno-Ugric East—we can see more clearly than anywhere else perhaps the lasting political legacy of Paul Ariste’s particular type of cosmopolitanism. Ariste studied ethnographic difference and particularity, stressing the inadequacy of large states—and their languages (like Russian, English, or French)—to offer an adequate account of the world. From 1992 to 2001 Lennart Meri was the First Estonian President. In 1998 the French Newspaper, La Vie, pronounced him “European of the Year.”

Twenty-five years later at the national Estonian ceremony for the 375th anniversary of Tartu University in 2007 the man of the hour was Yuri Lotman. He was commemorated with Tartu’s most elaborate monument to date, installed in front of the University library—a colossal tangle of five wires—actually 6-inch diameter steel pipes-reaching eight meters into the sky. When viewed from a few different angles, they drew together for the viewer to form the face of Yuri Lotman, as he had sketched it himself in two or three of his doodles, an image at once intimate and estranged, a fitting symbol of those epiphanies where meaning is suddenly found in a tangle of chaotic facts. The sculpture is also a fountain, and from the ends of these pipes, which from some angles represented the strands of Lotman’s hair flows a stream of water into the reflecting pool behind them, as if irrigating the land with content of Lotman’s thought.

The ceremonial unveiling of the new Lotman’s monument was part of the festivities of the 375th anniversary celebration of Tartu University in Fall 2007. A string quartet played; the mayor of Tartu and rector of Tartu University each made a speech; the Estonian Minister of Culture, Laine Jänes, came down from Tallinn to say a word or two about the efforts of the Government and the Estonian artist Mati Karmen to bring this monument into existence. And finally members of the university in attendance retired to the halls of the University library to attend a trilingual—Estonian, Russian, English—conference on Lotman’s life and work and service to Estonia and the world. Tartu University briefly became an ivory tower of Babel once more: Kalevi Kull, representing Tartu’s department of Semiotics, spoke in Estonian; Larissa Volpert, a former Soviet Chess Champion, representing Tartu’s department of Russian Literature, spoke in Russian; and the president of the International Association for Semiotic Studies from Helsinki, Eero Tarasti, spoke in that eternally foreign language that is “International English,” while Lotman’s eldest son, Mihhail, representing the Lotman family, addressed the audience in eloquent, if idiosyncratically accented Estonian—the intimately familiar speech of Mikhail Lotman.

Paul Ariste’s own children, Marju-Ilona and Paul, grew up in the 1930s and 40s. The name Marju-Ilona had a Finnic (Marju) as well as an Ugric (Ilona) component, as if born of Ariste’s hyphenated devotion to Finno-Ugric languages. Andri learned the language of “binary” and worked with Tartu’s first computer installed on the ground floor of Tartu’s “The House of Languages” (Keelte maja) in the 1950s, where Lotman’s Department of Russian Literature occupied the top floor. They led quiet lives for the most part out of the public eye. Lotman’s children were born after the war. They attended Estonian schools in Tartu instead of Russian ones and two of his three sons, the semiotician Mikhail (b. 1950) and biologist Alexei (b. 1960)

1244 See http://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilt:Juri_lotmani_malestusmark.jpg
1245 I attended the unveiling and conference.
served in the Estonian Parliament since 1991 as spokesmen for the Fiscally Conservative Estonian Res Publica Party and Green Party respectively. They married Estonian women and Lotman’s grandchildren can be found in every part of contemporary Estonian culture from the Classics Department of Tartu University to journalism. In 2009, Lotman’s granddaughter Rebekka Lotman was granted an exclusive interview with Umberto Eco, when the famous writer and cosmopolitan professor of semiotics from one of Europe’s oldest Universities at Bologna came to Tartu University to receive an honorary doctorate. Eco was a former correspondent of Yuri Lotman, and an important fellow figure in the international semiotic community. He had written the introduction to the English language edition of a compilation of Lotman’s work, The Universe of the Mind, quoting Lotman’s own remarks on the transformative power of translation and the lasting (and often irreversible) changes that translation can produce in any text: “if we put together lots of veal cutlets, we do not obtain a calf. But if we cut up a calf, we obtain lots of veal cutlets.”

On May 9, 2009 Rebekka’s own Estonian language translation of her exclusive interview with Umberto Eco appeared for the entire Estonian nation to read on the front page of the national daily newspaper, Postimees.

More than ninety years after Friedebert Tuglas bemoaned Paul Ariste’s failure to be Jewish, Tuglas finally got his wish, and Estonia fulfilled his criterion for modern European statehood with the children, grandchildren, and memory of Yuri Lotman. The Lotmans had finally become Estonians.

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1246 Umberto Eco, Introduction to Universe of the Mind, xii-xiii.
Chapter 8. A Linguistic Observatory For a Linguistic Century

8.1 200 Years of Soviet Tartu: 1952–1982

This study began with an evocation of the painting commissioned by the Soviet Estonian Ministry of Education in Tallinn to commemorate Tartu University’s 350th anniversary in 1982. It was entitled *Universitas Tartuensis* and imitated Raphael’s *School of Athens* in the Vatican. Thirty years earlier, in 1952, Tartu State University had celebrated its 150th anniversary in a much narrower bilingual key. In other words, between 1952 and 1982 Tartu State University aged 200 years as a Soviet VUZ (Institution of Higher Learning). This commemorative time warp in the history of Tartu University echoes a more widespread transformation in the Soviet discourse, and perhaps in a global one as well, which begins to reveal itself in a juxtaposition of the commemorative, documentary films produced for each occasion. In 1952 it was the special genius of the Russian nation teaching Estonians to be free of their German oppressors. This is how the commemorative film of the 1952 anniversary told Tartu’s story. Set to upbeat, marshal music, it showed the relentless march of progress at Tartu University. In one scene the Estonian university student Lydia Kivisaar read Lenin (in Russian) and consulted with the Leningrad-born and trained Estonian historian Hilda Moosberg to write her history of the first Estonian printing press. In another, the Estonian biology student, Lembit Sarapuu, consulted his Russian instructor to develop a new species of sunflower according to the teachings of Lysenko and Michurin in Tartu University’s 19th-century botanical garden. The confident, masculine, Estonian overvoice of the narrator spoke of Estonia’s place in the Soviet Friendship of the Peoples while showing images of a young Estonian Komsomol member, recently back from the Pamir mountains, sharing stories and photographs with his envious friends: “The Soviet Union has widened his horizons immeasurably.” The film culminated with a speech in Russian by the rector of the University, Feodor Klement, and a translation by the narrator into Estonian, revealing the perfectly Pentecostal transparency of language and the unity of Bolshevik purpose that united the Estonian and Russian people.1248

The 1982 film was entitled “Ritual.” It was backward-looking and nostalgic, set to elegiac music. It added a third language to the commemoration of the past: besides speeches and addresses in Estonian and Russian, there were several in Latin as well. In fact the Latin language had an inordinately prominent place in the ceremony for a Soviet University. Latin could be heard in old medieval European university rituals like the singing of *Gaudeamus*; even the awarding of an honorary doctorate to the foreign (non-Soviet) scholar, Zygmunt Palach, a Hungarian Social Scientist, was performed in Latin. In the 1952 film, Tartu’s identity was sought in conflict with Europe from within the borders of the Soviet Union; in the 1982 film the identity of Tartu came from outside the borders of the Soviet Union in a celebration of pan-European, and even global culture, reaching well beyond the borders of the Soviet state. It showed young pioneers with their red scarves laying carnations at the feet of the Lenin Monument in Tartu’s Lenin Square, singing in Estonian: “Lenin, our Lenin!” But it also featured Goethe’s poem of 1789, read in Estonian translation, a return in some sense to Soviet dreams and internationalism of the very beginning, “The Boundaries of Humanity”:  

1248 *150. aastat Tartu Ülikooli*, directed by Nikolai Dolinski (1952; Tallinn, Estonia: Tallinn Kinostuudio, 2007), DVD.
In the end, the bilingual, Russian- and Estonian-speaking Tartu University, united by a common German enemy in 1952, became a multilingual Tartu University, united by a third more neutral pan-European language (Latin) in 1982; a commitment to “transforming Tartu beyond recognition” turned into a celebration and recovery of Tartu’s Swedish, Latin speaking origins. The relentless march of forward-looking enlightened progress ended in an elegiac cycling back to origins. Change had turned into continuity.

8.2 Soviet Languages and Institutions of Higher Learning

In a book for Soviet children composed in the early 1930s, *Men and Mountains: Man’s Victory Over Nature*, author Engineer Mikhail Ilin explained the Soviet project of “Reassembling the World.” For this he drew an analogy between academic departments and nation-states:

> We were divided up into different departments, like different countries. Some took up Botany, others Physics. Some were going to be mathematicians, others physicists, others chemists. … We each discovered many interesting things in our own “countries.” But not one of us got a view of the world as a whole. Nobody 'circumnavigated the globe.'

In order to circumnavigate the globe the Soviet experiment would need a common language. But next to time, language was the most problematic dimension of the Soviet experiment. Maximally uniform in its socialist content, the Soviet Union was at the same time maximally multiple in its national forms. It was caught from its inception between a vision of its mission as finding a universal language to bring order back to Babel and a Pentecostal celebration of its internal linguistic diversity. Nothing symbolizes the original Soviet dream of global Communism better than Vladimir Tatlin’s tower of 1919, the intended headquarters of the Third International in Petrograd (Leningrad). With three different levels, rotating at different speeds (once a day, once a month, and once a year), housed inside an iron cage tilted at 23.5 degrees (the tilt of the axis of the globe itself), and vaguely resembling an ancient Mesopotamian Ziggurat (like the original Tower of Babel at Babylon itself), Vladimir Tatlin offered a Constructivist design for a structure that would have been the tallest tower on earth at the time (400 meters), definitively surpassing its nearest competitor, the Eiffel Tower (1889) standing at 324 meters. But in the end, like the dream of Soviet Communism with its universal language,

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1249 “Üks väike ring/ piirab me eku, ja paljud sugupõlved rivistavad end kestvad/ oma eksisteerimise/ lõputusse ahelasse.” *Ritaal*, directed by Hagi Šein (1982; Tallinn: Eesti Telefilm, 2007), DVD.
Vladimir Tatlin’s tower turned out to be a Tower of Babel. And like the Tower of Babel, it was never completed.

The Soviet Union did not have an official state language until the very end. On April 24, 1990 it passed a law “on the languages of the nationalities of the USSR” which stated that “in recognition of historical difficulties and for the sake of general social harmony, the Russian language is to be recognized as the official language of the Soviet Union, to be used as a means of international communication” (emphasis added). Rhetorically at least this declaration reversed Lenin’s firm position on the question of an official language. In his 1914 article, “Is a State Language Necessary?” Lenin had taken issue with “Liberal” Russian arguments on behalf of an official language. He conceded the greatness and power of the language of “Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dobrolyubov, and Chernyshevsky”; he expressed hope for “closer communication and fraternal unity … between the oppressed classes of all … nationalities living in Russia”; he even stated his belief that “every citizen of Russia [should] have an opportunity to learn the Russian language.” But he drew the line at the idea that Russian—or any other language for that matter—should be made the “official language” of a Bolshevik state:

We do not want to have people driven into paradise with a cudgel; for no matter how many fine phrases about ‘culture’ you may utter, a compulsory official language involves coercion, the use of a cudgel.... That is why Russian Marxists say there must be no compulsory official language, that the population must be provided with schools where the teaching will be carried on in all local languages. And there must be in the Constitution a statement declaring null and void any privileges accruing to one nation and any violations of the rights of national minorities.

Even as the 1990 language law made Russian the “official” language of Soviet international communication, it also reaffirmed the official legitimacy of the national republican languages within their respective territories: “The federal, autonomous republics have the right to determine the legal status of the languages of the republics, including deploying them as official languages,” adding that “the legal status of the language is not permitted to infringe upon the right of citizens of the USSR to use their mother tongue and other languages of the USSR in various spheres of public life.” Indeed, while the three Soviet constitutions—of 1924, 1936,
and 1977—conscientiously avoided avoided making any claims about an official state language, the constitutions of three Soviet national republics—Soviet Georgia (Article 156), Soviet Armenia (Article 119) and Soviet Azerbaidzhan (Article 151)—declared Georgian, Armenian, and Azeri to be the “official” languages of their respective national territories.\textsuperscript{1256} Thus, in an important sense the new law, formulated only months before the collapse of the Soviet Union, merely formalized the de facto multilingualism that had existed all along in the non-Russian parts of Soviet Union.

In a speech delivered at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in Moscow in 1925, Joseph Stalin quoted from a letter he had received from some “Buriat comrades.” They had asked him to explain serious and difficult questions concerning the relations between universal culture and national culture. Here it is: “We earnestly request you to explain the following, for us, very serious and difficult questions. The ultimate aim of the Communist Party is to achieve a single universal culture. How is one to conceive the transition to a single universal culture through the national cultures which are developing within the limits of our individual autonomous republics? How is the assimilation of the specific features of the individual national cultures (language, etc.) to take place?”\textsuperscript{1257}

This was the great question of the Soviet experiment. With the dream of Communism and its universal language fading further and further out of reach in the emplotment of the Soviet future, three phases might be observed in Soviet history to show how Russian became the Soviet language \textit{par excellence}: (1) Imminent Communism, (2) Deferred Communism, and (3) Communism Indefinitely Postponed.

Since 1991, the Soviet story has typically been emplotted by its greatest supporters and critics alike as a tragedy, as the tale of a noble dream that collapsed under the ideological weight of an all-powerful one-party system (as in Martin Malia’s \textit{Soviet Tragedy}), or dissipated in the absence of sufficient ideological leadership in the thoroughly bureaucratized state of a “no-party system” (as in Moshe Lewin’s \textit{Soviet Century}). But these are both retrospective assessments. For those who did not yet know how the Soviet experiment would end, whose own lives were caught up in anticipating the future, the Soviet story was emplotted as everything but tragedy (as Romance, Comedy, and Satire in turn, to adapt Northrop Frye’s Theory of Myths). In the early 1920s the Soviet story was inseparable from the dream of global Communism and its romantic slogan “Workers of the World Unite!” In this world Russian was the Soviet Latin, merely an arbitrary and temporary tool of convenience to hold the Soviet Union together until the imminent Communist millennium and its language would take the world by storm. In the deferred Communism of the Stalin era, the Russian nation and its language (the first among equals) increasingly sacralized the growing gap between the Socialist present and the Communist future. The official Soviet story became a comedy rather than a romance—i.e. the more modest short-term success story of “building (and preserving) Socialism in one Country.” But with the cult of

\begin{quotation}
dopuskaetsia ushemlenie prava grazhdan SSSR ispol’zovat’ v razlichnykh sferax gosudarstvennoi i obshhestvennoi zhizni svoi rodnoi iazyk i drugie iazyki narodov SSSR.”
\end{quotation}


Stalin exposed in the Secret Speech of 1956, the gap grew too wide even for Socialist Realist fiction and its vanguard, the Russian nation, to bridge. The truth of the Soviet experience was increasingly sought in satirical anecdotes: “The newspaper Pravda is running a contest for the best political joke. First prize: 20 years.” As Socialism hardened into an “eternal state,” bilingualism with Russian as a “second native tongue” for all non-Russian Soviet people became the linguistic ideal of really existing Socialism.

8.2.1 Imminent Communism: Russian as the Soviet Latin

When the Soviet Union was born in 1922 and adopted its first Constitution in 1924 the Russian language was to the realm what Latin had been to the medieval church, a language of chance and convenience severed from its roots, the un-Holy inheritance of a maculate past in a defunct and un-Holy empire. The Soviet experiment began as a Pentecostal solution to the Babel of its imperial inheritance with korenizatsia (indigenization) campaigns, translating the words of Marx and Lenin into all the national languages of the realm, founding Party schools and institutions in as many as possible:

In 1921 Poles received 154,000 newly published books in their language while the half-recognized Krashen received 10; the Azerbaijani Communist Party had Iranian, German, Greek and Jewish sections; the Commissariat of Enlightenment in Moscow had 14 national bureaus; and 103 local party organizations in Russia were supposed to transact their business in Estonian.

In the Abkhasian part of Georgia in 1926 there were 43 Armenian, 41 Greek, 27 Russian, 2 Estonian, and 2 German state-sponsored schools, reflecting the variety of national minorities and languages present in the region. In 1913 as the newly appointed Bolshevik Commissar of Nationalities, Jospeh Stalin, explained: “A minority is discontented not because there is no [extraterritorial] national union but because it does not have the right to use its native language. Allow it to use its native language and the discontent will pass by itself.” But the instrumental tone of Stalin’s early work echoed the broader consensus of the time: languages were not to be promoted for their own sake (because they had intrinsic value), but in the anticipation of the imminent Communist millennium. Stalin concluded by seeking in Marxist ideology an integrative solution to the divisive question of nationalities: “The only cure for this is organization on the basis of internationalism./ To unite locally the workers of all nationalities of Russia into single, integral collective bodies, to unite these collective bodies into a single party—such is the task.”

But what language would those united proletarian workers eventually speak to each other? The Babel of answers to this question was as extensive as the Babel of languages they hoped to unite. In the romantic, dialectical anticipation of imminent, global Communism—for

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1258 Soviet jokes from the streets of Moscow as reported by Irvine Levine in Main Street USSR. Quoted in Time Magazine, February 9, 1959.
1259 Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment,” 422.
1260 Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, 430.
1261 Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment”, 419.
dialectical thinking whether in its Marxist or Hegelian variant is eminently tied to German Romanticism—it was perfectly plausible to believe that the strengthening of the state would lead to its eventual withering away or that the cultivation of separate national languages and traditions would end in their eventual integration. At the time, Russian was just one tongue among many, not a specially privileged or important one. If anything, it was especially suspect, as Lenin recognized, for its disproportionate power (and number of its speakers) in respect to other linguistic groups. Even the original anthem of the Soviet Union, “The Internationale,” composed in French at the time of the Paris Commune in 1871, had nothing Russian about it. In these early iconoclastic years, the futurist spirit of novelty and innovation prevailed as artists and intellectuals attempted to imagine a world integrated on the basis of something other than national languages and national traditions. The poet Mayakovsky called for throwing all the great nineteenth-century Russian writers overboard from the steamship of history in order to clear the slate for a fresh start.1263

Forward-looking utopian proposals and projects abounded for the invention of a new, more inclusive, more perfect Soviet language by many avant-garde artists and scholars, like Velimir Khlebnikov’s transrational “zaum.” In 1922, Jakob Linzbach (1873—1953), an Estonian-speaking ethnic Russian with a German name, who earned his living in Tallinn by cartography, attracted the interest and support of the Soviet Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatoli Lunacharskii, with his “Schemes for a Geometrical Language” and “Principle of a Philosophical Language. An Experiment in exact linguistic science” (1916) [Printsip filosofskogo iazyka: opyt tochnogo iazikoznania].1264 Meanwhile, Communists, both inside the Soviet Union and out took Esperanto very seriously in anticipation of the imminent global revolution and an integrated international community on the basis of a new, genuinely international language. Ernest Drezen, an ethnic Latvian, presided over the Union of Soviet Esperantists from its foundation in 1921 until his execution in the Great Terror in 1937. From Ludwig Zamenhoff (born in Bialystok close to the Belarussian-Lithuanian border), the inventor of Esperanto, to Ernest Drezen and Jakob Linzbach, the Baltic World has produced an inordinate number of inventors and proponents of metalanguages.

In Moscow, Russian-language Party Schools like the Communist Academy (1918), Sverdlov Communist University (1919), and the Institute of Red Professors (1921) had non-Russian counterparts. In 1921 the Council of Peoples’ Commissars (Sovnarkom) founded a university “on the model of Sverdlov Communist University,” but specified that here “teaching would take place in the language of the students.”1265 Between 1921 and 1937, the Moscow campus of Marchlewski Communist University of Minorities of the West trained German, Polish, and Lithuanian Bolsheviks, while the Leningrad campus was divided into Finnish, Latvian, and Estonian sections, each group taught in its own language. Of the 198 graduates of the Estonian section between 1921 and 1936 only a few survived the Stalinist Purges, but those who did would play a central role in the Sovietization of Estonia and Tartu University after the Second World War. Among them were the First Secretary of the Estonian Communist Party, Nikolai

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1263 Vladimir Paperny, Culture Two, 177.
Karotamm (1945-1950), and the Tartu University historian, Hilda Moosberg, who chaired Tartu’s department of the History of the USSR from 1963 until her retirement in 1974.\footnote{For an engaging account of life at the Estonian section of Marchlewski University for Western Minorities in the 1920s and her work at the University of Tartu in Estonia after the war as a Bolshevik missionary see the memoirs of Hilda Moosberg, Neevalinnast Emajõ elitna: Mälestusi [From the Neva River Town to the Ema River Town] (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1989).}

The extent to which the language question remained an open one at this early historical juncture can be gleaned from the 100-page diary kept over the course of a single year (1922-1923) by one of Moosberg’s classmates at the Estonian Section in Leningrad, located at Fontanka #27. Jaan Reisa kept his journal in Estonian, sometimes interjecting Russian words whenever confronted by the limits of one language by itself to grasp the meaning of the other. Reisa was born in a village near Tartu in 1898, but his parents moved to Saint Petersburg soon thereafter, a destination for many poor Estonian families seeking their fortune before the Revolution; demographically speaking, Saint Petersburg was Estonia’s “second city”—i.e. there were more Estonians living in Saint Petersburg in 1910 than in Tartu. By the time he matriculated at the University of Western Minorities, Reisa’s own Estonian was clearly rusty. Though perfectly adequate, he made elementary mistakes and his journal may well have been part of an effort to recover or keep his native language in the spirit of 

\textit{korenizatsia} (indigenization). In any case, his classes at the University were all conducted in Estonian, though Russian was taught as a separate subject.

The need for a real international language seemed especially pressing in December 1922 when the Estonian section hosted a visitor from the American Comintern, and Reisa observed that students were only able to converse with him because one of their members had recently returned from America where he had learned English.\footnote{“Üks kominterni saadik Ameerikast käis klassis meid vaatamas, kuidas meie õpime. Ta rääkis sm. Kepmaniga, kes ka paar aastat tagasi Ameerikast Venemaale sõitis ja ingliskeel (sic) oskab.” December 16, 1922, TÜRK f.85,s.1,1.6.} Though Russian was used to integrate the Finnish, Latvian, and Estonian sections of the University with each other, the idea that Russian might have a long-term role to play in integrating the peoples of the Soviet Union or the world never appears to have crossed his mind. By contrast, Reise devoted many entries in his journal to Esperanto, which he studied and discussed with fellow students in various courses, clubs, publications, and study groups. In a diary entry dated March 11, 1923, Reisa reported that at 7pm on the previous night there had been a formal discussion of the question “whether Esperanto is necessary as the international language or not? The debate lasted until midnight.”\footnote{“Õhtul kell 7 algas ’суд-диспуд’ (kohus-vaitlusõhtu) (sic) aine üle kas on esperanto tarvilik kui rahuvsaheline keel või ei? Vaidlus kestis kuna kella 12. öösel. The diary of Jaan Reisa in Hilda Moosberg’s personal file at TÜRK f.85,s.1,1.29b.}

Founded at the same time and following a parallel trajectory, Moscow’s Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) with regional branches in Baku, Irkutsk, and Tashkent saw to the Marxist-Leninist education of more than seventy-three nationalities from both inside the Soviet Union and out, including many future world leaders like Ho Chih Minh of Vietnam and Deng Xiao Ping of China. The unspecified national origins of the students made the use of Russian as its lingua franca a defacto practice. Nonetheless, when Joseph Stalin delivered a speech on the dual tasks of the University in 1925—to cultivate revolutionaries abroad and builders of socialism at home—he stressed the growing linguistic diversity of the Soviet Union and the world rather than linguistic unity or consolidation:
Some people (Kautsky, for instance) talk of the creation of a single universal language and the dying away of all other languages in the period of socialism. I have little faith in this theory of a single, all-embracing language. Experience, at any rate, speaks against rather than for such a theory. Until now what has happened has been that the socialist revolution has not diminished but rather increased the number of languages; for, by stirring up the lowest sections of humanity and pushing them on to the political arena, it awakens to new life a number of hitherto unknown or little-known nationalities.1269

This was a hardly an answer to the question of the Buriat comrade, who had written to Stalin to ask how the Soviet Union would achieve its multinational integration if it was always promoting the cultivation of distinct national cultures. Stalin merely sidestepped the question with the comment that “the national culture of the peoples does not annul, but supplements and enriches universal proletarian culture.”

The “early Soviet language planners were not a homogenous body.”1270 To the extent that the spirit of imminent Communism produced a consensus about the linguistic future, it was closer to Kautsky than to Stalin. Nikolai Marr’s New Theory of Language was published in 1928 and institutionalized at most academies, institutes, schools, and universities of the Soviet Union. Marr maintained that changes in the economic “base” of society would produce an entirely new proletarian language in its cultural “superstructure” by recombining and redistributing the elements of existing national languages:

…dialectical materialist thought has outgrown linear speech, no longer fits within sound speech, and, as it outgrows sound speech, it is preparing to mold—to create—a new unified language, [...] a language wherein supreme beauty will merge with the highest development of the mind. Where? Only in a classless, communist society, comrades.1271

Even Marr’s opponents, like the Moscow State University professor of philology, Viktor Vinogradov, praised Marr’s contribution in waging a “fierce and uncompromising battle with [bourgeois-idealist science] in the name of materialist linguistics.”1272 And Joseph Stalin himself, at the Sixteenth Party Congress on June 27, 1930, still surrounded by members of the old guard of the Communist Party, addressed the Leninist paradox at the heart of the Soviet experiment that enabled the romantic emplotment of the Soviet story. Thus, he gave credence to the Marr’s theory of language: on the one hand the Soviet state promoted “the flowering of national cultures (and languages) in the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat in one country”; on the other hand this was all done with the long term objective “of preparing the

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1270 Language Planning in the Soviet Union, 40; for the persistence of other non-Marrist trends in Soviet linguistic science in the 1920s and 30s, and the observation that Marr appealed more to the Communist Party than to his colleagues, see also Ethan Pollock, Stalin and the Soviet Science War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 106.
1271 Nikolai Marr as quoted in Slezkine, Marr, 843.
conditions for their withering away and merging into one common socialist culture (and into one common language) in the period of the victory of socialism all over the world.”\textsuperscript{1273}

In the meantime, as he waited for coming of “one single language—the master of all time and all space,” Nikolai Marr, like everyone else, advocated \textit{korenizatsia} (indigenization).\textsuperscript{1274} As a member of the Alphabet Committee, Marr signed on wholeheartedly to literacy campaigns promoting the latinization of the alphabets of the various languages of the realm. And “no less a figure than Lunacharskii wrote both in the central newspapers and in the journal of the Alphabet Committee in favour of the imminent latinisation of the Russian language itself.”\textsuperscript{1275} Nothing about Russian was sacred, not even the Cyrillic alphabet. Languages were tools of convenience. Like all other really existing national languages, Russian might very well disappear one day when a more perfect language of the proletariat would rise to take its place, just as horse-drawn buggies could be expected to disappear from city streets little by little as automobiles grew faster, cheaper, and more reliable. But for a while at least, the world could expect to see and hear both, and until a more perfect language would emerge to replace it, Russian would serve as the Soviet Latin—maybe even adopt the Latin alphabet—temporarily integrating the realm and staving off Babel.

8.2.2 Deferred Communism: Russian as the Language of Lenin and Pushkin

The 1930s saw a shift in the Soviet story and its storytellers as the dream Communism receded out of reach. The global Soviet story that called for the “workers of the world to unite” (with its romantic emplotment) gave way to the domestic Soviet story of “building Socialism in one country” (with its comic emplotment).\textsuperscript{1276} The successes of the Soviet experiment were now to be achieved by incremental progress, by industrialization and collectivization, by hard work rather than imagination. Gone were the dreamers, architects and visionaries—the constructivists, formalists, futurists, Godbuilders, and conductorless orchestras—of the 1920s.\textsuperscript{1277} They were replaced by the engineers and Stakhanovites of the 1930s, with their 5-year plans, statistics, and overfilled production quotas. In this era, even writers—the “unacknowledged legislators of humankind” became the “engineers of human souls” in Stalin’s famous phrase.\textsuperscript{1278} The state turned inward. Internal ethnic identities of the realm were reified with a system of internal passports, formally established in December 1932. Crossing state borders came to carry a one to three year prison sentence after 1936.\textsuperscript{1279} The Universities of Western Minorities and of the Toilers of the East were both closed down in 1937, many of their leading figures executed in the purges of the late 1930s. The latinization campaign of the 1920s,

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{1274} Nikolai Marr, “Iazyk i myshlenie” (1931) as quoted in Slezkine, Marr, 843.
\item \textsuperscript{1275} \textit{Language Planning in the Soviet Union}, 28 and 31.
\item \textsuperscript{1276} For Hayden White in \textit{Metahistory} the Comic Mode of Emplotment is best exemplified by Leopold von Ranke’s historical writings, because they tell of the emergence of coherent states.
\item \textsuperscript{1277} For an evocation of the rich tapestry of Russian revolutionary utopianism and egalitarian life in the 1920s, including the phenomenon of the “Conductorless Orchestra,” see Richard Stites, \textit{Revolutionary Dreams and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 135-140.
\item \textsuperscript{1278} The distinction I draw is not the same as Vladimir Paperny’s distinction between Culture One and Culture Two, with 1934 as the crucial pivot point. While recognizing the value (and brilliance) of his ideal types the transition form Beauty
\item \textsuperscript{1279} Kotkin, 225.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
undertaken in anticipation of a world language that would recognize no state boundaries, gave way to a cyrrilization campaign, focused upon integrating the languages within the borders of the Soviet Union, and increasingly using the Russian alphabet as a basis for making new, Soviet literary languages.  

At the same time the ideal of a global language—necessary for Communism—that had inspired so many Soviet artists, thinkers, and intellectuals in the 1920s lost its appeal to the state. The Union of Soviet Esperantists, founded in 1921 under the direction Ernest Drezen (1898—1937), was effectively abolished in 1937 when most of its leadership was executed in Stalin’s purges. In 1952, the same Tallinn-based inventor, Jakob Linzbach, who had inspired Anatolii Lunacharskii with his proposals for a universal language in 1922, sent his most recent effort along the same lines to the Academy of Sciences in Moscow under the title, “Universal Science. Universal Language” (Universal’naia nauka. Universal’nyi iazyk). Jakob Linzbach dedicated all 439 elegantly hand-written pages of his manuscript to “Comrade Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin in connection with his work: ‘About Marxism and Problems of Linguistics’ (Posviashaetsia tov. Iosife Vissarionovichu Stalimu po povodu ego raboty: ‘Otnositel’no marksizma v iazykoznani). But this time he received an unequivocal rejection. Both the Institute of Languages and the Institute of Mathematics at the Academy of Science reviewed his work, and both condemned it as pseudo-science:

The Institute of Language finds that in your proposed scheme of ‘ideographical writing’ there is no coherent system, that the system you propose is extremely abstract and incomprehensible, that the examples you cite in your manuscript could lead to a variety of interpretations. The V.A. Steklova Mathematical Institute and Institute of Philosophy at the Academy of Sciences of the USSR also agree, that your manuscript about ‘the universal language’ presents no scientific interest and cannot be a subject of further discussion among scholars-specialists.  

As the promise of Communism receded into the future, national languages and cultures, led by the language of Lenin and Pushkin, the first among equals, rushed in to sacralize the growing gap.

In the 1930s the Russian language ceased to be the Soviet Latin, an arbitrary and ultimately dispensable medium of international communication, and became instead a sacred inheritance. Now “all non-Russians…were required not only to learn the Russian language but also to familiarize themselves with the Russian culture.” In March 1938, for the first time in Soviet history, “Russian was made a compulsory subject in all schools in the Soviet Union.”

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1280 Nigel Grant, 66.
1282 Terry Martin, Affirmative Action Empire, 461.
1283 Wolf Moskovich, “Planned Language Change in Russia since 1917” in Language Planning in the Soviet Union, 86.
And in 1944 the original Soviet anthem, composed in French, titled the “Internationale,” and lacking a single Russian element, was replaced with a new anthem written in Russian and glorifying not only the broadly Soviet “friendship of the peoples” and the exploits of Lenin and Stalin, but also the primordial origins of the Russian nation with its reference to “Velikaia Rus.”

The Soviet nationalities were not only to cultivate their own revolutionaries and alphabets, but their own Pushkins too, to develop (or recover) their own indigenous literary traditions. But most of these were merely of local and national importance. Pushkin, on the other hand, was a universal figure. The official celebration of the 100th anniversary of the death of the “great Russian poet” in 1937 exhibited a level of pomp and circumstance that rivaled even the cult of Lenin. On February 10th the Moscow literary journal, Zvezda (Star) printed a portrait of Pushkin with a caption that identified him as the “great Russian poet, creator of the Russian literary language, and founder of the new Russian literature, who enriched humankind with his immortal creations in artistic language” (emphasis added). Thus the caption stressed that Pushkin’s universal achievements were an outgrowth of his national ones. It was quoted from a directive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party on December 16, 1935, a fine example of the transformed status of Russian as the Soviet language.1284

The lead editorial in Uchitel’skaia gazeta for August 7, 1938 sang the praises of the Russian language as the sacred voice of the Russian people and therefore a sacred voice for all Soviet people:

The great and mighty Russian language, the language of Lenin and Stalin, Pushkin and Gorky, Tolstoi and Belinskii, is profoundly dear to all citizens of the USSR, and is studied with love by children and adults… [which shows] the exclusive interest of all nationalities to the study of the language of the great Russian people, first among equals in the fraternal family of the peoples of the USSR.1285

Pushkin was necessary in order to make Lenin possible. For as the Soviet Union’s preeminent “literary language,” the first among equals, the Russian language had made the Revolution possible. Nobody needed to be reminded that the Russian Revolution had started in Russia and in the Russian language, not in the Kazhak SSR or in some tribal language of the East.

Nor was the Pushkin cult merely confined to Moscow and Leningrad. It enveloped the entire non-Russian Soviet periphery as well, even Estonia. On June 5, 1949, passing through Tartu, the itinerant Estonian illegal Jaan Roos wrote in his diary of how the 150th anniversary of Pushkin’s birth had taken Estonia by storm:

A Pushkin craze has seized the entire Soviet Union. Poor Pushkin, if you only knew, who was riding on your back right now. You, who celebrated the animating principle of freedom. Now those who use your name are advocates and agents of the most horrible slavery. Also Estonia has reached the apogee of insanity, which is insulting both to the Estonian people and to Pushkin. Newspapers and journals are full from end to end of his writings and ceremonies dedicated to him fill up every possible space. No Estonian

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1285 Martin, 428.
writer has his jubilee celebrated with such noise as Pushkin. Estonian Communists are on their hands and knees before the Russian writer.\footnote{1286}

The 100th anniversary of Pushkin’s death in 1937 had not passed by unnoticed in independent interwar Estonia, but it had been a modest affair of a few respectful lines in the Estonian newspaper Free Land (Vaba maa). Now Estonian Communists like E. Päll, noted Jaan Roos, treated the refusal to elevate Pushkin above all national Estonian writers as “hooliganistic opposition” (“huliganistlik väljaastumine”).\footnote{1287}

The new position of the Russian language and culture at the center of the educational and academic establishment emerged prominently in the celebration of Stalin’s 70th birthday at Moscow State University in 1949. In the early years of the Soviet experiment the future of Russia’s oldest University, founded in 1755, seemed in jeopardy. The “assault” on the very idea of the traditional European university reached its peak during the First Five-Year Plan: “in January 1930 a flood of articles were printed under an editorial declaring ‘universities are not necessary.’” Universities were portrayed as “‘monstrous conglomerates’ holding to ‘medieval’ notions of “pure science,” hindering “the progress of modern, specialized knowledge.””\footnote{1288} But in the end, the old universities survived all the workers’ academies and Party schools that were designed to replace them in the first two decades of Soviet rule.

After the War, Moscow State University moved into its new towering skyscraper of a home, the tallest educational building in the world, which had been largely been built by German POWs. It was located on Sparrow Hills (now called Lenin Hills), one of the Holy places of the Russian intelligentsia, where Alexander Herzen and Nikolai Ogarev had taken their oath in 1827 following the failed Decembrist uprising not to rest until Russia was free. Vladimir Paperny evoked the enormous cultural symbolism of the new university building, underscoring its similarity to Moscow’s most famous Church in the final paragraphs of the main text of \textit{Architecture in the Age of Stalin}:

Of all the culture’s architectural creations, possibly the Moscow State University Building on the Lenin Hills can be considered such a symbol [of the new culture]…. The building has nothing common with professional architecture; it should instead be examined together with the \textit{Iliad}, the \textit{Mahabharata}, the Finnish \textit{Kalevala}, or \textit{Beowulf}—or at least with the building folklore of India, Egypt, or Babylon.

Still, the closest analogue to this university building is Russian architectural epic, among which is, first of all, the Cathedral of Vasilii Blazhennyi (Saint Basil’s) on Red Square (1551-61). Both were to symbolize recent victories; both are shaped, as the cathedral was described at the end of the nineteenth century, as ‘a pyramid consisting of bizarre forms and bizarre spaces’; both strain upward, and both are verbal: The side

\footnote{1287}June 5, 1949—Jaan Roos III, 245.
\footnote{1288}David Michael Fox “The Assault on the Universities and the Dynamics of Stalin’s ‘Great Break,’ 1928-1932” in \textit{Academia in Upheaval: Origins, Transfers and Transformations of the Communist Academic Regime in Russia and East Central Europe} (Westport, Conn.: 2000), 84.
chapels of the cathedral are dedicated to different stages in the conquest of Kazan.’ The composition of Moscow State University, in the first place, signifies the graded ascent of knowledge toward the name (as represented by the steeple); in the second place, it ‘embodied the national character, humanism, and the progressive knowledge of socialistic science.’ Both constructions are emphatically colored, and in each the red-white color scale originally predominated.

One cannot imagine Moscow today without either one of them.\footnote{Vladimir Papernyi, \textit{Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). 248.}

It was in this building that between December 19 and 29, 1949 the University with all its eleven faculties, the department of Marxism-Leninism, and the Gorky Library celebrated Stalin’s birthday with a conference devoted to the leading role of the Russian nation in the achievement of Soviet socialism. Dotsent I. Shipanov’s talk, “J.V. Stalin on the historical role of the Russian nation and the growth of its culture” [I.V. Stalin ob istoricheskoi roli russkogo naroda i razvitii ego kul’tury], made the case explicitly. Shipanov declared that

Comrade Stalin shows that Russia, as the most developed, most cohesive, and organized nation, played already in those times [before the Russian Revolution] the leading role in the development of the multi-national Russian empire, acting as the unifier of separate nationalities into a single state and taking a leading role in this.\footnote{“Tovarish Stalin pokazyvaet, chto russkii narod, kak naibolee razvityi, splochenyi i organizovannyi, syegral uzhe v to vremia vydaushuisia rol’ v obrazovanii mnogonatsional’nogo russkogo gosudarstva, vystupiv v roli obedinitelia otdel’nyx narodnostei v edinoe gosudarstvo i zaniav v nem vdushee mesto.” in “Svodnyi otchet o nauchnoi sessii, posviashennoi 70-letiu so dnia rozhdenia Iosifa Vissarionovicha Stalina,” GARF f.P-9396, o.2, d.366.}

Thus, Shipanov turned rupture into continuity. The Soviet Union, hitherto profoundly different from the Russian empire by virtue of its Communist ideology, now became profoundly similar by virtue of its Russian nationality. The integrative glue of the Soviet Union, it turned out, had been its Russianness all along, and Communism was less of an escape from the Russianness of the Russian Empire than its culmination.

Less than six months later, Joseph Stalin gave theoretical expression to the linguistic compromise of deferred Communism with his formal repudiation of Nikolai Marr’s “Theory of Language” in \textit{Pravda} on June 20, 1950. Stalin began his intervention in the linguistic debate by noting how little the Russian language had in fact changed over the course of the first thirty years of the Soviet experiment:

Take, for example, Russian society and the Russian language. In the course of the past thirty years the old, capitalist base has been eliminated in Russia and a new, socialist base has been built. Correspondingly, the superstructure on the capitalist base has been eliminated and a new superstructure created corresponding to the socialist base. The old political legal and other institutions, consequently, have been supplanted by new socialist institutions. But in spite of this the Russian language has remained basically what it was before the October Revolution.\footnote{Joseph Stalin, “Concerning Marxims in Linguistics,” \textit{Pravda}, June 20,1950 as published in Joseph Stalin, \textit{Marxism and Problems of Linguistics} (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1950).}
The language of the Russian Revolution was still essentially the language of Pushkin. Stalin underscored this point explicitly: “As to the structure of Pushkin’s language, with its grammatical system and its basic stock of words, in all essentials it has remained as the basis of modern Russian.” And he extended this point to all the languages of the realm:

The same must be said of the Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Uzbek, Kazakh, Georgian, Armenian, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Moldavian, Tatar, Azerbaijani, Bashkirian, Turkmenian and other languages of the Soviet nation; they served the old bourgeois system of these nations just as well as they serve the new, socialist system.

The implications of this seemingly commonsensical inversion of previous Soviet linguistic policy were momentous: in Marr’s theory language merely reflected the prevailing material conditions of society and its ideology; now Stalin proclaimed language to be a feature neither of the base, nor superstructure of society, nor some “intermediate phenomenon,” but the “whole society” potentially making language a more powerful source of truth than ideology itself. Rehabilitating an old Romantic trope (and anticipating a Poststructuralist one), language had ceased merely to reflect reality and had started producing it.

Shortly thereafter a certain Comrade A. Kohlopov challenged Stalin to explain the apparent contradiction between his statements about language at the Sixteenth Party Congress in 1930 and his statements in the summer of 1950: “From your article,” Kohlopov wrote, “I understood that the crossing of languages can never produce some new language, whereas prior to your article I was firmly convinced, in conformity with your speech at the Sixteenth Congress of the C.P.S.U (B.), that under communism, languages would merge into one common language.” On July 28, Stalin addressed Kohlopov’s confusion by invoking the logic of deferred Communism, while giving expression to the emerging anti-Semitism of the times:

Comrade Kohlopov does not even suspect that both formulas can be correct—each for its own time./ That is always the case with textualists and Talmudists who do not delve into the essence of the matter, quote mechanically and irrespective of the historical conditions of which the quotations treat, and invariably find themselves in a hopeless situation.

Before “the victory of socialism on the world scale,” Stalin went on, “the crossing… of two languages results not in the formation of a new language, but in the victory of one of the languages and the defeat of the other”; in the time after the victory of socialism, however, Stalin stressed that “languages will merge into a single international language, which of course, will be neither German, nor Russian, nor English, but a new language that has absorbed the best elements of the national and zonal languages.”

It would be hard to say how Stalin’s last comment repudiated Marr’s Theory of Language. It was more a repudiation of its timing than its essence. In some sense, the Communist future was still emplotted according to the Marrist model, but the story of Socialism and the story of Communism had grown apart. So long as the Soviet story was emplotted in the comic mode, the Russian nation could sacralize the growing gap in Socialist Realist fiction.

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1292 Slezkine, Marr, 858.
Adapting a speech by Stalin to the purposes of his 1932 production novel, *Time, Forward!*, Valentin Kataev explained why breaking records and increasing the pace of steel production was so important to the Soviet experiment:

…to lower tempos means to fall back, and those who fall back are beaten. But we do not want to be beaten. No, we will not have it! This was the history of old Russia: it was continually beaten because of backwardness. It was beaten by Mongol khans. It was beaten by Turkish beks. It was beaten by Swedish feudal lords. It was beaten by Polish and Lithuanian gentry. It was beaten by English and French capitalists.

It was beaten by Japanese barons.

It was beaten because of military backwardness, cultural backwardness, governmental backwardness. It was beaten because it was profitable to do so and because the beating went unpunished…

That is why we cannot be backward any more [....]

Flickering across the windows from right to left, swirled the obelisk: “Asia-
Europe”

A senseless post…

I demand that it be taken down!

Never again shall we be Asia!

Never! Never! Never!^{1294}

Kataev’s novel told the story of the first great Soviet industrial city, Magnitogorsk. But the “we” of this novel had ceased to be the global proletariat; maybe the Soviet story had never really been about the global proletariat, even if the original Marxist slogan—“Workers of the world, unite!”—remained attached to Soviet iconography until the very end, underscoring the growing gap between communists dreams and socialist realities. Rather, the “we” of this novel was the Soviet people, but a people constructed in Russian terms. Born in Odessa into a Jewish family in 1897, Kataev was himself from the non-Russian Soviet periphery, but the extent to which he venerated and elevated the Russian national perspective above all others in this passage is a testament to the emerging importance and power of Russian nationality in the 1930s as a universal lens upon the truth.

The humiliation to which this passage—like Stalin’s speech before it (another non-Russian embrace of Russian nationalism)—referred was Russian national humiliation, not the humiliation of anyone else. After all, from the perspective of the periphery of the Soviet experience, the Mongol khans, the Turkish beks, the Swedish feudal lords and the Polish and Lithuanian gentry were all more likely agents of freedom, liberation, and national self-respect than the authorities that currently occupied Moscow. How could a Buriat, a Kazakh, or an Uzbek take comfort in the words, “never again shall we be Asia” without becoming Russian themselves? And why in this long list of nationally defined oppressors was there no mention of Russian noblemen, only foreign ones? After all, to the Russian peasant the yoke of Russian serfdom should have been (in Communist ideology if no where else) a more recent and serious

concern than the “Mongol yoke” had ever been. Kataev’s paragraphs show the transformation and translation of the language of class struggle into national terms.  

8.2.3 Indefinitely Postponed Communism: Russian as a Second Native Tongue

The dream of Communism and its universal language never vanished entirely from the Soviet experiment. But in Nikita Krushchev’s Secret Speech of 1956, Stalin’s contradictions were exposed as hypocrisy rather than the necessary contradictions of Marxist dialectic they had been in socialist realist fiction. This was a discomfiting act, which could not help but call the entire narrative of Soviet history into question at the highest level. Nothing undermines confidence like an unfulfilled promise. One of Nikita Krushchev’s greatest political blunders may have been to set a precise date for the achievement of Communism. In 1961 at the Twenty-second Party Congress he promised that “by 1980 a Communist society would be built ‘in the main’ in the USSR.” This only intensified consciousness of the growing gap between appearances and realities as the date drew nigh, rendering them intolerable—or at least laughable—by the late 1970s. The Soviet story turned into a global satire rather than the global romance it had been in the 1920s or the domestic comedy of Stalin’s reign, “dizzy with success.”

In the final third of the Soviet story, Soviet jokes rushed in to fill the gap between Communist promises and Socialist realities. No longer sought in novels like Kataev’s Time, Forward!, the essence of the Soviet experience could be found in Soviet anecdotes, many of which concerned the experience of time itself—e.g. “What is the most permanent thing in the Soviet Union?—Temporary difficulties.”

Reconciling itself to the realities of “really existing socialism” the Soviet experiment recovered some of the original global orientation it had lost with the closing of the Soviet mind (and state) in Stalin’s time, though now in the new context of the global Cold War. The incorporation of the Baltic States at the end of the Second World War expanded its borders, and its exercise of power in Eastern Europe, China, and throughout the Second World, attested to its new role as a global Superpower. This shift was especially pronounced in education and language. In 1960 a new Soviet University picked up where the University of the Toilers of the East had left off in 1937. Patrice Lumumba Friendship of the Peoples University in Moscow was founded to help the nations of the Third World—of Asia, Africa, and South America—cultivate their intelligentsias and political elite in a socialist key. By 1975 the University had more than 5600 graduates, with 4250 from eighty-nine foreign countries, including the Sudanese writer and poet, Abed Elrahim Abu Zakrra, who studied Russian literature and specialized in Arabic-Russian translation, the Brazilian linguist, Lucy Seki, who specialized in the indigenous languages of the Americas, the President of the Central African Republic, Michel Djotodia, and

1295 Read closely, these passages can also be used to show the slippage between various ideal types of nationalism used by political scientists. Language is the hidden ethnic element in every civic nationalism. For a division of the world into “ethnic” and “civic” nationalisms, see Hans Kohn’s seminal 1944 work, The Idea of Nationalism. Language can also be the hidden “monoethnic” element in any “multiethnic” or “anti-ethnic” “regime of ethnicity.” For a division of the twentieth-century into three national regimes of ethnicity see Sener Akturk, Regimes of Ethnicity and Nationhood in Germany, Russia, and Turkey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). After all, of the earliest and most important definitions of the nation by J. G. Herder, was framed in purely linguistic terms: a “Sprachgemeinschaft” (Language Community). Blood and soil came later.


1297 “Chto v Sovetskom Soiuze samoe postoiannoe?—vremennye trudnosti.” Anecdote # 309 in Iulius Telsin, 1001 izbrannyi sovetskii politicheskii ankedot (Tenafly, New Jersey: Erimitzh, 1986)
the Chairman of the PLO, and President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas. 1962 saw the rehabilitation of Esperanto in the Soviet Union with the formation of an Esperanto Commission. And from 1979 until 1989 a leading Soviet linguist, Magomet Ismailovich Isaev, an expert on Iranian languages, became the head of the new “Association of Soviet Esperantists.”

Isaev ended his definitive 1977 book, *National Languages of the USSR: Problems and Solutions*, with a short excursis “in lieu of a conclusion” on “The Language of the Future.” In the spirit of indefinitely postponed Communism, he began his remarks by cautioning that “[i]n referring to the future one should be careful to make it clear whether one has in mind the distant future or the near future.” These two realms had grown very far apart indeed. For the distant future, Isaev admitted the absence of a consensus. While Soviet Marxists could agree that “humanity [would] eventually attain a stage of complete unity,” and that language differences would eventually be overcome by the convergence of all languages, they did not know how or when this would happen and offered “two mutually exclusive propositions.” Some, like A.A. Reformsatky and K.Kh. Khanzarov, believed that a “genuine international language” would be formed on the basis of the organic evolution and convergence of particular national languages; others, like V.G. Kostomarov, M.P. Kim, and E.P. Svidost believed that “the future common language [would] be artificial.” As an Esperantist himself, Isaev sided with the latter, noting the rebirth and spread of enthusiasm for Esperanto “in almost all the national republics” of the Soviet Union. Thus, the Soviet experiment had cycled back to the Babel of its maculate birth, with scholars like Nikolai Marr arguing about whether the language of the Communist future would turn out to be the organic outgrowth of existing languages or an artificial imposition. But in a world chastened by violence, a world that no longer really believed in the Communist millennium, all this speculation was purely academic.

In the meantime the new Soviet linguistic compromise was bilingualism. The ideal was first spelled out the Twenty-Second Party Congress in 1961, when Nikita Krushchev announced that “the Russian language had in fact become a second native tongue.” The use of Russian to integrate the realm was justified sometimes by an appeal to an accident of history and at others to its special role in the Soviet experiment. In fact, Isaev’s book waivered back and forth between both positions. In his chapter on “The Soviet People as a New Historical Community and Its Interlanguage,” he noted that in theory at least, any Soviet national language might be used as the Soviet interlanguage “depending on the specific linguistic situation in particular communities and on the preferences of speakers.” However, in practice

the specific type of bilingualism that is needed in the Soviet multinational state is the one in which a person knows both his native tongue and Russian. While other forms of bilingualism may also be developing, (such as Uzbek-Tadjik, Azerbaijani-Armenian, and Lithuanian-Lettish) their importance is of a local character.

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But at the same time, Isaev—like Stalin and Kataev before him—stressed that the Russian people were special:

> Through their loyalty to the concerns of socialism and to friendly relations among peoples, and their unselfish assistance to the country’s other republics the Russian people have earned the deep respect of other peoples of the USSR and a position of leadership. It is, therefore, quite natural that Russian should become a second native language to the USSR’s many peoples. Both Russian and their mother tongue coexist and mutually complement each other. Such a situation is only possible within a socialist society.

Thus, if Russian had a special role to play in integrating the Soviet state, this was not only because Russian was the most common language in the realm, but also in some sense, the best, the language of the most “unselfish” and most “loyal” nation.

Multilingualism was never a viable principle of integration for the Soviet state. It was a problem and a source of Babel—even if it was a value—that had to be overcome or resolved by other means—i.e. whether learning other languages oneself, or compelling others to learn one’s own. A Babel of ethnic and linguistic particularism attended both the rise and fall of the Soviet Union. In the meantime borders shifted; some languages did not receive state protection (like Livonian), and went extinct. Others (like Tadzhik) were elevated from the status of one tribal language among many others to become the language of an entire Soviet National Republic. The drama of Soviet history was the attempt to reconcile and integrate all the various nations of the Soviet Union in all their ethnic and linguistic particularity in what Stalin called the “Friendship of the Peoples.”

At its maximum point of expansion the Soviet Union encompassed 8,649,490 square miles with a total population just under 286,000,000. The last Soviet census reported around 130 ethnic groups, with different percentages of every group speaking its heritage language. Linguists have estimated that while the official language count of the Soviet Union numbered 150, the actual number of languages in use in the USSR was closer to 200 (almost identical to the number of sovereign states in the world today). Thus, Lenin’s multilingual model was under strain all throughout, pulled in opposite directions:

> On the one hand, the national languages were manipulated to create a sense of identity among individual groups of people, despite the potential that this created for emerging sense of nationalism. On the other hand, there was a strong tendency to promote a single language in the formation of a unified, industrialized nation state, with Russian serving all the functions of a state language in its official use in government, law, and education.

In fact, the actual division of linguistic labor was less clearcut than appears in the statement above. For Soviet education, going back to the korenizatsia (indigenization) campaigns of the early 1920s was always supposed to be in the native language of the student up to a certain point.

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extent, and national institutions of higher of learning (like Tartu University) received extensive support so that they could cultivate subjects directly connected to the cultural life of the ethnic nation as well as the interethnic state.

However, the question of what and how much was to be taught in Russian, whether children were to learn Russian at the lowest levels, and whether at the highest level candidate and doctoral dissertations could be defended in languages other than Russian became an acute source of tension after the Second World War. In 1978 Tartu was officially counted among the leading twenty-one universities of the Soviet Union, which “gave it new opportunities for founding new organizations and positions and procuring state funding.”1308 This was also the year that many Estonians saw as the beginning of linguistic Russification: the Estonian-speaking First Secretary of the Communist Party, Johannes (Ivan) Käbin, was replaced with a Russian-speaking ethnic Estonian, Karl Vaino; an October decree issued by the Council of Ministers of the USSR made Russian instruction in kindergarten and the first grade obligatory, though “Lithuania and Estonia were the last two holdouts of the Soviet Republics; study of Russian in the first grade was not introduced until 1980-81.”1309 Above all, this was the same year that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union ended the right to defend doctoral dissertation in languages other than Russian, essentially giving Russian a linguistic monopoly in the Soviet Union on universal knowledge and serious science. 1310

Even dissertations written in the Estonian department of Tartu University on the Estonian language were now to be written and defended in Russian: in the process of achieving Soviet consciousness the minority languages of the Soviet Union had been dealt a severe blow, and nowhere was this experienced more acutely than in the Estonian and Finno-Ugric departments of Tartu University, where all of a sudden the Estonian language had been reduced from a


1309 Kohanemine ja vastupanu, 281-282; Laura Grenoble, 97.

1310 “In 1978 the CPSU Central Committee decreed a further increase in Russian language teaching in non-Russian schools right down to kindergarten level. The same principle was applied to the universities, where all doctoral dissertations were now to be written in Russian.” David Smith, 41. “With the ruling of the Higher Attestation Commission in 1975. theses and dissertation could only be presented in Russian, and dissertation defences in other languages were only allowed with the agreement of the Learned Soviet (?) and the assigned opponent. The 1975 decision meant the total russification of degree defences—at least one opponent was appointed from some other Soviet University or Academic Institution, who did not speak Estonian or whatever other local language, and for whom it was not enough to have merely a Russian summary (autoreferat). Though this was a device for Russification, there were also public and concealed ‘objective explanations for this. An open explanation was the homogenization of the Soviet system of degrees; a concealed explanation was that in some corrupt national higher schools and academic institutions, especially in the Caucasus and Central-Asia, certain undeserving individuals were awarded academic degrees without meeting the requisite standards, which the Higher Attestation Commission did not have the linguistic means to control.”/ “Kõrgema Atestatsioonikomisjoni 1975. a. määrusega lubati tööde kinnitamise, ametikohtade loomise ja käitumise kohta kasutada asendust.” Kõrgema Atestatsioonikomisjoni 1975. a. määruse 612—“Tartu Ülikoolis teaduskraadide süsteemi edasine ühtlustamine, varjatud kasutamise õigus.” TÜAK XXX: Tartu Ülikool 1970-1988 (Tartu, 1998), 168.
legitimate form of scholarly subjectivity at the highest level to an object of scholarly investigation. Isaev wrote that Russian had become essential to a higher education:

Both centers of production and the USSR’s entire educational system are playing an increasing role in the dissemination of bilingualism….A good knowledge of Russian is needed today in order to attend institutions of higher education and to share in the advance of science. Over one-third of the books that are published in the entire world today are published in Russian, and more books in technology and the exact sciences are published in Russian than in all the other major languages of the world taken together.1311

Apparently, in 1977 Russian was well on its way to becoming the universal language of scholarship and science, not just for the Soviet Union, but the entire world. But this was also the moment when the entire Soviet intelligentsia began discovering the world in a Babel of foreign languages, a Babel that had already begun to emerge at Tartu State University two decades earlier with the Tartu School of Semiotics, with Pent Nurmekund’s unofficial Oriental Institute, and with innumerable unofficial guru-polyglots like Uku Masing.

8.3 De-Nationalization of the Center or Russification of the Periphery?

What was Soviet bilingualism? De-nationalization of the center or russification of the periphery? The escalating tension within the postwar Soviet semiosphere between honoring and giving expression to a diversity of cultures and languages on the one hand, while integrating them into a universal, bilingual Soviet whole on the other in which Russian might become everyone’s “second native language” can be found in the production story of the most successful Soviet Estonian film of all time. This was Grigori Kromonov’s The Last Relic (Viimne Reliikvia). Released in 1969, it had 45 million viewers in the first year alone in the Soviet Union, a significant achievement for a national republic with a population of less than 1.5 million. But its success extended to the wider world as well. By 1973 it had been sold (by Moscow) to sixty-three countries all around the world. A partial alphabetical list will give some sense of its global reach: Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Ceylon, Columbia, Czechoslovakia, the Dominican Republic, Finland, Ghana, Guinea, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, India, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, France, Romania, West and East Germany, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Spain, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Yemen, Yugoslavia, and Zambia.1312 Indeed, the release of this film may be the closest that the Estonian national republic has ever come to having a global cultural event.

The Last Relic was full of national Estonian elements, even if on closer inspection many turned out to be more German than Estonian. It was based on the historical novel of the late nineteenth-century Estonian writer, Eduard Börnhöhe, Count Gabriel and the Last Days of Saint Bridgett’s Cloister, and set in medieval Livonia, bringing to life some of the historical figures featured in the Balthasar Russow’s sixteenth-century Chronicle of Livonia. It also made good use of the Estonian landscape: it was filmed partly in Tallinn’s old town; it took advantage of

1311 Isaev, National Languages in the USSR, 350.
the medieval ruins of Saint Bridget’s Cloister on the edge of the capital; and it included one of
the more striking and distinctive landscapes in Southern Estonia, the sandstone cliffs and streams
of Taevaskoja [Chamber of Heaven], where Tartu writers and scholars like Uku Masing have
long gone for inspiration.

Moreover, it was produced by the leading figures of the Soviet Estonian cultural and
artistic elite. Several had Tartu State University educations, like the script editor, Lennart Meri,
a writer, ethnographer, and documentary film producer, who studied the Finno-Ugric tribes of
Siberia, and had graduated from the History department in 1950. The screenplay was scripted by
the well-known writer, Arvo Valton; the founder of the internationally recognized Estonian
school of Animation, Rein Raamat, was the Art Director; the lyrics to the songs were done by
one of the most important young radical, poetic voices of the 1960s, Paul-Erik Rummo, a son of
the noted interwar poet Paul Rummo, and graduate of Tartu University in Estonian philology in
1965. Around the same time as he worked on The Last Relic, Rummo penned the popular play,
Cinderella Game (Tuhkatriinumäng) which was first performed at Tartu’s Vanemuine Theater in
1968, but soon found an audience Off-Broadway in New York in English translation, and was
widely interpreted as a subtle critique of the Soviet Regime, with its clever extension of the old
fairytale: the Prince begins to doubt that the woman he chose is in fact the “real” Cinderella—i.e.
the proletariat.1313 After Estonian independence Rummo would join the dominant fiscally
conservative party and become the Estonian Minister of Culture and Education (1992-1994) and
later Minister of Population and Ethnic Affairs (2003-2007). The songs were sung, in the
Russian version of the movie at least, by the renowned Estonian Baritone opera singer, Georg
Ots.1314

At the same time, the film was also a wonderful expression of the multinational and
multilingual Soviet ideal of the “Friendship of the Peoples.” The male lead, Gariel, was played
by a Ukrainian actor (Aleksandr Goloborodko); his side-kick was Lithuanian (Uldis Vazdiks);
the female lead, Agnes von Mönikhausen, was played by a Latvian actress (Ingrida Andrina).
One of the villainous church figures was played by the famous Russian-Jewish MXAT actor
Roland Bykov, who had to be ferried back and forth by taxi between Tallinn and Moscow, for he
was shooting another film at the same time.1315 The sixteenth century Estonian “bandit” Ivo
Schenkenberg, portrayed here as a villain—though celebrated at the same time as a hero by the
Estonian writer Jaan Kross, in his novel Between Three Plagues (Kolme katku vahel)—was
played by an Estonian actor (Peeter Jakobi). Estonians also played most of the secondary roles
and bit parts.

On set each of the actors spoke his own language, and in the end everything was dubbed
into Estonian for the release in Estonia, Russian for the release in Russia, Latvian in Latvia, and
so on.1316 Moreover the story itself fit rather well with the underlying undercurrents of Soviet
materialism, poking fun at the absurdity of Christian superstition, belief, and above all rituals in
the magical powers of the “last relic”—i.e. the remains of a Christian Saint Bridgett—which are
to be delivered to a medieval convent in Livonia. Ultimately the casket is dropped and shatters
upon the Convent floor, revealing only old bones and dust for all to see, a fitting materialist

1313 For an attempt at a non-political interpretation on the basis of Jungian archetypes see Mardi Valgemäe, “The
1314 My first visit to Soviet Tallinn as a six year old in the Summer of 1983 was aboard a ship from Helsinki, which
bore the name of this well-known Soviet Estonian opera singer, “Georg Ots.”
1315 Interview with Reim Raamat and Arvo Valton, Igavene Reliikvia.
1316 Igavene Reliikvia.
conclusion, disabusing the viewer of any enduring theological belief in the existence of higher powers, or in the value of prayer to change anything about the really existing world.

But for all this perfectly seamless integration of international and national elements in a Soviet key, on September 23, 1967 at a meeting of the production team of the Tallinn film studios, one of the Estonians in attendance, listed only as Comrade Viiding, voiced his misgivings about the whole undertaking:

What makes me pessimistic about the whole project is that though the screenplay is on the whole quite spirited and well written, it does not answer to our national mentality. I cannot imagine how our actors will play in this film. I cannot imagine how will Agnes frolic in the saddle before Gabriel … how beautiful and terrible this could be … We should try to do something more in keeping with our national character. Our national dance is not the Georgian national dance; our ladies do not act in the way that French ladies act.\(^{1317}\)

A few months later, on February 6, 1968, at the artistic director, Rein Raamat, voiced a similar complaint:

One more little criticism. Somebody noted that this is a fairytale. If a fairytale can renounce history, then we can renounce Estonia, and we might as well make this film in the Caucasus. We were given the opportunity to make a historical film, and we have already renounced everything [historical], so we might as well renounce everything else as well.

Our history has been more a history of tears than of laughter…. There is no need to show great anguish, but still it could be a bit more serious. At the moment, all we have are peasants beating each other up. Observers from Russia will note that the Western frontier was truly a land of Barbarians.\(^{1318}\)

For all the use of Estonian scenery, story, actors, and production team, the movie is a generic, swashbuckling romance, with an atheist Communist twist, scarcely distinguishable from any Hollywood fairytale.\(^{1319}\) This similarity was not incidental. The production team had unique access to the Moscow film archives in order to prepare the film. And in their trips to Moscow had spent most of their time watching American Westerns—six films a day or so—which only accentuated the predicable appearance of the final product.\(^{1320}\) In an article published in the Tartu Newspaper \textit{Edasi} shortly after its release, the former chair of Tartu University’s

\(^{1317}\) Viiding: “Veel teikitab pessimistliku tunde see, et kuigi stsenaarium on suuremas osas vaimukalt kirjutatud, ei vasta see mitte pärast meie rahva mentaliteedile. Ma ei kujuta ette hästi, kuidas meie näitlejad seda mängivad hakkavad. Kui kujutada ette, kuidas Agnes seal sadulas Gabrieli ees vallatleb …. Kui ilus ja hirmus see võib olla… Peaks katsuma siiski rahvapärasemaks teha. Meie rahvatants pole see mis gruusia rahvatants, meie daamide käitumine pole see mis prantsuse daamide käitumine.” Stenogramm of the meeting of the Tallinnfilm Artistic Committee (Kunstinõukogu), September 23, 1967.


\(^{1319}\) Kalju Komissarov and Rein Raamat in an interview observe this, \textit{Igavene Reliikvia}.

\(^{1320}\) Kalju Komissarov minutes \textit{Igavene Reliikvia}, minutes 3.40.
department of the History of the Soviet Communist Party (1944-1961) and a 1929 graduate of the Estonian section of Leningrad’s Marchlewski Communist University for Western Minorities, Vilhelm Reiman suggested that the film might be considered the world’s first “Estern” (collapsing the words “Eastern” and “Estonian”—a piece of word play that works better in Estonian than in English).¹³²¹

Twenty-one years later in 1990 on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the author of the screen-play for The Last Relic, Arvo Valton, was invited to represent Estonia at a round-table discussion entitled the “Dialectics of Unity” meant to discuss the aims and realities of the Friendship of the Peoples. He was one of four cultural figures representing the literary scholarly elites of four different Soviet national republics: Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Russia, and Estonia. In more ways than one over the course of the previous forty years the Baltic States had risen to the forefront of Soviet identity politics. And this roundtable discussion was printed (in English) in an international edition of Literaturnaya Gazeta, which also included an interview with Victor Kalnbers, the Latvian surgeon and member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Moscow, who had covertly performed the first Soviet sex-change operation twenty years before (against the wishes of the Party), resulting in the transformation of a woman into a man.¹³²² In addition to Arvo Valton, the participants in the conversation included Mikola Zhulinsky, a literary critic from Kiev, Rustem Janguzhin, a philosopher from Alma-Alta, Vladimir Shatskov, a poet and translator form Moscow.¹³²³

As a child Valton had been deported together with his parents to the Region around Novosibirsk during the second and largest wave of Baltic mass deportations in the “dekulakizing” campaign of 1949. He graduated in 1954 from a high-school in Magadan oblast in Siberia, before being allowed to return to Estonia where he studied chemistry at Tallinn Polytechnic Institute. Valton took his appearance on the Round-Table as an opportunity to speak out strongly against what he took to be the false-universalism of Soviet nationalities policy, seeking its legitimation in “science”:

The trouble with science is that it has looked for overall solutions, and, at times, when it was expedient, has reduced quite different things to a common denominator. I don’t think it’s right to classify cultures according to their development, contribution to world culture etc. We should proceed from the premise that any yes, any culture is of great value for all humanity. Be it a nomad camp with shamans, a fishermen’s hamlet, or a mountain village—no matter; if it is needed there, it must be preserved.

Valton illustrated his case with examples plucked from the Eastern borderlands of the Soviet Union, taking up the defense of “our Buryats—a nation closely related to the Mongolians.” He argued that they were being Russified: “Until recently, their native language was used only for the first three years of the village school. In the early thirties there began the annihilation of the new intelligentsia that had then barely taken shape in the small nations (or in the great ones)…”

¹³²³ See “The Dialectics of Unity: A Round Table Discussion.” in The Literary Gazette (Literaturnaya Gazeta). International. Volume 1, Issue 2, February 1990. Moscow-Washington. The following quotations are all taken from this article.
Speaking from the Muscovite center, Vladimir Shatskov scoffed at this appeal to the
equality of all languages and nationalities expressed by the voice from the Estonian periphery.
Instead he spoke up on behalf of universal standards of world civilization: “No matter what his
nationality, in a poverty-stricken language an individual will inevitably produce poverty stricken
ideas.” But Valton challenged Shatskov to see the hubris of the view that Russian is really an
adequate universal language of culture, by pointing out that what is taken to be universal and
international in the Soviet Union is in fact deeply imbued with national Russian character, while
in the larger global scheme of things, as Valton pointed out, Russian remained a minor language:
“Currently 80 per cent of world science uses English as its medium. But, like art, science can
not be devoid of national character, and it goes for the exact sciences as well. They, too, will
reflect national thinking and language-related philosophical potentialities and specific features....”

Shatskov parried by turning Valton’s argument on its head. He suggested that the
problem with the Soviet Union was not so much Russification as de-nationalization, even at the
Russian center:

The language my son learns at school is not really Russian, because he is taught
according to methods used in teaching foreign tongues—English, German, French,
Spanish etc. Like these languages, it is adapted simplified and, as a result, turned into a
kind of Esperanto—a language of anti-culture under the guise of Russian culture. 
Consequently, there is no question of propagating Russian culture even in the very heart
of Russia. What is perceived as ‘Russian’ … is actually no more than some 'local color'
ornamentation.1324

When pressed by Valton to expand his vision from Russia and the Soviet Union to the entire
world, Shatskov made the following global declaration, apparently retreating a bit from his
earlier condemnation of “poverty-stricken languages”:

There must be a reason why nations speak different languages and, with language being a
form of reflection of essence, we can logically infer that nations are different. Self
awareness, the understanding of one’s national value and uniqueness, leads to respect for
other nations and other cultures, not to chauvinism or nationalism as some continue to
believe. Such (let us call it scholarly) nationalism will take us to the desired wholeness.

Ironically, this was exactly what Soviet nationalities policy had been trying to do all along. All
throughout the era of official bilingualism, Soviet discourse toggled between these two mutally
incompatible positions. Did Russians owe their preeminent position in the Soviet Union to a
quirk of fate or historical destiny? Did they just happen to be the most numerous and in the right
place at the right time? Or did their national culture—and language—embody a standard of
civilization to which all other Soviet people should aspire.

The whole drama of Soviet nationalities is contained in the clash of Arvo Valton and
Vladimir Shatskov. What was Sovietization in its essence? Was it the russification of the
periphery or the de-nationalization of the center? This question became especially acute after
the Second World War. As the dream of Communism and its universal language faded out of

1324 “The Dialectics of Unity: A Round Table Discussion.” in The Literary Gazette (Literanturnaya Gazeta).
reach, first deferred and then indefinitely postponed, bilingualism (with Russian as a “second native tongue” for all non-Russians) became institutionalized as official state policy under Brezhnev. Many Russians (like Vladimir Shatskov) resented the denationalization of their language and culture; it had been drained of its essence, turned into a bureaucratic, communicative device for the international integration of the realm. For a poet like Shatskov there was no poetry in this. Meanwhile, the Soviet periphery—and the Caucasus and the Baltic especially—resented Russification. Protesting the Soviet crackdown on the Prague Spring in 1968, banners in Tallinn turned Soviet slogans back against Russia: “Freedom for small peoples!” “Russians, to the moon!” “Belief in the Triumph of Communism—the opium of the masses.” The Communist Party expressed alarm at Tartu University student slogans like “Rookida puhtaks eesti keel!” (clean up the Estonian Language), an attack on the linguistic shortcomings of the Soviet-born Russian-Estonians at the helm of the Party establishment. 20,000 Georgian university students took to the streets in Tblisi in 1978 to keep Georgian as the only official language in their Republican Constitution. Forty Estonian intellectuals and cultural figures (most with ties to Tartu University) signed an open letter to Pravda in 1980 to protest the encroachment of Russian upon Estonian.

The cosmopolitan (universalist) and national (particularist) strands of the Soviet intelligentsia were already coming unraveled in the 1970s. In the late 1980s Yuri Lotman’s friendship with Dmitri Likhachev suffered over the question of Estonian independence. Paralyzed by bilingualism, and the incompatible attitudes toward the Russian language at its core, the Soviet language disintegrated in a Babel of nation-states when Russia seceded from the multilingual Empire it had founded in 1922 on the Communist promise of a universal language (that would replace all existing languages) and a universal state (that would wither away of its own accord). It was clearly stated in the Communist Manifesto—and this could never be completely forgotten without giving up on Marx entirely—that the “working men have no country” and that “from the numerous national and local literatures there arises world literature.” But could the Soviet Union tolerate the idea of an international, world literature? Pushkin was the great Russian poet, after all, not the great Soviet poet. When in the final words of Literature and Revolution Leon Trotsky predicted in 1923 that under the new Soviet conditions of life “the average human type [would] rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx,” there were no Russian-speakers on his list, no inkling yet that the New Soviet Man would carry an internal passport with his nationality listed on the fifth line. In the end, the Soviet Union was deeply divided: its people lived in two separate worlds at once: a world of the

1325 Universitas Tartuensis, 582.
1326 Tartu University Party members speculated that this was a reference to the poor command of Estonian of the Party leadership. Protocoll for Tartu University Communist Party Committee Meeting, November 18, 1968- ERAF f.152,n.12,s.172,l.88.
1328 “Soviet Marxist atheism was a Christian heresy” wrote the legal historian, Harold Berman. Like most European heresies and reformations, Soviet Marxism began with the eschatological promise of a future society that “would have no need for a state or for a body of law” but ended up creating more of both. “Not rule of law but nevertheless rule by law came to play an increasingly important role in the Soviet Union from the 1950s to the 1980s” such that when the Soviet Union collapsed in December 1991 there “were over 250,000 university-trained lawyers” in a state that had promised to do away with them (and itself). Harold Berman, Law and Revolution II: The Impact of the Protestant Reformation on the Western Legal Tradition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 18 and 19.
present with nationalities and a world of the future without them—and nowhere was this bifurcated state of being more worrisome and visible than at Tartu University in Soviet Estonia.

8.4 Language as the Hero of Our Time

 Thou hast’ taught me language and my profit on’t is that I know how to curse.

- Caliban in Shakespeare, The Tempest (1610)

In December 1999 on the eve of the new millennium, Yuri Lotman and Paul Ariste came in first and second respectively in a national poll to determine the most important Estonian scholar of the twentieth century.\(^{1330}\) It was not by chance that both were professors of language and literature. There is something peculiar and unprecedented about the unintended fascination with language—both as a means for the self-expression of particular groups and as a universal means of communication among them—at Tartu University in the Soviet period. In this work, I have tried to show how and why this came to be. For all its ineluctable particularity, I hope this story renders visible a more universal story that remains hidden in plain view when universities speak relatively uncontested languages in the service of relatively uncontested states, the story of how language became a central preoccupation of so much twentieth century scholarly endeavor and popular thought. The twentieth century looked for truth in language, much as the nineteenth century had looked for truth in history.

If the origins of the nineteenth century’s obsession with history owe something to the quickening pace of historical change in the ongoing French and Industrial Revolutions (indeed neither has a clear end date), the origins of the twentieth century’s obsession with language must be sought in the repeated and totally unpredictable disruption of that change—the discombobulating effect of Two World Wars on human consciousness, and the political and social upheavals they produced, challenging Europe’s global hegemony with political decolonization, economic globalization, and a kind of global war no-one had ever heard of before, cold rather than hot. It was a repeatedly disrupted world that no longer trusted the internal subjective expressions of the individual mind nor the external world of empirical, objective facts. Both were equally susceptible to the manipulations of advertising or the propaganda state. So it sought refuge in what lay between—language, the narrow pathway that led from the internal isolation of individual consciousness (where Continental philosophers ever since Descartes had been looking for reality, “I think therefore I am”) to the outward manifestation of being (where British empiricists had placed their bets since John Locke declared the human mind to be a Tabula rasa). Language was a link from the inner world to the outer one, the individual to the collective, self to society—which had the virtue of being the property of both and neither at the same time.

Thus even language itself was divided. If language had a special place in twentieth-century consciousness, this was an obsession that cut in two directions at once—toward the particularity of individual and national expression on the one hand and the universality of global communication on the other: the century that began with the global promise of Esperanto and Saussurean structuralism in the 1920s, ended with Babel on both sides of the Iron Curtain with Yuri Lotman defining the minimum standard for any adequate representation of reality as “two languages” and Jacques Derrida offering a nearly identical definition of his critical method of deconstruction as “plus d’une langue” (more than one language). But the tension between the

two impulses could be felt throughout. The heyday of national languages was equally the heyday of Esperanto. Before settling on Europe’s three most imperial languages (English, French, and Spanish) the League of Nations even briefly considered adopting Esperanto as truly non-hegemonic *lingua franca* in 1920.\(^\text{1331}\) Esperanto was only the best known of 912 metalinguistic projects undertaken since the Fall of Rome, most conceived in Europe or Eurasia, and nearly two thirds (560) in the 20\(^{th}\) century before the collapse of the Soviet Union.\(^\text{1332}\) In the same period, under the force of national self-determination and decolonization the number of sovereign states in the world nearly quadrupled from a little more than 50 to a little less than 200. In the process, some languages (like Livonian) went extinct, while others (like Hebrew) came back to life. By the end of the century, more than half of the world’s states had a European language as one of their official languages, and more than a quarter spoke English. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian, the fifth most spoken language in the world (directly ahead of Arabic), only remained an official language in five of its fifteen former Republics—Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan—a testament to its failed bid for linguistic transparency and universalism.\(^\text{1333}\) But the Babel of decolonization was always offset by globalization Pentecost, carried out in both a Communist and Capitalist key: as its restaurants spread around the world, McDonalds began speaking in tongues, its menu translated into Spanish (1967), German (1971), Japanese (1971), French (1972), Finnish (1984), Italian (1985), Hungarian (1988) Russian (1990), Chinese (1990) Hebrew (1993), Arabic (1993) Estonian (1995), Urdu (1998), Georgian (1999), and Azeri (1999). The binary divide was inherent in language itself—the relationship between particular individual expression and the laws or structures that underlay them. Saussure’s revolutionary invention of modern linguistics on the eve of World War One occupied the universe of the mind with the division of language into a relationship between the deep structures of *langue* and the surface utterance of *parole*. The structuralist faith in *langue* as the metalinguistic key to the underlying order of things gave way in the 1960s to the poststructuralist revenge of particular utterance (*parole*) with the “hermeneutics of suspicion,” “performativity,” and the conviction that “there is nothing outside the text,” no objective, pre-textual reference point from which any textual analysis might proceed. The non-verbal order of things capitulated to Derridean deconstructions and Foucauldian genealogies of the politics of the real, as in the *Orientalism* of Edward Said, who refused to make any positive claims about the Near East while decriying its construction in the literature of British and French 19\(^{th}\)-century Imperialism. Language became the hero of our time, the author of humanity (rather than vice versa) as Foucault questioned the author and Roland Barthes announced his “death.”\(^\text{1334}\) It turned out that “man had been a figure occurring between two modes of language.”\(^\text{1335}\) A change in those arrangements and “man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.”\(^\text{1336}\) Or as Jean-François Lyotard put it, linking early twentieth-century crises of self to science, and appealing to Robert


1334 See Foucault “What is an author” and Roland Barthes, “Death of the Author”

1335 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 385.

1336 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 425.
Musil’s classic from interwar Vienna, *The Man Without Qualities*: “each of us knows that our self does not amount to much.”¹³³⁷

But this anti-humanist defamiliarization of humanity by language was just one side of the linguistic colonization of twentieth-century thought. For at the same time earnest post-colonials “gave voice” to silent subalterns and rescued invisible agents from the “enormous condescension of posterity” through “thick description” and participant-observer anthropology.¹³³⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre rejoiced when he discovered Frantz Fanon: “the Third World finds itself and speaks to itself through his voice.”¹³³⁹ Still, Sartre’s enthusiasm for Fanon seemed to have as much to do with how Fanon defamiliarized Europe as with how he gave voice to the Third World:

1961. Listen: “Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe. For centuries they have stifled almost the whole of humanity in the name of a so-called spiritual experience.” The tone is new. Who dares to speak thus? It is an African, a man from the Third World, an ex-’native.’¹³⁴⁰

The defamiliarizing encounter with the other, whether real or imaginary, was to become a common poststructuralist trope. Just as Sartre had savored the otherness of Fanon’s representation of Europe, Michel Foucault savored the literary otherness of a Chinese Emperor’s classificational scheme. He loved its capacity—never mind that it was plucked from a fictional story conceived in a yet another post-colonial periphery (Argentina)—to make us realize “by the exotic charm of another system of thought, … the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking that.” In fact, Foucault claimed that his entire Archaeology of the Human Sciences “arose out of [this one] passage in Borges.”¹³⁴¹ In a similar vein, Julia Kristeva savored her personal encounter with the “otherness” of a Chinese village in *Des Chinoises* (1974), where Kristeva (and her tour group, including Roland Barthes) had been the first foreigners these villagers had ever seen. This passage is quoted, with a certain degree of irony, by Boris Gasparov in his essay, “In Search of the Other.” Kristeva wrote of her experience there: “I don't feel myself to be a foreigner as in Baghdad or New York. I feel myself to be a monkey, a Martian—the other.”¹³⁴² The unique linguistic spirit of twentieth-century life and thought can be found in the encounter of two ways of knowing—by means of particularist empathy of the periphery and universalist estrangement of the center—and their encounter in the academic culture of the universities of the twentieth century. Though often geographical, here it should be specified that center and periphery are used metaphorically (as they are in most contemporary discourse) less to mean a geographical position on the globe, though quite often they correspond to this, as a position in relation to power.

¹³³⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon, trans. by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 10.
¹³⁴⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, 9.
¹³⁴¹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xxiii.
8.4.1 The Particularist Periphery and Its Language of Empathy

The voice of the periphery had its eighteenth-century Bildung in the embattled, self-doubting, particularism of biblical hermeneutics and small-town German Romanticism. French after-all had been the language of the 18th-century German aristocracy. Setting the value of cultural freedom above political power, it sought to save the particularizing human sciences from the arrogant law-bound universalism of the natural ones. German national consciousness, like the national consciousness of most nations east of the Rhine in Europe or in Third World in the twentieth century (where elites spoke a different language from commoners), arose out of a sense of inferiority, division, and oppression. Nationals came to seek in the unique and authentic depths of their “culture” (or “national soul”)—always juxtaposed to the more superficial attainments of Imperial French or Roman “Civilization”—a “special path,” Sonderweg in German, an Osobyi put’ in Russian, terms that have broader and deeper cultural relevance than more limited historiographical debates care to consider.

Johann Gottfried von Herder set the empathetic tone, claiming that in order to understand the ancient Scottish poet Ossian one “must become a rough Scotsman and see the incidents of his life through his eyes, feel with his heart, think with his imagination.” For Herder and Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer—all figures who owed a personal and intellectual debt to small-town German Universities—knowledge was born of experience, of subjective identification and empathetic understanding. From Herder’s Einfühlung (empathy) to Dilthey’s Verstehen (understanding), to Gadamer’s “fusion of horizons”

1343 See Norbert Elias’s The Civilizing Process for an interesting historical exegesis of the sociogenesis of French Civilization and German Culture as the basis for French and German nationalism respectively.
1344 For a particularly concise and cogent late-19th-century German expression of this opposition see Wilhelm Windelband (1848, Potsdam—1915, Heidelberg). Windelband sought to establish the essential differences between the human and natural sciences. For Windelband (1) nomothetic and (2) idiographic approaches differed in that one sought to make knowledge by finding “rules” or propositional laws (nomethesis) to explain the phenomena of the world in an objective way, while the other relied on descriptive specifications to understand in a subjective way. The former is often seen as appropriate for studies of classes and groups (the individual subsumed within a larger totality), the latter for examining the behavior of the individual investigated upon its own terms.
1345 For a brilliant account of the sociogenesis of French “Civilization” and German “Culture” as national ideals see the first chapters of Norbert Elias, The Civilizing Process. Elias argues that the comparative ease of ennoblement in the France and difficulty in German-speaking lands open possibilities for upward mobility it afforded, and i, resulted in the in the
1347 There were other voices here too, and other ways of constructing this genealogy. For many intellectual historians, the Enlightenment is the touchstone by which.... John Zammito writes that “Frederick Beiser, for example, has argued that the line from Hume to Friedrich Nietzsche has proved far more influential for modernism and especially postmodernism than the Kantian enterprise of a transcendental grounding of reason. Beiser traces this line from Berlin’s ‘counter enlightenment’ via the Jena Romantics, the later Friedrich Schelling and Sören Kierkegaard. That may render the history of modern thought in too starkly an anti-Enlightenment light. But there is an alternative tradition, one not so hostile to the Enlightenment, that would carry forward from Herder to Wilhelm von Humboldt and G.W.F. Hegel, to Friedrich Schleiermacher and Friedrich Wolf, to the left Hegelians, to Leopold von Ranke, Johann Droysen and Wilhelm Dilthey: the tradition of hermeneutics and historicism. I believe that tradition deserves to be regarded as part of the ‘unfinished project of the Enlightenment,’ not lumped among its adversaries. But that would entail seeing the Enlightenment as more than just eh Kantian critical philosophy, or at least it urges us to reconsider the eighteenth century without orthodox Kantian lenses.” John Zammito, Kant, Herder, and The Birth of Anthropology (2002), 7 and 8.
knowing was a matter of learning to see with the eyes and speak with the tongue of another. And insofar as “language [was] the house of being” as Heidegger declared it to be, knowing meant turning the other’s house into a home, not collapsing it into oneself, but expanding oneself to match the linguistic vision of the other’s consciousness. This is precisely what the small-town Basel historian, Jacob Burckhardt, recommended in the final sentences of his *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*: “The soul of man can by recognizing God draw Him into its narrow boundaries, but also by love to Him itself expand into the Infinite—and this is blessedness on earth.”

If this vision had global purchase in the new world order of the aftermath of the Second World War this was because of the high premium placed upon the *expressive* language of the embattled periphery, the colonized other, reasserting its self and authenticity against an indifferent metropolitan center and state, which had subsumed its difference to an allegedly universal standard of truth and progress. As Frantz Fanon put it in 1961, “Challenging the colonial world … is not a discourse on the universal, but the impassioned claim by the colonized that their world is fundamentally different.” But in order to be heard, Fanon had to become fluent in the “universal” language of the metropole—the scientific language of psychiatry, of trauma, of European philosophy and revolution—a language to which he had been initiated at an elite preparatory school in Martinique by his Europeanized teacher, Aimé Césaire, but carried to fluency through his studies in Lyon. It was a mastery that rendered him comprehensible and interesting to Jean-Paul Sartre, who then wrote of Fanon as the authentic voice of the Third World.

The same relationship between the language of the center and periphery, of the universal and the particular, might be found in the language of Mahatma Gandhi, whose journey to agrarian Indian traditionalism happened by way of law school at University College London, and the discovery of his Indian national identity in South Africa. His Western education rendered him the simple voice of the huddled masses of the periphery, perfectly poised to mock the self-satisfied universalism of the West: Western Civilization? “It would be a good idea.” This sounded better, of course, after Gandhi had cast off the smart suit with which he defended his wealthy Muslim clients as a lawyer in South Africa, and donned the simple homespun Indian cloth of the Khadi movement.

Whether imagined violently (as in Fanon) or peacefully (as in Gandhi) the challenge of the periphery to the center in the throes of decolonization was essentially a Herderian position. Herder had theorized the value of the authentic native voice and language, as he gathered the folksongs of the last Christians in Hartmann Schedel’s 1493 *World Chronicle* (*Weltchronik*)—the Estonians, Livs, and Latvians, from his post as a young Lutheran pastor in Riga in the 1760s. One can only wonder if they—or anyone else for that matter—would ever have come to see the value of their music and folksongs, let alone organize national song festivals to

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1351 Originally published as *Folksongs* in 1778-9 and then a quarter of a century later as *Voices of Nations in Songs* (*Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*).
celebrate it, if someone more cosmopolitan than they had not yearned for its authenticity in the first place.

The Estonian national epic was published in German translation together with the Estonian “original” between 1857 and 1861. The relationship of Estonian students to their Baltic German teachers at the imperial university of Tartu was foreshadowed by Herder’s own vexed relationship to his teacher in the Prussian capital of Königsberg, Immanuel Kant. John Zammito has described Herder’s wide-eyed arrival in the Prussian capital itself as an encounter between the cosmopolitan core and provincial periphery:

Johan Gottfried Herder arrived in Königsberg in May 1762, a seventeen-year-old, small town boy, sensitive and reticent, for whom the city initially appeared overwhelming…. Kant’s praise for “Königsberg’s cosmopolitanism” was for the benefit of “his students, most of them young men from the hinterlands of Königsberg, for whom this was in all likelihood the best and for some the only vantage on the wider world they could expect.”

In a reconstruction of the relationship between Kant and Herder, based largely on letters and Herder’s lecture notes, Zammito traces the divergence of their thought in the 1760s and 70s. On the one side it culminated in Kant’s “critical turn” and three philosophical critiques—of Pure Reason, Practical Reason, and Judgment (1781—1790), on the other, in Herder’s anthropological turn expressed in the four volumes of Ideas for a Philosophical History of Man (1784-91). The thought of each was shaped by his encounter with the other, and pursuit of an enlightened answer to a common question: “what is a human being?” Critical of Kant’s hasty flight to universals, Herder plunged into particular authors and multiple genres, seeking to compile a “map of the human soul.”

The patronizing tone of some of Kant’s letters to his bright charge cannot have helped to build common ground between them. Cautioning Herder against an overabundance of emotion (the center is always telling the periphery to calm down and be reasonable), Kant wrote to Herder:

I look forward with much satisfaction to that time when the fruitful spirit is no longer so driven by the warm impulses of youthful feelings and achieves that tranquility which is gentle and yet full of feeling and at the same time is the contemplative life of the philosopher, the very opposite of the one that mystics dream of.

When Herder responded to this letter after a six-month silence in November 1768, he foreshadowed the arguments Fanon and Gandhi put to Western Civilization in the twentieth century, by turning his teachers words against him, exposing the performative contradiction

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1353 In a wonderful “contextual history” of Johann Gottfried von Herder’s lecture notes from the classes of Immanuel Kant between 1762 and 1764, John Zammito reconstructs how this relationship informs our knowledge of the “calving” of Anthropology from Philosophy: “What I propose is an effort…. to trace the emergence of the differences between Herder and Kant, articulating the rift as it widened gradually over the last years of the 1760s and the first years of the 1770s…… I am concerned with Herder’s ‘reception’ of Kant as much as with Kant’s ‘influence.’” John Zammito, Kant, Herder, 350.
1354 Zammito, Kant, Herder, 314.
1355 Kant to Herder, May 9, 1768 as quoted in Zammito, Kant, Herder, 312.
between Kant’s example and statements: “Why shouldn’t I apply the little bit of philosophy I possess to the fashionable materials of our quarter century, if the application of a sound philosophy, as I flatter myself, can correct so many things?” But the world-historical triumph of Herder over Kant—of the periphery over the center, the university student over the university teacher, of the particularism of anthropology over the universalism of philosophy—may be that today the “most interesting current reception [of Kant] seeks to reinterpret Kant’s entire opus in anthropological terms.” In other words, the lens and object of study have switched places. In his own day, Herder had to answer to Kant, and Kant’s “critical philosophy as the systematic articulation of the experience of freedom” determined the reception Herder’s “science of man.” Today, it is just the reverse. Kant’s “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View” (1784) and faith in the possibility of a universal, transparent, unproblematic language in which to express it is challenged by Herder’s vision of a multiplicity of particular languages as the only meaningful kind of cosmopolitanism: “How little progress would we have made, were each nation to strive for learnedness by itself, confined within the narrow sphere of its language?”

8.4.2 The Universalist Center and Its Language of Estrangement

The need for a new universal language was not entirely clear to René Descartes. “We do not need to learn a new language to talk only to Frenchmen” he mused in 1629 in a letter to abbé Mersenne, when asked to comment upon a recent project for a more perfect, universal language. In fact, his famous phrase “Cogito, ergo sum,” like the rest of his 1637 Discourse on Method was originally written in French to reach a wider audience—a sign of the changing linguistic character of Europe—only to be translated into Latin as an afterthought. With France as the universal nation, the civilizing process has long been about turning peasants into Frenchmen. And the whole world is full of potential Frenchmen. Only from the perspective of a language with the hubris to imagine itself as universal is it possible to speak of “language as such.” This idea was taken up by Descartes, compiled into a Grammar and methodology by the Porte Royale Grammarians, and then reimagined by Noam Chomsky as a predecessor to his own most controversial and least successful work: Cartesian Linguistics. With his Cartesian Coordinate system, Descartes cast a mathematical grid across the world, an image given resonant expression—the metaphor applied just as easily to English at the height of the British Empire as to French—in E.M. Forester’s Passage to India: “The roads, named after victorious generals and intersecting at right angles, were symbolic of the net Great Britain had thrown over India. [Aziz] felt caught in their meshes.”

In the absence of a perfect mathematical or artificial language to do the task—of the kind imagined by Descartes and later Leibniz, Condillac, d’Alembert, and Condorcet—the European center, ever since the seventeenth-century decline of Latin as the universal language of

1356 Herder to Kant November 1768 as quoted in Zammito, Kant, Herder, 312.
1357 Zammito, Kant, Herder, 351.
1360 E.M. Forester, A Passage to India (San Diego: Harcourt, 1984), 13.
scholarship, faith, and diplomacy—spoke increasingly in the self-confident, universal language of French-civilization and its metropolitan capital.\(^{1361}\) Many echoed Walter Benjamin in calling Paris the “Capital of the Nineteenth Century.” More recent scholars have gone further. David Harvey has called Paris the “Capital of Modernity” and Patrice Higonnet, “Capital of the World.” From the eighteenth-century to the Second World War, according to Higonnet, Paris had also been the “capital of the modern self” with its “blend of meliorism, rationality, individualism, and scientism.”\(^{1362}\) Paris needed no justification outside itself; it seemed to offer a view from nowhere, exceeding any personal experience of Paris. Perhaps the most universal European man of letters at the turn of the nineteenth century and author of the idea of “World Literature,” Johann Wolfgang von “Goethe—though he never visited Paris—called it the universal city.”\(^{1363}\) Paris had no need for the concept of “authenticity.” Authenticity mattered to excluded peripherals like Rousseau or Herder. For them Paris was a city of veils, dissembling, artifice, and inauthentic self-reinvention.

But the global colonization of the human sciences by its metropolitan language was largely a twentieth-century phenomenon at a peculiar historical conjuncture. Impressed into the service of the Third Reich in the Second World War, and faced with the loss of its colonies in the decades thereafter, Paris turned back against its humiliated and defamiliarized self in the postwar era (as it had in a more limited way after the Russian occupation of 1814). For the new antihumanist cosmopolitans born in the first third of the twentieth century, educated and estranged in Paris—Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Deleuze, and Baudrillard—all knowledge was born of estrangement, of Saussure’s recognition of the arbitrariness of the relationship between signifier and signified. Even those who explicitly rejected this way of seeing the world—like Pierre Bourdieu—nonetheless formulated their positions in explicit opposition to it, crediting first Saussure and then Chomsky with provoking a revolution in his own field of sociology.\(^{1364}\) Knowledge was the dispassionate translation of the terms of one’s own language into those of an unfamiliar and foreign tongue, overcoming or escaping oneself and one’s home, indeed the limits of all homes and subjectivities.

In Tristes Tropiques and The Savage Mind Lévi-Strauss did less to domesticate the image of the colonized other than to defamiliarize the portrait of the metropolitan self, a process that was only radicalized by the poststructuralists who challenged and questioned him. All knowledge (and its power) had become relational, to be sought and found in the communicative act itself, in the moment of homeless encounter between the imperial center and its colonized periphery, rather than in the naively earnest expressions of the native tongue. In this estranged, cosmopolitan vision of the world, “home” was neither possible nor desirable. If Heidegger’s language was the native’s “house of being,” then Derrida’s language was a halfway house for the estranged colonial exile, an Algerian-born, Paris-educated Jewish-Frenchman on a path of

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\(^{1361}\) For a late twentieth-century French take on these two epistemological directions see Jean François Lyotard’s Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. Lyotard’s interpretation of the reigning epistemological tension of the twentieth century essentially boils down to two national metanarratives: the French narrative of liberation and the German narrative of the integration of all knowledge, symbolized above all by the University of Berlin.  


\(^{1363}\) Patrice Higonnet, Paris, 1.  

\(^{1364}\) Though he acknowledged the debt of 20\(^{th}\)-century sociology to Saussure and Chomsky, ultimately Bourdieu was more concerned with the specious objectivity of structural linguistics: “Given that it sprang from the autonomy attributed to language in relation to its social conditions of production, reproduction and use, structural linguistics could not become the dominant social science without exercising an ideological effect, by bestowing the appearance of scientificty on the naturalization of the products of history, that is, on symbolic objects.” Pierre Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 33.
“traces,” “erosion,” and “différance” to an infinitely deferred and indeterminate destination. His life in Algiers and the anti-semitic colonial policy of the Vichy regime gave him “a lifelong aversion to communities” and a “deep suspicion of solidarity” of any kind. Defamiliarization, after all, was what Derrida stated as the ultimate aim of his *Grammatology*: “To make enigmatic what one think one understands by the words “proximity,” “immediacy,” “presence” (the proximate [proche], the own [propre], and the pre- of presence), is my final intention in this book.” Derrida’s simplest definition of Deconstruction seems to grasp this direction in twentieth-century thought, celebrating irreducible multiplicity and polyphony for its own sake: “If I had to risk a single definition of deconstruction, one as brief, elliptical, and economical as a password, I would say simply and without overstatement: plus d’une langue—more than one language, no more of one language.”

One feature of this perspective is relentless suspicion of the position (and linguistic identity) of the speaker, as Derrida expressed in his essay on the Tower of Babel: “One should never pass over in silence the question of the tongue in which the question of the tongue is raised and into which a discourse on translation is translated.”

Better than anywhere else, perhaps, the tension within twentieth-century linguistic consciousness emerges in the common concerns of Heidegger and Derrida. But in their shared suspicion of the last two thousand years of European thought, their common suspicion of “intelligibility” (which explains in part the studied difficulty of their prose), similar vocabulary (“Destruktion” and “deconstruction”), and seemingly identical concern with “the metaphysics of presence,” something is lost in translation. In *The Truth (and Untruth) of Language*, Gert-Jan van der Heiden sets the linguistic dimensions of their philosophy in comparative perspective. Where Heidegger’s backward-looking language “disclosed” deep and hidden, long-forgotten truths and elevated the authentic immediacy of the spoken word of poetry (like Herder or Rousseau) above philosophy to a position of “sacred” importance, Derrida’s forward-looking language—a written rather than oral one to be examined by means of “grammatology”—“displaced” meanings through infinite translations in a world where all existence is relational, where the idea of truth itself is naive. In performative practice, Derrida’s critique—like *différance* itself—amounted to the eternal deferral of the question that launched Heidegger’s career in 1927 and in which he had made his intellectual home ever since—i.e. the question of what it means to “be.”

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1365 “At the age of 12, Derrida was excluded form his lycee when the Algerian government, anxious to outdo the Vichy regime in its anti-semitic zeal, decided to lower the quota of Jewish pupils. ... Paradoxically, the effect of this brutal rejection on a ‘little black and very Arab Jew’ as he described himself, was not only to make him feel an outsider, but to breed in him a lifelong aversion to communities. He was taken in by a Jewish school, and hated the idea of being defined by his Jewish identity. Identity and homogeneity were what he would later seek to deconstruct. Yet the experience also gave him a deep suspicion of solidarity.” Terry Eagleton, “Derrida: A Biography by Benoît Peeters,” *The Guardian*, November 12, 2012; “I took part in the extraordinary transformation of the Algerian Jews; my great-grandparents were by language, custom, etc., still identified with Arabic culture. After the Cremieux Decree (1870), at the end of the 19th c., the following generation became bourgeois.” Jacques Derrida, “Je suis en guerre contre moi,” *Le Monde*, August 19, 2004.


1368 Jacques Derrida, “Des Tours de Babel” 244-5.


1370 In this sense, if none other, Derrida seems to approximate Isaiah Berlin’s “fox” (who sees many things), and Heidegger, his “hedgehog” (who sees only one big thing).
Like many of the leading French intellectuals of his generation, Derrida got his academic degree in Paris at the post-Revolutionary Napoleonic institution for the cultivation of a new French intelligentsia, the École Normale Supérieure. He took several different positions at institutions of higher learning in Paris and elsewhere, alighting finally in 1987 as “Professor of the Humanities” for one semester a year upon the brutalist, concentric rings of UC Irvine. Designed and built in the 1960s, UC Irvine was a university of the present, without a past, colonizing empty space in the middle of nowhere (perfect for postmodern reflections on “deterриториализация”), near a highway overpass on the outskirts of America’s most sprawling metropolis in the Wild West. It was the very antithesis of Heidegger’s Freiburg, an old small-town university founded in 1457, where Heidegger spent almost the entirety of his academic career (interspersed with a brief interlude in Marburg) from his student days in the Second Reich to his retirement after the Second World War in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Derrida, by contrast, spent almost the entirety of his academic career en route to somewhere else. Deprived of any content, the new “University of Excellence” had become a school for the cultivation of exchange and instrumental reason in a referentless market economy, ever since the abolition of the gold standard and the postwar economic arrangements reached at Bretton Woods (1944) turned the global economy into virtual reality in 1971. As Bill Readings argued in The University in Ruins, using UC Irvine as an example, “What gets taught or researched matters less than the fact that it be excellently taught or researched.” By not fitting in anywhere at all, Derrida fit right in to the University of Irvine.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari lamented this new, homeless, virtual language and university of the postmodern predicament, where all knowledge had been reduced to communication (however transparent or opaque), language games promoting a never-ending dialogical exchange of ideas:

We do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it. We lack creation. We lack resistance to the present. The creation of concepts in itself calls for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist. Europeanization does not constitute a becoming but merely the history of capitalism, which prevents the becoming of subjected peoples.

The appeal to “a new earth and people,” to liberation from the prevailing European order of things, to salvation in the “becoming of subjected peoples” rings out here like an echo of old-fashioned German or Russian romanticism—and its call for the sacred (now located in the periphery)—at the heart of this French poststructuralist text. After estrangement, however, it seemed there was nowhere else for the poststructuralists to go but the old universalist millenarian promise of a new humanity, no longer redeemed by the homeless proletariat (who “has no native land”) but this time by the uprooted and exiled “subjected peoples” of the Third World, resisting “Europeanization.”

Others, like Heidegger, tried to go back, to find their point of origin, to recover a simpler home at the very heart of the old Europe. Heidegger withdrew in 1947 to the mountain cabin at


Totdnauberg overlooking the Black Forest outside of Freiburg, where he had composed most of *Being in Time*. Now he wrote “The Pathway,” his ode to primordial simplicity born of memories of his childhood home in nearby Messkirch, an attempt—in the spirit of his teacher’s (Edmund Husserl’s) phenomenology—to save the integrity of thought by embedding it in sensory experience, with an almost studied omission of possessive pronouns: “The pathway remains as close to the step of the thinker as to that of the farmer walking out to the mowing in early morning.” He wrote of the memory of “the father” (not *my* father) who “labored, thoughtful when pausing from his efforts at the sound of tower clock and bells—both maintaining their own relationship to time and temporality.” Heidegger claimed that the language of the modern world had silenced an older and nearly silent language:

> In vain does man try with his plans to bring his globe into order if he is not ordered to the message of the pathway. The danger looms that today’s men are hard of hearing towards its language. They have ears only for the noise of media, which they consider to be almost the voice of God. So man becomes distracted and pathless. To the distracted the Simple seems monotonous…. With the last stroke the stillness becomes yet more still. It reaches out even to those who have been sacrificed before time in two world wars. The Simple has become simpler….. The message of the pathway is now quite clear. Is the soul speaking? Is the world speaking? Is God speaking?”

In silence, Heidegger claimed to find the answer: “The message makes us be at home in a long Origin.” (*Der Zuspruch macht heimisch in einer langen Herkunft*). But home could scarcely be what it had been before the War for a man who was undergoing scrutiny at the time for his political compromise. Heidegger had lost his professorship in Freiburg after the War, and his fate remained in limbo while he was investigated for what he had done when appointed Rector of his hometown University of Freiburg by Hitler in the Third Reich.

Postwar Europe was full of displaced persons, of refugees turned colonists. “The colonist is always a foreigner,” declared Fanon. Presumably he remained a foreigner—and a colonist—even when he tried to reclaim his ancestral home. This was as true of postwar European thought as its populations. Some rejected the past and tried to turn their newfound “displacement” into a way of life and thought (like Derrida); but even those who tried to return home—from Concentration camps, from the Gulag, from foreign exile, from the shame and judgment of deeds done in the name of past commitments (like Heidegger), or from the resentments of forgotten injustice to homes lost in their own lifetime or in some mythical past (each to his own Jerusalem)—found that there too they had been rendered strange, colonists on someone else’s land.

### 8.4.3 The Postwar University and Its Languages of Empathy and Estrangement

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1377 Frantz Fanon, “On Violence” in *The Wretched of the Earth*, 5.
The European University has always been both a meeting place for particular languages and a laboratory for the making (or recovery) of a more universal one. In the twentieth century the struggle between the centripetal impulse toward the integration of all knowledge into a universal metalanguage of science and the centrifugal tendency toward a particularistic linguistic division of labor became especially acute and threatened both the university and the nation-state with irrelevance. In *The Postmodern Condition* (1978), a work commissioned by the universities of Quebec, Jean François Lyotard predicted the disappearance of the university: “this very postmodern moment […] finds the University nearing what may be its end, while the Institute may just be beginning”). In *The University in Ruins* (1994), another book commissioned by the universities of Quebec, Bill Readings anticipated the disappearance of the nation-state as well:

The so-called center, the nation-state, is now merely a virtual point that organizes peripheral subjectivities within the global flow of capital; it is not a site to be occupied. Everyone seems to be culturally excluded, while at the same time almost everyone is included within the global flow of capital. As academics know very well, the position of enunciation is peripheral: the center is silent. By this I mean that in order to speak in today’s academy one is constrained to assume a position of marginality. So even conservatives have to tell the story of their own marginalization from culture in order to speak for themselves.1379

With the decline of the university and the nation-state, what remained was language speaking itself as “discourse.” Indeed, after the Second World War with decolonization and globalization, nearly every discipline in the humanities and social sciences underwent a “linguistic turn,” capitalizing on hitherto specialized studies of language—from linguistic structuralism to British analytic philosophy to Chomsky’s Generative Grammar. These became models for universal knowledge in disciplines all across the human and social sciences and beyond. Thus, in a peculiar and unprecedented way, in the second half of the twentieth century all knowledge turned into language.

Even the French Revolution in the throes of decolonization turned into something linguistic at the heart of the New Europe. Gone was the easy Marxist synthesis of the Popular Front and Georges LeFebvre’s 1939 “history from below,” the *Coming of the French Revolution*. Lefebvre had represented the French nation as an integration of its proletarian, peasant, bourgeois, and aristocratic elements. Each had contributed something to the Revolution and therefore to modern France; each had its place in the national pantheon. After the War, the colonial periphery struck back at the center as the new occupant of the Chair of the French Revolution at the Sorbonne from 1967, the Algerian-born communist Albert Soboul, initiated a Leninist purge of the historiographical ranks of LeFebvre’s Revolution, celebrating the “Popular masses and Militant Sans-Culottes” at the expense of everyone else as the vanguard of revolutionary consciousness, turning LeFebvre’s revolutionary allies into enemies of the people.”1380

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1378 It is often forgotten that the original essay was commissioned by the Conseil supérieur de l’éducation de Québec as a consulting piece for its universities. See Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), xxv
1379 Readings, *The University in Ruins*, 111.
Faced with this challenge from the periphery and the historiographical estrangement of the defining moment of French history, François Furet carried the French Revolution towards a new linguistic synthesis—by purging Marx, rehabilitating Tocqueville—and initiating a “linguistic turn” with his discursive analysis of French Revolutionary politics: what mattered to Furet was not the people as such, but the linguistic construction of the people, the people who had been discursively produced by the Revolution, to fill the disembodied void that is popular sovereignty. With self-conscious irony, French television crowned Furet “King of the Bicentennial” in 1989. Thus, even the most resonant founding moment of Europe’s metropolitan modernity had turned into a linguistic function; its political power, meaning, possibilities, and pathologies were all to be sought, found, and diagnosed in language. An expatriate from a different periphery darkened Furet’s already somber vision of the Revolution. The francophone Pole, Bronislaw Basczko, began *Ending the Terror* with the 1794 Parisian rumor of Robespierre’s hidden royalism, ended with the myth of the eternal Revolution, and entirely avoided the return of the non-linguistic “real world” that Furet had at least projected forward into the Thermidorean reaction.

As nearly every discipline in the humanities and social sciences underwent a “linguistic turn” in the new world order of the second half of the twentieth century—with its dual impulse to domesticate the foreign with the “authenticity” of the singular decolonized voice of the nation on the one hand and estrange the familiar with relativity of a multiplicity of voices—language even threatened the positivism of political economy. In 1982, Austrian-born John Gerard Ruggie, Harvard’s future Berthold Beitz Professor in Human Rights and International Affairs and an important figure in the United Nations, posed the central question of his classic essay on the economic and geopolitical regimes of the postwar world as a problem of language: “What is the ‘generative grammar’ that shapes the internationalization of political authority?” Ruggie went on to argue that the logic of state-economic relations must be sought in language: “international regimes are akin to language—we may think of them as the language of state action.” If the language of free trade was the prevailing economic regime of the late nineteenth century, and de-globalized protectionism the language of the interwar period, then “embedded liberalism” (in which the free-market was tempered by concerns for domestic welfare) was the language that ruled the global world order until the United States unilaterally decided to abandon the Gold Standard in 1971, turning global economics into a virtual reality akin to language.

Ruggie’s linguistic vision of shifts within the regimes of global political economy bore more than a passing resemblance to the “paradigm shifts” by which Thomas Kuhn—relying on the linguistic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein—explained the “structure of scientific revolutions” or the linguistic “epistemes” by which Michel Foucault explained the “the order of

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1385 In 2005 Ruggie took a post as the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary General on human rights and transnational corporations and business enterprises.
things” more generally.  

For all three, knowledge was modeled by language. Kuhn said so explicitly: “Scientific knowledge, like language, is intrinsically the common property of a group or else nothing at all.”

But it was not just scientific knowledge but the natural world itself that had turned into language when Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould, challenged prevailing thinking in Evolutionary biology with their classic 1972 article, “Punctuated Equilibria: an Alternative to Phyletic Gradualism.” This was in its own way a kind of textual fundamentalism, a Lutheran Reformation at the heart of the biological establishment. With a few explicit references to Kuhn’s “Paradigm Shifts,” they offered a temporal model of change—in the manner of Kuhn for science, Ruggie for economics, and Foucault for all scientific knowledge—that periods of stasis (in this case a relatively static gene pool) are interspersed with periods of rapid change. Biologists had spent too much time accounting for “gaps” in the fossil record, they argued, projecting missing links—Piltdown men, as it were—into them, to satisfy the expectations of theory instead of reading what was actually in the text. After all, Darwin had “viewed the fossil record more as an embarrassment than as an aid to his theory.” The prevailing theory of “phyletic gradualism” (change within established lineages) carried with it several insidious consequences: “it colors our language. We are compelled to talk of ‘morphological breaks’ in order to be understood.” Instead, the text of the fossil record should read be literally, without the accumulations of intervening tradition as Luther read the bible: “Many breaks in the fossil record are real; they express the way in which evolution occurs, not the fragments of an imperfect record,” concluding that “an inadequate picture has been guiding our thoughts on speciation for 100 years.”

The twentieth century was the century psychologists learned to believe in Freud’s “talking cure,” philosophers to play Wittgenstein’s “language games,” historians to agree with Hayden White that history is more about the “mode of emplotment” than the facts you choose to emplot, and social scientists of all stripes to recognize modernity for the fictional “metanarrative” Jean-François Lyotard declared it to be. It was also the century when computers learned to speak “binary,” geneticists to study gene “translation,” astrophysicists to abandon the age-old steady-state model of the universe and debate its “narrative” from the “Big Bang” (a term coined in 1949) to the “Big Crunch,” “Big Rip,” “Big Bounce,” or “Big Freeze.”

Briefly after the publication of Norbert Wiener’s 1948 classic, Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and Machine, the cybernetic movement that followed in both the United States and the Soviet Union seemed to herald the end of Babel and the promise of a

1386 Kuhn writes “In the absence of a competent body of rules, what restricts the scientist to a particular normal-scientific tradition. What can the phrase ‘direct inspection of paradigms’ mean? Partial answers to questions like these were developed by the late Ludwig Wittgenstein…. What need we know, Wittgenstein asked, in order that we apply terms like ‘chair,’ or ‘leaf,’ or ‘game’ unequivocally…?” Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 44.


1389 In the lecture course I attended as a Freshman at Harvard College in 1997 (Biology 17), Gould frequently compared the fossil record to a text (lecture notes from 1997).


1391 Gould, 96 and 86.

new interdisciplinary “language of science” that would transcend both the political divisions of the Cold War and all the self-enclosed monasteries of disciplinary isolation. Slava Gerovitch succinctly summarized the elements of this new language:

This language combines concepts from physiology (homeostasis and reflex), psychology (behavior and goal), control engineering (control and feedback), thermodynamics (entropy and order), and communication engineering (information, signal, and noise) and generalizes each of them to be equally applicable to living organisms, to self-regulating machines, and to human society.1393

From outer space to cyberspace, the second half of the twentieth-century offered a universe ruled by language, playing the “language game of science.”1394

But with the disintegration of world empires from Britain and France to the Soviet Union universalism gave way to particularism, structuralist confidence to poststructuralist doubt. Imperial languages—and the university departments that studied them—discovered the limits of their grand narratives in the decolonized voices of their former subjects. In 1964 a voice from Kenya, the British-educated Ngugi wa Thiong’o stopped writing in English and started writing in his native tribal language of Gikuyu. In 1994 he bid a more formal farewell to the English language with Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature. Those who spoke only the language of empire yearned for a different native tongue. A voice from the island of Antigua, Jamaica Kincaid, explained why English was inadequate to tell her story:

[I]sn’t it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime? And what can that really mean? For the language of the criminal can contain only the goodness of the criminal’s deed. The language of the criminal can explain and express the deed only from the criminal’s point of view. It cannot contain the horror of the deed, the injustice of the deed, the agony, the humiliation inflicted on me.1395

Confronting the multiplicity of identity and experience, departments of ethnic-, gender, and cultural studies proliferated at European and American universities. They emphasized the “productive” (rather than merely “reflective”) character of language, each speaking its own neologism-laden dialect and turning every question of being into a question of “discourse.” In the Babel of identity politics that was the postmodern condition, universities “gave voice” to voiceless linguistic particularity with dictionaries of Ebonics and Spanglish, studies of the particularities of Francophone and Anglophone literature, bemoaning what was “lost” in translation while still dreaming of a universal metalanguage to speak on their behalf.

In the academic hit of the year 2000, Empire, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri lamented the Babel of the globalized world, where struggles in—“Beijing, Los Angeles, Nablus, Chiapas, Paris, and Seoul… cannot communicate”:

1394 This phrase comes from J.F. Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), 27.
This [...] points toward an important political task: to construct a new common language that facilitates communication, as the languages of anti-imperialism and proletarian internationalism did for the struggles of the previous era. Perhaps this needs to be a new type of communication that functions not on the basis of resemblances but on the basis of differences: a communication of singularities.  

But was Babel really the enemy? Maybe the real enemy was a false Pentecost? This is what Dipesh Chakrabarty argued, pointing out the insidious “placelessness” in Hardt and Negri’s vision of global universalism. They had inherited Karl Marx’s antagonism toward anything merely “local,” treating “locality” itself as a fabrication of discourse, something in need of linguistic deconstruction. Alerted to the limits of Marxist categories by seeing their application in an Indian context, Chakrabarty argued that the European ideas that Hardt and Negri seemed to take for granted were in fact the product of a particularly European time, place, and constellation of languages and set out to discover the “European origins of Marx’s thoughts” in all their ineluctable particularity.

Chakrabarty wanted to “provincialize Europe”:

Once put into prose, a universal concept carries within it traces of what Gadamer would call ‘prejudice’—not a conscious bias but a sign that we think out of particular accretion of histories that are not always transparent to us. To provincialize Europe was then to know how universalistic thought was always and already modified by particular histories, whether or not we could excavate such pasts fully.

In explaining his aim, however, Chakrabarty relied not on an Indian compatriot but on another European—Hans Gadamer, a philosopher born and educated at a small town German University of Marburg. So in the end, even in Chakrabarty’s work, one German-speaker provincializes another, and Europe provincializes itself—or rather one version of Europe, the particularizing small German hometown university (insisting on Herderian Babel) provincializes the universalizing metropolitan world of Marx and Hegel at the University of Berlin (with its Kantian faith in the Pentecostal transparency and perfect transatability of all Languages). Long before Dipesh Charkabarty, Tartu University was “provincializing” Europe—and the Soviet Union—with its Ivory Tower of Babel.

There is nothing new about the claim that language has an important place in the making of reality: “In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God” (John 1:1). Goethe translated this claim for the nineteenth century as Faust struggles to produce an adequate German translation of the aforementioned Biblical passage: could “word [Wort]” be better rendered by “thought [Gedanke],” “power [Macht],” or “deed [Tat]”? But there was something new about the linguistic millenarianism of late twentieth-century scholarship, the hope or promise—so clearly on display in Soviet Tartu—that somehow by knowing language we

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1397 “the struggle against capital must at the same time be a struggle against all forms of attachment to particular places, for the desire for absolute mobility can only be based on the cultivation of a planetary sense of attachment.” (xvii)
would know ourselves and achieve salvation and liberation, whether by discovering our essence in words or by exposing the verbal hollowness of discursive constructions of reality. The emergence of Tartu University’s Department of Semiotics and UC Berkeley’s Department of Rhetoric in the final third of the twentieth century are each in their own way a testament to the linguistic millenarianism of twentieth century life and thought with its paradoxical faith in the capacity of language to produce reality on the one hand while liberating us from it on the other.

The Baltic world is not only a prime example of this story but also its intellectual point of origin. It was the Babel of Baltic Europe after all that gave birth in thought both to the linguistic particularism of Herderian cultural nation—a “Language Community” or Sprachgemeinschaft—and the linguistic universalism of Ludwig Zamenhof’s Esperanto in Riga and Bialystok respectively, towns barely 300 miles apart. And nowhere in the twentieth century can we see more clearly the tension between these two ways of knowing and speaking than in the postwar linguistic preoccupations of Paul Ariste and Yuri Lotman. From their perch in bilingual Tartu on the edge of the Soviet Union in its only traditional German university town each buried himself passionately in the intimate details of his own native tongue and the particularities of its folklore, mythology, and worldview, while at the same time dreaming of a universal language of science in which to converse with the world at large. It is the irony of their Tartu predicament—and perhaps twentieth-century academic life more generally—that neither of these scholars, for all their Baltic “diligence in the study of several learned languages” ever really learned to speak to each other.

For an interesting take on the Russian particularity of this story at the turn of the 20th century see Thomas Seifrid, The Word Made Self. The central tension here is between a view of language as a disinterested means of communication on the one hand, and as an expressive source of meaning on the other. And as the title implies, this is a book about the linguistic construction of the self more than it is about the communication with others, though arguably (as I have argued here) these are mutually constitutive processes. Language can only express the self only as it becomes a means of communication with others; this is widely recognized. What has been forgotten—a lacuna of the present intellectual climate—is the reverse, that language can only become a meaningful form of communication with others insofar as it expresses a self.


The quotation comes from the title of one of Johann Gottfried Herder’s first essays, composed in 1764 while Herder served as a pastor in Riga and first began collecting folksongs. It attests to the power of his Baltic environment in cultivating his view of language, and especially the idea, shared by both Yuri Lotman and Paul Ariste, that multilingualism is essential for any kind of adequate perception of reality or meaningful progress.

Like the history of Russia and Europe, the history of Tartu University in the twentieth century was one of especially frequent political, intellectual, and linguistic upheaval. Where the flag on the top of the main building of the University remained constant from the time it was built in the first decade of the nineteenth century until the Russian Revolution, between 1917 and 1991 it changed seven times as the University faced seven short-lived “decolonizations” by several states in the name of a variety of chosen peoples each with its own language(s): Bolsheviks (1918), Germans (1918), Estonians (1919), Soviets (1940), Nazis (1941), Soviets (1944), and Estonians (1991) again. Since 2004 the flag of the European Union has joined the Estonian flag in only the most recent attempt at a political reconciliation of the particular with the universal.

In the twentieth century three globalizing ideological empires (Nazi, Soviet, and American)—each with its own universal vision for Europe sought its own integration with the particular nation. Tartu University has served them all. From 1941 to 1944 its Department of Race Science served the Nazi vision of a “New Europe” and its “Thousand Year Reich” in a mixture of Estonian and German. From 1944 to 1991 Tartu’s “Red” Departments of Marxism-Leninism served the Soviet promise of Communism in a mixture of Estonian and Russian. Since 1991 Tartu’s Department of Economics has served the neoliberal ideology of US Capitalism in a mixture of Estonian and English. Tartu-educated Estonian Prime Ministers Mart Laar, Siim Kallas, and Andrus Ansip (two were former members of the Estonian Communist Party) shook the austere (if invisible) hand of Milton Friedman with greater enthusiasm than any other newly independent national republic in Eastern Europe. In 2006 the Cato Institute awarded Mart Laar the “Friedman Prize for Liberty” for making Estonia the first nation-state in the world to implement a flat tax.

Within the European Union, Estonia stands out for the extremities of its universalism and particularism. Estonia was the first Baltic Republic to abandon its national currency in favor of the Euro. It feels more like a “Baltic outpost of Silicon Valley than of Europe,” wrote Mark Landler describing Tallinn in the New York Times on December 21, 2005, echoing August Annist’s 1923 warning about the superficial changeability of Tallinn’s cosmopolitan international spirit. “Nineteen months after it achieved its cherished goal of joining the European Union, one might even characterize Estonia as the un-Europe.” Tallinn was also the birthplace of Skype—a form of communication so perfectly transparent and universal that nobody noticed that its inventors had unmistakeably Estonian names and accents: Priit Kaesalu, Ahti Heinla, and Jaan Tallinn, the latter a Tartu University alumnus.

At the same time Estonia remains extremely protective of its national language, with a citizenship law that raises linguistic competence in Estonian above all other ethnic criteria for national membership. Indeed, what can be seen from Estonia as one of the smallest nation-states in the world with a national culture based on its own language is the vital importance of language as the hidden ethnic element in every civic- and antiethnic nationalism. In a brief on Estonian language policy from the Estonian Ministry of Education and Science, Tõnu Tender—an alumnus of Tartu’s Veljesto Student Society—noted that “Estonian language policy derives from the understanding that nationality or ethnicity is determined by language and that the Estonian

language is the carrier of Estonian identity.” Speaking impeccable Estonian in the nationally televised parliamentary debates of March 2011, Dmitri Klenski, the spokesman for Estonia’s “Russian Party”—and a former colleague of Sergei Dovlatov on the Russian-language Tallinn newspaper Sovetskaia Estonia—called for a return to the Cultural Autonomy Law of 1925, which granted recognized minorities (Germans, Jews, Russians, and Swedes) state support for their cultural and linguistic identities (schools, houses of worship, other cultural institutions). It had even permitted members of these recognized minorities to conduct their correspondence with the state in their own languages. Lamenting the difference between the 1930s and the present, Klenski exclaimed: “You should be ashamed [of how you disenfranchise your minorities]!” But this was a difficult subject after the Soviet deportations and the immigration of hundreds of thousands of Russian-speakers in the interim. Moreover, Interwar Cultural Autonomy had been a mixed blessing, even in the opinion of Estonia’s miniscule Jewish population, who remembered the generation of their grandparents: “the cultural autonomy had also some negative impacts on Jewish people, as it led to certain isolation. Jews communicated mainly among themselves with the exception of work relations, and contacts with Estonians were quite limited.” Above all, Cultural Autonomy granted in 1925 had failed to generate the kind of solidarity—or common language—any state requires to sustain itself. At their last meeting in 1940 even as they were being disbanded by the Soviet government, the Cultural Council for Jewish Autonomy in Estonia had sung—not the Estonian National Anthem—but the “Internationale.” The article does not say, but it is highly unlikely that they were singing it in Estonian.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union the lines of inter-ethnic solidarity shifted somewhat. At the 2011 Parliamentary Debates, it was Yuri Lotman’s youngest son, a biologist and the spokesman for the Estonian Green Party, Alexei Lotman, who came to the defense of the Estonian nation against Dmitri Klensky’s accusation of ethnic discrimination: “I want to correct a very small thing. Like Mr. Klenski, I am not of ethnic Estonian parentage and I categorically protest the notion that there is any ethnic discrimination in Estonia.” Klenski tried to interrupt to specify that he was talking only of Russians—not all ethnic minorities—but it was too late. For the room had already erupted in applause for Alexei Lotman.

For all the changes wrought in Tartu by the twentieth century, this has been as much a story of continuity as change: the story of how Tartu clung to its University as a symbol of European culture through all the upheavals of its linguistic and political identity. This reciprocal tension between continuity and change could be found equally in the lives of individual scholars and in the institution as a whole. Around the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Yuri Lotman wrote:

“The snake grows by shedding its skin. This is a perfect symbolic expression of scientific progress. In order to remain true to itself, the process of cultural growth must change in

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1407 “Juudi kultuuriumokogu viimane istung lõppes Internationaaliga.” “Juudi kultuurumavalitsus liikideerub” [“The Jewish Autonomous Cultural Council is being Liquidated”), Rahva hääl, July 29, 1940.

time. The old skin grows tight, no longer protecting, but inhibiting growth. In the course of my scholarly life together with the Tartu School, I needed several times to shed my old skin. The most recent example can be found in the difficulties of the present moment, where almost our entire collective has given way to a new generation as the old generation departs from the stage. No matter how sad individual moments of this process may be, it is not only inevitable but also necessary. Moreover, it was programmed into us. We can only hope that with a new skin, the snake, despite all changes to its color and size, preserves its essential unity.\footnote{Lotman as quoted in Egorov, Zhizn' i tvorchestvo Iu. M. Lotmana (Saint Petersburg: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1999), 322.}

This autobiographical sketch offers the outlines of a “Bildungsroman,” the term first uttered in the newly built auditorium of Dorpat (Tartu) University in 1810 by Karl Morgenstern (1770-1852), the German-Jewish scholar from the Weimar circles of Goethe, who had studied Philology with Friedrich August Wolff in Halle. Like Morgenstern, who stood between German Romantic particularism and Enlightenment universalism at the turn of the 19th century, whose writings tended in both directions at once, Lotman stood between the national and the universal in space, just as he stood between change and continuity in time. The tension between change and continuity obsessed Lotman—as revealed by his idiosyncratic metaphor of the snake shedding its skin as a model for universal scholarly progress. Like Jacob Burckhardt or the scholars of the Annales School, Lotman was as impressed with what does not change as much as with that which does, the lingering background in any historical transformation.

One side of this fascination emerges in one of his favorite anecdotes. His student and informal Estonian secretary, Ann Malts, remembered a story Lotman used to tell about a young boy his artillery regiment had caught trying to steal their suitcases at a train station during the Second World War. In good Soviet fashion the comrades took the young thief under their wing and tried to enlighten him. They taught him math and morals; they educated him in Kant’s categorical imperative and ideals of the Enlightenment; Sapere aude! (Dare to know!). He appeared to be making wonderful progress. But when they found themselves on the platform of the next train station, the young man’s eyes lit up when he saw the sea of unattended suitcases spread out before them. Rubbing his hands together, he turned to his teachers and said: “Thank you comrades for the wonderful education you have given me, but I think that I am now quite ready to use my own reason and set out on my own.”\footnote{Interview with Ann Malts at her Annelinn apartment in Tartu, June 5, 2008.}

The failures and limits of revolutionary change and ideological education have preoccupied Baltic thought through the ages, just as they were a leitmotif of Burckhardt’s cultural history in Basel and the Annales School in Strasbourg and small town German University life in general. A very different Tartu figure, Daniel Palgi ended his memoirs cursing all those who tried to break the world into something that it was not in the twentieth century, who refused to respect their human and historical inheritance.\footnote{See for example the concluding passage of Daniel Palgi’s memoirs composed in 1963: “Those who want to make the world happy according to their own recipes are terrible people. Hitler was terrible, Lenin and Stalin were terrible, and there are many others as well. Since 1914 many have tried to break this world and set it on a new course. This has produced a heap of misery, which is much higher than the Himalayas or Everest. This has crushed people…. There were moments, when many thought the world was going to break: just a little bit more and our world will turn into a different kind of one. But it did not break! It has always remained a world of ordinary people. It is always so: the breakers disappear. And this heap of misery that is the Earth revolves in the universe indifferently and people still remain people…. A curse on all those who would break this world into something else!” Palgi, Murduvas maailmas, 521.}
Often contrasted to the silver-age mysticism bordering on religiosity of his wife, the Blok scholar, Zara Mints, Yuri Lotman was remembered by many diverse figures—Leonid Stolovich, Peeter Tulviste, Ann Malts—as an Enlightenment optimist by comparison. But over the course of his career at Tartu University, he grew attentive to what could not be changed and what got left behind. Lotman’s last letters are full of nostalgia and yearning for a lost world. To Boris Egorov, he wrote in December 1992: “The situation is laughable and unlike all preceding life: I feel like a dinosaur (mastodont) who accidentally walked into a modern elegant boutique (passazh).” To Frida Soninka, one of his classmates at Leningrad State University after the war he wrote in 1993: “I like the world of my memory more than the one I see around myself.”

Less than a year before his death he stressed to Egorov the loss of the old warm world of the town he had called home for nearly half a century: “You would scarcely recognize Tartu now: almost all the people are different, and our acquaintances are getting older and dying off one after the other.” A half century earlier the itinerant Estonian wanderer, Jaan Roos, recorded his first encounter with downtown Tartu after the Second World War in nearly identical terms of loss and estrangement: “One almost does not see former acquaintances at every step, now it is an unusual occurrence. Everywhere there are foreign faces. The majority of the inhabitants are now Russians, but not to the same degree as in Tallinn. All in all, the town has become foreign to me.” Nonetheless, for all that changed about Tartu through the century, it still stood for something eternal and enduring. And Lotman remained deeply committed to the transcendent “idea” of Tartu University above and beyond his particular community of friends and followers. He had been heard to say—and this was a poignant remark for someone so gregarious and so deeply concerned with the problem of communication and human interaction—that even if no students came to hear him lecture he would still hold class and speak to the walls that had heard the likes of Karl Ernst von Baer, Jan Badouin de Courtenay, and other universal figures of the “Tartu Spirit” and the nineteenth-century Dorpat intelligentsia.

The history of universal ideas cannot be disentangled completely from the story of the particular places that produce, use, and transmit them. And one of my aims in this work has been to show all the ways in which particularism and universalism, nationalism and cosmopolitanism, Russia and Europe have shaped and needed each other through the ages. On closer inspection, the universal story Lotman tells of “scientific progress” as a snake shedding its skin is the story of his own transnational position in a particular town and university promoting Russian literary culture within the constraints of a non-Russian Soviet national community, structurally very similar to that of Tartu University’s first German-Jewish Librarian, Professor of Rhetoric, and Curator of the Museum of Antiquities and Botanical Garden, Karl Morgenstern,

1412 Yuri Lotman, letters to Vera Sonkina and Boris Egorov in Lotman, Pis’mo (442 and 358) as quoted in Maxim Waldstein, The Soviet Empire of Signs, 76–77.
1413 “Tartu Vy teper’ by ne uznali: pochti sovsem drugie liudi vydvinulis’, a nashi znakomye stareiut I umiraiut odin za drugim.” Lotman, Pis’ma, 358.
1415 Ann Malts, interview by author, Tartu, July 5, 2008. Ann Malts was probably the Estonian closest to Lotman throughout his Tartu career. She was first a student and then a kind of informal secretary for the Department of Russian Literature, who handled most of the administrative questions. She single-handedly organized Yuri Lotman’s funeral.
nearly two hundred years before in the first decades of the nineteenth century. One of the tensions around which Lotman built his enormously popular televised lecture series, *Conservations About Russian Culture* was a tension between “culture” and “everyday life,” a tension that was especially pronounced in a world where the Russian language of literary culture was embedded for Lotman within an Estonian language of everyday life. Tartu gave Lotman a perfect balance of estrangement and familiarity with regard to Russian literary culture. As he said himself in one of his lectures: “In order that what is ‘ours’ might become meaningful, i.e. ‘new,’ it is placed in the position of the ‘other’, and we ‘confront it a second time’ and it becomes ‘ours’ again.”\(^\text{1416}\) Commissioned and sponsored by Soviet Estonian State Television, the explicitly Estonian audience for which this series of lectures was originally produced is too often overlooked.\(^\text{1417}\)

Positioned between the fluctuating demands of the state and the fluctuating languages of society, universities—like the scholars who teach at them—can see the overlooked continuities of a rapidly changing world where “all that is solid melts into air.”\(^\text{1418}\) One of those continuities is the role played by the university itself as an ivory tower of Babel. Tartu University offers an especially good vantage point upon the fate and identity of Europe through the ages because its scholars have always found themselves ambiguously caught between the universalizing languages of Europe’s metropolitan centers and the particularizing languages of its small-town peripheries and borderlands. This is a predicament doubly amplified in Tartu, where all the states that gave Tartu University a home—Imperial Sweden, Imperial Russia, National Estonia, and the Soviet Union—their themselves occupied an ambiguous position in Europe’s periphery. In all of them Tartu University was charged with the dual task of articulating and securing a state ideology on the one hand, while establishing more broadly European credentials on the other. Always more than a state-directed laboratory of official nationality, Tartu University served throughout history as an exemplary cultural observatory, acquiring its European power and influence in every incarnation—imperial, national, and Soviet—by giving voice to a Babel of languages at once more particular and more universal than those formally endorsed by any one of its states.

If Tartu University compels us today, this is less because it proved so effective at fulfilling its assigned task of bureaucratizing and institutionalizing state ideology than because it so often permitted its scholars to do the opposite, posing new (and forgotten) questions in new (and forgotten) languages which have ultimately proved more enduring, interesting, universal, and global than any of the states it happened to serve. Efforts today to make Tartu speak the new universal language of global academic discourse (International English) and bolster the prevailing political and economic order of the European Union should not be embraced blindly, but treated with the same critical skepticism with which Tartu scholars have treated every

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\(^{1417}\) See for example Lotman’s use of Estonian cultural sensibilities in one lecture to check and question the universality of Russian ones: “Neznakomyie liudi vstrechait'sia v avtobuse: kak obratit’sia k drugomu cheloveku? “Grazhdanin”—tak obrashhtutsia ochen’ ofitsial’nye litsa, tak militsia obrashaetsia; ‘tovarish’—tak obratit’sia k chuzhdomu chelovieku tozhe nel’zia. To zhe same, naskol’ko ia sebe predstavliaiu, i v estonskom iazyke: ‘kodanik’ skazat’—kak-to ne prinato, ‘eltsimees’—to zhe, ‘härria’—nuzhno, navernoe, familiu znat’. “Tsikl vtoroi: Vzaimootnosheniia liudei i razvitie kul’tur,” *Fospitanie dushe*, 415.

previous state and language—both imperial and national—that has laid claim to its academic culture.

THE END
Selected Bibliography

The following is not a complete list of all materials, but an overview of the main archival collections and other types of primary and secondary sources used. The organizing rubrics and their subdivisions are intended to give a sense of the range and variety of materials consulted. The bibliography is divided into six main categories: (1) archival sources; (2) recorded interviews; (3) other audio and visual materials; (4) periodicals; (5) published primary sources; and (6) secondary sources.

I. ARCHIVAL SOURCES

The archival documents I used can be classified into three main types: (1) political records ranging from stenograms of Communist Party meetings to the reports on individuals produced by and for the organizations of state security and the Communist Party (especially ERAF and ERA); (2) administrative documents concerning the structure and functioning of Tartu State University and its departments (especially EAA); (3) personal archives containing the correspondence, personal writings, and scholarly work of Tartu University instructors and former students (especially EKLA and TÜRK).

i. Eesti Riigarhiiv (ERA) and Eesti Riigiarhiivi Filiaal (ERAF). Tallinn:

ERAF Fond 1. Eestimaa Kommunistliku Partei Keskkomitee [The Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party]:
Nimistu 4a; 46a; 72; 129—Correspondence between Tartu University and the Central Committee of the Communist Party on questions of scholarship, education, and culture at Tartu University.

ERAF Fond 7068. Körgkoolide parteikomiteede ja parteialgorganisatsioonide dokumentide kollektsoon [Collection of documents from the Party Committee on Higher Education and the subordinate Party organizations.]
Note: The Estonian State Archives changed its system of classification for some of its Communist Party documents since I used them. Fond 7068, which includes notes from the meetings of Party Committees and subordinate cells at all institutions of higher learning in Soviet Estonia, has absorbed Fond 151, which previously held all the documents of the Communist Party organization and departmental cells of Tartu University. Since most of my research was conducted in the old system, I have continued to use the old system in my footnotes and references. The new system retains the earlier markings so that any document can still be located using either system.

I consulted materials from the Estonian state archives on the following individuals. The letters SM, which appear in several of the collections listed below, stand for
Siseministeerium (Ministry of the Interior). Väljasõidutoimikud [Travel Abroad Files] were compiled by state security on individuals who applied for visas to travel abroad once this became possible in the 1960s (e.g. Fonds ERAF.136SM and ERAF.7SM). Individuals under direct suspicion of the organs of state security became the subject of investigative files (e.g. ERAF.130SM). Material concerning the deportation of particular families and individuals and their rehabilitation is held in separate files (e.g. Fonds ERAF.8SM and ERAF.6R). As observed by Indrek Jürjo (see “Secondary Sources” below) the majority of the Soviet Estonian state security files compiled after the late 1950s were clandestinely shipped back to Russia at the time of collapse of the Soviet Union where they remain inaccessible to scholars.

Paul Ariste:
Fond ERAF.130 SM.1.3090 (1945-1946)
Fond ERAF.7 SM.1.21686 (1975)

Hans Kruus:
Fond ERAF.1.6 and 7 (1940-1989) — Kruus’s Communist Party files, including admission, expulsion, and rehabilitation.
Fond ERAF.12.2.89 (1940) — Kruus’s Tartu County Communist Party file.
Fond ERAF.9607.1 — Correspondence with Nikolai Karotamm, former First Secretary of the Estonian Communist Party (1940-1950).
Fond ERAF.247.78 — Correspondence with state officials, including I. Käbin, First Secretary of the Estonian Communist Party (1950-1978).
Fond ERA.R-3.3.198 (1943) — Election of H. Kruus to Soviet Estonian Academy of Sciences.

Yuri Lotman:
Fond ERAF.136 SM.1.21617

Eha Masing:
Fond ERAF.136 SM.1.6725

Juhan Tuldava:
Fond ERAF.6R.1.971 (1950) — rehabilitation file for deported members of Tuldava’s family.
Fond ERAF.8 SM.1.1241 — file for Tuldava’s mother, Elisabeta.
Fond ERAF.148.85.2 (1973) — Tuldava’s Tartu Communist Party file.

ii. Eesti Ajalooarhiiv (EAA) [Estonian History Archive]. Tartu Fond 5311. Tartu Riiklik Ülikool/ Tartuskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1941-1998

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iii. *Eesti Kulturilooline Arhiiv* (EKLA). [*Estonian Cultural History Archive at the Estonian Literary Museum*]. Tartu
   - Fond 319. Pent Nurmekund
   - Fond 330. Paul Ariste
   - Fond 344. Valmar Adams

iv. *Tartu Ülikooli Raamatukogu käsikirjade ja haruldaste raamatute osakond* (TÜRK) [*Manuscript and Rare Books Division of Tartu University Library*]. Tartu
   - Fond 71. Pent Nurmekund
   - Fond 72. Feodor Klement
   - Fond 79. Konstantin Ramul
   - Fond 83. Villem Ernits
   - Fond 84. Alfred Koort
   - Fond 85. Hilda Moosberg
   - Fond 93. Leo Leesment
   - Fond 101. Jakob Linzbach
   - Fond 117. Viktor Masing
   - Fond 147. Juhan Aul
   - Fond 150. Arnold Koop
   - Fond 160. Eduard Martinson
   - Fond 90. Richard Kleis
   - Fond 124. Rem Blum
   - Fond 135. Juri Lotman and Zara Mints Epistolary archive
   - Fond 136. Juri Lotman
   - Fond 141. Hillar Palamets
   - Fond 157. Sergei Issakov
   - Fond 158. Valeri Bezzubov

   I am grateful to Tartu University Library’s archivists for allowing me to consult materials from still unsorted and uncatologued boxes delivered to the archive by Juhan Tuldava’s widow during my time in Tartu.

v. *Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (GARF) [State Archive of the Russian Federation]. Moscow:
   - Fond P-9396. *Ministerstvo vysshego obrazovaniia SSSR. 1946-1959*

vi. *Hoover Institution Archives. Stanford University, Palo Alto, California.*
   - Collection 66001. Aleksander Kesküla Papers.
II. INTERVIEWS

A. INTERVIEWS RECORDED BY THE AUTHOR 2005-2011:

I conducted interviews with thirty-five people about their own experiences, fellow students, and colleagues at Tartu State University. Most of the interviews were conducted in Estonian; a few were conducted in Russian and one in English. In addition, I learned a great deal from informal conversations with various Tartu University scholars, teachers, and former students I got to know over the course of several years I spent there. Though I did not record formal interviews with the scholars Mikhail Lotman, Liubov’ Kiseleva, or Marek Tamm, I had several conversations with each of them, and they played a vital role in shaping my impressions of Soviet Tartu. My single greatest human and historical debt in Estonia was to Aigi Rahi-Tamm at Tartu University. We spoke nearly every week during the years I spent in Estonia and she helped me make contact with several of the people listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Field(s) studied or taught; Profession</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Helle-Tia Heiter</td>
<td>Russian Language; Instructor</td>
<td>Tartu, Annelinn</td>
<td>June 28, 2005</td>
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<td>(2) Helmut Piirimäe</td>
<td>History (Sweden); Professor</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
<td>June 28, 2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>(3) Jaan Kross</td>
<td>Law; writer</td>
<td>Tallinn</td>
<td>August 5, 2005</td>
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<td>(4) Ellen Niit</td>
<td>Estonian Philology; writer</td>
<td></td>
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<td>(4) Siiri Raitar</td>
<td>German Language; Language Teacher</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
<td>August 9, 2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>(6) Mall Tamm</td>
<td>English Language; Language Teacher</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(7) Ilmar Anvelt</td>
<td>English; Language Teacher</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
<td>June 30, 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>(8) Ann Pill</td>
<td>German; Language Teacher</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
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<tr>
<td>(9) Leili Kostabi</td>
<td>English; Language Teacher</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
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<tr>
<td>(10) Heino Noor</td>
<td>Medicine; Doctor and Instructor</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
<td>February 24, March 10, July 5, 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>(11) Malle Salupere</td>
<td>Russian Literature; Researcher and Instructor</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
<td>July 1, 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>(12) Peeter Tulviste</td>
<td>Psychology; Professor</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
<td>July 3, 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>(13) Ann Malts</td>
<td>Russian Literature; Instructor</td>
<td>Tartu, Annelinn</td>
<td>July 5, 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>(14) Kalevi Kull</td>
<td>Biology, Biosemiotics; Professor</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
<td>August 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>(15) Peeter Torop</td>
<td>Russian Literature, Cultural Semiotics; Professor</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
<td>July 3, 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>(17) Linnart Mäll</td>
<td>History, Indology, Buddhology, Semiotics; Orientalist, Historian, Politician</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
<td>May 25, 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>(16) Valter Haamer</td>
<td>TSU Prorector</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
<td>June 1, 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>(18) Liudmila Vedina</td>
<td>Russian Language; Language Teacher</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
<td>June 8, 2009</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Igor Rozenfeld</td>
<td>Russian Philology; Bookstore Owner</td>
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<td>Tatiana Shor</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Mart Niklus</td>
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<td>Katrin Raid</td>
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<td>Huno Rätslep</td>
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<td>Tõnu Tender</td>
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<td>Mati Erelt</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Jaak Kangilaski</td>
<td>Art History; Professor</td>
<td>Kääriku; Tallinn</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Mira Kangilaski</td>
<td>English Philology; Actress</td>
<td>Tallinn</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Lagle Parek</td>
<td>Architecture (Tallinn Polytechnique); City Planner, Dissident, Politician</td>
<td>Tallinn; Tartu</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>Marju Lauristin</td>
<td>Sociology, Journalism; Professor and Politician</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>Madis Linnamägi</td>
<td>Esperanto; Secondary School Principal Veterinary Medicine, Finno-Ugric Philology, Esperanto</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>Enn Ernits</td>
<td>Veterinary Medicine, Finno-Ugric Philology, Esperanto</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>Ingrid Heinmaa</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td>Rein Ruutsoo</td>
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<td>Peeter Olesk</td>
<td>Finno-Ugric Philology; Scholar</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>Boris Gasparov</td>
<td>Russian Philology; Professor</td>
<td>Berkeley, CA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Videotaped interviews about Uku Masing by Vallo Kepp:


These filmed interviews and their written transcripts are included as supplementary material to the documentary film trilogy on Uku Masing (see “Other Audio and Visual Materials” below). Unless otherwise indicated, the following interviews were all conducted by Vallo Kepp:

Lõhmus, Jaak. Tallinn (Kadriorg), May 14, 2006.
Milius, Matti. Tartu, October 1, 2005.
Salum, Vello. Pilistvere, November 23, 2001

C. AUDIOTAPED INTERVIEWS BY TARTU HISTORIAN HILLAR PALAMETS:
Audio recordings on various subjects connected with the history of Tartu University are held at Tartu University Library’s phonotek, and their written transcripts in the fond of Hillar Palamets at the Manuscript Division of Tartu University Library:

Koop, Arnold. Tartu, November 9, 1983.
Matteus, Arnold. Tartu, February 9, 1981.

III. OTHER AUDIO AND VISUAL MATERIALS

A. PAINTING:


B. DOCUMENTARY AND COMMEMORATIVE FILMS ABOUT TARTU UNIVERSITY:


C. DOCUMENTARY ON YURI LOTMAN:


D. DOCUMENTARY TRILOGY ON UKU MASING:


Surm on öömaja põllul [Death is on the Field of House Where We Sleep]. DVD. Directed by Vallo Kepp. Eestinfilm, 2009.

E. DOCUMENTARY ON THE 1969 FILM VIIMNE RELIIKVIA [THE LAST RELIC]


F. AUDIO RECORDINGS OF UNIVERSITY EVENTS, TALKS, COMMEMORATIONS:

At the Phonotek of Tartu University Library:

60th birthday jubilee of prof. Alma Tomingas, the first woman to become a Tartu University Professor and member of the Estonian Academy of Sciences (in Estonian). September 15, 1960.

Finnish President Kekkonen’s speech in the main auditorium of Tartu University (in Estonian). March 9, 1964.


Ceremony to award the “Red Flag of Labor” to Tartu University (in Estonian and Russian). January 8, 1967.

Ceremony to commemorate the reopening of the main auditorium of the university after the fire of December 21, 1965 (in Estonian). May 1, 1967.

Anatoli Mitt’s 60th birthday celebrated in the main auditorium of Tartu University (in Estonian). January 12, 1969.

Rector Fedor Klement’s retirement ceremony in the main auditorium of Tartu University (in Estonian). April 28, 1970.

“Mälu ja mälestused” [“Memory and Memories”]—a talk by Hans Kruus on the place of Memory and Memory study in historical knowledge (in Estonian). 1972.

30th anniversary of the re-opening of Tartu State University after the Second World War (in Estonian and Russian). November 16, 1974.

IV. PERIODICALS

A. NEWSPAPERS

Edasi [Forward]
The Tartu daily newspaper Postimees became Edasi in 1948, the official newspaper of the Communist Party of Tartu. It appeared predominantly in Estonian. From 1986 to 1991 it appeared in parallel Russian and Estonian editions.

Rahva hääl [People’s Voice]

Noorte hääl [The Voice of Youth]

Sovetskaia Estonia [Soviet Estonia]

Tartu Riiklik Ülikool [Tartu State University] (TRÜ)
Throughout the Soviet Period the university newspaper (TRÜ) was published weekly and mainly in Estonian. For a few years in the early 1970s the newspaper was printed in Estonian with a brief one-page Russian digest (“russkaia stranitsa”) of the articles written in Estonian. On about thirty occasions between 1974 and 1976 the newspaper
appeared only in Russian. Parallel Russian and Estonian versions of the newspaper were printed from 1977 to 1985.

B. JOURNALS

i. TARTU STATE UNIVERSITY JOURNALS

Eesti NSV Tartu Riikliku Ülikooli Toimetused / Uchenye zapiski tartuskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta / Acta et Commentationes Universitatis Tartuensis [Transactions of Tartu State University]

This multilingual series first appeared in 1893 under the bilingual Russian and Latin titles, Uchenyia zapiski Imperatorskago iur’evskago universiteta and Acta et commentationes Imp. Universitatis jurievensis. In interwar Tartu it continued to appear in a variety of languages under the bilingual Estonian and Latin titles, Eesti vabariigi Tartu Ülikooli toimetused and Acta et commentationes Universitatis Dorpatensis. In Soviet Tartu most of its articles appeared either in Russian or Estonian, accompanied by abstracts in the other language and a third European language (usually English, French, or German). Each issue was labeled with its founding date (1893)—stressing continuity with the pre-Soviet (Russian) past—with the title of the series printed in Estonian, Russian, and Latin on the cover.

The Transactions of Tartu State University provided a flexible scholarly form for the publication of independent monographs and collections of articles. It allowed for the emergence of embedded journals closely affiliated with particular university departments. Issues were numbered both by their position in the overall series of publications of Tartu State University (since 1945) on the one hand and by their position within their own particular series (if applicable) under a given title on the other. Yuri Lotman’s Trudy po znakovim sistemam [Sign System Studies], inaugurated by his famous monograph Lektsii po struktural’noi poetike [Lectures on Structural Poetics] (1964), was the most famous of these embedded journals. Several of the journals listed below helped to establish the identities of the various scholarly collectives of Tartu’s linguistic landscape. Key editors and/or contributors for each journal are listed below:

Fenno-Ugristica [Finno-Ugric Studies]
  Paul Ariste
  18 issues, 1975-1992

Interlinguistica Tartuensis
  Alexander Dulichenko
  7 issues, 1982-1990

Keele modelleerimise probleeme [The problems of linguistic modeling]
  Huno Rätsep
  5 issues, 1966-1975

Quantitative linguistics and automatic text analysis
  Juhan Tuldava
  6 issues, 1985–1990
Töid keelestatistika alalt [Works from the Field of Quantitative Linguistics]
Juhan Tuldava
10 issues, 1976–1984

Töid Orientalistika alalt [Oriental Studies]
Pent Nurmekund
9 issues, 1968–1981

Trudy po russkoi i slavianskoi filologii [Works on Russian and Slavic Philology]
Yuri Lotman
40 issues, 1958-1990

Trudy po znakovym sistemam [Sign System Studies]
Yuri Lotman
25 issues, 1964-1992

DEPARTMENTAL JOURNALS

Keel ja struktuur: Töid struktuuralse ja matemaatilise lingvistika alalt [Language and Structure: Works from the field of structural and mathematical linguistics]
Huno Rätsep
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