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"Passengeriality": Vita Sackville-West's *Passenger to Teheran* and the May Coup in Poland

„Pasażerskość": *A Passenger to Teheran* Vity Sackville-West a przewrót majowy w Polsce

Abstract: Travellers' discourses thrive on anecdotes. According to Stephen Greenblatt, they interpose between a series of similar, narrow experiences and a wider pattern they may indicate. This analysis deciphers how an anecdote from *Passenger to Teheran* (1926), the travelogue written by Vita Sackville-West, is not just an isolated flash but can indicate larger representational strategies. In her epic journey Vita Sackville-West travelled from London to Egypt, India, Persia, and then back to England, through Russia, Poland and Prussia; by boat, train and car. In the episode which is subject to a detailed analysis, the travellers were stopped at the Polish–East Prussian border and forced to leave the train. The consequences of what could be just an anecdote about an "unwelcome incident", reverberate – as it turns out – far beyond the incidental because what is at stake at almost every border incident is a socio–political, geo–political, military and ideological reality. No matter whether such events are presented as adventures or in all seriousness, each border trouble has consequences beyond any "local moment". To disclose some of the less obvious implications of the Polish–Prussian passage in Vita Sackville-West's book is the aim of this essay.

Keywords: border crossing, Eastern Europe, Grajewo, May Coup, "passengeriality", travelogue, Vita Sackville-West

Abstrakt: Dyskursy podróżnicze obfitują w różnego rodzaju anegdoty. Zdaniem Stephena Greenblatta pośredniczą one pomiędzy sekwencją podobnych do siebie chwil, a ogólniejszym schematem, na którego istnienie wskazują. Niniejsza analiza dowodzi, że anegdota zawarta w dzienniku podróży *Passenger to Teheran* Vity Sackville-West (1926) stanowi nie tyle odosobniony przypadek, ile wpisuje się w szersze ramy strategii dotyczących reprezentacji podróży. Vita Sackville-West odbyła podróż z Londynu do Egiptu, Indii, Persji, a następnie wróciła do Anglii przez Rosję, Polskę i Prusy. Autor szczegółowo analizuje tę część relacji, kiedy podróżni zostali zatrzymani na polsko-pruskiej granicy i zmuszeni do opuszczenia pociągu. Konsekwencje tego, co mogłoby być wyłącznie anegdotą o „nieprzyjemnym incydencie", są dalekosiężne. Do zajść granicznych dochodzi bowiem zawsze na tle rzeczywistości społeczno-politycznej, geopolitycznej, militarnej i ideologicznej. Bez względu na to, czy tego typu wydarzenia przedstawia się jako przygody czy poważne incydenty, mają one konsekwencje wykraczające poza „lokalny moment". Celem eseju jest ukazanie niektórych mniej oczywistych implikacji polsko-pruskiego fragmentu książki Vity Sackville-West.

Słowa kluczowe: podróżopisarstwo, Grajewo, „pasażerskość", Vita Sackville-West, przewrót majowy

The word "passenger" in the title of a travelogue is rather uncommon. Not because travel writers were not passengers – of course they were, almost all of them, at least occasionally – but they did not boast of this fact in titles of their accounts. Not only didn't they boast, as a matter of fact their "passengeriality" was usually bashfully concealed. Seen against this context, Vita Sackville-West's choice of the title – *Passenger to Teheran* – is both striking and loaded with interpretative possibilities.

The very noun "passenger" is etymologically derived from Middle English *passager* from Anglo-French: *passage* – path, way, passage (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, passenger entry), and when used today, it retains the idea of transitoriness, suggesting at the same time a form of passivity. To be a passenger does not mean to actively and arduously pursue the toil of moving through space. The passenger's toil, usually bracketed by acts of embarkation and disembarkation, is minimalized. Since responsibility is delegated into someone else's hands, a passenger's agency is, in a way, partially suspended. Admitting openly to being a passenger, to adopting, temporarily, this specifically passive role may be an act of honest reckoning of one's situation: in the case of Vita Sackville-West the author/narrator is (1) a woman and (2) an aristocrat.[1]

This is not to say that confessing to being a "passenger" necessarily suggests that the author is assuming an inferior role when compared to that of a "traveller". Rather, Vita Sackville-West demonstrates that she feels no qualms in admitting somebody else is doing the necessary labour. Moreover, passengers have, at least potentially, the privilege of

[1] Of course, this is not an absolute rule and there are exceptions. It is worth mentioning here, for example, the novel by Zofia Posmysz, *The Passenger* (1962), as well as the film by Andrzej Munk of the same title (1963), or the opera *Пассажирка* Op. 97 by Mieczysław Weinberg (1968). Posmysz's novel is not a travel book. Although set on a luxurious ocean liner, it is mostly devoted to reminiscences of concentration camp experiences. Cf. Zofia Posmysz, *Pasażerka* (2019).

implementing a Wordsworthian postulate of "tranquility". A passenger can be more introspective and perhaps more observant than an active traveller negotiating space (e.g.: a driver, a rider, a walker) who has fewer opportunities to indulge in contemplation or to study during the journey.

In my analysis I am using the 1990 edition of *Passenger to Teheran* with the introduction by Nigel Nicolson (Sackville-West 1990). The original was published, unsurprisingly, by Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press in 1926 and dedicated to Vita Sackville-West's husband, Harold Nicolson, who was at the time a member of British diplomatic mission in Persia (Sackville-West 1926). The abundance of the Nicolsons in the whole enterprise is not surprising to anybody who grapples with the emotional entanglements of the Blooomsbury Group, members of which notoriously "lived in squares and loved in triangles" (Licence 2016). When Vita undertook the epic journey to visit her husband, she was in a liaison with Virginia Woolf, who subsequently became the publisher of the travelogue. The course of events is well documented both in Virginia Woolf's diaries and in extensive critical and biographical literature (Licence 2016; Briggs 2006; Caws 1990; Curtis 2002; Glendinning 1983), so there is no need to elaborate on details here.

There exist two editions of *Passenger to Teheran* and their covers are strikingly different. In the first edition the dustjacket presents a photograph of the entrance to the madrasseh in Isfahan, according to Lord Curzon "one of the stateliest ruins in Persia" (Sackville-West 1990, 116). In other words, it shows a standard oriental architectural element. It is in the second edition that the photograph on the cover refers directly to "passengeriality". It introduces Vita Sackville-West sitting in a studied pose on the ship's railing. Wearing a fashionable hat and with a lady's purse on her lap, she is looking into the distance (Sackville-West 1990, dustjacket). This is the author, conscious and confident in her passengerial mode: well to do, moving but remaining motionless; looking out; and – quite obviously – ready for an exotic adventure.[2]

[2] Cf. Sackville-West (1990, 49). The photograph was taken on board S.S. Rajputana, on which she sailed from Port Said to Bombay.

What kind of a travelling persona Vita Sackville-West was adopting immediately after her return to England becomes clear when one reads Virginia Woolf's notes in her diaries:

> So Vita came: & I register the shock of meeting after absence; how shy one is; how disillusioned by the actual body; how sensitive to new shades of tone – something "womanly" I detected, more mature; & she was shabbier, come straight off in her travelling clothes; & not so beautiful, as sometimes perhaps; & so we sat talking on the sofa by the window, she rather silent, I chattering, partly to divert her attention from me; & to prevent her thinking "Well, is this all?" as she was bound to think, having declared herself so openly in writing. So that we each registered some disillusionment; & perhaps also acquired some grains of additional solidity. This may well be more lasting than the first rhapsody. But I compared her state, justly, to a flock of birds flying hither thither, escaped, confused: returning, after a long journey, to the middle of things again. She was quieter, shyer, awkwarder than usual even. She has no ready talk – confronted by Nelly or Mrs. Cartwright she stands like a schoolgirl (Woolf 1981, 88).

On the one hand, it is easy to sense that Vita Sackville-West attempts to appear as a seasoned traveller rather than a seasoned passenger (more mature, shabbier, and in her travelling clothes – the image that comes to mind is that of Lawrence of Arabia parading over London in Arab costume or that of Freya Stark in Arab dress in many photographic portraits[3]). On the other hand, the confrontation between Virginia Woolf

[3] Lawrence of Arabia began to dress in Arab costume around 1907 and that remained his trademark for years to come. During the Arabian campaign Lawrence claimed that that he was invited by Feisal (the future king of Iraq) to wear an Arab dress again (Lawrence 1997, 113), but biographers suggest it was Lawrence's own idea (Asher 1999, 193). Lawrence James likewise concludes the whole gear was simply "fancy dress" because of T.E. Lawrence's exhibitionist streak (James 1995, 153). Lawrence of Arabia's biographies often employ "Lawrence–as–Arab" images (either photographs or paintings) on their covers (James 1995; Asher 1999; Sattin 2015).

and Vita Sackville-West is sketched in a romantic fashion, in a manner of a gentleman's visit in a Jane Austen novel: a weary, wealthy globetrotter, not too impressively eloquent and rather withdrawn, as if unable to easily fit again into "polite society". Sackville-West's parading in her Turkish garments, which was creatively and facetiously used by Virginia Woolf in the climactic gender-bending episode of *Orlando* (Woolf 1993, 95–98), does indeed blend, as Joanna Grant notices "the masculine and the feminine, the domestic and the exotic" (2008, 49), and we might add – in this festival of blending activities – the active and the passive. We do not know and we never will to what extent Vita Sackville-West's masquerade in London was serious and to what extent just playful.

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Although *Passenger to Teheran* is most frequently interpreted by critics as one of numerous "Near Eastern travel narratives" (Grant 2008, 83),[4] typical of Modernist times and sensibilities, such a description is not entirely accurate if one takes into account the massive, geographical scope of the journey. Of course Vita Sackville-West was not the sort of highly accomplished and respected traveller that we do have in the persons of Gertrude Bell, Freya Stark, or Rebecca West of more or less the same period of time. Nor does she intend to present herself as a scholar, archaeologist, politician or historian, though it must be admitted that her general knowledge is very impressive.[5] To dismiss Vita Sackville-West

[4] There are photographs of Freya Stark in Arab dress taken e.g. in 1928 after her first "Oriental trip" when she visited the forbidden territory of the Druze (Geniesse 2001, 66). The same photograph is reprinted on the cover of Geniesse's book (2001). That Vita Sackville-West admired Freya Stark is well documented (Glendinning 1983, 272, 298, 371 and 397).

[5] Vita Sackville-West was a prolific writer and her literary output is enormous, spanning from privately printed verse dramas in 1909, when she was a teenager, until 1960s when she published profiles of dogs. Predominant among some fifty titles she produced

as just a "passenger to Teheran" would be imprecise and unfair. The epic, slow journey took her from London to Egypt, India and then to Persia, and after that back to England via communist Russia, Poland and Prussia; by boat, by train and by road. The return to England, i.e., the last part of the book, is frequently neglected probably because it is considered to be an anecdotal embellishment and a post-script to the main text. However, anecdotes should not be disregarded, especially in travellers' discourses which, in fact, thrive on them. Anecdotes are "mediators between the undifferentiated succession of local moments and a larger strategy toward which they can only gesture" (Greenblatt 1991, 3; Gallop 2002).[6] In what follows I will try to decipher how a minor incident, contained in the concluding pages of *Passenger to Teheran* and referring to Vita Sackville-West's brief "passengerial transit" through Poland, can be seen not just as an isolated flash but, indeed, an indicator, along Greenblatt's lines, of larger representational strategies.

It is easy to identify the exact date when Vita Sackville-West entered Poland. It was 14th May 1926, the day Józef Piłsudski took power over Warsaw, the last day of the "May Coup", or, as the author says, "Revolution".

Not surprisingly, Vita Sackville-West was at a loss as to the intricacies of the coup:

> Revolution in Poland; Warsaw in the hands of the rebels; the telegraph wires cut; the line blown up; no trains able to proceed to Warsaw. The dismayed passengers crowded round the phlegmatic officials in the customs shed. No, they could tell us nothing more; the train would go on as far as it could, perhaps to within twenty, perhaps fifteen miles of Warsaw; there we

are novels, biographies, stories, books on gardening and collections of poems. Books of travel are, in fact, an exception. Apart from *Passenger to Teheran* she wrote only one more: *Twelve Days: Across the Mountains with the Bakhtiari Tribe* (1928), a result of her second visit to Persia, in 1927. This latter volume is an account of an arduous (i.e. "non–passengerial") journey across remote Persian mountains.

[6] Similarly, and more recently, Jane Gallop (2002) urges theoreticians of culture and literature to pay closer attention to the "trivial" narratives.

> should be turned out and left to our own devices; people were being shot down in the streets of Warsaw; how many? perhaps three hundred, perhaps three thousand; who could tell? No news was coming through. Would they advise us to go on or not? They shrugged, they could not advise; if we liked to risk it… (Sackville-West 1990, 150).

The tone of the account verges on the mock heroic: "I was not afraid of being shot, but I *was* afraid of being indefinitely delayed" (Sackville-West 1990, 150).

This was not Vita's initiation to Poland. In the autumn of 1909 she had visited Count Joseph Potocki's palace in Antoniny, far east of Warsaw, in the present territory of Ukraine. (At that time, it was, from the point of view of political realities, the territory of tsarist Russia, because Poland was under partitions). The luxury that seventeen-year-old Vita witnessed in the neo-baroque palace and the incredible social inequalities that she saw made her "unsurprised when the Russian Revolution came nine years later" (Glendinning 1983, 32).[7] Vita Sackville-West saw Count Potocki again in the south of France early in 1911 when the Polish aristocrat came with a visit, directly from Warsaw, especially to see her, or so he claimed (Glendinning 1983, 40). Victoria Glendinning maintains in her biography of Vita Sackville-West that on her way back from the Persian journey she planned to see Potocki, who was greatly impoverished as a result of the Soviet Revolution and the loss of Antoniny palace (Glendinning 1983, 160). However, these intentions are not articulated in the travelogue. The reader is certainly justified to form an impression that Sackville-West was just trying to get out of Poland as fast as possible, and she does not mention any plans whatsoever concerning Count Potocki. Perhaps they did not fit the tone of the last chapter of the book or perhaps such plans simply did not exist. Nigel Nicolson writes in the introduction to the 1990 edition that "[the author] is reticent to the point of obscurity about her own identity, her companions (…) and her mo-

[7] Just ten years after Sackville-West's visit the palace was burnt to the ground during the Polish–Soviet War.

tives" (1990, 18). And further: "[i]t is striking how much she omits from her narrative" (Nicolson 1990, 19). The very beginning of the travelogue offers perhaps another clue to Potocki's absence in the text: "Travel is the most private of pleasures. There is no greater bore than the travel bore. We do not in the least want to hear what he has seen in Hong-Kong" (Sackville-West 1990, 151).

Coming back to the transit through Poland, the reader learns that – objective obstacles notwithstanding – the priority was to cross the Polish-East Prussian border as fast as possible:

> A time–table was produced from somewhere; assuming that it still held good for the unaffected parts of Poland, we calculated that we should be able to reach the German frontier that night. The Germans had but one idea in their heads, and that was to sleep that night in their own country. Considering the rumours that were current – the whole of Poland under military rule within twenty–four hours, railways and bridges destroyed, communication with the rest of Europe interrupted – I could scarcely blame them; indeed, I shared their determination. My difficulty was that I had no money. I had my ticket through from Moscow to London, and only enough cash to pay for my food on the way: how was I to buy new tickets, however "hard" I might be prepared to travel? (Sackville-West 1990, 151).

Incidentally, the frank admission concerning lack of funds makes one additionally question Vita's determination to visit Count Potocki during this particular journey.

The train takes the travellers as far as Białystok; then a local train takes them to the border town of Grajewo. Vita Sackville-West reports she sees no sign of revolution "except a few troops standing about at country stations, and a few sentries posted near bridges and signal–boxes" (Sackville-West, 151). Suddenly the report changes into a bucolic account:

> It was warm, and the corn was growing; the farms and homesteads looked prosperous, not unlike English farms; it was pleasant to come back to

> spring, after Russia where the spring had not yet broken, and to see rural Poland thus unexpectedly, instead of keeping to the beaten track. It was a rolling landscape, with clumps of dark firs on the sky-line, well-kept roads, gates painted a clean white; after Persia and Russia, I felt that I was really back in Europe (Sackville-West 1990, 151–152).

Interestingly, although so obviously aware of immense differences between the two countries, Sackville-West does not dedicate a separate chapter to her transit through Poland. Instead, she inserts the Polish episode into the last section of the last chapter, entitled "Russia".

At eight in the evening the passengers reach Grajewo and they learn that the train will not go farther. "My Germans were in consternation," the author remarks. "Sleep on Polish soil they would not" (Sackville-West, 152). With the only motor in Grajewo broken down, the travellers are forced to wait until one o'clock at night to cross the border in a side-engine.

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The subsequent report of the events in Grajewo over the next few hours continues the mock-heroic mode. The travellers – much as they are determined to leave Poland and cross the border to East-Prussia – end up drunk and, to mark the occasion, sign a commemorative postcard.

The inscriptions on the back of the postcard first of all confirm the date of the incident as 14th May 1926. The name of the town is spelled properly (I shall presently explain why this is significant). There are eleven signatures, the only one missing is that of Vita Sackville-West; therefore, one can presume this postcard belonged to her. Had it been otherwise, she would have been asked to sign it too.

The front side of the postcard is extremely interesting. Its old-fashioned look, even by the standards of the 1920s, results from the fact that its origin goes back to the time of the First World War. Grajewo was

captured by the Germans in October 1914, then it passed from hand to hand (between Germans and Russians) until February 1915, when it was re-captured by the Germans. During the siege of the nearby Osowiec, stronghold soldiers took photographs of the surrounding area and sent makeshift, amateur "photographic postcards" to their families and friends. Among the local population, the art of photography was not yet known, but it was introduced by the Germans who photographed the inhabitants of the area in official, bureaucratic capacity for the purpose of issuing passports. The postcard signed by Vita Sackville-West's co-travellers shows soldiers in German uniforms; the name of the town and the street is printed in German and Russian while the more recent Polish stamp is placed below.

There was no Polish name on the original 1915 postcard. After all, postal services were as a rule in the hands of the official administration (in this case interchangeably Russian and Prussian).

Vita Sackville-West purchased the postcard eleven years later, when Poland regained its independence. It is quite astonishing that in Polish Grajewo, almost a decade after colossal political changes and the fall of two empires, postcards which were sold in this border outpost still used the photographs with German soldiers, as well as with German and Russian street names. Polish amateurish-looking stamp is added as if it was an afterthought or a nonchalantly applied palimpsest.

There is no visible attempt to eradicate the past; perhaps on the contrary, one witnesses a somewhat condescending statement that no matter what uniforms the soldiers are wearing, no matter how many names in foreign languages were printed prior to the Polish stamp, and – finally – no matter in what circumstances the photograph was taken, Grajewo is *so* Polish that it does not need to hide its complex history which, if anything, testifies to the previous victimization of the nation. Such attitudes are, perhaps, legitimate today; it is, however, hard to think they were acceptable in the aftermath of the Great War.

Of course, there could be other valid interpretations: (a) for many years after the departure of the Germans and the Russians nobody in

Figure 1. The original postcard of 1915, available from https://grajewiak.pl/images/galerie/pocztowki/1914/postcard_20.jpg [accessed on: 7 January 2021].

Figure 2. Vita Sackville-West's postcard of 1926 (Sackville-West 1990, 152).

Poland was interested in manufacturing new postcards in Grajewo, or (b) Vita Sackville-West chose the strangest among the many postcards available in Grajewo in 1926.[8] Of course, the likelihood of the last option is relatively small.

IV

When eventually Sackville-West managed to leave Poland, her journey proceeded swiftly:

> That day passed in a haze: Königsberg; a long wait there, drinking coffee out of thick cups and looking at photographs in the German papers of the scenes in Warsaw; then another train; the Polish Corridor; East Prussia; Berlin (Sackville-West 1990, 152).

The author got her geography almost right. The exception is her use of "East Prussia" by which she means eastern part of Germany "proper". This can be misleading and indeed it could explain partly why the 1990 edition manages to make a total geographical mess out of this fragment of the story.

There are two issues at stake. One is editorial carelessness. Although the name of the town is not really a tongue-twister, and the author spelled it correctly in her text (and in the postcard, as I mentioned before), in the 1990 edition Grajewo becomes "Gravejo", both in the map and in the description of the postcard (Sackville-West 1990, 14–15 and 152). One could be willing to assume that this is a trivial and isolated anecdotal issue of no great importance. However, if one notices the fact that in the Vita Sackville-West's biography the

[8] By means of a coincidence that the English author could not have predicted, this street was to become the centre of Grajewo ghetto in August 1941. The ghetto extended across Dolna, Rudzka and Łazienna streets.

name of the town is even more tortuously distorted – it functions as "Graceivo" – the well intentioned assumption turns into another one: about disrespect with regard to ground realities in Eastern Europe (Glendinning 1983, 160).

Lord Byron famously admitted in *Don Juan*'s Canto VII that the Western poet is helpless in confrontation with Eastern Europe because of "unpronounceable" Slavonic names.[9] But, as I signalled in the beginning of this article, the issue is not merely anecdotal, or, if it is, it points to larger strategies.

If close attention is now paid to the map that the editors included in the 1990 version of *Passenger to Teheran*, it becomes evident that either Vita Sackville-West's transit through Poland was senseless or the publisher was unconcerned with the geographical accuracy of this part of the travelogue.[10] Even if the author's reference to "East Prussia" in the fragment which I quoted was misleading, it does not justify blatant errors in basic facts.

The editors placed "Gravejo" not where it actually was, i.e., at the eastern border of East Prussia and Poland, a little west of Białystok. They placed the town at a completely different border, between Poland and Germany, about four hundred kilometers further west. If what the map suggests were correct, the succession of stations and legs of the journey that Vita Sackville-West writes about: "Königsberg (…) then another train; the Polish Corridor; East Prussia; Berlin," would be very hard to imagine. If the faulty placement of Grajewo could be

[9] But oh, ye goddesses of war and glory!
How shall I spell the name of each Cossacque
Who were immortal, could one tell their story?
Alas! what to their memory can lack?
Achilles' self was not more grim and gory
Than thousands of this new and polish'd nation,
Whose names want nothing but – pronunciation (Byron 1988, 325).

[10] In the first edition of *Passenger to Teheran* the map was not included (neither was the postcard).

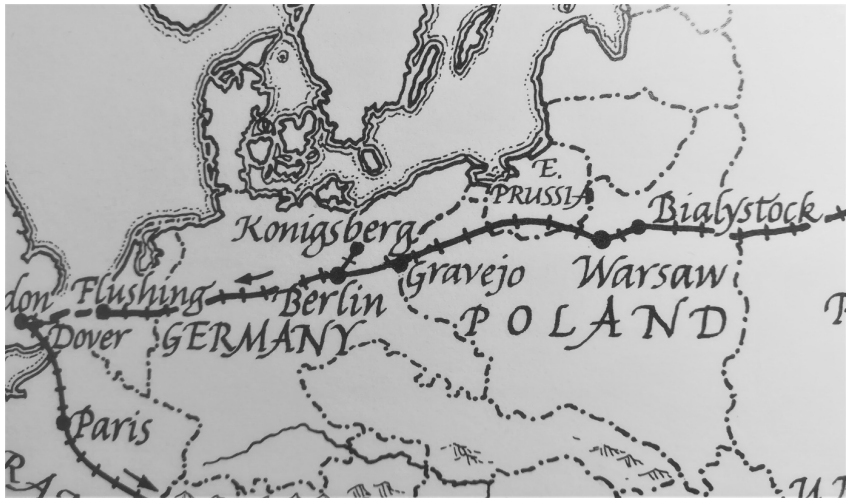

Figure 3. Fragment of a map: V. Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran* (1990, 14).

explained by Sackville-West's imprecise use of the term "East Prussia", it is much harder to understand what made the editors locate Königsberg near Berlin (again an error of about five hundred kilometers). If one studies this map, it is clear that to reach Berlin from "Gravejo", one does not have to cross the border with East Prussia or make a detour towards Königsberg, not to mention the crossing of the Polish Corridor in order to continue travelling through eastern part of Germany. A short, direct trip to Berlin would suffice. If this map were to be taken seriously, Vita Sackville-West travelled in inexplicable zigzags. To conclude: the map of the part of Europe which contains the last leg of Vita Sackville-West's journey was prepared with utter disregard for cartographic and narrative sense.

The number of "anecdotes" prompts one to answer the initial question: what larger strategies do these accumulated incidents point to? First, unwelcome border incidents have a broader significance because what is at stake at almost every such adventure results from a socio-political, geo-political, military and/or ideological tension. No matter whether these events are presented as adventures or not, border trouble usually has consequences far beyond any "local moment".

Secondly, the European metropolis had of course its frontier, its own lands of incivility and barbarity. Enlightenment philosophers, like Rousseau and Voltaire, who introduced the conceptual division of Europe between the civilised West and unpronounceable lands of incivility in the East needed this dualism because without barbarism one cannot praise one's own culture.[11] What the accumulated misprints and mis-edits in the 1990 version of *Passenger to Teheran* point to is that (1) the modes of eighteenth–century European representation and (2) Western Europe's conceptual map of Eastern Europe remain largely unchanged. In contemporary times reckless orientalism is being radically eradicated when it comes to the Middle East or the Far East but it is not being eradicated with equal enthusiasm when it comes to Eastern Europe. Poland is still "readable equally from Europe and Asia," as even major postcolonial critics awkwardly asserted (Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin 1989, 159). Perhaps this is the reason why small places like Grajewo in Poland and a big city of Königberg in East Prussia cannot be given a fixed place in the map. As long as they are close to ever-changing borders in Eastern Europe, nobody seems to care too obsessively about historical, geographical, linguistic and contextual details.

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[11] On the invention of Eastern Europe see: Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilisation On the Mind of the Enlightenment* (1994).

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Illustrations

Figure 1. The original postcard of 1915, available from https://grajewiak.pl/images/galerie/pocztowki/1914/postcard_20.jpg [accessed on: 7 January 2021].

Figure 2. Vita Sackville West's postcard of 1926 (Sackville-West 1990, 152).

Figure 3. Fragment of a map: V. Sackville–West, Passenger to Teheran (1990, 14).

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Zbigniew Białas is Professor of English in the Institute of Literary Studies at the University of Silesia in Katowice (Poland) and author of five novels. He was Humboldt Research Fellow in Germany, Rockefeller Fellow in Italy and Fulbright Senior Fellow in the USA. His academic books include *Post-Tribal Ethos in African Literature* (1993), *Mapping Wild Gardens* (1997) and *The Body Wall* (2006). His first novel, *Korzeniec*, was awarded Silesian Literary Laurels, won the title of Best Polish Prose of 2011 and was turned into a successful theatrical play. Białas edited/co-edited twelve academic volumes, wrote over sixty academic essays and translated English, American and Nigerian literature into Polish.

Anglista, profesor nauk humanistycznych i autor pięciu powieści. Stypendysta Fundacji Humboldta, Rockefellera i Fulbrighta. Autor trzech anglojęzycznych monografii poświęconych literaturze afrykańskiej i podróżopisarstwu. Jego pierwsza powieść *Korzeniec* została nagrodzona Śląskim Wawrzynem Literackim i przeniesiona na deski teatralne. Zbigniew Białas tłumaczył na język polski literaturę angielską, amerykańską i nigeryjską.

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