



“If Sweden is a province, what are we?”

Map-making and man-making in Marius Ivaškevičius’s essay series *My Scandinavia*

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Abstract

This co-written article approaches the influential Lithuanian writer and playwright Marius Ivaškevičius’s essay series *My Scandinavia* (2004) from two different vantage points reflecting either side of the former ‘Iron Curtain’. Published in the year when Lithuania joined the European Union, the essay series describes the narrator’s travels and symbolic and ironic conquest of Northern Europe in the wake of the border openings following the collapse of the Soviet Union. First, employing the notions of “temporal” and “spatial nodes” (Ringgard & DuBois 2017), the article addresses how the crossings of the Baltic Sea and journeys through Northern Europe depicted in Ivaškevičius’s essays represent an awareness of significant shifts in the unfolding of European history and Europe’s spatial configuration. Second, the article reads *My Scandinavia* as an example of creative map-making in line with theories of critical cartography. Finally, the article puts the travelling subject in *My Scandinavia* centre stage, looking at the dialectic ways in which subject and place create each other. Just as Scandinavia has been actively moulding the narrating and, by implication, also the writing subject’s biography, so has he given Scandinavia shape through his discourse, while also idiosyncratically framing Europe’s shifting political and mental geography.

Keywords: post-Cold War Scandinavia; Baltic Sea region; Lithuanian literature; Marius Ivaškevičius; literary cartography



1. INTRODUCTION

The present article is the product of a joint effort by two participants of the *New Geographies of Scandinavian Studies* network. It directly reflects the network's ambition to map the geo-cultural coordinates of this field of study after the expansion of Europe following the end of the Cold War, and, equally, the realization that the notion of Scandinavia and the ways it can be studied acquire new meanings and call for redefinition each time Scandinavia is set into a new context. The idea that it can be best approached through the dynamism and 'renewable' energy that such encounters produce, has been an underlying one – both with regard to the network's activities and this article.

Since the authors of the article have come into Scandinavian Studies from different backgrounds, and since this has from the start been an important factor for the ways the network has been organised and functioned, we have decided to start with a reflection of our individual reasons for engaging with the text that will be analysed here: the essay series *My Scandinavia* (2004) by the Lithuanian author Marius Ivaškevičius.

1.1 WHY THIS TEXT: APPROACHES FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE FORMER IRON CURTAIN DIVIDE

Lill-Ann:

When Ieva first introduced Marius Ivaškevičius's essay series *My Scandinavia* to the network members and the rest of the audience at the conference of the Association pour les Études Nordiques (APEN) in Paris in November 2021, I was instantly intrigued because the essays seemed to respond to two intertwined concerns at the core of the network's – and my own – research interests. First, they seemed to be an excellent example of the ways in which literature has contributed to a reflection and negotiation of geopolitical changes in the extended Baltic Sea Region since the fall of the so-called Iron Curtain. Second, the first quotations I read from Ivaškevičius's essays made it clear that the author is not only interested in shifting imagined geographies or mental maps in a metaphorical way, but that he "draws" maps, too: the images of the region he describes resemble practices of "critical" or "creative cartography" I had written about earlier (Körber 2020), but in a textual, rather than the more usual visual, form.

A third aspect that convinced me that it would be rewarding to explore Ivaškevičius's texts in close collaboration with Ieva was that they represent a vantage point that itself is located outside of, yet in proximity to, Scandinavia. While Scandinavian representations of what is still often called "Eastern Europe" and "Eastern Europeans" are abundant in Scandinavia, the inverted gaze is less common, or less often considered as a valuable source for understanding Scandinavia's position in the post-1989 era. The appropriating gesture in the title of Ivaškevičius's essay series, *My Scandinavia*, contributes to rethinking both the notion of centre-periphery and the power relations in recent decades within the Baltic Sea Region. In this way, the engagement with Ivaškevičius's works can help to articulate and remedy the continuous asymmetry inherent in mutual imaginations across the Baltic Sea, an asymmetry the author summarizes in the quote we have chosen for the article title: "If Sweden is a province, what are we?"

What is more, the Lithuanian perspective on the two oceans framing the Nordic region, the Baltic Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, sheds new light on past and present maritime connections and associations linked to the coastal areas that – dependent on time and place – have embodied trade and travel opportunities and encounters, on the one hand, and severed ties and the longing for other shores, on the other. This 'oceanic' gaze from across the Baltic Sea helps us to contour Scandinavia in a way that is more aware of and

inclusive towards the Baltic neighbours. To give literary voices such as Ivaškevičius's a forum is not only an opportunity to rethink Scandinavia and Scandinavian Studies – a matter close to my Scandinavianist heart – but is more important than ever as we see the dawn of a new era, where European integration beyond the divide stemming from the Cold War might be the only way to safeguard our future.

Ieva:

An orientation towards Scandinavia, both political and cultural, has been strong in Lithuania since it regained its statehood in 1990, and the ambition to become a full-fledged member of the Nordic region has probably never been felt as powerfully as it has been in the recent decade. However, Scandinavia's representations in contemporary Lithuanian literature are still quite scarce, and in order to trace Scandinavian inspirations and *topoi* one would more likely turn to the writers of the interwar period¹ or discuss texts that relate to one particular country.² Marius Ivaškevičius (b. 1973) stands out in this context, because his experience of Scandinavia embraces the whole region and is reflected in different genres and media: essays, theatre plays, and film.

Ivaškevičius represents my own generation – born and raised under the Soviet occupation, but whose formative years coincided with the collapse of the regime, which for many young people brought about freedom of movement and thought, and (the illusion of) limitless possibilities. Now, more than thirty years later, many of us indeed feel at ease and at home in the 'big world' that opened up for us then, working across borders in all sorts of international constellations. However, this integration has been a long and not always smooth process, also in affective terms, and Ivaškevičius's essays *My Scandinavia* reflect that very well. As we will see, their subject's emotions towards Scandinavia and with respect to his own identity as a former Eastern European, are complex, at times even conflicting and changing over a course of time. There is an exasperating realization of the economic and mental gap that initially separates the Baltic states from Scandinavia and a passionate aspiration to belong there; there are a young man's frustrations at being a 'second-rate' European, but also the determination to prove the opposite. There comes also a matured and self-confident, yet still young, artist's ability to look at one's older self without self-pity, embracing, often humorously, even most uncomfortable experience to further one's own creative ends.

Looking from today's perspective at the author's career as an artist and public intellectual, Ivaškevičius appears to have fully mastered the art of oscillating between the former East and West, and communicating the experience of one to the other. His early and active exposure to the best practices of democratic countries through work, travel and international cooperation – whose significance he himself emphasized in an interview where he condemned all sorts of xenophobia (Jauniškis 2013) – are most likely what earned him a reputation at home as a breaker of national myths.³ At the same time, his work – above all

¹ See Gaižiūnas (2008).

² Sweden seems to be most prominent in this respect, e.g., Stockholm and Gotland play an important role in the poetry and essays of Rolandas Rastauskas, who has also acted as a translator of Swedish poetry (Bruno K. Öijer), and has had some of his essays translated into Swedish and included in the collection *Café Tabac: litauiska essäer*. Stockholm: Tranan, 2006. Gotland, thanks to the Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators in Visby, figures also in the poetry and prose of Eugenijus Ališanka, Herkus Kunčius, Ramunė Brundzaitė, and some others.

³ He was probably the first Lithuanian author to exhibit what the Lithuanian born American cultural scholar Vytautas Kavolis named a 'cooling' attitude towards the national identity, which meant taking a critical and objective, yet also creative stance towards one's cultural and historical heritage (see Sprindytė 2005; Jurgutienė 2015). It was especially his novel *Žali* (2002; *The Green*), a subversive fantasy about the Lithuanian postwar freedom fighters, that was received by many as an attack on one of the great narratives upon which the idea of independent Lithuania rested, see, for example, Andriukonis (n.d). As a key initiator of the Molėtai remembrance march (2016) Ivaškevičius has also significantly

his plays, often set outside Lithuania and far from being realistic in their mode – brought to international audiences an awareness of the social, historical, and cultural legacy of the “Eastern world”,⁴ while his latest ones in particular⁵ call attention to disturbing political processes brewing at the borders of today’s expanded Europe. In this respect, Ivaškevičius seems to have embraced the ‘Eastern’, ‘post-communist’ part of his identity, and turned it into a valuable asset, with which he can contribute to the international polylogue on entanglements of art and geopolitics. Numerous intellectuals in post-communist countries likely share this feeling, especially as the experience shared by many of them of living under totalitarianism and Soviet domination gains relevance in the face of the catastrophe that has hit Europe with Russia’s revanchist war in Ukraine.

Although Ivaškevičius can be called a voice of his generation, this voice is undoubtedly both idiosyncratic and illuminating. This pertains also to his essays *My Scandinavia*, which are based on the writer’s multiple and diverse experiences of the region and its people. The essays take the reader beyond the usual tourist paths, and do not attempt to merge the places he speaks about into a homogenous map of “Scandinavia”. Although they explore a common – Nordic and European – dimension, the essays are also concerned with differences and parallels (historico-political and socio-cultural), in regard both to the relationship between the Scandinavian and Baltic countries, and to Scandinavia internally. And although they are not free of stereotypes (or, possibly, purposively bring them to the fore), they inhabit ‘their’ Scandinavia with representations of real people and unique life-stories that cannot be generalised.

This makes the essays an interesting read for anyone exploring conceptualizations of Scandinavia in contemporary literature. I was therefore happy when Lill-Ann proposed we look at them together from the angle of literary cartographies she had worked with previously. This has been an intriguing process, as we come from different academic traditions and stand at a different distance from the ‘affective region’ that the writer represents; yet we are also related by Scandinavia and its study, and by the belief in the significance of its inter-cultural dimension.

1.2 AUTHOR, NARRATOR, TRAVELER? DEFINING THE SUBJECT OF *MY SCANDINAVIA*

Marius Ivaškevičius first emerged on the Lithuanian literary landscape as a short story writer and novelist, and he continues writing prose (his most recent novel, *Tomas Mūras*, came out in 2022). He has created a name for himself internationally, first of all, as a playwright (see Clemens Räthel’s article in this volume on Ivaškevičius’s play *Close City*). Throughout his career, he has also been writing essays and giving interviews for the mass and cultural media of different countries.⁶ Most of the essays are written in the first person, and their speaker can be fully identified with the author, who shares his views on the cultural and political developments discussed. The essays in *My Scandinavia* are also written in the first person; however, they possess a high degree of literariness, which makes the relation between the speaker and their biographical author more complex. The series contains three temporal narrative levels. First, the subject is presented as a narrator reflecting on his experiences, which may date back more than ten years. Second, the narrator recounts in detail

contributed to greater and self-critical public awareness about the tragedy and scale of the Holocaust in Lithuania (see “Five Years On Molėtai Marches Again” 2021).

⁴ Such as *Malysh* (2002), *Madagascar* (2004), *Mistras* (2010), *Expulsion* (2011), or *Russian Romance* (2014).

⁵ Such as *The Great Evil* (2015; co-production with the Hungarian director Árpád Schilling), *The Sleepers* (2019), and, most recently, *The Dawn of the Gods* (2022), directly addressing Russian aggression in Ukraine.

⁶ For example, Ivaškevičius (2004), (2016), (2017), and (2023); see also, Jauniškis (2013).

a recent journey through northern Scandinavia. Third, a change in the predominant narrative tense from past to present in the last three essays indicates that the narrator is also writing on the road. The seven-part composition, with allusions to the story of Genesis, brings to the fore the idea of the transformative power of travelling and features a strong visual element that adds to the essays' literary effect.

We have therefore chosen to refer to the subject of the essays as the Narrator in order to respect the difference between the biographical author and the personae (such as the Author and the Traveler) he consciously or unconsciously creates. However, since the essays do not provide any evidence of the fictional manipulation of the writer's biographical details, we do not abstain in our analysis from making use of ideas Ivaškevičius expressed in his public discourse and of his biography, but simply treat these as extra-textual material that can place the dialectic interdependence between travelling and identity into starker relief.

1.3 STRUCTURE AND METHODOLOGY

The remainder of the article will have three main focal points. First, inspired by the original organizing principle of *Nordic Literature: A Comparative History* (2017), we will investigate the 'temporal nodes' central for Ivaškevičius's essays, and the ways in which they intersect with 'spatial nodes.' According to the editors of the literary history's first volume, Dan Ringgaard and Thomas A. DuBois' *Spatial Nodes*, a "temporal node represents a significant turning point in time, one that resonates both backward through history [...] and forward" (2017:19). Temporal nodes in *My Scandinavia* pertain to tectonic shifts in Europe's political landscape that reverberate with the author's development as a writer and intellectual, and his reflections on his own positioning at specific points of time in contemporary history, but also in specific places. This is where the temporal nodes in *My Scandinavia* intersect with spatial nodes: "a significant location, a type of location, or a use of location that can assume [...] formative resonance within literary culture" (ibid.). The crossings of the Baltic Sea and journeys through Northern Europe depicted in Ivaškevičius's essays represent an awareness of significant shifts in the unfolding of European history and Europe's spatial configuration.

Second, we will undertake a reading of *My Scandinavia* as an example of creative map-making. As the narrator studies existing maps of the region and overwrites them with his own imaginations, and as he travels and turns abstract spaces into experienced places, he creates 'his Scandinavia'. Taking theories of critical cartography as its point of departure, the section explores the ways in which the Scandinavia of the 1990s and 2000s comes into being as both an imagined and concrete experiential geography in a performative mapping process. The third and final section will put the travelling subject in *My Scandinavia* centre stage, looking at the dialectic ways in which subject and place shape each other. By tracing the implications of Scandinavia's role as a 'maturing agent' in the narrator's artistic career, we also highlight how he – by immersion in and appropriation of the culture that Scandinavia provides – reinvents himself as an explorer and conqueror of previously unattainable shores.

Taken together, the three sections sketch out a reciprocal process that is key for an understanding of Ivaškevičius's essay series, but with implications that reach much further than that. What we are interested in here is the correlation between the experiencing individual and a place: How a human being – in this case the writing subject – shapes and is in turn shaped by a political and mental geography.

2. TEMPORAL NODES: THE DISSOLUTION OF THE EASTERN BLOC AND THE EXPANSION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

There are two main temporal nodes that structure the narrator's experience with Scandinavia and the narrative space of the essays. The first one is introduced in the opening words of the series: "Before we had the opportunity to travel freely around Europe", and some sentences later: "When the borders opened up, and I began travelling around Scandinavia"⁷ (MS I; our emphasis). This shift from "before" to "when", directly related to the dynamics of space, refers to a crucial point in European 20th-century history that changed the region's political landscape. In official discourse it is usually called the 'End of the Cold War', the emphasis being on the disappearance of the clash of two mutually irreconcilable political systems, and in the 'West' often identified with the 'Fall of the Berlin Wall' – a real event that took place in October 1989, but also a powerful symbol signifying the popular will among people on both sides of the former Iron Curtain divide to remove the barriers separating them. In the Baltic countries, however, this 'tectonic' political shift, or rather, chain of events, that resulted in the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc is in everyday life usually referred to as the 'Restoration of Independence'. It was declared in 1990 (1991 for Estonia), but its early hallmarks were the 'Singing Revolution' that was in full swing in 1988 and 'The Chain of Freedom' (or 'The Baltic Way') in August 1989, when people in all the three Baltic republics joined hands and expressed a unified determination to break free from the Soviet Union. It was the first time when the postwar world media showed the Baltic countries re-emerge as a region, which already had a common agenda.⁸ For Lithuania specifically, 'Independence', and its *de facto* and *de jure* recognition, with Iceland being the first to break the ice,⁹ signified the end of 'unfreedom' that in the collective Lithuanian memory often merges fifty years of Soviet occupation with more than one hundred years of Tsarist rule.¹⁰ The former (first in 1940, and then again in 1944, with the German occupation in-between) erased the country from the modern European map for fifty years by putting an end to its short independent existence (1918–1940), which in its turn is often associated with the country's long tradition of statehood: its prehistory as the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.¹¹

'Independence' is, undoubtedly, an important notion that lies behind the narrator's relation to this major historical shift and the history of occupation that it ended. In the first essay, just a few paragraphs later than the quotes cited earlier, he speculates about the Nordic countries' role in the newly proclaimed state's recognition process (MS I). In the third essay, in which he reflects on the different meanings that the same time (1944) engenders in different locations ("The war in Europe, with all its bloody battles, concentration camps, was still raging – and there was Bergman, creating a film"),¹² he speaks of the moral and pragmatic implications of a country of staying neutral during a world war, and remaining "the only country on the Baltic Sea that [...] wasn't occupied" (MS III).¹³ In the same essay, he compares Finland's and his own country's different responses to their independence being targeted: "the Finns won the most respect for their resistance to the Soviet Union in the

⁷ Lith. orig.: "Kai neturėjome sąlygų keliauti po Europą"; "Kai sienoms atsivėrus pradėjau keliauti po Skandinaviją."

⁸ This unity has, however, been often questioned (see, e.g., Apsalons 1996).

⁹ On the history and myths regarding Iceland's role in the recognition of the Baltic countries, see Guðni Jóhannesson (2016).

¹⁰ That is, since the third partition of the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth by Austria, Prussia, and Russia in 1795.

¹¹ *Soviet Postcolonial Studies* by the Estonian scholar Epp Annus (2018) illuminates several aspects that this paragraph alludes to, including national nostalgia as a product of the "traumatic rupture" caused by Soviet occupation/hegemony in the so-called "Soviet Western borderlands" (i.e., the Baltic countries and the countries of East Central Europe), and the relevance of the post-colonial approach, however reframed, for the study of the relation of these countries to the Soviet Union.

¹² Lith. orig.: "Europoje vis dar karas, kruviniausi mūšiai, konclageriai, o Bergmanas kuria filmą."

¹³ Lith. orig.: "ji vienintelė prie Baltijos jūros nedalyvavo Antrajame pasauliniame kare ir nebuvo okupuota."

Winter War [...] They did it and we didn't even try".¹⁴ Later, he would allude to the possibility for Norwegian Finnmark to suffer a fate similar to that of the Baltic states: "Who knows what Finnmark [sic]¹⁵ would have been called: FSSR – the Finnmark [sic] Socialist Soviet Republic, or the Northern Norwegian Democratic Republic?" (MS V).¹⁶ At the same time, right from the very first sentences, there seems to be a realization that independence, although undoubtedly precious, is not the final goal, but rather a *sine qua non* to being able to transgress the local boundaries, and, as will be discussed later, entering – with Scandinavia – the rest of Europe, and, probably, even taking a step further.

The second key temporal node is the year 2004, which turned into a political reality the aspirations that had been fostered by a number of former Eastern Bloc countries since the first tectonic shift. That year, ten new states were accepted into the EU (Lithuania among them), with rights equal to those of its old members. Neither this event nor the year is mentioned explicitly in the essays, but it can be concluded from extratextual information that this geopolitical shift coincides with the narrator's 'now', in particular, the fact that 2004 was the year the essays were completed and first published. This was done in the immediate wake of the author's earlier mentioned travel through Northern Finland and Norway, the recount of which occupies a significant part of the text's narrative space, and with which the essays end. Having understood this temporal connection between the narrative act and the expansion of the EU, we understand why the questions of how each of the Scandinavian countries that he visited relates itself to Europe, and how his own country looks in this regard – and thus the question of centres and peripheries – become central in the essays.

A bit more than a decade separate the two above-mentioned historical nodes, and in the narrative moment, "ten years" have passed since the narrator's first 'physical' contact with Scandinavia (MS II); however, a great change has occurred in his relation to this place during this interval. The first temporal node enabled him to come to Sweden as a student summer labourer in 1989, providing him with his first independent income ("huge for the average Lithuanian" MS II),¹⁷ but it also inflicted (self)humiliation, as in one episode where he describes a challenge to taste *surströmming* for twenty crowns: "I was just a common strawberry picker, who'd agreed to eat rotten food for money" (MS II).¹⁸ With the second node he has not only already "acquired a taste for this rot" and for the ritual of eating it "complete with griddle cake, onions, and vodka" (*ibid.*),¹⁹ but much more importantly: With this narration he is inscribing himself, his imaginings and experiences into the international discourse on Scandinavia, and giving Scandinavia his original meaning and shape – through a performative action that will be explored in the following section.

¹⁴ Lith. orig.: "Jie sugebėjo, o mes net nepabandėme." This is a reference to the lack of an immediate military response on Lithuania's part to the Soviet ultimatum of June 14, 1940.

¹⁵ Unfortunately, there are quite a few mistakes in the translation, especially misspelt place-names. We have indicated these with [sic] in our quotes.

¹⁶ Lith. orig.: "Nežinia, kaip Finnmarkas būtų tuomet vadinamas: FTSR – Finmarko Tarybų Socialistinė Respublika ar ŠNDR – Šiaurės Norvegijos Demokratine Respublika?" Although the anecdote about the United States and Great Britain being ready to hand over Finnmark to Stalin, which he apparently picked up during his travel, has no historical foundation, the allusions to Soviet expansionism and terror are, no doubt, well-grounded: "The battle-weary patriarch couldn't be bothered with building more concentration camps and hunting down several million more political prisoners to fill up the sixteenth Soviet Republic" ("nebesinorėjo karo išvargintam patriarchui kurti naujų lagerių ir ieškoti papildomo milijono tremtinių ir politinių kalinių užpildyti šešioliktą skandinavišką sovietų respubliką").

¹⁷ Lith. orig.: "ši suma tuometiniam eiliniam lietuviui buvo didžiuliai pinigai."

¹⁸ Lith. orig.: "Bet tada aš tiesiog buvau paprastas braškiautojas, už pinigus sutikęs praryti puvesį."

¹⁹ Lith. orig.: "Vėliau, kai kiti švedai mane išmokė viso "siurstriomingo" valgyimo ritualo su šiaurietiška paplotėliu duona, svogūnais ir degtine, tikrai pamėgau šitą šlykštynę."

3. MAPPING SCANDINAVIA

3.1 LITERARY CARTOGRAPHIES

As a more specific ‘turn’ within the spatial turn in the humanities, a ‘cartographic turn’ has evolved since the 1990s that concerns itself with the significance and use of maps as human-produced knowledge about the world and their place in it. A central insight of recent scholarship produced within the fields of human geography, cultural studies, art and literary studies is the move from an understanding of maps as representations to an interest in map-making as a performative practice. Art and literature have come to be regarded as prime spaces for an exploration of creative and “imaginative mapping practices” (Crampton & Krygier 2006:12).²⁰ Przemysław Czapliński is among the scholars who emphasize the performative role of literature to make sense of the “cartographical shifts” brought about by geopolitical events in Europe in recent decades (Czapliński 2020:144). According to him, such shifts bring us to “the frontier of the imagination” (ibid.:143). It is here that literature comes into the picture: Being especially “efficient in using the imagination” (ibid.:144), literature should participate on equal terms in discussions about the present and the future. Czapliński focuses on Poland, but we find that his approach is valid for all those affected by what we have termed Europe’s recent tectonic shifts: “To draw this new map, one needs to imagine a different future” (ibid.:163).

Marius Ivaškevičius’s *My Scandinavia* is an excellent example of literary cartography that reflects these shifts. Bringing together approaches from human geography, critical and creative cartography, and narratology has not only proven to be a fruitful method for analysing the literary text at hand, but also sheds a more general light on the urgency of creative cartographic practices in the face of geopolitical change. *My Scandinavia* features a range of literary cartographical practices: The essays refer to actual maps as they change in the wake of the European revolutions of 1989–91; they demonstrate the workings of ‘mental maps’ to replace, supplement or question official representations; they show travelling and travel writing as a mapping process, complementing given and mental maps with the narrator’s own experiences and encounters. Ultimately, the narrator creates his own personal map of the Nordic and Baltic Sea Region, emerging as *My Scandinavia*. As the map of Scandinavia shifts from political maps and mental maps to a collage of visited places and people, a bird’s-eye view is replaced by a ground-level view, and the official understanding and visual representation of the region are complemented by an experiential dimension. Indicated by the possessive pronoun in the title (and explained further in the article’s fourth section), the narrating subject makes sense both of himself and his location in the world as he maps the political and geopolitical changes of Northern and North-East Europe of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In the following paragraphs, we will trace this performative and palimpsestic mapping process in accordance with some of the categories proposed by the narrator as he surveys the region: The notions of proximity and similarity; size and scope; topography and locatedness: islands, peninsulas and coastal versus continental areas; centres and peripheries; and the North-South and West-East axes.

²⁰ For an overview of the intersections of human and cultural geography and literary studies within the “cartographic turn” see Rossetto (2014). For the notion of critical and creative cartography, see Crampton and Krygier (2006) and D’Ignazio (2020). See Engberg-Petersen (2017) and Tally (2014) on the crossroads of cartography and literature.

3.2 FROM APPLE TREE TO CHRISTMAS TREE

The first essay starts with an actual map: A map of the world that is used by the narrator to support and stir the imagination. This use of a map, and the images it engenders, are directly linked to one of the central temporal nodes in the essay series, namely the collapse of the Soviet Union that brought about the opening of inner-European borders and the lift of travel restrictions. In the view and experience of the narrator, the map of Europe, and especially of Scandinavia, shifts radically in the process. The two first paragraphs start accordingly, juxtaposing the time “[b]efore we had the opportunity to travel freely around Europe” with the time “[w]hen the borders opened up and I began travelling around Scandinavia” (MS I).²¹ During the phase characterized by “before”, “the only opportunity for travel was through our imaginations”,²² and it is here the map comes into play and receives its function as generator of fantasies. To the narrator looking at a map of the world,

Scandinavia looked like a huge apple-tree branch, bending downwards from the sky, hanging over Europe. Finland was the trunk [in the Lithuanian original: a supporting pole or stick] that held up the heavy branch; Denmark was the apples that had fallen into the orchard, and the branch itself was Sweden and Norway. To make my picture of the world fuller, I'd imagine the Faroe Islands as the moon and Iceland as the sun. (Ibid.)²³

The imagination of Scandinavia as a fertile yet abstract cosmos shifts in the wake of the border openings which coincide in the essay series with the start of the narrator's travelling activities. As it turns out,

this apple tree was populated [...]. Then a new type of tree formed for me – a Christmas tree [in the original: a Christmas Apple Tree] decorated with the faces of new friends and hung with wreaths made of the names of Scandinavian towns and villages. In other words, “my Scandinavia” found a home in the branches of that tree. (Ibid.)²⁴

The narrator's experiences and encounters populate the map and turn its abstract spatial representations into experiential places. The bird's-eye perspective of the narrator bent over a map on his desk is being replaced with a traveller's ground-level view. In this process, the official cartographic depiction of Scandinavia gets overwritten first by the image of an apple tree that orients itself at the topographical outlines of Scandinavia's peninsulas and islands, and then the second image of a decorated Christmas tree that privileges distinct details over a comprehensive overview. The palimpsestic layering of a general reference map, a child's and teenager's imagined geography, and finally, the adult narrator's experience-based map in the form of a kind of travelogue can be read as a creative cartographic project: the simultaneous creation and appropriation of the narrating and travelling subject's Scandinavia.

It is worth noting the creative cartographer's own position on both the official and self-created maps. His early and imaginative ‘cartographic gaze’ enters Scandinavia from South to North (Finland being the supporting stick that holds the heavily laden branch), and the continental Southeastern rim of the Baltic Sea with Lithuania at the bottom,

²¹ See note 7 for Lith. orig.

²² Lith. orig.: “vienintelė galimybė buvo keliauti mintyse.”

²³ Lith. orig.: “Skandinavija man atrodydavo kaip didelė obels šaka, nusvirusi iš dangaus ir pakibusi virš Europos. Suomija buvo pagalys apsunkusiai šakai paremti, Danija – jau nukritę į sodą obuoliai, o pati šaka – Švedija ir Norvegija. Kad pasaulio vaizdas būtų pilnesnis, Farerų salas įsivaizdavau kaip Mėnulį, o Islandiją – kaip Saulę.”

²⁴ Lith. orig.: “paaiškėjo, kad ši Obelis gyvenama [...]. Susiformavo tokia kalėdinė Obelis su prikabintais naujų pažįstamų ir draugų veidais bei skandinaviškų kaimų ir miestelių giriandomis. Kitaip tariant, ant tos Obels šakos apsigyveno “mano Skandinavija.”

would therefore form the trunk or the roots of the imagined tree, of something that is still hidden under the surface (of the Baltic Sea), but which forms the foundation from which 'his' Scandinavia 'grows.'²⁵ So despite the disrupted opportunities to travel and explore in person, the Baltic Sea region forms one connected shape on maps of northern or northeast Europe. It is these cross-regional connections the narrator sets out to explore for the remainder of the essay series, zooming in on some places and people in Scandinavia (or, the 'Christmas apple tree' decorations), on the one hand, and on Lithuania as the origin of the narrator's travels and musings, on the other.

3.3 TWO ISLANDS IN THE SEA

The second essay centres on the two biggest islands in the Baltic Sea, the Swedish islands of Öland and Gotland. Öland, where the narrator spends the summers of his early adult and student years working as a strawberry picker, represents the first personal encounter with Scandinavia. Later, as a writer, the narrator returns to Sweden, this time to Gotland's capital Visby. Accordingly, the narrator "can boast" that he is "familiar with two cultural levels in Sweden: that of culture and that of agriculture" (MS II);²⁶ his coming-of-age process and education and development as an intellectual and cultural worker coincides with the region's geopolitical shifts. Importantly, we learn that Gotland is the Scandinavian landmass closest to Lithuania. In the essay series, the two islands represent cross-Baltic Sea meetings directly after the opening of borders and job markets in the early 1990s, as well as a later stage of cultural integration across the Baltic Sea (not to mention the references to pre-twentieth-century connections). Hence, the two islands also give occasion to discuss notions of European centres and peripheries, of land-based versus oceanic thinking, of shifting regional identities, and of alliances beyond the East-West divide.

Looking back to his arrival on Öland in the beginning of the 1990s, at the time of writing – ten years later – the narrator states that "at the time Sweden seemed to me like another world, a world that had nothing whatsoever to do with my world" (MS II).²⁷ The first essays highlight two movements across the Baltic Sea in the wake of the opened borders: Scandinavian sex and booze tourists travelling to the port cities of Riga and Tallinn, and seasonal laborers from Lithuania and Poland travelling in the opposite direction to work under "slave-like" conditions. These encounters are described as the meeting of "the wealthy world and the poor world" (MS I),²⁸ an exchange of "cheap labour [...] from the East"²⁹ for Western currency (MS II). For the narrator, it is a period that alternates between "hard physical work" in Sweden and "scholarly work" at a university back home, where, if his hands "got dirty, then only from ink" (MS II).³⁰ But a mental shift takes place, as well, a shift that is framed in spatial terms, as a change in geographical affiliation: From stating the radical asymmetry of the western and eastern rims of the Baltic Sea, the narrator strives to overcome these differences. Every time the workers "resisted the temptation" to cheat with the number

²⁵ Ironically, the Soviet political map that the young creative cartographer was apparently using, and which drew the land borders that separated the USSR from the West as an impenetrable line – the line of the Iron Curtain – could not fully disconnect Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia from Scandinavia, and they remained connected through the Baltic Sea, as if visually protesting their forced attribution to the Soviet Union.

²⁶ Lith. orig.: "Galiu dabar girtis neblogai pažinęs du Švedijos sluoksnius: kultūrinį ir agrikultūrinį."

²⁷ Lith. orig.: "Švedija išties tuo metu man atrodė kitas pasaulis, nieko bendra neturintis su manimi."

²⁸ Lith. orig.: "turtingųjų ir skurdžių pasaulio."

²⁹ Lith. orig.: "pigią darbo jėgą, atvažiuojančią čia iš Rytų."

³⁰ Lith. orig.: "O jei išsitepti – nebent rašalu."

of worked hours, they “moved a little bit further away from being that Soviet person, and moved a little closer towards Scandinavia” [in the original: “towards being a Scandinavian”] (MS II).³¹

Finally, when the narrator exchanges “my agricultural Sweden in Oland [sic; correct: Öland] for a cultural Sweden in Gotland” (MS II)³² and the picturesque town of Visby, the gaze shifts, as well, from a migrant worker’s and tourist’s to a resident’s – another example of the place-making activity in *My Scandinavia* that goes beyond the image of the Christmas tree ornaments from the beginning: “I stopped seeing this fairy tale city as a decoration and began living in it” (MS II).³³ But Gotland is more than “the Scandinavian land closest to Lithuania” (ibid.),³⁴ and the place the narrator makes his home, staying there repeatedly at the Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators. In the essays’ second reference to actual maps, a map is used to identify Gotland’s central position, past and present: “In general, Visby and all of Gotland at one time was a very important meeting place for all cultures living on the Baltic Sea. You only need to look at a map to see how conveniently Gotland is situated in the very centre of the Baltic Sea” (ibid.).³⁵ The map and Visby’s former position as “the Baltic Sea’s central marketplace” (ibid.)³⁶ however do not represent infrastructure and travel routes at the time of writing. The end of the era of seafaring and the Iron Curtain have disrupted direct connections between Lithuania and Gotland: “Those for whom the flight to Visby [...] is still too expensive must travel in a huge circle until arriving with a ferry from Nynesham [sic; correct: Nynäshamn]. That trip takes two days. When you finally get to the island, you find it hard to believe that the distance between Gotland and Lithuania is just a few hundred kilometres” (ibid.).³⁷ Yet the narrator sees the opportunity to reconnect the region, replacing Gotland’s former economic capital with today’s cultural capital: “Gotland has ambitions of culturally uniting the Baltic countries with Scandinavian culture. If seas had presidents, then the president of the Baltic Sea would have to be situated in Visby. And all of us would travel there in the boats we don’t yet have, to settle all our watery affairs” (ibid.).³⁸

3.4 EAST, WEST, AND AROUND THE BALTIC SEA

These “watery” or “maritime affairs”,³⁹ as Ivaškevičius puts it, are central, as they involve a shift of perspective from focusing on land-based routes to centring waterways or oceanic connections. From this point of view, Gotland is not in the periphery of Sweden, but the capital of the Baltic Sea. The northwestern and southeastern shores of the Baltic Sea move closer together. Lithuania is not on the periphery of Europe, but an equal Baltic Sea neighbour – despite the fact, emphasized by Ivaškevičius, that Lithuania is the only country in the region whose capital is not a port city, and whose identity is less linked to the coastal

³¹ Lith. orig.: “Ir kiekvieną kartą suvaldęs savyje šį sunkiai numaldomą norą tu šiek tiek iš sovietinio žmogaus pasistūmėdavai link skandinavo.”

³² Lith. orig.: “agrikultūrinę Švediją Elande po kelerių metų iškeičiau į kultūrinę Švediją Gotlande.”

³³ Lith. orig.: “nustojau manyti, kad šis pasakų miestas tėra dekoracija, ir pradėjau jame gyventi.”

³⁴ Lith. orig.: “pati artimiausia Lietuvai skandinaviška žemė.”

³⁵ Lith. orig.: “Apskritai Visbis ir visas Gotlandas kadaise buvo nepaprastai svarbi interesų susikirtimo vieta Baltijos jūroje. Užtenka tik įsižiūrėti į jo padėtį žemėlapyje, kaip jis patogiai įsitaisęs pačiame Baltijos jūros viduryje [...]”

³⁶ Lith. orig.: “centrinio Baltijos jūros turgumi.”

³⁷ Lith. orig.: “Tiems, kuriems skrydis į Visbį persėdant Stokholme vis dar yra per brangus, tenka apsukti didžiulį ratą, kol keltas iš Niuneshamno atplukdo į Visbį. Tokia kelionė užtrunka kone dvi paras ir tuomet būnant saloje net sunku patikėti, kad atstumas nuo jos iki Lietuvos – vos keli šimtai kilometrų.”

³⁸ Lith. orig.: “Vargu ar ši žemė gali vėl kada nors tapti centriniu Baltijos jūros turgumi. Šiandien Gotlandas labiau pretenduoja kultūriškai sujungti Baltijos šalis su Skandinavija. Jei jūros turėtų sostines, Baltijos jūros prezidentas turėtų sėdėti Visbyje. Ir mes visais savo laivais, kurių kol kas neturime, plaukiotume į Visbį tvarkyti jūrinių reikalų.”

³⁹ Lith. orig.: “jūriniai reikalai.”

areas than the rest of the region: “we never found our way to that place where all of Scandinavia meets – the sea” (MS I).⁴⁰ If the sea is a defining regional trait, and if travelling by sea has for long been the dominant mode of transport, then the lack of Lithuania’s identification with its coastal areas could explain the “lack of knowledge about Lithuania, or rather lack of interest in Lithuania”⁴¹ in the rest of the region (MS I). In other words, the essays explore the sea as a common denominator, but also a differentiating factor within the region. Yet, the oceanic perspective allows for a rethinking of the Baltic Sea Region as a region after the Iron Curtain was lifted, providing a framework for the essay series’ preoccupation with locating Lithuania on the geopolitical map of post-Iron Curtain Europe.

If the sea is one connecting factor, size, significance and position are others: the essays posit the significance of alliances between small or even “tiny nations”, and peripheral places. As noted at the very beginning of the essay series, the first official recognition of Lithuania’s statehood came from Iceland, the narrator’s “Scandinavian sun” from the first cartographic image, followed by Denmark: “These small nations started to build bridges with the Baltic States” (MS I).⁴² This leads to the narrator’s realization of the significance or usefulness of small nations: The less at stake compared to bigger players, the more room to manoeuvre. The discovery of a potential new alliance of small nations, that is, the realization of similarities beyond the West-East divide, and, very likely, a memory of earlier aspirations to bond,⁴³ is followed by the discovery of the opposite, namely of hierarchies within the group of smaller nations, and of centre-periphery and metropolis-province dichotomies within the region: Sweden “behaved like a bigger political fish”⁴⁴ in the immediate post-Soviet era (MS I), first waiting for the reaction of even bigger players, then turning the Baltic Sea region into their sphere of influence (perhaps compensating for the loss of the influence it possessed in previous centuries). The narrator explores the dynamic between “a newly formed” and an established nation, taking advantage of the open situation to start “a cultural invasion and occupation” (ibid.).⁴⁵

We learn the interpretation of the constellation by the narrator’s German conversation partner: “Those European provinces, she explained, need to realize their ambitions; what better way than to seek out countries that are even more provincial than they are? Provinces that could become cultural centres.” The narrator is shaken: “That was the first time I became aware of Europe as having a centre and periphery. [...] if you please, Sweden, a province, a periphery. It was catastrophic. If Sweden is a province, then what are we?” (ibid.).⁴⁶ A new map emerges from these deliberations, a map in which a region on “the very edge” of continental Europe takes shape: “Scandinavia as a union of northern countries

⁴⁰ Lith. orig.: “į pagrindinę skandinavų susitikimo vietą – jūrą mes taip ir neradome kelio.”

⁴¹ Lith. orig.: “Lietuvos nepažinimas arba, tiksliau, nesidomėjimas Lietuva.”

⁴² Lith. orig.: “šios mažos šalys tarytum pradėjo tiesti geros kaimynystės tiltus į Baltijos valstybes.”

⁴³ This aspiration has been especially voiced by the Lithuanian geographer Kazys Pakštas, who against the background of the Swedish scientist Sten de Geer’s notion of Baltoscandia proposed his idea of the Baltoscandian Confederation, which would culturally and politically unite Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark on the basis of mutual respect and tolerance and help them withstand the influence of big militant nations. He presented his ideas at a number of lectures in different Nordic and Baltic countries in 1934, and they came out as a book in 1942 in the USA (see Pakštas 2005). He was also a proponent of Lithuania becoming a true maritime nation and advocated for the establishment of a Lithuanian colony overseas as a way for the young small nation to survive the geopolitical threats it was facing. Pakštas’s personality and ideas have inspired Ivaškevičius to create the tragi-comical character Pokštas [Joke], who appears in his play *Madagascar* (2004).

⁴⁴ Lith. orig.: “kaip didesnė politikos žuvis.”

⁴⁵ Lith. orig.: “Taigi ko ne kultūrinė kolonija, ko ne meninė invazija ir okupacija?”

⁴⁶ Lith. orig.: “O ką gi jiems daryti, tiems Europos provincialams, samprotavo ji, kaip įgyvendinti savo ambicijas? Štai ir ieško dar provincialesnių kraštų, kuriems galėtų tapti centru. Tuomet pirmą kartą susimąščiau apie Europą kaip apie turinčią centrą ir pakraščius... Ir še kad nori. Švedija – provincija, periferija, pakraštys. Katastrofa. Kas gi tuomet mes?”

or as a Baltic region. A place where Sweden could play first violin” (ibid.).⁴⁷ The new Baltic region looks ambivalent from a Lithuanian point of view: Whilst the narrator perceives the prospect of being a province’s province as disastrous, other alliances and affiliations might form at the fringes of the new region.

Thus, within this newly found context, or union, or Baltic region, the narrator bonds most easily with the Finns. The third time the essays refer to an actual map is when the narrator looks at Finland’s shrinking and expanding territory over the course of the 20th century: “On the map of prewar Europe, Finland looked like a girl with a long puffy skirt, holding both her arms up in the air” (MS III).⁴⁸ In the course of the wars of the 20th century, Finland lost and later tried to regain “the left corner of her skirt [...] and her left arm” (ibid.).⁴⁹ Comparing the political geographies of northeast Europe of the decades before and after the two World Wars, the narrator points at “historical parallels” between Finland and Lithuania, namely histories of domination and cultural assimilation, the shared experience of being squeezed between two powers (Sweden and Russia and Poland and Russia, respectively), and of resistance and the struggle for independence. A Finnish conversation partner draws Europe’s borders according to an understanding that excludes the northern and eastern European peninsulas and peripheral coastal areas: “Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania are not in Europe – no way. Those are the Baltic States. Poland? Maybe. Germany, now that’s Europe, one hundred percent. Even Denmark is Europe. But Sweden? No. Sweden’s Sweden.”⁵⁰ The conversation partner’s own country (Finland) is also placed outside the continent; the narrator notices her wording when she says: “When I travel to Europe...” (ibid.).⁵¹ This passage reiterates the differentiation of the Baltic Sea region according to an urban-rural, metropolis-province, and “a peasant-gentleman dichotomy” (MS III)⁵² exemplified by the Finnish conception of its relationship with Sweden, but where the Lithuanian narrator identifies with the Finnish side, recognizing in this pattern the relationship between Lithuania and Poland. The third essay ends with humorous musings about alcohol consumption as a common regional – that is, “northern” – trait transcending the previously mentioned West-East and class divides. The Lithuanian traveller feels most at home with Finnish drinking companions, feeling a geocultural bond: “I was normal. A normal northerner trying to lighten himself up on the inside on a long, dark northern evening” (MS III).⁵³

3.5 NORTH AND SOUTH, OR BECOMING THE NORTHERNMOST EUROPEAN

From the observations of West-East relationships in Europe and especially the Baltic Sea area in the first three essays, the narrator turns into a traveller and explorer of the North for the remainder of the series. Like the West-East axis, the South-North axis turns out to be concrete and hierarchical, on the one hand, and metaphorical, fluid and dynamic, on the other. The narrator notes a widespread ignorance about the northern parts of their countries among Scandinavians, most of whom live in the more urban south. Notions of scale and scope return, for instance, in the form of perceived distances and a perceived expansion of space (with vast spaces being one of the defining factors of Scandinavia throughout the series). The narrator

⁴⁷ Lith. orig.: “Skandinavija, Šiaurės šalių sąjungą ar Baltijos jūros regioną. Ką nors, kur Švedija galėtų griežti pirmuoju smuiku.”

⁴⁸ Lith. orig.: “Prieškarinė Suomija Europos žemėlapyje atrodė kaip mergina su ilgu, pūstu sijonu, iškėlusi į viršų abi rankas.”

⁴⁹ Lith. orig.: “kairį sijono kampą [...] ir kairę ranką.”

⁵⁰ Lith. orig.: “Estija, Latvija, Lietuva? Ne, tai jokių būdu ne Europa. Tai Baltijos šalis. Lenkija? Galbūt. Vokietija – šimtaprocentinė Europa. Netgi Danija – jau Europa. O Švedija – ne. Švedija yra tiesiog Švedija.”

⁵¹ Lith. orig.: “Kai aš būnu Europoje...”

⁵² Lith. orig.: “valstiečio ir pono priešpriešos principu.”

⁵³ Lith. orig.: “Normalus šiaurietis, tamsiais žiemos vakarais besistengiantis kuo greičiau apšviesti save iš vidaus.”

encounters central places in the North that turn out to be defined more from their outward significance than from their inherent qualities, such as the Arctic Circle (“It’s true that you won’t see the Arctic Circle or touch it, the only thing you can really do with it is take a photo of yourself next to the sign announcing where it is” MS IV)⁵⁴ and the North Cape. The narrator shares that before he “came to Nordkap [sic], [he] spent about a month thinking about what it would be like.”⁵⁵ He admits however that “Nordkap [sic] itself was a disappointment” (MS VI).⁵⁶ In the case of the North Cape, the “main reason to come here” is the “geographic position” (ibid.),⁵⁷ and the Arctic Circle is relevant mainly for cartographic and astronomic reasons (the southernmost latitude where the midnight sun and polar night can be experienced, on the days of the summer and winter solstice respectively). A traveller would pick the destinations because of their significance on a general reference map, imbuing the places with meaning on a mental map, as well.

The actual experience of the two places is that of a void, of a lack of immediate attractiveness: “I felt that there was far too much deception in this Nordkap [sic] set-up” (MS VI).⁵⁸ The narrator performs place-making actions to turn these abstract spaces into experiential places: In the case of the invisible Arctic Circle, he takes a photo to put his body into relation with the place, and, in the case of the North Cape, makes an effort to determine the northernmost spot around the Visitor Centre and “become the northernmost European” (ibid.).⁵⁹ He is on a diplomatic (“I felt I was not just responsible for myself, but for my entire nation” (ibid.))⁶⁰ as well as on a cartographic mission: “I tried to take a look at Europe from above, from the viewpoint of someone standing on the edge, and to consider it awhile. I imagined that I was standing at the bow of this huge continent and that I was sailing it who knows where” (ibid.).⁶¹ In contrast to the beginning of the essay series, where the narrator zooms into a map lying on his desk, he now zooms out of his own position on the North Cape to attain a bird’s-eye view of the European continent that, seen from this angle, takes the form and function of a ship. The impetus of this “imaginative mapping practice” (cf. Crampton & Krygier 2006:12) is not only to make sense of one’s place in relation to the rest of the world, but also to recognize Europe’s inherent dynamism and to express the ambition to change the continent’s direction of travel. As becomes clear again from the North Cape episode, the narrator is on both an individual and a collective mission: locating the Lithuanian, and Lithuania, on the map of Europe, and thereby shuffling the coordinates of the entire continent.

The endeavour to pin down an exact position, location, or direction is however bound to fail. The final essays seem to take great pleasure in demonstrating the irony of the undertaking. The Arctic Circle is not only invisible, but is, in fact, constantly moving. At the North Cape, the visitor is prevented by a fence and closed observation deck from reaching the actual northernmost tip. North and South turn out to be dynamic relational terms rather than designating specific places. As the narrator pushes “further and further into Europe’s north” on the quest for the “true north”, he finds that “the very understanding of ‘north’” changes for him: “Whatever is behind you becomes south” (MS V).⁶²

⁵⁴ Lith. orig.: “poliarinio rato nei pamatysi, nei pačiuipinėsi, gali nebent nusifotografuoti ties jį žyminčia iškaba.”

⁵⁵ Lith. orig.: “Prieš vykdamas į Nordkapą ne vieną savaitę ir mėnesį dėlėjau galvoje būsimą patyrimą.”

⁵⁶ Lith. orig.: “pats Nordkapas mane net šiek tiek nuvylė.”

⁵⁷ Lith. orig.: “dėl jo geografinės padėties [...] visi čia pirmiausia to ir važiuoja.”

⁵⁸ Lith. orig.: “Pernelyg daug klastos man atrodė visame šiame Nordkapu vadinamame įrenginyje.”

⁵⁹ Lith. orig.: “tapti šiauriausiu europiečiu.”

⁶⁰ Lith. orig.: “Pajutau, kad esu atsakingas ne vien už save, bet ir už savo tautą.”

⁶¹ Lith. orig.: “Todėl stengiausi pažvelgti į Europą tarsi iš viršaus, kraštinio žmogaus žvilgsniu ir ją apmąstyti. Paskui įsivaizdavau, kad stoviu šio didelio žemyno pirmagalėje ir plukdau jį nežinia kur.”

⁶² Lith. orig.: “Tačiau vis tolyn stumiantis į Europos šiaurę keičiasi ir pats šiaurės suvokimas. Tai, kas pasilieka už nugaros, bematant tampa pietumis.”

As he gets acquainted with the Sámi people, he realizes that there is a space in Europe that functions with fluid borders: “Sapmi has been around much longer than Scandinavian borders have” (ibid.).⁶³ The meeting with the Sámi is given more textual space in the essays than any other encounter. This can be explained by the fact that the Lithuanian reader in 2004 knows little about the Sámi and their ancestral land, Sápmi. But what is more, the traditional Sámi border-defying migration culture fits well with the ethos of the narrator’s own quest to interrogate and go beyond borders. The episode of his sojourn in Norwegian Finnmark subverts the ethnocentric and monolingual idea of what a Scandinavian country is, while it also ridicules the stereotypical thinking that regards people other than the ‘core’ national population as ‘minor’ and ‘separate’. As a borderless entity and because it is not a nation state, Sápmi is not marked on political maps. Since “the largest Sami populations are in Stockholm and Oslo” (ibid.), it would also be misleading to limit the Sámi to the territory of Sápmi. In the form of anecdotes, the narrator implies that even a linguistic map could not separate the Sami, many of whom are bilingual or do not speak Sámi, from the rest of the Norwegian-speaking population. The narrator’s irony is not only directed against the Norwegians, who know little about the people in the north, but also against his own prejudice that it is possible to define people according to their physiological characteristics and ethnic origin: He sits in a bar and tries to distinguish Sami from non-Sami, but ultimately has to admit to himself that his efforts are in vain.

In accordance with the narrator’s realization of the fluidity and fictionality of cartographic representations, the seventh and last essay ends with a question. Instead of having found out what Scandinavia *is*, the narrator asks “Is that Scandinavia?” (MS VII). In other words, what is left for the narrator to do is to imagine and create his own patchworked map of a changing Europe, and imagine his own position within it. Maps change in the wake of historical events, but also in the wake of shifts in perceptions and perspectives. The mapping process in *My Scandinavia* appears as a relational process: The new Europe and the narrating subject as an inhabitant of this new Europe are created in a reciprocal, dialectic process. *My Scandinavia* is the product of a creative cartographic project, a temporary, fluid, subjective map. At the same time, the mapping project puts the creative cartographer himself and his ambitions centre stage. The series both begins and ends with his ‘mapping gaze’, from bending over the world map as a kid in Molėtai on the first essay’s first page (MS I) to observing a pair of lovers kissing in a car during a blizzard in Visby on the last essay’s last page (MS VII). Both instances are connected by the narrator’s quest for ‘his Scandinavia’. The ‘cartographic gaze’ is potentially powerful in that it creates a representation of the world that will then be disseminated, guided by the figure of a “monarch of all I survey”.⁶⁴ This fantasy of (visual) appropriation contains an earnest aspiration of self-liberation from the limiting legacies of the Iron Curtain, yet it is also an ironic gesture as the narrator turns out to be on an impossible mission. As a boy without the option to travel, he cannot *see*, but must *imagine* Scandinavia. As an adult, although he has travelled all around Scandinavia, it turns out he has still not been able to find it as it is ever-changing and its essence is impossible to pin down. Consequentially, the series concludes with the image of the narrator standing *in* Scandinavia without being able to *see* because he is blinded by a blizzard: “Heaven and earth mingled, waves crashed against the shore, and snow pelted my face” (MS VII).⁶⁵ In contrast to a tidy map, he is unable to discern any visible demarcations. As the narrator

⁶³ Lith. orig.: “Sapmi atsirado daug anksčiau nei valstybių sienos Skandinavijos šiaurėje.”

⁶⁴ The origin of the phrase “I am monarch of all I survey” is believed to be a poem by the English poet William Cowper (1731–1800). More recently, its occurrence as a topos in (colonial) travel literature has been found to indicate fantasies and instances of appropriation; see Mary Louise Pratt’s seminal book *Imperial Eyes* (1992), and Annegret Heitmann’s reading of Karen Blixen’s *Out of Africa* (2010).

⁶⁵ Lith. orig.: “Dangus maišėsi su žeme, bangos lipo į krantą ir sniegas smūgiavo tiesiai į veidą.”

sketches the dissolution of both socio-economic and visual characteristics of the place in the text's last section, he asks "What is Scandinavia then?" and ultimately, "Is that Scandinavia?"⁶⁶ Instead of an answer, what is left is the indefinite character of the narrator's quest, and of the European map.

4. CONQUEROR IN THE MERCEDES OF CULTURE

Scandinavia, which in the narrative 'now' emerges from the narrator's memory and imagination in relation to its specific locations, periods of time, people, ideas and events, becomes part of the story, in which the narrator is also embedded and 'embodied'. The result of this simultaneous 'storying' of place and self can be called a chapter (framed by the earlier discussed temporal and spatial nodes) from the narrator's 'geobiography' – "the expression of the course of life as it relates to the places lived", and involving the "triad of place, memory and self at work" (Karjalainen 2003:87f.). Both the place (Scandinavia in its different manifestations) and the remembering/narrating subject in the essays reveal themselves to be 'at work' in shaping each other, and we have already demonstrated the narrator's performative actions with regard to the region that he thus makes 'his'. The essays also provide an understanding of the ways Scandinavia has been forming and reforming the narrating subject, and reveal for their reader Scandinavia's (in all its heterogeneity) agential powers, which would not, of course, have unfolded without the narrator's predisposition and active response. First, as a visual shape on the world map, Scandinavia triggered the dreamer-boy's imagination. Later it provided an economic 'safety-pillow', as well as an 'ethical compass' to the young East-European student working his summers in Swedish strawberry fields and farms, and embarking on the journey "towards Scandinavia" [literally: towards being a Scandinavian] (MS II).⁶⁷ To the curious young writer, Scandinavia showed examples of a pragmatic attitude towards his craft: Literature is business, where authors strive for institutional support, or otherwise have to find other means to finance it (MS VII). Throughout all the encounters between them, Scandinavia appears to have fostered his curiosity and intellectual thirst: There are numerous mentions of artistic collaborations, meetings, discussions and impressions that took place on the Scandinavian soil, among them beaches and bars, islands and capitals, writer refugia and theatres. Whether through the narrator's talking to people, observing or reading, Scandinavia has provoked him to reflect on differences in the countries' histories and survival patterns, stereotypes, the meaning of place and time and much more, while also teaching him the importance of civic responsibility (MS VII). Scandinavia has enriched his life with numerous artistic and personal contacts, people of different ethnic and national backgrounds, and with different experiences, whom he often calls in the essays by their first names and whose stories he tells.

Scandinavia, the essays suggest, has also been instrumental in fuelling the narrator's own sense of dignity, his artistic ambitions and realisation of the power of culture. Ironically, it is Sweden, the country in respect to which the narrator's relation appears to have been most ambivalent, that seems to have given him the first push to break through the historically contingent political and socio-economic, but also the mental divide of Europe into East and West, which did not disappear with the Iron Curtain:

⁶⁶ Lith. orig.: "Tai kas gi ta Skandinavija?"; "Gal tai ir yra Skandinavija?"

⁶⁷ Lith. orig.: "pasistūmėdavai link skandinavų."

All of us, the Poles and the Lithuanians, dreamed that after ten years we'd return to Oland [sic; correct: Öland] driving white Mercedes. We'd all come back, just to say hello to Ulf, our farmer, and to Josta [sic; correct: Gösta], our friend. And we'd settle in at the beach a kilometre away, where our Catholic gazes would fall on the Swedish girls' naked breasts. We'd rent wooden houses. We'd race sailboats in the bay. And we'd go over to the village in the evenings to buy strawberries. We all dreamed that one day we'd come back, proud of ourselves, we dreamed, that our lives would reach the standard of an average Swedish villager. But I've never been back. I intend to, just in another ten years maybe. (MS II)⁶⁸

The narrator did, of course, come back, although not exclusively to the village where he was picking strawberries as a young student. His coming back, as we have already hinted at, is the very narrative of Scandinavia he weaves in these essays, and we see him there in a much more solid position than driving a white Mercedes. His vehicle is rather one of the "boats we don't yet have" (MS II), but which now has taken its course directly towards the seat of "the President of the Baltic Sea" (ibid.)⁶⁹ – the symbolic virtual capital of the region's culture. Here also Sweden seems to have provided him with a model for penetrating the persistent Iron Curtain divide (we are using the metaphor purposely to accentuate the masculinist character of the narrator's fantasies to explore, conquer and appropriate).⁷⁰ Swedish cultural expansionism, which he has exposed with a tongue in his cheek (MS I), as discussed earlier, becomes his own resolute strategy of cultural 'revenge':

And so therefore the only way to talk about ourselves in the future is to become suddenly wealthy and return a big cultural *punch* to the Scandinavians. To *bury them* in our books, our theatre, our jazz concerts. To *attack them* so intensely that they *wouldn't recover their breath* and would only come to after they knew everything about us. (Ibid.; our emphasis)⁷¹

The narrator's most recent travel, which took him to the Scandinavian North and of which he minutely recounts in the concluding three essays, provided him with ample proof of small countries' and individual talent's cultural potential (hardly, however, possible without special support schemes, and thus, a political will) to subvert or at least challenge the traditional binary of centre and periphery. The most evident example for the narrator is Kristian Smeds, the acclaimed Finnish director who is "able to shock Europe"⁷² and leads the Kajaani City Theatre "right in the middle of nowhere",⁷³ thereby turning the place into a destination for cultural pilgrimage like the one the narrator himself undertakes (MS IV).

The description of the narrator's border-crossing journey to reach Scandinavia's and the Europe's 'northernmost edge', in which he stages himself as a polar explorer, serves as another symbolic expression of the writer's ambition to leave his own footprint on the region, without, however, stopping at its illusionary 'utmost' borders. This North-and-beyond-conquering quest, although performed and represented with comic relief, helps us realize that the ambition was there, right from the opening sentences of the essays. When one returns to them after having read the entire series, one may want to take the explicit

⁶⁸ Lith. orig.: "Visi mes, ir lenkai, ir lietuviai, tuomet svajojome, kaip po dešimties metų grįšime čia su baltais mersedesais. Tiesiog suvažiuosime, kad pasveikintume Ulfą, buvusį savo ūkininką, ir Jostą, buvusį savo draugą. Ir įsikursime štai ten paplūdimyje už kilometro, kur mūsų katalikiškus žvilgsnius prikaustydavo švedės nuogomis krūtinėmis. Išsinuomosime medinį namuką. Raižysime burlentėmis Kalmaro sąsiaurį. Ir eisime vakarais į buvusį savo kaimą nusipirkti braškių. Mes svajojome pasipuikuoti, svajojome, kad kada nors mūsų visų gyvenimai pasivys šį eilinį Švedijos kaimą. Bent jau aš vėliau į jį nebuvau užsukęs. Bet užsuksi. Tik gal dar po dešimties metų."

⁶⁹ Lith. orig.: "savo laivais, kurių kol kas neturime"; "Baltijos jūros prezidentas turėtų sėdėti Visbyje."

⁷⁰ See Pratt (2008) for a discussion of performances of masculinity in (colonial) explorers' travelogues.

⁷¹ Lith. orig.: "Užversti juos knygomis, teatru ir džiaz koncertais. Atakuoti taip intensyviai, kad nespėtų atgauti kvapo ir atsitokėtų tik viską apie mus sužinoję."

⁷² Lith. orig.: "netgi visko mačiusius Europos teatralus šokiruojantys spektakliai."

⁷³ Lith. orig.: "Pačiame Nieko viduryje", literally: "right in the middle of Nothing."

declarations of love for Scandinavia one finds there with a certain grain of salt. Because in the slightly comical, domesticated image of the map of Scandinavia as a decorated Christmas Apple Tree, the gesture of adding names and places may evoke an association with a military general who, by placing and moving tokens on a map, marks the territory that he plans to conquer or already has. As a piece of geobiography, *My Scandinavia* is also a story of man-making, in which place and man interact, but in which the protagonist claims for himself, albeit not without self-irony, the role of an ambitious conquering 'newcomer'.

If we go beyond the narrative space of Ivaškevičius's essays and refer to the author's own career, we will find numerous evidence of the realization of this ambition to take Scandinavia into his cultural 'possession' and claim his right to be there. These projects have earned him an international name, though some have been more successful than others. *My Scandinavia* is proof of the author's international recognition – as the essays were written and the journey to the Scandinavian North undertaken with funding from "some Finnish theatre folks" who chose him as a voice that could show them Scandinavia from "an East European's perspective" (see Domeikaitė 2013). Another product of the same journey to the Scandinavian North, which seems to have intensified Ivaškevičius's cooperation with Finnish artists, was his film *Santa* (2016), a romantic melodrama, filmed in Lapland, funded by the Finnish Film Foundation and starring the Finnish actor Tommi Korpela. His greatest international fame as a playwright came with the theatre play *Close City*, in which Scandinavia also serves as a setting and which is explored in detail in this special issue by our colleague Clemens Räthel.

Ivaškevičius's creative geography is, of course, not limited to Scandinavia. His work, as mentioned earlier, can be set in invented lands resembling both East and West, as he addresses diverse international audiences. This author has undoubtedly secured himself a position as one of the best (or the best) internationally known contemporary Lithuanian artists, whose plays are successfully "exported abroad" (Steiblytė 2018:24). During the time when this paper was written – thirty years after Ivaškevičius's initiation into Scandinavian agriculture – his play about the war in Ukraine, *The Dawn of the Gods*, specially commissioned by Avignon theatre festival, had its premier (see Iva Company 2022),⁷⁴ and the Timișoara National Theatre was rehearsing his play *Expulsion* in preparation for the programme of "Timișoara 2023 European Capital of Culture".⁷⁵ This is surely proof that the narrator's ambition in the essays *My Scandinavia* to play the conqueror of lands was not without grounds.

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⁷⁴ The play was subsequently performed at The Old Theatre of Vilnius (former Russian Drama Theatre), however, it was soon stopped by the playwright himself due to his dissatisfaction with the instructor Vladimir Gurfinkel's solution (Joteikaitė 2022).

⁷⁵ See Brezeanu (2023). As another example of the author's recent international output, one can also mention the essay "Dein Mann ist tot" published in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Ivaškevičius 2023).

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