

Vilnius and the Problem of Rococo, 1803–1830*

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Abstract. Post-partition Vilnius has often been described as the birthplace of Romanticism (or the city of late Enlightenment). This article focuses not on Classicism or Romanticism, but on the local Rococo culture that flourished between 1803 and 1830. The term ‘Rococo’ encompasses a certain aesthetic sensibility that became popular in the *salons mondains* of the long 18th century. The preference for the small, the irregular, the intriguing and the enchanting can be observed not only in the metropolises such as Paris, Rome, London or Warsaw, but also in Vilnius at the beginning of the 19th century. The author of the article presents the local Rococo culture on the basis of three examples: the periodical *Tygodnik Wileński* (1804), selected book publications from the early 1820s, and the activities of youth societies (Philomaths, Filarets, and ‘promieniści’ [‘Radiants’]).

Keywords: Rococo, Vilnius, Enlightenment, Romanticism, Philomaths, salon poetry.

Vilnius ir Rokoko problema, 1803–1830 m.

Santrauka. XIX amžiaus pradžios Vilnius dažnai vadinamas Romantizmo gimine (arba vėlyvosios Apšvietos miestu). Šiame straipsnyje dėmesys skiriamas ne klasicizmui ar romantizmui, bet vietinei rokoko kultūrai, klestėjusiai nuo 1803 iki 1830 metų. „Rokoko“ reiškiniui būdingas tam tikras estetiškas jautrumas, išpopuliarėjęs XVIII amžiaus salonuose. Pirmenybės teikimas mažiems, neįprastiems, intriguojantiems, žavingiems dalykams pastebimas ne tik tokiuose didmiesčiuose, kaip Paryžius, Roma, Londonas ar Varšuva, bet ir XIX amžiaus pradžios Vilniuje. Straipsnio autorius vietinę rokoko kultūrą pristato pasitelkdamas tris pavyzdžius: periodinį leidinį „Tygodnik Wileński“ (1804 m.), atskiras 1820-ųjų metų pradžios knygas ir jaunimo draugijų, tokių kaip filomatai, filaretai ir „spindulingieji“, veiklą.

Raktiniai žodžiai: Rokoko, Vilnius, Apšvieta, Romantizmas, filomatai, salonų poezija.

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Cultural modernization of Vilnius in the early 19th century

In a book dedicated to the educational institutions of Vilnius between 1803 and 1832, Daniel Beauvois documented the development of the city, which pulsated with scientific and literary life as the “cultural capital of the Russian partition” (Beauvois, 2010). This favourable conjuncture was linked to the modernization efforts of Tsar Alexander I, which included the cultural sphere. Scholars, students, artists and travelers flocked to the city, which had its university restored in 1803. Social life in salons and cafés gained new momentum. Publishing initiatives flourished (Kowal, 2017; Skwarczyński, 1962; H. Czernianin, W. Czernianin, 2010). In the first three decades of the 19th century, the city underwent an intensive process of cultural modernization, which was halted after the fall of the November Uprising. Until that dramatic moment, Vilnius, “strengthened in its role as an administrative center,” remained, as the French scholar pointed out, “the soul of Lithuania” (Beauvois, 2010, p. 28; Witkowska, 1998, pp. 26–33).

The Vilnius of this period, about which Beauvois wrote as a social historian, has long been of interest to literary historians because of the works of Adam Mickiewicz and his friends from the Philomath Society (Masiūnas, 2003, pp. 260–323; Skuodis, 2003). The city as the cradle of Romanticism was addressed by Mościcki (1908), Witkowska (1998, 1st ed. 1962), Zawadzka (1996), Kalėda (2001), Ławski (2005), Griškaitė (2022), Špeičytė (2022), among others. Quite a few works have been written about the origins of Romanticism in Vilnius – and it would seem that now, when it comes to the literary movements in Vilnius, we are doomed to repeat the opinion about the circulation of old (Classical) and new (Romantic) aesthetics (*Apšvietos ir romantizmo kryžkelėse*, 2008). I argue that, contrary to appearances, the case is not closed, and that it is still possible to say something about the literary currents in Vilnius in the post-partition era. Rococo culture flourished vividly and remained strong for more than a quarter of a century, 1803–1830. In this article, I will present three examples of Rococo culture in Vilnius and try to explain why it developed during this period. First, however, I will define what I mean by literary Rococo, and why I am writing about Rococo culture, and not simply about Rococo works (Stankiewicz-Kopeć, 2009).

What is literary rococo?

The tradition of research on literary Rococo is about a century old. During the interwar period, attempts were made to apply to literature a term that had previously been used in relation to the art and manners of the first half of the 18th century, especially in France (Gurlitt, 1989; Schmarsow, 1897; Neubert, 1922; Klemperer, 1925; Ermatinger, 1926). In the following decades, the research gradually expanded to include an increasingly broader range of issues. Referring to the studies of Laufer (1963), Hatzfeld (1972), Poe (1987), Brady (1992), Binni (2016), Weisgerber (1991, 2001), Gladu (2019), among others, – it can be said that:

- 1) In Rococo, small things were preferred. Rococo authors wrote texts about beautiful details; they practiced small genres. Writers experimented also with larger genres, but they fragmented them. The dominant themes were those of small pleasures, the so-called “sweetness of life”, related to fun and recreation in an intimate setting.
- 2) Rococo artists valued the strange and the irregular. Unknown imaginary worlds were explored (e.g. the Orient, folk tales, mythology), a fairy-tale landscape was introduced that gave the impression of being “somewhere else”. The “unknown world” could be a pastoral retreat, an ornate boudoir or a corner of a park.
- 3) In Rococo works, an excess of ornamentation was introduced, which put the listener or reader in a state of pleasant confusion. An ornamentation had a disorienting effect on the recipient, who was not interested in seeking the main idea of the work, as captivating details, *beaux détails*, absorbed his or her attention¹.

At the end of the reign of Louis XIV, during the Regency and the reign of Louis XV, the *grand goût* (Classicism and Baroque), which had emerged in the previous century, was losing popularity, while the *petit goût* was gaining ground among the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie (von Boehn, 1921). While *grand goût* was linked to a politically engaged and public art programme, *petit goût* was associated with privatised art, operating on a smaller scale (salons, boudoirs) and in smaller groups of people (Mauzi, 1960). Poems about love or friendship games stimulated the wit and imagination of the salon society, providing the impetus for conversation (*causerie*), social games (*jeux de société*) and entertainment (dancing). In the *salons mondains*, the moral norm was discreetly violated, while at the same time ensuring that the good social taste was not offended. *Petit goût* also implied *bon goût* (Bray, 1966, pp. 137–138).

Not only Paris

The reshaping of the social system and reconfiguration of the elite promoted the liberalization of morals and aesthetics. Social mobility was a prerequisite for the emergence of the culture later called Rococo: constant movement between the urban centers, comings and goings. This movement involved aristocrats and bourgeois, men and women, natives and newcomers (Hauser, 1958, p. 31). Rococo culture was not an exclusively Parisian discovery. Analogous phenomena were recognized in other European metropolises, and rococo tendencies were identified in various national literatures. In 1690 Accademia dell’Arcadia was founded in Rome; this institution initiated the *arcadismo* movement, associated with the aesthetics of Rococo in the works of Paolo Rolli and Pietro Metastasio, among others (Chłędowski 1959, 1st ed. 1914). Among the Arcadians, the campaign for *buon gusto* was conducted in the name of the principles of delicacy and good manners, in which women played a key role (Graziosi, 1991). London of the early 18th century is also the place where Rococo literature developed, as evidenced by the work of Alexander

¹ See also: Schönberger and Soehner (1959); Minguet (1966); Anger, *Literariches Rokoko* (1962); I. Magnani Campanacci (1986); Thomas (2004); Sengle (2005); Magnusson (2017).

Pope (*The Rape of the Lock*) or John Gay (*The Fan* [Brie, 1927]). In the first half of the 18th century German Rococo begins to blossom, thanks to the members of the Hallescher Dichterkreis (Johann Peter Uz, Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim, Johann Nikolaus Götz). Rococo culture was also emerging in other parts of Europe (Hatzfeld, 1972).

Although *petit goût* appeared in the territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as early as the 1690s and returned in the first half of the 18th century, these were isolated instances of the penetration of Western aesthetic trends into aristocratic residences (Prejs, 1989). On a larger scale, Rococo culture emerged in Warsaw in the 1760s, with the accession of Stanisław August to the throne (1764). “The social life of the Enlightenment was characterized by ‘epicureanism and feminism’. This means social freedom, directness, and a significant role of women (...)”, as stated Maciejewski (1977, p. 39). One could observe the phenomenon of the mixing of social classes and genders, as well as processes of emancipation and social integration (Libera, 1971; Kostkiewiczowa, 1975). I want to point out – and this is the main issue of this article – that after the third partition of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1795), we can observe the Rococo culture in Vilnius². This phenomenon was integrally related to what I emphasized at the beginning: cultural modernization or, as Witkowska called it – “late Enlightenment” (1998, p. 32), including the development of social life, the publishing industry, social mobility, “comings and goings”. The beginning of the 19th century in the city was a time of flourishing *salons mondain*, a period of formation of groups and cliques. In conversations and social gatherings, topics related to the principle of “sweetness of life” became popular: rest, amusements, sensual love, and affairs, which were reflected in the periodical press, booklets, and books. In the following considerations, I will be interested in the manifestations of Rococo culture in Vilnius, and its inhabitants who lived – to use the expression of Stanisław Morawski, the author of *Kilka lat młodości mojej w Wilnie 1818–1825* – “in a purely Cytherean spirit and style” (“W czysto cyteryjskim duchu i stylu”):

[...] *duch unoszący się nad ówczesnym towarzystwem był duchem galanterii i kokieterii, był ostatnim już wprawdzie, ale najsilniejszym odbłaskiem salonowego ducha XVIII wieku. [...] Stąd się rodziły mimowolnie male intryżki, w największej liczbie razy najzupełniej niewinne, dziecinne, były to tylko miłości, a nie miłość* (Morawski, 1959, pp. 59, 381–382)³.

Based on the existing literary testimonies, I will try to show Vilnius’ post-partition Rococo through three examples. The first is the press, the second – book publishing, and the third – youth societies.

² A significant feature of Vilnius in the era of Stanisław August is the combination of Baroque and Classical tendencies (Ślusarska, 1998).

³ “[...] the spirit hovering over the society of the time was the spirit of gallantry and coquetry, it was admittedly the last, but the strongest reflection of the salon spirit of the 18th century. [...] Thus, small intrigues were involuntarily born, most often completely innocent, childish, merely affairs of the heart, not true love”.

Vilnius Rococo practices.

Example 1: press („Tygodnik Wileński“, 1804)

“Tygodnik Wileński”, founded and published in 1804 by students and professors of Vilnius University, presents itself quite specifically to the literary historian and historian of the periodical press: articles were scarce in the “Tygodnik Wileński” (Skwarczyński, 1958). In all twelve issues between March 12 and July 9, only a few articles were published in total. Most of the space was devoted to so-called *petits vers*, pastorals, anecdotes, and maxims. The most common theme of these small forms, both poetic and prosaic, was lightly treated love. Many texts contain humorous ridicule of marriage and numerous descriptions of extramarital love:

Prawdziwą miłość przywrócić można do upiórów, wszyscy o nich mówią, a nich ich jednakże nie widział (Tygodnik Wileński, 4, p. 56)⁴.

Stara pewna kokietka wpadłszy w niebeśpieszną [!] chorobę, posłała po spowiednika, ten jej radził zapomnieć o życiu, a myśleć [!] o miłości Boga. „Niestety! odpowiedziała, w takich latach czy też można myśleć o nowej miłości?” (Tygodnik Wileński, 7, pp. 104–105)⁵.

Księżna Majeny pytała się raz kilku świątłych ludzi, którzy się zeszli do jej domu: jaka by była różnica między nią a zegarem? [...] Kiedy wszedł Fontenel, księżna zadała mu toż samo pytanie, on w ten moment tak jej rzecze: „zegar wskazuje godziny, a Wasza Księżęcia mość każesz o nich zapominać” (Tygodnik Wileński, 2, p. 29)⁶

*Napominając pleban źle żyjącą wdowę,
Do nieboszczyka męża zwrócił swoją mowę,
I rzekł: „po jego cnotach spodziewać się trzeba,
Że prosto z tego świata pójść musiał do nieba;
A ty żono! gdzie pójdziesz?” Ta mu na to rzekła:
„Kiedy mąż w niebie, to ja wolę iść do piekła”⁷
(Tygodnik Wileński, 8, pp. 98–99).*

The theme of the *amourettes* did not result from the individual preferences of the editors. As memoirs of the period attest, it circulated in salon conversations and amusements. Flirtation and romance were considered a favorite pastime of the *bonne compagnie*. “The

⁴ “True love can be compared to ghosts; everyone talks about them, but no one has seen them.”

⁵ “A certain old coquette, having fallen into a languid illness, sent for a confessor. He advised her to forget about worldly affairs and concentrate on the love of God. ‘Alas!’ she replied, ‘at my age, can one think of new love?’”

⁶ “Once, Princess of Maiena asked some intelligent people who had gathered in her house: ‘What would be the difference between me and a clock?’ When Fontenel entered, the princess asked him the same question, and he replied at that moment: ‘The clock shows the hours, but your grace commands us to forget them.’”

⁷ “When the priest was admonishing a widow who was living badly, / He turned to her dead husband and said, ‘With his virtues, we must expect/ That he went straight from this world to heaven; / But you, wife, where will you go?’ She replied, / ‘If my husband is in heaven, I would rather go to hell.’”

spirit of gallantry and coquetry” prevailed in Vilnius, which in the early 19th century became a city of entertainment and love, a new Cythera (Ireland 2006). The publications of the “Tygodnik Wileński” were connected with the behavior of the inhabitants of this Cythera, the new island of love.

The pages of “Tygodnik Wileński” were dominated by fashionable French, Italian and English authors, popular in the circles of the cosmopolitan society of the 18th century (e.g. Alexis Piron, Claude Joseph Dorat, Alexander Pope, Pietro Metastasio). In the poems, as well as in the maxims and anecdotes, the Cupid motifs, complaints about indifferent girls, themes of love caresses, as well as praise of carefree life recur:

*Piękność mnie często zaślepia,
Lecz wstyd do miłości skłania;
Tej się chronię, co zaczepia,
Za tą [!] ginę, co się wzbrania*⁸.
(Tygodnik Wileński, 11, p. 164–165)

*O! Wy, pod których kajdany
Jęczy nieszczęśliwych tyle;
Śpijcie okrutne tyrany,
Dajcie światu spocząć chwilę*⁹
(Tygodnik Wileński, 12, p. 168)

In addition to *amourettes*, the authors and editors of “Tygodnik Wileński” were interested in recreation and art. The profile of the magazine, which recalled the “sweetness of life” in various ways, corresponded to the customs and communication practices of the Vilnius elite, which took on the cosmopolitan tone of the salons of European metropolises. Although we do not have direct examples of the use of these particular works in a specific situation, we can state that the *petits vers* published in “Tygodnik Wileński” were suitable for verbal games and social amusements. Anecdotes could be retold in the salon, and compliments were useful for engaging in flirting. Seemingly morally neutral pieces – such as descriptions of streams or groves – alluded either allusively or directly to love rituals taking place in secret. “Tygodnik Wileński” provided readers with an arsenal of tools that could be used in *jeux de société*.

The journal is also notable for its physical characteristics: it was published in a small format, and the content of each issue fit on sixteen pages. It could be thought of as a prop that could be discreetly carried from place to place. Friends could enjoy reading the texts as part of a shared reading experience. The trend of carrying magazines in pockets continued into the early 19th century. In the third part of Adam Mickiewicz’s *Dziady* (p. 200),

⁸ “Beauty often blinds me, / But shame inclines me to love; / I’m avoiding the girl who accosts me, / I perish for the one who resists.”

⁹ “Oh! You, under whose chains/ So many wretched ones moan; / Sleep, cruel tyrants, / Give the world a moment of rest!”

one of the characters from the Warsaw salon carried “cover” of his own poems under tailcoat. (“Zwykłeś z sobą nosić./ Masz przy sobie pod frakiem – a – widzę okładki”)¹⁰. Litwinowicz-Drożdźiel, referring to Mickiewicz’s youthful texts, wrote of “practices of live speech” that echo in “scripts-partitures” (2016, p. 163). The small books – copies of the first volume of Mickiewicz’s *Poezyje* were 12.5 x 10.0 x 1.1 cm – serve as an object of communal entertainment. These publications encoded a social ritual, the opposite of what we now associate with quiet, solitary reading. “Tygodnik Wileński” can be seen as a script-partiture that could be performed in front of a group of people.

Vilnius Rococo practices.

Example 2: book publications

While “Tygodnik Wileński” of 1804 contained mainly translations of foreign works, other journals – appearing after 1815 – published translations together with an increasing number of original Rococo poems. It became fashionable among representatives of cultural and social circles to create their own “literary gems”.¹¹ Small poems also found their way into albums (e.g., those of Salomea Słowacka-Becu or Ludwika Kostrowicka). “Toys in verses” became so popular that in the early 1820s, they appeared in separate book publications or constituted an important part of poetic volumes published by local publishers. In 1823, the diocesan printing house published Józef Massalski’s poem *Karnawał*, which depicts social games:

*Tysiącami piękności zakwitnęły sale;
Z miast sąsiednich zwabiona młodź zabawy chciwa
I których na wieś lato rozkoszniejsze wzywa,
Gdy z niej wdzięki wystraszył zimy wzrok ponury
Zwiększać radość przybyli w Gedymina mury
[...]*¹².

Kasyno wileńskie by Antoni Edward Odyniec, published in 1823, and then included in the second volume of this author’s *Poezje* (1826), was maintained in a similar spirit – enchantment with fun, dances, masquerades and flirtations:

¹⁰ “You used to have it with you. / You have it with you under your coat – ah – I see the covers”.

¹¹ Pietraszko (1966, p. 344). For example, in 1816 alone, “Tygodnik Wileński” published, among others, the following Rococo poems: K. Piotrowski, *Kupido Zdrajca* (no 13, pp. 219–220); S. Konopacki, *Do Józefy* (no 14, p. 236); I.P. Legatowicz (no 47, p. 348); A. Turski, *Do Róży* (no 50, p. 396); I.P. Legatowicz, *Anakreontyk do Marysi* (no 55, p. 29); P. Sosnowski, *Żal Filona na Filidę* (no 64, p. 275). Later, also in “Tygodnik Wileński” (1818, no. 125, pp. 254–256), Mickiewicz’s *Zima miejska* was published. I analyze this poem as an example of Rococo aesthetics in the book *Blednący atrament* (Jędrzejewski, 2022, pp. 296–307).

¹² “Thousands of beauties blossomed in the halls; / lured by neighboring towns, the youth came eager for celebration; / and those whose country summer calls for more delight, / when winter’s gloomy gaze has fled its charms. / They came to Gedymin’s walls to increase their joy. [...] Here, evening turns day into fire, harmonious choirs’ sounds / Awakening the desire to display grace in dance, / Raise circles intertwined by graceful youth, / Wander in passionate variations skillfully learned. / Like light thoughts of maidens, they flicker before the eyes [...]”.

[...] *Chociażby prawdą było, co nam twoja plecie*
Łechcąc wschodnie zmysły księga, Mahomecie!
Wolałbym przed ostatnią żywota godziną,
*Niż wiecznie w twoim raju, raz być na Kasyno*¹³.

In 1828 and 1829, Massalski, who was, by the way, the tutor of Juliusz Słowacki, published two volumes of poetry (volume I in Neuman's printing house, volume II in Marcinowski's printing house), which were filled with frivolous love poems, anacreontic idylls, and verses dedicated to beautiful details (such as the poem about the death of Zosia's canary and the little poem about Bufcio, "the Adonis of the dog breed" ["adonisek piesków rodu"]). There are love triolets and playful erotic scenes:

Pięć dni Elizę katar tyrani
I dłuższą napaścią lęka.
Katar w zapusty! tak młodej Pani!
Uważcie jaka to męka (I, p. 140)¹⁴.

Rococo poems were written by Ignacy Kułakowski, the author of *Zabawki wierszem*, published by Marcinowski's printing house in 1824:

Tu się goździk z trawką splata,
Brzoza spuszcza warkocz ciemny,
Tu, Belciu, przed skwarem lata
Znajdziemy chłodnik przyjemny (p. 15)¹⁵.

The poetry of Julian Korsak (1830), a friend of Odyńiec and Mickiewicz, although published in Petersburg, was also influenced by the Cytherean games and amusements in Vilnius:

Tum pięknych dziewic ujrzyś w Mendoga krainie,
Gdy na wiosnę ustroją powilejskie błonie;
Wdzięczne są, jak na młodej rosnące darninie
*Kwiaty, gdy swe w powietrzu rozlewają wonie*¹⁶ (p. 140).

Rococo works by Antoni Edward Odyńiec, Józef Massalski, Ignacy Kułakowski, and Julian Korsak capture the atmosphere of meetings and parties in Vilnius in the 1820s. As the memoirs of Morawski, Gabriela Puzynina, and contemporary youth attest, many such social gatherings were organized at that time (Morawski, 1959; Puzynina, 1928,

¹³ "[...] Even if what your enchanting tales / Tickling the senses like an Eastern book, Mahomet, / Were true, I would prefer to spend the last hour of life / Rather than being forever in your paradise, to experience once the joy of a casino".

¹⁴ "For five days, Eliza suffers from the tyranny of a cold, / And she fears a longer attack. / A cold during the carnival! Oh, for a young lady! / You can see what anguish it brings".

¹⁵ "Here, carnation intertwines with grass, / The birch releases its dark braid, / Here, my dear Belcia, during the scorching summer, / We will find a pleasant corner".

¹⁶ "In Mendog's land, you will see a crowd of beautiful maidens / When they adorn the meadows over the Neris river in Spring; / They are as grateful as flowers growing in the young grass, / When they spread their fragrance in the air".

Z filareckiego świata, 1924). In the poems of the aforementioned poets, there were many references to specific situations, people, and places. These texts emphasized the pleasures of being in good company. Events such as dancing or conversation were described in delightful colors, giving them a somewhat fairy-tale significance.

Mickiewicz's *Ballady i romanse*, published by Zawadzki in 1822, are not devoid of Rococo accents. In the ballad *To lubię*, protagonist, who does not believe in magic, experiences a vehicle breakdown during a night journey to Ruta: "Zostać na polu samemu i w nocy? To lubię, rzekłem, to lubię"¹⁷. Upon an involuntary incantation, a terrifying figure appears. It seems that the protagonist will face the consequences of his disbelief. "The dreadful specter" narrates the story of its callous heart. At the end of the tale, a rooster crows, and the nightmare disappears:

*Skinęła tylko, widać radość z oczek,
Mieni się w parę cieniuchną,
Ginie, jak ginie bladawy obloczek,
Kiedy zefiry nań dmuchną*¹⁸.

Let's pay attention to the vocabulary used in this fragment. "The joy of eyes" ("Radość z oczek" turns into "thin vapor" ("w parę cieniuchną"). The spell broke, the spirit vanished. The "Dreadful specter" was not a real scare but an illusion. The two final stanzas of the ballad *To lubię* suggest that the hero simply fell asleep on his way to Ruta, and the crowing of a rooster woke him up. Mickiewicz's balladry in this poem have a character of love and friendly play, as the poet admits in the dedicatory verse *Do przyjaciół. Posyłając im balladę „To lubię”* (pp. 84–85):

*Czasem, gdy słodkie złudzi zachwycenie,
Kochankę widzę lub braci;
Zrywam się, patrząc: aż tylko po ścienie
Biega cień własnej postaci.
[...]
Za to więc w Rucie, pod północną chwilę,
Kiedy się wszyscy spać kładą,
Ja na dobranoc żegnając Marylę,
Taką straszylem balladą*¹⁹.

Friends and lovers are told horror stories to arouse their curiosity, to "enchant" them, to make them feel, for a few moments, as if they were in another reality, in a land where it is frightening, but at the same time, no one is really threatened by anything. These texts contain what I would call the aesthetic anesthesia characteristic of the Rococo: the poet

¹⁷ "Stay in the field alone and at night? That's what I like, I said, that's what I like".

¹⁸ "She just nodded, joy visible in her eyes, / Turns into thin vapor, / She is vanishing, just like a pale cloud, / When the zephyrs blow upon it".

¹⁹ "At times, when sweet delusion enchants me, / I see my beloved one or my brothers; / I startle, I look: only a shadow of my own figure / Runs along the wall. / [...] / So, in Ruta, at the midnight hour, / When everyone goes to sleep, / When I said goodbye to Maryla for the night, / I frightened her with a ballad".

recounted shocking events, but allowed the reader not to care too much about the horrors and miseries. They are, after all, written on a piece of paper and enclosed in a book – it is good to be reminded now and then that reality looks different from the ballad world.

Vilnius Rococo practices.

Example 3: youth associations

In the previous two sections, I presented examples of poems about amourettes. Rococo poems about love affairs were also written by the Philomaths and Philarets:

*A cała nasza słodycz, ulga cała nasza,
Że sie ukradkiem coś pomarzy trochę,
Czasem napiszę trochę,
Lub się osłodzi w rozmowach Tomasza.
A broń Bożeż się wspomni oczko dziewicy,
Broń Boże jej usteczka lub talię gładką [...] ²⁰.
(Chodźko, *Poezya filomatów*, I, p. 5)*

*Kto w miłosnych miłostkach, kto Janowi rówien?
Kto takie listki spuszczać może do B[ekiu]wien?
Kto przybrawszy zefirku i serce, i postać,
Chciał miłości caulunka A[leksan]dry dostać?
(Zan, *Poezya filomatów*, II, p. 125)*

The correspondence and memoirs of Vilnius students provide numerous examples of Rococo manners in the courtship of ladies. An excerpt from Otto Ślizień's memoirs testifies to the vitality of masquerades, the "courts" and "tribunals of love", social games popular in the 18th century:

Niektórzy filareci dla krotofili mieli swoje śliczne, młode królowe, każda z nich miała swój dwór z kilku dworzan złożony; do królowej należało nadawać (według swego widzimisie) swym dworzanom tytuły; byli sekretarze, śpiewacy, pазie, czytelnicy, radcy, przyjaciele, powiernicy itp. Ja u mojej królowej Z. Sz. byłem paziem (Z filareckiego świata, 1924, pp. 123–124) ²¹.

It was not only in their relationships with women that the Philomaths displayed a Rococo sensibility. Even in the poems they wrote within their own association, one can see the playfulness of the joint enchantment of the social refuge. The works depicting the Philomathic festivities – name day celebrations, welcome or farewell gatherings – are full

²⁰ "And all our sweetness, all our relief, / Comes from secretly daydreaming a little, / Sometimes we write a little, / Or sweeten our conversations with Tomasz, / But God forbid to remember the maiden's eye, / God forbid her lips or her smooth neckline [...]"

²¹ "Some Philarets had their lovely young queens for the fun, each of whom had her own court of several courtiers. The queen had the privilege of bestowing titles on her courtiers according to her whims. There were secretaries, singers, pages, readers, advisors, friends, confidants, etc. I was one of my queen's pages, Mrs. Z. Sz."

of Rococo motifs (pastoral and mythological) and anacreontic practices (dancing, singing, feasting). In this case, the object of adoration is not ladies or the salon *la bonne compagnie*, but a group of friends who are playfully admired. The students of Vilnius University are portrayed in these poems as extraordinary people, thanks to whom common reality turns into a fairy tale. The Vilnians depicted themselves as sensitive, tender, and receptive to beauty. In Philomaths' poetry, the motif of the poet surrounded by muses often recurred, signifying both an affinity for art and sensual love. The young poets reminded each other of the sweetness of life, drawn from shared games, activities, and leisure. During these celebrations, the Philomath Society was transformed into a group of *bon vivants*, seekers of earthly happiness. The texts prepared for the festivities (*Adamowe, Tomaszowe, Onufrowe*, etc.) praised the charm of secluded corners where the world takes on soft colors and where one can enjoy creating a "happy island" in the midst of a sea of prosaic reality:

*O, ileż słodkich pamiątek
W czasu przeszłego przegłędzie!
Żaden już świata zakątek
Milszy nam nad ten nie będzie!*²²
(Czeczot, *Poezya filomatów*, I, p. 93)

Archival records of the circumstances of the organization of these feasts testify to the Rococo setting of these events: "Czerwca 24 n. s. 1819 roku w Górach, majątku jenerała Paca. Za zbliżeniem się do gaika brzoźowego, gdzie stół zielony liściem był zasłany, zaczął czytać wiersze Jan [...]" (*Poezya filomatów*, II, p. 107)²³. The entertainments of the society "promieniści" ("radiant ones") had a similarly elaborate setting:

Zabawa ta dnia 6 maja 1820 roku odbyła się na Popławach i na Rosie. Przyjemny wzgórek, oblany z jednej strony strumieniem, a z drugiej Wilenką, (...) był miejscem rozpoczęcia się, a piękny wzgórek, zieloną murawą i drzewami porośły, obok wiejskiej lepianki dokończenia zabawy.

Rozproszone hufce modzieży snuły się tu i ówdzie po wzgórkach, okrytych zielonością i kwiatami [...].

I Mówca powiedział wiersze i nastąpiło pocałowanie na znak przyjaźni, i Michał czytał wierszel, i Teodor Szeroki czytał wiersze, i wszyscy ruszyli się na mleko, bo już się jeść chciało, i wesołość na wszystkich okazała się twarzach (*Poezya filomatów*, II, p. 294)²⁴.

²² "Oh, how many sweet memories / We will review from the past time! / No corner of the world will ever / Be dearer to us than this one!"

²³ "June 24th (of the new calendar) 1819 in Góry, the estate of general Pac. Approaching a birch grove, where a green table was covered with leaves, Jan [...] began to read his poems".

²⁴ "This celebration, on May 6, 1820, took place at Popławy and Rosa. A pleasant hill, flanked on one side by a stream and on the other by the Vilnelė River, [...], was the place where the party began, and a beautiful hill, covered with green lawn and trees, next to a country cottage, was the place where the party ended. / Scattered groups of young people were walking here and there on the hills covered with greenery and flowers [...]. / And the speaker read the verses, and there was a kiss as a sign of friendship, and Michael read the verses, and Teodor Szeroki read the verses, and everyone went to the milk, because everyone was already thirsty, and happiness appeared on all the faces".

In the verses of Tomasz Zan prepared for the May Day celebration of the ‘radiants’, one can read:

*Plyniemy po rozkosznym gładkich wód błękitach
Do wysp, gdzie z twardym dębem zielony laur kwicie,
Gdzie zawsze oddech świeży i pogody letnie,
Gdzie z brzękiem zdrojów, ptaszka mieszają się fletnie,
[...]²⁵ (Zan, *Poezya filomatów*, I, p. 309)*

The customs of the Philomaths, Philarets, radiants may seem strange. Shepherd’s festivities and *fêtes champêtres* may not fit well with the traditional image of Vilnius students as “pedants,” young scholars, who uphold the civic ethos of “homeland, knowledge, and virtue” (Boguševičius, 2018, pp. 157–178; Aleksandravičius, 2016, pp. 87–104). Drinking milk, declamation, dancing, and kissing were not eccentric, however, when placed in the broader context of local Rococo culture. Matters of the heart, tender gestures, delicacy, sensitivity to poetry and art, and playful participation in masquerades were all in harmony with the norms of social life at the time. Rococo sensibilities and beliefs extended beyond the salons and infiltrated student organizations. Courtesy and gallantry were applied not only to relations between men and women, but to social life in general, as demanded by the “spirit of gallantry and coquetry”.

Conclusion

I do not claim that the literary and social culture of Vilnius in 1803–1830 was entirely Rococo. In fact, there were many texts, manners, and practices in both literary and social life that did not fit the sensibility of *salons mondains*. Rather, it is important to note that Rococo was a long-lasting and internally complex phenomenon, situated within the broader post-partition cultural landscape. However, I argue that the “strongest reflection of the salon spirit of the 18th century” should not be overlooked or omitted. In Vilnius, the period 1803–1830 was not only a time of confrontation between Classicism and Romanticism. It was also an important episode in the history of European Rococo. This city, along with Paris, London, Rome, Venice and Vienna, became one of the Cytheras, island of love, that emerged at the very end of the so-called long 18th century.

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²⁵ “We sail on the blissful smooth blue waters / To the islands where the green laurel blooms with sturdy oaks, / Where there’s always a fresh breath and summer serenity, / Where the sound of springs blends with the birds’ flutes [...]”.

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