

“Tearing Apart the Bear” and British Military Involvement in the Construction of
Modern Latvia: A History Untold

by

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BASc, Waterloo, 1975
BA, Victoria, 2008

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Abstract

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Despite significant evidence to the contrary in the Latvian language, especially the memoirs of General Pēteris Radziņš, Latvians, historians included, and others, have persisted in mythologizing the military events of 8 October to 11 November 1919 in Riga as some sort of national miracle. Since this Latvian army victory, first celebrated as Lāčplēsis Day on 11 November 1920, accounts of this battle have been unrepresented, poorly represented or misrepresented. For example, the 2007 historical film *Rīgas Sargi* (The Defenders of Riga) uses the 1888 poem *Lāčplēsis* by Andrējs Pumpurs as a template to portray the Latvians successfully defeating the German-Russian force on their own without Allied military aid. Pumpurs' dream and revolutionary legacy has provided a well used script for Latvian nation building. However, the reality documented by Radziņš in 1922 clearly gives most of the credit to the Allied Fleet which provided two significant series of well planned and well coordinated naval artillery barrages in support of Latvian infantry offensives which succeeded in driving their dual enemy out of Riga thereby ending Russian-German hegemony in the Latvian territory and making Latvian independence possible. How the poem, military event, and film are related in a problematic way with respect to Latvian/Russian relations is the subject of this thesis.

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Introduction: *Lāčplēsis Dzīvs* (Bearslayer Alive)

Latvians commemorate November 11, not as the Remembrance Day with which we are familiar with in the West, a day associated with the armistice of 1918 and the mourning of the fallen, but as a day celebrating a nationalist military victory in 1919, Lāčplēsis Day. They also remember this date in a way that reveals the creation of nationalist mythologies. A recent Latvian historical film, *Rīgas Sargi* (Defenders of Riga 2007) provides a canonic interpretation of the Latvian National Army's climactic victory over the West Russian Volunteer Army in the Battle of Riga, which ended on 11 November 1919. In the film, the Allied Fleet approaches the Latvian coast and Kārlis Ulmanis, the prime minister of the newly formed Latvian Republic, requests aid from this flotilla, but is denied any assistance.¹ *Rīgas Sargi* is a classic historical film: fiction.² It also employs cultural models borrowed from earlier Latvian nationalist mythology. The four principal characters of the film, Mārtiņš, Elza, Jēkabs, and Justīne are modern-day cinematic adaptations of the fictional characters Lāčplēsis, Laimdota, Koknesis, and Spīdala from the Latvian national epic *Lāčplēsis* (1888) by Andrējs Pumpurs.³ The film's representation of the nation's liberation struggle has more to do with this iconic legend and post-1919 events than with the events that took place in Latvia in 1919. In an

¹ *Rīgas Sargi* (Defenders of Riga), DVD, directed by Aigars Grauba (Riga: Platform Filma, 2007).

² Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History* (New York: Longman/Pearson, 2006), 63.

³ Andrējs Pumpurs, *Bearslayer: The Latvian Legend*, trans. Arthur Cropley, ed. Arthur Cropley, Ausma Cimdiņa and Kaspars Klavinš (Riga: University of Latvia, 2007).

attempt to explain the construction of nationalist myths in twentieth-century Europe, my thesis focuses on the “politics of memory.”⁴

Bearing in mind that the writing of history is always a relative process, my aim is to strip this Battle of Riga as much as possible of its Latvian nationalist mystique. I will also examine, through an analysis of *Lāčplēsis*, the prior development of the nationalist narrative framework demonstrating how the battle had to fit into the existing cultural model. I will show how the present-day interpretations of the 1919 struggles reinforce the nationalist archetypes of the Latvian nation rising up against its German and Russian imperial masters.

The Latvian example provides an excellent case study of how and why a relatively recent historical event can be mythologized in the interests of nation building. The military events of 1919 in Latvia were more than episodes in the so-called Latvian War of Independence. They were also part of the Russian Civil War and the general geopolitical rearrangement in Europe at the end of World War I. The complex and chaotic history of this place and time also includes a political revolution, a complete overthrow of the social order in Latvia, and feverish nationalist state building—the latter sponsored and guided by the British, partly by their government, but primarily by army and navy officers in the region who had considerable leeway in their decision-making. However, this crucial component is usually minimized or omitted in nationalist narratives. The Allied Fleet’s artillery barrage, which saved the day in 1919, is conveniently forgotten.

⁴ As defined by Laura Nasrallah, “The Politics of Memory,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 33, No. 2 (2005): “The politics of memory is the political means by which events are remembered and recorded or discarded. The terminology addresses the role of politics in shaping collective memory and how remembrances can differ markedly from the objective truth of the events as they happened.”

In order to explain the selective remembering in the Latvian case, a fruitful comparison can be made with Great Britain's military involvement in the Arab Revolt, made famous thanks to T. E. Lawrence. In the 1962 film *Lawrence of Arabia*, Lawrence leads his band of Arabs across an inhospitable desert behind the big guns of the coastal town of Aqaba, facing seaward, and takes this important port town from the Turks. In Cairo, the British authorities are astonished that Lawrence and his band of motley Arab fighters have done this.⁵ The reality was very different. Prior to and while Aqaba was being taken by Lawrence and his Arab force, the Royal Navy had carried out a naval artillery barrage of Aqaba which demoralized the Turkish defenders and allowed the Arabs, commanded by Lawrence, to enter and loot the town with little resistance. The historian James Barr has uncovered the Royal Navy's crucial role in these events,⁶ but for example, the novelist and war journalist Scott Anderson, among others, follows basically the same story line as the David Lean movie.⁷ For example, Anderson does not mention any involvement on the part of the Royal Navy, nor the naval gun barrage documented by Barr.

The relationship between reality and mythology in Latvia was similar but even more emphatic. The Royal and French navies not only supported the Latvian infantry, but were also the crucial factor in making Latvian independence possible, as confirmed by the writings of the high-ranking Latvian officer General Pēteris Radziņš, in 1922. Assuming the role of Chief of Staff on 27 October, in the middle of the so-called

⁵ *Lawrence of Arabia*, DVD, directed by David Lean (London: Horizon Pictures, 1962).

⁶ James Barr, *Setting the Desert on Fire: T.E. Lawrence and Britain's Secret War in Arabia, 1916-1918* (London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 158.

⁷ Scott Anderson, *Lawrence in Arabia: War, Deceit, Imperial Folly and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2013), 337-38.

Bermontiāde, the offensive mounted by Colonel Bermond-Avalov's White Russian troops, which took place between 8 October and 11 November 1919, Radziņš planned and led the Latvian counter-offensive, bringing it to a successful conclusion.⁸ His introspective account and analysis of this battle (in the Latvian language) is the main primary source for my thesis, a source that is readily available, but which has been ignored systematically until recently.

My main argument is that thanks to British tutelage and the help of an intensive and well-coordinated Allied naval bombardment the newly formed Latvian infantry successfully defeated an enemy force consisting primarily of German soldiers, from the Iron Division, German Legion, and Freikorps, wearing White Russian insignia and serving alongside a small number of White Russian troops and newly released Russian POWs in the ranks of the West Russian Volunteer Army. This greatly mythologized victory ensured the collapse of German and Russian hegemony over Latvian territory and the creation of independent Latvia.

The construction of this Latvian state was carried out under the guidance of the British mission to the Baltic region. An American colleague of Stephen Tallents, Chief Commissioner for the Baltic States, noted after seeing Lithuanian troops dressed in khaki uniforms: "How easily they might have been taken for English soldiers"⁹ and Tallents himself remarked how the Baltic peoples had "succeeded in making Britain conscious of their existence."¹⁰ The Latvians did not look very foreign to the British. This certainly speaks of Western European prejudices toward Eastern Europeans and how they had to

⁸ Pēteris Radziņš, *Latvijas Atbrīvošanas Kars 1918-1920. Pirmā daļa: Cīņas ar Bermontu (Latvia's Liberation War 1918-1920. First Part: The Struggle with Bermond)* (Riga: SIA "Jūra Apgāds," 2005), 11.

⁹ Stephen Tallents, *Man and Boy* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1943), 271.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 267.

be perceived first as Western before aid was provided. However, the resulting Latvian nation-state, the product of both a class and a national struggle,¹¹ became one of the authoritarian dictatorships in Europe. The transformation of Latvians from loyal subjects of the tsar then into to Bolsheviks loyal to Lenin, republicans loyal to President Ulmanis, and ultimately subjects of the dictator Ulmanis owes much to British tutelage and the Allied project to create a *cordon sanitaire* of small nation-states between Russia and Germany. Slavophobia and Russophobia were part of this national development. Memories of Germany and the former German land barons in Latvia were more convoluted, ranging from philia to phobia, a phenomenon that was not uncommon in post-colonial situations, but the fealty that these German barons owed the Russian tsar is often selectively forgotten.

Because the new nationalist narrative highlighted the united Latvian nation rising to defeat the German-Russian enemy, accounts of the Latvian army's military success deliberately minimized the assistance that was provided by her Western Allies. The Latvian legend, *Lāčplēsis*, became the template—I would even go so far as call it a script—for Latvian national identity. Since the publication of the eponymous poem by Andrejs Pumpurs in 1888, the participants in the Latvian national movement adopted the Bearslayer character as their symbol. After 1919, independent Latvia also fashioned its military heroes as *Lāčplēši*, tearers apart of the imperial bear.

My interest in deconstructing Latvian nationalist mythologies is linked to my family background. My father, Viktors, an ethnic Latvian, was born in the Russian imperial capital of St. Petersburg in 1907. Paps died in 2003 at the age of 96, a citizen of

¹¹ Geoffrey Swain, *Between Stalin and Hitler: Class War and Race War on the Dvina, 1940-46* (London: Routledge, 2004), 221-22.

Canada. His final three years were marred by dementia. During this period, my father tried to talk to us in Russian, his second, if not first language, which I knew he loved for its poetic quality and literary appeal. We, his children, had no idea what he was saying to us, because none of us spoke Russian and we had been taught that the Russians were “devils.” During his lifetime my father’s image of Russia underwent a radical transformation. My devoutly Catholic father, who was born in the Russian Empire and spoke Russian in his youth, went from being a tsarist subject to a Latvian nationalist.

How and why the Latvians became so Russophobic is another theme of my thesis. Arising in the 1920s, this anti-Russian sentiment has now become a Latvian identifier. This is true to such an extent that Latvian veterans of the two Latvian divisions of the Waffen-SS in World War II are considered heroes by many, just as Latvian Riflemen were considered heroes, after World War I and the Latvian War of Independence. They are also called *Lāčplēši* (Bearslayers), literally “tearers apart of the bear.”

I will also argue that a continuity of nationalist cultural mythologies may be traced in Latvian history from 1888 to the present day, as exemplified by the Latvian national epic, *Lāčplēsis*, the nationalist framing of events in Latvia in 1919, and the 2007 historical film *Rīgas Sargi*. This theory is supported by analysis and interpretation of the film, which is closely based on the 1888 poem *Lāčplēsis* in its depiction of the events of 1919. The explicit construction of Latvian military memory was determinate in successful state and nation formation, in that order. The purpose of modern Latvia was to tear apart the bear (Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, the German enemy now largely forgotten).

Latvian independence in 1919 seems to be more a tactical experience than a strategic one, a concern of officers in the field, *à la* Lawrence of Arabia, rather than of diplomats. However, the script for nation building was already present. Going beyond Robert Rosenstone's linking of historical text and historical film construction,¹² I see historical narrative as a script, a basis for foresight.¹³ This historical narrative need not be an academic history survey but can take the form of cultural constructions such as poems, songs, and films, within which adaptations of historical events are embedded. While taking history as a form of literature or art, as the postmodernists argue, is not a bad thing, we also need to recognize the very real social impact of these texts.¹⁴

Lāčplēsis provides just such a script for the Latvian people and the Latvian nation. I will employ the methodology of cultural history to deconstruct Latvian historical mythologies. The comparative method, the close reading of texts and visual narratives, and attention to the historical context of their production will be used as my main tools.

Nationalists tend to valorize collective memory, but this can be destructive. Some say nations are imagined communities and their national traditions are modern inventions, yet their mobilization based on these myths can be very real. Alexander Laban Hinton of Rutgers University has studied this "process of othering" through the "politics of memory" and has concluded that it can be a cause of genocide when taken to an extreme.¹⁵

¹² Rosenstone, *History on Film*, 161.

¹³ Carl Zimmer, "The Brain: Rich autobiographical memory is the essence of our humanity and the base from which we foresee the future—A key to our species' success," *Discover* April 2011: 24-27.

¹⁴ Hayden White, "The Public Relevance of Historical Studies: A Reply to Dirk Moses," *History and Theory* 44, No. 3 (2005): 336.

¹⁵ CV Alexander Laban Hinton at: gda.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/HintonCV.DGA10.28.12.pdf (Accessed 24 Dec 2014).

The Latvian word for memory is “atmina.” This word has distinctly archaic Indo-European roots. The Hindu word for soul is also “atman”¹⁶ and the Buddhist term for having no individual soul is “anatman.”¹⁷ Hence to Latvians, soul and memory are related. Latvians refer to “Tauta” in the same way that Germans refer to “Volk.”¹⁸ In both the German and Latvian cases, this idea, taken to the extreme, led to the ideology of “one people, one state, one leader”¹⁹ in the mid-twentieth century. Ninety percent of the Jewish-German and Jewish-Latvian citizens were murdered. Perhaps a larger number of Russian-Latvians were murdered than even Jewish-Latvians.²⁰ Thus the metaphor of “slaying the bear” could have deadly implications. Thus, a critical contextualization of nationalist myth making forms an important background for our understanding of twentieth century tragedies in the region.

This thesis is divided into five sections: an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. In Chapter One, entitled “Prologue: *Lāčplēsis* 1888,” I introduce and present the Latvian national epic, *Lāčplēsis*, along with its author Andrējs Pumpurs. My source

¹⁶ “Atman – the Soul Eternal: Atman is the immortal aspect of the mortal existence, the self, which is hidden in every object of creation including man,” located at: www.hinduwebsite.com/atman.asp-the concept of atman or eternal soul in Hinduism (Accessed 23 Dec 2014).

¹⁷ Barbara O’Brien, “The doctrine of Anatman (or Anatta in Pali) is one of the central doctrines of Buddhism. According to this doctrine, there is no ‘self’ in the sense of a permanent integral autonomous being within an individual existence,” located at: inBuddhism.about.com/od/abuddhistglossary/g/Anatman.htm-Anatman or Anatta is a foundational Buddhist teaching (Accessed 23 Dec 2014).

¹⁸ According to A Teacher’s Guide to the Holocaust, “the concept of Volk (people, nation, or race) has been an underlying idea in German history since the early nineteenth century. Inherent in the name was a feeling of superiority of German culture and the idea of a universal mission for the German people,” located at: infcit.usf.edu/holocaust/DEFN/-Volk.htm-Definition of Volk (Accessed 23 Dec 2014).

¹⁹ A fascistic slogan according to David Walsh: “The cult of the leader, which surpassed any normal level of trust in political leadership, is central to an understanding of the appeal of national socialism. It was undoubtedly the most important theme running through Nazi propaganda,” located at: www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/nazi_propaganda_gallery_03.shtml:Nazi Propaganda (Accessed 23 Dec 2014).

²⁰ Modris Ekšteins, *Walking Since Daybreak: A Story of Eastern Europe, World War II, and the Heart of Our Century* (Toronto: Key Porter, 1999), 159.

is the first complete English translation by Arthur Cropley (2005).²¹ The 2007 Latvian edition of this translation, as I will argue here, is provocative and serves as an example of the nation-centric and mythologized nature of Latvian historiography.²² Cropley expresses his gratitude to the project “Culture and Power,” financed by the National Research Program “Lettonika.” That the cultural artifact *Lāčplēsis* is associated with power is most apposite.

In English *Lāčplēsis* has been traditionally translated as “Bearslayer” or “Bear Slayer.” In my estimation, this is an inaccurate translation. *Lāčplēsis* literally means “tearer apart of the bear.” The contemporary film historian Yuri Tsivian also used a similar translation, “bear-tearer,” which although marginally better, does not fully convey the meaning of the original.²³ I propose that *Lāčplēsis* was interpreted at the time as a subversive revolutionary text calling on all Latvians to take action—essentially a call to arms—against the autocratic Russian Empire as well as against the traditionally maligned German invader and occupier. In the same year that Pumpurs’ poem was published (1888), an Austro-Hungarian diplomat reported to his government: “People who are familiar with the Baltic doubt whether the Estonians and Latvians will allow anyone to Russify them. It is much more likely that once they gain in the battle against Germans, they will take a stand against all that is Russian just as fiercely as the German barons.”²⁴

²¹ Arthur Cropley, “BEARSLAYER by Andrējs Pumpurs (1841-1902): A free translation from the unrhymed Latvian into English heroic verse,” located at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/17445/17445-8.txt> (Accessed 3 Jan. 2008).

²² Pumpurs, *Bearslayer* 2007.

²³ Yuri Tsivian, “*Lāčplēsis*, un film dalla Lettonia/*Lāčplēsis*, a Film from Latvia,” *Griffithiana* 38/39 (Oct. 1990): 197-200.

²⁴ Uldis Gērmanis, *The Latvian Saga* trans. Kārlis Streips (Stockholm: Memento, 1998), 185.

In Chapter Two entitled “Chronologue and Eventory: *Latvija*²⁵ 1919” my goal is not only to question nationalist mythology, but also to fill a lacuna in English-language accounts of this period. I provide a narrative of the role played by the Allied Fleet and Allied officers, primarily British officers in the Imperial British Army and Royal Navy, who worked in close coordination with the newly formed Latvian infantry in October and November 1919 to defeat the West Russian Volunteer Army under the command of Pavel Bermond-Avalov. My primary source is the Latvian-language memoirs of General Pēteris Radziņš published in 1922. Radziņš explains his need to offer his own account of these events before politicians had a chance to distort them.²⁶ He clearly gives the bulk of the credit to the Allied Fleet, primarily the Royal Navy, noting that Latvian independence would not have been possible without their assistance.²⁷

In addition to Radziņš's memoirs, I consulted Geoffrey Bennett's book,²⁸ examined documents from British government archives, and contemporary newspaper articles to fill out the British side of the story. To round out my narrative I also compare the Latvian and British accounts with the French ones²⁹ and particularly the German account written by Rudiger von der Goltz³⁰ and the Russian account by Pavel Bermond-Avalov.³¹

²⁵ *Latvija* is the Latvian language spelling of Latvia, the English spelling. I use it here for consistency with my other Latvian language chapter titles, *Lāčplēsis* and *Rīgas Sargi*. It also provides a more foreign flavour.

²⁶ Radziņš, *Latvijas Atbrīvošanas Kars*, 19.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁸ Geoffrey Bennett, *Cowan's War: The Story of British Naval Operations in the Baltic, 1918-1920* (London: Collins, 1964).

²⁹ John F.N. Bradley, “L'Intervention alliée dans les États Baltes (1919),” *Revue d'histoire modern et contemporaine* (1954-) 23e, No. 2 (1976): 236-57. Ludovic Chevutschi, “L'Intervention Navale Alliee en Lettonie, Octobre-Novembre 1919: L'Exemple D'une Collaboration Franco-Britannique,” *Revue Historique des Armees* no.1, 1995: 105-116.

³⁰ Rudiger von der Goltz, *Meine Sendung in Finnland und im Baltikum* (Leipzig: K. F. Koehler, 1920).

³¹ Pavel M. Avalov, *V bor'be s bolshevizmom* (Hamburg: J.J. Augustin, 1925).

I have researched English-, Latvian-, French-, German-, and Russian-language sources in order to fill out the picture and provide a short, reasonably accurate, narrative of the military events that took place in Riga between 8 October and 11 November 1919. Bennett's book was translated into Latvian in 2012.³²

In Chapter Three, entitled "Epilogue: *Rīgas Sargi* (Defenders of Riga) 2007," I analyze another Latvian cultural product, an historical film portraying this battle. This film directed by Aigars Grauba and released in 2007, in Latvian with English and Russian subtitles, was Latvia's official submission to the Academy Awards for Best Foreign Language Film in the 2008/2009 season.³³ It did not win and was subjected to what I would consider simplistic criticism, with critics calling it a trite romantic film with nationalist overtones. As a student of Latvian history, I found it to be a new "classic" historical film, that is a fictional cinematic work supposedly based on the military events I present in Chapter Two, but ultimately having more to do with Latvia in 1945 and 1991, rather than being a historically accurate representation of the 1919 events. Films are constructed and directed, as are histories.³⁴ History is both inquiry and representation, and so is historical film. I will analyze *Rīgas Sargi*, along with its promotional materials, for historical accuracy and inaccuracy, errors and omissions, representations and misrepresentations. In addition, and more importantly, I will provide an interpretation of this film: what it is portraying, intentionally and unintentionally, and how and why, both explicitly and implicitly. To this student of Latvian history, *Rīgas Sargi* is a modern

³² Džefrijs Benets [Geoffrey Bennett] *Atrīvojojot Baltiju 1919-1920 (Freeing the Baltic 1919-1920)*, trans. Dainis Pozinš and Imants Breidaks (Riga: Zvaigzne ABC, 2012.)

³³"2008 foreign Oscar contenders," *Variety* 4 November 2008 located at: <http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=awardcentral&jump=contenders&id=issue&articl> (Accessed 8 Apr 2009).

³⁴ Rosenstone, 161.

ethnic masterpiece: a fantastical film, in the sense of fantasy, whose significance is lost on an audience ignorant of Latvian history. Even though this film constructs and mythologizes a fictional past, when viewed critically it sparks questions and challenges various types of accounts of the Latvian past, textual as well as cinematic. How this poem, historical event, and film are related or connected is the subject of my thesis. Its goal is to uncover the construction of national memory and ultimately of the modern Latvian nation.

Chapter One - Prologue: *Lāčplēsis* 1888

The Latvian national epic *Lāčplēsis* was published in 1888 by Andrējs Pumpurs (1841-1902) after fifteen years in composition. Pumpurs, a farmer's son, "was one of three children from the civil parish chosen by the Lutheran minister for the German class of the church school in Lielvārde,"³⁵ a good subordinate Latvian boy. He dropped out after three years, his family unable to pay the required fees. However, as a raftsman on the Daugava River and surveyor travelling the land, Pumpurs became interested in the venerable and vibrant Latvian oral tradition around him. As a peasant boy he had been exposed to poetic Latvian folk tales, the *dainas*, and folksongs. After a brief sojourn in Riga, in 1876, Pumpurs pursued his career in Moscow, where he made contact with the Slavophile literary figures, Ivan Aksakov and the editor Mikhail Katkov.³⁶ Like the romantic nationalist Young Latvians who preceded him, Krišjānis Valdemārs, Juris Alunāns, and Krišjānis Barons,³⁷ Pumpurs moved to Russia to seek the aid of the conservative Russian nationalists who they thought would be likely allies against the Baltic German nobility. Converted to Slavophilia, the following year he volunteered to fight with the Serbs in their war against the Turks. However, based on what we know about the evolution of national movements in nineteenth-century Europe, and especially in the Russian Empire after it adopted a more assimilationist policy under Alexander III, I propose that Pumpurs would ultimately be disappointed with his earlier enthusiastic

³⁵ Anita Rožkalne, project manager, *Latviešu rakstniecība biogrāfijas (Latvian Writer Biographies). Second revised and expanded edition.* (Rīga: Zinātne, 2003), 463-64.

Viktors Hausmanis, ed., *Latviešu rakstniecības biogrāfijas (Latvian Writer Biographies)* (Rīga: LZA, 1992), 257.

³⁶ Rožkalne; Hausmanis.

³⁷ Ģērmanis, 172.

association with the Slavophiles. Pumpurs, like many Latvians at this time, likely concluded that the replacement of German power by Russian power was not in Latvia's best interest.³⁸

Pumpurs is considered a member of the "Young Latvian" or "New Latvian" movement, modeled after "Young Germany" (*Junges Deutschland*) led by Heinrich Heine.³⁹ The self-named National Awakening or *Atmoda*, the Latvian movement, can be traced back to the day in 1854 when the son of a Kurzeme farmer, Krišjānis Valdemārs, became an economics student at Tartu University in the Russian Province of Estland. Valdemārs, so the story goes, attached a sign to the door of his room, which read "Krišjanis Valdemārs. Latvian." When called to the administration's office to explain this atrocious insubordinate declaration, the young Latvian is said to have responded that "a Latvian who speaks good German, English, and French does not become German, English or French . . . He is still a Latvian."⁴⁰ Intriguingly according to this account, Russian was not mentioned. It was preposterous for someone in the Baltic Provinces to call himself a Latvian, just as it was preposterous that Latvian would be used as literary language.⁴¹ Indigenous Baltic peasants were referred to as *undeutsch*. The early Latvian movement was an academic project, a student's movement. It was expected that the sons of Latvian peasantry would become educated in the Baltic German system, adopt German or Russian as their language of high culture and discard Latvian, the language of the field and shop floor. New Latvians thought differently.

³⁸ Andrējs Plakāns, *The Latvians: A Short History* (Stanford: Hoover Institute Press, 1995), 100.

³⁹ Latvian Institute, "The First Awakening," located at: http://www.li.lv/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=466&Itemid=1636 (Accessed 8 Jan 2011).

⁴⁰ Ģermanis, 170.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 171.

The military offered common men, peasants, in Imperial Russia, opportunities for education and advancement and Pumpurs took this up by enrolling in military schools in Sevastopol and Odessa, where he received an officer's commission. In 1882, Pumpurs returned to Latvia to serve as an officer in the Ust-Dvinsk Regiment. Pumpurs is noted for being "a prominent figure in the Young Latvia movement," "a loyal officer in the Russian army and also a staunch promoter of the Latvian culture."⁴² However, his multiple and sometimes contradictory identities do not stop there; Pumpurs was also involved with the secret *Narodnaya Volya* (NV) movement of Russian populist revolutionaries. Andrējs Pumpurs was no mere romantic nationalist; he was a subversive revolutionary, a closet insubordinate.

Narodnaya Volya (The Peoples's Will or The People's Freedom) was a Russian left-wing terrorist organization, best known for the successful assassination of Tsar Alexander II of Russia, in 1881. *Narodnaya Volya* consisted of a network of cells composed of workers, students, and members of the military. Led by an "Executive Committee," the organization had less than 500 members and a few thousand followers, with affiliates in almost 50 cities, especially in Ukraine and the Volga region. The program of this movement contained a mix of democratic and socialist demands which are echoed in *Lāčplēsis*.⁴³

Over time, members of NV came to the conclusion that a social revolution could not take place without a political revolution, without an end to autocratic government. Later, many NV members joined the ranks of the Socialist Revolutionaries looking

⁴² Rožkalne; Hausmanis.

⁴³ Avraham Yarmolinsky,, *Road to Revolution: A Century of Russian Radicalism Chapter 12 The People's Will (Narodnaya Volya)* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 223-241.

forward to a peasants' revolution rather than a worker's one. Pumpurs as a follower, if not an actual member of NV, was a Latvian revolutionary ahead of his time, or as I interpret him, a proponent of culture and revolution in tune with his time. Rather than look upon him as simply "a prominent figure in the Young Latvia movement," I see him as a transitional figure between the romantic nationalists of Young Latvia, and the more political Latvian leftist movement called "New Current," led by Pēteris Bisenieks, and friends Pēteris Stučka and Jānis Pliekšāns (Rainis). Bisenieks founded the paper *Dienas Lapas* and ran the Riga Latvian Craftsmen's Credit Union.⁴⁴ Stučka later became a communist, and in 1918-19 served as president of the short-lived first Latvian Socialist Republic. After its fall, he was driven out of Latvia and declared a *persona non grata*. As a loyal Latvian Bolshevik, in exile in Russia, Stučka went on to organize the Soviet Union's judicial system.⁴⁵ Pliekšāns would become Latvia's most revered man of letters, its national poet, and minister of education, under the pen name "Rainis." Before they went their separate ways, it was Rainis who smuggled the works of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Karl Kautsky into Latvia, in two pieces of luggage, in 1893.⁴⁶ Where does Pumpurs fit in this evolving picture?

After the 1881 assassination of Tsar Alexander II, his son Alexander III succeeded to the throne. Unlike his liberal-minded father, who emancipated all the serfs in 1861, Alexander III was a staunch conservative and upholder of Orthodoxy and the Russian language throughout the empire. He instituted a strict Russification policy from

⁴⁴ Latvian Institute, "The New Current and the Revolution of 1905," located at: http://www.li.lv/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=467&Itemid=1637 (Accessed 29 Nov 2010).

⁴⁵ Ģērmanis, 237.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

1885 to 1895, which made Russian the sole language of education and forced mixed marriage couples to adopt the Orthodox faith.⁴⁷ The Orthodox faith, translated in Latvian as “correct believers” was something Pumpurs respected in defiance of his own Lutheran upbringing, but the extreme limits on the use of the Latvian language would have irked the Latvian writer in Pumpurs,⁴⁸ the author of *Lāčplēsis*.

Following the height of the NV movement in 1880-81, just as the Russian Empire was experiencing a reactionary turn, I propose there was a shift in Pumpurs’ ideology, a shift from believing in Russian nationalists as allies against autocracy within the imperial system, to perceiving the Russian Empire and Russian nationalists as Latvia’s adversaries, a revolutionary shift. Historian A. Jankavs calls Pumpurs a revolutionary. Jankavs reported that in the autumn of 1882 Pumpurs became so enraged with the *Cēsu muižnieki* (Cēsis manor owners) that he had to be restrained from ordering the 180 disciplined soldiers under his command to blow the *muižnieki* to kingdom come while they were meeting in their lodge at Cēsis. He is alleged to have said:

Tonight I will free the Latvian tauta of some 50 tyrants. I will lead my soldiers out and place them against the muižnieki windows wherein this evening the black ravens have gathered to plan the suppression of our tauta. I know I will be shot for this, but a few 10’s of the enemies of progress and spiritual striving will be sent to hell.⁴⁹

This is a far cry from Kaspars Klaviņš’ claim that Pumpurs shared the attitude of the other activists of the Latvian National Awakening in the nineteenth century whose emphasis “was always on tolerant values, on the power of culture and solidarity, but not

⁴⁷ Andrējs Plakāns, 101.

⁴⁸ Ģērmanis, 184.

⁴⁹ A. Jankavs, “Pumpurs Andrējs revolucionārs,” *Jaunākas Zinās* Dec. 8, 1928: 12 in Jāzeps Rudzītis, *Andrējs Pumpurs* (Riga: Liesma, 1991), 138.

on war or conquest.” Klavinš marvels at Pumpurs unique *Lāčplēsis* epic, which recounts the exploits of a warrior who also possessed an education and ethical qualities. Klavinš finds this odd in “a military man by profession!”⁵⁰ As I will explain later, this applies to both *Lāčplēsis* and Pumpurs, one and the same. I do not find an ethical military man odd at all and neither would the militancy of the national or social movement seem out of place in Pumpurs’ time. Historian Jāzeps Rudzītis addresses Pumpurs’ association with *Narodnaya Volya*. He claims that Pumpurs joined a small NV-type secret military group called *Aizupa pulcinš* in the early 1880s. Local civil authorities discovered the activities of this group and the Vilnius district war court investigated the matter during their visit to Riga in April 1882. The group was charged, according to the data collected by the constabulary, of planning to seize power in Latvia, take the land away from the barons, the factories from the capitalists, divide the land among the peasants and give ownership of the factories to the workers, essentially according to the program of the NV. Pumpurs was summoned to testify as a witness in the trial of Kārlis Aizups, the group’s leader. The accused group was acquitted in part because of insufficient evidence and in part because the court was not favourably inclined toward the *baltvācu muižniekiem* (Baltic German manor owners),⁵¹ which reflected the new policies of Alexander III.

A family member assisting me with research in Latvian has asked: “So did Pumpers come to the realization that even though the *vilki* (wolves - Germans) were the

⁵⁰ Kaspars Klavinš in Pumpurs 2007 Forward, 14.

⁵¹ Jāzeps Rudzītis, *Andrējs Pumpurs Lāčplēsis, Latvju Tautas Varonis, Tautas Eposs: Ar Jāzepa Rudzīša ievadpācērojumu un komentāriem (Andrējs Pumpurs’ Lāčplēsis, Latvia’s Folk Hero, Folk Epic: With Introduction and commentary by Rudzītis)*(Riga: Zinatne, 1988), 28.

Jāzeps Rudzītis, *Andrējs Pumpurs* (Riga: Liesma, 1991), 136-137.

oppressors, the buck actually stopped in the *lācis* lair (bear's - Russian's lair)?”⁵² Loyal German Baltic hegemony existed under the patronage of the Tsar and his aristocratic court. Pumpurs may have been sympathetic to the Slavophiles and wanted their sympathy in return, but the repressive Russification project of the late nineteenth century revealed to Pumpurs that his and Latvia's foe was two fold, German and Russian.

If Pumpurs was a political radical, how much of his position is reflected in the poem? It is my contention that contemporary and later Latvian patriots (correctly) read into *Lāčplēsis* a subliminal subversive revolutionary message calling on them to become educated, to become active, and ultimately to take up arms, to overthrow the Russian autocracy, to literally “tear apart the bear,” the bear being Russia. It is this interpretation that links this so-called Young Latvian to New Current. Pumpurs was a transitional figure between the primordialist romantic nationalism espoused by Johan Herder and the twentieth-century ideological currents such as modern nationalism and Marxist theory.

Pumpurs in the words of Sergei Kruks, was the winner of an informal “competition . . . among the Latvian literati” to compose a national epic, “a heroic fairy tale” to define a national identity thus providing a cultural passport for nation-state ambitions, a conscious political effort. Pumpurs' unusual poem won out over two variants of national poems by Fridrihs Malberģis and three variants produced by Jēkabs Lautenbahs-Jūsminš. As Kruks puts it “the canonization of *Lāčplēsis* served particular ideological goals.”⁵³ In this process we see the mechanism of the progression from the academic to cultural to political activities, which, according to the Czech Marxist

⁵² Question posed to me by my bother, Gunārs, while doing Latvian language research on Pumpurs.

⁵³ Sergei Kruks, “The Latvian Epic *Lāčplēsis*: Passe-partout ideology. Traumatic Imagination of Community,” *Journal of Folkloric Research* 41, No. 1 (2004): 5.

historian Miroslav Hroch, characterize the construction of modern stateless nations in Eastern Europe.⁵⁴ The historian Andrējs Plakāns applied Hroch's theory to the Latvian case.⁵⁵ This mutable “epic”—in reality a modern literary work incorporating some elements of folk legends—would serve an amazingly broad range of goals: it would be used by Latvian patriots in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by Latvian nationalists and Latvian Bolsheviks during the interwar period and by the Nazis and Soviets during World War II. During the postwar period, both Soviet Latvia and the Latvian Diaspora in the West claimed the Pumpurs legacy, which is now considered a cultural foundation of the independent Latvian state. What a glorious work of art *Lāčplēsis* was, constructing and reflecting Latvian society for one hundred and twenty-six years!

Rather than going through *Lāčplēsis*, in the Latvian language, I was fortunate in finding a 2005 “free translation from the unrhymed Latvian into English heroic verse” by Australian Arthur Cropley of the University of Hamburg. Cropley admits that he took minor liberties with the Latvian text.⁵⁶ Much like my thesis, a work in English written for a present-day Western audience, some things are lost in Cropley's translation. The English heroic verse does not truly capture Pumpurs' art or his meaning. *Lāčplēsis*, translated as “Bearslayer,” does not have the same import as *Lāčplēsis* literally translated as “Tearer Apart of the Bear” or “Ripper Apart of the Bear.” “A corrected and substantially revised version” of the “very free translation of 2005” with academic

⁵⁴ Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 22-23.

⁵⁵ Toivo U. Raun and Andrējs Plakāns, “The Estonian and Latvian National Movements: An Assessment of Miroslav Hroch's Model,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 21, No. 2 (1990): 131-144.

⁵⁶ Cropley in Pumpurs 2007, 18-19.

commentaries was published in book form in 2007, by the University of Latvia.

Provocatively several chapters are framed by Latvian folk designs incorporating the traditional swastika.⁵⁷ I detect a sinister message in this volume, a challenge to a post-Soviet Russia which considers Latvia an enemy, in what one may call a psychological projection or reflection of Latvia's view of Russia.⁵⁸ Being anti-Russian has become one of the markers of Latvian national identity and *Lāčplēsis* (both its message and reception) was a factor.

The poem's title, two scenes with bears, one nurturing, one savage, the climactic cutting off of *Lāčplēsis*' bear's ears, and the unequivocal closing stanzas, predicting a future Latvia free of all foreign oppressors are my strongest evidence. The British and others have caricatured Russia as a bear since the late sixteenth century.⁵⁹ *Lāčplēsis* was not only adopted and adapted by Latvian nationalists. Pumpurs intended *Lāčplēsis* to be subversive, but perhaps not entirely in the way it was ultimately interpreted, a matter of unintended consequences. *Lāčplēsis* was co-opted or appropriated by later separatists, for their nation-building project. Pumpurs may have been only suggesting the overthrow of the autocratic authoritarian regime, autonomy within the Russian Empire at best, not its complete tearing apart. However, the conclusion of the *Lāčplēsis* poem can be read as suggesting something more—the actual tearing apart of the Russian Empire, self-determination, of a kind and at a time unimaginable to Pumpurs and his contemporaries.

⁵⁷ Pumpurs 2007, Canto VI, 235-287.

⁵⁸ Ekšteins, 31.

⁵⁹ A. Rossomakhin and D. Krustalev, “‘Rossiia kak medved’: Istoki vizualizatsii (XVI-XVIIiiveka)” (Russia as a Bear: Origins of Visual Imagery (16th to 18th Centuries)), *Graintsy: Al'manakh Tsentra etnicheskikh i natsional'nykh issledovani Ivanovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta (Borders: Almanac of the Center for Ethnic and Nationality Studies of Ivanovo State University)*, Vol.2 (2008), located at: <http://cens.ivanovo.ac.ru/almanach/rossomakhin-krustalev-2008.htm>

Although wonderfully adaptable and mutable to multiple ideological beliefs, Pumpurs' masterpiece is the centerpiece of Latvian nationalism, permeating the way Latvians construct their memories, their national iconography.

The poem is subdivided into six cantos or sections. Pumpurs called his own work "epic chant," but his definition has been rejected, by subsequent Latvian literary critics who did not consider Pumpurs competent in literary criticism.⁶⁰ Analysis and interpretation of *Lāčplēsis* has been problematic, in my opinion. *Lāčplēsis* studies have been relegated to folklore and literature. Applying the historical turn in literary analysis reveals the missing political context.

I will confine my analysis and interpretation primarily to Cantos I, II, III, and VI. These are the cantos dealing with issues in the Latvian lands. Cantos IV and V are foreign episodes, in Rome, in Germany, and the Northern Sea, for the most part more a homage to Homer's *Odyssey* and Wagner than a Latvian tale. However, like Odysseus, *Lāčplēsis* and Pumpurs travelled widely, but returned home to solve their domestic problems.

In Canto I, "The Revelation of Bearslayer," the pagan Baltic gods convene and hear a warning from the Father of Destiny that strangers, crusading German knights, corrupted Christians from a corrupted Rome, have invaded the Baltic region and pose a threat to both them and the Latvians. *Pērkons*, the God of Thunder, calls on the Baltic pantheon to protect the Latvians. The river goddess, *Staburadze*, announces that she has saved a young man from *Staburags* whirlpool in the *Daugava* River where two witches had thrown him. *Pērkons* commends *Staburadze* for saving the young man who under

⁶⁰ Vīke-Freiberga in Pumpurs 2007 Chapter 3, 301.

Pērkon's protection will become the hero, Lāčplēsis, who will "strive mightily against the forces of evil." Pērkons offers this oath:

The Latvians I will guard in my strong care,
 All worthy teachings I will permit to stand.
 Christ's teaching is not new that now we share,
 Its true foundation is the Eastern Land.
 But those who bear His message to our shores
 Have come to us to serve a different view.
 To conquer Baltic regions is their cause,
 To make our people slaves their purpose new

In this first scene, Pumpurs is giving Lāčplēsis and the Latvian people the "mandate of heaven," a license to overthrow the existing regime. It is an interesting mandate in that the pagan Latvian gods have vowed to protect the true Christian faith as well as the pagan Latvians. Pumpurs pays tribute to the Orthodox faith which established churches in Latgale in the twelfth century, before the Teutonic conquests and conversions by the sword in the thirteen and he acknowledges the construction of Orthodox churches in the Baltic ordered by Alexander II in the nineteenth. Pumpurs appears to be turning his back on the German Lutheranism of his childhood as well as separating his opinion of church and state in Imperial Russia.

By saying "its true foundation is the Eastern Land," Pumpurs appears to be supporting Russian Orthodoxy over German Lutheranism or Roman Catholicism. This would conform to his Slavophile sympathies. On the other hand, the pagan Latvians did use early alliances with the German invaders to free them of their tribute payments to the Principality of Polotsk and to defend themselves against rival Estonian and Lithuanian tribes.⁶¹ Only later would the indigenous Balts once more turn against the Germans and

⁶¹ Klavinš in Pumpurs 2007 Chapter 6, 347.

only later would the Germans initiate a conversion by the sword strategy.⁶² Pumpurs is painting a before and after picture in words, a thirteenth century and a nineteenth century picture. Ambivalent, ambiguous changing allegiances were certainly a concern of Pumpurs.

What followed the thirteenth century conquest and conversion of pagan Latvia was not 700 years of German oppression as it has been portrayed, but a German period followed by Polish-Lithuanian, Swedish, and finally Russian domination in 1795. The history of conquest, subjugation, subordination, and insubordination is complex and nuanced in the Baltic region, not a simple German oppression of Latvians.

In Canto II, “Bearslayer Begins His Life as a Hero,” we learn that a male foundling was taken from a she-bear which was nursing him, by Vaidelots, a Herald of the Gods and “Messenger of the Krivi (Wise Ones),” to be adopted by a pagan tribal chief, Lielvārds, who resides in his stronghold of Lielvārde. The child appears human except he has the ears of a bear. One day, eighteen years later, the young man saves Lielvārds from an attack by a bear, by tearing the bear apart, by his jaws, with his bare hands. He is named Lāčplēsis, “tearer apart of the bear,” a Latvian version of the biblical Samson killing the lion or the American Davy Crockett killing “himself a bear when he was only three.” The important incident with the savage bear is told in this way:

Grown weary, there the old man on the ground
 Beneath the oaks sat on the verdant grass.
 When all at once from out the forest sprang
 A savage bear that fell upon the man
 He had no time to stand against its fang —
 He thought its strength would end his mortal span.
 The young man ran up fast, with swiftness rare,

⁶² Eric Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades: The Baltic and Catholic Frontier, 1100-1525* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1980), 38, 99. Plakāns, 16-17.

And seized the creature by its gaping jaw;
 With mighty strength he tore apart the bear —
 A baby goat had troubled him no more.⁶³

By this action Lāčplēsis earned his name. By sending Vaidelots, a Messenger of the Krīvi, to save Lāčplēsis from a life with the bears, a life in the wild Latvian woods, Pumpurs is praising wise Russians who offer their aid to Old Latvians subjugated by German lords. Here is a reference to the Young Latvians' approach to the Slavophiles and the Russian Empire as allies against German barons. Latvians call all Russians "Krievi," or "Krievichi" which is the name of the Slavic tribe which inhabited the lands directly east of the ancient Baltic tribes. However, I see a transition in Pumpurs thinking when the young man rips the savage bear apart. Both the earlier nurturing female bear and the savage male bears can be interpreted as personifications of Russia. The female bear, Mother Russia, is a positive influence, the male bear, xenophobic nationalist Russia, is a negative influence. The mother bear is the hoped for nurturing Slavophile, which the Young Latvians were counting on for support. The male bear is the Russifier of Alexander III's reign and the Lettophile's rival Slavophile, harmful to the Latvian cause. Latvians want to overthrow the power of the Baltic German barons, but they do not want the Russian nobility to assume the same social privileges over them. The educated and literate Latvians want social justice not a new ethnic master; they want to be governed not ruled. This autocratic chauvinist Russian nationalist bear must be torn apart so as not to bother the baby goat any more. The baby goat is a personification of Old Latvia. Lāčplēsis is the personification of New Latvia, agent not victim, a generational transition. Rudzītis says that by the 1880s the Latvian "Tautas" growth (conversion) into a nation

⁶³ Pumpurs 2007, 40.

was fundamentally complete.⁶⁴ Some new tactic was required to press the nationalist project forward. Not only was the “tearing apart of the bear” the first heroic deed, but in my interpretation the primary or number one deed.

However, the German enemy had to be dealt with first. The Russian Herald reminds us that:

There in the West . . .
 Against the God of Thunder risen stand
 A fearsome herd of raging monsters dread,
 Whose cross-shaped horns rip at the Eastern Land.⁶⁵

It is certainly easy to see how Russians and Soviets would adopt *Lāčplēsis* as their heroic story about their battles with the Teutonic Knights and Germans, on their western border, with their Latvian ally, but would the New Latvians adopt Russians as their ally?

Pumpurs raises this doubt with his bear-tearing incident.

The lesson continues, with *Lāčplēsis* subsequently sent off to the castle of Burtnieks for seven years to study the Latvian Way. *Lāčplēsis* is waylaid by a stop over at the castle of Aizkraulis whose daughter *Spīdala* is strikingly beautiful, but is a witch. Bearslayer spies on *Spīdala* and the corrupt holy man, the traitor *Kangars*, in the Hellhole. Two witches, agents of the Devil, attack Bearslayer and cast him into the whirlpool of *Staburags*, from which he will be turned to stone should he escape. *Lāčplēsis* is rescued by the Goddess *Staburadze* and proclaimed a noble warrior and guardian of the good Latvian people, as prophesied in Canto I.

Nursed back to health by *Staburadze* and the beautiful and virtuous, *Laimdota*, daughter of *Burtnieks*, *Lāčplēsis* performs his second heroic deed, saving a floundering

⁶⁴ Rudzītis, 13.

⁶⁵ Pumpurs 2007, 42.

boat in the Daugava, “rowing with his bare hands.”⁶⁶ Another youth, Koknesis, “the carrier of wood,” witnesses this act and suitably impressed, befriends Lāčplēsis. The floundering boat likely symbolizes the romantic nationalism of the Young Latvians and Lāčplēsis represents Pumpurs’ ideal of pragmatic action, political, social, and educational, to improve the lives of the people, as I will explain in more detail later. Pumpurs’ bare hands, his writing would save the Latvian cause. Together, Lāčplēsis and Koknesis go off to Burtnieks for their Latvian education. In this Canto, the storyline is further developed by flashbacks to earlier episodes mentioned in Canto I. The storyline or plot thickens, but so does Pumpurs’ evolving message.

Canto III, IV, and V are highly derivative and behold to Homer’s *Odyssey*, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, the Saxon *Beowulf*, Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*, among other literary sources for inspiration, providing allusions and symbols, such as the raising of the Sunken Castle, analyzed by other scholars. For example, the renaissance of a new Golden Age in this part of *Lāčplēsis* is celebrated by Vaira Vīke-Freiberga,⁶⁷ but the presence of this concept in modern nationalisms has been ridiculed by Benedict Anderson.⁶⁸ In support of my thesis, I will concentrate explicitly on the first two and last cantos. However, a few developments from these central cantos need explanation.

In Canto III, “Bearslayer and Laimdota are Betrayed,” Spīdala and Kangars plot against Lāčplēsis, by provoking a war against the Estonian giant, Kalapuisis. Burtnieks offers the hand of his daughter, Laimdota, to the warrior who can dispatch Kalapuisis.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Vīke-Freiberga in Pumpurs 2007, Chapter 3, 305-306.

⁶⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006, 1983), 72.

Lacplesis defeats Kalapuisis, but instead of killing him makes him an ally, as the giant also knows the prophecy of a bear cub coming from the Daugava to save the Latvians and Estonians from their conquerers, the Germans.⁶⁹ Thus Pumpurs foretells of the need for Latvians and Estonians (or perhaps all of the empire's oppressed nations) to form an alliance. Indeed, just such an alliance between the Estonians and Latvians occurred, in the summer and fall of 1919, against the Germans and Russians, White and Red, a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Canto IV, "The Latvians Suffer Many Hardships," opens in Rome, with Kaupa, a Liv chieftain, taken in by the power and wealth, resolving to convert the Latvians. Back in Latvia, the locals help the invaders found Riga and are subsequently turned upon by the Germans, who pillage, plunder, and destroy from their new fortress.⁷⁰ It took over one hundred years (1187-1290) for the Germans to complete their conquest and conversion of Livonia or Terra Mariana.

Canto VI, "The Struggle Against the Invaders," introduces the Latvian festival of Midsummer's Eve, *Līgo Svētki*, beloved of Johann Gottfried Herder.⁷¹ Herder coined the term nationalism and spent a brief period in Riga as a teacher before being exiled for his mischief.⁷² The Baltic lands are at war, "the German knights have captured a number of Latvian stockades and built their own stone castles, and are imposing Christianity at the point of the sword." Lāčplēsis is elected warlord. After the weddings of our two male and two female heroes, "the Latvian host gathers and marches on Turaida. On the way,

⁶⁹ Cropley in Pumpurs 2007 Chapter 2, 291.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 295.

⁷¹ Plakāns, 84.

⁷² Gērmanis, 159-160. Plakāns, 84. Andrew Hamilton, "Herder's Theory of the Volksgeist," *North American New Right* May 20, 2011, located at: <http://www.counter-currents.com/2011/05/herdes-theory-of-the-volksgeist/print/>

they eliminate German infestation whenever they encounter it.”⁷³ With these stanzas, Pumpurs harkens back to a period of struggle against the German conquest in Baltic history.

In 1236, the Swordbrothers, a minor corrupt religious military order established by Bishop Albert, was defeated at the battle of Saule by a pagan Lithuanian army (Samogitians) assisted by Semigalians, one of the ancient Latvian tribes.⁷⁴ Forty years of successful conversions were put aside as many indigenous Balts returned to pagan practice after their alliances with the Germans were no longer useful. The Papacy, earlier sheltering the new converts, declared war against the apostates and a brutal conversion by the sword campaign commenced. Pumpurs places his fictional Lāčplēsis into this historical conflict at the same time that he is dealing with his own and Latvia’s conflicts in the late nineteenth century. The earlier hopes for alliance with the Slavophiles are waning and resistance to extreme Russification is the order of the day. In the poem, with spring comes peace. However, trouble brews with the traitor, Kangars, who learns the secret of Lāčplēsis’ power in a demon-induced dream. The Bearslayer’s strength lies in his ears, his bear’s ears. The Black Knight from Germany arrives, the son of a witch, immune from wounds and tainted with evil deeds, brought to Latvia by Bishop Albert. The Black Knight seeks to parlay with Lāčplēsis at Lielvārde and suggests a friendly fight, a tournament of strength to which Lāčplēsis reluctantly acquiesces. The fight gets ugly, the Black Knight cuts off one of Lāčplēsis’ ears, enraged Lāčplēsis tears into the Black Knight’s armor and flesh with his sword, Lāčplēsis’ second ear is severed. Together, these iconic combatants, entangled, struggle to the edge of Daugava’s cliffs.

⁷³ Cropley in Pumpurs 2007, Chapter 2, 298.

⁷⁴ Gērmanis, 78-80.

Bearslayer throws the Black Knight over the cliff, but is himself pulled down with his foe. “The waves roar and an island rises up in the river. In the castle, Laimdota shrieks and ends her own life.”⁷⁵

The Germans now defeat the Latvians who are then made their slaves. However, Lāčplēsis is alive to the Latvian people, just asleep “beneath the island in a golden bed.” At night, on the River Daugava can be seen two shadowy figures locked in battle while Laimdota’s light shines in the ruins of Lielvārde castle. The warriors always rerun their combat and plunge into the Daugava, Laimdota always screams, and the castle’s light extinguishes as always (Latvian: *arvien*). This poem has no absolute end, but promises resurrection, a continuing fight till freedom is achieved.

Pumpurs closes Canto VI with these words:

It is Bearslayer struggling there,
 Still fighting with the foreign foe,
 And Laimdota whose watching stare
 Awaits the triumph he will know.
 For soon or late will come, is sure,
 The day when foes are all cast down,
 Oppressors all alone will drown.
 When strangers no more rule the folk,
 In Latvia freedom’s day will dawn;
 When Latvians no more bear the yoke,
 Their Golden Age will be reborn.⁷⁶

Pumpurs was not only a poet, but also a Latvian patriot, who in *Lāčplēsis* created a European literary masterpiece, but also a revolutionary call to arms. Pumpurs is predicting that ultimately it is inevitable that all foreign foes will be cast down, all oppressors will drown, the tauta will govern itself and not be ruled by others. The folk will not be ruled by tyrannical strangers, Latvia sooner or later will be free and self-

⁷⁵ Cropley in Pumpurs 2007, Chapter 2, 300.

⁷⁶ Pumpurs 2007, 286-287.

governing. This is indeed a bold and revolutionary statement, a statement originally censored by Imperial and Soviet authorities.

So we have after many trials and tribulations, Lāčplēsis with his friend Koknesis, and their beautiful women, Laimdota and the reformed Spīdala going on to fight the evil German invaders of the thirteenth century. One should note the central importance of women in the poem, as indeed in all of nineteenth-century European national movements. They played an important role in the “organic” work of nation building and served as symbols of the nation—the role often lost in twentieth-century radical nationalism. Pumpurs used his wife, Ede Goba, as his model for Laimdota and based his character of Spīdala on his lost love Līze Ratmindere. Līze’s husband, writer Matīss Kaudzīte, was the model for Koknesis.⁷⁷ So Pumpurs must be Lāčplēsis. Pumpurs, Goba, Ratmindere, and Kaudzīte also go on to figuratively fight the foreign oppressors surrounding them in reality and in Pumpurs’ dreams manifest in his poem *Lāčplēsis*. Pumpurs was not outwardly revolutionary, but through *Lāčplēsis* he had revolutionary dreams, which became his legacy.

Lāčplēsis is lost when in combat with the Black Knight, his bear’s ears, the source of his power, are cut off, and while tossing the Black Knight off a cliff into the Daugava River is himself dragged down, always returning until the day when he will defeat the Black Knight and free the Latvian people. Perhaps Pumpurs’ lost bear’s ears are his earlier ties to the Slavophiles, which are no longer needed by him and the evolving Latvian nationalists. This severing of Lāčplēsis’ bears’ ears is *the coupe de grace* of my

⁷⁷ Valdis Veilands, editor-in-chief, *A Hundred Great Latvians: Andrējs Pumpurs 1841-1902 Poet* (Riga: Nacionālais Apgāds, 2006), 26-27.

argument. The extreme Russification measures in Latvia in 1887 certainly influenced Pumpurs' tale of a Latvian hero who falsely relies on bears' ears for his power, but when they are shed in the fight with the German reveal that Lāčplēsis' power is not dependent upon them. Lāčplēsis' bear's ears made him deaf to the true enemy, the lords of the German barons, the Russians and their continuing imperial ambitions.

Pumpurs' intent and message can be reconstructed as follows: As an early Latvian nationalist he is calling for the overthrow of the Baltic German feudal overlords, landowners, and their Russian Tsarist patrons. The romantic nationalism of the Young Latvians was a dead end. Like the sympathetic German enlightenment philosophers, Herder and Garlieb Helwig Merkel⁷⁸ before them, the Slavophiles served only to educate the Latvians to the fact that their fight was their own and future success would have to be accomplished politically and militarily, a Latvian revolution. Envisioned by Pumpurs, his fictional hero, half-primitive, half-civilized, Lāčplēsis, with an individual and collective identity, in a Freudian sense, the Latvian individual and the Latvian people, related to the Russian bear and hoping for the bear's assistance, but leery of the bear, in fact audaciously threatening the bear and killing the bear, will ultimately defeat the occupiers of the Latvian homeland.

Defying criticism made by the Baltic German elite that the Latvian language, a language of the field and shop floor was unfit for literature,⁷⁹ Pumpurs over the course of fifteen years produced a Latvian literary masterpiece.⁸⁰ This poetic construction,

⁷⁸ Garlieb Helwig Merkel, *DIE LETTEN, vorzüglich in Liefland am ende des philosophiselen Jahrhunderts* (1796).

⁷⁹ Plakāns, 101.

⁸⁰ Lāms supports my transitional argument for Pumpurs significance. Ojārs Lāms in Pumpurs 2007, 309.

neglected initially, stimulated learned debate about poetic and epic forms, symbols and meaning in the Latvian language and beyond.

Nations are defined by language according to Herder,⁸¹ and the printed word according to Benjamin Anderson.⁸² Pumpurs' poem was a timely contribution to this nation building linguistic and literary enterprise. During the same period, according to Plakāns: "The number of new titles published in Latvian rose from 181 in 1884 to 822 in 1904; the total print runs rose from 168,000 units in 1884 to more than five million in 1904."⁸³ This cultural flowering was also accompanied by significant demographic changes. A mass of "landless, agricultural proletarians" was created in 1817 when the German barons in the Baltic Provinces emancipated their serfs. These members of the absolute lowest social order who enjoyed "bird freedom" without land, travel or civil rights, with "labour obligations but no land, property or skills," when finally released from their tenancy were attracted to the towns, especially Riga.⁸⁴ According to Aldis Edvards Purs: "From 1867 to 1897, the number of Latvians doubled in nearly every town and the trend continued into the twentieth century. By 1913, Riga was predominantly populated by Latvians, with the German population proportion dropping from 42.8% in 1867 to 13.8% in 1913."⁸⁵ The German-founded, former Hanseatic city of Riga was being gradually overtaken by Latvians, a people who in the 1890's were obliged to use Russian

⁸¹ Hamilton on Herder, 5.

⁸² Anderson, 36, 43-44, 67, 80.

⁸³ Plakāns, 101.

⁸⁴ Aldis Edvards Purs, "Creating the State from Above and Below" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1998),13.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

in the educational and judicial systems, who learned German as “a necessity for virtually all professions,” but who spoke Latvian in the fields and now the shop floors of Riga.

In the country, some significant land reform also took place, a response to a series of peasant riots in 1777, 1784, 1790, and 1802.⁸⁶ The serfs were emancipated in 1817, 1819, and 1861 in Kurland, Livland, and Latgale respectively.⁸⁷ Tsar Alexander II passed a new law stating: “That the land of the farmers must be kept separate from the land of the baronial estates,” thus allowing Latvians to lease or buy land. After indentured servitude was repealed village inhabitants received title for their land and were required to pay a leasing fee for it. These fees were exorbitant, but by 1863, Latgalians began to buy land and in 1907 all debt was waived.⁸⁸ A new class of Latvian kulaks or “grey barons” was created. Also in 1863 peasants were allowed to move to the towns, forming a new class of workers.⁸⁹ By the beginning of World War I, land ownership was almost divided 50/50 between the aristocracy and the common people, about the same ratio that existed in Great Britain during the same period. However, reforms had come too late and were complicated by both class and ethnic struggle; it was the time for revolution.

After the killing of seventy demonstrators in St. Petersburg on 22 January 1905, a general strike was called for in Riga and other towns. Demonstrations and violence spread to the countryside. In the Baltic Province of Livland, 183 estates and 72 manorial residences were completely or partially destroyed. In Courland, 229 estates and 42 manorial residences met the same fate. Property damage was estimated at approximately

⁸⁶ Gērmanis, 151.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 157, 162-163.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 161, 163.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

3.8 million rubles in Livland and 5.0 million rubles in Courland.⁹⁰ When the Imperial Russian Army returned from the war with the Japanese, from December 1905 until April 1907, with the help of baronial self-protection units (*Selbstschutz*), severe punitive reprisals were carried out against the Latvians. Some five thousand Latvians fled west, with four thousand arriving in North America,⁹¹ one of which was Kārlis Ulmanis. Ulmanis would graduate from the agronomy school at the University of Nebraska before returning to Latvia in 1916.⁹²

In 1905, the year of the Russian (and Latvian) revolution, Rainis wrote a play entitled *Fire and Night*, not performed till 1911, based on Pumpurs' *Lāčplēsis*. Rainis explicitly turned the Black Knight into a Tartar, clearly making the Russians (traditionally disparaged as Tartars or Mongols) the enemy.⁹³ The rock opera, *Lāčplēsis*, with libretto by Mara Zālīte, opened on 23 August 1988 and “ran for forty-three sold out performances with 180,000 viewers” at the time of the non-violent Latvian Popular Front’s drive for independence. Zālīte went so far as dressing the female demons, in league with the devil and the Germans, in Red Army-like uniforms. She was precise in her identification of her Lāčplēsis/Spīdala composite hero/heroine as the Latvian people personified.⁹⁴ Aigars Grauba, in his 2007 film, *Rīgas Sargi*, would do exactly the same thing with his characters Mārtiņš/Elza. Today, the 1988 performances of the rock opera

⁹⁰ Plakāns, 105.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Alexander V. Berkis, “Soviet Russia’s Persecution of Latvia, 1918 to the Present,” *Institute for Historical Review*, 3-4, located at: http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v08/v08p-25_Berkis.html (Accessed 3 Dec 2013).

⁹³ Plakāns, 106-107. “Unlike Pumpurs, the Dark Knight for Rainis is not a German but comes <<from the Tartars>>, thus symbolizing Czarist Russia.” Lāms in Pumpurs 2007, Chapter 4, 324.

⁹⁴ Guntis Smidchens, “Notes on the Latvian National Hero, Lāčplēsis,” *Journal of Folkloric Research* 43, No. 3 (2006): 275-277.

Lāms, 328-329.

Lāčplēsis are viewed as the start of the third national awakening. The events after 1905, leading up to the first declaration of independence on 18 November 1918 are called the second national awakening.

Ojārs Lāms looks at the nature of a national epic, sources of material, the reception of the poem by Pumpurs' contemporary Latvians, and "the role . . . it played in Latvia since its first publication."⁹⁵ Lāms gives too much credit, in my opinion, to Rainis and Zālīte.⁹⁶ In the play the Black Knight is the Russian enemy. In the Rock Opera, the devil and his female demons in the Hellhole scene are overtly costumed and portrayed as Russians, the enemy. The devil is completely clothed in red and is a virtuoso ballet dancer. The lady demons all wear the high peaked hats of the Russian military officers' fashion. I watched a videotape of a performance of the Rock Opera *Lāčplēsis*. I could not understand the libretto, but the on stage liturgy was very clear. Both Zālīte, in the rock opera *Lāčplēsis*, and Aigars Grauba, in the film *Rīgas Sargi* used the poem *Lāčplēsis* in the same way. They tell one story overtly while telling another covertly.

Pumpurs also did all this, the overt tale of struggle with the Germans, during their medieval Teutonic Baltic crusade and later lordship over the Latvian peasants turned to serfs, but also the covert tale about the Russians, patrons of the loyal Baltic German barons of Pumpurs' day. The modern day enemy of Pumpurs was not just the German manorial landowners, but also the Russian aristocracy, which empowered them. A majority of these German lords owed their titles and land privileges to the Tsars and Tsarinas of Russia, not a hereditary Teutonic legacy.

⁹⁵ Cropley on Lāms in Pumpurs 2007, Foreword, 11.

⁹⁶ Lāms, 322-23, 328-29.

According to Lāms, *Lāčplēsis* was not an overnight success, it was not received well critically or popularly, it was largely ignored, put on the back shelf so to speak. Lāms concludes that *Lāčplēsis* is indeed a national epic in that it was ultimately accepted by the people “as a summary of who and what they are (or at least would like to believe they are) and gives them a sense of belonging to a great and respected tradition at both national and supra-national levels,” achieving “a lasting place in Latvian literature and also in the identity of the Latvian people.”⁹⁷ This was a huge leap.

Sergei Kruks considers the characters in *Lāčplēsis* a figment of Pumpurs’ imagination.⁹⁸ I do not doubt some of the folkloric tradition upon which *Lāčplēsis* is based, but the question of its origin is answerable. It could even go back to the time of Baltic/Finno-Ugric contact, with a bear eared man defending a Liv territory against Indo-European (Baltic) invaders. The folkloric figure of *Lāčausis* (Bear’s Ears) is obviously the model for *Lāčplēsis*,⁹⁹ along with the Liv warrior Imauts (sic) or Imants who slew the missionary priest Bertold with his spear.¹⁰⁰ Pumpurs was well versed in the historical chronicles¹⁰¹ as well as the *dainas* (Latvian poetic folk verses).

The literary debate between Sergei Kruks of the University of Latvia and Guntis Smidchens of the University of Washington, on the integrity, symbolism, and value of Latvia’s national epic is interesting in itself, but the point of significance to my thesis is

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Kruks, 4.

⁹⁹ “Based on a national legend about a strongman called Lāčausis (Bear’s ears).” Germanis, 182.

¹⁰⁰ “A Livonian warrior thrust a spear through the bishop, and thus died a second German clergyman . . . Bertold died in 1198. We know from the chronicle of Henricus that the warrior who killed Bertold was known as Imauts (sic).” Germanis, 59.

¹⁰¹ James A. Brundage, *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1961). Jerry Christopher Smith and William L. Urban, *The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1977). A good synopsis in English of the Baltic Crusades is provided by Indriķis Šterns, *Latvijas Vēsture 1180-1290 Krustakari (History of Latvia 1180-1290: The Crusades)*. (Riga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2002).

the mutability of this myth over time and space. How could Latvian historians resist following what would prove to be an ambiguous model when templates of the present were overlaid on the past.

The historical myth of Saint Alexander Nevsky and his contribution to the history of the Baltic, with the aid of Andrējs Plakāns, deserves attention. Plakāns enlists Nevsky as an ally of the rebellious Semigalians in his description of the 1242 Battle of Lake Peipus against the Teutonic Order. Portraying Alexander Nevsky acting in the interests of the Baltic tribes, not acting as the “evil” Russian invader, as Ivan IV (the Terrible) and Peter the Great are later portrayed by Germanophile Latvians, in their understanding and accounts of the Livonian and Great Northern Wars is novel.¹⁰² Aside from the mythic and historical significance to the Russian people and Soviet Union, as immortalized in the great propaganda film of Sergei Eisenstein of 1938, as the bulwark against the Teutonic invasions, Nevsky’s actual status as a vassal of the Mongols is also worth noting.

The concept of Russians helping Latvians, as dreamed of by Pumpurs, is not outlandish. The Latvian nationalists of the late nineteenth century, the “Young Latvians,” one of which supposedly was Pumpurs, were looking to the Russian intelligentsia to aid them in their dreams of liberation from the German-speaking nobility serving the Romanov dynasty. The Latvians and Russians shared a common goal of liberation from oppression. A common Slavic/Baltic/Finno-Ugric cultural heritage embodied in the epic *Lāčplēsis* is certainly a proposal that cannot be easily refuted. It need not be discarded as useless Soviet propaganda.

¹⁰² Plakāns, 17.

Both *Lāčplēsis* and Alexander Nevsky inspired military decorations of the highest level in the Republic of Latvia and the U.S.S.R. respectively. Vaira Vīke-Freiberga says “it is no coincidence that a military medal of the independent Republic of Latvia shares the name with the protagonist of the epic. The same name is also used to refer to Latvian soldiers as a whole.”¹⁰³

Freiberga further explains that “Pumpurs’s (sic) contemporary ideals are set in the past, showing, as it were, the nation the way to the future.”¹⁰⁴ Much of Freiberga’s analysis deals with symbols, such as the raising of the Sunken Castle and the dawn of a new golden age, and their literary and psychological significance. She sees the prophetic in *Lāčplēsis*, a hero who actually never dies, as he was never alive.¹⁰⁵ Kruks finds this form of fictional hero, condemned to everlasting struggle, unsatisfactory as a model for a people. With no resolution to the epic, Kruks is disappointed.¹⁰⁶

However, the idea of resurrection, the spring following the winter, day following night, is a very strong symbol, the very essence of Christianity, the very essence of the Eleusian mysteries, is a strong point of *Lāčplēsis*, not a weakness. Like the inexplicable Christian Trinity, the miracle of the Buddha duplication at Sravasti, and the bodily resurrection of Christ, *Lāčplēsis*’ struggle is mysterious, timeless, and rewarding, always (*arvien*), at least to the Latvians. The origin of the national struggle mentality in Latvia can be traced to *Lāčplēsis*.

The ex-Canadian, Western Diaspora Latvian DP, former president of Latvia, Vaira Vīke-Freiberga, herself a *Lāčplēsis* scholar, recruited *Lāčplēsis* for her program of

¹⁰³ Vīke-Freiberga in Pumpurs 2007, 301.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 302.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 307.

¹⁰⁶ Kruks, 26.

nationalism and entry into the European Union and NATO, just as the interwar Latvian government used *Lāčplēsis* for its nation building needs. Freiberga deals with the symbolic elements of *Lāčplēsis*, with less focus on the political and historical. She is a psychologist interested in how these elements affect the reader's mind.

Both Freiberga and Klavinš stress that prior to *Lāčplēsis* there was no Latvian folkloric tradition of great heroes fighting battles against dragons and giants. The few Latvian folkloric heroes were by and large strong men who loved nature and provided protection to their people from evil.¹⁰⁷

Janīna Kursīte, in her analysis, focuses on “the poetic technology that gives *Lāčplēsis* its power . . . the metrical structure of Pumpurs’ poem.” Kursīte explains there was no precedent for what Pumpurs was doing. Traditional Latvian folk poetry dealt with rustic scenes of nature celebration and rejoicing, not “telling dark tales of trafficking with the Devil, betraying a whole people, murdering those who oppose, or treacherously luring a hero to his death.”¹⁰⁸ Pumpurs was unique in developing his “own poetic forms.”

Not many people in Latvia or the Latvian Diaspora today have read *Lāčplēsis*, but *Lāčplēsis* is a strong figure in Latvian collective memory. Appendix A shows a modern image of *Lāčplēsis*, an image provided by the *Lāčplēsis* Brewing Company as wallpaper for computer screens.¹⁰⁹ He is not easy to see, but he is there. In their advertising, this brewery, ironically established as a *kolkhoz* during the Soviet period, referring to their

¹⁰⁷ Vīke-Freiberga in Pumpurs 2007, 301.

Klavins in Pumpurs 2007, 341.

¹⁰⁸ Cropley on Janīna Kursīte in Pumpurs 2007, Foreword, 13.

¹⁰⁹ “*Lāčplēsa* Alus,” located at: http://www.lacplesisalus.lv/files/wallpaper/img_7_1280x1024.jpg (Accessed 21 April 2011) and <http://www.royalbrew.com/Default.aspx?ID=226> (Accessed 8 June 2009).

beer's freshness on their label declares *Lāčplēsis Dzīvs* (Lāčplēsis Alive). Yes, I believe he is.

One of my earliest childhood memories is being put to bed by my mother, Nina Rundans (nee Grumondzs), singing to me the lullaby: “*aijā žūžū lāča bērni.*” This roughly translates into “go to sleep my little bear children.” Looking back at the *Lāčplēsis* epic, there is no doubt in my mind that my mother, like many Latvian mothers was programming me to be a son of *Lāčplēsis*, a Latvian nationalist, who would rid her country of birth of foreign communist invaders. My father, Viktors, would later use the succinct term “indoctrination” to describe just such things.

Lāčplēsis became a “superhero” in the Marvel comic book sense with the 2009 publication of the graphic novels *Lāčpleša dzimšana* (Lāčplēsis' birth) and *Lāčplēša hronika* (Lāčplēsis' chronicle) in Latvian by the Vietnamese-Latvian artist Kao Viets Ngujens.¹¹⁰ The myth and its uses live on, giving solace and inspiration to a new kind of Latvian citizen, a Southeast Asian immigrant. However, is mythic identity construction relevant in a postmodern world, which Latvia has subscribed to, with its entry into the EU?

Steven Kiersons demonstrates how *Lāčplēsis* became the template for Latvians writing their memoirs, especially in their World War experiences, the template for how Latvians view the world and their place in it.¹¹¹ He does not however address its revolutionary aspect or its subliminal messaging, which I do.

¹¹⁰ Kao Viets Ngujens, *Lāčpleša dzimšana* (Rīga: Apgāds Zvaigzne, 2009). Kao Viets Ngujens, *Lāčplēša hronika* (Rīga: Apgāds Zvaigzne, 2009).

¹¹¹ Steven Kiersons, *Bear-Slayers: Latvian Myth, Memory, and the World Wars* (Canada: Lulu Publishers, 2008).

Pumpurs called his land holdings *Vilksplēši*, which literally means “tearers apart of the wolf.” His uncle’s land holdings were called *Lāčplēsis*, “tearer apart of the bear.”¹¹² Why did Pumpurs not use *Vilksplēsis* for his bear-eared character and title? Should the poem be called *Vilksplēsis*, to better suit the story about the struggle with the German enemy? Should the wolf be torn apart rather than the bear? The answer is ironically no. Pumpurs was writing in the context of his historical present, conveying a message about the present subordinate social, economic, and political status of the Latvians. While hoping for and trying to enlist nationalist Russian Slavophile support for Latvian rights as a later day Young Latvian, I propose that Pumpurs inspired by the NV program, after the imposition of strict Russification by Alexander III from 1885 to 1895,¹¹³ revised the text and title of *Lāčplēsis* to condemn the Germans overtly and the Russians covertly.

It was not the Germania of the past that needed to be torn apart, but the local Baltic German baronial power of the present, in the immediate Latvian context, and of course the Russian autocratic imperial power in the greater context. Pumpurs was anti-autocratic if not anti-imperial. Inspired by the American and French revolutions, educated and literate Latvians wanted to be governed and not ruled. Pumpurs was working at linking the mythological past with the present. Pumpurs intuitively knew the power of past/future connections. He knew what novelist Joseph Boydon meant in his reflection: “The past and the future are present.”¹¹⁴

¹¹² Apinis on Pumpurs in *A Hundred Great Latvians*, pg 2 of 2.

¹¹³ Germanis, 184-185. “These measures lay like a pall over Baltic cultural life for three decades, they were stringently enforced only from 1885 to 1895.” Plakāns, 100-101.

¹¹⁴ Joseph Boyden, *The Orenda* (Toronto: Penguin Books Canada, 2013), 487.

Chapter Two - Chronologue and Eventory: *Latvija* 1919

Now the days following the Great Peace were troublous days. There were wars and rumours of wars, famines and pestilences in divers places. Of all the lands, no land was more sorely distressed than the Land of Russ. For there arose a band of thieves and murderers who called themselves the Bolshevites, and their hand was against every man and every man's hand against them. Then said the Great Men of the Land of Brit, these Bolshevites have troubled the world overlong. We will utterly destroy them. But we dare not do it openly, for we fear the people, who have a great love for these Bolshevites, not understanding them. Let us therefore send The Ships, and in order that no man may gainsay us, we will call it A Summer Cruise . . . So The Ships came and cast anchor in the place which is called Biorko in the Land of the Fin and close by the Isle of Kron, a fortress of the Bolshevites of exceeding great strength. And they besieged the Bolshevites by sea while the Lettites, the Finnites and the Estonites besieged them by land. But the Bolshevites fled before The Ships and hid in their harbours, refusing to give battle. So The Ships tarried at Biorko, waiting and watching. And the men passed their time in the pursuit of arms and with games, The Ships competing one with the other. But many sighed for the fleshpots of their own land, and for their wives and children. . . . Now the chief of All the captains was a mighty man of valour, not great of stature but cunning in battle. . . .¹¹⁵

The quote above comes from an anonymous contributor to the first (and only) issue of 'Baltic Bits,' the journal produced in the fall of 1919 from the wardroom of H.M.S. Delhi in the autumn of 1919, one of the ships of the Allied Fleet in the Baltic. The "chief of All the captains" was Walter Cowan. What we can glean from this biblically inspired treatise is that the crew was aware of the covert nature of its mission in support of the Baltic States against the Bolsheviks. The author of this word play resorted to biblical allusions to mythologize this campaign to make it palatable to the crew, just as Pumpurs used medieval allusions in *Lāčplēsis* to make nineteenth-century national

¹¹⁵ Bennett 1964, 11-12.

struggle palatable to the Latvians. One in a solemn mode and another in an ironic one, both these conflicts were characterized as epic events in the struggle of good against evil.

This 1919 war was undeclared. Unwanted publicity back in Britain could spawn labour unrest and even revolution in a population tired of war and perhaps even sympathetic to the revolution in Russia. What is ironic is that these allied crews ended up assisting not only the Latvian resistance to the Bolsheviks, but also a social revolution against the Baltic German barons and the White Russians, a complete overturning of the social order in the Baltic, at the same time as the British government was involved in suppressing just such a movement in Ireland.

Major General Clifford Kinvig, in the introduction to his book on the Allied military intervention in Russia at the end of the Great War, quotes George F. Kennan's view that the study of this intervention is like "entering one of the most impenetrable thickets of confusion and perplexity to be found anywhere in the forests of recent history."¹¹⁶ Kennan was addressing the chaos in the accounts of this period. Rear-Admiral Sir Walter Cowan faced the chaos in the field of operations at the time of his posting there. Upon being briefed on his deployment with a second fleet of cruisers and destroyers to the Baltic, in the winter of 1918-1919, Cowan remarked:

It seemed to me that there was never such a tangle, and my brain reeled with it. An unbeaten German army, two kinds of belligerent Russians, Letts, Finns, Esthonians [sic], Lithuanians, ice, mines – 60,000 of them! Russian submarines, German small craft, Russian battleships, cruisers, and destroyers all waiting for the ice to melt to ravage the Baltic.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Kinvig, Clifford. *Churchill's Crusade: The British Invasion of Russia 1918-1920* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), xv.

¹¹⁷ Bennett, 70.

Military historian Prit Buttar also describes a highly confusing picture on the ground in Latvia in 1919:

Latvia was almost completely overrun by the Red Army, but the Baltic Germans and the *Freikorps* under the command of Rudiger von der Goltz managed to retain control of a small bridgehead around the port of Liepāja, and in conjunction with other German forces in northern Latvia, Goltz’s units and the small Latvian nationalist army retook Riga. Thereafter, as Goltz tried to establish a pro-German government in place of the nationalist administration, there was confused fighting between the Germans and Latvians, with Estonian forces aiding the latter, ultimately resulting in the expulsion of the *Freikorps* from Latvia.¹¹⁸

The Latvian word *nekārtības* means disorder or more precisely, distasteful disorder. Not only did “disorder” produce the circumstances that led to the first independent Latvian nation-state, but historians of this nation-state produced disorder in writing Latvian national history, a disorder which persists and requires correction. It is my intention in this chapter to straighten out this *nekārtība*, the disorder in the Baltic region after the Russian Revolution and World War I: the chaotic Allied intervention, the ad hoc creation of the Latvian state, and the bias in the writing of the history of this time and place. The “confused fighting” referred to by Buttar remains confused primarily in English-language texts and Latvian versions, both official and unofficial. My research has led me to the conclusion that these events are very well documented in the Latvian language, but have been selectively ignored and forgotten. Research in English based on these primary and secondary sources would clear up much of the confusion in the West. It is my intention to remedy this lacuna in a very small way.

This chapter is not concerned with the rationalization of an ethnic or cultural nation or identity, *Tauta*, the Latvian version of the German *Volk*, which existed prior to

¹¹⁸ Buttar, Prit. *Between Giants: The Battle for the Baltics in World War II* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2013), 22.

the declaration of independence on 18 November 1918. Rather, this chapter concerns the formation of the political state of Latvia from 1918 to 1920 and how subsequent Latvian history was written using the self-determination template, the *Lāčplēsis* template, with the refusal to acknowledge that Latvia was formed more by external forces than internal ones. Latvians were followers rather than leaders in the formation of an independent Latvia. Fictional Latvian history became a primary tool for the successful invention and construction of Latvian identity and nation post independence, not previous to it.

However, the determining factor in Latvia's success in achieving independence was not the so-called great-power diplomacy *per se*, as suggested by Stanley W. Page, but three decisive military battles: the defeat of the German Iron Division and Baltic Landeswehr at Cēsis on 23 June 1919; the defeat of the "West Russian Army" led by Bermondts at Rīga on 11 November 1919; and the defeat of the Russian Red Army in Latgale in January 1920.¹¹⁹ In all three battles, the major players, Estonian in the first case, British in the second, and Polish in the third, are downplayed or completely overlooked in the Latvian historical narratives. Latvian historians and historians of Latvia have adopted, adapted, and distorted historical events to suit their nation building and pedagogical socialization purposes. These purposes are not necessarily bad, but as John Buchan said: "With time and with sufficient evidence, the ruse of romance can be discarded."¹²⁰ It is time to take the fiction out of Latvian history or at least moderate it to suit our present.

¹¹⁹ Daina Bleiere; Ilgvars Butulis; Inesis Feldmanis; Aivars Stranga; and Antonijs Zunda. Translated by Valdis Bērziņš, Pēteris Cedriņš, Filips Birzulis, and Rihards Kalniņš. *History of Latvia: The 20th Century* (Rīga: Jumava, 2006), 134-137.

¹²⁰ John Buchan, Dedication "To Caroline Grosvenor," *Greenmantle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 1916), 3.

Chapter Two of my thesis concerns the second significant battle mentioned in the preceding paragraph, a battle which took place from 8 October to 11 November 1919 in the environs of Riga between the Latvian National Army and the West Russian Volunteer Army of Colonel Bermond. Radzinš' account of this battle is my primary source, which I consider to be a very good one, a professional officer's memoir. Radzinš is surprisingly purged from many later Latvian sources, especially after his dismissal and death "under a cloud of scandal" in 1930. Radzinš was not the submissive officer the Latvian government was comfortable with nor was he comfortable with the personnel and policies of the Latvian government during the interwar period. Radzinš cannot be accused of nationalist myth making.

While of course blowing his own horn to some degree, Radzinš concludes that this battle, a close thing, a last-ditch effort with no reserves to count on, was won for three reasons: the bravery and determination of the Latvian fighters; the incompetence of the West Russian Army's command; and the tactical military involvement of the Allied Fleet, using naval gunnery to support Latvian infantry.¹²¹ Radzinš is very clear and adamant that the most significant factor was this Allied Fleet's support and that without it there would have been no victory, and no independence for Latvia. Radzinš views this military event as the defining event in Latvian liberation and in his 1922 book wanted to document it before the politicians could distort it.

He was a soldier of lowly origins. Pēteris Valdemārs Radzinš was born on 2 May 1880 to a peasant family, in Lugāžu parish, in the Baltic Province of Livland, in the Imperial Russian Empire. In 1898, Radzinš volunteered for service in the Imperial

¹²¹ Radzinš, 114.

Russian Army, a way for someone of his class to get ahead in this society, much like Pumpurs had done. He began his career with the 112th Ural Regiment, attended the officer school in Vilnius, where he graduated in 1901. He was then assigned, as a junior lieutenant, to the 24th Simbirsk Infantry Regiment in Lomza province, now in Poland, and subsequently served in the Russo-Japanese War, in 1905, where he participated in several battles. After the war, he was promoted to full lieutenant and returned with the 24th Regiment. Radzinš returned to the military academy in 1907 and was promoted to lieutenant colonel in 1909 and full colonel in 1910. He assumed command of the 32nd Kremenchuk Infantry Regiment stationed in Warsaw.¹²² Radzinš developed an affinity towards Poland in his early career as well as towards Ukraine later, in contrast to other Latvian-born career officers who were more Germanophile or Russophile.

During World War I, Radzinš served with distinction in various theaters of operations until disbanding his unit, in Bessarabia, in February 1918. He sought sanctuary in Romania until joining the army of the Hetmanate of Pavlo Skoropadsky as a staff officer in March 1918. With the collapse of this regime in December 1918, Radzinš went into the service of the Army of the Ukrainian Directorate of Simon Petlura, as chief of staff. He fled to Warsaw in September 1919, after Petlura's government failed, where in October he came across Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics, the Latvian Foreign Minister returning to Latvia, from the Paris Peace talks.¹²³ Meierovics knew that self-determination required more than talk. Meierovics recruited Radzinš to serve as a senior officer in the Latvian Army. Radzinš' affinity for rebel military operations was fortunate

¹²² Lāčplēsis kara ordena kavalēri (L.k.o.k.) biogrāfija (Lāčplēsis Order Recipient Biographies), "LKOK nr.3/1 Radzinš, Pēteris," located at: <http://www.lkok.com/detail1.asp?I=1275> (Accessed 24 Oct 2014).

¹²³ *Ibid.*

for the Latvian nationalists. He was the commander with links to the land and supporter of new nation-states rather than old imperial projects.

A brief synopsis of events in the Baltic prior to 8 October 1919 is in order, before proceeding. Following the success at Gorlice in May 1915, by September Germany had occupied Poland, Lithuania, and Courland. About one-third of the Latvian population fled back into Russia proper and Latvia's primarily Riga's industries were destroyed or dismantled and evacuated back into Russian territory. The Daugava River, between Kurland and Livland, became the northwestern boundary of German-held territory in the Baltic, the *Ober-Kommand Ost*, through 1917.¹²⁴ Nine ethnic Latvian infantry regiments were formed in 1915 for service in the Russian army, commanded by Latvian officers, a new style of imperial military unit.¹²⁵ During the Christmas battles of 1916, a Latvian-led offensive in Kurland was denied Russian reserves, which soured the Latvian allegiance to the Tsar and his aristocratic high command.¹²⁶ By 23 February 1917, revolution broke out in Russia and Nicholas II abdicated in Pskov on 2 March. Chaos prevailed in the Russian Baltic Provinces unoccupied by the Germans. Local radical workers and intellectuals formed councils or soviets, in part to prevent complete anarchy. These decentralized political and administrative units formed what would later be called the Iskolat Republic.¹²⁷ The Iskolat Republic is commonly attributed to the first Soviet

¹²⁴ Stanley W. Page, *The Formation of the Baltic States: A Study of the Effects of Great Power Politics upon the Emergence of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1970), 27. Daina Bleiere *et al.*, 80. Ģermanis, 212.

¹²⁵ Bleiere *et al.*, 83-84.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹²⁷ Page, 62.

Socialist regime of Stučka, but after reading Page and Ezergailis¹²⁸ it appears to me that Iskolat preceded Stučka and was appropriated by the Bolsheviks after their seizure of power. On March 3, a Latvian congress in Valmeira proposed “an autonomous administrative unit to be called Latvia.” On 29 April a congress in Latgale, a predominantly Latvian-speaking region within the Russian province of Vitebsk, outside the Baltic Provinces, voted unanimously for a unified Latvia.¹²⁹ In May, the Provisional Government of Kerensky turned down Latvian autonomy, but by July it issued a decree “permitting temporary organization of an administration and self government in the provinces of Livonia and Courland.”¹³⁰ Another group, a social nationalist Livonian Council, made up of workmen, soldiers, and peasants, convened in Riga, on 30 July 1917 to lay out a program of self-determination for Southern Livonia, Courland, and Latgale.¹³¹ However, by September Red Riga fell to the Germans. The Riga election was cancelled, but elsewhere in Livonia elections resulted in a socialist or Bolshevik majority.¹³²

In German-occupied Courland, a provincial council or Landesrat was formed with 40% Latvian landowner representation.¹³³ Latvian politics was clearly dividing society along class lines, with Marxist or class struggle superimposed upon national movement, the duality of modern Latvian history. The Bolsheviks, under the leadership of Vladimir

¹²⁸ Andrew Ezergailis, *The 1917 Revolution in Latvia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), *The Latvian Impact on the Bolshevik Revolution the First Phase: September 1917 to April 1918* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); *The 1917 Revolution in Latvia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

¹²⁹ Page, 63.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹³² Ekšteins, 53.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 40.

Lenin, effectively seized power in a *coup d'etat* in October 1917, with the aid of the Latvian Red Riflemen. All nine Latvian regiments had gone over to the Bolshevik cause *en masse*.¹³⁴

In October 1917, the elected Livonian Council at Valmeira was replaced by a dictatorship of the proletariat. "A Soviet of Workers and Landless Peasants [became] the central authority, and soviets of landless peasants [formed] in place of local councils."¹³⁵ This was the transition point between the decentralized Iskolat and the centralized Latvian Socialist Republic, which was to follow. Fricis Rozinš was the chairman of the "newly-elected" Bolshevik Iskolat Republic formed in December 1917, although its government subsequently moved to Moscow in February 1918.¹³⁶ The Latvian National Council was established at Valka in November to counter these radical socialist developments. However, this council, with delegates from all parties except the Bolsheviks, represented "less than 30 percent of the Latvian people not under German rule."¹³⁷

During this period, international politics begins shaping the Latvian affairs. With the war going badly on the Eastern front for the Russians, an armistice was concluded between Soviet Russia and the Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk on 15 December 1917. In January, the Latvian National Council sent Zigfrīds Meierovics, a Jewish-Latvian diplomat, west to garner support and patronage from Allied Councils.¹³⁸ All of Livonia and Estonia were overrun by German forces and by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of 3

¹³⁴ Bleiere *et al*, 93.

¹³⁵ Page, 67.

¹³⁶ Bleiere *et al*, 92.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

March 1918 “Estonia and Livonia [were] without delay [to] be cleared of Russian troops [and were to] be occupied by a German police force until security ensured by proper national institutions and until public order had been established.”¹³⁹ Germany had won control of the Baltic Provinces.

On 8 March, the newly formed Landesrat of Courland accepted a resolution requesting “his Majesty Kaiser Wilhelm to accept the crown of the Duchy of Courland” and expressed hope that “Courland, Livonia, Estonia, and Osel would be joined under a common governing body and attached to the German Reich.”¹⁴⁰ At this time ethnic Germans accounted for only 8% of the population of this so-called *Baltikum*. But the defeat at the hands of the Allies put an end to German expansionist plans. By October 1918, the Supreme Commander of the Red Army, a Latvian, Joachim I. Vatsetis (Jukums Vācietas) was planning the Bolshevik military takeover of the borderlands.¹⁴¹ It is ironic that the literal translation of Vatsetis is “the German.”

German plans in the annexed East were foiled by an armistice in the West on 11 November 1918. Article Twelve of this armistice required that the defeated Germans remain on territory they had conquered to maintain order and provide relief until such time as the Allied Powers could take over.¹⁴² With the Allies’ covert encouragement, on 18 November 1918, the independent Republic of Latvia was proclaimed in German-occupied Riga by the Democratic Bloc and the National Council, led by Kārlis Ulmanis,

¹³⁹ Ģērmanis, 231.

Page, 82.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

¹⁴¹ Jerzy Borzecki, *The Soviet Peace of 1921 and the Creation of Interwar Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 8.

¹⁴² Bennett, 28.

a former commissar under Kerensky's regime.¹⁴³ The governments of France and Great Britain gave *de facto* recognition to the self-declared governments of Latvia and Estonia. Effectively the first (in)dependent Latvian government was initially established as a British puppet state in the making.

The Provisional Government of Courland, elected by the Landesrat, in October, and in essence a German puppet government, organized a militia, the *Baltische Landeswehr*, from Baltic-Germans, a few right-wing Latvians, and some White Russians to counter these geopolitical threats from the East and the West.¹⁴⁴ Back in the United Kingdom, the British Foreign office decided: "To supply the Baltic States with military material if and when they had a government ready to utilize such material."¹⁴⁵ As Olavi Hovi argues, despite conflicting actions by various departments of the British government, apparently acting at odds with each other, the principle guiding policy for the British was the separation of Germany and Russia.¹⁴⁶

The British War Cabinet, led by Winston Churchill decided to send "a substantial naval force to the Baltic, but on no account to provide troops." A "light cruiser squadron and destroyer flotilla supported by minesweepers with auxiliary cargo vessels with weaponry for the embryonic Baltic Governments" was deployed to the eastern Baltic Sea under the command of Rear-Admiral Edwyn Alexander-Sinclair. Orders to Alexander-Sinclair were "to show the flag and support British policy as circumstances dictate."¹⁴⁷ These were indeed fluid orders taking into account both fluid policy and fluid

¹⁴³ Bleiere *et al*, 127. Plakāns, 117.

¹⁴⁴ Page, 109.

¹⁴⁵ Kinvig, 137.

¹⁴⁶ Hovi, 211.

¹⁴⁷ Kinvig, 137.

circumstances. Between November and December 1918, acting in support of the Estonian army, exceeding orders to carry out “coastal reconnaissance only,” the British naval fleet sailed along the Estonian coast, in the Gulf of Finland, to the Russian border and used the “combined guns of two light cruisers and five destroyers to lay down a devastating barrage on the advancing Bolshevik supply lines.”¹⁴⁸ A frontier bridge was destroyed and the Bolsheviks were forced to retreat. More than the flag was shown in this encounter. Exceeding orders would be the precedent for future Baltic military operations. At this point, the British fleet was split up, part of the fleet deployed to Riga.

The British at first displayed an ambivalent attitude to the Germans and Latvians in the region. In December 1918, two British warships arrived in Riga harbor. The English demanded that the Germans retain Riga and recapture all of the already evacuated portions of the Baltic region.¹⁴⁹ After the armistice, disgruntled and rebellious German soldiers had retreated ahead of the advancing Red Army and had turned over their positions without a fight. Alexander-Sinclair advised Prime Minister Ulmanis to approach the Germans for help.¹⁵⁰ Acting upon German intelligence, on 27 December, Alexander-Sinclair assisted German units of the Landeswehr in putting down a supposed Bolshevik mutiny of one of two new Latvian military units in Riga. The barracks housing the alleged mutineers was fired upon by British naval salvos.¹⁵¹

By December, most of Lithuania was occupied by the Red Army and by January it also controlled three quarters of Latvia, including Riga, Jelgava, and Ventspils.¹⁵² A

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁴⁹ Bennett, 47-48.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 49. Kinvig, 138.

¹⁵² Page, 96-97, 135. Ekšteins, 67.

second Latvian government, an “independent” Soviet Latvia, the first Soviet Socialist Republic outside Russia, a Russian Bolshevik puppet state, was established under the leadership of Pēteris Stučka, with substantial popular support.¹⁵³ The remaining German forces and the first Latvian government of Ulmanis retreated to western Courland and the port of Liepāja. Alexander-Sinclair withdrew the Royal Navy squadron to Copenhagen.

Not entirely satisfied with Alexander-Sinclair’s performance, the British War Cabinet decided to deploy a new fleet of Allied, British and French, cruisers and destroyers to the eastern Baltic Sea, under the command of Rear-Admiral Sir Walter Cowan, a true fighting admiral in the mold of Nelson, with orders “to show the British Flag and support British policy” and “to prevent the destruction of Estonia and Latvia by external aggression,” the later referring to the Bolsheviks.¹⁵⁴ On the German side, General Rudiger von der Goltz, recent “scourge of the Bolsheviks” in Finland, arrived in Courland on 1 February 1919, “to stem the [Red] tidal wave on the north-east boundary of [Germany].”¹⁵⁵

By 24 February, the Red Army was driven “beyond the ethnological frontiers of Estonia,” by the newly formed Estonian Army and the White Russian North Army.¹⁵⁶ British involvement in Estonian affairs had yielded a positive return, an investment was now required in Latvia. What presented a difficulty there, at least from the British perspective, was that the first Latvian government of Ulmanis was deposed on 16 April 1919 by a detachment of the Landeswehr, manned by German Balts, led by Baron Hans

¹⁵³ Plakāns, 118. Page, 135.

¹⁵⁴ Bennett, 71.

¹⁵⁵ Page, 145-146.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

von Manteuffel. Ulmanis was provided refuge with most of his cabinet on the Latvian steamer Saratov in Liepāja harbour, under the protection of British warships.¹⁵⁷ On 19 April, the peace conference in Paris was presented with a joint request for *de jure* recognition from Russia of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Georgia.¹⁵⁸ A third Latvian government was formed on 10 May as a German puppet regime led by Pastor Andrievs Niedra with one-third of its ministers Baltic Germans and the rest pro-German Latvians.¹⁵⁹ This was the reactionary faction of the status quo, German Lutheran hegemony and Latvian subordination, a not insignificant faction.

Riga was “liberated” from the Bolsheviks on 23 May by the Landeswehr, with German volunteers of the Iron Division, organized by Goltz, with Latvian military units fighting alongside.¹⁶⁰ At this point these Latvian units were sub units of the Landeswehr and not the Latvian Army *per se*. Oskars Kalpaks, the commander of the Latvian units had been killed in a “friendly fire” incident in Courland during these actions with their German allies on 6 March 1919. Jānis Balodis replaced Kalpaks as commander of this southern Latvian brigade.¹⁶¹ Subsequently, intending to reestablish German dominance of the Baltic, Goltz ordered his Iron Division in aid of the Landeswehr to advance north into Livonia and Estonia.

The Allies needed the Germans to check the Bolshevik advance, but they did not intend to leave the region under German control. The Allied Foreign Ministers in Paris

¹⁵⁷ Ģermanis, 243-244. Kinvig, 141. Bleire *et al*, 132.

¹⁵⁸ Page, 175.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁶⁰ Ģermanis, 245.

¹⁶¹ Igors Vārpa, *Latviešu Karavīrs Zem SarkanBaltSarkanā Karoga: No pirmajām pašaizsardzības rotām līdz vienotai Latvijas armijai (Latvian Soldiers Under the RedWhiteRed Flag: From the First Self Defence units to the Formation of the Latvian Army)* (Riga: Nordik, 2008), 99, 602. Edgars Andersons, *Latvijas Vēsture 1914-1920 (Latvian History 1914-1920)* (Stockholm: Daugava 1967).

decided to send a joint Allied Commission to the Baltic to “remove the ‘perfidious’ Germans from the anti-Soviet Baltic front as soon as possible and expedite the raising and equipping of native Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian troops.”¹⁶² On June 4, British Lieutenant-General Sir Hubert Gough was appointed to head the Inter-Allied Mission, on the ground, in the Baltic, supported by a British contingent of sixty-six personnel including two brigadier-generals and thirty-one other officers distributed across the four capitals of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Lieutenant-Colonel (sic) Stephen Tallents, a senior Foreign Office official, was appointed Chief Commissioner for the Baltic States.¹⁶³

Gough ordered Goltz to withdraw his troops into Courland on June 10.¹⁶⁴ Goltz defied the Allied orders and sent the Iron Division and Niedra’s Landeswehr north into Livland, but his forces were defeated on 23 June 1919 at Cēsis by the combined forces of the Estonian Army and a small Latvian Northern Corps led by Captain Jorģis Zemitāns.¹⁶⁵ The German forces failed to commit enough troops in support of the Landeswehr. The Landeswehr and Iron Division retreated back to Riga with the Estonians in pursuit where an armistice was concluded between the Germans and Estonians on July 3. A British officer, Harald Alexander was given command of the remaining 2000 “Balts” of the Landswehr, which was then sent out to the front against the Bolsheviks in Latgale.¹⁶⁶ Ulmanis returned to Riga on July 8, after a trip to London and after twelve weeks of exile in Liepāja Harbour. Neidra and his German puppet

¹⁶² Page, 152-153.

¹⁶³ Kinvig, 142-143.

¹⁶⁴ Page, 154.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁶⁶ Kinvig, 143-144. Page, 154-155.

government were retired in disgrace. The two Latvian brigades joined up in Riga and the new Latvian Army was established. The elderly David Simonsons now commanded the Latvian Army as its first true Commander-in-Chief. On 1 August French Field Marshal Foch ordered all “German” forces out of Latvia by August 30. However, Goltz had other plans and these “German” forces were now reorganized under the command of Russian Colonel Pavel Bermond-Avalov as the West Russian Volunteer Army, a reactionary monarchist army previously destined to be Neidra’s army, an army primarily German wearing Russian insignia along with returning Russian prisoners of war.¹⁶⁷ Bermond succeeded Prince Anatoly Lieven as commander of this military unit in Courland. This was the army that Radzinš and the fledgling Latvian Army faced in October 1919.

Upon arriving in Riga on 25 October, Radzinš began an assessment of events up to his arrival.¹⁶⁸ His retrospective account provides my background to the early part of the battle. On 8 October 1919, the West Russian Volunteer Army, under the command of Bermond, based in Jelgava (German: Mitau), commenced an offensive against the Latvian Army on the left bank of the Daugava, primarily along the axis of the main road and rail line leading into Riga.¹⁶⁹ His objective was to depose the national Latvian government and reestablish German-Russian hegemony in the Baltic before joining Yudenich’s North Russian Army in its campaign against the Bolsheviks. All traffic was stopped on the roads. At 11:00 am the offensive opened up along the entire front, with fire exchanged by both sides. The Iron Division joined up with the German Legion and initially fared poorly in attacking the Tornkalns (Tower Hill) bridges. On 9 October, the

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 155, 157, 159-164.

¹⁶⁸ Radzinš, 21.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

Latvians responded with a counteroffensive, with reserves being sent to Jorģis Zemitāns' unit.¹⁷⁰ The German plan in October was to soften Riga up through artillery bombardment in order to intimidate the Latvians into surrender. With the counteroffensive going badly their troops stopped one half *versts*¹⁷¹ from the bridges, and the Latvians retreated to the edge of Torņkalns, with the German Legion advancing on the right, the Iron Division advancing on the left, and the White Russians further left.

Acting on exaggerated intelligence regarding imminent taking of the bridges by the Russo-Germans, the southern front commander, Zemitāns, carried out a premature retreat across the bridges to the right bank and through Riga to the northern suburbs. Without reserve forces, the Latvians would be unable to take and hold Torņkalns, so General Simonsons ordered a full tactical retreat across the Daugava, without panic or confusion. There was no panic at the front, however panic at the rear was fomented by Zemitāns' flight. Subsequently, Zemitāns would lose his commission over this mistake. By the end of the day, all Latvian forces were on the right bank, the Bermontians on the left bank, occupying the Torņkalns neighborhood of Pārdaugava (literally meaning and actually located across the Daugava).¹⁷² The West Russian Army did not pursue the Latvians across the river into old town Riga to consolidate their victory, deciding to assume a defensive and command position in Torņkalns instead, as well as consolidating their position on the left bank all the way down to the old Daugagrīva Fortress at the mouth of the river. This would prove to be a mistake militarily.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

¹⁷¹ 7.95 say 8 miles or 12.8 say 13 kilometers, a *versta* being a Russian measure of about 3500 ft, 0.6629 miles or 1.067 kilometers.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 43-46.

Present-day Latvian Government accounts marvel at the miracle of how an army of 10,000 Latvians defeated a Russo-German army of 50,000. Radzinš clarifies the battle order of this time. The Bermontians consisted of: the Iron Division made up of 5000 infantry and 20 heavy artillery pieces; the German Legion made up of 5500 men and 39 heavy guns; the Russian units made up of 1500 soldiers and 6 heavy guns. This West Russian Army totaled about 12,000 fighters and 66 heavy artillery pieces. The Latvian Army was of similar size, say 10,000 to 12,000 strong, but equipped with only a third of their enemies' heavy artillery.¹⁷³ It is a testament to growing Latvian patriotism inspired by the earlier victory against the Landeswehr and the prospect of continuing Western support for the national cause, that the Army's manpower grew after the Cēsis battle from about 4000 in July 1919 to about 12,000 in October.¹⁷⁴ Kalpaks previously had a problem recruiting for his Latvian units, as sympathy for the Bolshevik cause had remained high and support for the Germans low.¹⁷⁵ By the end of this Latvian Liberation War in 1920, the strength of the Latvian Army grew to 76,000.¹⁷⁶ These numbers suggest a mass mobilization for the national cause, but behind them also was the Allied support for Latvian independence and the commitment to arm and supply the Latvian forces.

Radzinš explains that the Latvian retreat to the right bank was not a major defeat, just a part of war. Nothing was lost except the strategic position of Torņkalns, offering good artillery positions for the Germans, with subsequent heavy damage to Riga, and a

¹⁷³ Kārlis Brīvība in Radzinš, 7-8.

¹⁷⁴ "1918-1920 / Latvijas armijas 90. Gadadienas mājas lapa (Latvian Army 90th Anniversary Home Page): 1918-1920 Freedom Fights," located at: <http://www.la90.lv/?top=-1&sa=1968&setlang=1> (Accessed 18 March 2010).

¹⁷⁵ H. Rozenšteins, sr.ed., *Latvijas Armija 20 Gados (The Latvian Army in 20 Years)* (Riga: Armija štāba Apmacības daļa, 1940), 55-56.

¹⁷⁶ Nacionālie bruņotie spēki (Latvian National Armed Forces), "Latvijas armijas dibināšana (The Formation of the Latvian Army)," located at: http://www.mil.lv/lv/Par_mums/Vesture/Latvijas_armijas_izveidošana.aspx (Accessed 27 Oct. 2014).

potential bridgehead across the river that was never exploited.¹⁷⁷ This opportunity diminished with time as the Latvian military strength grew after the 27 October restructuring. Latvian self-defence units and local militias began to consolidate into the Latvian Army. Some Red Riflemen volunteered their services and experience after self-demobilizing from Vātsetis' invasion force, but by and large this recruitment was of new men, young and old, a motley army, predominantly an army of students and peasants, ill equipped and poorly clothed.¹⁷⁸ Help came from the British, as it had come to the Estonians, but not just in material.

Prior to Bermondts' attack of 8 October, the Allies were pushing Bermondts and the Latvian Army to pursue the Bolshevik forces northeast. Goltz thought his puppet West Russian Army, as an anti-Bolshevik force would be supplied by the Allies for this purpose.¹⁷⁹ At the same time Bermondts was also lobbying Berlin for its support, financial and moral, ostensibly for his anti-Bolshevik cause, but with the implicit aim of preserving a German military presence in the region.¹⁸⁰ The Allies hoped that the Germans, White Russians, and Latvians would rally around a common cause and fight together again. While overtly playing along with the Allies, however the Latvians were preparing for a war against the West Russian Army, a more immediate threat to their nation-state, holding back men and materials from the Bolshevik front. The Allies were not expecting Bermondts' attack on Riga, but the Latvian command did. Only once the offensive started did the Allies give the Latvians a free hand.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Radziņš, 47.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 24. Bermondts, 171.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 125, 143-144.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

On 13 October, the Allied war fleet left the Daugava River and assumed cruising positions off the mouth of the Daugava, in the Gulf of Riga.¹⁸² Latvia's Prime Minister Ulmanis and his government, taken up with the panic behind the lines and bolstered with brandy, supplied by Acting Governor of Riga, the British diplomat Stephen Tallents, decided to leave the city.¹⁸³ On 14 October, General Simonsons contacted Major-General Alfred Burt and asked him if British and French pride allowed them being pushed out of Riga by the Russo-German force. Simonsons appealed to British honour and asked the English officer if this affront was acceptable. Burt answered in the negative. Simonsons then asked Burt to request Allied naval cover for a proposed Latvian crossing of the Daugava at its mouth, an assault on Bermondts's Russian garrison in Daugagrīva Fortress. This request was forwarded to the Allied naval commander in Tallinn (German: Reval), the diminutive fighting Rear-Admiral Walter Cowan, who upon his arrival off the Latvian coast had immediately and vigorously shelled the Bolsheviks out of their positions in Ventspils, the second major Latvian ice free port on the north Courland coast. Before contacting Cowan, Burt had assured Simonsons that he would elicit a positive answer from the rear-admiral.¹⁸⁴ I am sure this answer was an easy one to procure, as Cowan would later demonstrate by authorizing the audacious activities of Augustus Agar and his small fleet of Coastal Motor Boats, against the Bolshevik fleet in their base at Kronstadt.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁸³ Tallents, 332, 366.

¹⁸⁴ Radziņš, 49-50.

¹⁸⁵ Augustus Agar, *Baltic Episode: A Classic of Secret Service in Russian Waters* (London: Naval Institute Press, 1963). Harry Ferguson, *Operation Kronstadt: The True Story of Honor, Espionage, and the Rescue of Britain's Greatest spy, the Man with a Hundred Faces* (New York: Overlook, 2009).

Both actions were field decisions made by the most senior commander in the Baltic theatre of operations, Cowan, acting without the explicit authorization of the British government. British Army Major-General Alfred Burt would assume the descriptor “influential” in Latvian accounts. Another officer, Major A. H. Keenan, is also described as “sympathetic.” The British naval historian, Geoffrey Bennett, pays tribute to these two men in his text, effectively announcing that the Latvian people owed a great deal of gratitude to these two sympathetic and influential men.¹⁸⁶ Keenan was one of the first British Imperial Army officers on the ground in Liepāja when the Allied Mission arrived. He and Burt provided support to the Latvians in a similar manner to what T.E. Lawrence did for the Arabs in their revolt against the Ottomans. By working for the Latvians, they were working for the British interests, and the British foreign policy was to keep Germany and Russia apart, to prevent the spread of Bolshevism westward on one hand, but also to preclude the formation of a new alliance between the Germans and White Russians. General Hubert Gough, the Allied Mission’s leader was dismissed after having gone too far in offering Estonia recognition of its independence in return for co-operating with General Nikolai Yudenich’s White Russians.¹⁸⁷ One can argue that Cowan likewise went too far; yet Gough was dismissed and Cowan was made a Baronet.¹⁸⁸ A senior Royal Navy officer held more sway than a British Imperial Army officer at this time and place, but perhaps Cowan’s intuition also fit better with the changing understanding of British interests—establishing a *cordon sanitaire* of client states around Russia rather than supporting the restoration of a strong Russia under the

¹⁸⁶ Bennett, 83-84, 87, 92, 95, 98-99.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 185. Hubert Gough, *Soldiering On* (London: Arthur Barker Ltd, 1954), 201-202.

¹⁸⁸ Bennett, Frontispiece photograph, “First Baronet of the Baltic: Admiral Sir Walter Cowan, K.C.B., D.S.O. and bar, M.V.O.

Whites.

The Franco-British fleet off the mouth of the Daugava promised naval artillery support up to a range of 12 *versts*,¹⁸⁹ Radiotelegraph and previously agreed signals would be used to direct naval gunfire.¹⁹⁰ Keenan contributed his personal services for this first gunnery targeting¹⁹¹ and Tallents watched the show from a rooftop in Riga,¹⁹² the Allied Mission thus demonstrating its support for their Latvian allies. Ulmanis had by now returned to Riga.

Three Latvian regiments launched a feint, trying to cross the bridges to Torņkalns, One succeeded and returned with few losses. Meanwhile, British officers had been meeting with Bermondts and his staff, and upon leaving, at 14:30, Commodore Jean-Joseph Brisson, the French officer in charge of this squadron of Allied war ships, detached from the mother fleet in the Gulf of Finland, commenced a heavy naval artillery barrage against three positions: Daugavgrīva's prison; Bolderai; and positions in the rear of the West Russian forces. Concurrently, Latvian infantry crossed the Daugava in small boats and overwhelmed the Russian garrison at the mouth of the Daugava, all to the cheers of the Allied crews in the fleet.¹⁹³ The heavy fire from the Allied fleet totally demoralized the incapable Russian defenders and the fort and garrison were captured largely intact. However, if one recalls the journal article on board the *Delhi*, this was an action against Germans and White Russians, not the Bolsheviks of *Baltic Bits*.

¹⁸⁹ Brīvība in Radziņš, 8.

¹⁹⁰ Radziņš, 50.

¹⁹¹ Janis Ķīselis served as a Latvian liaison officer on board HMS Dragon and provides a fine account of the British "actors," communications, and targeting involved in this event. Janis Ķīselis, *Cīņa Par Dzimteni – Atmiņas No Brīvības Cīņām 1918-1919 (The Struggle for the Native Land – Memories from the Freedom Struggles 1918-1919)*. (Lincoln: Vaidava/Augstums, 1971, 1936), 108-117.

¹⁹² Tallents, 368.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

In addition to spotters such as Keenan on the river, airplanes emblazoned with the Latvian swastika-like fire cross aided the fleet with targeting. The Latvian Army conducted two successful operations under protection of the fleets' guns: the capture of the Bolderaja region and the Island of Doles.¹⁹⁴ From August until 11 October, the Latvians had been on the defensive and now that they were on the offensive it was imperative that they continue to be so. Up until 16 October, the Latvian Army was establishing new forward positions under cover of the Royal and French Navies' guns and retreating when under fire by German artillery.¹⁹⁵ On 17 October, German shore artillery, responding to the Allied Fleet's naval salvos, succeeded in a direct hit on HMS Dragon, a light cruiser, killing nine members of the crew and wounding four others.¹⁹⁶ When the news reached London of this action and these casualties, orders were issued to cease and desist such activity and return to standby stations. Rear-Admiral Cowan and Commodore Brisson had pushed their luck and continuing their unauthorized active support for the Latvians was curtailed for the time being. A pause in the fighting set in.

After arriving on 25 October, Radziņš surveyed the situation and accepted the rank of Chief of Staff on 27 October. He became the third chief of staff in very short order at this time. It is also remarkable that Simonsons stepped down at this time and Jānis Balodis became Commander-in-Chief of the Latvian army.¹⁹⁷ Ulmanis wanted a more submissive commander and Jānis Balodis was his man. Radziņš was of a different

¹⁹⁴ Radziņš, 51-52.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

¹⁹⁶ "HMS Dragon at Riga 17th October 1919," <http://www.hmsdragon1919.co.uk/16253.html> (Accessed 19 Jan 2009).

¹⁹⁷ Brīvība in Radziņš, 7.

sort entirely, not so popular, but militarily adept.¹⁹⁸ Although winning distinction in the initial fight against the Bermontians on 8-9 October, Balodis, who Goltz had counted on not to resist him, but who did resist, moved his troops to the Latgale theatre of operations against the Bolsheviks.¹⁹⁹ Balodis' Germanophilia and his alleged sympathy for the Landeswehr did not become a factor in the coming offensive, planned by the experienced tactician and Slavophile Radzinš. In continuation of the Russian Imperial Army's tradition, a chief of staff was really acting more in the commanding capacity with the commander as a figurehead.²⁰⁰ Radzinš not only designed the Latvian November offensive, he commanded it to its successful conclusion, without any interference from Balodis. However, in many subsequent accounts Balodis would get the credit.

During this lull, the Latvians strengthened their command structure and personnel, and improvements were made to the fighting strength and condition of the infantry. The Allies provided food, clothing, boots, guns, ammunition, artillery and an artillery crew, training and guidance. The sympathetic local population not only provided food, clothing, and shelter, but moral support. Latvian morale and strength was on the rise. Although more volunteers were arriving to join Bermond's army, swelling their numbers to 50,000, they were primarily adventure and spoil seekers from Germany, and displaced Russian POW conscripts, not quality military personnel.²⁰¹ Many of the quality German officers and men had evacuated Latvia already, along with their true leader, Goltz, who succumbed to pressure from both the Allies and his government and had left the Baltic on 14 October, his departure also making another little-acknowledged turning point in the

¹⁹⁸ Andersons, 527.

¹⁹⁹ Ģermanis, 250.

²⁰⁰ Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front 1914 – 1917* (London: Penguin Books, 1998,1973), 19.

²⁰¹ Radzinš, 67.

battle.²⁰²

Not only was Goltz gone, Bermondts' chief of staff was wounded on 8 October.²⁰³ A flamboyant adventurer claiming aristocratic descent, Bermondts proved to be an incompetent leader. His disjointed memoir also attests to his disorganization and incompetence. In his past as a junior officer of the Imperial Russian Army, he had once served under the command of the Latvian officer Rudolfs Bangerskis, who would become the Inspector General of the Latvian Legion in World War II. Bermondts had applied for a promotion based on false pretenses. His promotion was denied and his bad reputation established.²⁰⁴ In Latvia, Bermondts surrounded himself with inappropriate and incompetent officers. The German Legion commander was a naval officer unfamiliar with land forces. The poor tactics of their command were observed by some of the remaining veteran German soldiers.²⁰⁵ Dissatisfaction was growing in the poorly fed, poorly clothed German ranks, living unsheltered under the open skies, harassed by local partisans, while the Allied-appointed commander of the Landswehr, Harald Alexander, enjoyed the opera in Riga, on his leave from the Latgale front.²⁰⁶ Alexander reveled in such a civilized war. Bermondts' troops and officers did not find things so civilized. The West Russian Army was effectively leaderless till the 11 November return of Bermondts' wounded staff officer, too late.²⁰⁷ From 17-31 October there was a pause in the fighting, with some scouting and shooting and skirmishing, but the combatants held their

²⁰² Goltz, 281.

²⁰³ Radziņš, 67.

²⁰⁴ Rūdolfis Bangerskis, *Mana Mūža Atmiņas Pirmā Grāmata* (My Memoirs Volume One) (Copenhagen: Imanta, 1953), 301-303, 306-308.

²⁰⁵ Radziņš, 55.

²⁰⁶ Ekšteins, 86.

²⁰⁷ Radziņš, 56.

positions. Radziņš formulated a desperate plan for a relentless offensive, and once again the Allied Fleet would be called upon for its active support, despite London's earlier admonitions to hold back. When Radziņš submitted his proposal to the Allied officers, their first question was what reserves could the Latvians count on. Radziņš responded that the only reserves the Latvian Army had were its patriotism and its prayers.²⁰⁸ Yet he was confident that the battle plan would work.

Despite other later accounts, misrepresentations, and mythologizing, Radziņš was aware that the two armies involved in this battle were roughly even strength. Initially, the Latvians were worried that they were facing experienced German officers in command of Bermond's forces, but very early on in this military campaign, the experienced staff officer Radziņš realized he was not facing a competent adversary. Also contributing to the West Russian Army's troubles was the hostility of the local population. Not only were supplies and shelter withheld, valuable military personnel were taken up on guard duty. It was expected that Bermond would have learned from the battles at Torņkalns and Daugavgrīva. It was a mistake to concentrate on taking the two bridges at Torņkalns, well guarded on the right bank side, including by a British artillery unit and crew. Operations on the left bank down river from Torņkalns were under the cover of the Allied Fleet's guns, a military asset decisively in favour of the Latvian infantry supported by them.

Radziņš speculated that the only way the West Russian Army could take Riga would be to cross the Daugava upstream of the city and approach from the east out of range of the Allied Fleet's guns. The best the Latvians could do in this circumstance

²⁰⁸ "Mūsu rezerves ir mūsu patriotisms un mūsu tautas lūgšanas! (Our reserves are our patriotism and our nation's prayers)." Brīvība quoting Radziņš in Radziņš, 9.

would be to keep an eye on the West Russian Army's advance, and skirmish where opportune, but an actual defence of Riga would not be feasible.²⁰⁹ Luck would have it that Bermondts and his staff did not work on such a tactic, one of the principle reasons for the Latvians' success.

With the approach of winter, the dangers of freeze up became crucial. The Allied Fleet would be denied the harbour of Riga and the Daugava River, and cruising would be made more difficult offshore in the Gulf of Riga.²¹⁰ This fleet of poorly armoured warships had to keep moving to stay out of range of artillery batteries on shore. The attack on the Dragon was a sobering event for the Royal Navy. The main advantage the German-Russian force had was its superiority in heavy artillery. The Allies muted this advantage of the Bermontians by offering their big naval guns in support of Latvian ground assaults. With Bermondts deciding to occupy and defend the left bank area down to the mouth of the river, the success of the Latvian infantry in taking these positions and advancing upriver to Torņkalns allowed the fleet to maintain its cover, thereby reinforcing the Latvian assault, altogether a symbiotic relationship. The Latvians were using the British and French, while the Western Allies were using the Latvians. The objectives of these allies of the moment differed, the Latvians pursuing liberation, independence, and social revolution, while the Western Allies trying to ensure the separation of Germany and Russia and the creation of a *cordon sanitaire* between the West and the East.²¹¹ Yet this meant they were both interested in the emergence of a

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 60-64.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

²¹¹ Olavi Hovi, *The Baltic Area in British Policy, 1918-1921 Vol. I: From the Compiegne Armistice to the Implementation of the Versailles Treaty, 11. 11. 1918 - 20. 1. 1920* (Helsinki: Finnish Historical Society, 1980), 211.

Latvian nation-state. Great power geopolitics was entwined with pygmy wars. Radzinš knew that the Latvians had to act quickly before the enemy came to their senses and saw the Latvians' weakness.

In his memoirs, Radzinš did not even call the Latvian forces an army in the true sense. It was enthusiastic, but lacked any strategic or tactical knowledge.²¹² It did, however, have local and superior knowledge of the war theatre. Radzinš, as Simonsons before him, wanted Allied naval bombardment to soften up their enemy's positions so their new recruits could gain combat experience against a disrupted enemy prior to later more difficult operations without such support.²¹³ The big naval guns were more terror-weapons than anything else. The Latvians counted on the demoralizing effects of the shellings upon their ragtag adversary. The lessons of World War I artillery tactics were being applied. Among the Germans were seasoned veterans, who shared the same fighting spirit of the Latvians, veterans of World War I, who were fighting for their country, but the Baltic Germans were fighting for money and trophies, according to Radzinš. The Russian component of Bermond's army was largely commandeered POWs returning from imprisonment by the Central Power, not a dependable source of *élan*.

The best plan to secure Torņkalns, before the freeze up, would be for the Latvians to attack on two front flanks, but the Latvian Army did not contain enough men for such a maneuver. A frontal assault was considered the only offensive action available to the Latvian forces, a very risky maneuver in light of the thousands upon thousands lost in futile frontal assaults on the Western front in World War I. Once again the Allied Fleet provided the solution. When the "influential" Burt was asked again to help convince the

²¹² Radzinš, 67.

²¹³ Brīvība in Radzinš, 9.

navies to provide their firepower in support of a Latvian military offensive, he replied that he could secure a positive response, even before approaching the appropriate naval officers. Burt's confidence was rewarded. The Allied Fleet again kindly offered its naval guns.²¹⁴

For this operation, scheduled to commence on 2 November, there were thorough preparations with the fleet and the Latvian command. Diversionary attacks in outlying areas were planned and the Allied Fleet could and wanted to take part. The attack was delayed till 3 November, as the Allied Fleet was not ready. Any further delays may have been catastrophic as it was later learned that Bermondts was planning to start his own offensive on 5 November. Moving up and initiating a German-Russian artillery assault may have killed any chance of Latvian success, but it was the Latvians who went on the offensive first and maintained a relentless offensive till the end.

On the land, on the right bank in Riga, the English provided an artillery battery and crew, but the gun was delivered without its aiming mechanism. Radziņš praises the great work performed by the artillery crew to get the aiming mechanism ready for the upcoming battle at Torņkalns, which would be fought out of range of the Allied Fleet.²¹⁵ In addition, the Estonians provided two guns mounted on rail cars.²¹⁶ Armoured vehicles also showed up on the ground, as well as aircraft in the air.²¹⁷ Overcoming communications problems became a priority, solved by a very successful and uninterrupted radiotelegraph system, later cited as a good example in a volume on

²¹⁴ Radziņš, 67-70.

²¹⁵ Radziņš, 71-74.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

military communications.²¹⁸ Logistically the Latvians had a distinct advantage.

Bermondts was by now at the mercy of dwindling support from Germany, from German industrialist patrons, support which was failing from the start of his campaign, support which he needed before entering Riga, where fierce street fighting would have likely ensued, not to Bermondts's or his mercenaries' taste.²¹⁹

On 3 November, Radziņš' offensive began, with a diversionary landing at Jūrmala by three small Latvian vessels, supported by the Allied Fleet offshore. At a predetermined hour, the Allied Fleet of Britain and France once again opened up on predetermined positions, let up, and then resumed firing on the rear of the enemy positions. The Latvians began their coordinated assaults against West Russian positions along the full front, with naval salvos being very successful, except in the area of the cement factory. The first line of attack was planned along the axis between Jūrmala and Torņkalns, with subsidiary actions on both flanks to prevent the enemy from concentrating their forces to challenge the main thrust. The Germans felt threatened all along the river, so could not move out of their defensive positions. Further upstream, the Jaunjelgava Group of the Latvian army accomplished a successful mission against Bermondts' right flank, but when the German Legion regrouped and counterattacked, the Latvians retreated to their original positions largely unscathed and intact. The Germans were on the defensive, the Latvians on the offensive, a situation remaining unchanged. Latvian units began hoarding captured machine guns. During combat in areas softened by the Allied Fleet's bombardments, the Latvian infantry was able to attack from the

²¹⁸ Christopher H. Sterling, *Military Communications: From Ancient Times to the 21st Century* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 53.

²¹⁹ Goltz, 284.

sides and the rear of German units seeking shelter. The Latvian offensive was unexpected, so the Germans were now nervous and the Latvians had the advantage. Day one, November 3, proved successful and victorious for the Latvians who dug in, and were fed and sheltered.²²⁰

By the third day of combined naval and infantry operations, Commodore Brisson, became aware of poor gunnery due to poor spotting and rued the waste of ammunition. Feedback to the fleet was coming over radio by Morse code, after being translated from Latvian to English. Naval officers were unhappy with the poor targeting results and were considering curtailing naval salvos, as ammunition was running low. The Latvians, who desperately wanted the bombardments to continue, responded by not being so honest or literal in their translations. They fed the fleet translations suggesting a better precision. According to Radzinš, the naval shells were not accurately hitting their targets, but were nonetheless very effective in demoralizing and terrorizing the enemy. The “misunderstanding” over missed targets was overcome and the brutal naval bombardments continued, even to the point of running out of ammunition, a major effort, not the minor or no contribution as attributed to the Western Allies in many subsequent accounts, including the inaction of the Allied Fleet in the film *Rīgas Sargi*.²²¹

It was imperative that the Latvians attack relentlessly, because they had no ability to defend. There was a danger that if Bermondts launched a major assault from the south the Allied Fleet could not assist in rebuffing it. The biggest danger was that the West Russian Army would retreat from Torņkalns, regroup, resupply, launch a new offensive across the Daugava, upstream from Riga, and approach Riga from the east, out of range

²²⁰ Radzinš, 76-80.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

of the Allied Fleet's guns. When Goltz's replacement, Magnus von Eberhardt, asked for a ceasefire, Radziņš gave no reply.

Over the coming days the Latvian centre kept advancing while the left and right flanks were held up. This salient or bulge presented a huge risk to the overextended Latvians.²²² The remaining Iron Division and German Legion soldiers insisted on defending their position at Torņkalns and fighting to the last man, rather than execute a fighting retreat and living to fight another day. The Latvians continued their extraordinary frontal assault until they defeated their enemy in hand-to-hand street fighting in Pardaugava on 11 November 1919.²²³ On 18 November 1919, one year after Latvia's declaration of independence, Jānis Balodis, the supreme commander of the Latvian Army received a telegram from German Lieutenant General Eberhard "informing him that Bermond's forces were now to be under German command." Latvian Foreign Minister Meierovics confirmed this act with the German Foreign Minister and subsequently Latvia declared war on Germany on 25 November.²²⁴ Latvia was now officially on the side of the Allies.

This liberation of Riga bolstered the Latvian army's confidence and ability to attract men to the cause of Latvian independence. Further success in driving the Bermontians back to Jelgava and into Lithuanian territory was accomplished without naval support. However, the Allied Fleet once again came to the rescue in the subsequent battle for Liepāja. The Polish army allied with the Latvians for their liberation of

²²² *Ibid.*, 92-93.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 102-106.

²²⁴ Bleiere *et al*, 137.

Daugavpils and Latgale.²²⁵ Latvia and Bolshevik Russia signed a peace treaty on 11 August 1920, much to the chagrin of General Radziņš.²²⁶ The Latvians thus did not achieve independence on their own, but in a favourable international situation.

A year after the victory in Riga, on 11 November 1920, the first Order of *Lāčplēšis* medals were awarded by General Balodis on the town square in Riga, to honour the Latvian heroes of the battle against the West Russian Volunteer Army of Bermondts, formerly Niedra's Army, formerly the Freikorps Army of Goltz. From this day forward Latvian soldiers would be known as *Lāčplēši* (Bearslayers), or as I suggest, literally "Tearers Apart of the Bear."²²⁷ Significantly, it was the united German-Russian force that they defeated, in a perfect match with the nationalist interpretation of *Lāčplēšis*.

Latvia was assured of its independence by the actions of its armed forces in conjunction with Allied naval forces between October 8 and November 11, 1919. With the land reforms of 1920, a complete overturning of the social order was achieved with the land holdings of the German barons confiscated and redistributed to select Latvians. The Latvian government offered payment, considered too little by the German barons, who took their complaint to the League of Nations. Latvia rescinded its offer, allowing the German aristocracy to keep only its manor houses and small land holdings.²²⁸

As previously mentioned, Radziņš attributed the Latvian victory to three things: the bravery and dedication of the Latvian soldiers; the passivity and incompetence of the

²²⁵ Bennett, 190-191

Plakāns, 119-120.

²²⁶ Bleire *et al*, 139.

²²⁷ Vīke-Freiberga in Pumpurs 2007 Chapter 3, 301.

²²⁸ Plakāns, 124-125.

West Russian Volunteer Army's command; the help of the Allied Fleet. Radziņš is very clear and unequivocal about this last thing, in his own words:

Then, when all the difficulties were over, our army advanced towards Jelgava without the fleet's artillery support, then this support began to be forgotten, and to some it seemed that the same outcome could have been achieved without the aid of the fleet. But the truth is and remains that without the artillery support of the fleet our army was incapable of moving from its position; without this support it was not capable of beginning an attack nor to continue it and not even defend its position on the left bank of the Daugava. The artillery fire of the fleet made it possible for our army to begin its heroic liberation of Latvia.²²⁹

Radziņš was a realist, not a romantic. I see no Lāčplēsis in Radziņš' account.

One reason why later Latvian scholars rarely cited Radziņš' testimony has been a later scandal leaving his reputation tarnished. As one account alleges, in 1930, "two years after being dismissed as Commander-in-Chief of the Latvian Army under a cloud of scandal, Radziņš committed suicide in Riga."²³⁰ Yet other accounts say he died of a heart attack.

I have not been able to find a clear explanation of this "cloud of scandal." Both Edgars Andersons and Igors Vārpa claim that leftist elements were influential in forcing Radziņš to be removed as Commander-in-Chief.²³¹ Another incomplete story involves Radziņš' attempts to form a military alliance with Poland against the Soviet Union, a negotiation not authorized by the government.²³² Radziņš was considered too friendly to the Poles, while the Latvian Republican Government of this time, essentially Germanophile, was at great pains not to antagonize Germany or Russia. Radziņš' account of the military events of October-November 1919 gave too much credit to the

²²⁹ Radziņš, 114.

²³⁰ "Radziņš, Pēteris :: R :: Lotyšsko (LVA), <http://forum.valka.cz/viewpoint.php/t/64788/start/-1>

²³¹ Edgars Andersons, *Latvijas Bruņotie Spēki un to Priekšvēsture* (Toronto: Daugavas Vanagi, 1983), 64, 86 .

²³² *Ibid.*, 64, 675.

Allied Fleet. His account did not match the Lāčplēšian script for nationalist mythology. It appears to me that the Latvian Government and Latvian Military were at odds with each other in 1930, as they may be now.

Today in Latvia, each March 16 veterans, family, and friends participate in a memorial service at the *Doma* church in Riga and then walk in procession to the Freedom Monument to lay remembrance wreaths. March 16 commemorates the day in 1944 when the two Latvian Divisions of the Waffen-SS fought together for the first and only time at the Battle of Velikaya River, defending Hill 93.4 from Red Army assaults. The Latvians held this hill for a very short time. This commemoration was established by a Latvian POW organization called *Daugavas Vanagi* (Hawks of the Daugava).²³³ *Daugavas Vanagi* has been commonly translated in English as the Latvian Relief Society and has become the leading cultural and sports organization in the Latvian Diaspora. The Freedom Monument in Riga erected in 1935 includes a sculptural relief showing Lāčplēšis tearing apart the bear and was built to commemorate the heroes of the 11 November 1919 victory, the Lāčplēši.²³⁴ *Daugavas Vanagi* sponsored the monument's restoration after 1991. Appendix B shows a photograph of the Lāčplēšis sculptural relief on this monument. This commemoration of Legion Day was once officially proclaimed by the government from 1998 to 2000, but was subsequently rescinded under pressure from the international community because of the Legion's service on the German side in World War II.²³⁵ The Riga Government and mayor annually request that this parade be

²³³ Arthur Silgailis, *Latvian Legion* (San Jose: R. Bender, 1986), 57-58.

²³⁴ "Freedom Monument," located at: <http://www.liveriga.com/en/3231-freedom-monument> (Accessed 21 Nov 2013).

²³⁵ "Hundreds commemorate Waffen SS divisions in Latvia, anti-fascists outraged." *RT.com* March 16, 2013 13:36, located at: <http://rt.com/news/latvia-demonstrations-363/>

cancelled, but it carries on, sponsored by *Daugavas Vanagi*, under police protection, but more significantly under military honor guard. The Latvian Legionnaires want Legion Day to be associated with Lāčplēsis Day and Legionnaires associated with Latvian Riflemen. Lāčplēsi is an endearing term for all Latvian soldiers. Once again, as in *Lāčplēsis* the covert trumps the overt.

Radziņš was a highly honored and decorated soldier. The *Latvijas Kareivis* eulogy, representing the Latvian Army, paid tribute to Radziņš, especially his invaluable contribution during the War of Liberation and the battle for Riga in 1919.²³⁶ Radziņš received military decorations from Estonia, France, Poland, Finland, and Sweden, as well as the Order of Lāčplēsis, third and second-class.²³⁷ “The Medal of the Lāčplēsis Military order is a white enameled Thunder and Fire Cross (Latvian left facing swastika) with red and gold edging. In the centre of the obverse there is a medallion with picture of the folk hero Lāčplēsis wrestling with a bear. On the reverse side there is a date, 11 November 1919, the date when the Latvian Army expelled the troops of Pavel Bermond-Avalov from Riga.” Seven awards were bestowed on the highest-ranking Latvian Army commanders at the first ceremony, on Esplanade Square, in Riga, on 11 November 1920. These men were General Pēteris Radziņš, Colonels Mārtiņš Penikis, Krišjānis Berķis, Jūlijs Jansons and Jānis Apīnis and Lieutenant Colonels Oskars Dankers and Jānis Purinš. Dankers would later become leader of the Latvian Self Government, during the German occupation of Latvia during World War II, a puppet regime of the Third Reich. In order to receive the Order of Lāčplēsis first class a Latvian must already hold the Order third and second-class. Foreigners were exempt from this qualification. In the course of the

²³⁶ “Gen. Radziņa Ioma,” *Latvijas Kareivis*, No. 230, 10 oktobri 1930.

²³⁷ L.k.o.k. biogrāfija, “Radziņš, Pēteris.”

eight years that this medal was awarded, 1920-1928, according to the Office of the President of the Republic of Latvia: “Lāčplēsis Military Order decorations of I Class were conferred on 11 persons, among them were Generals Jānis Balodis and Krišjānis Berķis, Colonels Fridrihs Briedis and Oskars Kalpaks, Estonian General Johan Laidener, Polish Marshal Jozef Pilsudsky, French Marshal Ferdinand Fosch [sic], King of Italy Victor Emmanuel and Prime Minister Benito Mussilini and King of Belgium Albert I.”²³⁸

It is significant that this is a list of 10 recipients from a total of 11. Usually if one uses the term “among them,” one would provide a much shorter list, certainly not the complete list less one. Could this last recipient have been the disgraced Peteris Radzinš? Radzinš’ 1922 book was entitled *Latvijas Atbrīvošanas Kars: 1918-1920. Pirmā Daļa. Cīņas ar Bermond.*” This literally translates into “Latvia’s Liberation War: 1918-1920. First Phase. Struggles with Bermond.” It is notable that Radzinš uses the term War of Liberation rather the later more commonly used War of Independence. I see a degree of precision in this nomenclature. However, Radzinš does claim the Latvian Army’s efforts were the principle rung in achieving independence. Independence was achieved only after liberation and territorial occupation was accomplished by the Latvian Army, “the true builder of the Latvian Nation.”²³⁹ Later accounts of this misnamed Bermontiāde, which I would rename the Radziniāde, were overflowing with *Lāčplēsis*, deliberate governmental mythologizing in the name of Latvian nation building. Battles should commemorate the competent, not the incompetent.

Rodney M. Bennett notes: “that in [only] one of these states the events recounted

²³⁸ “Lāčplēsis Military Order,” Office of the President of Latvia, located at: http://www.president.lv/pk/content/?cat_id=1251&lng=en (Accessed 4 Feb 2011).

²³⁹ Radzinš, 19.

here are remembered and respected.” Bennett subsequently praises Estonia for its memorialization of the Royal Navy’s contribution to the “young democracies’ elimination of the Soviet threat.”²⁴⁰ He is clearly chastising the Latvians for not being duly respectful. Bennett had not read the rare Latvian sources that do give credit to the Royal Navy, such as Radziņš’ published in 1922, republished in 2005, Edgars Andersons’ published in 1967,²⁴¹ nor *Latvijas Atbrīvošanas Kara Vēsture* (Latvia’s Liberation War History) edited by General M. Peniķis published in 1938, republished in 2005.²⁴² However, Bennett can be excused, as these texts dealing with part of the same campaign, which were the subject of his father’s 1964 volume, were written in the Latvian language. This campaign, in the area of Riga, in the fall of 1919, is very well documented in these three volumes, including both the contributions of the Latvian Army and the Allied Fleet. Yet, Bennett is right that the recognition in official commemoration policy remains very limited. My thesis has explained that this is connected to the enduring power of national mythology, in which the Latvian people and not the British naval guns represent the Lāčplēsis tearing apart the Russian bear.

²⁴⁰ Rodney M. Bennett Preface in Geoffrey Bennett, *Freeing the Baltic* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2002).

²⁴¹ Edgars Andersons, *Latvijas Vesture 1914-1920 (Latvian History 1914-1920)* (Stockholm: Daugava, 1967).

²⁴² This is not a good source for Radziņš, but is extensive for other infantry details and personnel. M. Peniķis, sr. ed., *Latvijas Atbrīvošanas Kara Vēsture (Latvia’s Liberation War History)* (Riga: Izdevusi <<Literatura>>, 2005, 1938).

Chapter Three – *Rīgas Sargi* (The Defenders of Riga) 2007

The film *Rīgas Sargi* has already been introduced earlier in my thesis as an example of how present-day Latvian historical memory is being constructed. Quite in line with the academic historiography of the formation of the Latvian nation-state, the movie represents the British as just a footnote to the story of Latvian national self-determination. How did an army of 11,000 Latvian soldiers defeat an army of 50,000 German-Russian soldiers in November 1919? This same question is raised by promotional material for *Rīgas Sargi* and by an unusual source for my thesis, an internet web site for war gamers hosted by Mark Plant.²⁴³

In providing the basic outline of the 1919 victory, the official Latvian narrative as represented by the web site of the Embassy of Latvia in the U.S. relies on both Latvian sources and English ones, such as Andrew Plakāns' short history of the Latvians. To be fair to Plakāns, the social historian, there are only 30,000 enemy combatants in his account, however, to be critical of Plakāns, there are no British at all.²⁴⁴ In its introduction to *Rīgas Sargi*, the Embassy of Latvia website says:

The rogue general [Rudiger von der Goltz], aided by Russian Colonel Bermont . . . ordered the renegade army of about 50,000 to attack Riga . . . though vastly outnumbered, the Latvian army together with many non-military volunteers totaling some 11,000 men, miraculously managed to defend Riga by pushing back and defeat (sic) the Germans.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ Mark Plant, "Pygmy Wars: Eastern Europe's Bloody Wars 1918-1923. The Russian Civil War, Freicorps in Latvia, Soviet-Polish War, Hungarian Soviet War and the Galician-Polish War, located at: <http://pygmy-wars.50megs.com/home.html> (Accessed 19 Jan 2009).

²⁴⁴ Plakanš, 119.

²⁴⁵ Embassy of Latvia, "Latvian Movie 'Defenders of Riga' Screening in New York, located at: <http://www.latvia-usa.org/lamodofrisci.html> (Accessed 22 Jan. 2009).

This is how Latvian history, as I knew it, reads and what *Rīgas Sargi* shows. Miracles are the stuff of religious devotion, hagiography, and nationalist myth-making, not secular history. Revising this incoherent history, I have shown that the British were the most significant determinant in the “birth,” the formation of the Latvian nation-state and that the Latvian nation developed for the most part after British midwifery.

Rīgas Sargi is a historical film produced in Latvia, in 2007, by Andrejs Ekis. Aigars Grauba was the director. It was nominated for an Oscar in 2008/2009, in the category of the best foreign language film. There was debate in Latvia whether it should be put forward as an Academy Awards entry, as it was considered to be not so much a Latvian film, but a Hollywood-style take on the national history. *Rīgas Sargi* did not win the Oscar. Hollywood critics thought it to be just a romantic nationalist film of little consequence or merit. However, in Latvia, it broke all previous box-office records, including that established by James Cameron’s film *Titanic*.²⁴⁶

Grauba, like Pumpurs, constructed a cultural product for Latvians with little concern for other audiences. It is interesting how audiences in Latvia and abroad perceive differently even the film’s genre. My Latvian cousin, Rita, thought it just a simple romantic entertainment with some educational historical value, in regards to Pavel Avalov-Bermondts. I, having studied Latvian history for the last twelve years, could see much more in this film, a classic historical film, full of history, but not historically accurate with respect to the event it purports to represent.

Rīgas Sargi opens rather peacefully in a church in Pārdaugava, literally “across the Daugava,” a neighbourhood of Riga on the left bank of the Daugava River. The

²⁴⁶ Embassy of Latvia, “Latvian Film Rīgas Sargi ‘Defenders of Riga’ to premiere at EU Film Showcase,” located at: <http://www.latvia-usa.org/risadofritop.html> (Accessed 20 March 2009).

Lutheran minister is announcing the marriage of Elza and Mārtiņš, a seamstress and a labourer, to be performed on the following Saturday. However, Mārtiņš, the groom, is problematically absent. He is making his way through Riga on his bicycle when he comes across an Imperial Russian Army officer reading a proclamation calling upon more Latvians to join the Imperial Russian Army, as part of Latvian national units, in its defence of empire against Imperial Germany. The year is 1915 and just such a proclamation was indeed issued, sponsored by Latvian representatives in the Russian Duma, in St. Petersburg.²⁴⁷ Upon arriving at the church, Mārtiņš takes over the religious service, reads the proclamation, and incites his friends to sign up as *strēlnieki* (“riflemen” or infantrymen) in the Russian army, with the hope of forming a Latvian army for a new Latvian state in the future. Mārtiņš declares: “Gather under the flag . . . now or never . . . who believes wins.” When asked who they were going to fight, Mārtiņš responds “the Fritzes,” to thunderous applause. It is historically accurate that Latvians were recruited and formed nine regiments in the Russian Imperial Army commanded by their own officers.²⁴⁸ The Lutheran minister sneaks out the back door of the church, as a new Latvian religion is being born, Latvian nationalism. The marriage, in the interest of the nation, is postponed.

Next *Rīgas Sargi* uses a scene adopted from the 1937 French film *Marseillaise*, a recruiting station. In fact Grauba uses such a scene twice. Much like Pumpurs, much of what Grauba does is derivative, not original. The use of templates is ubiquitous. In the French film, explicitly about the French Revolution, but implicitly about politics in inter-

²⁴⁷ “On August 1, 1915, two Latvian members of the Russian Duma, Jānis Goldmanis and Jānis Zālītis, published an appeal to the Latvian nation.” Ģērmanis, 204.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

war France, the film scholar Pierre Sorlin explains that “volunteers come forward, but . . . we do not see them: a register and a pen appear on screen, hands take the pen, sign, replace the pen and disappear . . . in the foreground, the volunteers give their names and particulars in voice-over.”²⁴⁹ The Latvian director, Grauba, in his first recruiting scene has the camera facing the recruits, with full views of their faces. The recruiting officer, with us looking over his shoulder asks each recruit for his name and occupation. The men are assigned to units based on their occupations, since class background matters in the Imperial Russian army. Most men are *strādnieki* (labourers) who are enlisted as *strēlnieki* (riflemen). Note also the alliteration present in the words *strādnieki* and *strēlnieki*, suggestive of the noble, labour-like character of fighting in defence of one’s nation.

In the second recruitment station scene, after the *strēlnieki* have returned from Russia in January 1919, and the Latvian Army is being formed, the camera is now looking at the army recruiter, Arnolds, and we are looking over the recruits’ shoulders. Arnolds asks the recruit for his name and signature only, the hallmarks of an egalitarian army. Although there are officer ranks in the army, they are all volunteers in the name of the nation and as such brethren.

More significantly, Grauba is following in the footsteps of a film released in 1930, *Lāčplēsis*, directed by Alexandrs Rusteiķis. This film, inspired by the editing if not the ideology of Eisenstein’s *October*, has two parts. The first part presents the *Lāčplēsis* epic of Pumpurs, while the second part presents the Bermontiāde, the struggle with Bermondts and the West Russian Volunteer Army. There is no attempt at subtlety, no

²⁴⁹ Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 73.

covert subversive irony. The Black Knight appears as a Cossack as well as a German spy in this film. The connection between *Lāčplesis* and the events of 8 October to 11 November 1919 is totally clear. The connection to the end result of history, the Latvian nation-state, is equally clear. So much so, that Ulmanis and Balodis appear as themselves in the film.²⁵⁰ Grauba is more subtle in his approach, but nonetheless connects his film implicitly if not explicitly to the 1888 poem and goes beyond Rusteikis by connecting his film to the recruitment of the Latvian Waffen-SS in 1943 and the confrontation with pro-Soviet forces at “The Barricades,” and the bridges, in Riga, in 1991. This becomes increasingly obvious to the audience as the storyline unfolds.

While Mārtiņš is away with the Latvian *strēlnieki* in Russia, Elza awaits his return. It is significant that the film has Mārtiņš going away to Russia to fight the Germans. In reality the war was at Riga’s doorstep, with the Daugava River the front with the Germans for the most part of World War I. During the winter of 1916, the Russian high command launched an offensive using the Latvian regiments against these German troops to liberate Kurzeme. Latvian historians constructed these failed “Christmas Battles,” which lacked sufficient Russian reserves, as a betrayal of the Latvian Riflemen and one factor that inspired the later desertion of the Latvian regiments to the Bolshevik side. I see a similar process represented in the film as in Pumpurs’ poem. The Germans are the enemy start to finish while the Russians are initially allies, but eventually enemies, enemies of two sorts, White and Red.

Back at Elza’s, we are shown the changing seasons over four years while she reads Mārtiņš’ letters from St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Vladivostok, the latter

²⁵⁰ Tsivian, 201-202.

symbolically on the opposite side of the huge Russian Empire. Elza grows unsure of her love for Mārtiņš and after his return she resolves not to marry him. Here we have Grauba's reflection of the central Cantos of Lāčplēsis, away from the Latvian land when the hero, Lāčplēsis, and the heroine, Laimdota are separated. Lāčplēsis is sailing the Northern Sea, battling beasts and confronting demons on foreign shores before returning to the Motherland. However, Laimdota is not at home awaiting her love, but is imprisoned in a foreign land and threatened with becoming a concubine. Elza stays home, but is also threatened by the attentions of another suitor.

Although this process is not explicitly shown or explained, after the Bolshevik Revolution, Mārtiņš and his nine regiments had gone over to the Bolsheviks *en masse* and had become the proletarian guard of Lenin and the spearhead of Trotsky's new Red Army. Latvian Red Riflemen fought against the Czech Legion in the critical Volga battles and against Denikin in Ukraine and Wrangel in Crimea. Military analysts claim these Latvian units were the most intact and militarily efficient units in the early days of the Red Army.²⁵¹

However not all Latvian riflemen became "Reds." Others such as Radziņš, Bangerskis, and Dankers served White Russian or minority national causes during the Russian civil war. In the movie, as in much Latvian history, at least in the inter-war period, *strēlnieki* are represented as Latvian soldiers who disappeared in Russia, then returned as patriots. The Red part, the Bolshevik part, the "evil" part is glossed over and the "good" Latvian riflemen are rehabilitated as part of the nation building myth.

²⁵¹ John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 343.

Mārtiņš thus needed rehabilitation at this point in the film. But before that, History needs to be introduced.

During the film, several historic characters appear and curiously, they are portrayed in a stereotypical way: the German commander, Rudiger von der Goltz, is depicted as a Hitleresque character, the Russian warlord, Pavel Bermont-Avalov, is portrayed as a foolish Borat type character, and the Latvian prime minister, Kārlis Ulmanis, is presented as a diminutive *hobbit*-like hero. Ulmanis is consistently portrayed in Latvian history, as in this movie, as the hero, the man who knew the interests of the Latvian people and acted in accordance with those interests.²⁵²

In the film, before Mārtiņš returns to Rīga, Grauba uses actual newsreel footage to explain the situation in Latvia in 1919, adding the statement, “the Allies doubt the Latvians’ ability to guard the north-eastern border of Europe,” against the encroaching menace of communism. This doubt would become one of the most significant themes of the movie, Allied doubt and inaction. The scene now switches to the Allied Military Mission Headquarters in Riga, where Goltz is signing an agreement to deploy the Iron Division and Landeswehr to Mitau (Latvian: Jelgava), former capital of the Duchy of Courland and seat of its dukes and duchesses of the Kettler and Biron families. The Germans are to evacuate the Baltic States within two months. However, Goltz is disgusted at the Latvian insolence and declares: “The Latvian State! What nonsense. Show me one person in Europe who knows where Latvia is. Words alone don’t make a country. Real power is needed to form a state. The Allies run Germany. . . there is nothing there for us anymore.”

²⁵² Ulmanis became the Mussolini-style fascist dictator of Latvia from 1934 to 1940, more *orc* than *hobbit*. He made himself President in 1936, an easy thing to do when all political parties were banned.

The Germans were content to leave their Finnish allies to run their state, but in Latvia they had plans to reestablish German hegemony, set up a Duchy ruled by Kaiser Wilhelm II, and recolonize their beloved mythic Baltic frontier, effectively lost to them in the sixteenth century. As the historian Stanley W. Page explains, this was not just the goal of Goltz and his Freikorps, but the goal shared by German political forces on all sides: from the conservatives, former Kaiser Reich authorities back in Germany and Prussia, to the newly installed republicans, the social democrats.²⁵³ Much like Margaret MacMillan in *Paris 1919*, Page concentrates on the diplomatic and political side of these events. MacMillan proclaims the “rebirth of the ancient nations of the Baltic,” nations which had not existed before.²⁵⁴

Not only is Goltz signing an agreement to vacate Latvia, but he is doing so, unexplained in the film, because of the military defeat of the Landeswehr at Cēsis in June 1919, by the Estonian Army and the Latvian Northern Brigade. Goltz was signing a peace treaty, with Estonian forces threatening Riga’s northern approaches. The British had successfully supplied, tutored, and assisted Estonia through direct military intervention, the same aid provided to Latvia, but denied in the film *Rīgas Sargi*. The next scene in the movie is in the Latvian government’s office, with acting Prime Minister Ulmanis and his Foreign Minister Meierovics. Meierovics is not optimistic saying “Nobody cares about us. From Europe Latvia is not seen.” Goltz is shown driving into

²⁵³ Stanley W. Page, *The Formation of the Baltic States: A Study of the Effects of Great Power Politics upon the Emergence of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1970), 98-99, 110-111, 144-145.

²⁵⁴ By this anachronistic statement, MacMillan may have been paying tribute to her U of T colleague Modris Ekšteins or Latvian Diaspora friends, more than historical accuracy. Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2001). In contrast, Timothy Snyder completely ignores Latvia and Estonia, significant elements in the story of this region. Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Lithuania, Belarus 1569-1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

the grounds of a castle, supposedly at Jelgava, supposedly owned by a Duchess, the widow of Duke (in reality – Count) Shuvalov.

The palace used in the film is actually the restored Rundāle Palace near the border with Lithuania. The Duke of Courland, Ernst Johann von Biron, originally commissioned it in 1736, as a summer residence. The architect was Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli, whose works also include the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg and the Catherine Palace in Tsarskoye Selo. I visited Rundāle in 2006 and found it a much more livable palace than Versailles. The palace stood empty till the 1760's after Biron's "fall from grace." It was completed in 1768 and presented by Catharine the Great to Count Valerian Zubov, the youngest brother of her lover, Prince Platon Zubov. Platon Zubov's widow remarried Count Shuvalov, thus bringing the palace to the Shuvalov family in the early nineteenth century.²⁵⁵ The palace thus serves as a perfect reference to the Russian imperial domination, but the very mention of the Dukes of Courland brings to mind the historical symbiosis between the German and Russian imperial masters.

The first Duke of Courland and Semigallia was Gotthard Kettler, the last Master of the Order of Livonia, a branch of the Teutonic Order. The Kettler ducal dynasty lasted from 1561 until 1710. The last Kettler Duke was Friedrich Wilhelm Kettler, who promised Peter the Great that he would marry one of the Tsar's nieces. F.W. Kettler subsequently, in 1710, married Anna Ivanova (later Empress of Russia), but died on his way back to Courland. Anna ruled as Duchess from 1711 to 1730, appointing Ernst Johan von Biron, a court favourite, Duke of Courland in 1737. When Anna Ivanova died in 1740, Biron was exiled to Siberia from where he unsuccessfully attempted to rule. A

²⁵⁵ Imants Lancmanis, "Rundāle Palace," Rundāle Palace Museum, 2005.

succession of pretenders followed, supported by various dynastic factions, until Empress Catharine II of Russia recalled Ernst von Biron from exile in 1763. The ailing Ernst turned over the ducal seat to his son, Peter von Biron, who in 1769 sold the ducal rights and gave up his Duchy to Russia in 1795, in the third partition of Poland.²⁵⁶

Grauba uses the setting of Rundāle without any historical explanation to show the libidiously convoluted relationship between the German Baltic nobility, the Baltic Germans and their former patrons, the Russian aristocracy. The Rundāle Palace is more than a period piece set; it is a social and ethnic commentary. While Goltz is driving into the courtyard of Rundāle, he explains how “the Allies will forget Latvia after we play our ‘Russian Card.’” Upon meeting Goltz, the Duchess (whom we are led to believe is the Duchess of Courland, a title which became extinct in 1795) tells Goltz that “the flag of the German monarchy looks out of place here” and overlooking the arriving troops, comments that Goltz appears to be “commanding a band of starving soldiers.” Bischoff, Goltz’s aide in an aside takes this to heart and asks: “How will we pay our soldiers?” “Give them land” Goltz says. In fact this promise of land for German volunteers in the Latvian war against the Bolsheviks came from the provisional Latvian government of Ulmanis, but this is not something a modern nationalist mythmaker would want to acknowledge.²⁵⁷

Now Mārtiņš and the *strēlnieks* come back from Russia in rail cars, overjoyed at their homecoming. While smiling and waving to farmers building something in the fields he is passing, he fails to notice that these are actually German soldiers who have taken off

²⁵⁶ “Duchy of Courland and Semigallia – House of Biron.” Located at: <http://www.almanachdegotha.org/id268.html> (Accessed 24 Oct 2014).

²⁵⁷ Page, 144.

their uniforms to erect fencing across the land. One fence post actually impales a dead Latvian farmer's hand, a dead Latvian farmer surrounded by his dead Latvian family, crucified by a German invader. Grauba like Pumpurs was not adverse to Christian imagery.

Colonel Pavel Bermond-Avalov arrives at General von der Goltz's military camp at the Duchess' palace with the Duchess eyeing Bermond lecherously. Bermond arrives in full Cossack regalia, and announces his position as Commander of the Western Russian Army, after which he asks: "Where is my army?" Bermond's army was a military force made up primarily of German soldiers and White Russian troops including some Russian P.O.W.s initially commanded by Baltic German Prince Anatoly Lieven supposedly under General Nikolai Yudenich's overall command, levied to fight the Bolsheviks. It was in reality essentially a freikorps unit controlled by Goltz who intended to use it to destroy the nascent army of the Latvian Republic. This freikorps unit harkens back to the Teutonic Knights, the German invaders of *Lāčplēsis*, supposedly a religious military order sanctioned by the Pope, but actually piratical in nature, fighting for the booty more than the holy.

In town, Goltz informs Ulmanis that his Iron Division is going off to Russia to fight the Bolsheviks, but he insists on going through Riga to get there. Meierovics tells Ulmanis that: "Legally, everything is fine." However, the audiences have a hindsight knowledge that everything is not going to be fine and thus identify with Ulmanis, who declares that he will refuse Goltz's entry.

In the meantime, Mārtiņš, so eager to get home, jumps off the train in Pardaugava and walks into town passing the iron bridge to Riga. He meets one of his friends,

Arnolds, now wearing the uniform of the Latvian Army, a very British-looking uniform. Martiņš is glad to see “our own government and our own army,” but shrugs off the idea of joining Arnolds. He also meets another friend, Paul, who is a fisherman with a grand plan to can smoked sprats with a “little oil on top,” a product that would become one of Latvia’s signature exports later in the twentieth century. When I first saw this film in Toronto in 2009, at this point the mostly Latvian-Canadian audience burst out in uproarious laughter, a dear familiarity. Sprats, like *Lāčplēsis*, are another beloved Latvian icon. Mārtiņš like *Lāčplēsis* returns home to deal with Latvia’s domestic problems, but unlike *Lāčplēsis* is not yet ready to jump into the fight, more like Pumpurs perhaps with his conflicted loyalties.

Returning to Elza’s shop, we meet Mr. Jansons, who is buying his third custom tailored suit from Elza. He asks Elza to go for a ride in his shiny new car, but is foiled when he sits on a chair, which collapses under him. Comic relief relieves the tension of Jansons, the incarnation of capitalism wooing Latvia personified, Elza. On his way to Elza’s, Mārtiņš comes across his best friend, Jēkabs or Jake, who reprimands Mārtiņš for not seeking him out earlier. Mārtiņš joins Jēkabs in his truck bed and proceeds to Elza’s, consuming large volumes of vodka, a habit frowned upon in Latvia. Arriving at Elza’s, surrounded by his friends, he is prodded forward. Grabbing Elza’s ass does not endear him to his fiancée and she recoils back into the house. Mārtiņš follows and has a formal conversation with Elza and her assistant Anna. They agree to meet at the hotel where Jēkab lives. Latvia has rejected the returning Red Rifleman and this symbolic scene stands for an important page in Latvian history.

When the Bolsheviks occupied most of Latvia in 1919, including Riga and the Baltic port Ventspils (German: Wendau), but excluding the Baltic port Liepāja (German: Libau) and its environs in Ķuršeme, the invading army was largely made up of Latvian Red Riflemen. Pēteris Stučka was installed as the ruler of this Latvian Socialist Republic. Many of the disillusioned riflemen subsequently demobilized and went home.²⁵⁸ The Germans acting in alliance with the Latvian units in the Landeswehr drove the remaining Bolsheviks out of Riga and western Latvia. Both the Bolsheviks and the Germans were accused of atrocities against civilians during their military campaigns. Only over time was the reputation of the Latvian Red Riflemen rehabilitated.

Back at the castle, Bermondts accepts payment terms from Goltz for his service as Goltz's military puppet and commences his affair with the Duchess, an affair reflecting the Russian/Baltic German courtship over the centuries, with the Latvians up until the twentieth century mere pawns, subordinates. Secondly, Goltz tells Bermondts to complain to the Latvian government of Ulmanis about not being able to transit Riga on the way to St. Petersburg. Bermondts recoils: "What, to Russia, that is not what we agreed." Goltz fires back: "Of course, that's just the deceit of war, the allies want us to fight the Bolsheviks, we must convince them that we will, a formal reason to declare war." Such duplicity was certainly evident during this period and not just from the German/Russian side. At Elza's shop, Mr. Jansons arrives to pick up his suit and he tries to enter the shop, but Elza presses the package into his hands before he can. Jansons says he has "heard that Mārtiņš has returned." Elza responds with "hope it fits you well," as I am sure the capitalist Jansons senses the irony. The other flirtation continues between the Duchess

²⁵⁸ Geoffrey Swain, "The Disillusioning of the Revolution's Praetorian Guard: The Latvian Riflemen, Summer-Autumn 1918, *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, No. 4 (1999): 684.

and Bermond. Bermond tells the Duchess “your indignity will now end” as he robs her of a piece of jewelry and proclaims that: “As commander of a unified army I will take you under my wing.” A candle is knocked over. The Duchess protests “don’t burn down my castle.” “Don’t be afraid of fire,” Bermond admonishes her, a prophecy.

Goltz has a problem with Bischoff, when he tells his subordinate that it is now “time to take our part in Europe.” Bischoff advises Goltz that it won’t be possible to prepare the army as the German soldiers refuse to march under the Russian flag. They want more than land; they want money. Goltz says “print some,” to which Bischoff responds “we have, but nobody will take it.” Goltz throws the money away and closes the argument with the order “if anyone refuses, shoot him!” These mercenaries are a far cry from the Latvian patriots of the thirteenth century in *Lāčplēsis* and the Latvian patriots of Radzinš’ 1919 army and *Rīgas Sargi*.

Money was a serious problem for the West Russian Army. Logistics were one of the contributing factors in their military failure. This lack of shelter, food, boots, warm clothing comes across in Radzinš’ account, but Goltz and Bermond’s failure to secure enough financing from their patrons primarily in Germany, but even from Britain and America, precluded any successful campaign into and through Riga.²⁵⁹ This sequence of scenes ends with German soldiers around their campfires sewing Russian insignia to their uniforms. Good Lutheran German boys here are talking about how some “future ataman will make them pray standing up like the Russians. A German wolf in a Russian Bearskin.” Of course, such a visually underscored transformation complete with the bear reference creates a perfect target for the *Lāčplēsi*, two traditional enemies in one, as

²⁵⁹ “Political Archive of the 20th Century: Colonel P.R. Bermond-Avalov: Documents and Memoirs, A.K Niedra to Pavel Bermond 14 Sept 1919,” *Voprosy istorii*, No. 1 (2003): 17. Page, 150.

always (Latvian: *arvien*.)

Goltz announces that he is off to Berlin while Bermondts is left to take Riga. At the palace, Bermondts makes a toast: “To the Tsar, to Orthodoxy, to a unified Russia!” and “Death to the Communists and their henchmen.” From this it appears that perhaps Bermondts, White Russia personified, has aspirations beyond puppetry for Goltz and the Germans. The henchmen are certainly the Latvians, who are persistently accused of being Bolsheviks in the accounts of Goltz and Bermondts.²⁶⁰ Goltz takes it one step further in his memoir, covering the period before 14 October 1919, when he left Latvia. Goltz accuses the British of being Bolshevik supporters, their wrongful support of the Latvian rebels responsible for the German failure in deposing the Bolshevik regime, the failure of combined German/Russian efforts to restore order, their order.²⁶¹ However, the creation of independent Latvia was certainly a victory for Lord Curzon and his Foreign Office, achieving the separation of Germany and Russia.²⁶²

In Riga, Mārtiņš and Ulmanis are having a few drinks at the bridge. “Hang in there buddy!” is the subtitle to Mārtiņš salutation, but the literal Latvian is not “buddy.” “*Vetsīt*,” means more than just buddy, a familiar “old man.” This is how Lāčplēsis (Mārtiņš) is assuring his adoptive father, the Lord of Lielvārde (Ulmanis) that all will be well, after tearing apart the bear. As you can see by now, in many subtle ways Grauba’s *Rīgas Sargi* references the *Lāčplēsis* epic with Mārtiņš as Lāčplēsis, Elza as Laimdota, Jēkabs as Koknesis, and Justīne, Jake’s girlfriend as Spīdala. Heroic national models from the future are also telescoped back into the past. At the same time, Ulmanis is

²⁶⁰ Goltz, 275-276. Bermondts, 218.

²⁶¹ Goltz, 282-283.

²⁶² Hovi, Chapter VI Summary: The Nature of Britain’s Baltic Policy during the Period from the Compiegne Armistice to the Implementation of the Versailles Treaty, 207-211.

acting more like Prime Minister Ivars Godmanis, who “regularly held meetings with commanders of individual barricades, in 1991, not 1919. In January 1991, up to 500,000 Latvians took to the streets of Riga to resist pro-Soviet forces, although these “Latvians” numbered minorities, ethnic Russians as well as the majority ethnic Latvians.²⁶³

It is now time to rebuild national unity in the film as well. In Riga, at the hotel/bar owned by Justīne, where Jake lives and drinks, Mārtiņš arrives and breaks up their lovemaking. Jēkabs explains that Mārtiņš is his childhood friend who saved his life, digging him out of a swamp. It should be noted here that Jake or Jēkabs in the Latvian form “Jeska” is a male name insinuating trouble, roguishness, disreputability, and undependability. Upstairs Jēkabs and Mārtiņš discuss Elza. Mārtiņš says their relationship is “fine” and she just “needs time.” Jeska responds that he “knows what she needs.” A Hollywood movie needs some sex too. Jēkabs has his own plan. He has arranged to have the wedding of Mārtiņš and Elza on the morrow. Elza arrives with Anna, intent on telling Mārtiņš that “it’s all over.” The musician, Jēkabs, stokes up the music on his guitar and Mārtiņš and Elza pushed together, start the dance, a simple Latvian polka, and their love appears to blossom again. Mārtiņš appears more pink than red now.

The next morning, at the church, Bermondts arrives with his troops and tells the minister that the “church will be at the disposal of the Iron Division.” The pastor is summarily executed, shot in the back by one of Bermondts’s men, an ambiguous and ambivalent scene in the film. The murder is made comic by Bermondts exclaiming: “Whew, you scared me!” Rather than emphasizing an assault in Latvia, the murder scene

²⁶³ Latvian Ministry of Defence, “Declaration of Independence, Barricades (1990-1991),” located at: http://www.mod.gov.lv/lv/Ministrija/Vesture/Barikades_1991.aspx?lg=Print (Accessed 24 Oct. 2014).

suggests religious irrelevance. Perhaps this also reflects upon how the future communists would persecute the churches in the Soviet Union, as well as showing the church's limited role in the Latvian national movement. It is also reminiscent of Pumpurs' religious references in *Lāčplēsis*, although not so kindly.

Soldiers are now shown marching on Riga in the very recognizable German "steel helmets" we associate now more with the Nazis. The Germans used this style of helmet in the later stages of World War I, but Grauba here wants their association with World War II to have its subliminal influence on the audience. In the film the Latvians wear no such helmets, but in the promotional poster, they do, as I will discuss later.

The wedding party is forced to jump on a truck and cross the second bridge to the right bank. The German infantry accompanied by an armored truck run over the wedding banquet and proceed across the bridge in pursuit of our heroes and into Riga. Mārtiņš saves the day by opening and closing a swing bridge at just the critical time. The bridge is mined by the Latvians. However, Elza is fed up with Mārtiņš. Mārtiņš tells Elza "trust me . . . all is well." Elza responds to Mārtiņš with "all you care about is yourself," an interesting dialogue between characters who both personify Latvia, a Yin Yang situation, schizophrenic in fact. Jake adds: "The Krauts! We're fucked! What now?" He could just as well have said: "The Russkies! We're fucked! What now?" The audience would read into this scene a reference to a more recent national revival also interrupted by an invasion over the bridge.

In 1991, Russian tanks were on the Daugava River bridges, preparing to cross the Daugava into town. The OMON riot police had been sent into Riga by Gorbachev to reestablish Soviet control over the city. The resistance to this military incursion is one of

the tributes of Grauba's film, an implicit reference to the other "defenders of Riga" that he was indirectly celebrating. Eight men were killed, the "Red Army" backed down, just as Bermond's Army did in the film, just as Bermond's army did in reality. The "Red Army" of 1991 went away on its own accord. The West Russian Volunteer Army of 1919 took up a defensive position and dug in at Torņkalns, overlooking and in command of the two bridges over the Daugava, but they never crossed.

Back at the church, Bermond has carved his name into a wooden sill of the bell tower and advises a subordinate to tell Goltz that "Riga has fallen." At the government office, however, the Latvian flag is still in place and Ulmanis is resolutely still in charge. Wounded soldiers are being carried into Justīne's hotel, against her wishes. A very dramatic scene ensues. Justīne betrays Jēkabs saying: "Jake has no say here. Jake just lives here on my tab." Mārtiņš asks Arnold if "the army will protect the city." Jēkabs interjects that "there is no unit." Arnolds responds that: "if some sign up, we will be fine." Arnold asks Jēkabs to join up. Justīne interjects that "he is a musician." Elza walks in. Jake declares that, "Latvian money is good only for ass wipe." Mārtiņš pleads for reason. Augusts, the senior, laments the losses after five years of war. Mārtiņš talks about having their own country, fulfilling their dreams. Arnolds complains about their rude awakening now, after one year, with no stability and discord in the government. Justīne declares: "we all just want to live." Only Mārtiņš dreams on. Elza faces Mārtiņš with the reproach that: "None except you believes, I don't either. Nothing will come of this. I am leaving Riga." Mārtiņš' response is "No, we will fight!" The army's recruitment and the stabilization of the political situation in Latvia at this time was very difficult: Bolshevik sympathies were still very strong, reactionary elements wanted a

return to the status quo, some factions favoured the Germans, others favoured the White Russians. Factional fighting, including the commitment of atrocities by all sides, hampered the establishment of a national army as well as a nation-state. The restoration of order required direction and a concerted effort. The national uprising was not spontaneous. The liberation of Riga was a first step. The scene in *Rīgas Sargi* captures the angst and chaos of this period. The people want “Peace, Bread, and Land,” a very Bolshevik sentiment.

On the street, as Elza exits the hotel, Jansons drives up and offers Elza a lift out of town. Elza gets in. Grauba resorts to actual newsreel footage again, the city in flames, refugees streaming out of the city. The Allied Fleet finally arrives offshore, Latvia’s supposed last hope. “The Allies have arrived. The Germans will have to split.” Mārtiņš dubiously asserts: “He would like to see that.” Back at government house, the legalist Meierovics keeps insisting that: “They say that, legally, everything is fine. We will have to let Bermondts through Riga.” The forever-heroic Ulmanis declares: “Let him go to hell. We will defend the city.” In fact at this point in the actual events, Ulmanis and his government fled Riga to the north, leaving the British Commissioner Stephen Tallents as temporary four-day Governor of Riga.²⁶⁴ Before Ulmanis left, Tallents armed him with a case of brandy. The Allied Fleet not only arrived, but had already been stationed in the Baltic, including Riga. Rear-Admiral Cowan had been approached by Major-General Alfred Burt to aid the Latvian infantry assault on the Russian Bermontians on the left bank at the mouth of the Daugava and they provided well co-ordinated naval artillery barrages from October 13 to 17 and November 3 to 11. The film omits any aid from the

²⁶⁴ Tallents, 366.

Allies. Why would admitting British assistance be so inconvenient for present-day Latvia?

Perhaps because the British did not come to Latvia's aid when the Red Army invaded in 1940. A revealing language in a World War II British report could provide a clue. In the spring of 1942, British Labour MP, Sir Stafford Cripps, travelled to Russia, to Moscow, on a British government "mission" to study Britain's valuable wartime ally and returned to England with a glowing report of a admirable Soviet society. In an interview by Edward Hulton, entitled "Sir Stafford Cripps on the Soviet Union," published in the journal *World Review*, in June 1942, Cripps declared that the territories of the Baltic States had always belonged to Russia and that they should remain the property of the Soviet Union. Cripps said precisely this:

The Baltic States of Esthonia (sic), Latvia and Lithuania must belong to the Soviet Union. They had long been an integral part of the Empire of the Tsars; and no one had suggested that it was in any way improper that they should not so belong. However, after the Bolshevik Revolution they had been set up as independent - States, as a kind of *cordon sanitaire*, with the specific intention of curtailing the activities of the new Soviet power. The States must now become, as they had been before Hitler's attack, autonomous nations within the Union of Soviet Republics.²⁶⁵

Just as the British helped the Baltic States in 1919, in 1942 some British politicians felt they could agree to these states' inclusion into Stalin's empire. This was certainly not the official position of Britain during the Cold War, but as a piece of disinformation was useful in establishing the Soviet Union as a "friendly" ally in World War II at the expense of the Baltic States, whose loss was considered affordable in 1942.

Moreover, Latvia was at the moment in German hands and Latvians volunteered and were conscripted in the majority to fight on the German side. Twice as many

²⁶⁵ Edward Hulton, "Sir Stafford Cripps on the Soviet Union," *World Review* June 1942, 3.

Latvians fought with the Germans²⁶⁶ than with the Russians.²⁶⁷ After the last significant German victory, at the Third Battle of Kharkov, in 1943, fought between 19 February and 15 March, spearheaded by Waffen-SS units, Heinrich Himmler was able to convince Adolf Hitler that non-German recruits should be levied from countries occupied by Germany and outfitted as Waffen-SS, to incite terror in the Red Army with their reputation and their Death's Head badges. Hitler finally gave in to arming non-Germans for combat and various European nationalities provided volunteers and conscripts. Waffen-SS divisions were formed in Ukraine, the 14th, in Latvia, the 15th and 19th, and in Estonia, the 20th, among others. The Latvian divisions totaling some eighty thousand men were the largest non-German recruitment and along with the Estonian were considered the most effective non-Germanic levy.²⁶⁸ Latvians in wolves' clothing in 1943 mirrors the Germans in bears' clothing of 1919 and certainly reflects the wolf/bear imagery of Pumpurs.

In 1943, a very elaborate poster appeared in German occupied Latvia, duplicating verbatim the offending words on page 6, from the journal interview by Sir Stafford Cripps. See Appendix C. Looming over three little Baltic girls in traditional costumes stands an image of Churchill smoking a cigar, held in the girls' faces. In Latvian, the caption at the top reads: "Churchill is telling fairy tales: 'England is fighting for small nations freedom.'" The bottom caption, to the right of the *World Review* cover page and

²⁶⁶ Silgailis, 237. The total number of Latvian combatants "within the framework of the German military forces" was approximately 148,000.

²⁶⁷ Frank Gordon, *Latvians and Jews / Between Germany and Russia* (Riga: Memento, 2001), 95. On the Russian side, Gordon accounts for "about 65,000 [ethnic Latvians], plus 15,000 Latvian Jews, Russians from Latgale, Poles, and others."

²⁶⁸ George H. Stein, *The Waffen-SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War 1939-1945* (Ithaca: Columbia University Press, 1966), 193.

page 6, starts out: “However the Truth is!” and highlights the words of Cripps, then continues “Germans are working to keep this a dream. Latvians take note!”²⁶⁹ Such messages had their impact on the popular perceptions of the Allies and I think Grauba indeed did take note.

By 1943, Germany appeared to be the only country left which remotely offered any hope of autonomy and independence for Latvia, though exceedingly doubtful. This was the carrot used to attract Latvian men to the cause of anti-Bolshevism, especially effective with the Red Army advancing upon their border. Latvian patriots served, by and large, as willing allies with the Germans. This is why the Western Allies are shown arriving, but not doing anything in 1919. The Allies did not come to Latvia’s aid in 1940 or 1991, so they get no credit from Grauba for 1919. Moreover to remain true to the *Lāčplēsis* script, of course the British had to be omitted. There were no foreign allies assisting *Lāčplēsis* and the national mythology must feature the heroic nation as its main subject. This is the strongest statement made by Grauba in the film. Latvians liberated themselves, except that in reality they did not, as Radzinš’ memoir attests to. Radzinš was not aware of World War II history, but Grauba certainly was.

Instead of Ulmanis’ short-lived retreat and the actual military events of 8 October - 11 November, Grauba presents a nationalist fantasy in his film, a fantasy not entirely of his own imagination, but a deliberate nation building myth sponsored by the Republic of Latvia, now and during the interwar independence period. In the film, Ulmanis next hosts a news conference where he tells reporters to write of the conspiracy facing Latvia, not unlike the Popular Front’s use of the press in 1991. On a street in Riga’s old town,

²⁶⁹ “Churchill is Telling Fairytales,” unknown artist, 1943, *Karš un Miers* (War and Peace) online poster exhibit, located at: http://old.lnb/digitala_biblioteka/Plakati_Latvija/tables/HTML/745.htm (Accessed 17 Oct 2008).

the disillusioned friends of Mārtiņš are just lying about until Mārtiņš picks up a pick and commences digging a trench in the middle of the street. In Berlin, at the “Offices of the Party for the Restoration of the German Empire,” Goltz brags about capturing Riga with the “spare change you gave me.” The esteemed men complain that Goltz’s and Germany’s name are implicated in the Riga situation. To which Goltz replies: “That’s why I hired the Russian to capture Riga for us.” The newspapers in the film and the papers in the archives read otherwise. The German command and control of the West Russian Volunteer Army are unambiguously reported in both the film and the contemporary press.

Back in Riga, we see Ulmanis has picked up a shovel and joined his buddy, Mārtiņš in the trenches, more like Godmanis than the historical Ulmanis. Women at the hotel, including Justīne are preparing food for the soldiers, good food, with good Baltic black rye bread. Outside, Arnolds has set up a recruiting station for the Latvian Army and business is very good, men are lining up. Even Ernests (Shorty) and Paul, the “sprats guy,” sign up. A *New York Times* photographer is looking for a “real Latvian hero face” and he pulls Shorty out of the crowd. Mārtiņš oversees the scene dressed with a cap, white shirt, and black suit looking more like Lenin than a military man, another ambiguous and ambivalent scene. Mārtiņš like Lāčplēsis is now a warlord, like Pumpurs fighting both Germans and Russians, but his Red Army past cannot be forgotten just as Slavophilia marks Pumpurs.

On the drive out of town Mr. Jansons is pleased that Elza has finally smiled. Jansons makes his move. “Mārtiņš is not a bad person, but it is naive to believe. Riga will surrender.” To which Elza responds: “Mārtiņš will not surrender. Please stop the

vehicle.” She gets out. Now it is clear, Elza is Latvia and Mārtiņš is its defender, and the traitor capitalists will not hijack either. Later in Rīga, someone shouts: “Mārtiņ your wife has come back!” Elza and Mārtiņš kiss and embrace. The Red Rifleman has been accepted; he is the hero. Shouts of “*Rūgts*” echo through town, the wedding reception call for the bride and groom to kiss.

At the castle, the other romance continues apace. Bermondts in his full Cossack regalia is performing a ridiculous dance in front of his drunken men and the Duchess. Bischoff arrives and asks about the meaning of this. Bermondts says he is celebrating Riga’s capture. Bischoff declares otherwise to which Bermondts replies: “Never do today what you can leave for tomorrow,” an old Russian saying, according to Bermondts. His dance continues until the party winds down and he beds the Duchess. Goltz arrives in the night and drags the Duchess out of bed and Bermondts back to the battle.

The next morning, the scene opens with five German bi-planes flying over the bridges, over the Daugava in a bombing attack on Riga. The street scenes are ones of destruction and pandemonium, bomb bursts, bodies, wounded. The senior, Augusts is hit and dies in his son’s arms. The hotel, where Elza is working gets a direct hit. Mārtiņš starts to run towards the hotel, Elza emerges, and they both fall into a huge bomb crater, where they lie side by side, resolving to carry on, always, *arvien*, like Lāčplēsis and Laimdota, like Andrējs and Ede (Pumpurs and his wife). At the church bell tower, Goltz calls off the attack, sarcastically congratulates Bermondts, and sends an ultimatum to Ulmanis to raise a white flag of surrender by morning.

At government house, there appears to be a soft coup attempt to remove Ulmanis by voting him out. They say Andrievs Niedra, who is at this conference, has a plan and

that he should be sent to negotiate, as he is a “professional politician.” So Ulmanis is asked to resign because he has proven himself “inept” with his ill-conceived politics. There is a lot of Latvian history here, but its complexities are glossed over in the film. Niedra was indeed installed as the Latvian leader, by Goltz after Ulmanis was removed by a military coup, conducted by the Landeswehr. This, however, preceded the German advance north, by the Iron Division and Landeswehr to their defeat at the hands of the Estonians at Cēsis in June 1919. During this summer, when the Allies were pushing the Germans to leave, Goltz was conspiring to keep his forces in Latvia, but under another name and insignia. He considered making Niedra commander of his phantom army, now to be labelled “Latvian.” In fact, Niedra and the ultimate leader of this army, Bermondts, were also in contact and conspiring against the Latvians nationalists and the British.²⁷⁰ The historical Niedra was a Lutheran pastor, a “politician” interested in maintaining the status quo, German/Lutheran/Russian hegemony. Ulmanis as an agronomist could be criticized as not having the best qualifications for the prime minister’s office or presidency. He held both offices at various stages of his career, until 1934, when he declared himself dictator, in Latvian *vadonis*. Ulmanis is certainly a controversial figure. At the time of his coup in 1934, perhaps fifty percent of the Latvian people supported him. Some worshipped him, but by eliminating democracy and installing a fascist-like dictatorship he may have been instrumental in the Western Allies turning their backs on Latvia. Even Burt declared that the Soviet Union’s invasion of 1940 was a good thing.²⁷¹ Latvia was never supposed to remain existent; it was merely a temporary *cordon sanitaire*, which had outlived its usefulness. Incidentally, both Burt and Tallents were

²⁷⁰ “A.K. Niedra to Bermondts-Avalov 14 Sept 1919,” 17.

²⁷¹ Valdonis Frickauss, “Generala Berta Draudzība [General Burt’s Friendship],” *Jaunā Gaitē* 217:39, 51.

unable to make good on their business ventures in Latvia.²⁷² *Rīgas Sargi* was made three years after the referendum on joining the EU and NATO was held. There was still ambivalence about joining the West. The referendum was a closely won thing. The support from the West in the late 1980s and early 1990s did not completely override its lack of enthusiasm in the 1940s. The Popular Front in Latvia was a domestic Latvian independence movement. The Supreme Soviet of Latvia declared independence on 4 May 1990. Western support outside of Diaspora support, after independence, came largely after the *fait accompli*.

In the next scene, Ulmanis and Meierovics take their cases to the street, the rails exactly, pontificating from the back platform of a rail car. The foreign minister says: “That all that will be left are fallen and dead. We’ve done everything in our power. Might lose too much. You must leave the city. We will stay and obtain peace.” At this point, Mārtiņš speaks up: “Then it’s over. Goodbye Latvia!” pausing, then “No - that will not happen - we will fight,” to loud applause. He represents the voice of the people. Ulmanis smiles quietly, without a word.

Going back to the hotel, the “boys” (Latvian: *puikas*, another reference to the brotherhood of all members in the nation), including Ulmanis, are discussing their options. As the river is close to freezing up, allowing unlimited crossing opportunities for the enemy, it is decided that they “need to attack tonight.” Mārtiņš has a plan. While a contingent of Latvian soldiers, under the command of Arnolds, carries out a diversionary frontal assault across the iron bridge against the entrenched Iron Division and German Legion on the left bank side, at Torņkalns, the four musketeers, Mārtiņš,

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 50-51. Tallents, 389.

Jake, Shorty, and Paul will cross under the bridge deck and take over the German heavy artillery piece at the church, which they will then turn against the rear of the Germans on the bank of the Daugava. The Germans will turn their attention to repulsing this audacious attack, thus allowing the mass of the Latvian army to cross the river by boat.

Before leaving, Justine tells Jake he does not have to go, as he is a musician. Jake says he is “just a parasite. If I don’t go, my life is over, but if I come back I’ll marry you.” Just as Koknesis would marry the reformed Spīdala in the *Lāčplēsis* epic Justīne would marry the reformed Jēkabs, a little play on gender roles in nationalist imagination by Grauba.

Back at government house, Ulmanis and Meierovics are fighting over this crazy plan. Ulmanis asks Meierovics: “When will the Allied ships back us up?” Meierovics says: “They need their governments’ approval” and that they’ll take more time than we have.” Ulmanis replies: “Our men are ready for battle.” In reality the Allied Fleet did not wait for government approval and acted in a timely manner. Later, after the army has been issued its marching orders, Meierovics comments that the “Allies will watch us fight and side with the winner,” so Ulmanis says: “So then we must be the stronger.” In reality the Latvians were the stronger because of the British involvement.

At the palace, Bermondts wants to beg off, he wants his money and he wants to “disappear.” Goltz will not permit this. Goltz announces: “The Allied dogs are sniffing around. Either Riga becomes the capital of the *Baltenlande* or I will wipe it off the map!” One can see in this language the shades of Hitler and the Third Reich.

Back to Riga, where the soldiers’ watches are synchronized, as are the audiences’, the feint begins. The four heroes make it to the left bank, climbing the understructure of

the bridge. While pondering their next move against the gun crew, Jeska remarks that he did not expect to die sober. (Big laughs from the Latvian-Canadian audience at the Regent Theatre in Toronto.) The successful attack against the steel-helmeted Germans by the French- or Italian- helmeted Latvians takes place. The German force on the bank of the river turns and advances toward the church, and the Latvian Army crosses and storms the German positions. Jēkabs is wounded by a hidden German soldier in the bell tower, but is saved by his punctured canteen filled with vodka, combining comedic relief with heroic redemption for a national weakness. Mārtiņš has an extended hand-to-hand fight with the German, until Mārtiņš flings him from the tower much like Lāčplēsis does to his enemy. Mārtiņš does not however follow the German, he does not get entangled with this Black Knight. Lāčplēsis has finally won his long struggle.

However, back at the government office, Ulmanis and Meierovics have been fighting verbally and physically, before getting an improvised positive bell signal from the boys in Pardaugava. Meierovics says: “The Allies won’t give a damn.” Ulmanis, the father of Latvia, as presented in this movie, explains succinctly to his colleague: “That Latvia exists only because the *Tauta* wants it!” This certainly sounds like Ulmanis’ future “Latvia for Latvians” policy.²⁷³ This scene closes with Ulmanis throwing Meierovics into the corner. In reality, it was Meierovics who recruited Radziņš, in Warsaw, to take over the battle against Bermondts thus engineering the Latvian victory. Meierovics also later served as prime minister. The conflict with the Jewish-Latvian Meierovics and the *pur laine* Latvian Ulmanis, may have more to do with imagining independent Latvia as product of the national movement rather than the international geo-

²⁷³ Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia 1941-1944* (Riga: The Historical Institute of Latvia, 1996), 67.

political situation and the designs of contemporary politicians who were not ethnic Latvians.

Back at the palace, Bermondts steals a painting off the wall then leaves on horseback, with the castle in flames behind him. Goltz is shocked when he hears about the latest developments: The Latvians taking the left bank, the West Russian Volunteer Army in full flight back to Jelgava, and Bermondts disappeared.

Fake newsreel coverage blending into live action concludes the film portraying the *Lāčplēsis* Day celebrations in Riga on 11 November 1920. The Allies have recognized *de jure* an independent Latvia. The Order of *Lāčplēsis* has been created and conferred for the first time on this date. The moral to this story: “The wolf in a Russian bearskin was driven out of Latvia. If you want to dress up as a bear, don’t mess with the Latvian *Lāčplēsis*.” What about the bear in a German wolfskin? Much as Pumpurs did, Grauba mixes the bear and wolf, Russian and German imagery, implying that both were the allies and enemies of the Latvians at various times, under various circumstances.

These crucial climactic military events occurred on 11 November 1919, a day now celebrated as *Lāčplēsis* Day, in honour of Bearslayer, the hero of Latvia’s national epic. This day is celebrated as a memorial to the Latvian military in all its guises, good and evil.

In the tradition of American historical film, the troubled lovers reconcile and marry, the conflict is resolved in Latvia’s favour, the story-line is complete: the beginning, middle, and the “happy” end, fiction not history. Latvia has achieved nationhood. Good triumphed over evil. In the final scene, the heroes and their new families light candles at the Riga bridgehead and proclaim that there should be a “Latvia

for Latvians,” a slogan that sounded patriotic in 1919, but more sinister after World War II and the Holocaust, in the face of a Riga population made up of about 40% ethnic Russians, and out of a total population of approximately 27% Russian today. To be politically correct and reconciliatory, one of the heroes should have been an ethnic-Russian to reflect a more true demography. Yet myth knows no statistics or political expediency. Many German-Latvians were also awarded Lāčplēsis medals for their contribution in the fight for independence.²⁷⁴ On 4 May 2012, Saeima Speaker, Solvita Aboltina, speaking on the 22nd anniversary of the Declaration of the Renewal of Independence of the Republic of Latvia, reminded Latvians of “the role Latvia’s minorities had in helping to regain independence, who stood side-by-side with Latvians during the Barricades, as well as fought side-by-side with Latvians during the fight for freedom in the first half of the 20th century.”²⁷⁵ This is a different story than Grauba’s, more inclusive of the minorities, but also hinting at inclusion of the Latvian Legionnaires.

More intriguingly, why are the four heroes in the movie’s promotional poster wearing German “steel helmets,” the helmets of their enemies in the movie, and looking with piercing eyes at the viewer? (Look at the image included in Appendix D, the promotional poster for the film.) The front figure is Arnolds, again the recruiter, sporting a Latvian Army lance corporal collar patch from the interwar period, when he probably was recruiting another Latvian Army in WWII. The Latvian Armed Forces now commemorate a continuity of 95 years since their founding. I attended a showing of this film in Toronto, where most of the audience was made up of Latvian-Canadians. At a

²⁷⁴ “List of Baltic German Recipients of the Military Order of Lāčplēsis,” LKOK Archives, 2010.

²⁷⁵ “Aboltīņa praises freedom fighters in independence struggle,” *The Baltic Times*, May 10, 2012, located at: http://www.baltictimes.com/tools/print_article/31184/ (Accessed 14 May 2012).

private cocktail party afterwards, one of the guests commented that they should make a film like this about the Latvian Waffen-SS. Yet, implicitly *Rīgas Sargi* is a film about them as well. Even without such visual hints, it is a film about fighting for the nation.

In my analysis, the favourable image of Red, Bolshevik or Communist Latvian *strēlnieki*, maintained in the movie and Latvian history, is challenging the viewer to reflect on the film and history, and possibly consider whether the veterans of the Waffen-SS, part of the approximately 150,000 strong Latvian Legion, can be viewed in the same way as the returned Latvian Red Riflemen.²⁷⁶ The later themselves were once part of approximately 150,000 strong World War I Latvian combatants,²⁷⁷ Latvian patriots, simple soldiers, labourers, and peasants just doing their job, no matter how dirty that job was. If Elza (Latvia) can accept Mārtiņš, the prodigal Red Rifleman (*sarkanais strēlnieks*), can Latvia accept the prodigal Legionnaires (including the Waffen-SS)?

Elza's rejection of her businessman suitor, the good Mr. Jansons, Latvia symbolically rejecting capitalism is doubly striking with respect to the inevitable poor commercial appeal of this movie outside Latvia and the economic crisis the world and Latvia suffered in 2008. It almost looks like the peasant populism morphed into the fascist-like ideology of Ulmanis' authoritarian state is still an accepted building block of the Latvian historical memory. Since independence in 1991, Latvians have favoured a center-right government. The strong western diaspora's influence on Latvia makes its electorate leery of leftist governments, but it also means the continuous injection of 1940s ideology, which the Diaspora kept frozen in time.

The film's value to my research is how it handled "bombardment," which I

²⁷⁶ Silgailis, 236-237.

²⁷⁷ Plakāns, 115.

believe is critical to the formation of the Latvian state. In the film, the four Latvian heroes bombard the German positions and turn the course of the battle. Rather than just arriving on station as depicted in the film, unable without London's permission to aid the Latvians as requested by Ulmanis, the Allied Navy did significantly bombard German-Russian positions on the left bank of the Daugava in October and November 1919 allowing the Latvian infantry to advance and prevail. This British military involvement is ignored or treated in a cursory way in much Latvian historiography, including this film. There is no official British history of this action; this action was not officially authorized.

A comparison can be made between Grauba's 2007 *Rīgas Sargi* and D.W. Griffith's 1915 *Birth of a Nation*. The very financially successful American film, *Birth of a Nation*, lionized white Ku Klux Klan heroes and vilified black freed-slave marauders, in the interest of rationalizing white supremacy and segregation in 1915 America. Grauba appears to be doing the same thing, once again in a popular movie, lionizing Latvian Red Riflemen and Waffen-SS soldiers in the interest of rationalizing a narcissistic notion of a native nation in Latvia.

Conclusion

I Every Saturday Evening

I every Saturday evening, always, always
 Went to Trina's in the grainery, always, always.
 I every Saturday evening
 Went to Trina's in the grainery, always, always,
 Always, always, always.
 But once arriving at the door, always, always
 Inside I heard a noise, always, always.
 But once arriving at the door
 Inside I heard a noise, always, always
 Always, always, always.
 There Jake inside sat, always, always
 And was kissing my Trina, always, always.
 Oh, Trinity flower of my heart, always, always
 You once promised to be mine, always, always.
 But now you betrayed me, always, always,
 And gave your heart to Jake, always, always.
 I am off to the east, always, always,
 You will never see me again, always, always.
 There we will beat the flea bitten ones, always, always,
 After that the blue and grey ones, always, always.
 May the Latvian swords never rust, never, never,
 May the Latvian sun never set, never, never,
 May the Latvian swords never rust, never, never,
 May the Latvian sun never set, never, never,
 Never, never, never.²⁷⁸

Trinity is Latvia, the Latvia of three provinces, Kurzeme & Zemgale, Vidzeme, and Latgale. I came upon this song on a compact disk included with the coffee table book *Latviešu Leģionāri: Latvian Legionnaires*. It is enthusiastically sung by a domestic Latvian male vocal group called *Vilks* (Wolf), as part of a collection of Legionnaires'

²⁷⁸ Trīnīte, *Latviešu Leģionāru dziesmas* (Latvian Legionnaires' Songs). Sung by Vilki Vīru Kopa. Translated by Indulis Kūlnieks. included as a supplement in Edvīns Brūvelis; Andrējs Feldmanis; Taiga Koknēvica; Valdis Kuzminš; Anda Līce; Uldis Neiburgs; Jānis Vasilevskis, *Latviešu Leģionāri: Latvian Legionnaires* (Toronto: Daugavas Vanagi, 2006).

songs. My brother, George (Juris), recalls my father singing this song with his friends, in our home in Canada. However, this song comes from an earlier time.

Historian Valdis Lumāns remembers his grandmother singing this song to him and advised me that it was a Latvian Nationalist song.²⁷⁹ I beg to differ. Latvian Red Riflemen certainly sang this tune as well. “I am off to the east, always, always. You will never see me again, always, always.” Earlier in the lyrics, the hero finds the “disreputable Jake” kissing and making out with his betrothed, in my interpretation, Latvia embracing capitalism. Grauba sees this as well. Disgusted, the hero vows to go east to fight, first the louse ridden Imperial Russian, then the blue-grey uniformed Imperial German. There will be no turning back to a bourgeois Latvia, as a new international socialist order needs to be built. The struggle never ends, always, *arvien*, just like *Lāčplēsis*.

During the Russian Civil War, the Latvian nationalists turned east as well, to fight the Bolsheviks in Latgale, perhaps to die and not return, but more likely hoping to return to an independent Latvia. In World War II, the Latvian Waffen-SS soldiers saw things differently with their turning east to die, doomed to condemnation by Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill, never to return, sacrificing themselves to Soviet aggression, but also going full circle, west, to survive and continue their fight. Ironically their uniforms were blue-grey. There were 120,000 Latvians stuck in Germany by the end of the war,²⁸⁰ made up primarily of labour service and military veterans and their families, an unusual and unique refugee population. The resulting Latvian Diaspora maintained a nationalist

²⁷⁹ Val Lumāns, email communication 24 June 2010.

²⁸⁰ Valdis O. Lumāns, *Latvia in World War II* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 391.

ideology frozen in time, a modern ideology inspired by *Lāčplēsis*, anachronistic in a post-modern Latvia.

All these interpretations follow the same basic storyline, the classic struggle of Good vs Evil, the theme of *Lāčplēsis*, the theme adopted by the Latvian nation, socialist or nationalist. The *Lāčplēsis* poem became a template for Latvian nation building under different political banners. A nineteenth-century patriot, Pumpurs, who was close both to the Russian revolutionaries and the national intelligentsia, wrote *Lāčplēsis* deliberately in the age when these two orientations were not yet mutually exclusive. With just the title itself, Pumpurs transmitted a subversive and revolutionary message from his present into the future, a past to build a future on, collective if not historical memory, tinged with ubiquitous anachronisms.

Pumpurs' *Lāčplēsis* of 1888 is the template for future Latvian memoirs, textual histories, and historical films. Its title, *Lāčplēsis* literally translated as “tearer apart of the bear” is the subversive subliminal message given to Latvians to become educated and revolt overtly immediately against the Baltic German barons and covertly ultimately against their patrons, the autocratic Tsarist regime. Pumpurs envisioned more than Latvian autonomy within the Russian empire. He foretold an eventual liberation from all foreign invaders and occupiers, just a dream perhaps. Pumpurs message is ironic and ambiguous in his title and bear episodes, but his closing stanzas are unequivocal. Modern Latvian nationalists took up this call to arms in ways unintended by Pumpurs.

The memoir of General Pēteris Radziņš provides the best narrative of military events in Riga from 8 October to 11 November 1919, but is in no way an example of national mythologizing. There is no *Lāčplēsis* in Radziņš. On the other hand, the 2007

film *Rīgas Sargi* portrays the military events of that period, fantastically, not realistically, using the *Lāčplēsis* epic as a template. *Rīgas Sargi* became the biggest box office success in Latvia, an historical film following the accepted collective storyline of Latvian self-determination. Radziņš was unpopular and politically incorrect with his attribution of Latvian success in October-November 1919 to the Allied Fleet. Not willing to submit to nationalist myth makers, Radziņš later may have committed suicide under “a cloud of scandal” in 1930. His account and his memory were effectively purged from the historical record and collective memory until recently.

One legacy of *Lāčplēšian* ideology is Russophobia, the Latvian drive to reduce Russia and “tear apart the bear,” in 1919, in 1943, in 1991, and perhaps now. The reality is that Latvia achieved its liberation in 1919 primarily due to the Allied Fleet’s tactical involvement in the battle against the West Russian Volunteer Army. British and French naval guns in the Gulf of Riga, backing up Latvian infantry offensives in Paradaugava, assured Latvian success, otherwise impossible. British propaganda models taught the Latvians to blow their own horn,²⁸¹ which with the help of *Lāčplēsis* they did. As part of the school curriculum *Lāčplēsis* helped define who the Latvians were and the anti-Russian interpretation was embedded in their identity.

At the beginning of the Second World War, Latvians, the *undeutch* of the Medieval Baltic, were *untermenschen*, inferior people, in the Nazi German racial hierarchy. The Latvians had a leg up on Slavs, like the Byelorussians and Ukrainians, at least in the eyes of Alfred Rosenberg and Heinrich Himmler, if not Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels. So by late 1944, the Latvians were almost as “white” as their close

²⁸¹ Stephen Tallents, *The Projection of England* (London: Faber & Faber, 1932), 46. Philip M. Taylor, “Techniques of Persuasion: basic ground rules of British Propaganda during the Second World War,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 1, No.1 (1981): 59-66.

German allies, their cold blue-grey eyes matching the field blue-grey uniforms of the infamous Waffen-SS, and their hands were stained with the blood of up to 240,000 victims, some say.²⁸² Latvians as having been caught between a rock and a hard place is a historical myth, a rationalization. Latvians were part-of both the rock and the hard place, Germany and Russia, agents as well as victims, *Lāčpleši*, tearing apart the bear. *Lāčplēsis* helped imagine the Latvian nation, but also led Latvia down a dark modern path.

Today Latvia is left dealing with an imperial legacy in the form of its significant Russian minority, which is often politically pro-Russian. Out of some 538,000 ethnic Russians in a total Latvian state population of roughly 2,000,000 up to fifty percent are resident aliens who have not taken up Latvian citizenship, which includes a Latvian language qualification. They are effectively stateless people, unable to vote and participate completely in Latvian society. The past cannot be forgotten, but it can be remembered in more critical and less provocative ways. Ethnic discord and hatred need to be left behind and a peaceful and just civil society built in Latvia with new interpretations of Latvian identity embedded in the cultural background. Latvia's membership in the EU offers mechanisms for civic activism and social reconstruction based on European democratic principles. Sympathy may be asking for too much, but empathy may be a good first step. The problem of Latvian/Russian reconciliation is a barrier that needs to be surmounted for the postmodern nation-state of Latvia to prosper.

²⁸² Lumāns, 261-262. Lumāns cites Soviet sources that “claim that altogether as many as 240,000 Jews died in Latvia.” Ezergailis estimated approximately 85,000 Jews victims in Latvia including about 20,000 imported from the Reich. Soviet military sources also record some 162,000 Red Army combatants killed in the battles in Latvia. 240,000 may not be an inaccurate number if the Russian civilian victims in Latvia are considered. Other Soviet sources increase this number to 400,000.

Hockey offers hope. On 3 November 2004, late in a game between Riga 2000 and Dinamo Minsk, thirty-one year old Latvian hockey star, Sergei Zholtok left the ice and died of heart failure. Zholtok had come back to Riga, from Minnesota, to play in the Latvian National and Open Belarus Championships during the National Hockey League (NHL) lockout. He had played in the NHL for ten years, for six teams. “Guntis Ķeiselis, a sports reporter with the country’s leading newspaper *Diena*, told AP: ‘Ten years in the NHL is quite an achievement. He was the best goal scorer, the best forward, Latvia ever produced.’”²⁸³ Sergei Zholtok (Latvian: *Sergejs Zoltoks*) was a Latvian. His name was Russian. There is hope.

²⁸³ “Goodbye Sergei Zholtok,” located at: <http://darkknight9.tripod.com/zholtok.html> (Accessed 21 May 2012).

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Appendix

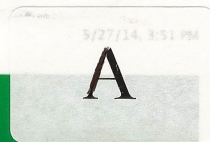
- A** 2011 Lāčplēsis image on computer wallpaper from Lāčplēsis Brewery

- B** 1935 Lāčplēsis sculptural relief on Freedom Monument in Riga

- C** 1943 Latvian Propaganda Poster

- D** 2007 *Rīgas Sargi* Promotional Poster

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B



Karš un miers

C



Mākslinieks nezināms.
Litogrāfija ; 58,8 x 42 cm. [B.v. : b.i., 1943].



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