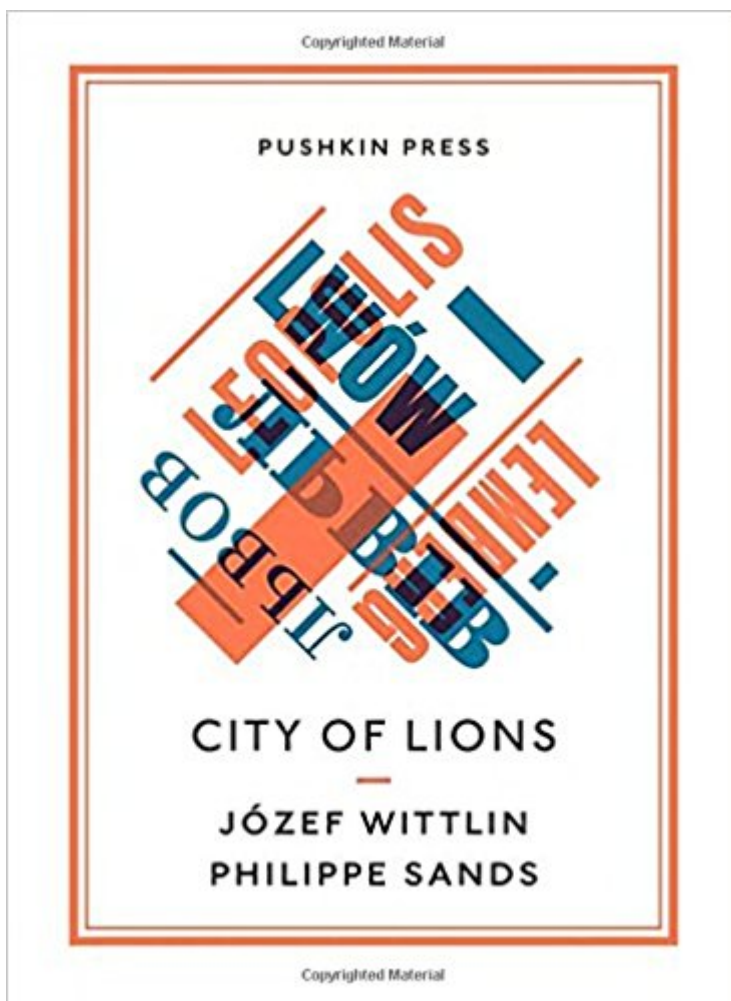


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City Of Lions (Pushkin Collection)



Synopsis

The Ukrainian city Lviv's many names (Lviv, Lvov, Lwow, Lemberg, Leopoldis) bear witness to its conflicted past - it has, at one time or another, belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Poland, Russia and Germany, and has brought forth numerous famous artists and intellectuals. My Lwow, Jozef Wittlin's short 1946 treatise on the city he left in 1922, is a wistful and lyrical study of an electrifying cosmopolis, told from the other side of the catastrophe of the Second World War. Philippe Sand's essay provides a parallel account of the city as it is today: the cultural capital of Ukraine, its citizens played a key role during the Orange Revolution, and its executive committee declared itself independent of the rule of President Viktor Yanukovych in February 2014. The City of Lions includes both old black-and-white photos showing Lviv during the first half of the twentieth century, and new photographs by the award-winning Diana Matar, of the city as it is today.

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Customer Reviews

"[Wittlin's essay *My Lwow* is] for many Poles the definitive evocation of one of their great lost cities. . . a loving, sensuous, but also gently ironic reconstruction. . . Sand's perspective is closer to that of the contemporary reader, who struggles with the juxtaposition between beauty, faded grandeur, and whimsical visions of a cosmopolitan past on the one hand, and savage mass murder on the other." â Los Angeles Review of Books "Congratulations to Pushkin Press for bringing lovely, haunted Lviv to a new audience." â Times Literary Supplement "A walk down memory lane, a meditation on time, politics and remembrance." â Dublin Review of Books "Wittlin takes us on a detailed tour of the city... well-illustrated." â East-West

Review "Beautiful and disturbing songs in prose." - Kazimierz Wierzyński

Jozef Wittlin (1896-1976), Polish novelist, essayist and poet, studied Philosophy, German, French and History of Art before he was drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army in 1914. Discharged from the army two years later on the grounds of poor health, he became a teacher and turned to writing, and published Polish translations of the Epic of Gilgamesh and Homer's Odyssey in the 1920s. His novel Salt of the Earth (1936), has been translated into several languages and its American publication in 1941 resulted in awards from the Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters. Wittlin left Poland shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, and eventually settled in New York City. Philippe Sands, QC, is a barrister, writer and Professor of Law at UCL, London, specialising in international law. He is a regular commentator on the BBC and CNN and writes frequently for leading newspapers. He is the author of East West Street: On the Origins of "Genocide" and "Crimes Against Humanity" (2016 winner of the Baillie Gifford Prize for Non-Fiction), Torture Team: Rumsfeld's Memo and the Betrayal of American Values, From Nuremberg to The Hague: The Future of International Criminal Justice, and Lawless World: America and the Making and Breaking of Global Rules--From FDR's Atlantic Charter to George W. Bush's Illegal War. Jozef Wittlin's My Lviv translated from the Polish by Antonia Lloyd Jones

The combination of essays provides a sense of continuity (and perhaps even hope/optimism) to what might otherwise be a grim exercise in nostalgia. Wittlin's observations about Lemberg are both entertaining and insightful; Sands revisits all of this, now Lviv, with history providing a wholly different perspective. It's a crisp and really interesting read!

City of Lions is offered as a celebration of the Galician city known today as Lviv, Ukraine. When in the Soviet Union, the city was Lvov; when in Poland, Lwów; and when Galicia was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire the city was Lemberg, the German name to which it reverted in the Nazi's General Government. The book brings together a translation of the poet and novelist Józef Wittlin's 1946 essay "My Lwów" and a new essay by human rights lawyer and Professor at University College, London, Philippe Sands. Wittlin was not born in Lviv, but he lived there for 18 years, leaving in 1922 at the age of 26. He eventually migrated to New York, where his essay was first published in Polish. Sands is of Galician Jewish origin. One of his grandfathers moved away from Lviv in 1914: many of his wider family remained and all were murdered in the holocaust. Sands has in recent years explored the Galician part of his heritage,

focussing particularly on the city of Lviv. His essay in this book sits well alongside Wittlin's, as Sands was aware of the earlier work and as he writes he refers to it often. Wittlin takes us on a detailed tour of Lviv, describing three cathedrals; the 'Main Station' built in 1904 on a grand scale; pharmacies dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit, Divine Providence, the Roman Emperor Titus, and the Hungarian Crown; the city's second-hand bookshops, and much more. The bookshops were all on one side of a single street and were all Jewish-owned. Jews were deeply involved in the city's commerce. As Sands notes, in Wittlin's time Jews (and Ukrainians) were discriminated against in education and other matters. Wittlin absolves the city to some extent with a story of the protection from massacre afforded the Jews by a 17th century mayor. The city has been blessed with other mayoral 'lions' too; Wittlin goes on to describe examples from the 19th and 20th centuries. He entertains us with the story of an experience he had as a teacher in the city. He and one of his pupils were faced with the prospect of her receiving a failing grade. He was invited to a prominent café 'wonderfully described' and instead of the anticipated coffee was presented with a feast fit for a king. Then a bribe was proposed. Wittlin threw down his 'snow-white napkin', demanded the bill 'which was not produced' and left. The girl duly failed Wittlin's course. Sands, in keeping with his professional interests, notes that Rafael Lemkin, who originated the word and concept of 'genocide' studied law in Lviv, as did 'a few years earlier' Hersch Lauterpacht, the originator of the term 'crimes against humanity'. Sands was surprised and disappointed to find that Lemkin and Lauterpacht are neither memorialised in Lviv nor much remembered. As a response, he was told: 'You cannot imagine what it was like under [Soviet rule] and that is why we know nothing about all these people you are interested in.' Like many other visitors to Ukraine seeking out the places where their Jewish forebears lived and were murdered, Sands regrets the general lack of commemoration of holocaust victims in and around Lviv. Understandably in light of this, fascinated as he is by the city of Lviv and its past, he closes on an ambivalent note with respect to the present. Both essays are well-illustrated by an extensive selection of full-page black and white photographs.

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