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Literary Travel: Ukrainian Journeys Toward the National and the Modern¹

Arriving in Georgia in 1909, the Ukrainian dramatist and poet Lesia Ukrainka (1871–1913) noted in a letter to her mother, ‘even geographically this is different part of the world, for this really is *Asia*, not “Asia”’.² A month later she wrote,

It’s quite tricky to set oneself up here in a more or less European way – this isn’t Asia for nothing. It’s difficult to arrange the ‘prose of life’ here, whereas the poetry doesn’t need to be arranged – it’s everywhere. From my room, for example, you can see the whole of Dagestan, a majestic white-capped spine. It’s far away – some forty versts – but on fine days and moonlit nights it comes frighteningly close; it seems then like the ghost of a newly created world, lighter than clouds and more translucent than ice...³

For Lesia Ukrainka the journey to a new and distant place created the possibility of remembering the familiar: the ‘real *Asia*’ presented itself to her imagination through the Romantic and, *ipso facto*, European categories of the exotic and the sublime. At the same time *Asia* compelled the writer to reflect on ‘Asia’ in ironic inverted commas: on those parts of geographical Europe (Lesia Ukrainka’s homeland among them) that, she thought, fell short of ‘European’ civilisational standards and therefore deserved to be identified, dismissively, with Asia. In this counterpoint ‘Europe’ is the norm; it is a metaphor of civilisation *per se*, of progress, modernity and high culture, and of a politics worthy of the autonomous and rational human being. This political Europe Lesia Ukrainka had sensed eighteen years earlier upon first visiting Vienna: ‘I feel somehow more free’, she wrote to her brother, ‘and on the other hand I have nowhere felt more acutely

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² Lesia Ukraïnka, letter to Ol’ha Petrivna Kosach, 19 and 22 February 1909, in Lesia Ukraïnka, *Zibrannia tvoriv u dvanadtsiaty tomakh* (Kyïv: Naukova dumka, 1975–1979), 12: 270.

³ Lesia Ukraïnka, letter to Halyna Mykhailivna Komarova, 23 March 1909, in Lesia Ukraïnka, *Zibrannia tvoriv u dvanadtsiaty tomakh*, 12: 276.

how hard it is to go about in chains, and how terribly the yoke has chafed my neck'.⁴

A journey invites the traveller to notice and attribute meanings to the differences and similarities between places. Conceptualised in the spirit of Bakhtin, the journey – the combination of the chronotopes of the road and the foreign place⁵ – may present itself as one of the possible generic structures for the narrative organisation of time and space. Here, instead, the journey will be examined in the tradition of rhetorical analysis as a topos – as a ‘common place’ where arguments can be ‘found’ or, to use a different metaphor, as a form able to be filled with diverse contents for the purpose of bringing particular addressees to particular points of view.⁶ The object of discussion will be the journey as a topos in texts of Ukrainian culture – a culture which, located within the force fields of other, ‘stronger’ cultures linked to politically and economically dominant powers, is readily interpretable as colonised. Of interest to this study are the arguments carried by the topos of the journey in the early stages of the evolution of the Ukrainian national project in the nineteenth century, and later in the course of the Soviet reconfiguration of that project in the 1920s.

Travel writing has been the object of much research, including many contributions to postcolonial studies that have inquired into the ways in which imperial, Eurocentric ideologies permeated descriptions of journeys in the ‘major’ European literatures. It is one of the familiar paradoxes of postcolonial studies that this branch of literary scholarship typically selected metropolitan texts as its objects of inquiry, doing little to counteract one of the prime injustices suffered by colonised cultures: their invisibility in the global context into which colonisation has resistlessly drawn them. ‘Travellers, merely through their greater access to the technology of transportation, implicitly belong to a more developed culture’, observed Steve Clark.⁷ Representatives of these cultures travelled more; they

⁴ Lesia Ukraïнка, letter to Mykhailo Petrovych Kosach, 25 February 1891, in Lesia Ukraïнка, *Zibrannia tvoriv u dvanadtsiaty tomakh*, 10: 68.

⁵ Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, ‘Formy vremeni i khronotopa v romane’, in *Literaturno-kriticheskie stat'i* (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986), 121–290, here 277–78.

⁶ Studies of the argumentative role of topoi include Dieter Breuer and Helmut Schanze (eds.), *Topik: Beiträge zur interdisziplinären Diskussion* (München: Fink, 1981); Thomas Schirren and Gerd Ueding, *Topik und Rhetorik* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000) and Andreas Dörpinghaus and Karl Helmer, *Topik und Argumentation* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2004).

⁷ Steve Clark, ‘Introduction’, in Steve Clark (ed.), *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 1–28, here 3.

generated more texts about their travels; and these texts, in turn, became the objects of more academic studies in the knowledge institutions of these advanced cultures.

But what of the journeys of the colonised to the colonising centres? Where are the descriptions of the travels of the writing intelligentsia of the Ukrainian lands during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to Western Europe or to the capitals of the Russian or Austro-Hungarian Empires? The journeys to Ukraine of privileged travellers from Russia during the first decades of the nineteenth century – Petr Shalikov, Vladimir Izmailov, Ivan Dolgoruky and Aleksei Levshin – generated texts that make it possible to speak of a ‘Russian discovery of Ukraine’.⁸ There is no corpus of texts analogously intended to secure for the public of the Ukrainian lands a ‘discovery of Russia’, despite the stream of educated Ukrainians who migrated to St. Petersburg to work in the imperial service.⁹ In his book *From Half-Asia* (1876) that enjoyed translation into no fewer than sixteen languages¹⁰ the German-language writer Karl Emil Franzos (1848–1904), himself born in Ukraine, adopted for the benefit of his intended European readers the pose of the orientalisising discoverer of the Ukrainian territories of the Habsburg and Romanov empires:

The political and social realities of these lands present an extraordinary collision of European enlightenment and Asiatic barbarism, of the European will to progress and Asian indolence, of European humaneness and such wild and violent conflict between nations and confessions that to a denizen of the West it must appear not merely as alien, but as unheard of and, indeed, incomprehensible.¹¹

⁸ O. P. Tolochko, ‘Kyievo-rus’ka spadshchyna v istorychniĭ dumtsi Ukraïny pochatku XIX st.’, in *Ukraïna i Rosiia v istorychniĭ retrospektyvi: Narysy v 3-kh tomakh*, Vol. 1: V. F. Verstiuk, V. M. Horobets’ and O. P. Tolochko, *Ukraïns’ki proekty v rosii’s’kiĭ imperii* (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 2004), 250–350, here 266–310.

⁹ See David Saunders, *The Ukrainian Impact on Russian Culture, 1750–1850* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1985).

¹⁰ According to the introduction to the third German edition, the book was translated in full into Danish, Dutch, Swedish and Russian, and in part into English, French, Italian, Hungarian, Ukrainian, Polish, Romanian, Norwegian, Finnish, Spanish, Hebrew and Yiddish (twice: in Vilnius and New York). Karl Emil Franzos, *Aus Halb-Asien: Culturbilder aus Galizien, der Bukowina, Südrussland und Rumänien*, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Alfred Bonz, 1889), 1: vii.

¹¹ Franzos, *Aus Halb-Asien*, 1: xxiii–xxiv.

Similarly categorical judgments based on journeys, let us say, to Vienna, are not to be found in analogously visible Ukrainian texts by such visitors to the imperial capital as the prominent writers Ivan Franko (1856–1916), Olha Kobylanska (1863–1942) or Lesia Ukrainka.

Why such restraint on the part of representatives of modern Ukrainian literature at the very time when the national project was gathering momentum? Were one to risk ascribing ‘causes’, one might hypothesise that for the intelligentsia of a colonially dependent society the centre is always already known, while the periphery is forever unknown to the centre (for where is the benefit of such knowledge?). Colonial intellectuals are formed through the culture and education ordained by the centre and, accordingly, are honorary members of the metropolitan culture; they find it awkward and artificial to adopt a position ‘external’ to that culture in order to ‘discover’ it as new and observe it with the same ethnographising gaze that it directs at them. Attempts to adopt such a position may lead, on the one hand, to an embarrassing unmasking of one’s cultural naïveté in the style of Gogol’s blacksmith Vakula from ‘The Night Before Christmas’. On the other hand, all-too-agile a command of the discourses of empire bears the danger of what Mary Louise Pratt called ‘autoethnography’ – self-representation ‘in ways that engage with the coloniser’s terms’.¹² Yuri Andrukhovych (b. 1960) pointed to this danger in his novel *The Secret* (2007), which is structured as a series of interviews that the central character, a Ukrainian writer resident in Berlin, gives a German-speaking journalist. The interviewer repeatedly attempts to compel the interviewee to harmonise his narratives and reflections with the expectations and prejudices of the Western public.

However, the colonised may travel not only to the centre, but through ‘their own’ territory, constructing its significance relative to a particular world view or system of arguments. A journey is the movement of a subject between places that are – cannot but be – different from one another. The interpretation of such differences is often facilitated by figures of opposition. The opposition ‘familiar/unfamiliar’, or ‘previously seen by European observers / never before seen by Europeans’, is characteristic of descriptions of seafaring voyages that introduced Europeans to new worlds and new peoples. It prompted efforts at

¹² Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), 9.

accurate, even scientific descriptions and classifications. The opposition ‘beautiful (to European tastes)/ugly (to European tastes)’, not infrequently glossed as ‘clean/dirty’, often helped structure ambitious civilisational generalisations. The opposition of most interest for this discussion is ‘modern/backward’, often represented by the opposition ‘Europe/Asia’. From the Age of Enlightenment onward modernity had been an argument of legitimation for West European secular culture. The modern ideology promised, on the basis of advances in science and technology, to improve the material and cultural condition of human beings. The political equivalent of such improvements, as Eisenstadt argued, was to be ‘first the openness of the [political] arena and the political process; and second a strong emphasis on at least potential active participation of the periphery, of “society”, of all its members in the political arena’.¹³ Modernity became a key dimension of the self-image of European societies in their encounters with cultural Others, especially in the context of European colonial expansion. As one researcher put it, ‘From the point of view of the centre, global *space* appeared transformed into a *time* sequence, with Europeans as the only contemporaries, the sole inhabitants of modernity’.¹⁴

Advocacy of European-style political modernity was the implicit argument carried by the topos of the journey in a symptomatic text of the early 1990s, Yuri Andrukhovych’s *The Moscoviad* (1993). The novel was an instance of anticolonial argumentation: it rejected Soviet culture in general and Moscow as the old centre of cultural gravity in particular. The Europhilia of the early Andrukhovych and his circle was a companion to such anti-Soviet anti-colonialism. It was not always noticed, especially in the 1990s, when the phenomenon was still in its youth, how close this infatuation with Europe was to autoethnographism. Revealing in this respect were Andrukhovych’s European landscape idylls and his interpretation of the ‘discreteness, variety and formal closure’ of the topographic forms of Central and Western Europe as the source of the values of individualism and humaneness. The formless and boundless eastern steppe, by contrast, was generative of barbarity and despotism.¹⁵ Europe figured in this argumentation as

¹³ Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 497.

¹⁴ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Development Theory: Deconstructions/Reconstructions* (London: Sage, 2001), 19. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁵ Iurii Andrukhovych, *Dezorientatsiia na mistsevoisti* (Ivano-Frankivs’k: Lileia NV, 1999), 36–37.

a synonym of the civilisational and especially political values of modernity in the Eisenstadian definition of this term. Later, subdued by the tepid response of the European Union and the West European states to the pro-European enthusiasm of the Orange Revolution, Andrukhovych revised this position, offering a critique of it in *The Secret*.

In the nineteenth century the civilisationally normative standing of Europe was taken for granted in high-culture discourses in the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires. Accordingly, Europe was present, even if only by implication, in many descriptions of travel through Ukraine. Several instances of such ‘presence through absence’ are to be found in the prose works of Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861), the poet most lauded for advancing modern Ukrainian national identity. Europe is the silent norm behind the satirical argumentation in Shevchenko’s *Excursion with Pleasure and Not Without Instructiveness* (1857–1858), where the narrator’s journey from Kyiv to a relative’s estate serves to criticise the inertia, lassitude and backwardness of all ranks of society. These social distempers are symbolised by staging posts and inns that exhaust and exasperate the traveller with their various discomforts and ‘our renowned Little Russian mud’,¹⁶ which all but renders impossible any forward movement. The novella attacks society’s readiness to accept such miserable conditions and its refusal to initiate improvements. Alongside any road, the narrator complains, there is always a tree stump against which ‘several generations of my forelocked compatriots have been breaking their axles. [...] Perhaps there’s at least the mark of an axe or the hint of some intention to remove this axle crusher? Nothing, not the merest sign. Let it stand where the Lord put it, say my naïve countrymen, patiently continuing to destroy their good hornbeam axles’ (4: 320). The text ascribes the malaise afflicting the narrator’s countrymen to the primitive, childish level of their civilisational development. The generality of this pre-modern state makes it contagious: the narrator himself complains of becoming ‘morally and physically petrified’ in this environment (4: 279). Even if a ray of the modern penetrates into this gloom, it is immediately neutralised by the force of tradition. The narrator’s servant Trokhym repeats in his dream a phrase remembered from a physics textbook: ‘The eye is the organ that serves to transmit impressions of light’. But this encouragingly

¹⁶ Taras Shevchenko, ‘Progulka s udovol’stviam i ne bez morali’, in *Povne zibrannia tvoriv u shesty tomakh* (Kyiv: Vydavnytstvo Akademii Nauk URSR, 1964), 4: 247–391, here 247.

enlightened sentiment is no more and no less valuable to its articulator than the content of his previous reading: ‘The Life and Sufferings of the Holy Martyr Eustathius Placidus’ (4: 285).

Philistinism – of the ordinary people as well as of the gentry – is the foil for the chief scandal and anachronism of this society, serfdom. Emblematic of this outrageous dominion of some people over others is the private harem of the landowner Kurnatovsky. To impress the reader with the grotesqueness of this institution and its contrariety to common sense and intuitive morality, Shevchenko has recourse to the ‘Europe/Asia’ opposition. The building that Kurnatovsky has erected for the satiation of his passions is emphatically Oriental: the rooms there are decorated ‘in the Chinese style’, the place is illuminated with ‘Chinese lanterns’, and the reader is scarcely surprised to discover among the furnishings ‘a Turkish sofa’ (4: 326).

In a similar spirit, the diary of Shevchenko’s journey from exile to St. Petersburg (1857–1858) attaches ‘Asiatic’ attributes to phenomena of which the diarist disapproves. Excessively ornate religious ceremonial appears to him as ‘something Tibetan or Japanese’ (5: 201), an aesthetically unsatisfactory icon is an example of ‘Indian hideousness’ (5: 201), a bad Moscow hotel becomes a ‘caravan-serai’ (5: 210), and if entry into St. Isaac’s cathedral requires a ticket signed by one particular bureaucrat and not another, then this is an example of ‘Chinese rationality’ (5: 239). For all the force of his critique of the Russian Empire as colonial, Shevchenko shares in the discourse of European superiority over non-Europe, familiar since the late 1970s under Edward Said’s label of ‘orientalism’. Similarity to Asia discredits, as does difference from Europe or its unsuccessful imitation. Such is the failure of the esplanade at Astrakhan, which is ‘morally “English” and physically wooden and made of planks. The canal itself is the devil knows what’ (5: 102).

Since much of Shevchenko’s journey is aboard a Volga steamship, there is ample opportunity in the diary for reflections on scientific and technical progress and its political corollaries. The diarist connects the pioneers of steam power to prospects of universal political liberty:

Great Fulton and great Watt! Your young child, which grows not by the day but by the hour, will soon devour all the world’s whips, thrones and crowns. What the Encyclopaedists commenced in France your colossal genius of a child will complete throughout the world. (5: 109)

The antithesis of rapid mechanised movement and the progress that it symbolises is Shevchenko's forced inactivity as he waits for permission in Novopetrovsk on the Caspian Sea to commence his journey to freedom and again in Nizhny Novgorod to continue it. This absence of movement is caused by bureaucratic delays that, in turn, are a consequence of the anachronism of tsarism. In Shevchenko's travel prose, including his diary, practically all of the content – the narrative elements, the representation of characters or real people, and reflections on various topics – becomes part of a continuous record of dissatisfaction, often waxing into outrage, with the political, social, economic and cultural state of affairs. In this respect, Shevchenko's travel writing is reminiscent of the prototype of oppositional travel prose in the Russian Empire, Alexandr Radishchev's *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (1790).

Journeys create opportunities for contemplating not only the faults of the state as a system of constraints imposed upon human beings from above, but also the failures of society and its rank-and-file members. Aversion to movement and change, the attitude so pointedly criticised by Shevchenko, occurs frequently in other travel literature of the nineteenth century, where it is mobilised in an argument about the theoretical desirability of modernisation and its practical impossibility in the conditions prevailing in agrarian Ukrainian society. Anatoly Svydnytsky (1834–1871) addressed this state of affairs in his story 'There and Back: Travel Notes' (1870). The narrator, represented as a liberal intellectual, having travelled forty versts from Kyiv, commences a conversation with his driver:

For quite some time [...] we talked about the liberation of the peasants, about what to expect from the new freedom and how to use it. For most of the time the driver listened, occasionally asking a question. In the end, evidently, he became convinced that the present is better than the past and that the future would be even better than the present.¹⁷

The phenomenon of the driver, a peasant who lacks the initiative and confidence to manage a farm of his own ('if you please, sir, I served as a lackey for the landlords, and I got used to easy bread' – 336), sheds an ironic light upon the narrator's liberal dream of the productive farmer as an autonomous agent in the free market. On the contrary, what is present in the peasants' consciousness are

¹⁷ Anatoliï Svydnyts'kyï, 'Tudy ĩ nazad: Podorozhni notatky', trans. Mykola Khvyl'ovyï, in *Biblioteka ukrains'koï literatury: Anatoliï Svydnyts'kyï* (Kyiv: A.S.K., 2006), 336–346, here 337.

images of spontaneous (and, from the narrator's perspective, irrational and pre-modern) struggle against intolerable social conditions: the driver sings of the *haidamaky*, participants in eighteenth-century popular revolts, and describes for the narrator folk memories of Ivan Gonta, a leader of one such revolt in 1768.

Similar arguments are advanced in the works of Panas Myrny (1849–1920) and Ivan Nechui-Levytsky (1838–1918). In Myrny's *Journey from Poltava to Hadiach* (1874) the tone is ironic, as in Svydnytsky's text, but the object of Myrny's irony is not only social reality as observed by the narrator, but also the efficacy of the journey as an instrument of ethnographic and social cognition. 'Preparing for my journey I formed the mental intention of observing the everyday life of the common people, of informing myself about the hidden thoughts by which they live', reports the narrator, but he is forced to conclude that 'travelling by post horse and getting to know the people is no easy matter'.¹⁸ The representative of the people is once again a driver, conversation with whom leads the narrator to theorise about the peasants and the destructiveness of both of the social options open to them: going to the city, or staying on the land. In the city nothing awaits the peasant but degradation: 'A loss of honesty and truthfulness; mutual deceit; [...] and on top of all this – drunkenness and more drunkenness', as well as the loss of folk customs and linguistic hybridisation (2: 14). On the other hand, peasants who remain in their villages, 'stalled in one place after the Cossack turbulences, [...] have remained so to this day; and to this day, swathed in a darkness beyond belief, they struggle with their miserable lives, with cold and hunger, and from time to time wash all this down with spirits' (2: 15). Neither the modernisation of life (urbanisation and social mobilisation), nor the retention of its pre-modern forms promises the peasants any pathway to improvement. As in Svydnytsky's novel, the narrator in Myrny's text observes, with a mixture of understanding and disapproval, the peasants' openness to the idea of collective social revenge. The ordinary people's view of the pathological robber and murderer Hnydka is 'harsh, but nonetheless poetic [...]. The ordinary folk have profound intuitions. They forgive the fiercest cutthroats from their own ranks, often exonerating them as victims of misfortune; but they do not forgive their age-old enemies who oppress them and destroy their defenceless lives' (2: 27). As his journey progresses, the

¹⁸ Panas Myrnyĭ, *Zibrannia tvoriv u semy tomakh* (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1968–1971), 2: 7–32, here 10.

traveller-narrator distances himself from his peasant compatriots and begins to view them with the seemingly objective, but also somewhat contemptuous, gaze of an anthropologist with anthropometric inclinations: ‘The things that I noticed about the people’s faces were the small noses of the women and girls, similar to Hungarian plums, and their short stature’ (2: 31).

At about the same time Ivan Nechui-Levytsky, while likewise employing the topos of the journey to question the advantage of liberal modernisation for ordinary people, harnessed it for the anti-colonial project of the construction of a Ukrainian nation on the ethnic territory of Ukraine. In an article of 1878 Nechui-Levytsky urged his fellow writers to take as their themes people from all parts of Ukraine. By doing so they would help create a kind of literary map of Ukraine whose borders would be congruent with the limits of Ukrainian rural settlement. But this literary territory, prototype of a modern multi-ethnic territorial nation-state, would embrace all social and ethnic groups to be found within these borders:

Ukrainian life is an untouched subterranean lode [...]; it offers limitless material to whole schools of literary workers. Before them unfolds, like an immensely wide canvas, the life of ordinary peasant folk from the Caucasus and the Volga to the Danube, to the Carpathians and beyond, do the distant forests of Hrodna and Minsk. [...] Cossacks and city dwellers likewise should not elude the attention of the attentive Ukrainian writer. [...] Ukrainian literature should not bypass the Jews, but show how they truly stand in relation to the ordinary people, the landowners, the priests and the Russian government. The upper echelons of Ukrainian society, the Ukrainian gentry of Eastern Ukraine and the Black Sea coast, the Catholic gentry of Western Ukraine, the Magyar gentry beyond the Carpathians – Ukrainian literature should reflect them all, and the more truthfully it does so, the greater will be its benefit. [...] In a word, all that falls within the ethnographic boundary of the Ukrainian people, not excluding people of other nationalities, should be and doubtless will be material for realist Ukrainian literature.¹⁹

In the same year Nechui-Levytsky’s novel *Mykola Dzheria* appeared. In many ways the book embodied these principles. The plot of the novel concerned a journey. Its subject, however, was not the customary educated, privileged traveller-

¹⁹ Ivan Nechui-Levyts'kyi, ‘Nepotribnist’ velykorus’koï literatury dlia Ukraïny i dlia slovianshchyny (S’ohochasne literaturne priamuvannia)’, *Ukraïns’kyi tsentr* <<http://www.ukrcenter.com/library/read.asdid=4568&read=true>>, accessed 31 May 2008.

narrator steeped in the modern European ethos, but a peasant full of intuitive anarchic resentment against his exploiters. Mykola's journey is an escape from his village to the sugar refineries along the Dnieper, and then through the steppe to the estuary of the Dnister. In this series of symbolic places the sugar refineries represent the unacceptable face of modernity that had offended Myrny. Nechui-Levytsky uses for its depiction the opposition of dirt and cleanliness: 'Filthy workers in black shirts and with black faces skulked around the factory yard. [...] Tall smokestacks constantly belched columns of black, stinking smoke'.²⁰ In the steppe, on the other hand, 'God's world seemed to smile upon them with its green spring grass, its blue sky and clean country air' (2: 215). The endpoint of Mykola's journey, the seashore near the Bessarabian border where he joins a band of fishermen, is the limit of Ukrainian settlement and thus, according to Nechui-Levytsky, the limit of the territory to be appropriated by Ukrainian literature. Fishing, the trade of the Apostles, suggests the sacral quality of this liminal place and its capacity to transform the human being. Indeed, to avoid repatriation and return to serf status, the newcomers receive new names which, attested by the identity papers of people who have died, endow them with a certain immortality.

And yet, Mykola's journey is no passage to secular salvation. It does not eradicate the memory of his native village or his abandoned wife Nymydora, whose sufferings recall those of the Great Martyr Minodora in whose name she was christened. After the liberation of the serfs Mykola returns to his village, finds that Nymydora is dead, and lives out his days in rebellious resentment against what is still, regardless of the emancipation of 1861, an anachronistic pre-modern social and political order. Mykola's life's journey does follow the pattern of the *Bildungsroman* – the novel of education where the travails of the apprentice and journeyman are followed by the age of the master, the return home and the harmonious re-entry into society. For Mykola industrial modernity has proved to be inhuman and alien, but it is no more destructive or unjust than the traditional rural order. Homelessness in space and time has become Mykola's destiny; his travels through the landscapes of Ukraine have not helped him find himself. He is a representative of the condition well described by John Phillips:

²⁰ Ivan Nechui-Levyts'kyi, *Tvory v chotyr'okh tomakh* (Kyiv: Derzhavne vydavnytstvo khudozhn'oi literatury, 1956), 2: 207.

Very generally, the figure of the exile – the unstable subject of numerous historical cases of exodus, diaspora, migration and decolonization – represents a subject that belongs to a dialectic that eludes the logic of identity. It is a subject for whom the origin (or home) is from the beginning a displacement and cannot be fixed.²¹

Demarcating the ethno-cultural territory of Ukraine is the main ideological task of Nechui-Levytsky's documentary travel story 'In the Carpathians' (1885). The work possesses many conventional attributes of European travel prose: a first-person narrator with anthropological and ethnographic interests, detailed descriptions of landscapes, and information about the comforts that the places visited provide for the educated traveller. A number of objects of observation interest Nechui-Levytsky above all: aspects of the appearance and culture of the people of the Carpathians that are similar to those of the inhabitants of Dnieper Ukraine; cultural differences that separate these Carpathian Ukrainians from representatives of other ethnic groups; and differences that make possible evaluative civilisational contrasts between 'one's own' and 'foreign' people. The 'dirt/cleanliness' opposition comes into its own here: a Masurian house is represented as 'a horrible *smoke-filled* house. I thought I had climbed into a chimney caked with soot' (2: 392; emphasis in the original). Another house evokes even less salutary impressions: 'My God! What filth! What chaos in this living-room! The place is unswept and untidy; everything is in a mess. And what poverty!' (2: 393). As for the people whom Nechui-Levytsky considers to be members of the Ukrainian ethnos, the difference between their archaic way of life and that of the Dnieper Ukrainians presents itself not as backwardness, but as asynchronicity: the Hutsuls are now at a developmental stage that other Ukrainians already have behind them. The narrator experiences in the church in the village of Shliakhova

[...] the whiff of the distant past. The iconostasis, the icons, the frescoes, the carvings of the iconostasis were so ancient that I could barely recollect having seen similar ones in old Ukrainian churches when I was a small child; today it is impossible to find them in [Dnieper] Ukraine with a candle in broad daylight. (2: 402)

²¹ John Phillips, 'Lagging Behind: Bhabha, Post-Colonial Theory and the Future', in Steve Clark (ed.), *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*, 63–80, here 65.

This archaic quality of Carpathian Ukrainian culture even suggests to Nechui-Levytsky a connection with ‘the ancient Kyiv of the princes’ (2: 403). As regards the appearance of the people and their possession of the civilisational attribute of ‘cleanliness’, Nechui-Levytsky finds similarities between the Ukrainians of both empires that, implicitly, add to the proofs of their membership of the one nation: ‘Among the girls there were a few of entirely southern type, like those of Kherson, with dark eyes and black eyebrows, and with an interestingly clean and expressive cut of the lips. The mobile faces of the people hereabouts are reminiscent of the inhabitants of Podillia and Volyn’. The house of one of the young married women is ‘as clean as a house in [Dnieper] Ukraine and far cleaner than a Masurian one’ (2: 404). It is the observation of similarities and differences such as these, presumably, that allows Nechui-Levytsky confidently to draw the border of the Ukrainian ethno-cultural territory: ‘A fine nook in the Carpathians is this last valley of Rus-Ukraine with its last four villages!’ (2: 409). In 1905, in the context of a revolution in the Russian Empire, Ivan Franko would connect this ethno-cultural understanding of the territory of Ukraine with a political imperative:

We must learn to apprehend ourselves as Ukrainians – not Galician or Bukovinian Ukrainians, but Ukrainians independent of formal borders. [...] We ought – all of us without exception – first to get to know this Ukraine of ours, all of it within its ethnographic borders [...], in order that we might *understand* all manifestations of its life; that we might feel truly and practically a part of it.²²

A wholly different use of the argumentative potential of the topos of the journey is to be encountered two decades later in the work of a representative of the new Soviet Ukrainian literature, Maik Yohansen (1896–1937). In 1928 Yohansen accused Nechui-Levytsky and the classics of Ukrainian literature generally of backwardness relative to the authoritative European model of literary development: ‘Europeans’, he claimed, ‘will not take to reading such things as *Mykola Dzheria*, but will wait until Ukrainian literature begins to look like any other grown-up literature’.²³ Yohansen found in the genre of travel writing or, more precisely, in its parodically modernist transformation a means for

²² Ivan Franko, ‘Odvertyi lyst do halyts’koï ukrains’koï molodezhi’, *Zibrannia tvoriv u piatdesiaty tomakh*, 45: 405. Emphasis in the original.

²³ Maik Yohansen, ‘Tak buduiet’sia opovidannia: Analiza prozovykh zrazkiv’, *Vybrani tvory* (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 2001), 361–475, here 474.

expressing the sense of simultaneous presence in two periods of time that Ernst Bloch seven years later would label ‘the synchronicity of the asynchronous’.²⁴ In contrast to his nineteenth-century predecessors who agonized over what they saw as the backwardness of their nation and culture relative to a normative Europe, Yohansen was troubled by the gulf in his own society between the modernity of some processes, and the retrograde nature of others. From Yohansen’s post-revolutionary perspective, although Europe remained a standard of the modern, its monopoly on modernity had been broken. Politically advanced processes and structures were to be found as much at home as in Europe. Yohansen articulated this idea in his *Journey of the Learned Doctor Leonardo and his Future Beloved, the Beauteous Alcestis, to the Switzerland of Slobozhanshchyna* (1930), where the central character, the Spanish antifascist and ‘tyrant-slayer by profession’ Don Jose Pereira was simultaneously the Ukrainian Danko Kharytonovych Pererva, member of a regional executive council of the Soviet government. The presence at home in Ukraine of realities customarily thought of as European is symbolised by the (real!) toponym ‘Switzerland of Slobozhanshchyna’²⁵ that brings together the names of a West European country and a Ukrainian historical region. But in the country of Soviet executive councils the progressive exists side-by-side with the backward: alongside a modern factory producing asbestos cement is a ‘gate, almost entirely [...] smeared with pitch’ (277) – the sign in the traditional village indicating that the unmarried girl who lives within has lost her virginity.

Today the form of the *Journey of the Learned Doctor Leonardo* might appear more postmodern than modern, as Rostyslav Melnykiv suggests, remarking upon the ‘whimsical content’ of the novel and its participation in the culture of ‘parodic and ironic literary mystification’.²⁶ The fact that the work proposes to reflect on travel prose as a genre is announced at the beginning of the prologue, which repeats the word ‘travel’ in a series of languages: ‘Podorozh! Puteshestvie! Wanderung! Travel! Voyage!’ (277). The *Journey* invokes the traditional genre of travel writing parodically. Whereas the traditional description of a journey rests upon the illusion of an authoritative, truthful narrator, Yohansen declares

²⁴ Ernst Bloch, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1962).

²⁵ Maïk Īohansen, ‘Podorozh uchenoho doktora Leonardo i ĩoho maibutn’ oï kokhanky prekrasnoi Al’chesty u Slobozhans’ku Shveĩtsariiu’, in *Vybrani tvory*, 277–359, here 282.

²⁶ Rostyslav Mel’nykiv, ‘Liudyna z khymernym imiam’, in Maïk Īohansen, *Vybrani tvory*, 5–28, here 19.

the unreality of all his characters: 'I made them up', announces the final sentence of the epilogue (387). Nor do these invented personages support the illusion of the coherent personality. Pereira is at times Pererva, who, in turn, might be the Doctor Leonardo Pazzi named in the title of the work. This hero of many names, furthermore, sometimes speaks in the first person, adding the possibility that he may be the textual representative of the Author, who, for his part, sometimes writes in the conditional mood, utilising the possibilities of grammar to underscore the non-binding nature of the situation that 'exists' in a literary text.

Similarly ambivalent is the attitude of the *Journey* to the tradition of sentimentalism, characteristic of travel prose of the time of the classic of this sub-genre, Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768). Sterne's work is sentimental in that it focuses on the inner world of the central character, Yorick, recording his impressions, emotions and reflections. It is sentimental, too – and this gives the work its tone of civilized gallantry – in its playful juxtaposition of Yorick's flirtations and intrigues, on the one hand, and his unflinching chastity, on the other. The pleasure that the English gentleman Yorick derives from his ability to respect Frenchwomen of various social ranks, and his own sense of equality with them, parallels his delicate sense of the variety, and yet equality, of cultures. This differentiates the *Sentimental Journey* from other instances of travel prose, where (as, for example, in Pushkin's *Journey to Arzrum*) a frequent motif is the male traveller-narrator's evaluation of the charms of local women and hypotheses as to their sexual availability.

Yohansen in this respect is a follower of Sterne. Leonardo and Alcestis, although they have been travelling together for a long time, maintain toward one another a chastity worthy of a Don Quixote. This motif, whose development generates a good part of the charm of Yohansen's story, also embodies the problem of the asynchronicity of the synchronous through the question that it raises: how should the reader judge a relationship between a man and a woman, where a sense of equality and a feeling of mutual respect makes impossible the transgression of the boundaries of conventional sexual morality and protects the private sphere of the Other, regardless of the passions and desires of the self? Is this ideal of intergender relations to be regarded as modern (deriving, perhaps, from the individualist and egalitarian ethics inherited from the Age of Enlightenment), or as pre-modern (characteristic of the cultural world of medieval, Renaissance or Baroque courtesy)? The names 'Leonardo' and 'Alcestis' suggest that the reader

should apprehend the characters who bear them as deliberately archaic literary constructions – quotations from the age, say, of Cervantes. Accordingly, among the ‘arguments’ advanced by the text is the suggestion that it would be good if courtesy and mutual respect between genders, instead of being archaic and fictional, were modern and real. It is not for nothing that Yohansen selects a gate smeared with pitch as the symbolic antithesis of the asbestos factory. One might think that the factory is a product of the present, a symbol of modern life, while the custom of shaming a young woman who has not adhered to traditional sexual rules represents a retrograde and barbaric patriarchal culture. But things are not so simple. ‘At times an ancient custom takes on a new content’, the narrator warns the reader. ‘Thus, teenage boys today smear the gate not of the girl who sinned, but of the one who refused to’ (306). It is a bad modernity, one unworthy of its Enlightenment prehistory, that replaces an old barbarism with a new one. The topos of the journey had helped Nechui-Levytsky formulate the thesis that for the peasant there is no good modernity. The same topos enables Yohansen, on the other hand, to observe the existence of modernities both good and bad, and to conclude, a little less pessimistically than Nechui-Levytsky, that the good modernity has yet to triumph.

One of the temptations of travel prose, as we have seen, is the anthropological generalisation which typically expresses an attitude of Eurocentrism or some other form of cultural narcissism. Yohansen is sensitive to the dangers of this convention of the travel genre and takes care to deconstruct it. He refuses to follow Svydnytsky and Myrny in decrying Ukrainian peasants’ alleged inclination toward violence as a deviation from an allegedly ‘European’ norm. Alcestis, summarising her impressions of the sensational acts of violence committed by local criminals, allows herself to conclude, ‘they are one hundred times worse and wilder than this storm, they are savage butchers, these people’. To which Leonardo replies, ‘Have you heard that during a certain polar expedition two Italians, stranded on the ice, killed and ate their Norwegian colleague, devouring him raw because there was no fire on which to cook him up in a soup or to roast him, like a shashlik, on a spit? [...] They were very nice cultivated people, polite and educated, and capable of refined and delicate feelings’. To drive home his demurral from European civilisational or racial suprematism, Yohansen’s hero continues with an apologia of the ordinary Ukrainian people, in which, inverting Eurocentric convention, he lauds non-European peoples as standard-setters: ‘The

people that you speak of is truly a strange people. It has created wondrous music and extraordinary art. [...] It has composed epic songs that are no worse than the codices of Homer. [...] This same people [...] is the equal in artistic prowess not only of the Japanese, but of the African' (341).

The Journey of the Learned Doctor Leonardo announces its relationship to the tradition of travel prose most clearly through its landscape descriptions of the steppes near Kherson and of the Switzerland of Slobozhanshchyna. It would be easy to demonstrate the virtuosity of these descriptions, their capacity to paint panoramas as well as details and to give landscapes a cultural and historical profile. These gems of literary landscape-painting, however, appear to contradict the doctrine that Yohansen set forth in his theoretical treatise, 'How to Construct a Story' (1928). Yohansen was scathing in his attack on landscape descriptions in Russian and Ukrainian literary prose, especially in the works of Turgenev and Nechui-Levytsky. He decried them as wasted words, acts of trespass on territory proper to the landscape painter and breaches of the author's contract with the reader to 'say interesting things' (471). In order to defeat the 'illiteracy of our Nechuis in this matter', Yohansen believed, Ukrainian literature should 'master the architecture of plot' (473). How, then, can we explain the presence in the *Journey* of landscape descriptions that are not only visible, but lovingly executed? The explanation may lie in the text's structural irony. In a short introduction to the *Journey* in English Yohansen insisted that his text be apprehended as an experiment, one aspect of which was the reversal of the usual relationship between plot and landscape:

landscape cannot be adequately treated in the literature [sic] in the usual descriptive way. But if some writer should by chance come across the idea of shifting the reciprocal roles of the landscape and the acting persons, it would be quite a different thing. The persons, treated as mere cardboard puppets, as moving decorations can nevertheless impart proper movement to a description of a landscape (because of the natural tendency of the reader to follow their ways, as if they were real living people) and so a 'Landscape-novel' could be made quite readable. But such a thing has still never been deliberately attempted. (277)

It was now deliberately attempted by Yohansen in the *Journey*. The attempt was of a piece with his general theory of art as a form of entertainment ('somewhere in the vicinity of soft drinks and lemonades' – 371) and with the general modern

project of demystifying the aura of high culture. The literary journey was to become that which the tourist journey was already: a means for obtaining pleasure – more effectively, if possible, than had been the case in the nineteenth century.

But notwithstanding this intention, the seriousness of which is difficult to gauge, the landscapes in Yohansen's journeys present themselves to a reading audience just as Nechui-Levytsky's had done. For Nechui-Levytsky landscapes were the property of the Ukrainian people, the visual equivalent of the country and the potential nation-state; Ukrainian landscapes changed for the worse under the pressure of modernisation, which, to boot, offered little hope of social improvement. For Yohansen it was different: modernisation had its good and bad sides, and while the good modernity struggled to prevail, nature continued to present itself to human beings as landscape. One of the possibilities given to art, including the literary genre of travel writing, was to make this landscape beautiful – or, to put it in the more utilitarian terms that Yohansen would have preferred, pleasant to apprehend.

What arguments related to the issue of modernity, then, did the topos of the journey support in Ukrainian literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? In the first instance, it helped structure a kind of human identity (with ethnic, territorial and cultural components) that was recognisably the identity of an inhabitant of a modern territorial nation-state *in spe*. Second, with the assistance of implied comparisons with an idealised Europe, it promoted an emancipatory social and political program oriented toward the creation of a humane society appropriate to the autonomous human individual. And thirdly, it created the possibilities of criticising that self-same Eurocentric project of development, indicating not only the normative values of Europe, but also the dangers that these norms pose for the evolution of identities that are sufficiently free of colonial dominion to be dignified and sovereign in their own right.