

REPRESENTATION OF THE SELF AND THE OTHER: THE TRAVELLER'S GAZE

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Since antiquity, since Homer's Odysseus sailed for Troy and after ten years of wandering came back to Ithaca, travel narratives have been firmly entrenched into the texture of world literature, and the claim that travel-writing is probably the oldest genre would not be an overstatement. People have always been fascinated by travels to distant foreign lands associated with unknown experiences and exciting adventures. But travel is not only a means of acquiring knowledge about the unknown "Other"; by travelling, we shape the world with our minds thus shaping ourselves. Travelling also means a journey of self-discovery. Homi Bhabha speaks about "re-creation of the self in the world of travel"¹. Travelling means negotiating with cultural difference and cultural hybridity, with cross-cultural initiation and, probably, with one's own multiple identities opened up in the world of travel. These problematic issues are mirrored by travel writing in the form of a record of journeys, diaries, memoirs with the focus not

only on the discovery of places, but also on their creation. As Peter Bishop rightly observes, "travel accounts are involved in the production of imaginative knowledges. They are an important aspect of a culture's myth-making."² A travel text, structured as a narrative, becomes an important cultural document and, as any other form of narrative, raises not only the issue of representation but also the question of national and cultural identity construction. Identity is marked by ambiguity and fluidity, it is never fixed and stable, changing across time; it is determined by history, ideology, power relations and constructed by historically and ideologically specific discursive practices. This is the discursive approach to identification which is seen as a construction, an on-going process never completed. Stuart Hall writes: "Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enun-

¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York: 2004, 12.

² Peter Bishop, *The Myth of Shangri-La. Tibet, Travel Writing and the Western Creation of Sacred Landscape*, London: The Athlone Press, 1989, 3.

ciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity (...)"³ Identity is constructed through difference, through the relation to the Other. According to Homi Bhabha, identity is shaped through "visual demand for a knowledge of the Other, and its representation in the act of articulation and enunciation."⁴ Thus, the discovery of the Other acquires a particular significance for the construction of identity. It is through cultural difference, through the knowledge of the Other that the national identity is reflected. I should think this could be a valid theoretical frame of reference for my argument. It is through this lens that I will look into Lithuanian travel writing as a reflection of personal and national consciousness, focusing on a few what I assume to be iconic texts pertaining to different historical epochs. I will try to situate Lithuanian travel writing within social and historical contexts, reading some chosen travel texts in relation to culture and ideology as their appeal essentially lies in their ideological implications.

Lithuanian national and cultural identity was shaped by multifarious historical and ideological factors and experiences, and this process is in a way mirrored by travel writing. For the historical background, I am drawing on the seminal book

*The History of Old Lithuania: 1009–1795*⁵ by Alfredas Bumblauskas, Professor of History at Vilnius University. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which existed from the mid-thirteenth century until the end of the eighteenth century, was a multilingual, multicultural and multiconfessional country. It gave rise to a nation that included noblemen not only of Lithuanian but also of Belarussian and Polish descent. A cradle of religious tolerance and the last pagan state in Europe to be baptized, Lithuania adopted Christianity in 1387 and, as Prof. Bumblauskas notes, "became an integral part of the then most advanced civilization of the world."⁶ The adoption of Christianity incited the process of Europeanization of culture the outcome of which was the integration of Lithuania into European society. The last pagan state managed to make a "cultural leap" over a period of 150 years: it embraced the ideas of the Renaissance and the Reformation, and created a legal system and Europe's easternmost university. It became a symbiosis of cultures and the centre of several civilizations with its heritage of both Catholic culture relevant to Italians, Spaniards, and Latin Americans and the westernised heritage of Orthodox culture important to Russians, Ukrainians, and Bulgarians. The teaching staff of Vilnius University boasted professors from nearly all European countries, from Spain to Norway. Historic Lithuania produced some outstanding figures in world culture and politics, like

³ Stuart Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?", *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. By Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, London: SAGE Publications, 2005, 4.

⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 72.

⁵ Alfredas Bumblauskas, *Senosios Lietuvos istorija, 1009–1795*, Vilnius: R. Paknio leidykla, 2005.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 272.

Romain Gary, Oscar and Czeslaw Milosz, Nikolai Lobachevsky, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Ivan Bunin and Piotr Stolypin. Interwar Lithuania offered shelter to Lev Karsavin and Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, who had fled from Bolshevik Russia. Germans can find traces of their culture, and not only in the Klaipėda region, which for 500 years belonged to the German Order of the Cross and later to Prussia and Germany, but also in other parts of Lithuania. They can find their Gothic and Baroque monuments, to say nothing of the German communities that existed in Vilnius and Kaunas in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries⁷.

Italian and Dutch masters created Renaissance and Baroque architecture, coming through the Milanese princess Bona Sforza who brought the Renaissance and the fork to Lithuania. Also, in 1562, Lithuania got its first and firm link to Western Europe and Italy, when the post-route Vilnius–Krakow–Vienna–Venice opened. Originating in the sixteenth century, the Lithuanian Calvinist community maintained direct links with John Calvin, and Lithuania itself received preachers from Switzerland. Hungarians may find traces of Stephen Batory and Kaspar Bekes important. The English would be surprised to learn that Klaipėda once had an English quarter, and that Kėdainiai boasts Scottish houses, and archaeologists occasionally dig up Scottish pipes in the countryside.⁸ Traces of European culture found in Lithuania are an interesting cultural document and a testimony of Lithuania's adopting Western values

in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. On the one hand, it is the Western values and cultural influences that were instrumental in the construction of national identity. On the other hand, the multicultural, multilingual and multiconfessional character of the country made the issue of national and cultural identity problematic: it was not always possible to define who the Lithuanians were. The educated people of the time, noticing resemblances between the Latin and Lithuanian languages, started looking for traces of the Lithuanian origins in ancient Roman history. This gave rise to the legend about Lithuanians coming from the ancient Romans, which was very popular and treated in all seriousness for a long time. Consequently, the Renaissance ideas, Christianity associated with European values as well as the theory of the ancient Roman origins of Lithuanians were instrumental in the formation of the Latin cultural model in Lithuania with Latin becoming the language of letters. The language issue again makes the construction of cultural and national identity controversial. Should we take Samuel Johnson's assumption that "languages are the pedigree of nations" at face value, what to make of the Lithuanian pedigree when Lithuanian, Polish, and Belorussian were spoken, and Latin was used as a written language by the educated in Old Lithuania? The language of instruction at Vilnius University was also Latin. In her study *Renaissance and Baroque Literature in Lithuania* (2001), Eugenija Ulčinaitė, Professor of Classics at Vilnius University, states that "it is the Latin language and the culture of antiquity that linked us to Western Europe; Renaissance Latin

⁷ Alfredas Bumblauskas, *Lithuania: An Old State in New Forms*, Vilnius: Akreta, 16.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

texts postulated the most significant ideas of Lithuanian statehood, defined the forms of relationship between an individual, nation, and state. Finally, it was on the basis of literature written in Latin and its cultural impact that Lithuanian writings grew and developed.”⁹ According to Ulčīnaitė, “thanks to Latin, the University of Vilnius was able to integrate itself into the general scholarly life of Western Europe, assimilate new scientific achievements and in its own turn spread the ideas generated by professors of Western universities.”¹⁰

Consequently, this leads me to the issue of travel writing. The first Lithuanian travel texts were also written in Latin and appeared in the sixteenth century, although Lithuanians travelled in Europe already in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, particularly monks, traders and diplomats. In the fifteenth century, travelling became widespread, when many young Lithuanian noblemen went to study abroad to universities in Poland, Germany, Italy, France, Belgium, and Holland. Travel abroad became fashionable, it was also regarded an inseparable part of one’s education as well as a mark of distinction and a possibility to move up a career ladder in the royal court. Professor Ulčīnaitė points out that the oldest Lithuanian travel text seems to be *A Journey to Italy: the Diary of 1575* (*Kelionė į Italiją: 1575 metų dienoraštis*) by Jurgis Radvila.¹¹ Jurgis Radvila (1556–1600) was a duke, a priest as well as a politician and a literary man who at a very young age of twenty-three became bishop

of Vilnius and later was consecrated a cardinal. His biography and career are emblematic of noblemen of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. For us, it is important to note that Jurgis Radvila played a key role in helping obtain the consent of the Pope and King Stephen Batory for the foundation of Vilnius University. His journey to Italy started on the 11th of October 1575 not far from Trakai and ended in Padova on the 7th of December the same year. He and his entourage travelled via Warsaw, Vienna, and Venice, stopping on the way to change horses, to take meals, and to have a rest. As the title indicates, his travel account is written in the form of a diary in which the author meticulously registers all the details of the journey, providing descriptions of the places visited, people he met, all the dates of arrivals and departures, distances between places, and the most important sights visited. The travel record, written, of course, in Latin, is quite schematic and sometimes sounds naïve, and were it longer (it is merely a 16-page text), it would probably be dull. Still, what appeals to the reader is of immediacy and a sense of wonder with which the traveller registers his impressions, sometimes displaying a sense of humour. It is also an interesting cultural document of the bygone epoch. While in Vienna, Jurgis Radvila, then a nineteen-year-old youth, was struck indeed by the grandeur and beauty of the emperor Maximilian’s palace, its gardens with pools, “full of various birds, especially pheasants and also rabbits.”¹² For instance, the entry of the 14th of November reads: “In the

⁹ Eugenija Ulčīnaitė, *Lietuvos Renesanso ir Baroko literatūra*, Vilnius: VU leidykla, 2001, 10–11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 336.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹² Jurgis Radvila, *Kelionė į Italiją: 1575 metų dienoraštis*, Vilnius: Lietuvos dailės muziejus, 2001, 39; (Translation from Lithuanian into English is mine – R.R.).

morning, I saw an elephant – an animal of enormous size – given as a present to the emperor by the King of Spain. In the afternoon, I went to pay my respects to Mr Johan Bernstein, Chancellor of Bohemia.”¹³ He also records being received by the emperor with due respect and then, shortly afterwards, went hunting for the wild boar with the emperor and his four sons, killing five boars and experiencing great pleasure. A special mention is made of the fact that “returning from the hunt the emperor and the King of Rome were kindly disposed towards me and chatted pleasantly with me.”¹⁴ From his diary we find out that Jurgis Radvila was greatly impressed by the Jesuit College in Vienna and the neighbouring church with miraculous relics of Blessed Virgin Mary. Radvila’s identity as a dignitary, a nobleman and a bishop undoubtedly emerges in his travel narrative. It leaves no doubt that the travel account is written by a deeply religious man as a particular focus is on the objects of religious worship. However, we find some mundane and even funny entries. After a long and difficult crossing of the Alps on the way from Vienna to Venice, which lasted for ten days full of dangers and fear, they came down to the Italian plain, “the most charming in the Venetian area”, and the entry of the 1st of December reads: “Thus, having crossed the unbelievably high Alps, we recovered and felt as if we had escaped from hell and entered paradise.”¹⁵ Radvila also mentions tasting for the first time “very delicate Italian food – frogs” in a small although pretty

town of Sacile; however, he does not elaborate on the taste or effects of the meal. We learn that he did not stay long in Venice; in fact, he was forced to leave it in a hurry because of the rumour about the breaking plague which “did great harm not only to this city but also spread to Milan, Mantova, Vicenza, Bergamo, Brescia.”¹⁶

The travel diary ends with two entries in Padova, where the young duke visited a few churches, a famous school, was taken to the circus, and went to see two comedies that he liked very much. One of the comedies was titled “A Pastoral”; seeing it, as he put it, was a rather costly experience because a wallet with money was stolen from his servant Grayovsky. With this last entry of December the 7th his travel diary ends.

A more sophisticated and mature, and more interesting travel narrative from the literary point of view is *A Pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Kelionė į Jeruzalę)* written by Mikalojus Kristupas Radvila Našlaitėlis (1549–1616), a junior brother of Jurgis Radvila. He was one of the most powerful, influential and richest noblemen of the Lithuanian and Polish State. A top ranking and highly educated dignitary, Radvila Našlaitėlis studied at the universities of Leipzig, Strasbourg, Paris, and Rome. In 1567 he converted to Catholicism. Being of poor health, he made vows to visit the Holy Land. Consequently, in September of 1582 he set off on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, in December reaching Venice, and from there in June of the next year he sailed to Syria and came to Jerusalem where he stayed for two weeks, visited the famous places of re-

¹³ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

ligious worship and in late July took a ship to Egypt. Here, he spent two months and sailed back to Italy, from where in 1584 he returned home. The journey lasted two years. His travel account *A Pilgrimage to Jerusalem* was first published in Latin in 1601 and became one of the most famous European bestsellers of the time. Until today four Latin, nine Polish, two German and one Russian editions of this travel text have been published. His authentic travel account remains a textual mystery for historians and literary scholars until today because his manuscript from which the book was first published in Latin had disappeared. Scholars do not agree on such issues as to who wrote the text – whether he himself or his secretary (Radvila Našlaitėlis might have dictated the text to him); when, where and in what language it was recorded: whether he was writing it during the journey or after he came back home, whether it was written in Latin or Polish. Until today there exist four Latin, nine Polish, two German and one Russian editions of this travel text. The opinions vary, but whatever they might be, the book still remains a valuable historical and cultural document.

A pilgrimage is a sacred journey having its own sacred places, sacred routes, and its account is often conveyed in a confessional mode which imparts authenticity. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, pilgrimages to Palestine were not rare. And it is not surprising that Radvila Našlaitėlis described his journey to Jerusalem; it is surprising how he described it. He gave his travel account an epistolary form popular at the time: the book is structured in the

form of four letters allegedly written to his friend who is not identified and to whom he is reporting and describing his experiences in distant lands. It is also obvious that the structural layout of the book was well-thought, the letters were put together much later; it is a kind of summing up of the travel experience; it is not a chronological narrative, the events are not described in sequence, the author digresses, sometimes filling in his narrative with amusing stories and philosophizing. This imparts a literary quality to the travel account, makes the text emotional, attractive, easy to read and comprehend, and also keeps the reader's interest alive – all these ingredients turned it into a proper bestseller. The story of the Egyptian mummies is an interesting case in point. While in Cairo, Radvila Našlaitėlis bought two mummies for scientific purposes and, having packed them in boxes, loaded onto the ship. However, during the voyage the storm broke out in the sea, and the priest started complaining about seeing two ghosts every night. Then Radvila Našlaitėlis decided that it was happening because of the mummies which were pagan bodies, and he dumped them into the sea. The storm instantly subsided, and the ghosts vanished.

The confessional mode of his travel text reveal the author's personality, education, his broad interests, his knowledge of history and sciences. Radvila Našlaitėlis was interested in everything and wanted to see and experience whatever was possible to. Thus, he often changed the itinerary of his pilgrimage. And it is not always the religious motives that determined the length of his visit to one or another location. He

stayed in Jerusalem for only two weeks, while he spent two months in Egypt. The scholar Jūratė Kiaupienė is amazed to state that “if we compare Radvila’s route with the one offered for tourists today, it is obvious that wherever he went he visited the same places which are recommended for twentieth-century travellers.”¹⁷ Travel writing can tell us not only about the foreign locations visited but also (and sometimes even more) about the cultural background of the travel writer himself. Radvila Našlaitėlis records his subjective travel impressions, detailed descriptions of places visited, of nations, plants, rivers, his encounters with people; his text also demonstrates how knowledgeable and well-read he was; the reader sees his attempts to analyze phenomena trying to draw scientific conclusions, even if they sometimes sound naïve, implausible and hardly believable. For instance, he notes that most people in Egypt have bad eye-sight because, according to him, the ordinary people live just on fruit and water. His text is filled with references to the Bible, to ancient Roman and Greek history; he refers to Herodotus and Pliny the Younger; he provides encyclopaedic data about the Library of Alexandria, Egyptian pyramids (noting that it took him an hour and a half to get to the top of the Great Pyramid), mummies of Ancient Egypt, etc. Radvila Našlaitėlis was particularly interested in the cultural “Other”, i.e. in the Muslim world, in the history and culture of all its nations. He focused his attention on the people of Palestine, Syria,

¹⁷ Jūratė Kiaupienė, „Įvadas“, Mikalojus Kristupas Našlaitėlis Radvila, *Kelionė į Jeruzalę*, 8–23, Vilnius: Mintis, 1990, 21.

Egypt, on their customs, manners, and life-style. In the descriptions of the Oriental cities, we find interesting and authentic historical and cultural details of material life, tinged by the traveller’s subjective reflections. For example, the reader finds out that Damascus is a big, pretty and densely inhabited city, “however, rarely visited by European traders because it is distanced from the sea and its people intensely hate Christians.”¹⁸ Here, he also discovered a very good fruit to be recommended – *mauza*, a banana: “(...) it looks like our cucumber, only it is a bit longer and thicker and grows on bushes.”¹⁹ Many of his observations are valuable from the point of view of ethnography. Interesting is his description of Cairo which he compares to Paris; in his opinion, Cairo “is three times bigger than Paris, but not as nicely planned, and its houses are not as beautiful (...)”²⁰ The reader is struck by the author’s attention to detail: he scrupulously indicates that in Cairo there are 200000 houses and 16000 streets, over 6000 mosques, about 20000 public canteens, “as only the rich and the nobility cook their meals at home, while simple folk eat in canteens which offer a lot of meat, especially mutton. Also plenty of duck and chicken; but rice and doughnuts cooked in oil sell best. (...) There is no wine in Egypt (...) Thus, Christians mostly drink Cretan wine. European consuls get their supplies of wine from Italy.”²¹ A chance encounter with a rich local trader

¹⁸ Mikalojus Kristupas Našlaitėlis Radvila, *Kelionė į Jeruzalę*, 59. (All translations from Lithuanian into English are mine – R.R.)

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

who informed him about his life-style gave the writer an opportunity to reflect on the condition of women in Arab countries. Radvila Našlaitėlis was appalled to hear that the trader had twelve white wives and eighteen Ethiopian women. He kept each of them in a separate room under lock and key which he carried in his pocket, because, according to Radvila Našlaitėlis, if all the wives could meet, they would strangle each other and would murder him. Food was served to them through the window. The husband could also kill them all if he chose, because he bought the wives, so they were his property, and everybody can do what he likes with his property. Radvila Našlaitėlis expresses his sympathy with the plight of the slaves exclaiming: what a poor life those pagans lead! However, he does not judge or criticize the foreign manners and morals; on the contrary, attention to and respect for other religions and confessions can be easily detected in his text. The cultural “Other” is not demonized in his travel account. He looks upon the cultural “Other” not with a look of an arrogant foreigner but with tolerance which is also a reflection of his national consciousness and identity. We see national self-definition and image emerging through experiencing foreignness and through extreme geographical and cultural differences.

The scholar Eugenija Ulčinaitė makes an assumption that Mikalojus Radvila Našlaitėlis might have been the first Lithuanian who had climbed to the top of the Great Egyptian pyramid, who had described the Sphinx and the ancient

acropolis of Memphis, who had seen the Nile flood and who had opened the way for Lithuanians into the Orient.²²

This might prove that Lithuanians have always been a nation of travellers, although it seems to contradict the traditional stereotypical nineteenth-century image of Lithuanians as a nation of sedentary docile peasants firmly rooted in their farm lands. Research shows that, curiously enough, travel writing makes up a substantial amount of the Lithuanian literary heritage, even if it has often been regarded as an inferior genre and not favoured by our reviewers, critics, and scholars. Travel writing particularly flourished in the early twentieth century, in the so-called “Golden Age” (from 1918 to 1940) of the Independent Lithuania before it was occupied by the Soviet Russia.

For instance, one of our best inter-war novelists Antanas Vienuolis was commissioned by the daily paper “Lietuvos aidas” to record his travel impressions from various European countries. Subsequently, after many years his travel accounts were published in a separate volume *Travel Sketches (Kelionių apybraižos, 1988)*. Most of the texts were written in the form of letters, and they form separate parts or chapters of the book, such as “Letters from Paris”, “Letters from Finland”, “Letters from Munich”, “Letters from Salzburg”, etc. This travel book also deserves a separate lengthy discussion as a valuable cultural document providing insights into the pre-World-War-Two European life and

²² Eugenija Ulčinaitė, *Lietuvos Renesanso ir Baroko literatūra*, 192.

culture filtered through the outsider's focus.

People seem to need sacred or utopian places exerting a particular fascination on them. And in Lithuanian travel writing such places are mythologized, like the West in Soviet times or the Orient in postmodernity. This point, I should think, is best proved considering travel books by two very different Lithuanian writers of the late twentieth century: Romualdas Lankauskas and Jurga Ivanauskaitė. Their travel narratives are a good case in point to support this thesis.

Romualdas Lankauskas (1932) is a famous short-story writer, a novelist and a painter who, for his laconic and terse style, has been labelled by Lithuanian critics as "the Lithuanian Hemingway". In his article "The City, Travel and Time: an Exhibition of Romualdas Lankauskas' Paintings and Art Objects", the art critic Vidas Poškus, reviewing Lankauskas' recent exhibition of paintings and art objects, points out that Lankauskas "is one of the pioneers of abstract painting in Lithuania" and "a representative of the Lithuanian beatnik generation of the mid-sixties", whose organic synthesis of literature and painting relates him to Friedrich Durrenmatt.²³ In the era of mass travel which started taking off probably in the 1960s, the Iron Curtain, however, separated Lithuania from the Western world, and West European countries which practically are very close geographically, ideologically, though, were distant and un-

reachable, thus becoming a source of mysterious fascination. The forbidden fruit is always the sweeter. Two travel books *Cicadas of Tokyo* (*Tokijo cikados*, 1989) and *Europe: What is it like?* (*Europa, kokia ji?*, 1994), by Romualdas Lankauskas are emblematic texts as reflections of Lithuanian national consciousness, as manifestations of the images of the West and the Orient imprinted in the nation's mentality, and articulating how the West and the East (Japan in this case) were experienced and imagined in the Soviet period. Apart from its aesthetic and cultural value, Lankauskas' travel writing is a socially and ideologically conscious text which resisted the colonizer's discourse. In his travel books, Lankauskas explicitly demonstrates his fascination with the West and Japan – the geographical and cultural Otherness, "the forbidden Other" which is not demonized but celebrated as a place of a more advanced civilization, a superior social system, human values and life-styles. Thus, his travel texts in a way turn into a delicate ideological weapon to challenge the system by demonstrating different existential possibilities and a superior set of values inscribed in them. The West and Japan are mythologized as a utopia, as something desirable, a place of hope and aspiration, where darkness is excluded; the West becomes a metaphorical space instrumental in the critique of the Soviet system and society. The notion of the Orient is problematized in Lankauskas' travel text about Japan which is conceptualized and reflected on as a cultural space rather than geographical – as a site of Western values. The writer firmly believes that Western values

²³ Vidas Poškus, „Miestas, kelionė, laikas: Romualdo Lankausko tapybos ir objektų paroda“, *7 meno dienos*, 2007 m. birželio 1 d., 8. (My translation from Lithuanian into English – R.R.)

have always been the basis of the Lithuanian national and cultural identity, and his travel writing postulates this idea both implicitly and explicitly. In his travel book *Europe: What is it like?* Lankauskas writes: “I have never felt a stranger anywhere, particularly in Europe because I also belong to this very continent marked by common cultural history and psychology. After all, I was born in Klaipėda, the westernmost part of Lithuania. Thus Europe has always been my true home. Of course, Lithuania today differs greatly from France or Holland, and its sole resemblance to Finland extends merely to the green landscape... This crucial difference essentially lies in lagging behind in all the spheres of life, which is the choky fruit of Soviet socialism and of long years of occupation”.²⁴

On the other hand, the most striking feature of the aesthetics of Lankauskas’ travel texts is the visual element, the poetic touch that he imparts to what otherwise would be an ordinary travel account, a record of facts and events. Like in his fiction, in his travel texts the topos or motive of “a journey” also acquires a symbolic and existential meaning. His travel books, similarly to diaries and memoirs, are marked by the author’s individuality and reflexivity, tinged by subjective emotions. It is this reflexivity and subjectivity as well as the visual quality that define the greatest value of his travel books. Reading them leaves no doubt that they have been written by a novelist and a painter who keeps moving back and forth in time and space,

who is playing with light and colours, for whom the smells and the taste of things are extremely important and who at times becomes a philosopher. In some flashbacks he plunges into personal reminiscences turning the private into the public. This is, for instance, how *Cicadas of Tokyo* which also bears the subtitle *Memories of a Journey* begins: “Japan... Could I ever, let us say, a few decades or more ago have believed that the day would come when I would visit it? No, I could not, because to dream of a journey to Japan would have meant to be carried away into the realm of sheer fantasy which, it seemed, was never to become reality. (...) To find myself in Japan, to see it with my own eyes, to set foot on its soil – could this dream come true? Sometimes one is suddenly visited by a strange thought about things having a magic power... Why? What things? Well, for instance, an old and very beautiful porcelain sugar-bowl with a typical Japanese landscape painted on its side; since childhood it has stood in our family cupboard and by a sheer miracle has survived until now when everything else is long gone... My father must have bought it about fifty years ago in Klaipėda, or maybe in Germany where every spring the famous Leipzig fairs took place. Time passed, and I would often gaze at this exotic, colourfully painted sugar-bowl, trying to imagine a terribly distant and mysterious country from which it had come to Lithuania and into my life. I grew up with it. Could this sugar-bowl have really contained some magic power or could have hidden a certain sign of fate as if saying that the time would come when this charming little picture painted

²⁴ Romualdas Lankauskas, *Europa, kokia ji?*, Vilnius: Viltis, 1994, 5. (Here and further on, all translations from Lithuanian into English are mine – R.R.)

on its side would turn into tangible reality, that a live, authentic landscape of the country of the Rising Sun would unfold before my eyes in all its subtle and amazing beauty?”²⁵

Lankauskas' travel book *Europe: What is it like?* is structured like a mosaic of fragments, a record of impressions of his shorter or longer visits to various European countries. The very titles of the chapters are telling, suggestive and at times emblematic, like, for example, “The French Collage”, “Portuguese Colours”, “The Light of Athens”, “Reflections in the Lagoon”, “A Return to Rome”, “Gentlemen and a Pastoral Landscape with Ghosts”. His own identity as a writer and an artist is clearly inscribed in this book which is saturated with references to literature and art. For instance, writing about Paris, Lankauskas reflects on innovative artistic movements that defined the character and atmosphere of the early-twentieth-century Paris; he refers to Emile Zola, to the writers of “the lost generation”, like F. Scott Fitzgerald and, of course, to Ernest Hemingway and his book *A Movable Feast* about his youth spent in Paris as a young American journalist and a writer just embarking on his literary career. Lankauskas also remembers numerous Lithuanian writers and artists who studied and lived in Paris before the Second World War, including the poet Juozas Tysliava who edited and published “Muba”, an avangarde literary magazine to which Jean Cocteau was a contributor. This referentiality often triggers self-

reflection and adds substance and “a third dimension” to the travel account.

Jurga Ivanauskaitė (1961–2007), a novelist, an essayist, a poetess and a painter, in 1994 for the first time went to India where in Dharamsala she studied Tibetan Buddhism. A few years later, the writer spent a year travelling in India and Nepal, staying for some time in a Buddhist monastery high in the mountains, in total seclusion, far away from the civilized world, and immersing herself in the study of religious texts, in mantras, mandalas, and meditation. She wrote about her travel experiences in the book *A Journey to Shambhala (Kelionė į Šambalą, 1997)* which is more than a travel account. Rather, it is a journey of self-discovery, the search for the Self. The travel atmosphere and the way of travelling are very important, they speak through hotels, cafes, travel guides and travel means described by Ivanauskaitė at times with mild irony. India and Nepal are used as an imaginative escape, a relaxation from Western values and rigid rationalism. In Ivanauskaitė's travel book, these places are both real and imaginary: they function as precise geographical locations (replete with people, customs, landscape, weather, food, clothing, etc.), but they are also imbued with a symbolic meaning. The title-word *Shambhala* (which is also the keyword) assumes a special significance in the book: it is both a concrete and a symbolic space. First, “Shambhala” is a small café described as “probably the most popular meeting-point in all Dharamsala”²⁶; it also

²⁵ Romualdas Lankauskas, *Tokijo cikados*, Vilnius: Vaga, 1989, 5–6.

²⁶ Jurga Ivanauskaitė, *Kelionė į Šambalą*, Vilnius: Tyto alba, 1997, 72.

functions as a sort of post-office with its notice-board, and a point of allocation bustling with “newcomers hunched under the burden of big back-packs and still bigger illusions”²⁷ The concept of *Shambhala* is, however, expanded to signify the Oriental milieu which, according to Ivanauskaitė, induces a bizarre change in the newcomers’ identity. Casting a critical and ironic gaze on the newcomers to the East, including herself, the writer observes: “The Oriental environment hypnotizes and drugs them, enslaves, subjugates, depersonalizes, and completely dissolves them. This might be the bliss of Extinction that the decadents of the West dreamt about, but it is by no means Freedom or Light.”²⁸

The writer provides the reader with the insider’s view of the East, combining her personal experiences with general observations about the oriental life-style, Buddhist philosophy and religion, throwing in theorizing about such things as psychoanalysis, the sacred and the profane, interweaving her narrative with historical excursions and legends. Hers is an interesting text with a strong self-reflexive quality, full of references to diverse philosophical and religious sources. Ivanauskaitė’s book combines external and internal stories; an external chain of events serves as a springboard for self-reflection and philosophizing. Thus, her travel account reads both like an adventure novel, a confession revealing the writer’s existential anguish caused by the crisis of values, and, at times, like an essay; it leaves no doubt that Ivanauskaitė is well-versed in the Buddhist

doctrine; however, often she becomes too fond of dealing out simplistic truths. It is the adventure stories she is spinning that is her greatest asset, not theorizing and naïve philosophizing drawn from other texts, the list of which she provides at the end of her book, ranging from M. Eliade’s and E. M. Bernbaum’s texts to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Ivanauskaitė herself admits that all those texts “accompanied, protected and inspired” her on her sacred journey. Her strength as a writer lies in her powers of observation, in the subjective account (often tinged with irony and self-irony) of her travel experiences, of encounters with all sorts of people, both local and strangers to the East. Her impressions and detailed, expanded “baroque” descriptions of the people and places all open up the unfamiliar, bizarre and fascinating world of the Orient upon which the writer looks with admiration and in which nothing astounds her, except two things: a young nun with a shaved head, breast-feeding a two-week old baby in the bus station and a turbaned Sikh, the owner of a small and cosy restaurant, who is stuck behind the cash register, passionately immersed in and completely carried away by Nabokov’s *Lolita*. Time spent in the East taught the writer Peace and Wisdom.

The writer is playing with the opposition between the West and the East, and it is the East which is privileged while the West is demonized. According to Ivanauskaitė, “the West increasingly suffers from the dangerous abyss dividing the intellect and the Spirit.”²⁹ Although this issue is more problematic than it might

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

appear at first sight, and the writer is conscious of the ambivalent situation she and other foreigners find themselves in exploring the East. She herself feels stuck between the two cultures – that of the East and of the West – and is keenly aware of the cultural differences between the two worlds. Observing life in India and Nepal with its dire poverty, its squalor and stink, and in spite of all the hardships she herself experienced in the East, the writer draws the conclusion: “I do not know why this everyday reality speaks to me while the other one, obscured by the facades of posh houses, glittering and spotlessly clean shop-windows, abracadabra of advertisements, is increasingly becoming more and more mute...”³⁰ In the Himalayas, she is astounded by the dire poverty of the people who nevertheless seem to be able to live a happy life in a friendly community, in harmony with each other and with nature. Moved by her experiences in the East, she makes the following declaration: “Because deserts actually do not stretch here, where it is so easy and free, but in hysterical big cities of the West, in the hearts of their well-fed inhabitants.”³¹ Thus, her travel book also casts an ironic look on the Western civilization, it is a critique of consumerism, and functions as a construction of new myths: the wisdom and peace of the East is postulated, the East which is very much desirable but not attainable for the westerners. Ivanauskaitė’s text ironizes the clichéd Western image of the East which is conceived as an earthly Paradise where crowds of westerners flock looking for es-

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

cape, salvation, and redemption; however, their spiritual search turns out to be not that simple, because all the problems, according to Tibetans, are caused not by the external world but they are lurking inside ourselves. Having fled from their own lives with the spirit of materialism and consumerism, the foreigners are trapped in the enclosure of exoticism, and their search for spirituality (or novelty and break rather, one suspects) becomes problematic while their newly assumed identity ambivalent. The “psychonauts” (the term coined by Ivanauskaitė) who come to the East “have already lost the spiritual and mental harmony or they may never have had it at all.”³² The Orient is ironically represented as a fashionable sacred site of Western pilgrimage. Thus flocking to the East is shown as part of the current vogue, snobbery and affectation which is ironized in the book; for instance, Ivanauskaitė describes how Dalai Lama’s preaching attracts people from all over the world, among them “beauties with radiant complexion and close-shaved, monk-like heads; spectacled, intelligent ladies clad like Buddhist monks, tall guys from Californian beaches on whom the *haute couture* of the Sunset boulevard would look more becoming than the togas of the Tibetan novices; a hundred-year old Austrian countess robed in purple and never, even in the temple, parting with a white, angry little dog...”³³ They are all driven by the new fashionable myth of the Eastern spirituality and fall into the trap of their own false assumptions and desires of attaining Freedom and Light the easiest way because

³² *Ibid.*, 36.

³³ *Ibid.*, 37.

they “wish, or maybe they are used to, getting everything fast and without any effort – the syndrome of the ‘supermarket’, ‘fast food’, ‘instant coffee’, ‘ready made’”.³⁴ Newcomers from the West firmly believe that big money buys everything, and that their wishes will be instantly gratified for money; thus, they often become an easy prey to crooks and charlatans masquerading as gurus, and may end in psychological torment and madness.

In Ivanauskaitė’s text, Shambhala is conceptualized as a non-existent location, a mystic and imaginary place, a metaphorical space, an incarnation of serenity and bliss, a treasure vault of Wisdom. It is conducive to the construction of a totally different – Oriental – identity based on renouncing consumerism and rationalism of everyday reality. Drawing on M.Eliade’s ideas, Ivanauskaitė believes that “creating or meditating mandala man can step into a different, great cosmic time and experience the Void, this way annihilating everyday reality and passing into the transcendental being, thus transforming samsara into nirvana, the Absolute.”³⁵ The writer is struggling with her own ego trying to suppress it, and feels her “Western nature fighting with her Eastern experience.”³⁶ The Eastern experience allegedly helps to bring out a different identity. She records how she is enchanted watching the Buddhist monks perform their ritual dancing and all of a sudden visualizes her own numerous reincarnations: her “innumerable deaths unfolding from each other and stepping

in an endless line reaching the primordial Origin...”³⁷

Landscape becomes important for the construction of identity. The writer engages with an unfamiliar and overwhelming mountain landscape which triggers peculiar inner experiences. Desolation and solitude, the immense wild landscape of the Himalayas produce a sense of the sublime. This kind of landscape exalts and fills the human soul but also dwarfs and crushes it. She feels herself “becoming lighter than the white tiny clouds floating in the fabulously blue sky over the Himalayas”, her identity “dissolving, dispersing, becoming fluid” and finally merging with the world which here seems to be almost primeval and unified.”³⁸ Conceptualizing Death is another signifier highlighting the divide between the Oriental and Western identity. Ivanauskaitė’s travel book is pervaded and haunted by death and its recurrent contemplation. The writer compares the Buddhist notion of death with the one practiced in the West, referring to Tibetan legends and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* which became very popular in the West since its first translation was published there in 1927. Death is a taboo, a forbidden subject in the West, while in the Tibetan understanding death imparts an additional meaning to human life. Ivanauskaitė confesses that through thinking and meditation she overcame the fear of death. Curiously enough, her obsession with death, which explicitly and pervasively features in the text, turned out to be so tragically prophetic: the writer

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 142–43.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

died of cancer ten years after the publication of her travel book.

Symbolically, the writer's journey to Shambhala becomes an inward journey, a sacred journey to her own hidden self in search of spirituality with the aim of changing herself and assuming a different, according to Ivanauskaitė, superior identity. This change presupposes an absolute refusal from egotism, the annihilation of one's ego and the "obliteration of personal history" as a means of attaining happiness and bliss, nirvana: "So what if my ego quizzically whispers to me that I used to like French cooking or Chinese delicacies, vintage red wine, and that I used to hobnob with refined aesthetes? But *then* and *there* I felt a void, I felt that something was always missing, while *here* and *now*, cutting the bird-like toenails from Lama's unwashed feet I am feeling happy. Maybe this is the bliss which only *the obliteration of personal history* can bring about. Here nobody is interested either in my native country or city, language, profession, social position, either in my family, age or my real name. I am simply Nobody having come from the Nowhere country where time should probably be named Never."³⁹ This kind of authorial stance

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

clashes with the existentialist ethos which Ivanauskaitė openly challenges in her text, calling for the denial of individualism as a corner-stone of the Western mentality and life-style. She equally questions the post-structuralist view of the world created by discourse which, however, according to Ivanauskaitė, "is not the sole reality but only a narrow subjective space created by ourselves."⁴⁰

To conclude, Lithuanian travel writing mirrors different angles of and approaches to the national and personal identity as well as various ways of identity construction depending on the historical epoch as well as social, ideological and historical contexts. However, the determining principle for the construction of identity, as the above discussed texts show, is the awareness of the cultural difference, the knowledge of the Other, which is instrumental in inscribing and revealing identity. Some of these travel books demonstrate how a geographical and spiritual journey in search of the Other is transformed into a pilgrimage. And, needless to say, the identity construction is always a journey, both geographical and spiritual; most often than not, it is a sacred journey in search of the self.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

AŠ IR KITAS: KELIAUTOJO ŽVILGSNIO PERSPEKTYVA

Regina Rudaitytė

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje susitelkiama į tapatybės kūrimą lietuvių kelionių literatūroje nuo Renesanso iki mūsų laikų, ir ši problema konkrečiai analizuojama Jurgio Radvilos ir Mikalojaus Kristupo Našlaitėlio Radvilos

kelionių knygoje, taip pat Romualdo Lankausko ir Jurgos Ivanauskaitės kelionių tekstuose.

Kelionių naratyvas – tai ne tik svarbus kultūrinis dokumentas, bet jis suponuoja ir identiteto kūrimo

problema. Kelionėje susiduriame ne tik su kultūrine kitybe ir hibridiškumu; keliaujant atsiveria įvairios savosios tapatybės pusės. Kelionė reiškia ir savęs atradimą. Analizės teorinis pradžios taškas – Homi Bhabhos ir Stuardo Hallo kritinės nuostatos ir ideologinė pozicija: tapatybė kuriama per santykį su kultūrine kitybe; tapatybė nėra stabili ir fiksuota, bet fluidiška, ji kinta priklausomai nuo vietos ir laiko; ją nulemia ideologija, istorija, galios santykiai, ją kuria istorinės ir ideologinės diskursyvinės praktikos.

Šis kritinis žiūros taškas ir pasirenkamas Romualdo Lankausko ir Jurgos Ivanauskaitės knygų analizei.

Romualdo Lankausko kelionių knygose atsispindi nacionalinė sąmonė, jose atsiveria Vakarų ir Rytų įvaizdžiai, išsiskniję tautos mentalitete, artikuliuojama tai, kaip sovietmečiu buvo suvokiami ir išivaizduojami Vakarai ir Rytai (šiuo konkrečiu atveju Japonija). Lankausko kelionių knygos – tai

socialiai ir ideologiškai „įkrauti“ tekstai, kurie priešinasi dominuojančiam kolonizatoriaus diskursui. Rašytojas juose pabrėžtinai demonstruoja savo susižavėjimą Vakarais ir Japonija – geografiniu ir kultūriniu „kitu“, „uždraustuju kitu“, kuris jo tekstuose ne demonizuojamas, bet iškeliamas kaip aukštesnės civilizacijos, pranašesnio gyvenimo būdo ir vertybių pavyzdys.

Rytų ir Vakarų gyvenimo būdo ir vertybių supriešinimas, sakralus metaforiškas peizažas, mirties samprata tampa svarbiais tapatybės kūrimo elementais Ivanauskaitės tekste. Simboliniu požiūriu rašytojos kelionė į mitologizuojamus Rytus, į mistinę Šambalą tampa jos sakralia vidine kelione į save, slaptas savo sielos gelmes, ieškant dvasingumo ir savęs tobulinimo, savo asmenybės keitimo galimybių. Geografinė ir dvasinė kelionė siekiant pažinti kultūrinę kitybę transformuojama į savęs pažinimo piligrimystę.

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