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In defence of travel. The importance of the journey in the Romantic era in Poland

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Abstract: The aim of the text is to analyse the Romantic journey as a key to the Romantic culture (particularly in Poland). It is possible because the concept of the journey combines and summarizes the most important constituents of Romantic philosophy. The author of the article presents the meaning of travel in the context of Romantic cognition, self-exploration and genology. The attention is also focused on Polishness and national identity regarded and defined by those who travel.

Key words: Polish Romanticism, travel, travel writing

W obronie podróżowania. Znaczenie podróży w polskiej literaturze romantycznej

Abstrakt: Celem tekstu jest odczytanie romantycznej podróży jako klucza do zrozumienia kultury tej epoki (szczególnie w Polsce). Jest to możliwe, ponieważ idea podróży łączy w sobie i niczym w soczewce skupia wszystkie najważniejsze elementy romantycznego światopoglądu. Autorka artykułu omawia znaczenie podróży w kontekście romantycznej epistemologii, antropologii oraz genologii. Odnotowano także wyczulenie na polonica i potrzebę definiowania własnej narodowej tożsamości doświadczane przez polskich podróżnych.

Słowa kluczowe: romantyzm polski, podróż, podróżopisanie

Much has already been said about Romantic journeys¹. This form of activity became extremely popular in the first half of the 19th century for many different reasons. On the one hand, it was the invention of the railway that made travelling easier, faster and eventually cheaper². On the other

¹ See for example: S. Burkot: *Polskie podróżopisarstwo romantyczne*. Warszawa 1988; J. Kamionka-Straszakowa: *"Do ziemi naszej"*. *Podróże romantyków*. Kraków 1988; Eadem: *Zbłąkany wędrowiec. Z dziejów romantycznej topiki*. Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków 1992; C.W. Thompson: *French Romantic Travel Writing. Chateaubriand to Nerval*. Oxford, New York 2012; R. Cardinal: *Romantic travel*. In: *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*. Ed. R. Porter. London, New York 1997, s. 135–155.

² W. Schivelbuscha W.: *The railway Journey: The Industrialisation of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century.* Oakland 2014; W. Tomasik: *Inna droga: romantycy i kolej.* Warszawa 2012.

hand, the appearance of the first travel agency initiated a phenomenon which can be described as group tourism accessible not only to rich and well-educated elite, but also to members of the middle class³. While the rules of organizing work and working hours were evolving, the number of people with free time enabling them to undertake various forms of travel grew. However, it was also culture and history that inspired movement and displacement of a different kind: some Europeans wanted to continue the tradition of the Grand Tour, while others were forced to leave their homelands and emigrate due to the political situation (in the case of Poland we can even talk about a great number of real exiles). All this justifies the popular notion that the 19th century was in fact the age of increased migrations⁴.

The title of this article is therefore somewhat provocative as there is no need to defend the privileged position of travelling in Romantic culture in general, and Polish culture in particular. I refer, however, to Ewa Paczoska's text entitled 'Against travel'5 where the author points out the limitations evoked by the 19th-century need, or even compulsion, to travel. It is not my aim to argue with the essentially accurate observations of the researcher6; instead, I am trying to focus on the very roots of this phenomenon, analysing its rapid development as a result of certain fundamental ideological discoveries rather than only social, economic and transportation changes. The importance of Romantic travels seems much deeper: it is an activity fully synchronized with the worldview of the epoch, which focuses like a lens on all the key elements of the Romantic (r)evolution⁷-the epistemological, anthropological and aesthetic ones. It is not a coincidence that Mickiewicz's *Crimean Sonnets*, which strengthened the position of the new Romantic movement in Polish literature, are in fact a 'tourist poem's, because according to the poet it is the journey itself that represents the very foundations of Romanticism.

³ D. Ziarkowski: Przewodniki turystyczne i ich znaczenie dla popularyzacji ustaleń polskiej historiografii artystycznej do końca XIX wieku. Kraków 2021.

⁴ S. Curran: *Romanticism displaced and placeless*. In: *Transforming Tragedy, Identity and Community*. Eds. I. Crisafulli, T. Rajan, D. Saglia. Routledge, New York 2011, s. 71.

⁵ E. Paczoska: *Przeciw podróżowaniu*. In: *Podróż i literatura 1864–1914*. Ed. E. Ihnatowicz. Warszawa 2008.

⁶ The author mentions, for example, the gap between observation and erudition that I also refer to in this article, and the 'aggressive' tendency to use European norms in analyzing foreign cultures (Ibidem, p. 589–595).

⁷ I use a double-meaning expression as I cannot arbitrate about the revolutionary or evolutionary character of Romanticism in this short text. Both approaches can be well justified, but it is not the aim of this article to decide which one is more accurate. Moreover, it might not be necessary and such a double approach may actually be desirable as it emphasizes the fact that Romanticism is new in a revolutionary way and deeply rooted in tradition at the same time. The journey, the concept analysed in this text, seems to require that way of thinking as it combines both tradition and modernity.

⁸ I. Opacki: *Człowiek w sonetach przełomu*. In: Ibidem: "*W środku niebokręga"*. *Poezja romantycznych przełomów*. Katowice 1995, p. 39.

Romantic cognition

Romantic epistemology, announced by Mickiewicz in his Ballads and Romances, aimed at completing the rational and empirical cognitive capacities inherited from the Age of Enlightenment with the newly discovered irrational and intuitive ones. The journey, which inevitably aims at gaining knowledge about the world around (though not only the world, as will be discussed below), serves as a model example of a cognitive experience. It enables the traveller to analyse how different powers can be joined to achieve a common goal: gaining an incomplete yet sufficient understanding of the world. Data gathered by the senses and organized rationally are a significant part of this process, but Romantic travel writing proves that something else is equally important: the creative imagination. This is perfectly depicted by Mickiewicz in The Crimean Sonnets, where, in order to create a complete and comprehensive image of the surrounding world, a vivid imagination must be used as only through its powers can an otherwise incomprehensible picture reveal the true sense of the world. It must be emphasized, however, that the picture created by the imagination is not unreal or fantastic because imagination does not impose non-existent shapes and forms on the world. On the contrary: it helps to combine elements that otherwise seem contradictory and lack any sense at all⁹. It can be regarded as a poetic exemplification of Słowacki's observation noted in one of his letters from a journey:

The journey brings a lot of images; what a pity that it presents everything as less beautiful than it was in the imagination. Then, there are two pictures in one's memory: one looks like it should because it was created by the eyes, while the other, much more beautiful, was created by the imagination. One day a third picture will appear in the mind: the finest one, made up of imagination and dreamy memories. It will contain the most beautiful elements of all these pictures. I cannot understand Byron, who could write at once, on the spot¹⁰.

Incorporating the power of imagination is essential for understanding the world while traveling. However, in Słowacki's reflection, it should not be identified as a false image that makes the reality look better. The creative power of imagination must be understood according to the rules of Romantic epistemology as that which reveals the true nature of things and all senses that are impossible for the human eye to grasp.

Such an attitude is not only an example of how the Romantic epistemological theory could have been put into practice. It also explains why Romantic geography is not a physical but an imaginative one¹¹. The process of

⁹ Mickiewicz's Pilgrim grows to understand the power of imagination in such a way in the Crimean cycle (see: J. Brzozowski: *"Jedno z miejsc najrozkoszniejszych Krymu". Uwagi o "Ałuszcie w dzień" i krymskim cyklu*. In: *Mickiewicz*. Ed. H. Krukowska. Białystok 1993, p. 103–117).

¹⁰ Korespondencja Juliusza Słowackiego. Vol. 1. Ed. E. Sawrymowicz. Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków 1962, p. 79 [tłum. własne].

¹¹ E.W. Said: Orientalism. New York 1978.

completing real places with their imagined pictures (ones filled with cultural and philosophical content¹² but also modified and recreated by the individual sensitivity and imagination of the traveller) is in fact a model description of the complicated process of gaining knowledge about the world that goes far beyond a simple enumeration: 'a column, a coliseum, a pyramid, a camel'. Romantic travel writing shows how individual creative discoveries are inscribed into the 'imagination-born map of the world'. Romantic travellers hit the road having read about the places they were going to visit and therefore already possessing certain degree of knowledge of those places, so they expected to confirm the images that they had developed in their minds. This only proves that gaining knowledge in that epoch must have been based on something more than gathering empirical data and arranging them rationally. We should not be misled by the fact that the growing popularity of journeys makes them increasingly conventionalized, which is reflected even in the tourist guides suggesting to their readers not only which places they should visit, but also what they should feel and think in a certain place¹³. However, the very idea of 'imagination-born geography' is deeply Romantic and can be regarded as a practical realization of the Romantic epistemological theory.

About oneself

The Romantic (r)evolution was also marked in anthropology. It was not only the world around that seemed a mystery to man but also his own self. Again, it is *The Crimean Sonnets* cycle that depicts this phenomenon as the travelling 'I' discovers, much to his amazement, two completely different and contradictory personalities within himself (one of a tourist fascinated by the world around and the other of a nostalgic exile¹⁴), and it is travel that enables this discovery. Mickiewicz's choice is not surprising, especially if we keep in mind the findings of travel writing studies, which prove the journey to be an important self-cognitive factor. The journey often determines the formation of the travelling self because it intensifies the experience of otherness. Contact with representatives of foreign cultures, nations and languages entails not only an effort to overcome the feeling of estrangement, but also the need to redefine oneself, sometimes through intensive introspection. Travel writing texts 'have traditionally been the vehicle by which our knowledge of things foreign has been mediated¹⁵.

¹² The process of creating such mental constructs is characterized by L. Wolff: *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford 1994.
¹³ B. Schaff: John Murray's "Handbooks to Italy". Making Tourism Literary. In: Liter-

ary Tourism and Nineteenth-Century Culture. Ed. N. Watson. London 2009, p. 106–118. ¹⁴ I. Opacki: Człowiek w sonetach przełomu...

¹⁴ I. Opacki: Człowiek w sonetach przełomu...

¹⁵ D. Porter: *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgressions in European Travel*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1991, p. 3.

However, travelling is an opportunity not only to compare oneself with the Other—a representative of foreign countries, regions and traditions—but also to see a new landscape which might already be known from literature but is nevertheless very different from the native one. And since '[p] erception is always self-reflection; as the traveller looks at a landscape, he or she is always looking at him or herself looking as well'¹⁶, an analysis of a foreign landscape can reveal some hidden truth about one's own nature. This is reflected both in non-fiction texts and literary works inspired by real journeys. It can certainly be observed in the already mentioned cycle *The Crimean Sonnets*, which masterfully combines the act of learning about the external reality with introspective self-reflection¹⁷.

The journey is inevitably an act of cognition—of the world around and of one's own identity. This process can take two forms. Jakub Lipski notes:

The shaping of and the exploration of identity are (...) the two topoi that, in my view, best render the eponymous juxtaposition of travel and identity. They are based on the pattern of linearity and circularity, respectively. When the self is being shaped on the road there is no coming back, strictly speaking; the returned self is a new man. Conversely, the exploration of identity depends on the psychological construct of a circular journey—the destination becomes home; the self may be changed but only in as much as the change is tantamount to greater self-knowledge¹⁸.

In order to decide which model is more appropriate for a certain text, one must analyse the chosen travel account in detail. One general comment, however, can be made. The second model distinguished by the scholar, based on self-exploration (and the discovery, in one's own soul and mind, of elements that were not visible before setting out), seems very appropriate for describing the Romantic way of thinking about man. The multitude of personalities hidden inside him, which often take the form of a *doppel-gänger*, requires defining self-cognition as a process of intensive internal exploration revealing different elements of one's hidden identity. The journey not only favours such self-exploration but also proves it a necessary condition for self-understanding¹⁹. While experiencing otherness, it is not just the hero of the Crimean cycle who becomes shocked upon discovering his internal contradictions; other travellers also inevitably realize (to paraphrase Wisława Szymborska): 'not for us such idiotic uniformity'.

¹⁶ B. Colbert: Travel writing and aesthetic vision. Oxon – New York 2016, p. 8.

¹⁷ See for example: Cisza morska [The Calm of the Sea] or Grób Potockiej [The Grave of Countess Potocka].

¹⁸ J. Lipski: Travel and Identity: an Introduction. In: Travel and Identity: Studies in Literature, Culture and Language. Ed. J. Lipski. Cham 2018, p. 4.

¹⁹ Ewa Ihnatowicz claims that in the second half of the 19th century the journey becomes even more important as an element of self-development and self-recognition for a Polish intellectual, however this goal is achieved rather through a 'journey to the homeland' than a European one (see. E. Ihnatowicz: *Podróż jako droga do humanitas w drugiej polowie XIX wieku*. In: *Humanizm polski*. *Długie trwanie – tradycje – współczesność*. Ed. A. Nowicka--Jeżowa, M. Cieński. Warszawa 2008, 2009, p. 205–221).

Travel and Polish matters

Meeting the Other not only triggers self-exploration, which sometimes leads to self-redefinition, but it also requires identification on the higher, national level as native culture is being compared with a foreign one. Sometimes such a comparison becomes more valuable and helpful in understanding one's own national identity than in discovering the true image of a foreign nation. The Poles travelling in the 19th century were very sensitive about all traces of Polishness in the places they visited²⁰. That is why Seweryn Korzeliński²¹, for example, reminds his readers that it was Paweł Strzelecki who discovered gold in Australia, although the achievement is commonly attributed to Edward Hargraves. The travellers presenting various types of oppositions between the representatives of their own culture and those of the other also create a special mirror in which their nation can see itself. Korzeliński not only notes the attempts of the English to deprive Strzelecki of the honour of being the discoverer of gold in Australia, which he finds dishonest and unfair, but he also depicts several incidents with Polish diggers meeting bushrangers—outlaws who were a real danger in the gold fields. Such episodes are described in a humorous way: the Poles manage to avoid any harm only because they reveal their nationality to the bandits, who immediately gave up the idea of attacking them, being sure that Poles never possessed anything worth stealing. This is actually an interesting example, because a comparison of these passages with other observations in Korzeliński's work reveals two different images of the representatives of the Polish nation. One is a self-image which presents them as heroic soldiers who have sacrificed everything for their country and that is why they suffer poverty and indifference from others. The other image is the one created by the foreigners (Australian bushrangers) which present the Poles as paupers, losers and unlucky men. The negative stereotype turns out to be advantageous as it literally saves their lives, which makes this opposition ambiguous-the terms of comparison comment on each other, compelling reinterpretation. The true image seems to be located in between the two extremes.

Comparisons are often used by the authors of (not only Romantic) journey accounts in order to collate what is regarded as one's own with all that is foreign. This leads not only to a deeper understanding of the native culture, but also to judging selected phenomena of a foreign culture according to familiar, national rules. The habit results in revealing one's own national identity rather than explaining the characteristics of the chosen foreign culture. That is, for example, how the Poles interpret an important episode from Portuguese history when the country unwillingly became a part of the Iberian Union as a result of the tragic Moroccan campaign of King Sebastian I. The childless

²⁰ T. Budrewicz: Kodeks Polaka w podróży. In: Podróż i literatura..., p. 549–555.

²¹ S. Korzeliński: Opis podróży do Australii i pobytu tamże od r. 1852 do 1856. Vol.1. Ed. A. Mauersberger. Warszawa 1954.

death of the young Portuguese king on the battlefield enabled King Philip II of Spain to take political control over Portugal. The period between 1581 and 1640²², when Portugal was united with (or in fact subjected to) the stronger neighbour, was noted by the authors of some old Polish memoirs and diaries concerning that distant country; however, it was mentioned with no sympathy at all²³. The partition era in Poland dramatically changed Polish attitudes towards this episode from Portuguese history. The 19th-century Polish literature and critical writing created a parallel between the situation in Portugal after 1581 and the one in Poland after the third partition, which triggered an important reinterpretation and revaluation²⁴. Both the fall of Portugal in the 16th century and its renewal in the 17th century became a prefiguration of Poland's fate and were interpreted according to Polish needs and hopes rather than in line with historiographical or political rules. This new interpretation can also be noticed in the travel accounts written by the Poles who travelled to Portugal in the first half of the 19th century. Those authors, like Teodor Tripplin, were sensitive to the Portuguese national identity and were not easilv tempted to see them as similar to the Spanish. While commenting on the Iberian Union, Tripplin notices its practical advantages, but he also seems to understand that the Portuguese are deeply attached to their national, cultural and-above all-linguistic uniqueness25. The writer acknowledges that their need to distinguish themselves from the more powerful neighbour is much more than just a matter of stubborness or eccentricity. Being polonocentric, Tripplin judges Portuguese affairs according to the experiences and beliefs characteristic for his own culture. Nevertheless, the way he describes the Portuguese identity proves that travelling has the power of multiplying the points of view, modifying common images and testing the knowledge of one's own culture and country.

Romantic genealogy

Travelogue is rarely mentioned among the key Romantic literary genres, but it certainly was extremely popular in the epoch²⁶. It must also be

²² The period between the coronation of Philip II and the moment when Portugal regained its independence (A. H. de Oliveira Marques: *Historia Portugalii*. Vol. 1. Translated by J. Z. Klave. Warsaw 1987, p. 292).

 $^{^{\}rm 23}$ A. Niewiara: Wyobrażenia o narodach w pamiętnikach i dziennikach z XVI – XIX wieku. Katowice 2000, p. 160–161.

²⁴ See A. Przezdziecki's drama: *Don Sébastien de Portugal*. Petersburg 1836 or a critical essay: K. Hoffman: *Cztery powstania czyli krótki wykład sposobów jakiemi dobijały się o niepodległość Grecja, Holandia, Portugalia i Polska*. Paryż 1837.

²⁵ T. Tripplin: Wspomnienia z podróży po Danii, Norwegii, Anglii, Portugalii, Hiszpanii i państwie marokańskim. Vol. 5. Warszawa 1851, p. 160–161.

²⁶ J. Kamionka-Straszakowa: *Podróż*. W: *Słownik literatury polskiej XIX wieku*. Red. J. Bachórz, A. Kowalczykowa. Wrocław 2009, s. 698–703.

remembered that the corpus of travel writing texts is very diversified²⁷ and the criteria that they all should meet were defined differently by individual critics²⁸. What seems to unite all the types of travel writing is the need for authenticity: each travel account should be based on authentic travel experience. As has already been mentioned, the Romantic (r)evolution appeared in epistemology, anthropology and aesthetics, which means that new forms of expression and new literary genres were used to reveal the new, Romantic worldview. The ideas discovered owing to journeys were commonly presented using the heterogeneous form of travelogue. Though it cannot be described as an entirely new genre, its increasing prominence and popularization can be regarded as one of very typical Romantic gestures. C. W. Thompson notices: 'In spite of their long history, travelogues have therefore usually been viewed as too hybrid to constitute anything but a bastard and minor genre². Another popular Romantic literary genre, the ballad, can be described in a relatively similar way. The ballad was not invented by the Romantics either, but it was discovered in history and tradition. Nevertheless, the tradition in question is complicated, which makes it impossible to define this genre precisely or place it with complete certainty in any specific literary or folk trends. The adaptation of the ballad to Polish Romantic literature was accompanied by its elevation from the position of a popular, peripheral genre – as it was regarded in the Age of Enlightenment – to the literary centre³⁰. What makes Romantic travel writing similar to the most representative literary genres of the epoch is: openness, lack of strict formal rules, the variety of possible implementations and heterogeneity.

It is worth remembering that the tourist guide, a very specific form of apodemic literature, follows the same rules. Although tourist guides are not new either, it was only in the 19th century that they came to be regarded as having become a separate genre. Their model form shaped at that time has continued till today with only minor changes³¹. One might believe that tourist guides have a purely practical character because they are apparently only supposed to share information that is helpful while visiting new places. However, they are in fact hybrid, polymorphic and intertextual forms, which are the characteristic features of all the most popular Romantic genres. The 19th-century tourist guides not only combine materials of different kinds (historical and topographical information, advice for travellers, tables,

²⁷ C. W. Thompson: French Romantic Travel Writing..., p. 91.

²⁸ G. Kowalski: Podróż/podróżopisarstwo. W: Słownik polskiej krytyki literackiej 1764 – 1918. Pojęcia – terminy – zjawiska – przekroje. Vol. 2. Red. J. Bachórz, G. Borkowska,

T. Kostkiewiczowa, M. Rudkowska, M. Strzyżewski. Toruń – Warszawa 2016, p. 273 – 280. ²⁹ C. W. Thompson: *French Romantic Travel Writing...*, p. 91.

³⁰ I. Opacki: *Ballada*. In: *Słownik literatury polskiej XIX wieku*. Ed. J. Bachórz, A. Kowalczykowa. Wrocław 2009, p. 72–74.

³¹ D. Ziarkowski: *Przewodniki turystyczne...*, s. 29, 47, 56–69.

maps, dictionaries and indexes), but they also refer to important literary texts—usually those concerning the country being described, yet sometimes also those of a very general character that merely suggest and evoke the feelings desired in travelling. The need to refer to different literary works results from the important Romantic belief that famous European places and monuments must be perceived according to the literary tradition of presenting them³². Therefore, it comes at no surprise that such a strategy was also used by the authors of tourist guides. The pleasure of travel, which becomes increasingly common in the Romantic era, is impossible to imagine without seeing what others have already seen or without feeling what they have already felt.

A generation traveling through the world

The first volume of Mickiewicz's Poetry, published in 1822, is considered to be the symbolic beginning of Romanticism in Polish literature. Soon afterwards (in 1826), still in a climate of vivid aesthetic and philosophical discussions, another important work by Mickiewicz was published-the one containing The Crimean Sonnets. Both Ballads and Romances from the first volume as well as the poetic reminiscence of the Crimean journey equally deserve to be regarded as truly 'cutting-edge' works. They both contain the same elements that form the basis for the modern worldview (in 19th-century terms, but to some extent also within our contemporary understanding of what modernity is). The latter contains three crucial elements: a new way of thinking about epistemology, a new concept of man and finally new forms of expressing knowledge about the world (this also includes new literary genres enabling effective communication of the newly discovered truth). A 'tourist poem' divided into a cycle of sonnets might not be a model realization of a travelogue form, but, taking into consideration the hybrid and heterogeneous character of the latter, one must notice that it certainly shares several distinctive features of travelogue. At the same time, it reveals the most important element of the Romantic epistemological reflection where imagination plays a crucial role. The concept presented in Ballads and Romances depicts a man who proves deeply heterogeneous, being in fact a surprise to himself. The hero of the Crimean cycle - a model traveller - experiences the same amazement at himself on his journey. The Romantic discovery of travel is in fact a discovery of a world as equivocal, complex and intricate as the man living in it.

Furthermore, Polish Romanticism as perceived through the figure of a journey reveals its very modern character. The 'I' regarded as complex, heterogeneous and forced to redefine itself while confronting the Other is

³² B. Schaff: John Murray's "Handbooks to Italy"...

not only the 'I' of a Romantic hero, but also the 'I' of a 20th-century traveller. In the Romantic negotiations between imaginative and physical geography, between observation and erudition, one can see the origins of the strategies applied by contemporary tourists who transform an object into a view³³. The tourist guide, which originated in the age of Romanticism, has also turned out to be a long-lasting form. True, it has somehow lost its solely literary character over the decades, but this could be partially explained by the fact that literature has lost its privileged position too.

The importance of travel in Romantic literature and culture results not only from its popularity, scope and variety of possible forms. Traveling is worth regarding as a central element of the epoch mainly because it combines and summarizes the most important constituents of Romantic philosophy. Therefore, it is a perfect key to the phenomenon of Romanticism. The significant position of travel within Romantic culture can be succinctly described using a paraphrase of Voltaire's words: 'If it did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it'.

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