

THE PLAY WITH GENRE:

KNUT HAMSUN'S *I ÆVENTYRLAND* (1903)

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ABSTRACT. The purpose of this study is to explore Knut Hamsun's *I Æventyrland. Oplevet og drømt i Kaukasien* (1903) as a text that interacts with some of the structural elements specific to the genre of travel literature. I have limited the investigation to the writer's use of comparative rhetoric on a formal level, and to the function of conventional character types, with respect to content. The evaluation of these aspects of the narrative is undertaken with the aim of highlighting Hamsun's awareness of and engagement with the tradition of travel writing and his talent for challenging its norms.

Given that more than a century now separates us from the publication of Knut Hamsun's *I Æventyrland. Oplevet og drømt i Kaukasien* (1903), the scarcity of critical attention paid to the work may be surprising. It is worthy of note, however, that the scholarly inquiry into this text has been significantly enriched with contributions from the 1990s and onwards, in line with the general upswing in the field of travel writing studies¹. Recent interpretative strategies have gone in the direction of examining the travelogue as an element in the construction of an Orientalist discourse, whether in terms of a glorification of the East (Žagar, 1998) or of an ironic narrative stance (Oxfeldt, 2005a; 2005b; 2010) culminating in “one long mockery of Orientalism” itself (Oxfeldt, 2005b:218). Waerp (1999 and 2005-2006) has established parallels between the Caucasian reality and what he calls “places of the mind” in his discussion of Knut Hamsun as a travel writer, whereas Kittang (1984) has contextualised the travelogue and related the

¹Carlo Salzani's and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek's impressive “Bibliography for Work in Travel Studies” includes 103 pages of entries regarding scholarship published in the last three decades and in several languages: <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/travelstudiesbibliography>>.

travelling persona to the archetypal figure of the vagabond recurring in the literary production of the Norwegian writer².

Although constant displacement and the character of the wanderer are easily recognised as central themes in the production of Knut Hamsun, and although it is known, from letters and notes, that the writer had a familiarity with travel literature and delighted in the genre,³ *I Æventyrland* stands out as the only example of an autobiographical travelogue in Hamsun's production: what we have is a narrative text recording the real-life itinerary of a traveller-narrator coinciding with the author himself. The metanarrative comments that surface in the course of the account testify to Hamsun's awareness of the *loci communes* of a genre that undoubtedly intrigued him⁴. The choice of subtitle points in the same direction: *Oplevet og drømt i Kaukasien*, together with the title *I Æventyrland*, hits the mark in travel writing⁵. The phrasing of title and subtitle quite evidently reflects the possibility in the hands of any travel writer of stretching the narration between the genre's two opposite poles: the factual, objective account at one end, and the fictional, autobiographical text at the other⁶. Through the use of a subtitle Hamsun clearly indicates that his book is to be representative of both orientations in the genre, the two points of reference — object (the geographical area) and subject (the experiences and dreams of the travelling persona) — are combined and intertwined in his work. The technique of enriching his wondrous narrative with scientific or pseudo-scientific observations furthermore sustains this intention. By allowing the travelogue to act as a vehicle for the narrator's projects of a Caucasian *Women's Lib*-movement and of a systematic study of the local architecture, as well as a receptacle for an academic lecture on the subject of Russian literature held in Helsinki before his departure, Hamsun seems to wink at travelogues of an earlier era. If the early scientific travellers gradually took to inserting

² Other aspects of the travelogue have been commented on in less ambitious writings such as: Arntzen (s.d.), Melberg (s.d.), Popov (2009), and in the substantial afterword to Gyldendal's 2000 re-edition of the work, see Rudborg & Førland (2000).

³ Cfr. Wærp (2005-2006:57) and Rudborg & Førland (2000:145). Wærp's essay is also available in Norwegian, see Wærp (1999).

⁴ When Hamsun's spouse and travelling companion Bergljot upon reading her husband's diary accuses the writer of including lies and insignificant details (*småtterier*) in his account of their trip (Hamsun, 2000:96), the narrator counteracts by slamming the door and retorting that her comment is directed at making him unsure of what it takes to write an excellent diary (97). And in truth, Hamsun does have the ingredients that make a good travel book up his sleeve: fictionalized accounts and first-hand experience, poetry and scientific observation, suspense and subjective impressions. See Oxfeldt (2010:68-69) for a comment on the narrator's play with the readers' expectations with regard to violence and passion in travel literature.

⁵ The subtitle appeared in the first edition of *I Æventyrland* and was kept in Gyldendal's 2000 edition of the travelogue while it is no longer present in the series of Knut Hamsun's collected works published in 2007-2009, cfr. vol. 23: *I eventyrland, På gjengrodde stier* (2009).

⁶ Cfr. e.g. Siegel (2002:2), Korte (2000:10-12), Petersson: (1988:13).

fictional anecdotes and personal tales into supposedly objective accounts, thus pushing the genre towards what has been called “the turn to the Romantic”⁷ in travel literature, Hamsun reverses the act of digression by introducing lengthy passages, (pseudo-)scholarly in their nature, that risk seeming unmotivated in the context of a post-Romantic travel account aiming at a readership almost certainly more interested in the literary values of the work than in any scientific discoveries it might have to convey.

The account of the journey to Caucasia (and Turkey)⁸ thus represents the only instance in which Hamsun deliberately associated with the practice of travel writing, an engagement which led him, I believe, to a meditation on the genre and, as a consequence, to an interaction with some of its specific traits. The following reading of *I Æventyrland* aims at taking a closer look at its dynamic interplay with the genre, and wishes to pay special attention to the way in which Hamsun responded to tradition, and how he played and broke with its conventions. In particular, I wish to discuss Hamsun’s approach to certain features in travel writing that have been identified as common and somewhat stable structural elements specific to the genre.

When Elisabeth Oxfeldt addresses the issue of Hamsun’s exploration of tradition in travel writing, she restricts it to comprehend those elements in the composition that are accomplished “in the vein of nineteenth-century Orientalist travel depictions” (2005b:216). The underlying strategy in Hamsun’s Romantic and Orientalist mode of travel writing encapsulates, as she sees it, a constant parodic reversal. In Oxfeldt’s analysis, *I Æventyrland* is therefore evaluated as

en tekst der indgår i legende dialog med genren som den eksisterede under romantikken. Temaerne er stadig fare, vold og erotik, men de optræder på det indre snarere end ydre plan. Det er psykologiske [...] kræfter der udspiller sig mod hinanden i pirrende, selvafslørende episoder. (2005a:115)

With Oxfeldt’s emphasis on the ironic distance established between Hamsun and his travelling persona, the latter is essentially viewed as a “mockery of the Orientalist traveler” making “foolish attempts at seeing what a Romanticist traveler would have hoped for” (2005b:216). While Oxfeldt’s reading calls attention to Hamsun’s reinterpretation of Romantic Orientalism, I would like to look at the writer’s play with the genre as a whole, with the hope of shedding light on the juggling with some of the key elements that are part of the rhetoric and the poetics of travel literature at work in the text.

⁷ Cfr. Parks (1964).

⁸ The description of the last part of the trip was published separately as a short story entitled *Under halvmånen* in *Aftenposten* in 1903 and is included in the collected works, see vol. 17 (2007:452-520).

Among the theoretical and critical works that point towards a theory of travel writing, there have been a few attempts at distinguishing common structural and textual traits in a genre notorious for its compositional hybridity and heterogeneity of content. In “Charting the genre”, the opening chapter to Barbara Korte’s volume on English travel writing, the German scholar speaks of a literary type “written according to particular strategies – including specific artistic principles and designs” (2000:3). Korte strives, at least initially, to establish “a set of features which allow us to recognize the account of travel as a distinct literary genre and to appreciate its specific qualities” (4). The aim is ambitious and the task is undertaken through an attempt to bridge the gap between the travel account and the creative plotting that goes on in literary fiction – though Korte quite appropriately warns against the risk of confining the genre merely to those works that are characterised by their literariness. The Danish scholar Lars Handesten, who has written extensively on Scandinavian travel writing, observes in a contribution to an anthology dedicated to genre problems that the theoretical studies on travel literature do not offer any systematic description of the genre (2004:85). This, admittedly, is also the case of his own volume *Litterære rejser. Poetik og erkendelse i danske rejsebøger* (1992), which, however, is introduced as a study that, among other things, also wishes to “give en beskrivelse af rejsebogen som genre” (7). In the above mentioned anthological article Handesten briefly touches upon some of the *topoi* that the reader of a travel book might expect to run into. Besides erotic adventures (Handesten, 2004:73), the scholar identifies as common motifs “passet, flugten og fortællerens undskyldninger for att kede læseren og hans udtryksmæssige afmagt i forhold til den storslåede verden” (86). He also discusses the act of comparison between “home” and “away” as a constant in travel writing: “Man sammenligner med det man kender hjemmefra – fordi det nu engang er det man kender – og det gør rejsebogen til noget af en provinsiel genre. Den er nationalt eller i hvert fald regionalt betinget” (82). He continues: “En rejse skildring er ikke bare en skildring af det fremmede, men i kraft af sine sammenligninger med det hjemlige i høj grad også en afdækning af netop det” (82).

The difficulty of pinning down exactly what features in content, style or structure that would allow us to recognize the travelogue as a genre of its own, might indicate that the differences in works belonging to the field outdo the similarities. From the point of view of literary scholars, a grip such as the identification of content-related key elements constituting the travelogue – a travelling subject, a surrounding territory and a decipherable itinerary⁹ – has

⁹ This concise genre definition has been served by the Swedish travel writer Tomas Löfström, cfr. Jacobsson (1989:3) and Petersson (1988:12). Jacobsson (2) also makes an attempt to distinguish four subcategories within the genre according to the position of the narrator and to

seemed a less fruitful approach to the genre than the search for generic structural patterns and rhetorical strategies in the travel writing of a particular age or of a specific type. To the extent that travel literature actually permits generic theoretical decoding as far as motifs connected to subject matter and strategies pertaining to narration are concerned (and aware of the fact that no literary genre is immobile), I will try to discuss the way in which Hamsun explored what could be considered narrative stereotypes present in the genre long before (and long after) his journey to the East. The analysis will first touch upon some of the rhetorical fixtures common to the art of travel writing: what use is made of a formal and stylistic device regarding the presentation of the discourse such as the strategy of comparison between two worlds, mentioned by Handesten? Secondly, and on the level of content, I have limited my focus to the function of certain conventional character types, which leaves out any discussion of other traditional motifs such as means of transportation or inns that also are present in the text.

The act of comparison between “home” and “away” is comprehensively discussed by Chloe Chard (1999), who has classified this procedure, distinguishing between what she labels “comparative commentary” (43), “commentary of intensification” (51) and “the rhetoric of hyperbole” (6). Although Chard concentrates on the travel writing specific to the Grand Tour-era, her study offers several interesting models for a more general study of the rhetorical discourse in this branch of literature. As she affirms in the volume, these comparative strategies are generic and never entirely disappear from the genre as a whole (184). This is the case with what she defines as “binary oppositions” (40), i.e. the traveller-narrator’s method of neatly separating the foreign environment, normally experienced as a dramatic, exciting and exotic, from a familiar reality most often felt as tame, insipid and mediocre. This act of comparison points to the creation of a symmetrical antagonism between “home” and “away”: in order to map the new surroundings and translate them to the reader, the narrators of travelogues frequently tend to measure things encountered to things known, imposing “on the foreign a demand that it should in some way proclaim itself as different from the familiar. At the same time, they define their own task as one of grasping the difference” (Chard, 1999:3). If the strategy of comparative commentary is quite evidently still visible at the bottom of Hamsun’s composition, this kind of clear-cut opposition between home and away is however rare, if not absent, in *I Æventyrland*. Hamsun is not interested in paying attention to those aspects of Caucasian “foreignness” that *differ* from his native region. In reverse, what he looks for are elements

the degree of authenticity of the account: the travelling protagonist coincides with the author of the book; the author is reporting somebody else’s journey on the basis of this person’s written material; the narrator has no first-hand experience of the territory and bases his account on secondary sources; the case of the imaginary voyage in non-existent places.

offering the possibility of establishing similes between what is known and what is yet unknown: to Hamsun the paths in the Russian forests observed from the train compartment are the very same “gjengrodde stier” trodden by his archetypal wanderer in the Norwegian wilderness, those paths that make the heart of the vagabond leap with joy in the memorable opening of *Under høststjernen* (1906) and the ones that would come to sign the title of his last work in 1949:

Tilvenstre er en skog, en sti skjærer ind i skogen og her går en mand. Det er noget så hjemlig ved dette billede, jeg har været hjemmefra så længe og ser det nu med glæde. Stien er halvt igjengrodd og manden som går der bærer en sæk på ryggen. (Hamsun, 2000:8)

Quite interestingly, unlike Chard’s “binary opposition”, the points of reference adopted in Hamsun’s comparative commentary form the shape of a triangle having Nordland, Caucasia and the U.S. at its extremes. In transferring the Caucasian experience into words and making it intelligible to the reader, “home” and “away” do not disagree, but join forces to condemn a third party, namely “det brølende Amerika” (Hamsun, 2000:6). One example of this triangular comparison can be found in the observations on the life of the herdsman that Hamsun had experienced personally as a child. The bucolic sight that the writer catches from the horse carriage while crossing the Caucasian mountain range – distant villages and cabins surrounded by herds of sheep and yellow fields – makes his thought wander back in time to the Nordland of his childhood. The natural landscape, his own stoic heroism as a young shepherd exposed to harsh weather conditions, and the triumphant feeling of being unworldly, “avsidet fra alt” (76), in Nordland as well as in Caucasia, are all elements that are said to have made up the very basis for his creative imagination. The Norwegian pastures, reminiscent of the Caucasian scenery before his eyes that once more triggers an act of narration, formed the setting for Hamsun’s creative activity as a child: “Der sat jeg og trallet eller skrev et eller andet på hvit næver eller skar noget ut med min tolkniv” (77). The life and the untroubled attitude of the Caucasian herdsman, with whom Hamsun clearly sympathises, had a few pages earlier been measured to the aloofness and aggressiveness of the American cowboy:

Vi er inde i Don [...] To eller tre hyrder vogter bølingen med en lang stav i hånden; de går i fåreskins pelser i den stærke sol og lever visst late dager således skjønt de ingen hunder har. Jeg må tænke på livet på de store havneganger i Texas hvor hyrderne er tilhest og ret som det er må bruke revolveren på naboens hyrder som stjæler kvæg. (19-20)

The aim of the comparative approach is normally, according to Chard, the attempt to prove that the unknown environment is capable of offering sensations that far surpass anything previously experienced. In the following example, Hamsun’s strategy of description adheres to tradition as he praises

the quality of the Caucasian grapes, though it turns out *hypercorrect* in an almost humorous manner as the narrator shrinks away with shame at the thought of previously having enjoyed simple European grapes:

Ved byen og stationen Armavirov kjøper vi atter pærer og druer. Druerne er de herligste jeg endnu har smakt i mit liv og jeg skammer mig litt over at jeg før i tiden hadde spist slikt noget som europæiske druer med velbehag. I sammenligning med disse er franske, tyske, ungarske, græske druer som skogbær. (27)

Moreover, in the final phrase above, Hamsun's mode of presenting the wonders of the foreignness draws close to what is called "intensification" in Chard's terminology (Chard, 1999:48). According to Chard, the strategy of intensification is an earlier form of comparative commentary wishing not so much to underline the dramatic unfamiliarity with aspects of the foreign, as the traveller's delight in the "unusual intensity, concentration, or extremity within objects and attributes which are in themselves perfectly familiar" (49) – the species, the grape, is recognisable but its dimensions and qualities unseen.

Among the tropes that, as Chard observes, proliferate in travel writing of different ages is the hyperbole in its specific varieties (4-6). In spite of its many similarities with his native region, Hamsun recurs to a mode of hyperbolic discourse as he claims the incomparability of the Caucasian reality to any other territory he has ever set foot in: "Denne verden er ikke som nogen anden verden jeg kjender og det kommer atter dertil at jeg kunde vilde være her for livet" (Hamsun, 2000:79). Within Hamsun's rhetoric of "hyperboles of indescribability" (Chard, 1999:84), I would like to summon certain categories that are taken into consideration for comparison and that cater for the most extravagant proof of the Norwegian writer's wit and originality also in the domain of travel literature. In the following quotation, Hamsun proceeds to comment on the delusion that slapped him in the face as he first set his eyes on Tiflis, the "Americanised" capital of Georgia, and chooses to match this experience with the description of another "first time", namely the very first time he attended a lecture by Georg Brandes:

Dette er da Tiflis som så mange russiske diktere har skrevet om og hvor så meget i den russiske roman har foregått. Jeg blir et øieblik ganske som en ungdom og ser forundret frem og hører mit hjerte banke. Jeg har den samme fornemmelse som den første gang jeg skulde høre Georg Brandes holde foredrag. Det var i en sal på universitet i Kjøbenhavn. Vi hadde stått uendelig længe i regnveir på gaten og trykket hverandre foran en stengt dør; så gik døren op og vi galopperte opover en trappe, bortover en gang, ind i en sal hvor jeg fandt en plass. Så ventet vi en lang tid igjen, salen fylldtes, det summet og suste av røster. Med ett blir alt stille, dødsstille, jeg hørte mit hjerte slå. Så steg han op på katedret... Men ikke for det, jeg vilde jo selv ha talt langt bedre. Naturligvis. (Hamsun, 2000:94-5)

Not only is the above another tale of great – and broken – expectations, but it is also one that helps to emphasise the narrator's firm belief in the importance of his own (travelling) persona, which brings us on to the treatment of the character types at work in the text. Next to Hamsun's innovative and creative use of a much exploited structural device in travelogues, the hyperbole, the writer decidedly hurls his readers very far from the mild and (most likely) falsely modest excuses for attaching too much importance to his own small persona that a travel writer like H. C. Andersen presented his readership with¹⁰. Here instead is a self-made travelling man, "en kjæmpekar" (Hamsun, 2000:57), who is convinced that there is no detail too small to be of interest to his readers and whose authority is confirmed by an identity dominated by an assertive manliness and, on many occasions, by a fictionalised high social position. The way in which the travelling persona switches identities with his renowned acquaintances from the year in Finland (the composer Jean Sibelius, the painter Albert Edelfeldt, the editor Wentzel Hagestam [and his wife!]) by introducing himself with their business cards instead of with his own, is reminiscent of how parallels are established to Goethe, von Heidenstam or Silvio Pellico, people almost "allied by nature" to Hamsun, in *På gjengrodede stier*. This play with identities¹¹ is certainly very much at home in wonderland, which is where Hamsun's journey takes place according to the choice of title. Whether ironic or not, the narrator delights in being judged a *highness* and a *Count*, he gets involved in the role play and is never late to draw advantages from his supposedly superior position. Accordingly, the encounter with the tailor in Moscow ends with the phrase: "Så måtte jeg være greve igjen. Man kan mangel gang prøve å reise som en ringe borgerlig mand og det nytter ikke" (Hamsun, 2000:12).

Another proof of the extreme self-confidence Hamsun's travelling persona is capable of exhibiting is offered by the references to his language skills. The juggling with languages is part of the general juggling with identities: this man of a thousand faces is also capable of conversing with anyone in any language and is also eager to impress the readership with his knowledge of Russian although it is limited to one, important, word only: "Njet, svarer jeg på godt russisk, njet [...] Jeg kan altså begynde å føre en samtale på russisk; nu skulde nogen derhjemme ha hørt mig!" (2000:25). Hamsun's poise is driven to the point that he even asks himself whether the Muscovites are capable of pronouncing the name of their native city correctly (2000:9).

This is a kind of wanderer that makes it clear from the very start that he is ready to do away with two of the most fundamental secondary characters in hodeopories – what role Virgil played to Dante or Friday to Robinson Crusoe

¹⁰ Cfr. *En Digters Bazar* (1842), Andersen (1969:139).

¹¹ Cfr. Kittang (1984:126-130).

is of no significance to Hamsun. His traveller-narrator is in no need of an intellectual guide (significantly it is only when he sneaks away from the insistent Greek guide in Istanbul that he gets to see the things he “ellers aldri ville ha fått se” [Hamsun, 2007:501]) and firmly distrusts in the usefulness of a travelling companion: “En skulde aldrig ha følge på reise, ens følge tænker bare på sig selv og putter i seg de bedste mundfulde” (Hamsun, 2000:96). The role and the functions of the trusted mentor and the loyal companion that cross the beaten track thus depart from established conventions. The protagonist rather feels akin to sophisticated men (and women) of culture on the one hand, and to farm labourers, mistreated animals and suffering plants, on the other. Most scholars who have dealt with *I Æventyrland* have been struck by the way in which the travelling protagonist neglects and almost hides away from the reader a faithful companion that happens to be his rather newly wedded wife. Bergljot is repeatedly mentioned as “reisefølge”, “reisefølge” or “reisekamerat” and only occasionally, and with quite evident irritation, appears as “min kone” (6). The travelling companions who are praised as “bedste og elskværdigste” (6) are instead a Finnish engineer with his Russian wife and daughter, who acts as interpreter and to whom the Hamsuns pay a visit while in Baku.

Apart from the heavy concentration on a travelling protagonist overshadowing his fellow travellers, Hamsun's text also invites the reader to encounters, at times brief, with other actors constituting the genre's standing gallery of character types, as identified by Percy G. Adams (1983:230-242). If Hamsun plays against tradition when dealing with the figure of the initiator and the travelling companion, the use of acquaintances such as the coachman¹² and the national stereotypes are in line with the conventional practise. Though these secondary characters overlap with their corresponding characters in many other works belonging to the genre, a look at Hamsun's handling of these motifs may serve to enrich the reader's understanding of the workings of the mind of the travelling protagonist. The play with cultural stereotypes is in keeping with the one at work in many travelogues of different epochs (Adams 1983:241-242). Apart from Hamsun's unreliable Jews and even more untrustworthy Armenians, commented on e.g. by Kittang (1984:128), there is the befuddled German whose first appearance is in the train compartment, where he snores all night and prevents the narrator from sleeping, as well as

¹² The coachman is not included in Adams' survey of character types in travel literature, but as a “mythical” type he appears in Attilio Brilli's study of the Grand Tour in Italy (Brilli, 1995:117-120). It must be admitted that the figure of the Caucasian *isvostsjik*, Karnej Gregorevitsj, is not a minor character but a fully developed personality, which deserves a closer look.

the arrogant Briton, a persisting type in travel writing¹³. This convention comes in handy to Hamsun who, in Monika Žagar's phrasing, "detested the British" (342) and who uses the occasion to generalise on the travelling Briton exemplified by specimen encountered in Caucasia as well as on an earlier trip to Germany. The disdainful young British traveller who does his best to ignore our travelling-narrator is "som alle briter på reise selvgod, stum, likegyldig for alverden" (Hamsun, 2000:88) and endlessly smoking his pipe. Hamsun therefore makes it his mission to provoke the Englishman and disrupt his indifference in a lengthy episode during which the Norwegian insists on reading aloud yesterday's news from the Finnish newspaper he is carrying with him, with the ambition of drawing the Briton into a dispute. To the very same narrator who a few pages earlier boasted of being a polyglot it now comes in handy to fake his ignorance in foreign languages while reading the paper:

Da jeg hadde læst det op oversatte jeg det for ham og martet ham med ikke å vite de simpleste ord i hans sprog, men tok ham med på råd. Tilslut sat han aldeles sløv og svarte ja til alle mine forslag. Så reiste han sig og forlangte sin telega kjørt frem, jeg hadde slitt ham ut. Han forsøkte å redde resterne av sit storbritanniske væsen da han gikk: han så mig atter ikke. (Hamsun, 2000:91-2)

The figure of the Briton who pays no heed to whatever goes on around him, brings back the memory of another episode of archetypal British cold-heartedness, namely an omnibus accident in Munich, in which a little girl was hit and nearly trampled underfoot by the horses in the street. Hamsun remembers observing a pipe-smoking Englishman who claimed his money back to get off and walk to his destination:

Jeg så en englænder engang på en sporvogn i München, han var vel kunstner, maler, hans skuld til Schackgalleriet. Vi kommer fremover gaten med al fart, et barn, en liten pike blev nær overkjørt, hun falder, kommer ind mellem hestene, blir trampet på, skadet; men vi får trukket hende frem ilive. Briten står under dette og røker sin snadde. Da alt var færdig og det endnu drøier et øieblik før kusken kjører ser briter ærgerlig på sit ur. Vi gir ham et blik nogen hver, men vi er luft for ham, han forlanger med sit vidunderlige englændertysk sine penger tilbake, han vil stige av. Et omkuldkjørt barn angår ham ikke. (92)

¹³ Korte (2000:2) reminds us of how the British globetrotter was mocked already in *Faust* (part II, act II, scene IV), where Goethe has Mephistopheles at the Classical Walpurgis-Night exclaim: "Are there any Britons around? [...] They'd love it here for their holidays". See also H.C. Andersen's contribution to the creation of this stereotype in the chapter *Reise med Veturin* (Andersen 1969:70-86) discussed in Storskog (2008:27). Hamsun uses the word "Englishmen" (within quotation marks) seemingly to define any annoying tourist, cfr.: "Jeg har læst om at orientalerne iblandt kan drive det kosteligste narrespil med reisende 'englændere' og vri sig under det lykkeligste latter når det går godt" (Hamsun 2000:128).

If German clumsiness in the end may be forgiven (Hamsun, 2007:492), the British tourist instead joins forces with the unbearable Yankee and his “brøl”. Both nationalities flaunt their wealth so loudly in the breakfast room at the hotel in Istanbul that the narrator hurries off: “det bruser så mange yankeepar inn i silke og gullbeslag og det går englendere i lakksko” (Hamsun 2007:462).

But there is no escaping Karnej Gregorevitsj, a coachman in H. C. Andersen's Romantic tradition¹⁴. He is in command, he turns the tables, he overcharges his clients. The relationship between the travelling persona and the coach-driver is tense and helps to explain Hamsun's strongly-felt need of imposing himself as a foreigner in a high social position. Karnej's refusal to understand the travellers' demands and requirements makes Hamsun realise “hvorfør befalingen, tsarordet, er nødvendig i dette store folk” (Hamsun, 2000:78). Nevertheless, the travelling protagonist still has to lower his tone and surrender to the fact that his attempt to impose “Western” time comes to nothing next to the local way of measuring time. When Oxfeldt (2010:64) discusses the episode with the Jew's watch “referring to bodily drives and rhythm” because of the image it contains, she stresses the opposition established between “nature” and “culture” as one in which the former outdoes the latter. On the subject of the difficult relationship between Hamsun and the coachman I would like to point out that it is only when the “false Jewish officer” with his Oriental watch intervenes that Hamsun finally manages to get his way. Any attempt to impose “Western” time by indicating his own watch repeatedly falls short – the notorious watch of the Jew is the only instrument that can regulate the time of the coachman in the East and settle an agreement:

Jeg går ut og finder Karnej utenfor. Han vil avtale klokkeslættet for morgningen. Jeg tar Karnej i kraven og således går vi side om side nedover trapperne. Vi kommer ind i lyset fra butikken og her viser jeg Karnej på mit ur at klokken fem skulde vi kjøre. Karnej holder på klokken seks. Da er det en røst som tiltaler Karnej på hans morsmål, jeg vender mig om og står ansigt til ansigt med officeren. [...] Han tar derpå sit ur op, viser på femtallet og sier: Klokken fem, som fyrsten har bestemt! (81-2)

The possibility of identifying narrative stereotypes and recurrent structural devices in the vast field of travel literature has not yet been thoroughly investigated. This exploration of *I Æventyrland* as a text that allows the reader to evaluate the way in which Knut Hamsun approached the genre of travel writing has touched upon conventions in form and content generic enough to find agreement among a number of the scholars dedicated to travel studies. It has led us to reveal the dialogue with tradition at work in the narrative, whether in terms of adhering to or of marking the distance from characteristic textual practices. An analysis of Hamsun's observations on the journey to the

¹⁴ Cfr. H. C. Andersen's introduction to this character type (1969:70-71).

East is bound to disclose the writer's creative use of a long-established rhetoric of comparison and of customary cultural stereotypes in travel literature. It reveals Hamsun's talent for challenging the norms and informs us of the views and the workings of the mind of his ineffable travelling protagonist.

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