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A WANDERER, DESCENDANT OF WANDERERS:  
NOMADISM IN MARTIN KUKUČÍN'S TRAVEL DIARY  
*A WALK THROUGH PATAGONIA*

TUŁACZ, POTOMEK TUŁACZY.  
NOMADYZM W DZIENNIKU PODRÓŻY MARTINA KUKUČÍNA  
*PRECHÁDZKA PO PATAGÓNII*

Abstract

The article discusses an extensive travel journal, entitled *A Walk Through Patagonia*, by the renowned Slovak writer Martin Kukučín (1860–1928). Recognised as a prominent representative of realism in Slovak literature, Kukučín experienced challenges associated with emigration throughout his life. His travel accounts, encompassing various destinations such as Dalmatia, Montenegro, France, and Patagonia, constitute an integral part of his creative output. In comparison with Kukučín's other travel narratives, this particular diary documenting his journey to Patagonia stands out through its meticulousness and a distinct dual perspective of an author and a traveller. In his writings, Kukučín portrays himself simultaneously as a wanderer and expresses a longing for a sense of belonging in the world. This dual nature of the writer is reflected in the landscapes depicted, in which the imagery of Patagonia becomes intertwined with the underlying portrayal of Kukučín's native region of Orava.

Streszczenie

Tematem artykułu jest obszerny dziennik podróży słowackiego pisarza Martina Kukučina zatytułowany *Prechádzka po Patagónii* [Spacer po Patagonii]. Życie autora, należącego do najwybitniejszych przedstawicieli słowackiego realizmu, naznaczone było stygmatem



emigracji, a dzienniki podróży (z Dalmacji, Czarnogóry, Francji, Patagonii) stanowią integralną część jego twórczego dorobku. Ten omawiany tutaj różni od innych tekstów podróżniczych Kukučina. Zwraca uwagę szczegółowością i pewnym podwójnym spojrzeniem na autora-podróżnika, który jednocześnie i określa samego siebie jako włóczęgę, i daje wyraz pragnieniu zakotwiczenia w świecie. Tej podwójności autora towarzyszy podwójność krajobrazu. Obraz Patagonii przeplata się tu bowiem z obrazem rodzimej Orawy.

Keywords: Patagonia, travelogue, palimpsest, nomad, wanderer, journey, emigration

Słowa kluczowe: Patagonia, dziennik podróży, palimpsest, nomada, tułacz, podróż, emigracja

Travelling seems to be one of the most universal strategies of recounting human experience. A travel diary, like any genre of intimist writing, is inextricably interwoven with the biography of the author himself, for example by suggesting the absolute truthfulness of the recorded events. This fact, however, does not deprive the travelogue of its value as a testimony of an authentic attempt to come to terms with the world by telling about it. Thus, the travel journal *Prechádzka po Patagónii* [A Walk Through Patagonia] may be treated also as a sort of autobiography. In this case it is an autobiography of a Slovak writer, traveller and physician, and at the same time, a Central-European intellectual of the second half of the nineteenth century.

Martin Kukučín (1860–1928) is the pen name of Matej Bencúr, one of Slovakia's most eminent prose writers, an exponent of the phenomenon known as the first wave of realism in Slovak literature. His literary work developed along a characteristic line: having begun with humorous short pieces, literary images depicting Slovak countryside, devoid of any superficial sentimentalism, it proceeded to more nuanced plots characterised by a deepened psychological insight, to be replaced later by massive novels of manners in which Kukučín appears as an astute observer and engaged social critic. Travel diaries were another realm of his creative expression, one that was inextricably linked with his work as a novelist.<sup>1</sup> Both of these spheres developed in parallel, and both of them display the characteristic features of Kukučín's writing idiom: his natural flair for spinning tales, his powers of observation, a friendly and ironic distance towards the reality he described, his unmistakable sense of humour and self-mockery. It has been an established fact in Slovak literary studies that travel diaries were for Kukučín a sort of testing ground for various fictional and descriptive strategies which, once tested, would appear in his novellas and novels.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. Šmatlák, *Dejiny slovenskej literatúry*, vol. 2, *19. storočie a prvá polovica 20. storočia*, Bratislava, Literárne informačné centrum, 2001, pp. 213–217.

<sup>2</sup> J. Noge, *Martin Kukučín – tradicionalista a novátor*, vol. 2, Bratislava, VEDA, 1962, pp. 103, 106.

Zlatko Klátik, an author of a still relevant monograph on Slovak travel literature, described Kukučín as ‘an idyllist and wanderer’.<sup>3</sup> His diagnosis was based on two premises: the first of them seems to be related to Kukučín’s internal predispositions and leanings, of which he was well aware, and the origin of which he tried to identify, while the second premise was the course of his life. Kukučín’s biography was marked with constant emigration. The following places and spaces passed one after the other: Orava, Prague, Dalmatia, Chile, Czechoslovakia and Croatia (from 1918 to 1929 it was called Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes).

Matej Bencúr was born in 1860 at Jasenová in the Orava region. An unfulfilled theologian, having failed to enrol for study in Bratislava, he decided instead to pursue medical studies at Charles University in Prague. Prague was a true Mecca for Slovak intellectuals in the second half of the nineteenth century, with tremendous role played there by the Slovak cultural and educational association ‘Detvan’ (the name, in Slovak, meaning an inhabitant of a place called Detva), which soon acquired also political importance. It was in this milieu that a new generation of ‘Hlasists’ was born, the term denoting a liberal-democratic movement, an alternative to the conservative Slovak politicians based at Martin. At ‘Detvan’ Kukučín honed his skills as a prose writer and translator of the works of Russian realists: Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Turgenev. His association with ‘Detvan’, along with the intellectual climate of Prague, stimulated the development of his talent, helped him complete his medical studies and launch his professional career.

Since he was unable to find employment in Slovakia, Kukučín accepted an offer of the Didolić family to run his own medical practice in the town of Selca on the island of Brač in Dalmatia. At the end of the 1870s, he tried, without success, to return to his homeland. Eventually, he and his wife, Perica Bencúrova (née Didolić), emigrated to Chile, and settled down in Punta Arenas, alongside other Croatian immigrants.

Kukučín briefly returned to Czechoslovakia in the 1920s. However, feeling out of place in the new socio-political reality and he set out for Dalmatia again where he died of pneumonia in one of Croatian health resorts, in 1928.<sup>4</sup>

Although the subsequent changes of Kukučín’s address were logically justified by the course of his life, the writer himself was convinced that there was another factor, unrelated to the pressure of external circumstances that contributed to them. This is

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<sup>3</sup> Z. Klátik, *Vývin slovenského cestopisu*, Bratislava, Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1968, p. 377.

<sup>4</sup> S. Šmatlák, *Dejiny slovenskej literatúry...*, op. cit., p. 217. See <https://www.litcentrum.sk/autor/martin-kukucin/zivotopis-autora> [accessed: 12.11.2021].

how he described these circumstances to his friend, Jozef Škultéty, a literary critic and historian, in a letter written from Punta Arenas on 6 January 1909:<sup>5</sup>

So far, I have been in Santiago de Chile, the capital city, in Buenos Aires, crossed the Andes, swam in the Atlantic and the Pacific – I've done everything a wanderer like me can do to stick my nose everywhere. I explain this step, or rather leap, from Europe to South America by an instinct of wandering that the Heavenly Father endowed me with, as a true descendant of itinerant tinkers and other wanderers. I've seen and tried all sorts of things, both good and bad – but I must confess that I've been fortunate everywhere, and I've never been so bad off that it couldn't have been much worse.<sup>6</sup>

Undoubtedly, such a dynamic biography must have resulted in a necessity, combined with inconvenience, of having to organise one's world every time anew. Zygmunt Bauman, writing in his *Two Sketches on Postmodern Morality* [Pol. *Dwa szkice o moralności ponowoczesnej*] about contemporary nomads, mentions in this context a sort of an imperative of intellectual wandering and a specific stigma consisting in, on the one hand, an inability to find a place of one's own and, on the other hand, in finding it everywhere.<sup>7</sup> The scholar emphasises at the same time the enormous impact exerted by the revolution of the mode of transportation on the social dynamics and behaviour of individuals. The ease of travelling led to transformations in behavioural patterns and to a sort of devaluation of the term 'permanent location'. Obviously, Bauman's findings refer to broadly defined postmodernity, but there is no denying that the end of the nineteenth century was a period similarly conducive to the formation of nomadic entities. What was particularly important in this regard was especially the revolution in the means of transportation with, above all, the impact made (though not instantaneously) by railway on the social sphere. Travelling by train, in turn, fundamentally influenced the perception of time and space. As noted by Hannu Salmi, it was for the first time that time and space had shrunk so irreversibly.<sup>8</sup>

Dr Matej Bencúr, along with his wife Perica, left for Chile in 1907. The reason for their departure from Selca was their unwillingness to take sides in the conflict between the most powerful local families (the Štambuk and the Didolić). After a year's

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<sup>5</sup> See A. Hudymač, *Włóczęga w Patagonii – uwagi wstępne* (Martin Kukučín, „Prechádzka po Patagonii”), [in:] *Horyzonty slowacystyki: dawne inspiracje i nowe wyzwania*, Sosnowiec, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego (forthcoming; due to appear in the last quarter of 2023).

<sup>6</sup> *List Jozefovi Škultétymu, 6. decembra 1909*, [in:] *Martin Kukučín v kritike a spomienkach*, A. Matuška, M. Prídavková, M. Tomčík (Eds.), Bratislava, Slovenské vydavateľstvo krásnej literatúry, 1957, p. 886. All quotations translated from Slovak by the author.

<sup>7</sup> Z. Bauman, *Dwa szkice o moralności ponowoczesnej*, Warszawa, Instytut Kultury, 1994, p. 36.

<sup>8</sup> H. Salmi, *Nineteenth-Century Europe: A Cultural History*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2008, pp. 41–42.

stay in Santiago, where the recognition of his medical diploma was necessary, Kukučín settled in Punta Arenas and worked there as a local physician for fourteen years. The city's inhabitants remembered him as a doctor-philanthropist who often treated his patients for free and even supported them financially.<sup>9</sup> As his medical practice brought little profit, the writer was forced to look for additional sources of income. In 1914 he became a co-owner of an estancia covering seventeen thousand hectares on which he would rear sheep. According to Milan Pišút, Kukučín's first trip to Patagonia was related precisely to the planning of this investment. He and his wife were invited by a friend, Jerko Stipčič, to visit his estate, and there the decision was finally made about joint ownership.<sup>10</sup> The Patagonian experiment of the Slovak writer resulted in an extensive, over a thousand-page-long, three-volume travelogue entitled *Prechádzka po Patagónii* [A Walk Through Patagonia]. It is a record of travels in the area made by Kukučín in 1913–1914. Initially, in 1920–1922, fragments of the book appeared in *Národné noviny* [National Newspaper], and then, in 1922, in *Slovenské pohľady* [Slovak Views], and finally, in 1923, the first part, entitled *Črty z ciest. Prechádzka po Patagónii, časť prvá* [Sketches from Journeys. A Walk Through Patagonia, Part One], appeared in a book form. Kukučín did not live to see the publication of the remaining two parts of his travelogue.<sup>11</sup>

Martin Kukučín's travel notes from Patagonia differ from his earlier diaries – namely, the much shorter and fragmentary, two-part project entitled *Cestopisné črty* [Travel Sketches], consisting of a diptych *V Dalmácii a na Čiernej hore* [In Dalmatia and Montenegro] and an urban trilogy – *Rijeka–Rohič–Záhreb* [Rijeka–Rogatec–Zagreb]. Both of these travelogues are made up of highly fictionalised, dynamic texts, clearly marked by the usage of literary devices. They are characterised by irony used to describe reality, a high level of self-mockery in the presentation of the author-traveller, and short, masterfully rendered portraits of people met by him along the way. Entire fragments of the book could be treated as separate novellas.

In the travel diary *Prechádzka po Patagónii*, in turn, Kukučín shows himself mainly as an obsessive documentarist. The text is filled with long, precise, almost pedantic descriptions of the Patagonian landscape. Their goal is not only to provide the reader with the depiction, but they are also an expression of absolute fascination with reality in all its guises. Its individual elements are examined, recognized, described and classified. At the same time, it is of little importance whether the object

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<sup>9</sup> J. Juríček, *Martin Kukučín. Život pútnika*, Bratislava, Mladé letá, 1975, pp. 103–104.

<sup>10</sup> J. Botík, *Patagónsky experiment Martina Kukučina*. Available at: <https://kultura.sme.sk/c/5546947/patagonsky-experiment-martina-kukucina.html> [accessed: 5.09.2022].

<sup>11</sup> M. Pišút, *Kukučínova tvorba za pobytu v Južnej Amerike*, [in:] *Martin Kukučín v kritike a spomienkach...*, op. cit., p. 248. See A. Hudymač, *Włóczęga w Patagonii – uwagi wstępne...*, op. cit.

under scrutiny was a cart, a variety of alcohol, or the most fashionable type of saddles. The endless Patagonian landscape that surrounds the traveler was captured by his gaze, but also by his imagination and knowledge. This integrity of perception seems to be related to the fear of inaccuracy, of not disappointing the reader, whom the author himself has led to such distant regions We read in the diary:

I had no other goal or interest than to breathe freely, explore the countryside, see what's happening there, how people live in it. I also had the audacity to lead the patient reader through remote places, assuming that if they get tired or bored by the journey, they would return by a shorter path. Only people who really feel like it should wander through the sad and empty camp.<sup>12</sup>

It's always unreliable to judge things and situations until you investigate them thoroughly and carefully. The eye is a very imperfect and deceptive tool. It doesn't think, it doesn't measure; it takes things as they appear to it.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, the author repeatedly, as if in a refrain, reiterates certain motifs, especially those related to the outline of the landscape. As a result, the reader can experience its monotony, a feeling that is fascinating and tedious at the same time. Kukučín, in turn, while returning to the same places of the Patagonian realm, seems to be re-writing the landscapes anew. Thus, his description of Patagonia becomes a sort of blooming meditation. It is meditation that is happening in motion, and its unit is simply the length of the footsteps taken by the walker. According to Michel de Certeau, walking is a philosophical activity and a performative operation; it is a spatial realisation of place in which the pedestrian appropriates the topographical system.<sup>14</sup> In this case, Kukučín's walk should be considered as a little too compulsive, and the wanderer as slightly lost and overwhelmed by the monotonous landscape. The writer reveals: 'On the pampas [...] the horizon is wide, greyish, and dull. One hill resembles another hill; it lacks any individuality or distinctive formations'.<sup>15</sup> It is very easy to lose one's sense of direction in such a countryside. All the more so because Kukučín in his diary has effectively separated Patagonia from any kind of political and social entanglements. He consciously omitted topics related to political movements and social conditions. Such comments were never missing in his travelogues from the Balkans. The author was very careful to present himself as an engaged and attentive member of a given community. So, Kukučín's Patagonia

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<sup>12</sup> M. Kukučín, *Dielo 12, Prechádzka po Patagónii 1–2, Črty z ciest*, Bratislava, Slovenské vydavateľstvo krásnej literatúry, 1962, p. 209.

<sup>13</sup> Idem, *Sobrané spisy Martina Kukučina*, vol. 27, *Črty z ciest. Prechádzka po Patagónii 3*, Turčiansky Sv. Martin, Matica Slovenská, 1932, p. 54.

<sup>14</sup> M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. S. Rendall, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984, p. 99.

<sup>15</sup> M. Kukučín, *Sobrané spisy Martina Kukučina*, vol. 27, op. cit., p. 386.

exists, as it were, beyond time, within only roughly delineated borders, and in a way, backwards. Because, in many respects, in terms of culture and civilisation, it is experienced as a negative image of the world to which the wanderer has been accustomed. It is far from what is familiar and intimate. Kukučín writes:

In that weariness, we have forgotten it is Christmas, precisely Christmas Eve. We're very far from the place where [...] the Saviour was born to the world in a stable, in poverty and humility. Very far from that place, on the opposite side of the globe. Not even the season corresponds to the time of the year that welcomed the Child: here, we're enjoying summer and heat, whereas at the manger, the Saviour had to be more or less warmed by the breath of oxen and donkeys. Nevertheless, this night preserves something of the atmosphere in which that sacred event breathes [...]. We, too, spend this holy night, full of mystery, among shepherds, on vast pastures, the only difference being that we are the Patagonian pampas, far, far away from the fields of Bethlehem.<sup>16</sup>

Two things are worth emphasising here. First, in spite of the fact that travelling seems to be in his blood, Kukučín had never been so far away from home. It may be said that he considered Dalmatia as his adopted homeland. He considered himself to be Dalmatian but, above all, a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In his earlier journals, the actual space of otherness was filled by Montenegro which he described through the lens of a sort of heroic paradigm.<sup>17</sup> On his return trip from Patagonia he visited France where he felt to be simply an European intellectual (*Dojmy z Francúzka* [Impressions from France] appeared in 1923). But at the southernmost tip of South America, he was unable to find a place he would fit in with. The only thing that seems to integrate him internally is traversing a slightly deserted pampa. And the fact that it is uninhabited is not without consequence, as it imposes a change in his perception of space and of reality in general. His earlier travels and descriptions of travels were woven of encounters and interactions with other people. It affected the dynamics of his descriptions and allowed him to fictionalise the text freely. Kukučín tries to handle this seclusion by interweaving the text of his Patagonian travelogue with short stories, which he himself calls 'fairy tales'. The appearance of each of such fairy tales results in an interruption of his travel account and in concentration on a detail of landscape. In such a tale a plant or animal are subjected to anthropomorphisation. In this way, a description of a beech forest becomes reminiscent of an Shakespearian drama about seizing power; a flock of ducks behaves like a conflicted family in which a strict, mafia-like hierarchy rules, and two sheep speak with one

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<sup>16</sup> Idem, *Dielo 12, Prechádzka po Patagónii 1–2...*, op. cit., pp. 88–89.

<sup>17</sup> See A. Hudymač, *Tvárou v tvár s "Iným". Kukučínova cesta do Dalmácie a Čiernej Hory*, [in:] *Kontakty literatúry (modely, identity, reprezentácie)*, M. Bystrzak, R. Passia, I. Taranenková (Eds.), Bratislava, VEDA, 2020, pp. 97–117.

another like two old ladies in a Slovak countryside, whereas an image of a lamb nibbling at grass near the body of a dead ewe becomes a pretext for a heart-rending story about orphanhood. Such examples, very numerous in the text, transform the diary into an intensified, internally unfolding story. Oskár Čepan, an eminent scholar of Slovak literature, writes with regard to these passages of *Prechádzky* that they are also a universal remedy for boredom and monotony experienced by the narrator-traveller in the pampas. He notes that Kukučín ‘searches everywhere for traces of humanity, and when he cannot find them, he anthropomorphises and personifies natural phenomena, animals, plants, and rocks’.<sup>18</sup>

However, this internal urge (experienced as a human but also as a writer) to be accompanied by another person has been in a way satisfied. The writer finds for himself – or perhaps discovers – a sort of emblematic figure that embodies Patagonia and the pampas. This figure is gaucho. This South American cowboy, or a guard, who can skilfully handle a lasso and knows the pampas inside out, in its every aspect, whose morality is impeccable and of whom one should not make an enemy, is an object of Kukučín’s utmost fascination. He is impressed not only by the fact that gaucho is a man of thousand trades and skills, whose life closely follows the rhythm of Patagonian nature but also because he is an entity that lives alone, being somewhat lonely, without a permanent place, whose element is in constant movement. In this picture Kukučín recognises in a way a part of his own self, when he writes about the gaucho:

He must be able to find his way in the pampas, even there, where he has never been before; it’s up to him whether he follows the clouds, the sun, the stars, the wind, or a type of shrubs, or whatever else he wants. When night catches up with him, he spends the night wherever he finds himself, sleeping even on bare ground, undaunted by hunger. [...] If you want to wander through the pampas, it will be good to make him your friend; if he accepts you as a friend, you will not have to fear hardships, mishaps, or dangers.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, gaucho is a sort of a medicine man, a mighty spirit that has to be won over. What is more, the choice of this very figure as a symbol of Patagonia is a result of the author’s observations combined with his erudition – since one can easily assume that Kukučín knew about, or at least must have been aware of the existence of the Argentinian national epic poem *El gaucho Martín Fierro*, written by José Hernández in 1872, which established the figure of the gaucho in Argentinian collective imagination and in the tradition of Latin American literature in general.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> O. Čepan, *Kukučínove cestopisy z Južnej Ameriky*, [in:] M. Kukučín, *Dielo 13, Prechádzky po Patagónii 3*, Bratislava, Slovenské vydavateľstvo krásnej literatúry, 1962, p. 478.

<sup>19</sup> M. Kukučín, *Dielo 12, Prechádzka po Patagónii 1–2...*, op. cit., pp. 91–92.

<sup>20</sup> V. Dianišková, *Prechádzka po Patagónii: údiv nad krajinou*, [in:] *Kukučín v interpretáciach*, ed. J. Gbúr, Bratislava, Literárne informačné centrum, 2010, p. 35.



Further, the distance from the native space means that its signs are intensively searched for, even in places where they are not supposed to be found. Kukučín's Patagonia contains another subcutaneous painting – the image of his home country. Many elements of the Patagonian landscape, as well as many situations that the traveller encounters, are compared to some elements of the Slovak space. In this text, the sphere of foreignness is linked by a rhyming comparison with the sphere of familiarity. Kukučín, therefore, exposes himself to the experience of otherness in a controlled way, turning the Patagonian land into a kind of palimpsest. Let us have a look at the following passages:

From there, it's even better to survey our ravine and the fields that extend all the way to the lagoon. It looks like a vast expanse filled with fields of grain, gently swaying in the breeze. I look at that as if through old spectacles that I forgot to leave at home and get new ones: I still see here landscapes that lie somewhere far away beyond the ocean, where such valleys, filled with fields of wheat, dominate.<sup>21</sup>

We could barely tear our eyes away from this peculiar spectacle. It changes momentarily, darkens and clears, revealing glimmers and shades. I see it for the first time, standing deeply moved in front of this picture, with a scattered mind. In it, impressions and images long experienced but not forgotten have awakened; also, views of mountain ranges and peaks seen long ago [...] bring the long-forgotten impressions and views of our High Tatras into light.<sup>22</sup>

I must admit that my heart sank a little when we were getting into our carts the following morning. We had spent a little over two months in this country, but even that short time was enough for me, as well as for others, to grow fond of it. For me, certainly because it reminded me, even from a distance, of the regions where I once wandered, carefree and happy; it evoked the old, indelible impressions and images.<sup>23</sup>

Paweł Próchniak, in his essay about topology of the palimpsest, writes that it is 'above all a topology of mutual relationships and transformations of texts superimposed on one another in layers – one written over another, interpenetrating in various ways, and thus forming a space whose internal continuity is based on incessant movement of fluctuation and flows'.<sup>24</sup> Reflections of the Slovak writer are not limited to merely thematising his longing and several existential thoughts. In his diary, actual places on the map of Patagonia were linked with their counterparts on the map of Slovakia. Kukučín writes:

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<sup>21</sup> M. Kukučín, *Dielo 12, Prechádzka po Patagónii 1–2...*, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 198.

<sup>23</sup> M. Kukučín, *Sobrané spisy Martina Kukučina*, vol. 27, op. cit., p. 262.

<sup>24</sup> P. Próchniak, *Lublin: Przyczynek do topologii palimpsestu*, [in:] *Inne przestrzenie, inne miejsca. Mapy i terytoria*, ed. D. Czaja, Wołowiec, Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2013, p. 143.

It is an image of Patagonia, yet it seems as if it were not – as if it were transplanted from other places, with corn fields waiting for the reaper and the harvest. Shortly, you'll hear the call of the quail answered from the thicket by a corn crane, and suddenly you are surprised by songs sung during harvesting and raking. It seems that you walk along a road [...] from Lišov, and a rich land, covered with wheat fields and cornfields, lies before you, extending all the way to Šahy itself...<sup>25</sup>

A picture of the writer's home country surreptitiously filters into an image of the South American prairie. In this way, otherness and native space do not so much crash into one another as they melt together, resulting in a sort of a double image. This doubleness affects also the figure of the traveller-narrator himself, who, on the one hand, embraces a deeply-rooted ideal of a settled way of life in the countryside on a farm, in harmony with the rhythm of the seasons, and on the other hand, he is a traveller, always out on the road and on the move, never having the luxury of internal peace of mind, always marked by the stigma of exile that he sometime experiences as a blessing. This is how the writer himself has put it:

It's hard to smother the affections you carry rooted in your inner self since childhood. Although at first they don't let themselves be known, it's only on the surface; they wait, dormant. As soon as an opportunity arises, their seeds sprout, shout in the grass, saying they can't be stifled anymore. I decided to be a wanderer, yielding to their insistence. I set off without a specific direction and goal, without work and worries, to places where others search for work and duties. Neither they, nor any sensible person for that matter, ever dreamt of looking for entertainment and respite in the pampas.<sup>26</sup>

I would be a liar if I tried to convince anyone that this our [...] erratic wandering [...] has saddened or perhaps frightened me. Deep inside, where the gaze doesn't reach, something similar to joy sounded. To wander through the vast Patagonian pampas! Not knowing where you are or where you'll end up; depending on chance, going wherever fate takes you: it had its own enormous charm.<sup>27</sup>

This clash between the expanse of Patagonia and the image of oneself as a traveller and a nomad on the one hand, and the space of Orava and a self-portrait of a farmer caring for his land, on the other, is the source of inner melancholy that trickles continuously through the pages of the book. The aforementioned scholar Oskár Čepan wrote:

There is one Kukučín, and at the same time, there are two Kukučíns. The first one is a cheerful chronicler of the Slovak countryside, who seems to disappear within conventional narrative. The second one – tragic, reflective, and anxious – is hidden in the subtext

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<sup>25</sup> M. Kukučín, *Dielo 12, Prechádzka po Patagónii 1–2...*, op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 209.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 143.

of his own work. He is a man who gets lost in the labyrinth of the world, a prose writer who alleviates all his disillusionment with memories of the warmth of his family hearth<sup>28</sup>.

The presence of this slightly different, gloomy face of the Slovak writer, who in the most popular opinion is still considered a benevolent humorist of Slovak literature, makes the Patagonian daily so attractive. A Slovak researcher Marcela Mikulová emphasizes that Kukučín's late work, often underestimated, is full of this anxiety. It is also characterized by a clear change in the means of expression, a tendency towards discursiveness and reflection, and towards reistic descriptiveness. Kukučín's caring gaze penetrates Patagonia through and through, as it reaches his native Orava, creating a nostalgic passage and connecting two distant landscapes. In this way, space is simultaneously felt and known, and the wanderer is – paradoxically – both an autochthon and a nomad. Above all, it is, as another outstanding Slovak literary critic Alexander Matuška wrote – 'a man with a secret'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> O. Čepan, *Stimuly realizmu*, Martin, Tatran, 1984, p. 115.

<sup>29</sup> A. Matuška, *Doslov*, [in:] *Martin Kukučín v kritike a spomienkach*, op. cit., pp. 919–922.

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