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The Imperial Topography *Sub Specie* of the Province: Petersburg Texts of Ukrainian Literature (works by Y. Hrebinka)

Introduction

The Petersburg text, created by non-Petersburg writers (not only those from the territory of Russia itself, but also by those from its *outskirts populated by other nationalities*, the ethnically marked periphery, from *faraway places*, the *depth of the country the former Russian Empire*, from local areas), is a relevant problem for Ukrainian urban studies. The contribution of Ukrainian writers to the interpretation of this topic comprises a virtually unexplored and unfairly overlooked field of inter-literary relations in terms of their borderlands and the creation of elastic forms for interaction between texts. In addition, texts of ethnocultural borderland emphasize the *otherness* of the Petersburg theme, make its junctions more visible, and amplify the structure that quiets down in dialogue, interaction, and convergence. The two opposing positions are aligned by integrating the *small* into the *big*, adding the personal viewpoint of a man from the province or the national outskirts into the polyphonic space of the capital. Such *discourse* retains its intrinsic tension but still smoothens the roughness of the opposing elements, and their sharp antithetic nature. At the same time, it replaces this with balancing between, on one hand, acceptance, and on the other hand, the rejection of Saint Petersburg. An example of *otherness* is represented

by Petersburg prose by Hrebinka from the viewpoint of ethnocultural borderland. It is an interesting phenomenon in the complicated coverage of this general topic and the duality of the artistic world of the writer whose works are based on antithesis and correlation of local spaces of varied volume, models of life order, and types of world perception.

The Borders of the Imperial Environment in the Anthropocentric Perspective

The Petersburg Area by Y. Hrebinka (1844) is almost a photographic spatial model, a mould made from the real landscape of an out-of-the-way district of the capital. This essay was created for the almanac *The Physiology of Petersburg* and acquired a considerable representative meaning. This text has a special type of marking, structuring and distribution of its descriptive segments and micro-themes, the extensive development of the single theme with numerous “narrative pre-motive compositions” (Toporov). It delves into the essence of urban problematics. Space is a pervasive theme here that is represented through local geographical vocabulary and brought to the level of text integrity. It is the text space, the monolithic cohesion of the subject and the object, where the real mapping of the city corresponds to the discreteness of text relations, and location of descriptions by certain algorithms. They are united by the reproduction of phenomena of a marginal nature, which is also reflected in the spatial plane as separation, demarcation, remoteness from the centre of what used to be the centre, a certain shift, displacement, and deformation.

The semantics of the partial and metonymic are specific. Petersburg is represented by one of its parts, an *area*, which is not only a separated but distinctively bordered space, the area between the worlds, life on the verge of poverty and the edge of civilization. As a representation of non-holistic, fragmentary, and marginal, the *area* possesses manifested anthropological features. They are too diagnostic for the evaluation of borderline contrasts inherent to the Petersburg text. Between a human being and the surroundings, there appears a space of *living out*, reflections and memories of youth, metropolitan glamour and signs of social status. This is the space of the unreal, of life’s fantasies, fake gestures, substitution and wholesale mimicry. The poorest part of Petersburg is inhabited by retired officials of all ranks, and positions and social statuses migrate here

only to settle down in the total materialisation of life. Hrebinka wrote: “On these yellow planks, all ranks are shining, from collegiate registrar to state councillor”¹. Here, all things are not what they seem and should be. The rigid connection between the signified and the signifier is lost, and a phenomenon is separated from its essence. The moor is white from the force of circumstances, masters work without apprentices, and servants live without gentlemen. Even nature seems to be half-alive, separated, and chaotic. For example, gardens are without trees, and the river is without water. The picture is complemented by local narratives that illustrate the absurdity of the bureaucratic court system based on the replacement of human and holistic by partial, things and objects. The story about a log as material evidence of injustice, backwardness and sluggishness of government mechanisms, the depersonalization of a human being and devaluation of human dignity by the empire operates in the text as a plot of lost illusions, shattered lives, tragic twists of fate, and breakdowns of unhappy consciousness.

Based on the idea of anthropocentrism of space, V. Toporov notes the difference between its open forms as counterparts of full-fledged living and the misshaped forms where the correlation between a human being and space is broken. He underlines, it “drifted apart, uncontrollably and irreversibly, breaking the connection with its ‘human’ centre; there comes a kind of emptiness and desolation that is harmful to a person as if you found yourselves in an airless space (emptied of its air ‘filling’), and equally harmful for real living”². The area is the final edge of extension, and beyond it, the modelling function of space ceases to operate, and the space is solidified, alienated, and mortified. V. Toporov compares the quarter to an arrow of space as *figura etymologica* that points towards the maximum point, the highest tension of spatial boundaries, and towards the transition into the field of non-spatiality, the “minus” space. Hrebinka’s topography of *The Petersburg Area* is not arbitrary but is based on the originally inherent mythological meanings, and it envisages “interpretation of designations of spatial elements as certain proper names (Area/ This area...)”. It is a kind of optics of the scaled-down space based on “special markings of spatial elements involved in the ‘space-like’ act of creation and accepted as

¹ Y. Hrebinka, *Works in 3 volumes* [Твори у 3 томах], Kyiv 1981, vol. 1, p. 392.

² V. Toporov, *Myth. Ritual. Symbol. Image: Research in the field of mythopoetics* [Миф. Ритуал. Символ. Образ: Исследования в области мифопоэтического], Moscow 1995, p. 508.

something unique rather than commonplace objects that belong to certain classes”³.

Within the genre of physiology, the Petersburg myogenesis is present only implicitly, as a kind of frame for the representation of naturalistic contents. Its remains can be found in the marginality of location, natural and cultural borderland, shifts between the centre and the periphery, and the expansion of urban toposes beyond the scope of the originally utilised landscape. The dynamics of space are fixed clearly, almost with scientific accuracy. “Petersburg Area used to be the best part of the city... but then... the city... began to expand towards the Moscow outpost, and Petersburg Area, being separated from the city centre by the river and lying in the north close to barren Finnish mountains and swamps, began to deteriorate and finally became a resort of poverty”⁴. The excursion into the theme of poverty becomes a leading element and permeates almost all levels of the story, becoming a symbol of entropy, life in its reduced forms, mimicry and even phantasmagoria. As a marker of the Petersburg text, poverty becomes catalogued, has various forms of manifestation, and could be a natural state predetermined by a person’s low social status or an unexpected stroke of fate.

Hrebinka’s position is topographic. He observes, notes, watches, generalises and classifies things. The chaotic street discourse appears typically flaneur-like, based on enumeration and collection of transient impressions: “turn to the right or the left, from this prospect or Bolshoi prospect – and you’ll see an ocean of streets varied in width, length and status, streets with all kinds of strange names; you’ll see several Grebenskaya, Dvorianskaya, Raznochinnaya, Zelenaya Streets along with Teriayeva Street, Podrezova Street, Plutalova Street, Odnostoronniaya Street, Barmaleyeva Street and Guliarnaya Street; there is even Dunka’s Lane and a multitude of others having very strange names; there is even a street with the name and paternal: *Andrei Petrovich!*” (Hrebinka 1981: 398). As to the latter, one may speak about literary mystification of the life of blessed Ksenia, “the most Petersburg-like saint” as defined by V. Toporov. This is a story of a woman who lived in a happy marriage. When her husband died, she took his name, dressed in his camisole, frock and cap,

³ Ibid., p. 471.

⁴ Y. Hrebinka, *Works in 3...*, p. 391–392.

and embarked on the path of asceticism. The saint woman believed that her husband had not died but turned into her, Ksenia, who allegedly passed away a long time before that. The introduction of this narrative is symbolic in the context of urban mythology, the formation of topographic memory in folklore stories, narrations, and rumours. “Being born in the narrow locus of Petersburg Area, the Urban Island of those days, in the street called Andrei Petrov (or its variant, Andrei Petrovich) ... the memory of Ksenia becomes the acquired property of the whole city”⁵. Hrebinka adds literary features to the folklore narrative, correlating the life of a happily married couple to sensitive novels by August Lafontaine. After her husband died, his loyal wife lost her reason and imagined that she “was not Ksenia Ivanovna but Andrei Petrovich and that Andrei Petrovich did not die but only turned into her, Ksenia, while in fact, he remained to be Andrei Petrovich”⁶. The imitation of folklore narrative at the level of text shifters is evident: “this is the expression used by the narrator from *Andrei Petrov Street*,” “people... got to call this street *Andrei Petrov*.”

The change in the spatial vector, the shift from extensive development to intensive deepening, representation of inner life complies with the principles of physiological descriptions. The narrator focuses his attention on the peculiarities of the residents’ nourishment, on differences in the paces of life between various classes of society, local aesthetic tastes, ways of travelling and leisure. There is a complete immersion in everyday life, and the space and time of the story are compressed in the same way as it happens to descriptive series of the materialised world and objectified actions and phenomena. Adding more trivial details and numerous circumstances causes an entropy of the already split space. It is about the trivial things, “an elementary-level world where the connections between causes and effects were too simple and free of secrecy to be considered sacred.” The so-called “weak” things are “at the origins of profane things and actions that satisfy the ordinary, current, accidental as being not involved in the cosmological perspective and its values”⁷. The physiologist narrator creates long lists of dishes available in unpretentious bourgeois cuisine, various low-grade restaurants and pubs, primitive arrangements of a home-based amateur theatre, an abandoned guest-house, and local natural phenomena.

⁵ V. Toporov, *Myth. Ritual...*, p. 370.

⁶ Y. Hrebinka, *Works in 3...*, p. 400.

⁷ V. Toporov, *Myth. Ritual...*, p. 11–12.

Other things mentioned here include musical instruments, a broken cup, homemade fountains imitating those found in Peterhof, needlework made by poor officials etc. Hrebinka resorts to multiple types of reflection, bringing together representatives of different social layers, and capturing involuntarily their dominant traits, which are mainly external. That is why instead of comprehensively described characterological types we find the same superficiality, a careless flaneur-like glance that corresponds to the physiological angle of vision.

Multiple types of reflection do not exclude the monotony in which the chaotic half-mortified mundanity, objectified and materialised aspects of life are decomposed. Negative entropic phenomena relate the text to the other sketches of the natural school based on general classifiers and shifters, under which Petersburg “appears in the almanac as a resemblance of a ‘hell’s dungeon’ – it is a consequence of the monotonous description given by all authors of “Physiology...” dictated by general literary trends of the time”⁸. Yet Hrebinka does deviate from the permanent recipe of his school and resorts to typological parallels drawn between Petersburg’s outskirts and the province. The comparative mode, the provincial “inspection”, allows the writer to describe the capital better. Hrebinka shows Petersburg from the viewpoint of ethnocultural borderland, and the modelling meaning can be found not only in the *outside perspective* – a typical provincial angle of vision – but also in the vision of *another nation*. Despite certain standardised approaches in comparison of typological peculiarities inherent to two types of outskirts – the metropolitan and the provincial, creation of reduced provinciality, amorphous and dual borderland – the text presents an essentially different viewpoint, accentuation of differences and even polarization, not only of different spaces but of incommensurable worlds and cultural images.

The distance between them is so huge that its proper coverage requires certain mythologization, with the layers of primitive folk ideas. The proximity of biographical memoir elements in the memories of the grandmother’s exhortations significantly enhances the manifestation of this theme and develops additional folklore and literary reminiscences: “study, so you will be clever when you grow up; you will go to Petersburg to

⁸ A. Kosiczin, *Evgeny Grebenka as a Literary Phenomenon: Problems of Biography, Poetics of Creativity, Textual Study*, [Евгений Гребенка как литературный феномен: проблемы жизнеописания, поэтики творчества, текстологического изучения], Samara 2010, p. 85.

serve, you will wear an embroidered uniform, and live in Petersburg Area, right in Dvoryanskaya [Noblemen] Street. You are a nobleman, after all”⁹. Petersburg and its residents are depicted as exotic and perceived through the prism of well-known travel narratives and fantastic images. The trip to the capital is implicitly identified with a fairytale-like border-crossing, and such reception is typified and appears as an indispensable feature in structures of mental thinking. “However, even now there are people in faraway provinces who believe that if Petersburg is good, then Petersburg Area in Petersburg should be the pitch of perfection; if noblemen are the upper class of this society, then just think about how great should Dvoryanskaya [Noblemen] Street be – in the capital!”¹⁰. An outside point of view, from the other national and mental space is marked with direct speech, in particular, with the grandmother’s Latinized polonism (*edukovannyi chelovek*, “educated person”), which is indirect evidence that this is a viewpoint with a Ukrainian origin.

Beyond the Boundaries of Binarity: Codification of the Metropolitan with the Provincial

Hrebinka joins the powerful tradition of provincial studies with the embodiment of this duality, the antithetic comparison of the polarised worlds in the “physiological notes” under the eloquent title *A Provincial in Petersburg* (1846). Its context is wide, and its artistic objectiveness turns into a subject of reflection. The transfer beyond artistic reality to the level of metatextual provincial as an anthropological entity and spatial identification takes place. In addition, the clarification of types of a provincial person is correlated with the practical tasks of the physiology genre, which is to categorise and classify characters by how the environment affects them. It appears that a provincial is a person residing in a province, and even if they used to live in the capital before, this does not change their newly acquired social status. And vice versa, moving to the capital removes the tinge of provinciality and assimilates them so they begin to live an impersonal life in a huge warren of the city. The ironically formulated sociological rationale is illustrated with a specific example of an argument between two madams: as soon as one of them moved to the capital, she

⁹ Y. Hrebinka, *Works in 3...*, p. 389.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

began associating her friend with the province in her letters. Resistance to being labelled as inferior is inherent to provincials, and in texts of this type, they are shown as being out of place, or more exactly, in no-places, in the borderland, because the “liminal interval is *beyond space*... an instantaneous jump between two status positions,” a “permanently sliding dotted line at the intersection of heterogeneous spaces”¹¹.

Another expression of liminality, halfness, and fictitiousness is the provincials’ habit of writing letters on *occasion*. This reduced form of communication represents the ephemerality of their existence in the plane of shifted space, distorted reality, and being excessively reserved and distant. Letters are written on *occasion*, despite the postal service available. Finally, the role of a postman is performed by the same newcomer from the outskirts, who suddenly faces a quite inhospitable welcome from his Petersburg fellow countrymen, whose letters he has to deliver. Boundary-related situations are created, as well as extra-spatial segments between reality and fiction, existence and non-existence, and the effect of a negative reception, which reduces all attempts of provincials to express themselves in the corresponding genres of speech. Their attempts to convey the truth of life, and bring it closer to the border of *the other* are neutralised and soon absorbed by the field of *the other*, therefore reduced to a useless archaism, and finally archived in the cultural memory. The same fictitious role is played by letters in Goncharov’s “Common Story” where the main character initially acts as a broadcaster of provincial bookishness into a fundamentally different communicative situation which is incompatible with the rhetoric of the outdated and irrelevant words. In the opinion of E. Etkind, these fictitious letters, monologues, or “dialogues of the deaf” are intended to represent the “mutual imperviousness of provincials and metropolitan officials (each of the letters is a lone voice in the wilderness), and people’s inability to express themselves in any other way but with mundane bookishness... Generally, the chain of letters-monologues is one of the demonstrative evidence of mutual incomprehension”¹². Another figment is the correspondence between two imaginary opponents in “Letters

¹¹ V. Podoroha, *Expression and Meaning. Landscape Worlds of Philosophy: S. Kirkegaard, F. Nietzsche, M. Heidegger, M. Proust, F. Kafka* [Выражение и смысл. Ландшафтные миры философии: С. Киркегор, Ф. Ницше, М. Хайдеггер, М. Пруст, Ф. Кафка], Moscow 1995, p. 144.

¹² E. Etkind, *Psychopoetics. “Inner Man” and Outer Speech* [Психопоэтика. «Внутренний человек» и внешняя речь], Saint Petersburg 2005), p. 107–108.

of a Friend from the Capital to a Provincial Bridegroom” as their moral, preaching and educational function end in annihilation. The simpleton from the province never manages to rise above his old-fashionedness which captures him within the too narrow confines of patriarchal and tawdry culture.

Such technique of rhetoric stratagems was first approbated by H. Kvitka-Osnovianenko in his *Letters to the Publisher* and *Letters to Luzhnitsky Starets* written on behalf of a provincial exoteric, and in the form of a polemic with the imaginary addressee. The inclusion of his counterarguments into his rhetorical competence emphasises the predetermined nature, programmability and stereotyping of provincial thinking. People from the province used the epistolary experiment and finally returns to the starting position and associated themselves with their community. The null effect or negative reception consists in the impossibility of entering the boundaries of the *other, alien, non-friendly* due to its communicative deafness, distance and antinomy. That is why letters from the province are not just a genre but a concept in which a certain type of consciousness is solidified and preserved, and the opposing nature of lifestyles is embodied. Later, M. Saltykov-Shchedrin in his *Letters About the Province* will severely criticise the inability to break from biased conservative thinking and come closer to comprehension of progressive trends. In I. Aksakov's *Letters from the Province* written almost in the same period as Hrebinka's works, the outskirts of the empire are assigned the status of multi-ethnic regions, the description of which is limited to the ethnographic discourse, local identities, and practices of othering. Province remains to be too enclosed a space where only its inherent powers tend to act.

In addition, open and quite natural for physiological descriptions positivism, associated with the ideas of Auguste Comte and soon formalised into a holistic doctrine by I. Ten about the influence of *race, environment, and moment* on artistic processes, we can talk about the echoes of even earlier literary and scientific tradition, the so-called *provincialias*. The significance of *Letters to the Provincial* by Blaise Pascal as a precedent for the development of the new French prose, the argumentation of the highest standard and a model of mastery in conducting philosophical and theological polemic sheds light on the imitated dialogue in Hrebinka's essay. Provincialias were a special genre with game techniques applied

to persuade the reader, with dialogues and conditional constructions for solving extremely significant and urgent problems. “The dialogue pulsates with Socratic irony, which arises from the question-and-answer method, in which one feels the “semantic beating of Greek verbs (to ask) and (to pretend to be a simpleton)”¹³. Therefore, provincials were best suited to study the dual experience, the instability of the “frontiersman,” the ratio of “disappearing” and “self-overcoming” in him, the phenomenon of transition from one state to another”¹⁴.

Certainly, this does not suggest any direct influence of the French philosopher’s text, but it does involve a special precedent, a kind of topological scattering of provincialias, as a concept and theme, over the grounds of a different culture and a different nation. This migration finds its embodiment in a similarly precedent work *Letters of a Friend from the Capital to a Provincial Bridegroom* (1847) by I. Goncharov, with which Hrebinka’s essay resonates in numerous thematic instances. The element shared by these texts is the directive for comparing two worldviews, patterns of behaviour, embodied social roles or, in a broader sense, cultural universals marked by the binary opposition of the urban versus the provincial. At the same time, irony and condescending intonations in the ridicule and caricature-like depiction of rudeness and weakness of a cynic countryman, his cultural backwardness and barbarism, bad manners and ignorance of the secular code of conduct leave a certain emptiness between the opposing members, some neutral zones, bridges for the borderland, and the convergence of the seemingly opposing provincial and metropolitan areas. They cannot be broken roughly and attributed unambiguously, as the tension between them creates a specific type of integrity, dialogical interaction between supra-texts, which cannot exist without each other. Hrebinka vividly demonstrates the gawkiness of the provincial nature as it becomes the subject of criticism and ridicule in Goncharov’s letters from a Petersburg resident.

It is remarkably surprising to watch an aborigine collecting his impressions from seeing the capital’s wonders, just as is the use and cognition of Petersburg from the viewpoint of surprise as an emotional and

¹³ K. Kashlyavik, *The Tradition of Letters to the Provincial Blaise Pascal in French Literature of the 18th Century* [Традиция Писем к провинциалу Блезе Паскаля во французской литературе XVIII века], XVIII century: Literature in the era of idylls and storms, Moscow 2012, p. 298.

¹⁴ V. Podoroĥa, *Expression and Meaning...*, p. 144.

aesthetic reaction. He focuses his attention on the different and unusual things, which are exotic to him. He watches the “red servant in the red clothes,” while the appearance of the observer himself is equally unusual for others (“he is easy to recognize among tens of thousands of Petersburg residents: he possesses sharply distinctive features”). The visual optics of the person overwhelmed with astonishment also corresponds with the situation (“he has scruples of his ignorance, and examines various amazing objects with the curiosity of a savage”). We can compare it with Gogol’s work, where alienation at the “level of *otherness*” (according to Barabash) is characteristic. He was the voice of Nevsky Prospekt, a Petersburg resident, although he is not a native but a newcomer from the outskirts of the Empire. “He is a stranger here, the *Other*, and it is easy to notice... Under the ‘Petersburg’ layer of the story, the Little Russian palimpsest is created, and it adds to the story of Petersburg and its very image the signs of instability and duality, which are characteristic of the borderland situation”¹⁵. Othering appears as a successful technique for demarcation, dissociation, antithesis, and comparison of our own and others’ own, the things we have just seen and the things we have known for a long time. It allows us to separate and attribute phenomena, objects and realities from the viewpoint of a mental borderland. Moreover, in Hrebinka’s works these sharp corners of human spontaneity, provincial-minded emotionality, and perception of unfamiliar objects are more distinct, which is dictated by the schematic and illustrative nature of the physiological description. Even more, unlike Gogol’s palimpsests, in this case, the provincial is clearly outlined and manifested in the corresponding topology.

The episode with tasting apples recreates the taste memory in the character’s consciousness as a method of communication with the world. The knowingly negative tasting assessment of an exotic variety of apples results from a biased attitude to everything foreign as to something alien and unacceptable. Certainly, this ideological function of taste emphasizes the provincial layer, which preserves an archive of traditional taste characteristics that activate the associative memory of cultural stimuli, memories of the extrasensory sphere inherent in *one’s* community, and transferring emotional experiences of the past onto the present. The functional meaning

¹⁵Y. Barabash, *Crocodile Street / Nevsky Prospekt. And beyond them. Writer on the ethnocultural frontier* [Вулиця крокодилів / Невський проспект. І поза ними. Письменник на етнокультурному пограниччі], Київ 2017, p. 90.

of “taste-related belief” in the opposition and polarization of worlds, or in evaluating one thing through the prism of another is the equivalent of topos, a textual pattern as an element of the cultural thesaurus. Let us compare coincidences in the works dating back to the same era. The taste preferences of a provincial in Petersburg, as depicted in the homonymous essay, are expressed with somewhat excessive self-righteousness and imperativeness: “Piece of junk! Only junk! In our parts, ordinary apples from a peasant’s garden are much tastier”¹⁶. A juicy picture of rich yield in pears at a hamlet is depicted in a meditative To Fellow Countrymen: “As you stare upwards, ripe pears are hanging over your head among dark branches, like balls of gold, as you hit the tree trunk unwillingly, the pears come falling on you like raindrops. Without caring to stand up, you grope around to find one and eat it. What wonderful pears they are, so fragrant and sweet! It melts when you put it in your mouth; when you’ve eaten it, your lips seem to stick together with the juice, and you feel strangely relieved – so ripe, fresh and good it is! *I’ll be born a German three times if anyone in Petersburg ever smelled a pear like that!...*”¹⁷. Through the prism of similar comparisons, Goncharov’s newcomer from the province evaluates the capital: “So is this what you call a pear? ... In our parts, even *servants* would not eat that!...”¹⁸. It is worth noting that these oppositions are based on the “antithesis and correlation” of the three factors that Claude Levi-Strauss wrote about in his study on the boundaries and borders of *one’s own* and *other’s* culture: endogenous vs. exogenous (local or imported), central vs. peripheral (food priorities), labelled vs. unlabelled food (tasty or tasteless)¹⁹.

From the same endogenous perspective, the character observes the capital, assessing it with an *internal, local, and regional* measure, and trying to adapt the strange and the unfamiliar to the optics of his vision. The inclusive title of the work complies with this strategy, and it conveys the marginal ratio of spatial volumes, the local and the large-scale. The provincial seems to select objects as if bringing them in accord with the similar objects that he knows for a long time. Suspicion and apprehension stemming from his biased opinion of cunning capital residents turn against

¹⁶ Y. Hrebinka, *Works in 3...*, p. 427.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 487.

¹⁸ I. Goncharov, *Complete Works and Letters in 20 Volumes* [Полное собрание сочинений и писем в 20-ти томах, том 1], Saint Petersburg 1997, p. 206.

¹⁹ K. Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* [Структурная антропология], Moscow 2001, p. 93.

him as he falls prey to commoners who look so similar to other provincials. His home-grown dandyism causes many comic situations related to his idea of fashion – so vulgar that borders on tawdriness. Once again, the motives and codes of specifically dandy-like behaviour that are repeated in different novels almost word for word have the status of textual patterns that represent thesaurus-related models of that era at a certain micro-level. Hrebinka's character “loves colourful vests and bright ties,” and Goncharov's provincial bridegroom is also a fan of variegation: “You have shown so much gaudiness in ordering vests, ties and other accessories... Please tell me, where do you take that passion for colourfulness from?”²⁰.

Hrebinka creates a series of situations which he uses to check the provincials in compliance with the surroundings. On a guest night, he is wearing a frock coat instead of an evening dress, and when going for a sledge down the hill, he turns up dressed as a true dandy decorated with the most elegant accessories and make-up. No less effective means to demonstrate his grotesque behaviour is the disparity between the two models of hospitality, the two types of communication. In an attempt to carry the openness of everyday communication over to the reserved and strictly regulated Petersburg converse, lack of mimicry skills and ignorance of the social niceties often result in comic and sometimes ridiculous situations. From the provincial point of view, Petersburg is a city of nonsense, rudeness and hypocrisy, where everything is turned inside out and life *circulates* similarly to the confusion of Babylon. Although this reminiscence emerges in a comic context, it acts as a shifter, an identifying mark of Petersburg text. Many researchers wrote about its “Babylon-like, mixing element,” the semantics of the city, and the seduction of its civilizing mission: V. Ivanov, V. Toporov, Y. Kurganov and others. Mythological metaphoric facilitates a deeper understanding of the cultural melting pot, the omnipresent mixing and overturning of social norms and customs, which in its turn provoke objections, philippics and jeering on the part of the antagonist. Impressions from the capital consist of instants and change dynamically. Admiration for the splendour of the capital evolves into disappointment with its inner order, and it erupts in angry self-reflection, “unforgettable letters full of complaints and curses were thrown at the capital, the letters that ignite and

²⁰ I. Goncharov, *Complete Works...*, p. 491.

nourish vanity in provincials”²¹. This is one of the text dimensions and discourses of Petersburg that demonstrate its liminal status. Once again, the textual pattern echoes with the transfer as a circulation of related and heterogeneous motives and subtexts / “micro texts” (Y. Barabash) concerned with Palmyra of the North.

In the context of denying the perception of the strange mortified city, confrontational speech genres with a distinct pragmatic function become relevant, because no city in the empire was subjected to “curses, blasphemies, insults, revelations, reproaches, sympathy, tears, and disappointments”²². This is an important emotional section in understanding the frontier-like nature of the phenomenon, and the presence of opposing and contradictory elements. That is why it is necessary to take into account these anti-Petersburg confessions and testimonies, which are made unselfishly and solely because of their internal, subjective imperative “without generalizing, without spreading this impulsive subjective word-thought outside of the situational locus where it arose, without exaggerating anything or looking for secrets and intentions”²³. The mockery expressed in an impromptu manner nourishes the Petersburg text while creating an antithetical pair for it, the provincial text. In Hrebinka’s works, these two concepts are inseparable, and exist in the relationship of additional distribution, thus creating a permanent area of tension and interaction. Procedural appears as an indispensable feature of provincial thinking, as it is manifested not in being distant from the capital, but in constantly approaching it, cognizing it, establishing analogies and common denominators with the things that have been already seen, studied, and accustomed to. Due to such comparisons, the image of Petersburg becomes subject to negativization, just as the provincial optics of seeing it becomes subject to interpretation. A. Koscizin noted: “Wrong features only emerge in the capital, and they do not manifest themselves at all if the contact with the capital’s space does not happen”²⁴.

²¹ Y. Hrebinka, *Works in 3...*, p. 434.

²² V. Toporov, *Myth. Ritual...*, p. 263.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

²⁴ A. Koscizin, *Evgeny Grebenka as a literary phenomenon: problems of biography, poetics of creativity, textual study* [Евгений Гребенка как литературный феномен: проблемы жизнеописания, поэтики творчества, текстологического изучения], Samara 2010, p. 88.

Conclusions

The imperial capital incarnates a “place of provocation” where each cultural topos is not self-sufficient and static but becomes an impulse, a moving and living momentum for the development of intercultural dialogue, a mystery of new borders arising due to semantical shifts, spatial deformations, and a quaint entanglement of traditions and modern trends. Duality determines the poetics of the Petersburg text, its heterogeneity, and topographical non-uniformity. Most texts written by Y. Hrebinka are based on the topology of intersection, on overcoming emptiness as an over-productive beyond-space area from the viewpoint of developing future landmarks and practices of othering. Coverage of typically Petersburg aspects from the sight of a provincial modality takes place in the form of topological binomial expressions, with superposition and amalgamation of opposing elements, convergence and repulsion, coincidences and differences. Practices of othering, angles and optics of vision predetermine certain fluctuations between acceptance and denial of the capital city’s order, aversion and complete mimicry, the separateness of a subject and its dissolution in space. A powerful contribution of the Ukrainian prose-writer in the creation of comparative frontiers consisted in notable ethnocultural and peculiarly national inclusions and local imagological images that reinforce the effects of the said othering. In these fluctuations and areas of semantic tension between the provincial and the metropolitan, the phenomenon of Ukrainian-Russian cultural transfer arises in the form of Petersburg text in Ukrainian literature.

Artur Malynovskyi

**The Imperial Topography *Sub Specie* of the Province:
Petersburg Texts of Ukrainian Literature (works by Y. Hrebinka)**

W artykule przeanalizowano tekst petersburski przez pryzmat pogranicza, będącego miejscem zachodzenia międzynarodowych relacji literackich. W tekście omówiono wkład E. Grebinki, utwory którego przedstawiają pogranicze etnokulturowe, w proces tworzenia wspólnej dla całego imperium, specyficznie oznaczonej intertekstualności ukraińsko-rosyjskiej. Ten temat wymaga podejścia naukowego opartego na transferze kulturowym, krążeniu i ruchu powszechnych wątków, na podstawie którego powstają nowe podtypy tekstu petersburskiego. Omawiane szkice Grebinki są najbardziej reprezentatywne z punktu widzenia stosowania typowych tropów artystycznych, fragmentaryzacji gatunkowej oraz stosunków pomiędzy dyskursem stołecznym a prowincjonalnym. Przestrzeń artystyczna staje się modelem relacji nieprzestrzennych i przybiera charakter antropocentryczny. Prześlędzono dynamikę jej ciągłych ruchów i przemieszczeń, zwrócono uwagę na spotkania subiekta z obcym oraz dokonano rewizji doświadczeń życiowych pod wpływem wstrząsu emocjonalnego w szerokiej amplitudzie wahań między akceptacją, idealizacją i odrazą do stolicy, podkreślaniem jej fantasmagoryczności, wyobcowania.

Keywords: Petersburg text, anthropocentric perspective, metropolitan, provincianity, Ukrainian-Russian intertextuality.

Słowa kluczowe: tekst petersburski, perspektywa antropocentryczna, prowincjonalność, stołeczność, intertekstualność ukraińsko-rosyjska.