Just as the Pilgrim fathers travelled across the Atlantic in the hope of establishing a New World, full of a determined Pioneer spirit and buoyed by their unshakable faith, so Lev and Lydia are embarked upon a journey of discovery. This journey has no certain outcome for either of them – even the more intellectual Lydia is travelling in response to the hope of ‘interviews’ rather than certain employment – and the pair share a hope, a determination that the new world in which they land, London, shall be the world of opportunity: ‘The English were lucky. …I’m going to make them share it with me’ thinks Lev. His determination and optimism winning through at the end of the passage.

The passage is set entirely on a coach, travelling overnight through central Europe, escaping a land ‘scorched by the dry wind’ and in which industry has destroyed the environment, the sawmill having ‘run out of trees’. The journey is cramped, with no space for the travellers and, for Lev, the added torture of not being allowed to smoke. He can only imagine the outside world. The passage describing the rest break and ‘cigarettenpause’ is hypothetical and lies in the future. He is trapped and Tremain renders the travellers as animals to be ‘herded back onto the coach’, sparing little as she describes the detritus of the countryside – ‘the soiled (toilet) paper vying with the wild flowers and the ‘stink’ of industry as nature is destroyed by man along the way.

The sense of being trapped and fearful dominates the early descriptions of Lev himself -he is ‘huddled’ at the back of the coach, clutching his ‘old red cotton handkerchief’ as though a small child with a comfort blanket. He seems utterly unprepared for his ordeal on the bus. Yet he has imagined it in detail and is fully aware of what lies ahead. His attempt to hold a cigarette in his mouth as a’companion’ or something with ‘promise’ indicates the depth of his despair. The cigarette which will be smoked at some stage is the only aspect of his life in which he seems to have any certainty.

He has isolated himself, oblivious to his surroundings and cannot ‘ be bothered’ to respond to Lydia’s ticking off (once a teacher, always a teacher…), allowing himself to descend into dreams as his coping mechanism.

His dreams, though ar ehardly positive. In a passage so concerned with departure and loss and ultimately the need for some form of companionship, his dystopian vision of arrival – separating with ‘barely a word or a look’- suggests someone so lost in their own world that little lies beyond.

The reasons for this closing down of his mind become evident as the passage unfolds the story of his wife who has recently died and introduces the daughter, presumably left in the Poland for whom Lev would sleep on the floor to look after her in illness or fear. Similarly he had slept on the hospital floor next to his dying wife, showing such loyalty and love, yet also creating an image of himself like the faithful dog at the hearth, guarding and protecting the family. In his reverie he offers the first point of emotional contact in the passage, Marina’s comment about storks. Whilst we do not see storks die, the point surely is that Lev has become a stork. He migrates huge distances in the hope of a better future, leaving his home though his ‘heart remained in his own country’.

Lydia forces her way into his world it is as a character of greater confidence – a teacher scolding a child caught smoking. Lev has noticed her and Tremain describes her from his perspective, the ‘moles like splashes of mud’ suggesting an instinctive dislike of the ‘plump, contained’ former teacher from Yarbl. Lev’s response, that they will need to tolerate each other ‘like a married couple’ as they share each other’s space and share the smells of the food they bring comes true when Lydia unwraps her meagre supper. Her boiled egg, reminding us that she too  is a traveller of few resources despite her educated status, is the sensory cue for  the memory of Marina which allows Lev to begin a tentative conversation.

As Lev launches a passage of direct speech, allowing us the ‘hear’ the characters, the pair move from the simple statements of introduction to a longer conversation in which Lydia tells him about herself. Lev’s response is told indirectly since he has not yet dropped his barriers and Tremain wishes to show him maintaining his distance form the comfort of a companion. Perhaps Lev, who has suffered the grief of the death of his wife is simply unable to allow himself to make close relationships for fear of the pain which follows.

Lydia tells him her straightforward backstory: a teacher who wants more from life than the ‘view from my window’, suggesting her feeling of entrapment in her life. She carries hope with her in terms of her interviews, but has little concrete to grasp -the pair are in the same position as each other – travelling to the unknown with nothing but hope. She is able to speak English and as the pair talk -she coaching him in the language – we learn more of Lev’s situation – his first statement ‘I am legal’ shows his concern and understanding of the hostility towards economic migrants throughout the world. His later ‘stork’s nest’ seems to have no purpose in his new country, though this is what he needs – a landing place as a migrating visitor – a B&B ‘quite cheap’.

His memory of his home suggests an older, timeless world. We notice how darkness comes in the same way ‘from the same direction, above the same trees’. This seems to be a world measured in light and dark, not time. As they travel Westwards, time will be more important, but trapped on the bus there is no time. The journey is counted off in ‘gas stops’ and cigarettes smoked. It is an older way of life, less touched by the trappings of modern society. He passes comment on the destruction of the land around Baryn which lead to the closure of the sawmill and the loss of his job with no bitterness – it happened. Life is not fair. After taking a furtive drink and being reminded of the survivor guilt he feels, he releases a final piece of information. Tremain places this in direct speech again – as he opens his heart a crack further on his road to moving through his grief. He is working for his daughter who needs ‘everything’ and this trip is his last hope.

Having established their credentials as co-travellers, the pair settle for the night, Lydia reading Graham Greene’s novel telling of a pair of broken individuals travelling in search of their own personal redemptions  – a priest and a lawman – ending in tragedy and the possibility of the indestructible nature of Faith. Thwarted of company Lev also reads – the £10 note. He does not recognise Elgar on the note and constructs a myhtology around the imagery. The most quintessentially English of composers, becomes a counterpoint to the ‘frumpy’ Queen and, taking the dogma of Capitalism as his cue, Lev sees him as a banker, embodying the luck of the English and blessed by the Angel as a manifestation of the promised land to which he travels. Blessed too as a ‘banker’ for belonging to a country viewed as safe and never occupied. A country not bothered by the misdeeds of Empire: ‘only intermittently do they see that their past deeds were not good’.

Ironically of course, to the majority of the country, Elgar is not recognised and is known only as the man who wrote what became ‘Land of Hope and Glory’, now used to represent the worst excesses of English nationalism: the very force against which Lev will need to fight if his time really is ‘coming’, as he thinks. For me, this intertextual resonance suggests otherwise and I fear for Lev – he is not young and has few obvious skills as required in his new country.

He seems a lost soul on his journey to an unknown country. As he equates his condition with that of the drivers with their ‘lonely vigil’ we can make a link – he is destined to travel this road again, just as they do, and just as the storks must as they return to their country of origin after the migration.