ROMANIA IN ENGLISH TRAVEL LITERATURE. FROM A WINTER IN THE CITY OF PLEASURE TO THE WAY OF THE CROSSES

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to explore a range of travel documents about Romania published in English literature starting with the XIX century up to the present and try to extract and analyze the image of Romania as perceived and depicted by the foreign travelers in different historical and political contexts, capturing the process of its development through time. For a more balanced approach, the selection of the documents analyzed draw on four different historical and political periods starting with the end of the XIX century titles, passing through the interwar period in the first half of the XX century, continuing with the accounts taken in the communist period and finishing with the modern, democratic Romania depicted after 1989. The investigation begins with the volumes titled A Winter in the City of Pleasure. Life on the Lower Danube published by Florence K. Burger in 1877, Three Years in Roumania written by J. W. Ozanne in 1878, Roumania: Past and Present written by James Samuelson in 1882 and Untrodden Paths in Roumania signed by Mary Adelaide Walker in 1888. It continues with the travel accounts recorded during the XX century, Roumania Yesterday and To-day published by Will Gordon in 1918, Twenty Years in Roumania signed by Maude Parkinson in 1921, Between the Woods and the Water: On Foot to Constantinople: From the Middle Danube to the Iron Gate written by Patrick Leigh Fermor in the interwar period and issued in 1986. From the works published in the communist period, Dracula Country. Travels and Folk Beliefs in Romania signed by Andrew Mackenzie in 1977 will be taken into account. From after the Revolution, the modern English travel literature about the country analyzed here includes the volumes Along the Enchanted Way: a Romanian Story signed by William Blacker and The Way of the Crosses published by Peter Hurley at the end of 2013.

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Basically conceived as a "first person account of a journey undertaken by an author" [1] the travel narrative is an old narrative style used all through the history in texts like Herodotus's *Histories* in order to make accurate reports on foreign countries visited. In this case, Herodotus particular acknowledged objective was to preserve facts from being lost[2] and record it for the benefit of the future readers. Generally, travel literature aims to describe the places visited, the people encountered, the cultural peculiarities and the experiences lived while travelling across a country. According to the study *The Cambridge Companion to the*

1 James Hooper and Tim Young, *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Aldershot 2004, p. 2.

2 „I, Herodotus of Halicarnassus, here displays his inquiry, so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time, and great and marvelous deeds – some displayed by Greeks, some by barbarians – may not be without their glory; and especially to show why the two peoples fought with each other", Herodotus, *The Histories, Revised*, translated by Aubrey de Selincourt, revised with Introduction and Notes by John Marincola, Penguin Books, London, 2003, p. 3.

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Travel Writing edited by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, the travel literature is an interdisciplinary approach situated at the border of the disciplines of "literature, history, geography, and anthropology" (Hulme & Youngs 2002, 1). The same volume makes it obvious that from the dawn of humanity, "writing and travel have always been intimately connected" (Hulme & Youngs 2002, 2) generating a rich body of literature enjoyed by the reading public of all times, appreciated for the historical and cultural documenting value. The editors propose Odysseus as the fist European travel writer and "the appropriate archetype for the traveler"[3] in the way that in the Christian tradition, the pilgrims can be regarded as "ancestors" or an early form of modern tourists[4].

In the study titled *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, the editors underline the "absorption" of various narrative techniques and genres in the travel narrative thus turning it into a literary mixture characterized by "interaction with a broad range of historical periods, disciplines and perspectives"[5]. At the same time, the act of traveling itself and the travel as an experience is viewed as a "fluid" process. In the study titled *An Introduction to Travel and Travel Writing*[6], Carmen Andras regards travel writing as having a "border status", pointing out the fact that even though travel is usually perceived as a metaphor, it has always been interconnected with the history of civilizations which "are also histories of travels, mobilities, migrations, and their integration in new topographies". In the same context, some of the first historical accounts about Dacian Romania are recorded in Herodot's *Histories*[7], Strabon's *Geographia*[8] and Pausanias's writings describing Leuke, the White island, the mythical sacred Island of the Blessed dedicated to Akhilleus[9].

In English literature, the travel narratives focused on Romania are quite numerous written based on a tradition of travel writing preoccupied with "distinguishing fact from

3 „So the ambiguous figure of Odysseus – adventurous, powerful, unreliable – is perhaps the appropriate archetype for the traveler, and by extension for the travel writer", Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs editors, *The Cambridge Companion to the Travel Writing*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 2.

4„Within the Christian tradition, life itself has often been symbolized as a journey, perhaps most famously in John Bunyan's allegory, The Pigrims Progress (1678); and the centrality of the pilgrimage to Christianity produces much medieval travel writing as well as the framing device for Chaucer's Canteburry Tales. In many respects pilgrims were ancestor of modern tourists: a catering industry grew up to look after them, they followed set routes, and the sites they visited were packaged for them", Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs editors, *The Cambridge Companion to the Travel Writing*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 2.

5 „One of the most persistent observation regarding travel writing, then, is its absorption of differing narrative styles and genres, the manner in which it effortlessly shape-shifts and blends any number of imaginative encounters, and its potential for interaction with a broad range of historical periods, disciplines and perspectives. In much the same way that travel itself can be seen as a somewhat fluid experience, so too can travel writing be regarded as a relatively open-ended and versatile form, notwithstanding the closure that occurs in some of its more rigidly conventional examples", James Hooper and Tim Young, editors, *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Aldershot 2004, p. 3.

6 "In what travel itself is concerned, it is agreed upon the fact that histories of civilizations are also histories of travels, mobilities, migrations, and their integration in new topographies (journeys, exodus, nomadism, pilgrimage, emigration, exploration, dislocations of populations etc.). Histories of civilizations are also covering the recording (under the form of travel accounts and travel literature, documents, maps, illustrations, etc.) and the reception of the respective experiences by the public", Carmen Andras, *Calatoria ca spatiu al cunoasterii si al comunicarii culturale, An Introduction to Travel Writing,* in Academia Romana, *Anuarul Institutului de Cercetari Socio-Umane "Gheorghe Sincai"* X, p.7-22, Mediaprint, Targu-Mures 2007.

7 Herodotus, *The Histories, Revised*, translated by Aubrey de Selincourt, revised with Introduction and Notes by John Marincola, Penguin Books, London, 2003.

8 Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, VII, with an English Translation by Horace Leonard Jones, PhD, LLD. Cornell University, London & New York: William Heinemann & Putnam's Sons, 1930.

9 *Pausanias's Description of Greece* edited and translated by J. G. Frazer, Cambridge University Press, New York 2012, p. 165-166.

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fiction", paying interest to the written testimony appreciated as an "eyewitness account"[10] of real facts and experiences lived in the foreign territories. The travel accounts about Romania come into being brought to the international attention by the conflictual events happening in the Eastern European region in the second half of the XIX century. After living three years in Romania, being certain that "no book on the country has ever been written by an Englishman in the English language"[11] even though the volume *A Winter in the City of Pleasure. Life on the Lower Danube* was published by Florence K. Burger in 1877, J. W. Ozanne gives an account about his travel making use of a "proper mixture of light and shade". In the *Preface*, the author confesses that the project started as a series of articles published in *Temple Bar* and *University Magazine* and progressed into a book aiming to provide "a general idea of the country". The author mentions the "power of fascination" (Ozanne 1878, 2) exerted by the Romanian territory on the visitors even though the risks taken could be dangerous: typhus, cholera, fevers. Ozanne left England in the summer of 1870, entering the Romanian territory on the "beautiful blue Danube", arriving in Bucharest, "the city of pleasure" (Ozanne 1878, 11). Florence K. Burger names Bucharest this way in her title, underlying the cosmopolitism encountered here and the "birje", which in her opinion, represent the Romanian capital in the highest degree[12] because it makes "the social machinery revolve with smoothness and precision" (Burger 1877, 42). For Florence K. Burger, Bucharest is "not the least like any other place in the world"[13], being the "City of Vlad, the Devil" (Burger 1877, 45). While Ozanne structures his book in eighteenth chapters reporting on social hierarchy, the government, religion, agriculture and commerce, history, culture and language, education, traditions, inserting a chapter titled "A Raid into Transylvania", ending the book with "A Review of the Political Situation", Florence K. Burger divides her book into twelve chapters and adds in the final chapter a collection of twenty "doine", among which *The Cuckoo and the Turtle Dove (Cucul si turturica), Miorita, The Enchanted Spring, Sburatorul*. She explains doina as "inspired by *Doru*, an indefinable sentiment"[14] which resembles the Troubadours songs or the German Lieder.

In his travel account, titled *Roumania Past and Present*, James Samuelson's target was "to obtain a better knowledge" of the country (Samuelson 1882, viii), driven by the lack of information regarding the country's geography, history and politics[15]. Samuelson divided his

10 „Against this background, the English editor of early travelers, Richard Hakluyt, argued for a history of travel which relied on the testimony of travelers themselves: in other words he looked mostly to eyewitness accounts (...)" James Hooper and Tim Young, editors, *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Aldershot, 2004, p. 3.

11 „To the best of my belief, no book on the country has ever been written by an Englishman in the English language. It is with a view to supplying a want admittedly felt that I have penned this work", J. W. Ozanne, *Three Year in Roumania*, Chapman and Hall, London, 1878, p. v-vi.

12 „Bucharest without its *birje* would be like Venice without gondolas or Cairo without donkeys, or the desert without camels", Florence K. Burger, *A Winter in the City of Pleasure. Life on the Lower Danube*, Richard Bentley and Son, London, 1877, p. 43.

13 „Bucharest is Bucharest, and therefore is not in the least like any other place in the world. Just as a Roumanian is a Roumanian, without a shadow of resemblance to a Turk, a Bosnian, a Galician, a Serb, a Montenegrin, or a Greek. It is not the East, still less the West", Florence K. Burger, *A Winter in the City of Pleasure. Life on the Lower Danube*, Richard Bentley and Son, London, 1877, p. 35.

14 „The *Doina* is presumably inspired by the *Doru*, an indefinable sentiment, made up of regret, hope, sadness, and love, and which is supposed to cause the ultimate death of whomsoever comes within the range of its fascinating, but baneful influence", Florence K. Burger, *A Winter in the City of Pleasure. Life on the Lower Danube*, Richard Bentley and Son, London, 1877, p. 247.

15 „There is no country in Europe which at the present time possesses greater interest for Englishmen than does the Kingdom of Roumania, and there is non with whose present state and past history, nay, with whose very geographical position, they are less familiar", James Samuelson, *Roumania Past and Present*, George Philip & Son, London, 1882, p. v.

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account into two parts, the first one, *Roumania to-day* informing about the present geographical, naval, topographical, agricultural, commercial, educational and judicial situation in the time of his visit and the second one dealing with the historical background from Dacia to the royal Roumania at the end of the XIX century. While Ozanne remembers a Bucharest with bumpy roads, Samuelson depicts Bucharest as being "the city of joy" (Samuelson 1882, 39) where the carriages called "birjas" transport high society members, whereas the workers and the peasants walk. They both agree, at a distance of more than ten years, on the harshness of the climate, which seems to be too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter, opinion shared by Walker in 1888, who points out that "the climate of Roumania is exposed to the greatest extremes of temperature" (Walker 1888, vi).

In the her volume's introduction, Walker declares Romania of that period as being "one of the most interesting" and "one of the least known countries of Europe" (Walker 1888, vi). The author of the book titled *Untrodden Paths in Roumania* enters Romanian territory on the Danube, too, the first city visited being Galati. She then visits Moldova describing its monasteries in Iasi, Neamt, Piatra, Durau, from where she travels by raft down the Bistrita reaching Bucharest in June 1887. In Bucharest, apart from the traffic noise[16] equaled, in her opinion, only by Naples, Walker fancies the gardens, Cismegiu park and mentions the Chaussee, "the fashionable drive" (Walker 1888, 169) characterized by Samuelson as being "the favourite drive of the Bucaresters" (Samuelson 1882, 41). From Bucharest, Walker travels to Curtea de Arges, Sinaia, Kronstadt, Valcea, Horezu and Bistrita, ending the volume with a historical review developed in two final chapters. She dedicates the third chapter to the popular superstitions among which the vampires, the "little lamb of Barsa" and "Manol the Mason and his young wife".

At the beginning of the new century, during the World War One, the tone of the travel accounts changes as in the case of the volume *Roumania Yesterday and To-day* signed by Winifried Gordon in 1918. The author acknowledges that the account's aim is to get a "closer understanding" of the Romanian country which has recently become an Ally to the British in the war. The volume is supplied with a chapter signed by Queen Marie of Romania, dedicated the people of Roumania and their courage. Winifried emphasis the Roumanians as a latin race in a "latin oasis" speaking a latin language[17], even more obvious in the rural region of Transylvania[18] and mentions the beauty that "captivates with an irresistible attraction" (Gordon 1918, 76). Bucharest, again called the "city of pleasures" is compared to Paris and found "the gayest, brightest, lightest-hearted little sister to the elder Paris it is possible to imagine" (Gordon 1920, 23).

Twenty Years in Roumania was written by Maude Parkinson aiming to offer an accurate "insight into the character of the people", made out of "random impressions and recollections" about the country where she spent "many of the happiest years" in her life working as a languages teacher. As the other English travelers, Maude mentions the Chaussee

16 „Every one drives in Bukurest, and every one seems to consider it of the highest importance to tear along the crowded streets at the utmost attainable speed", Mary Adelaide Walker, *Untrodden Paths in Roumania*, Chapmann and Hall Limited, London 1888, p. 169.

17 „One of the most remarkable features of this interesting people, indeed of all the Roumanian race, is the unity of their psychology. In all the countries through which this section of the race, these exiled and nomadic Wallachians, wander, they speak the same tongue, have the same manners and customs, songs, dances, music, legends and superstitions as the parent stock", Winifried Gordon, *Roumania Yesterday and To-day*, George Lane the Bodley Head, London 1918, p. 100.

18 „The Latin strain is even more marked and obvious among the Roumanians in the remoter villages of Transylvania, and their language is an indisputable proof of their origin", Winifried Gordon, *Roumania Yesterday and To-day*, George Lane the Bodley Head, London, 1918, p. 34.

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in Bucharest and the problem regarding "the constant rumbling of the traffic" there[19] which has been finally solved by wooden pavement. The capital city is described as a "picturesque" garden city[20], socially cosmopolitan. She accurately explains the Roumanian target in the World War One which is "to regain Transylvania" and unite all Romanian speakers in the same state[21], objective reached, Romania of that period being reported with a population of seventeen million.

The volume titled *Dracula Country. Travels and Folk Believes in Romania* was outlined by Andrew Mackenzie "mainly for journalistic purposes" in order to investigate folk traditions in Romania which he "visited yearly since 1968" working with Romanian folklorists in research trips, doing field work in the mountains (Mackenzie 1977, ix). In the account of his research, the author starts a dialogue with the earlier travelers and their narratives regarding Romania being certain that "every true traveler in a foreign country steps, in a sense, in the footprints of those who have travelled there before him and, if he is wise, he takes notice of what they have written"[22]. MacKenzie names Transylvania "the land beyond the forest" borrowing the title from Emily Gerard, and Romania, "Dracula country", being, according to the author, "unique"[23].

Unlike the former English travelers who used various means of transport, Patrick Leigh Fermor, the author of the volume titled *Between the Woods and the Water. On Foot to Constantinople: From the Middle Danube to the Iron Gate* travelled on foot, as we will see it happened again in 2013, in the case of the writer Peter Hurley, the author of *The Way of the Crosses*. Patrick started his trip in the interwar period, even though he published the book only in 1986. The author mentions that he has lost his notebook in Moldavia, restored it afterwards and published it in 1986, the writing being initially a "journal of travel"[24]. The Englishman begins his travel on a "bridge passage" in Esztergom, at the Hungarian border, and enters the Romanian territory in Transylvania from Hungary. He talks about "The Marches of Transylvania" and the "Carpathian Uplands", depicted in two different chapters.

Almost one hundred years later, Peter Hurley takes a similar walk into modern Romania, the author himself interpreting his narrative enterprise as a "task" that was "literally

19 „When I first went there the town was very badly paved with rough cobble-stones, and it was highly disagreeable to go through the Calea Victorie, as the constant rumbling of the traffic over these stones effectually prevented any attempt at conversation. That is all changed now since wood-paving has been introduced", Maude Parkinson, *Twenty Years in Roumania*, London 1921, p. 53.

20 „Numerous small public gardens, the largest called Cismegiu, and the drive known as the Chaussee, greatly contribute to the garden-like appearance of the town", Maude Parkinson, *Twenty Years in Roumania*, London 1921, p. 53.

21 „To regain Transylvania and see it incorporated in Roumania has always been the ardent desire of every Roumanian, young and old. In olden times the province formed part of the Roman province of Dacia under the Emperor Trajan", Maude Parkinson, *Twenty Years in Roumania*, London 1921, p. 251.

22 "Not only do the writings of former travelers throw light on the situation in Romania today but they can also illuminate scenes of the distant past which otherwise would remain in shadow", Andrew Mackenzie, *Dracula Country. Travels and Folk Beliefs in Romania*, Arthur Barker Limited, London, 1977, p. x, xi.

23 „Romania is unique. It lies in the heartland of Slavonic Europe, but it is quite different from the Slav countries – and I can say that, since I know the Slavs and love them. The Roman legions left their own Latin language in Romania, the most remote Latin outpost of the Empire. They left more than that. To this day, Romania not only speaks a language very much like Italian, but has a population which possesses the sparkle, the intelligence, the physical appearance that one meets in Tuscany and the Lombard plain. In the long run they have everything – natural riches, great scenic variety, widespread education, gifted people – which will make for a brilliant future", Andrew Mackenzie, *Dracula Country. Travels and Folk Beliefs in Romania*, Arthur Barker Limited, London, 1977, p. 3-4.

24 „The notebook covering this period, lost in Moldavia at the beginning of the War and restored a few years ago by a great stroke of luck, has been a great help, but not the unfailing prop it should have been", Patrick Leigh Fermor, *Between the Woods and the Water: On Foot to Constantinople: From the Middle Danube to the Iron Gate*, Introduction by Jan Morris, New York Review of Books, New York, 2005, p. 6.

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entrusted to me as an imperative" as he acknowledges in the end. This task has been put into action as a journey and the textual outcome has taken the form of a literary testimony shared to the reader as a "gift" being generously available to everyone showing interest. The author felt the burden of the "responsibility" entrusted, symbolically conveyed into the image of the rucksack carried on his back along the way. The story builds itself on the road, "overwhelming" the author with its "complexity" envisaged as "an enormous tapestry", a metaphor of the country, depicted as "this great magic mountain called Romania". The route taken by the author is chosen on the spot, depending on the conditions found in a specific situation, being exposed to the harsh nature of the life in the mountains which reveal to him as "held together by an infinite number of threads, natural fibers all". This natural route is called the Way, the Road, or *Drumul*, which Peter gets to know it in detail walking it step by step, finally named the Way of the Crosses. Peter Hurley is doing the investigation of the reality on the ground arguing that Romanians are "misrepresented in the foreign media" reason why the author feels the urge to point out the confusion it is made regarding the *Romania* word etymology, which is not Roma, but Rome. Peter Hurley's objective is to make his contribution in being "of help to the reader who has little or no knowledge of Romania" (Hurley 2013, IV).

After 1989, the interest in travelling in Romania increased and the modern English travel literature about the country investigated in this paper includes the volumes *Along the Enchanted Way: a Romanian Story* signed by William Blacker and *The Way of the Crosses* mentioned above. William Blacker, the author of *Along the Enchanted Way: a Romanian Story* travelled by train in the winter of 2008 entering Romania through North, knowing the country as he visited it before, in 1989, during the Revolution and in the following years. Drinking "tuica" and eating traditional food all through his journeys in Romania, the author felt welcome and treated with generosity[25], traits of character mentioned by Peter Hurley in his travel account, too. Peter got to know Romanians and the country as he was accommodated and fed by Romanians so he started to understand "Romanian dark humour" related to the "incredible, enormous, continuous amount of suffering and injustice" experienced over the centuries". This thought makes Peter think about the historical bad luck of this peaceful nation described as "not a conquering or a warring or in any way a cruel nation, not revengeful, fundamentally Christian, extraordinarily welcoming and hospitable, extremely creative, warm, giving, generous people, who are completely misunderstood and misbranded by the people who don't know them" (Hurley 2013, 278-279).

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25 "I remembered how on my early journeys the people of Romania, almost everywhere I went, had welcomed me amongst them. Wherever I travelled, when night fell I was offered food and the best bed in the house; sometimes it might have had a straw mattress, sometimes it had a box of chicks or a lamb sleeping underneath it, but always it was warm and comfortable and I had a roof over my head. In the morning when I left, my host would be appalled if offered any form of payment, and instead would fill my bag with food. In those days there were few shops and food was almost impossible to buy along the way. I was overwhelmed by the generosity of the villagers and their old-fashioned courtesy", Wiliam Blacker, *Along the Enchanted Way: a Romanian Story* John Murray, London, 2009.

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