The Annals of Ovidius University of Constanța: Philology Series Vol. XXIX, 2/2018

ROUTES OF TEMPORARY DISPLACEMENT IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY ROMANIA: TRAJECTORIES OF SPACE IN THE TRAVEL ACCOUNTS OF ADÈLE HOMMAIRE DE HELL AND JAMES WILLIAM OZANNE

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Abstract: *The article scrutinizes the trajectories of space in the travel accounts of the Frenchwoman Adèle Hommaire de Hell and of the British journalist James William Ozanne who spend one year (1868), respectively three years (1870-1873) in Romania. During their temporary displacement they use various means of transport—such as steamboat, coach, or train—which provide multiple perspectives on the local spatiality and different decoupages of the social, cultural, and economic reality. Taking into account criticism in mentalities and spatial studies, I show that the network of the travellers' routes configures cartographic sequences of the Romanian territory at the end of the 1860s and the beginning of the 1870s.*

Keywords: *trajectories of space, means of transport, spatiality, travellers*

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Union of Moldavia and Wallachia raises the interest of more and more travellers, eager to find out details about the newly created country. The improvements in economy, transport, and the general state of things, as well as the greater opening towards western civilization favoured voyages in the Danubian-Pontic territories. The article focuses on two complementary travel accounts of temporary displacement in Romania: one belongs to a feminine voice, the Frenchwoman Adèle Hommaire de Hell, and the other to a British journalist, James William Ozanne. While the former spends a year (1868) in Romania, where her son lives, for personal interest, the latter discovers the country due to some job requirements: assigned in 1870 with a diplomatic mission at the British consular representation in Bucharest, he remains here for three years. They travel to different cities in order to better understand their temporary residence, and they experience various means of transport, which lead to different and complex approaches of space.

In 1868, the Frenchwoman Jeanne Louise Adélaïde (Adèle) Hommaire de Hell, a member of the Geographic Society of France, arrives in Galați, a Danubian city-port, which she depicts as a multicultural space that gathers representatives of many nationalities such as Greeks, Romanians, Jews, Germans, Bulgarians, Hungarians, and Italians. Not only does this diversity of languages remind her of the cities of the Levant, but she notices the Oriental appearance of the inhabitants (Hell 355). Adèle Hommaire de Hell insists upon the dichotomous aspect of Galați. On the one hand, the mixed population, the wooden houses, the small shops, and the coffeehouses are perceived as characteristic of the Orient. On the other hand, Galați is presented as a major commercial centre, with a western-like lifestyle, where fashionable parties are organized for the officers of the French, British, Russian, Austrian, or Italian ships (Hell 354–5). The traveller interprets the active social life as a sign of Occidentalization.

The French lady's trajectories of space in Galaţi during her one-year displacement weave a fluid topography of the lively city-port, a mobile, cinematic mapping of its streets, houses, architecture, people, and their activities, with a particular focus on the roads along the river, where the limits between the water and the sky are vague and fascinating (Hell 362). In this particular context, the space gains synesthetic dimensions. Trying to depict the serenity of these grand horizons in the evenings, which reminds her of the Oriental nights, Mme de Hell abandons the visual description in favour of an auditory account which evokes the noises of the harbour, the music played in the summer gardens, the whispers of the city, the dogs' barks, and the rustle in the trees (362). The

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association with the image of Oriental nights mirrors Edward Said's remark, according to which the Orient tends to be a place of déjà vu (180), a mental construction. The walking trajectories at dusk induce poetic dreaming and transform the landscape into a state of mind.

Each means of transport triggers different modalities of space perception. For instance, coming from Odessa, Mme de Hell experiences a very tormented voyage during a terrible tempest. As she spends most of the time locked in the cabin, her visual field is obstructed and therefore the other senses orientate the description: auditory (footsteps, voices, cracking sounds) and tactile (violent movements) details configure her voyage (Hell 373). In comparison with the turbulent Black Sea voyage, the lady traveller finds navigation on the Danube smooth and peaceful (Hell 375). Another means of transport on water is the ferryboat, used to cross the river Siret. The Frenchwoman does not particularly like it, as she considers it tiring and unpleasant (Hell 379). The coach trip from Galaţi to Bucharest proves to be quite adventurous because of a hailstorm which makes the road muddy and slippery (378). The focus is not on the landscape but on the bad state of the roads and on the difficulties encountered. Only the endlessness of the steppe attracts the view and makes the voyageur eager to reach the animated city of Bucharest (Hell 381). The lady traveller seems to prefer the trajectories of space in the vibrant urban spaces, where she offers thorough accounts of the social life.

As regards Bucharest, Adèle Hommaire de Hell dedicates more pages to the places of socialization, such as the streets with "splendid"[1] shops, nice coffeehouses and aristocratic clientele, than to any others. Cișmigiu Garden, with its lake, alleys and "magnificent" weeping willows, is defined as a recreational area for the walks of the bourgeoisie, while the high-society chooses to view or to be viewed in sumptuous carriages on *Chaussée* (Hell 383, 385). The trajectories of space for spending leisure time in Bucharest differentiate, thus, according to the social status. In Galaţi, the representative spaces of socialization are coffeehouses. The French lady remarks that they are strategically located on the road to the harbour, together with docks, customs, post offices, and cabarets (Hell 360). Besides their recreational aim, coffeehouses in a city-port like Galaţi fulfil a major commercial role, as contracts can be signed here, labour force can be found, and the latest news in various fields can be exchanged. For Adèle de Hell coffeehouses are markers of the Orient, and she emphasizes the fact that they are always full of clients drinking coffee and smoking (indoors but also outdoors), watching the passengers and the activity of the ships (360). In the urban configuration of a city-port, the harbour and its coffeehouses represent the focal point of the social life and orientate accordingly the vectors of space.

The British journalist James William Ozanne also pays special attention to the recreational spaces in the urban centres he visits. The theatre in Bucharest is described, for example, as "one of the most comfortable in Europe, and is consecrated, according to the season, to the opera, the French stage, and the Carnival *bals masqués*" (Ozanne 14). Like Mme de Hell, Ozanne remarks the importance of the *Chaussée*, which "is thronged, both in summer and winter, with splendid equipages," and the centripetal force of the summer gardens and the cafés—the latter offering various possibilities of entertainment such as dominoes, billiards, chess and cards (15, 22). Ozanne's trajectories of space in Bucharest are influenced by the social and cultural attractions—which he highly appreciates—but are impeded by the bad state of the roads. In this connection, he complains about mud during winter and clouds of dust and insects during summer (Ozanne 11). The journalist's remarks become acid; Ozanne constructs sarcastic antinomies, noticing that in "'The City of Pleasure' the pavement was the most execrable that had ever been invented" (11). Criticism continues when Ozanne explains that "it is from the dirt of its roads that Bucharest has acquired the nick-name of '*Boue qui rest*'" (12). What results is a dichotomic image of a city that has not yet embraced all the aspects of modernity and civilization.

The British journalist declares that he accepted his deployment in Romania quite willingly, because he was "weary for a time of London life and burning for a change," and his decision was

[1] My translation.

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supported by his curiosity and need for adventure (1). His staying here extends, however, for three years, leading to the writing of a book entitled *Three Years in Roumania* and published in 1878, when the political context (the Russian–Romanian–Ottoman conflict) favours special attention to this country. Ozanne explains that he did not know much about Romania when he accepted the position in Bucharest; he felt like "taking a leap in the dark" because the newly formed country represented "almost a *terra incognita* to the inhabitants of Western Europe" (1). His sense of adventure helps him overcome the fear of unknown, but he still wears the burden of his fellows' contradictory opinions on Bucharest: some find it "a gay, fashionable place," others "dullness personified" (Ozanne 1). The difficult climate and environment are also issues for travellers, as summers are too hot and winters are too cold, and various diseases (such as cholera, typhus, and fevers) are "engendered by the pestilential swaps which swarmed on every plain" (2). The prospects for the traveller seem not favourable, and the others' opinions configure a conceived space[2] characterized by wilderness and dangers.

The first images the journalist registers while waiting for the Danubian steamer confirm his fears, as he disdains the Wallachian peasant in his rags and labels him an "uncouth monster" (Ozanne 4). This image is amplified to such an extent that makes him dramatically exclaim: "Civilisation, adieu!" and imagine "dreary visions of barren steppes and Wallachian brigands" (Ozanne 4). The conceived barbaric space appears to be totally different from the lived-in space, and he is pleasantly surprised to discover an extremely comfortable and luxurious steamer, as well as charming Moldo-Wallachian[3] companions—especially witty and beautiful ladies—returning from Paris or German baths (5). The British journalist and diplomat becomes more and more enthusiastic during his cruise along the Danube River, to which he dedicates the first chapter of his book. His admiring tone culminates with the hyperbolic description of the Iron Gates, a picturesque gorge on the Danube, which he considers "the finest bit of river scenery in Europe," and even in the whole world (Ozanne 6–7). By contrast, he couches his description of the Wallachian side of the Danube down to Giurgiu in terms of desolation, as lands are uncultivated and no living creature can be seen. However, the journalist tries to offer an explanation for this state of things, reminding his readers that the inhabitants prefer safer areas because of the frequent Turkish invasions into these territories (8). The slow movement of the steamer offers the traveller moments of reflection and of detailed descriptions of the landscape, and facilitates the transit towards the new country and the beginning of his temporary displacement.

The British journalist experiences various means of transport, and each of them offers different modalities of space perception. After the cruise on the Danube, he has the chance to travel with a new means of transport, which was still under construction during Mme de Hell's voyage in Romania: the train. In 1869, the railway connected the Danubian port of Giurgiu to Bucharest, the capital of Romania. Its introduction facilitated the connection with other European capitals and favoured the development of economy and tourism. The velocity of mechanical transportation also involved changes regarding the possibilities of spatial observation, leading to what Wolfgang Schivelbusch names "the shrinking of the natural world" (11). Ozanne's gaze does not linger on the landscape but highlights only one point of interest—Comana, "a pretty wood about half-an-hour's journey from Bucharest" (10). The traveller seems to suffer from what Michel de Certeau finds specific for "the railway navigation": "travelling incarceration," which means immobility inside the train while "seeing immobile things slip by" (111). When the train stops, the traveller's description becomes more extensive. Now he has the time to appreciate some young girls selling flowers and

[2] The term is used according to Henri Lefebvre's taxonomy, which points out the relationships between mental and real space, encompassed in the conceptual triad of spatial representation—perceived space, conceived space, lived space (33). The conceived space usually bears the imprint of stereotypes and prejudices.
[3] It is interesting to notice that he prefers to refer to Romania, the newly formed country, using the names of the former Principalities, as if rejecting its novel identity.

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wild strawberries to the passengers (Ozanne 10). The travel by train offers the advantage of time saving but diminishes the perception of the world.

The coach (*diligence*) is another means of transport James William Ozanne tries during his staying in Romania. Unlike the train, *diligence* offers him the opportunity to provide details about the route and even to produce poetic descriptions: "It was a lovely night, and as we rattled along the good broad road, lined on either side with crops of wheat and maize, we began to breathe freely again" (Ozanne 176). As Steve Matthewman remarks, coaches "permitted subjective connection with landscape, a direct experience of the immediate environment" (13). The sight lingers on various natural elements and registers the space linearly. Yet, the disadvantages of travelling by *diligence* become apparent as soon as it has to cross a stream with huge rocks and the conductor orders the passengers to descend and walk (Ozanne 177). The walking trajectories appear to be more harmful than the journey by coach, as the travellers get wet or incur various injuries. The British journalist prefers to remain in the coach for his safety, in spite of the conductor's protests. By comparison, Mme de Hell proves to be more adventurous, as she chooses to travel alone by coach from Galați to Bucharest, because no one else dares to undertake such a journey when the roads are still wet and extremely muddy and slippery (378). The trajectories of space designed by coach seem, thus, to be sinuous, highly influenced by weather, and quite challenging, revealing a country with a preponderant rural infrastructure.

The French lady traveller's temporary displacement in the new country does not cause her anxiety. On the contrary, she seems eager to explore the unfamiliar territories and to organize her own trajectories of space, despite the weather or the dangers. The British journalist overcomes his initial fears and accepts with interest his deployment in the unknown country. According to Tim Youngs, a characteristic of the travel writing in the last quarter of the nineteenth century is the desire to fill in the blanks of the "uncharted parts of the world" (2). Both voyageurs explore the space with inquisitive eyes and produce a quite balanced cartography of the Romanian territory, made up of shadows and lights. Mme de Hell points out that Romania is experiencing a period of transition, which seems promising for the future (viii), while Ozanne admits that despite its drawbacks the country has "a power of fascination simply unaccountable" (2). The travellers appreciate the progress—such as the introduction of gas illumination and of the tramway and railway—and the beginning of the modernization process.

The walking trajectories of the two voyageurs configure the topography of certain urban centres, offering glimpses of the social, cultural, administrative or economic aspects. Adèle Hommaire de Hell insists upon Galați, the multicultural Danubian city-port, while James William Ozanne focuses mainly on Bucharest, the capital of Romania. Both cities are presented as eclectic spaces, which reunite multiple contrasts—such as muddy streets and western-like social lifestyle—and Oriental and Occidental influences. The various means of transport the two writers use during their temporary residence provide different decoupages of the local spatiality and various modalities of space perception. The tormented ship voyage ensures a variety of multisensory details, while the peaceful steamboat cruise on the Danube offers the opportunity of extensive comments upon the landscape and the history of the country. The ferryboat, which facilitates the crossing of the river Siret, is regarded as tiring means of transport. The adventurous coach trips afford intense physical experiences and draw attention to the poor state of the roads in Romania, but also generate reflections on the natural beauty of the land. The modern train reduces considerably the duration of the travels, but diminishes the connection with the environment and therefore the possibility to create detailed descriptions. The network of the travellers' routes configures a versatile cartography of a newly formed country which reunites and transfigures Oriental and Occidental influences.

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