SPACE AND TIME IN CAMIL PETRESCU'S TRAVEL NOTES[1]

Abstract: *Camil Petrescu approached the travel note, an irregular species for his writing, to which he is defined by a polemical, dividing attitude, sometimes ironic, to which tradition, however, is subsumed. Rapid-Constantinopol-Bioram. Simplu itinerar pentru uzul bucureştenilor, this, "pseudo-reportage", as considered by exegete Liviu Călin, about a journey of several days in Constantinople, appeared in a small volume, in Bucharest, 1933. The present paper aims to follow the way in which the traveller's memory "acts" on the itinerary and since, this is a land with strong implications in the history of our people, for a period of 500 years, a land of legends, the text captures a particular aspect: time re-creates space, historical time becomes memory. Indeed, for the author - traveller and narrator at the same time - knowledge of this space is first pre-knowledge, followed, of course, by recognition.*

Keywords: *space, time, voyage*.

Camil Petrescu known as "the champion of anticallophile spirit", also approached the travel note, an irregular species for his writing, to which he is defined by a polemical, dividing attitude, sometimes ironic, to which tradition, however, is subsumed by chronology or scholarly references. *Rapid-Constantinopol-Bioram,* subtitled *Simplu itinerar pentru uzul bucureştenilor*, this "pseudo-reportage", as considered by exegete Liviu Calin, referring to a journey of several days in Constantinople, appeared in a small volume, in Bucharest, 1933, at Cartea Românească, being reprinted in 1974, at Dacia Publishing House, Cluj, in *Restituiri* series, edited by Mircea Zaciu.

In the book appeared, in Craiova, 2005, Scrisul Românesc Publishing House, *Camil Petrescu şi paradoxurile actului creator (Camil Petrescu and paradoxes of the creative act)*, which is "a reappraisal of the writer's prose work in terms of its relations with its theoretical doctrine" (Bălaşa, 2005: 7) Ariana Bălaşa approaches Camil Petrescu's travel note and asks herself: "Why should we read Camil Petrescu's journal today?" (*Ibidem*: 47).

She also offers an alternative response:

> If we do it just to get informed, there are richer sources. In fact, it is the journal of a great writer, whose pages stem from information sources, but we are more interested in his rational and emotional reactions to the impact with this exotic world. [...] We read it in the fictional register as a writing belonging to literature (*Ibidem: 48*).

Our work starts from this premise and aims to follow the way in which the traveller's memory "acts" on the itinerary and since this is a land with strong implications in the history of our people, for a period of about five centuries, a land of legends, the text renders a particular aspect: time re-creates space, historical time becomes memory.

As a reflective author, Camil Petrescu combines proper creation with meditation on the creation, which happens in the voyage note we deal with. From this well-known fact, Ion Cristoiu in the preface to the edition of 1974, gives an appreciation of the text self-reference:

> Placed on a fundamental direction of Camil Petrescu's work, *Rapid – Constantinopol –Bioram* is the note of a lucid travel, which along with sentimental pleasure of travel, gestures and cues of the <<traveller theatre>>, becomes the

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> observer of these experiences in an attempt to reveal the hidden mechanisms of the journey. The result is a book full of intellectual force from the beginning to the end, in which reportorial narrative interweaves with meditation on journey, a travel note which meditates on the mechanisms of the journey in general (Cristoiu, 1974: 7).

The text begins with a suggestively-entitled preamble *Preliminary Patience*. It plays the role of "parts of negotiating text" (Maingueneau, 2007: 164), since pragmatics explains the author's need to justify himself. In this respect, Dominique Maingueneau says: "The mere fact of speaking (as proposal of a work to the public does not mean speaking about it in the superlative ?) is a specific territorial incursion which requires remedial action. All forms of *captatio benevolentiae* popular to rhetoric are only an illustration of this requirement " (*Ibidem*, p. 163).

Since his first statements, the author tries to establish a "contract" with the reader. Here is the beginning: "Nu-mi plac deloc călătoriile. Sunt superficiale toate şi uneori vulgare ca nişte vise ratate " (I don't like travels at all. They are all superficial and sometimes vulgar like failing dreams). They are provocative, striking statements to begin a travel note with. A "but" is necessary. Perhaps : "But I will try another kind of travel and another travel note".

Next, the author ironically delimits the tradition of this species through the "praise" of superficial travel : "Prima condiție a unei excursii folositoare şi frumoase e să fie scurtă, grăbită şi superficială, ca să poată prinde singura realitate sesizabilă când eşti pe tărâm străin : atmosfera " (The first condition for a useful and beautiful trip is to be short, hasty and superficial, so that it can capture the only noticeable reality when you are on a foreign land : the atmosphere).

Here is the appropriate way to think of a travel and its outcome – the travel book : "Altminteri, e necesară trudă, şi studii întregi şi temeinice, adică făcute acasă, în bibliotecă, mult pe îndelete. Adevărul începi să-l pipăi sigur când a devenit element de laborator : îl pui în raft, îl dai jos, compari, notezi, îl împachetezi din nou sau îl laşi numai deoparte, pe birou, pentru a doua zi " (Otherwise, labor is needed, complete and thorough studies at home, at the library, in a leisure way. The truth is secure when it becomes part of the laboratory: you put it on the shelf, get it off, make comparisons, take notes, pack it again or put it on the desk for the second day).

Therefore, it is a thorough documentation providing the writer with a rich memory, traveller and narrator at the same time. This memory will act, as it was said, on the itinerary, so that we have the impression that the travel becomes a remembrance. Camil Petrescu's life and work are characterized by the deep thirst for knowledge.

This special documentary effort which hepled the traveller-writer go beyond the superficial atmosphere and discover a true reality is highly appreciated by Şerban Cioculescu : "Therefore, the writer put honest documentation before empty or surface « intuition ». Sight is not enough for him" (Cioculescu, 1966: 347). This lucid writer surprisingly becomes adept of inner landscapes : "Dealtminteri peisagiile exterioare – cele mai frumoase chiar – sunt neapărat mai puțin interesante decât cele interioare, care merg în tine ca în adâncimi fosforescente de mină şi de moarte" (As a matter of fact, outer landscapes – even the most beautiful – are necessarily less interesting than inner landscapes, penetrating you as phosphorescent deep mine and death).

Assuming that the concept of gender is not enough to define all possible literary contracts, since works may establish individual contracts, pragmatics distinguishes three types of such contracts: "those that fall just within a genre, those using generic contracts (combining several genres, using them ironically, parodying

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them, etc.) and those that do not correspond to any gender and claim to define a single pact " (Maingueneau, *op. cit*, p. 162). If we try to fit Camil Petrescu's text into this classification, it would probably find its place in the second type.

Once he decides to go on the trip, urged by a friend, the traveller-narrator tells himself: "În definitiv e vorba de o incursiune istorico-geografică, adică de una care nu are nevoie de nicio pătrundere" (After all, it is a historical and geographical travel, that does not require any insight). By this statement, he is almost playing with the reader's expectations, because, in fact, as Georgeta Antonescu observed (Antonescu, 2007: 862), descriptions and accounts of the volume are under the sign of *insight*, which is why this lexical-semantic field is well represented in the text, especially if we consider the small dimensions of: *intrăm, scoborâm, străbatem, ne strecurăm, ne scufundăm* etc. *(entering, descent, wandering, gliding, sinking).*

After this preamble, the first chapter *Dar e furtună*, which emphasizes the traveller's concern before leaving, ends with the statement "Let's climb" with metatextual function, because it invites the reader into the traveller-narrator's world, the reader himself becoming an imaginary traveller.

His delimitation from a whole literary and human tradition is supported by the way in which he reacts to his travel companions. For instance, he refuses to submit to the human weakness of seasickness. Thus, in the chapter entitled suggestively *Un spital pe valuri* after showing his "stubbornness" of not being seized with seasickness, the traveller-narrator confesses:

> Cunosc şi eu, o clipă, încercarea celor bolnavi. Ţi se pare că, după ridicarea vasului, o pompă îţi aspiră conţinutul pieptului, iar când vasul cade încet cu tine, simţi acolo un ghem viu; imediat apoi creierul îşi porneşte într-o parte, iar cutia craniană într-alta, ca apa care se clatină într-o strachină purtată. Picioarele nu-şi mai amintesc distanţa exactă până la podea. O sforţare, un act de voinţă, şi totul a trecut (I know myself for a moment what sickness is. You think that after raising the ship, a pump draws your chest contents, and when the ship falls slowly you feel there's a living ball; then your brain immediately starts to one side, and the skull to another, like water tossing in a bowl. Feet do not remember the exact distance to the floor. A stretch, an act of will, and everything goes by).

Moreover, the traveller-narrator is always detached from the others and the landscape, his travel companions remain some "simple silhouettes" being as Georgeta Antonescu stated, "more implied than really present in the reader's imagination" (*Ibidem*).

The author clearly names the addressee of the text, not only in the subtitle, but also in the confessions of the note: "Cred că e de prisos să descriu Stambulul pentru franţuzii şi nemţii care nu l-au văzut. Nu mă simt nici autor de pitoresc literar, nici de filme internaţionale. Scriu aici însemnări pentru prietenii de acasă, anume, şi această cunoaştere dă şi măsura şi întorsul din pană" (I think it is unnecessary to describe Stambul for the French and Germans who have not seen it. I feel myself author of neither literary beauty nor international films. I write notes to my home friends, and this knowledge conveys the quality of my writing). Evidence that this is the "initiated reader" as called by pragmatics, is that he appeals to intellectual associations and resemblances familiar to people in Bucharest: ,,Străbatem în fuga automobilului un cartier cam cum e strada Carol şi Calea Şerban Vodă, însă cu casele mai înalte, mai răsăritean (tramvaiele sunt verzi şi roşii), urcând spre colinele istorice ale Stambulului sfânt" (We drive through a neighborhood on Carol and Serban Voda Streets, with higher and more Eastern houses (trams are green and red), up to the historical hills of Holy Stambul).

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In the great Turkish city, in course of modernization, thanks to Kemal Ataturk, whom the author admires in particular, the traveller-narrator visits places that attract tourists traditionally, as St. Sophia, the hippodrome, bazaar and museum Top Kapu, other mosques, cafes, but feels special affinity when *searching* places (cemetery Buiuk Mezaristan, the Fanar) which remind him of the special historical links of our people with Inalta Poarta: "E acolo în fund pe râpele colinei, cam sub moscheea Soleiman (albă şi mare cât o cetate), şi faimosul Fanar cu străverii şi străverişoarele a jumătate din boierimea românească…" (In the background of hill cliffs, underneath mosque Soleiman (white and big as a fortress), there is the famous Fanar with grand-cousins of half of the Romanian nobility ...). Or: "Pe una scrie cu litere latine, banal, mic, ca o tăbliță de tramvai: *Fener.* […] Această tăbliță e aşadar insigna a o sută şi ceva de ani din istoria domniilor româneşti? Se adună anii mei de şcoală şi poveştile însângerate ale copilăriei, se urzesc amintirile pamfletelor istorico-politice" (One is written in trivial small Latin letters, like a tram slate: *Fener.* Could this slate be a badge of a hundred year history of Romanian principalities? My school years and bloody stories of childhood bring together, memories of historical political pamphlets devise).

Indeed, for the author - both traveller and narrator – knowledge of this land on which our fate as a people largely depended is first pre-knowledge, followed by recognition.

Thus, the very first encounter with this, "Eastern story", as the author names it, with Constantinople situated at the confluence of waters, reveals Camil Petrescu, the traveller keen to knowledge, well-informed, trying to recognize the places he knows so much about. He travels not only in space but also in historical time, so that the two temporal dimensions, past - present, seem to overlap through this travel. Moreover, under this modern present, the traveller is always *searching* traces of the past so that we can speak of a real reason for the *search*: "… noi, care căutăm ce a mai rămas de acum o mie şi sute de ani, suntem nişte zănateci care trăim în altă lume" (... we, who seek what's left of a thousand and one hundred years, are foolish living in another world).

Here is what he confesses when giving an insight of Constantinople: "ştiu, amintirea lecturilor mele e o caravană încărcată de miragii, întâmplări şi nume. Timp de secole au pornit de aici, din chioşcurile şi seraiurile acestui defileu, hotărâri crunte, care au dus moartea sau viața în principatele dunărene, au pornit porunci mânioase către paşii de pe Dunăre. Soarta Rusiei de sud, a Ungariei, a occidentului până sub zidurile Vienei, era schimbată de oameni care aici iubeau, aveau copii, sărbători şi zile de moarte. E pe aici pe undeva cetatea zidită de Murat al IV-lea, e legătura de tabii de piatră a lui Mohamed al II-lea, clădită aici cu un an înainte de căderea Bizanțului, înconjurat astfel din toate părțile. Pe aici trebuie să fie pe undeva Balta Liman cu <<Conacul>> în care în 1849 se hotăra soarta noastră. E încă, pe aici, poate, pe malul stâng, sub deal, între aceste înşirări de yaliuri şi castele, Ienichioi, unde la 1828 s-a hotărât independența Greciei. Pe dreapta, poate acolo unde sunt promenadele luxoase şi vilele, e desigur Therapia, cu palatele familiilor care, pornite din Fanarul încâlcit şi murdar al caselor de lemn, după ce ocoliseră şi se încărcaseră de averi în principate, nu se întorceau în mahalaua natală, ci îşi construiau aci, în această stație aristocratică, vile şi chioşcuri: Mavrocordat, Mavrogheni, Suțu, Moruzi, Caragea, Ipsilante etc., etc. Dar unde? Dar care anume sunt?" (I know, the memory of my readings is a caravan laden with charm, events and names. Cruel decisions leading to death or life in the Danubian principalities were made here for centuries, in kiosks and seraglios of this gorge, angry commands were given to pashas on the Danube. The fate of southern Russia, Hungary and West up to the walls of Vienna, was changed by people who loved, had children,

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holidays and death days here. There is somewhere the fortress built by Murat the Fourth, the strongholds of Mehmed II, built here a year before the fall of Byzantium, thus surrounded on all sides. Here must be Balta Liman with its <<Conac>> (manor) where our fate was decided in 1849. Ienichioi is still around perhaps on the left bank, underneath the hill, between this succession of yalis and castles, where Greece independence was decided in 1828. On the right, it is of course Therapia with luxurious promenades and cottages, palaces of families who had left the tangled and dirty Fanar of wooden houses, after rambling and gathering wealth in the principalities. They did not return to their home suburbs, but built cottages and kiosks here in this aristocratic area: Mavrocordat, Mavrogheni, Sutu, Moruzi, Caragea, Ipsilante etc. But where? But which are they?). What is important to notice here is that it is not places that awaken memories, but memory and pre-knowledge create places, sights and atmosphere. Sights are not what they appear to be, they receive a spiritual overflow: "Amintirea trecutului, înălțimea însăși, de turlă, noaptea cu lună, dau un soi de beție însă…" (Remembrance of the past, the tower height itself, the moonlit night, convey a kind of drunkenness…).

The author himself implies that the traveller's memory loads these places with something special. For example, reading on a slate that Fanar lies there, the place where the rulers of the principality came for a century, gives the place a special weight, otherwise, this historic place would not differ from the others: "…iar când, în zilele următoare, am străbătut cu o nostalgie ancestrală mahalale cu ulițe în costişe, cu lespezi desprinse, legate cu smocuri de iarbă între ele, printre case negre de lemn, cu balcoane cu geamlâc şi grădini închise, pe la răspântii cu platani, n-am cunoscut nimic şi nu m-a recunoscut nicio stafie. Să fie tăbliţa, să fie ce adăogim noi totul?..." (... and when, in the coming days, I wandered in ancestral nostalgia through the suburbs with sloping lanes, loose stones tied with tufts of grass, black wooden houses with glass balconies and closed gardens, and plane trees at crossroads, I knew nothing and I wasn't recognized by any ghost. Could it be the slate or what shall we add?)

Visiting each objective offers the narrator a fascinating insight into history, which requires, of course, a thorough documentation. This happens, for example, when visiting Rumeli-Hissar fortress: "Citesc acum, în camera de hotel, lămuriri despre ea, căci diseară vom merge, cale de o poştă, cu automobilele, de-a lungul Bosforului, ca s-o cercetăm sub lumina lunii" (I now read explanations about it in the hotel room, because tonight we are driving within a post mile, along the Bosphorus, to explore it under the moonlight). It is a real history lesson that follows the destiny of this people from Osman, "the first leader" for several hundred years.

The travel is sometimes a pretext to express concepts of aesthetics, which justify the way to travel and write a travel note:

> Îmi vine în minte reproşul pe care îl face Croce esteticei empiriste: nu poți cunoaşte nimic, dacă nu ai un plan, vag măcar, pe care să-l confrunți cu realitatea. Nu poți pretinde să aduni material estetic ca să-l studiezi, înainte de a şti mai întâi care e materialul estetic şi care nu, adică, în cele din urmă, fără un concept teoretic (I remember the reproach that Croce makes to empirical aesthetics: you cannot know anything, unless you have a plan, even vaguely, which to confront with reality. You cannot claim to collect aesthetic material and study it before knowing first what aesthetic material is, that is, without a theoretical concept).

But, as already shown, not only the traveller's memory acts on these places, but also that of the ones for whom this travel note was written, "those left behind". In order that the description of these places to create images for the receiver, the traveller-narrator resorts to images already known to them and the Bosporus is thus described:

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> Pentru cei care au străbătut trecătoarea de la Turnu Severin în sus, se poate cârpi o imagine a gâtului de apă care desparte Europa de Asia. Trebuiesc numai scoase stâncile de la Porțile de Fier şi oprită scurgerea prea văzută a şuvoiului. Încolo aceeaşi cale de apă largă între dealuri, aceleaşi coturi care închid şi deschid, ca nişte irisuri pe ecran, timp de aproape o oră, privelişti de măguri păduroase, cu vile la poale şi golfuri cu corăbii. Ba chiar şi pentru cei care nu cunosc decât defileul de la Călimăneşti la Brezoi se poate făuri o imagine. Desfaceți şi depărtați un mal înalt, stâncos, de altul, umpleți cotul cu apă adâncă, potolită, şi, sporind ruinele asemenea mesei lui Traian de o parte şi de alta, sporiți şi numărul vilelor, adăogați castele sarazine, suprimați ici şi acolo şoseaua, înlocuită aici cu mersul de apă" (For those who reached the gorge of Turnu Severin, one can draw a picture of the water that separates Europe from Asia. The rocks from Portile de Fier should be removed and the well seen flowing of the stream stopped. In other words, the same wide water stream between the hills, the same curves that close and open, like irises on the screen, for almost an hour, views of wooded hills, with cottages at the foot and bays with boats. Even for those who only know the gorge from Călimăneşti to Brezoi one can build an image. Loosen and separate a high rocky brink from another, fill the curve with deep still water, increase the number of ruins as Trajan's table, on each side, thus increasing the number of cottages, add muslim castles, remove the road here and there, replaced here by running water).

If we consider the theory of reading as enunciation, we can notice how the writer helps the receiver to build the world of the travel, starting from the clues provided by the text. It is about the *co-operant* reader or as Umberto Eco names him, *the model reader* (Eco, 1991: 95).

To conlcude with, Camil Petrescu's travel note, rich in digressions, full of historical information and legends, shows that historical and emotional memory of the traveller-narrator and the recipient, gives visited places a particular importance and a special weight.

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