The Poetics and Politics of Travel: an Overview

Carmen ANDRAŞ

> "Travel has a way of stretching the mind. The stretch comes not from travel's immediate rewards, the inevitable myriad new sights, smells and sounds, but with experiencing firsthand how others do differently what we believed to be the right and only way" (Ralph Crawshaw).

It is largely agreed upon the fact that, for a great part, 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. James Clifford synthesizes the definition of *travel* in close relation with *translation*: "My expansive use of "travel" goes a certain distance and falls apart into nonequivalents, overlapping experiences marked by different translation terms: "diaspora", "borderland", "immigration", "migrancy", "tourism", "pilgrimage", "exile". […] given the historical contingency of translations, there is no single location from which a full comparative account could be produced" (Clifford 1997: 11). Michel Butor extends the activities of travel beyond tourism, including in exchange reading and writing together with "nomadism", "settlement" and "exodus", exploration, pilgrimage, emigration, business trips or round-trips (Butor 1974).

The theme of travel is currently approached from the perspectives of imagology, travel studies ("les études viatiques" in French[1]), cultural and postcolonial studies, history, literature, geography, cartography, cultural anthropology, sociology, semiology[2], political sciences and other related domains of research, which encompass the discussion of themes like: the histories of travel and the travel of histories, the

[1] See: http://www.crlv.org/ Centre de Recherche sur la Littérature des Voyages, Université de Sorbonne.

[2] *Semiologies of Travel* by David Scott is the first book to explore comprehensively the role of semiology and signs in the encounter with foreign cultures as it is expressed in French travel writing. David Scott focuses on major writers of the last two hundred years, including Théophile Gautier, André Gide, Henri Michaux, Michel Leiris, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard, to show how ethnology, politics, sociology and semiotics, as well as literature, are deeply bound up in travel experience and the writing that emerges from it. Scott also shows how the concerns of Romantic writers and theorists are still relevant to reflections on travel in today's post-modern world. The book follows an itinerary through jungle, desert and Utopia, as well as through Disneyland and Chinese restaurants, and will be of interest to specialists in French studies and cultural studies as well as to readers of travel writing.

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relationship between travel – knowledge – power, between history and anthropology, discourses of identities and/or difference, the maps of travel and travel of maps, the poetics of the exile, or the definition of borders as spaces of intercultural and international communication and / or conflicts, the definition of travel accounts as documents and / or literature, etc. In Michel de Certeau's words, travel narratives "constitute interdisciplinary laboratories" where a vast range of fields and discourses converge" and an "everyday practice" (Certeau 1991: 115, 222)

Travel is often interpreted as a metaphor "by which we discuss other fundamental activities of life: we speak of our lives as a journey from death to birth and education as the road to knowledge. The journey is the metaphor by which we describe the mind's workings, our flights of fancy and imaginative adventures…." (Robertson 2001: XI). The journey is our "Traveling in the unconscious" (Cixous 1993: 70). Travel and mobility are crucial factors of histories, geographies, nations and cultures, most important in the contemporary endeavors toward globalization, trans - culturalism and - nationalism. Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* calls this globalization of mobility "the new internationalism" (Bhabha 1994: 5).

Poetics of travel (literature) play with its ambivalence, suggesting the travel's in-betweenness: pleasure of travel or travel of pleasure, literatures of travel or travel of literatures, cultures of travel or travel of cultures, theory of travel or travel of theory, education of travel or travel of education, histories of travel or travel of histories etc. The debate upon the art/science of travel (writing) continues to be of interest. Within the context of the heterogeneous genre of the travelogue and of today's age of globalization, CNN, and the internet, the poetics of travel literature is based largely on travel books, accounts and memoirs. One of their chief characteristics nowadays is that they all demonstrate a paradoxical resistance both to the very idea of travel(ing) as such and to the mimetic rhetoric of traditional travel narratives. Poetics of contemporary travel literature try to underline how these modern or postmodern texts question, revisit, subvert or reject such key notions of travel literature as exoticism, nostalgia, exile, nomadism, otherness or foreignness/selfhood, home/abroad, dwelling/traveling (which, in fact, cannot be separated; see James Clifford on "global commercialism", in *Traveling Cultures*). Poetics of travel and movement reflect upon the disembodiment of mobility and communication, the dislocation of space, the relation space-time (the chronotopes): "Telecommunications technologies, such as the telephone, radio or television, have made it possible to overcome territorial distances, have solved the problem of communication between geographically separated individuals, and have opened up the possibility of sending 'disembodied' messages; all this has been based on one fundamental concept; the conversion of space into time" (Gianetti 2001: 162).

Politics of travel focus on the role of travel in the formation of identity, and the travel-knowledge-power relations, which involve other pairs of relations between center-periphery, identity-difference, power-geography, mobility-passivity, the West-the East or the Orient (the Balkans).

In fact poetics and politics of travel (literature) cannot be totally separated as methodologies of studying travel and its related concepts: poetics and politics of location/dislocation, for example.

The word *travel* in English has a French origin, initially "travail" and meant – as it still does with that spelling – "bodily or mental labour or toil, especially of a painful

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or oppressive nature; exertion; trouble; hardship; suffering". "Nothing about pleasure", as Wykes rightly notices. In the past, travel was extremely painful and often unsafe. Indeed, the last source of the word "travel" is a medieval instrument of torture – the *trepalium* – a mechanism would perforate its victim's flesh with three pointed stakes (*tres* "three" and *palus* "stake"). The *trepalium* became a verb, *trepaliare*, which meant any form of torture, from torture to the Old French concept of *travailler* – or "putting oneself to pain or trouble". *Travailler* came to mean "work hard" in French. English borrowed the word as "travail" and this, in turn, was used to describe a tiresome journey-travel. The French language, on the other hand, never regarded travel with the same sense of uneasiness as did English. *Voyager* 'to travel' comes from the Latin *via*, or "way".

And even travel, accordingly spelt, is defined unhappily as the "act of travelling or journeying", "a movement through space that changes the location of something" or "the act of going from one place to another."[3] As a verb, it means nothing more than "to journey over, to pass, to journey on foot or in a vehicle, to tour abroad" (Irvine 1967: 1093). Defined by Wikipedia, "Travel is the transport of people on a trip or journey. Reasons for travel include: *Tourism – travel for recreation. This may apply to the travel itself, or the travel may just be the necessary investment to arrive at a desired location. *Visiting friends and family*Trade*Commuting – going to various routine activities, such as work or meetings.*Migration – travel to began life somewhere else; nomadic people do this*Pilgrimages – travel for religious reasons"[4]. We can also learn from dictionaries that "A travel image is one that captures the feeling of place and time, and portrays a land, people or culture in its natural state. It may be taken either in a foreign land or anywhere in one's own country. Excluded are ultra close-ups which lose their identity, studio-type model images, or images that have been obviously manipulated. The title is read before showing the image. It should indicate the location (town & country) and should complement the image"[5]. "Nothing about the fulfilment of the spirit, curiosity, the excitement of unfamiliar surroundings, or the amazement generated by marvels", Wykes concludes (Wykes 1973: 13). Travel always had pragmatic aims, so very obvious in its Anglo-American hypostases[6]. Nevertheless, during the 17th-18th centuries, pleasurable romantic and educational travel were going to impose themselves besides the pragmatic hypostases of travel.

In the twentieth century, travel writing came to be an object of study in its own right, and the last two decades have seen a steady stream of publications that have sought to map out the history of travel writing, to theorize it, and to investigate key

[3] wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn and Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary: http://dictionary.cambridge.org/cald/

[4] en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Travel

[5] www.pacamera.com/categyDef.html

[6] *Journey* is a "day's travel". The word comes originally from Latin via French. The Latin word *dies*, meaning 'day', led to *diurnus*, or 'daily' and then to the vulgar Latin word *diurnata* (modern Italian "giornata") which became jornee in Old French (*journée* today). The specific notion of a day's travel appears to have faded out of English during the 16th Century. *Tour* comes from Latin via French. The Latin word *tornus* means 'lathe', hence 'to turn'. It took on the meaning of a circuitous journey only in the 17th century. The term was popularised when, in the 18th century, it became fashionable for English young men of breeding to go on a *Grand Tour* of Continental Europe. However, it was not until about 1800 that the term 'tourist' was first used.

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questions of ethics and issues of identity. Mary Louise Pratt's important study of colonial landscape, the works of James Clifford and Paul Fussell, the growing number of studies deriving from work in cultural geography, representation theory, and postcolonial studies have resulted in a rich fund of secondary materials that complement the primary texts produced by travel writers.

Paul Fussel's *Abroad* is a reading of British "literary travelling" between the two world wars. He distinguishes three types: explorers, travellers and tourists. Explorers, he writes, like Francis Drake and Edmund Hillary, often end up with knighthoods. "No traveler, and certainly no tourist, is ever knighted for his performances, notices Paul Fussell, although the strains he may undergo can be as memorable as the explorer's." While "the explorer seeks the undiscovered, the traveler that has been discovered by the mind working in history, the tourist that which has been discovered by entrepreneurship and prepared for him by the arts of mass publicity. The genuine traveler is, or used to be, in the middle between the two extremes. If the explorer moves toward the risks of the formless and the unknown, the tourist moves toward the security of pure cliché. It is between these two poles that the traveler mediates, retaining all he can of the excitement of the unpredictable attaching to exploration, and fusing that with the pleasure of 'knowing where one is' belonging to tourism" (Fussell 1980: 39).

"But travel is work", Paul Fussell observes. "Before the development of tourism, travel was conceived to be like study, and its fruits were considered to be the adornment of the mind and the formation of the judgment. The traveler was a student of what he sought, and he was assisted by aids like the 34 volumes of the Medieval Town Series, now, significantly, out of print. One by-product of real travel was something that has virtually disappeared, the travel book as a record of an inquiry on the mind and imagination of the traveler. Lawrence's Italian journeys, says Anthony Burgess, 'by post-bus or cold late train or on foot are in that great laborious tradition which produced genuine travel books'. And Paul Theroux, whose book *The Great Railway Bazaar* is one of the few travel books to emerge from our age of tourism, observes that 'travel writing is a funny thing' because 'the worst trips make the best reading, which is why Graham Greene's *The Lawless Roads* and Kinglake's *Eothen* was so superb.' On the other hand, easy, passive travel results in books which offer 'little more than chatting,' or, like former British Prime Minister Edward Heath's *Travels*, 'smug boasting'. 'Let the tourist be cushioned against misadventure,' says Lawrence Durrell; 'your true traveler will not feel that he has had his money's worth unless he brings back a few scars.'" And, as Fussell concludes, "If exploration promised adventures, travel was travel because it held out high hopes of misadventures". In what tourism is concerned, Paul Fussell asserts: "As I have said, it is hard to be a snob and a tourist at the same time. A way to combine both roles is to become an anti-tourist. Despite the suffering he undergoes, the anti-tourist is not to be confused with the traveler: his motive is not inquiry but self-protection and vanity" (Fussell 1980: 39-40).

In his analysis of Paul Fussell's book, published in *Inscriptions*, an e-magazine, James Clifford distinguishes an "assumed topography, an already 'worlded' world (as Gayatri Spivak might put it) underlying Fussell's vision. The explorer 'seeks' the undiscovered; he and the other voyagers 'move toward' different experiences, discoveries. However formless or unknown the places an explorer visits (and this is a

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relative matter: how 'unknown' was the summit of Everest for Hillary? or the moon for Neil Armstrong?), the explorer's point of departure is clear. Home is a stable place to tell one's story, show one's photos, get one's knighthood. In Fussell's topography, home and abroad are still clearly divided, self and other spatially distinct. How far this is from the heterocultural situation of Britain today!

The title, *Abroad*..., has an old-fashioned ring. Abroad was once simply 'out there', over the Channel, a distanced but known set of places. And here Fussell's emphasis on the pleasure of orientation, of knowing where one is while traveling and while experiencing a domesticated frisson of adventure, rings true. The Eurocentrism, let alone andro- and Anglocentrism, of Fussell's definitions is all too clear. The genuine, reflective traveler, 'mediating' extremes, seeking what 'has been discovered by the mind working in history', moves across a landscape where things are in place-home and abroad, us and them-where one can go 'out' and 'return' with a representable experience or a discovery of interest to a stable community of readers. 'The mind working in history?' There is no need to ask whose mind, whose history... Fussell is right that these preconditions for the "genuine traveler" are no more" (Clifford, *Notes on Travel and Theory*).

The concept of "travel" is related to the categories of border, too. It is a transitional phenomenon implying transgression and communication sometimes, differentiation and opposition other times. The Westerner's travel "abroad" is the voyage across a liminal space (a threshold, a bridge or a crossroad). It is the overstep between two symbolic geographies, different civilizations, cultures, religions, races, or divergent ideologies and political systems. In ideal situations, the voyage is an opportunity for mutual knowledge and understanding between the traveller and the foreigner. Of all the literary genres Amanda Gilroy considers that travel writing in the Enlightenment and Romantic period emerges as perhaps "the most capacious cultural holdall", a hybrid discourse that traversed the disciplinary boundaries of politics, letter-writing, education, ethnography, anthropology, natural history, medicine, aesthetics, and economics (Gilroy 2000: 1). Indeed, the archaeological and anthropological research that was part of Britain's colonial project found its form in travel writing. Such genre crossings are acknowledged in the preface to naturalist Anders Sparrman's accounts of Cook's second voyage: "every authentic and well-written book of voyages and travels is, in fact, a treatise of experimental philosophy" (Gilroy 2000: III). Travellers often sought, Amanda Gilroy states, „to cross more than national boundaries. Sometimes the circulating discourses of travel secured self-identity and reaffirmed existing convictions of cultural superiority for the authors and readers of travel accounts, but the experience of geographic displacement also helped Romantic-era writers to renegotiate the cultural verities of «home». The disturbances of travel could destabilize the boundaries of national, racial, gender and class affiliation, thus enacting the disciplinary miscegenation that defined the mapping of geographical space" (Gilroy 2000: 1).

Academic researchers consider it important to register the "physicality of representation itself". This involves attending to "the multiple sites at which travel writing takes place and hence to the spatiality of representation" (Duncan 1999: 2). The representation of other cultures in travel literature is "a composite, fractual and spatialized construction. More than often truth and objectivity were decentred in 18th and 19th travel writing since direct observations collected on the spot were then either

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once again worked out or directly incorporated in official accounts prepared for public circulation" (Duncan 1999: 2).

There is also a second sense in which the travel archive is "fractured". Too often, we think, confesses Duncan, that "journals, letters and published writings are assigned to literary scholars and historians; sketches, watercolours and paintings to art historians; and photographs and postcards to historians of photography. We suggest that the alternative strategy of attending to the physicality of representation imposes the obligation to read these different media together and, in so doing, to attend to their different valences and silences" (Duncan 1999: 2).

In Duncan's opinion, there is yet a third sense in which we want to accentuate the spatiality of representation: "travel writing as an act of translation that constantly works to produce a tense 'space in-between'". "Defined literally, continues Duncan, 'translation' means to travel from one place to another and implies an obvious dialectic between the 'recognition' and 'recuperation' of difference. 'Memory', individual, but mostly collective or social memory, is also a hypostasis of translation marked by a boundary crossing and by a realignment of what has become different. This means that in representing other peoples, cultures and other natures, authors of travel accounts 'translate' one space into another, through a language-game going to and fro from their own cultural reference to the foreign one. Just as in literary transpositions from one language into another, translations from one culture into a referential one are approximate. They take place in an intermediary space where both cultures meet, define or reject, understand or reprehend, combine or clash, annex or censure, include or exclude, compare or classify each other, 'a space in-between'". Consequently, "this space of translation is not a neutral surface and it is never innocent: it is shot through with relations of power and of desire" (Duncan 1999: 2). Translation is either a "domesticating method, an ethnographic reduction of the foreign text to target language cultural values, bringing the author back home" or a "foreignizing method, an ethnographic pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad" (Venuti 1993: 210). Travel writing is often domesticating the unknown and inherently the dangerous in a knowledge-power play. Nevertheless, in its most fragrant imperial posture, through its imaginative or actual occupation of that "space in-between" – the space of "transculturation" (Pratt 1992) – travel writing can also reveal ambivalence and hybridity, a sense of questioning its own objectivity, expertise and theses (Duncan 1999: 3-4).

The concept of travel, characterized by its border status, is always defined in relation to the traditionally accepted as dichotomous concepts like: difference / totalization or absolutization, identity / alterity, representation of the Other / self-representation, otherness / sameness, imagology / ideology, subject / object of the representation, subjectivity / objectivity, activity / passivity etc., focusing on their in-betweenness instead.

It is Difference then that defeats totalization. But it also provides an alternative to totalization, insofar as what the plurality of the object invites is an articulation in multiple – i.e. different – "voices". The critique of totalization preaches a Nietzschean perspec-tivalism of multiple voices, many "standpoints".

The issue is "not plurality but alterity: the problem with Otherness is not that it resists being contained; the problem is that it can never be reached. …The Other is that

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which cannot be reached, but cannot be avoided either (death, 'insomnia', 'trauma', or 'haunting' to convey its unsettling effects)". Postmodernist theories challenge "the traditional subject-object distinction, but they do so in different ways. The 'postmodernism of difference' insists that the object is more active than it seems (e.g. texts 'produce' / 'proliferate meanings', etc.). The 'postmodernism of otherness' insists that the 'subject' is more passive than it seems. Levinas will speak of the subject's being constituted as such by being 'accused', 'afflicted', etc. , postmodernism thus rejects the empirical identification of subjectivity with activity and objectivity with passivity; but it also rejects the idealist attempt to collapse the distinction between subject and object" (Shankman and Lollini 2002: 15-7).

Location/displacement, mobility or activity/passivity, center/periphery are in fact pairs of concepts intrinsic in the postmodern (postcolonial) definition of travel. In the tradition of Said's analysis on the travel of theory, James Clifford considers that "'Location', here, is not a matter of finding a stable 'home' or of discovering a common experience. Rather it is a matter of being aware of the difference that makes a difference in concrete situations, of recognizing the various inscriptions, 'places' or 'histories' that both empower and inhibit the construction of theoretical categories like 'Woman', 'Patriarchy' or 'colonization,' categories essential to political action as well as to serious comparative knowledge. 'Location' is thus, concretely, a *series* of locations and encounters, travel within diverse, but limited spaces… To know who you are means knowing where you are. Your world has a center you carry with you…. Centers and borders, homes and other places, are already mapped for us. We grow, live across and through them. Locations, itineraries: helping us know our place, our futures, while always having to ask. 'Where will WE run out of continent?'" Clifford's discovery is that nothing matters "but movement: not where you are or what you have, but where you come from, where you are going and the rate at which you are getting there" (Clifford, "Notes on Travel and Theory"). As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "it is the body in its orientation toward and action upon and within its surroundings that constitutes the initial meaning-giving act" (*qtd* in Young 1990: 147). In the philosopher's opinion, meaning, definition, identity, and structure are the outcome of motility, movement through space.

Relations to place, power, and identity are often part of the traveller's luggage. Of particular significance is research into issues of gender and travel writing. In her book *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*, Gillian Rose argues that the academic discipline of geography has always been dominated by men. In this respect, it mirrors the history of travel, for this too has been predominantly a man's activity. The voyages of discovery, the mapmaking and surveying that were the objectives of so many journeys, were almost all undertaken by men alone. Susan Robertson comes to the same conclusion: "[…] when Paul Fussell speaks of travel, he means travel 'abroad' to foreign lands, the adventures that men (not women) of privilege, freedom, and education engage in and report about in their travel books, which hence take the reader 'abroad, into the author's brain, and into his own'" (Robertson 2001: XIII; Fussell 1980: 204).

In fact, travel is becoming day by day a metaphor of the globalized world where conceptual and political boundaries are in continual motion themselves and the mobile identity of the tourist, businessman, stranger, or nomad, who are travelling between unity or stability and alienation, exile or homelessness in geographical/ mental

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"unmapped" territories. Travel's expansion brings about not only new ways of communication or knowledge, but also the feeling of the obliteration of place and the consciousness of a transitory identity. Baudrillard, for example, "In search of astral America", discovers this feeling in "the America of desert speed", which obliterates objects in an "aesthetics of disappearance" and yet increases the traveller's "mental desert" (Baudrillard 1988: 5). On the other hand, James Clifford rejects the dichotomy between place/mobility, home/away, and introduces the concept of "dwelling-in travel" ("Travelling Cultures", 96-112). Travel is indeed a metaphor of individual freedom and personal experience. Temporary dislocation and absorption of what seems a different identity, does not have to mean an alienating experience. It means the freedom of mobility and choice. Dramatic, indeed, is the condition of those who cannot travel, except in their dreams!

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La poétique et la politique du voyage: vue générale

Les études viatiques ont acquis récemment une place importante en tant que discipline académique grâce au caractère pluridisciplinaire. Notre étude analyse le sujet en question des points de vue de la littérature, l'histoire, géographie, imagologie, cartographie, anthropologie, sociologie, les sciences politiques etc. L'histoire du monde est en grande mesure l'histoire des voyages, des mobilités, migrations, y compris leur intégration dans de nouvelles topographies si bien que la lecture et l'écriture de ces expériences (littérature de voyage et cartographie, documents, cartes, illustrations etc.). L'étude a l'intention de se concentrer sur la poétique et la politique du voyage et des récits de voyage : la relation art, plaisir et science du travail, conscience de soi et conscience de l'altérité, la relation entre connaissance et pouvoir dans la construction discursive et la création imaginaire de l'Autre, la relation centre et périphérie, la transformation or marginalisation des sociétés observées etc. Notre conclusion est que le voyage est une métaphore de la liberté de mobilité individuelle, et pas nécessairement la métaphore de la condition postmoderne caractérisée par l'aliénation et déterritorialisation de l'individu confronte avec la société globale .

The "Gheorghe Şincai" Research Institute for Social Sciences
and the Humanities of the Romanian Academy
Târgu-Mureş

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