"CAMINANTE" BETWEEN JOURNEY DIARY AND CONFESSION

Cristina-Eugenia Burtea-Cioroianu
Assoc. Prof., PhD, University of Craiova

Abstract: Octavian Paler's writing Caminante though liable to fall into the journey diary category along with Journeys through memory. Egypt. Greece, Journeys through memory. Italy, still contrasts through personal load, through the need for confession. Therefore, in Caminante Octavian Paler nevertheless breaks free from Journey through memory leaving the travel memories genre and entering the authentic journal territory. Paler uses his journey to Mexico as a pretext for a series of essays on Cortés, Ciudad de Mexico, Moctezuma, aztecs and mayans, pyramids and life in general. The writer will assume in Caminante the traveller's condition, for whom the journey means self awareness, confrontation with himself and his dilemas. Through myths, Paler is trying to offer himself a compensation of the struggle against an overwhelming reality, in a world created without fissures and upsetting questions. Octavian Paler's journeys display a profound intellectual adventure, meaningful and shining, one detectable on the ideatic level rather than on the level of an immediate reality.

Keywords: journey, confession, essay, diary, myths.

Introduction

We can notice in the evolution of the contemporary literature, an expansion of the authentic document, of the diary, although the diaristic genre had been overshadowed for many years, it had been kept in an "antechamber" of literature, without being completely assimilated nowadays. The diary is, as it was demonstrated, "a sign of culture's maturity, fullnes,"[1] showing "the level of development specific to the society and to the consciousness of human personality,"[2] being a necessity of the current times. Belonging to the same sphere of subjective literature, the personal diaries, the memories, the confessions and the literary autobiographies have many common points. However, between the journal and the other related species, there are structural differencies determined by the essence of its content, by the specific techniques of writing it, by the vision it projects onto the life facts and circumstances it evokes.

The memories, the confessions and the literary autobiographies are retrospective experiences, filtered through the man's consciousness, by means of the conclusions made on the basis of our life experience. Octavian Paler's books – *Roads through Memory. Egypt, Greece* (1972) *Roads through Memory. Italy* (1974) – fall under the category of the travel memoir, that includes the "moral reflection and a discreet poetry of time,"[3] while *Caminante* "focuses on the firect formula of the diary."[4] The first journey to Egypt, taken when he was 30 years old, (in 1956), and the second, when he was 44, reveal us a mature writer, characterologically and intellectually shaped, displaying a great spiritual disponibility.

The narrative formula of these "roads through memory" is that of remembrances, of the flow of retrospections, which explains the words of the traveller-writer included in the foreword to the 1972 volume: A part of the details from this book faded away, another part were intentionally ignored."[5]

[1] Eugen Simion, *The Fiction of Personal Diary*, vol. I, Univers Enciclopedic, Bucharest, 2001, p. 12.
[2] *Idem.*
[3] Eugen Simion, *Contemporary Romanian Writers*, vol. III, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1984, p. 516.
[4] Nicolae Oprea, *The Work and the Author*, Paralela 45, Bucharest, 2001, p. 113.
[5] Octavian Paler, *Roads through Memory. Egypt.Greece*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1972, p. 7.

BDD-A29468 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:09:39 UTC)

Following hard upon Octavian Paler, we notice that the author's intention is not "necessarily to write a travel book, but a book where the roads turn into subjective time and questions"[6], that is "something different." The roads through memory have first of all a self-expressive function, concerned with the transposition of the writer's soul of a cultivated poet, dominated by impressions, images, by the entire picturesque of some close and still distant countries, by landscapes, monuments of art, gestures that he filters through the various instances of meditation. Memory is just one of them, that the author seems to have integrated into his obsessions, next to solitude, desert, etc., recurring themes of Octavian Paler' s writings.

Although he "is a sedentary individual, a home-lover," Octavian Paler proves himself to be a tenacious traveller, endowed with the power of covering enormous spaces, without complaining about the shock generated by going beyond the borders between the civilizations. He begins his travels as an insider concentrated on the search of inner images or of the impressions left by the readings. The travel becomes for Octavian Paler a way of decanting his numberless nostalgias and obsessions, projections of his mainly romantic structure.

"Caminante" between journey diary and confession

Although it also deals with the travel diary, ***Caminante*** breaks with the *Roads through Memory*, going beyond the frames of the memoirs-based travel and pentrating between the borders of the authentic diary: "The Mexican «diary» is my first real diary, written on the basis of the direct impressions, comprehending what I thought and felt, daily, in a world that surprised me by fissions and and by its equivocal time."[7] The book is suggestively entitled *A Mexican Diary (and counter-diary)*, following the model of Malraux's *Anti-Memoirs*, a suggestion that will be essayistically exploited by the writer, in the present pages. Paler gives up the enfranchised idea, according to which any diary is by definition a mirror of reality, leaving his essayistic mark upon it and involving the reader in a lecture that, needs here and there extended pauses of meditation.

Paler uses the travel to Mexico as a pretext for a series of essays on Cortés, Ciudad de Mexico, Moctezuma, on the Aztecs and the Maya people, on the pyramids and life in general. The manner the author chose o write the book is indeed interesting. Thus, much of book is written during the travel, but, at the end of each essay, there are several paragraphs written with italics, by means of which Paler comes with additions and impressions "objectively," shaping thus a fascinating antithesis between the man that tries to get acquainted with Mexico through the eyes of the traveller and the man that makes remarks on it, reading again notebooks including travel notes: "There are, probably, places that call you not necessarily in order to know them, to get familiar with them, but to show you the way you perceive them. Unwillingly, the diary I kept in Mexico gradually became the story of a rupture: the rupture of the Mexican soul, as well as of my soul, as I discovered myself dumbfoundedly in this rupture."[8] The erudite traveller complements his travels notes in Mexico, the land of the mysterious civilizations, enveloped in the tropical sun. It is a book written "on the spot," in short, alomost sterile sequences of happenings, but not devoid of a deep experience and a concentrated vision: "Objectively precise, this is permanently mirrored in another vision, the subjective one."[9] Although it is a travel book, the author's intention in *Caminante* is not to put down excitedly what he observes, but rather what he feels when he rediscovers myths such as the snake, the pyramids, the aquatic labyrinth, Moctezuma, etc. Paler tries to offer himself among the myth a compensation for the anxieties in front of an onerous reality, in a world shaped without fissures and concerning questions.

Through the essayist's eyes, Mexico seems to be almost exotic. The Mexican travel is written down daily, the impressions are immediate, lest the writer should miss some detail that

[6] *Idem.*

[7] Octavian Paler, *Caminante*, Albatros, Bucharest, 2003, p. 7.
[8] Octavian Paler, *Caminante*, Eminescu, Bucharest, 1980, p. 7.
[9] Marin Sorescu, *Take Care while Bringing the Piano Downstairs*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1985, p. 208.

BDD-A29468 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:09:39 UTC)

might subsequently ontribute to the overview, in a really contagious efervescence. Octavian Paler puts everything down meticulously in a pocket book, that he learned how to use "along the way," putting it on his knees or on the corner of a table, in the plane, in the bus, in the hotel room, or on the hot stones of the pyramids. As far as the relief, the clime, the people, the Mexican traditions are concerned, that turned into the source of a serious analysis, the author does not lose the occasion to have a dilaogue with his own *self*, to confess himself. In the case of Paler, everything is related to the self: "Actually, we do not need to travel all over the world, to wander. (…) Of course, to see involves first of all the need to see. However, we probably do not discover anything important during a travel, unless we discover something within ourselves. A travel is finally, similar to the Odyssey, almost always a travel of our own truths and an opportunity to make things clear, as long as it does not resume to simple impressions."[10]

Standing between "the hands of the god of time" and those of "the ancient god,"[11] the writer begins his travel by the focus on the plane flight, so anguishing for somebody like him, "born under Cancer," which arouses his spirit, making an analogy with Icarus' flight, that we, the ordinary people, will always perceive symbolically and not as a aspiration, as: "(...) our souls will always belong to the land that I can distinguish fragmentarily, covered by the forests."[12] If the other travellers spend their time up to the destination by reading detective novels, Paler rememorates his melancholies, so well-known to us, shadows of the writer in his works. The arrow-like covering of a Gothic cathedral reminds him of his lost manuscript, he had long searched for, entitled *Rehabilitation of the Middle Ages*, and it outlines a real discourse in favour of this period: "(...) «the night of the Middle Ages» represents, in my opinion, on eof the most obstinate didactic platitudes. Giotto and Dante can be abusively annexed to Rennaisance, as forerunners. How could we reconcile the thirsty for the absolute og the Gothic edifices with the idea that there is only barbarity, cruelty and confusion beyond Renaissance? I may be wrong when I claim that Renaissance is a bright fatigue of the Middle Ages, but I am convinced that despite the current prejudices that reduce the Middle Ages to evils, people dared more then from certain points of view. The Gothic arrow is the sign of a spirit that aimed directly at the sky, while the wisest of all, the most practical, Renaissance, preferred to discover the earth. (...) Icarus is maybe a myth more appropriate for the Middle Ages than for Renaissance."[13]

In a century that "forces us not to be patient..."[14], where "We search for wisdom itself in concentrated forms"[15], obeying the alert rhythm from one boarding to another, who remembers the "outdated maxims" such as the Latin "*festina lente*?"[16]. We plentifully sense the subtle irony of the writer disappointed by those "wander through the world far and wide, understanding so little from it" and deluding themselves into thinking that "the world has no longer any secrets to hide."[17]

The extremely sensitive structure of the essayist, able to filtrate even the traces of sand from under the steps of time, feels even closer to the vision of the American historian William H. Prescott on the Mexican world. By his paper entitled *The Conquest of Mexico*, Prescott makes known the term *Aztec* in the whole scientific world: "Before, while Stephens blazed the path to the temples and pyramids of the Maya civilization, holding the hatchet, Prescott, almost blind, was writing down on his shiver plate *The Conquest of Mexico*, revealing to the world, without going out of his working room, the Aztec civilization. As far as I am concerned, I like Prescott to Stephens, as I continue to be an eternal dilettante among the travels' professionals."[18]

[10] Octavian Paler, *Caminante*, Albatros, Bucharest, 2003, pp. 149-151.
[11] Octavian Paler, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
[12] Octavian Paler, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.
[13] Octavian Paler, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.
[14] *Ibidem*, p. 16.
[15] *Ibidem*, p. 18.
[16] *Ibidem*, p. 17.
[17] *Ibidem*, p. 19.
[18] *Idem.*

BDD-A29468 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:09:39 UTC)

This is the traveller Octavian Paler, who, left in search of the world, assumes the role of creator and reshapes, re-creates and reinvents it between the walls of his room, on another continent, an insular continent of his solitudes. Convinced that the Mexican fiesta [19] is the product of "a world that amuses easily," the writer was to discover that sadness can hide beneath any mask: "Such as laugh, in the case of Baudelaire also knows sadness, the fiesta also knows solitude. Solitude is, according to Octavio Paz, the source of this burst of happiness and joy. In other terms, the Mexican needs celebrations to do away with sadness, to get out of himself. Without these celebrations, in the absence of their noise and brightness, the Mexicans could not break free from time to tine, from the negative feelings inside them. (...) They enjoy these parties with all their heart, to return then to their loneliness."[20] This may be the reason why "the Mexican calendar is overcrowded with celebrations"[21], that turn the streets' pavement into scenes where Indians with their faces hidden beneath the masks decorated with colourful bonetts dance. Într-o asemenea lume cele mai simple gesturi devin simbol, capătă semnificaţie: "The dance transforms into meaning. The soul purges itself off the dust. It becomes pure. (...) The measure, (the limit, the restraint) revenges by excess. (...) The fest purifies the souls from the toxines of solitude, this is why the opportunity offered by the fiesta must not be lost."[22]

The writer has the qualities of a good psychologist, being able to penetrate not only into the labyrinth of his own doubts and anxieties, but also into the abyss of the Mexican soul, noticing subtly the duality that characterizes the behaviour of the Aztec gods' worshippers: "(...) the Mexican soul is a mixture of passion and reluctancies. Passion gets him out of himself, whereas reticences make him yield. The Mexican gives us the feeling of insecurity, when he actually experiences a permanent fight with himself. Those knowledgeable about the Mexican soul made me understnad that, feeling himself vulnerable, the Mexican is ready to risk everything. Although he fears dangers, none of them seems to him to be too big. Dignity probably means for him to hide his fear as good as he can. It is not difficult to understand why some quiet people screa their heads off; why an usually shy temperament suddenly becomes aggressive; and why the most vital passion is sometimes so close to death. However, such as violent rains fall from the burnt sky, the most ceremonious Mexican can make us feel pleasantly surpised, if he is provoked. In order to hide his shyness, he becomes fighting. Aware of his weaknesses, he risks more than it is necessary. (...) Introverted and cordial at the same time, the Mexiacan does not reveal his soul more than it is necessary. He prefers to remain an enigma. (...) He feels safe only when he must bear his solitude. Furthermore, he got used to being lonely so much, that it is only violently that he can give up on his solitude. This is the reason why he sings and dances during the parties until he becomes exhausted."[23]

The gods of some excessive and volcanic, hot tempered people, could only be devoid of restraints, getting closer to the gods of Olympus only by the humanism that they borrow from those that worship them: "(...) my mind of European citizen, familiar with other kinds of myths, with gods that celebrate in Olympus, committing adulteries cold-bloodedly, was not ready to understand a god that stumped along the land, among the nopal bushes until he flew to the sky, after he had been a king held in high esteem and a known man of wisdom in Tula. Sometimes, I felt like smiling during the first part of tragedy. Each time I was tempted to do so, I flushed the very following moment. Quetzalcoatl insisted upon knowing all the pains of the world, which helped him see that life and death condition one another reciprocally, similar to

[19] Florica Dimitrescu, *Dictionary of New Words*, IInd edition, Logos, Bucharest, 1997, p. 102.
[20] Octavian Paler, *Caminante*, Albatros, Bucharest, 2003, pp. 30-31.
[21] *Idem.*
[22] Octavian Paler, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.
[23] *Ibidem*, pp. 58-60.

BDD-A29468 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:09:39 UTC)

suffering and hope."[24] Projected into another space and time, the traveller thirsty for knoweldge, must "first adress mythology, before history."[25] Myths acquire here profoundness and meanings, "that our words can no longer render"[26], as we find ourselves on the land where the balance scales are never in an equilibrium, where "(...) the tree of the universe has two arms. An arm of love. Another of suffering."[27]

The writer's humanism seems to be undermined by his attempt to understand the Aztec and Maya gods, that need the death of human beings in order to remain alive. They seem to intuit that, by their cruelty, they break a cosmic order. The reproductions of gods seem to gain the colour of the paintings illustrating the people terrorized by the Inquisition, ot by the dictators thirsty of blood, being thus associated with the esthetic sphere of the grotesque: "(...) a sculpture almost three meters tall, weighting two tons, representing Coatlicue, «wearing a skirt of writhing snakes». The most fierce in the Aztec Olympus, according to the European taste. Brutal and hypnotic. Her face is formed by two facing serpents (after her head was cut off and the blood spurt forth from her neck in the form of two gigantic serpents), referring to the myth that she was sacrificed during the beginning of the present creation. She wears a necklace made of human hearts, hands, and skulls. The skirt of snakes, rhombsu-shaped, symbolozing the earth, is encircled with a dark coloured belt, illustrating a skull and two knotted snakes. Her feet and hands are adorned with claws and her breasts are depicted as hanging flaccid from pregnancy. (...) The stome was smoked with nopal essence in the temple of Tenochtitlan and splashed with blood"[28] ; Xochipilli, the young god of Beauty, of Youth, «the prince of Flowers» was represented by a skull, whose drawn image suggested a terrifying grimace."[29] The comparison with the gods of Olympus becomes necessary, by an antithesis that brings face to face two different cultures, one that serves the beautiful and the art and another subjected to terrors and fear: "Although the truth is less and less comparable to the beautiful, it is difficult not to agree with the gods, that shaped beautiful gods, luring them to the human pleasures. The Aztecs distorted the gods' faces and wreathed them with snakes, to make them as terrifying as possible."[30] Thus, the fear that supported flourishing empires until the arrival of conquistadors, is preferable to those, who, beyond being perceived as a disembarrassment of the gods with terrifying faces, become "(...) am implacable end that was to be expected."[31]

In Mexico, similar to Greece and Egypt, the art descends on the sand in the time glass, to turn into the strong essence of myths: "In Mexico, (...) I understood that «mythological time» does not necessarily elapse to the gates of the archaeological sites. The gods come there from time to time under the form of souvenirs, bought by the visitors. However, on the fields of cacti or in the secluded villages neighbouring them, there are moments when the arid face of the god of rain can be dimly noticed.

The Mexican history finally came to terms with them. It seems that history is not enough for the Mexican people and that myth offers them everything they cannot find inside history. This is the reaon why, for the Mexicans, legends are not part, as in the case of other nations, only of their cultural patrimony. They are not simple stories. They seem to excerpted from the contemporary life, contaminated by it, mixed with it."[32] In a country where "the vocation for myth remained almost intact"[33] and where "a myth is not a simple story on

[24] *Ibidem*, p. 57.
[25] *Idem.*
[26] *Ibidem*, p. 55.
[27] *Idem.*
[28] Octavian Paler, *Caminante*, Albatros, Bucharest, 2003, pp. 69-70.
[29] *Ibidem*, p. 71.
[30] *Idem.*
[31] Radu Sorescu, *Octavian Paler's Work, Didactica Nova, Craiova, 1996*, p. 90.
[32] Octavian Paler, *op. cit.*, p. 168.
[33] *Ibidem*, p. 297.

BDD-A29468 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:09:39 UTC)

gods, it is also a way of feeling"[34], where "there are also shadows in the light" and where "happiness is sometimes painful,"[35], we discover the Minotaurul, between the confusing situations of a "vegetal labyrinth"[36] and Sisyphus climbing up a rainy cloud and falling down "into the flames of hell."[37]

Octavian Paler is a master of the ample descriptions, abundant in visual and auditory elements, that pave the way for the imaginative sphere: "The sun is burning right above us, in the middle of the day, on a perfectly clear sky. Down, among the ruins, pepper tress are in blossom. All around, there were many extinct volcanoes. I close my eyes, and I seem to hear a dull sound coming maybe from the womb of volcanoes..."[38]; "The headlight resemble some bright hatches that help the bus to force its way through this liquid jungle that threatens to engulf us, while the night is torn by lightnings. The electric snakes, (lightnings) invading the sky, penetrate the night with a troubling panic, making us fell that we strike into a primordial night, where everything is both terifying and sublime. The jackals probably lie now in ambush, with their eyes burnt by lightnings, looking at the sky and nobody in the jungle dares to sing or shout anymore. The thunders fall imperiously, as if determined to tear the night down, to turn it into ruins, to mix it with the ruins of Mexico."[39] The pictural sense of the essayist transposed on stamps interwoven from the delicate threads of corn silk from the Aztec fields seem to rather fit the efervescence of the colours present in Van Gogh's paintings. It is an ecstasy, a euphoria of personal undergoing, a concentration of the senses washed by the rains Maya gods and by the sun of the Aztec pyramids. *Involuntary memory*, curled as the feathered serpents around the immediate experience makes its presence felt, springing as the time-burnt grass under the traveller's feet: "The sun is beating down on my back. For a moment, I feel like being home, turning back from the beach, in the afternoon, when in Bărăgan, the light seems to lighten on the windshield, except that, on the left, there is the famous Popocatépetl, mysterious and glacial."[40]

The existential duality that seems part of that universal dichotomy that came into existence as early as genesis, lies at the basis of the present paper. The fragments of reality, reshaped by means of an interiorization of memory, confer coherence and steadiness to the visual, turning into a stimulus of confession. One of the confessions the author makes at a certain moment comes to consolidate the idea that the thorough analysis of the Mexican soul's vibrations brings out into high relief the deep rupture within his soul: "Mexico made me reflect on my condition of an intellectual born in a village I had left from while still a child. All the ruptures that exist deep down into my soul are complemented by another one, that makes clear and resumes all the others. It became clear to me that everything conservative inside myself complicated my melancholies and mistakes."[41]

The writer meets a civilization of the contrasts, difficult to understand for an European in love with the antiquity. Mexico seems to be enveloped in a mystery that it knows how to cultive, amazing us once again by the celebration of life and death with the same pathos: "Used to fear death, I was surprised to see it celebrated, in Mexico. Of course, I quickly realized that the mexican people were actually trying to exorcise fear, to make it easier to endure, to go through. However, I admit that there are details that disconcert in Mexico a man inclined rather to avoid the thought that he will day some day... (...) The Mexicans do not pretend to make philosophy. They just act exactly how

[34] *Ibidem*, p. 286.
[35] *Ibidem*, p. 298.
[36] *Ibidem*, p. 185.
[37] *Ibidem*, p. 154.
[38] *Ibidem*, pp. 82-83.
[39] Octavian Paler, *Caminante*, Albatros, Bucharest, 2003, pp. 207-208.
[40] *Ibidem*, p. 88.
[41] *Ibidem*, p. 61.

BDD-A29468 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:09:39 UTC)

they feel. They are convinced that in the absence of an ironical scepter, death would be unbearable."[42]

Prisoner of an unusual and enigmatic universe, the writer climbs the steps of the pyramids, descending to the mysteries of the ancient civilizations and meditating upon the wisdom issuing from the sunburnt stones: "The gods are the only ones that do not regret anything (...) their shadow neither shortens nor elongates."[43]; "Take a look at things without intending to understand everything. There are things that you will better undestand from details and silences, than by words. There are also thinkers that we can be better understand if we have a good look at their doubts, rather than their certainties"[44].

At the end of his travel, abundant in meanings hidden beneath the mask of time, Octavian Paler, the one that let himself conquered bot by the real, thrilling life, but by an imaginary life, returns to the *sea*, "as round as a life"[45], from whose waves the writer's ideas, in a continuous flux and reflux seem to have taken shape: "(...) Mexico. This country that does not seem to be attracted by the oceans that wash it and that flew away from the shore; that came on the shore together with Quetzalcóatl, but that stopped, as it did not want to follow it, returning among the cacti and the tropical rainforests to wait for it; well, this country teaches us the same lessons as the sea! This is the most unexpected discovery that I make at the end of my travel, that unsettles many of my reasonings."[46] Hope, the last one found in Pandora's box, ("wealthy in gifts"[47]), becomes the writer's last thought in front of those that confined him to the straps of the less mythological defamations: "I have achieved one single remarkable thing until the present moment. I have fortunately kept hope, despite all the mistakes I have made and all the deceptions I have experienced. (...) I only regret the mistakes I have not made yet. I could tell those that might reproach me that I talked too much about myself, instead of talking, as it happens in the encyclopaedias, about Mexico: no, you did not understand that I did not travel to Mexico, but to a country called Mexico."[48]

As the literary critic Nicolae Manolescu was stating: "Octavian Paler's Mexican diary is attractive and profound, sentimental and reflexive, informed and experienced, poetic and prosaic."[49] Let us not forget that in *Caminante*, "we must notice the competition between the pilgrim's notes on the spot and that filtered by the passage of time"[50] and that, *de facto*, the writer underlined this "shortcoming" of his travels, namely to be tempted more by the unseen than by the seen, perceived world, meditating and dreaming more than living practically in the real world: "I talked too little or almost at all about the lively Mexico, about nowdays Mexico. He who reads the journal will probably say that I did not visit the real Mexico, but in a legendary Mexico, a Mexico of stones, of phantoms and he will not be too wrong. (...) I travelled to Egypt twice. Each time I saw the Nile, the shinxes, the light and the sand. I did not penetrate into "the historical time" of Egypt, but into the "mithological" one, which is also valid for Greece. (...) In Mexico, I repeated the same experience."[51] Yes, we can say that the text abundant in an excess of plastic expressions tempts the reader to assert that he would have liked to notice more epic elements, supported by the direct impression, more spectacular facts that the writer did not meet or observe, being much too preoccupied with the reflection of his own self: "I have never experienced something incredible during my travels. Other people narrate all kinds of things, thrills, unusual or dramatic happenings,

[42] *Ibidem*, pp. 66-68.
[43] *Ibidem*, p. 290.
[44] *Ibidem*, pp. 64-65.
[45] *Ibidem*, p. 294.
[46] *Ibidem*, p. 298.
[47] Anna Ferrari, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Mythology*, *Polirom, Iaşi, 2003*, p. 631.
[48] Octavian Paler, *Caminante*, Albatros, Bucharest, 2003, pp. 299-302.
[49] Nicolae Manolescu, *Travels to Yucatan*, "România literară," Year XIII, no. 43, Thursday, October 23, 1980, p. 9.
[50] Cristian Livescu, *Scenes from the Imaginary Life*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1982, p. 158.
[51] Octavian Paler, *op. cit.*, pp. 254-255.

BDD-A29468 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:09:39 UTC)

whereas my travels, (except for the three plane accidents I experienced) unfold monotonously, predictably, by normal details..."[52] Consequently, "His diary contains more meditation than wandering. The tam-tam of the echoes in the ear drum sensitized by the lectures, checked on the spot, in an absolutely creative solitude is preferred over wandering."[53]

The scholar, excessively bookish, imperturbable incursions of Octavian Paler into the territories bathed in the Mexican sunlight, are the proofs of a sensibility that cannot heal from the world of ideas, in favour of the concrete life.

Conclusion

The travel literature of Octavian Paler is always read with a consistent pleasure, offering the reader spaces and times covered by means of subjectivism and interpretations, as the writer detests: " (...) the literature practised on the basis of touristic guide books."[54] The author re-experiences in this "second game" the emotion of the refined, purified perception in a lasting satisfaction, while the reader consolidates his pieces of information or he faces confronts own reactions with the commentary where he often finds himself. Travel represents a way to rediscover ourselves. We travel to know, to get familiar with things and people, to find personal fulfillment in a moral and cultural space.

The travel memoirs acquire that meaning that transfigures the voyage into an intellectual act, as, Octavian Paler's "roads through memory" gave a double function: to reflect a space of the world in a certain historical time and to project the personality and the universe of the traveller-writer. The searches of the modern scholar identify themeselves with his wish to get closer to the world, to turn his geographical travel into a spiritual experience: "The travel is not equivalent to wandering, it is a mirror of the self, whereas the contemporay «anti-traveller», Octavian Paler, gets acquainted with «the solar idea of eternity» in a fascinating travel to the land of the civilizations wearied by history, whose remembrance is still distilled in the calm smile of the Greek-Roman Mediteranean sea. "[55]

The learnt man is familiar with the imaginary geography that relies on lectures and studies, the mental images being projected into the concrete background he comments upon, similar to a specialist. The travel pages of Octavian Paler have the character of some extremely refined "voyages," their only form of adaptable reading being the tendency to identify them with the world of the bookish reality. Sober and austere in everything, with the melancholies of a public speaker touched by doubt, defined by his ethical maximalism, Octavian Paler essentially remains a peculiar author, different from the tradition of the autochthonous prose, dominated by the category of the narrators full of humour and inclined more to talk lightly. Part of a moral and esthetic category, characterized by an elevated intellectuality, the writer's literature amazes us especially by the pathos of ideas, as well as by an essayistic phantasy, abunding in nuances.

Octavian Paler's volumes – *Roads through memory. Egypt, Greece*, *Roads through Memory. Italy* and less *Caminante* – "are wealthy in monument descriptions, in archaeological details, in artistic judgments, in memoirs and even picturesque anecdotes, but what makes them really charming is especially the speculative capacity, the analysis of ideas."[56] The main subtext of these writings remains remains the lyrism of the intellect doubled by a slight glide to the baroque information, that "cultivates the pictorial, the thorough representation, the open form, the unit and the chiaroscuro."[57]

The essayistic memoir have a complex structure, "rendering" being only a pretext and a sometimes symbolic localization, helping us infer the writer's wish itself to head towards other regions. The expression from the second plan becomes the literary reality of te book, taking the

[52] *Ibidem*, pp. 153-154.
[53] Marin Sorescu, *op. cit.*, p. 210.
[54] George Arion, *A History of the Contemporary Romanian Society under the form of Interviews*, vol. I 1975 - 1989, "Premiile Flacăra Foundation – Romania," Bucharest, 1999, p. 155.
[55] Mircea Muthu, *Romanian Literary Permanences from the Compared Perspective*, Minerva, Bucharest, 1986, p. 205.
[56] Nicolae Manolescu, *Travels to Yucatan*, "România literară," Year XIII, no. 43, Thursday, October 23, 1980, p. 9.
[57] Adrian Marino, *Dictionary of Literary Ideas*, vol. I (A-G), Eminescu, Bucharest, 1973, p. 235.

BDD-A29468 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:09:39 UTC)

shape of a small encyclopaedia of the spirit, on imaginary trajectories, ("through memory"), around the localized and visited areas.

There are in Paler's writing a certain detachement, as well as a certain natural aspect specific to the associations that make reference to the cultural sphere, a certain easiness generated by a solid assimilation of the readings. Veritable fragments of books flow naturally, as the result of a very good memory, but beyond this, his unmistakable spirit, resembling the ancient structure, transcends. What really holds our attention with respect to Octavian Paler's style is "precisely its literary quality, its improved, controlled expressiveness, the perfect at of the word. All these things are nothing else than the reflux of a bookish inhibition in front of reality."[58]

The hallmark of the originality specific to Octavian Paler's travel writings consists precisely in the fact that he distances himself to a certain extent, going beyond the memoir-based pattern. If his *Roads to Memory* was conceived as a "scenario of cultural initiation," a " kind of exemplary adventure of the spirit," the final text abunding in retrospections, returns to the past, parentheses, in *Caminante*, the writer "replace life adventure with the adeventure based on ideas."[59] As a conclusion, we can say that the impression left by Octavian Paler's travels is that of several exceptional books, that embody a profound, significant and bright intellectual adventure.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Arion, George, *A History of the Contemporary Romanian Society under the form of Interviews*, vol. I 1975 - 1989, "Premiile Flacăra Foundation – Romania," Bucharest, 1999.

2. Dimitrescu, Florica, *Dictionary of New Words*, IInd edition, Logos, Bucharest, 1997.

3. Ferrari, Anna, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Mythology*, Polirom, Iaşi, 2003.

4. Livescu, Cristian, *Scenes from the Imaginary Life*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1982.

5. Manolescu, Nicolae, *Travels to Yucatan*, "România literară," Year XIII, no. 43, Thursday, October 23, 1980.

6. Marino, Adrian, *Dictionary of Literary Ideas*, vol. I (A-G), Eminescu, Bucharest, 1973.

7. Muthu, Mircea, *Romanian Literary Permanences from the Compared Perspective*, Minerva, Bucharest, 1986.

8. Oprea, Nicolae, *The Work and the Author*, Paralela 45, Bucharest, 2001.

9. Paler, Octavian, *Roads through Memory. Egypt.Greece*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1972.

10. Paler, Octavian, *Caminante*, Albatros, Bucharest, 2003.

11. Paler, Octavian, *Caminante*, Eminescu, Bucharest, 1980.

12. Simion, Eugen, *The Fiction of Personal Diary*, vol. I, Univers Enciclopedic, Bucharest, 2001.

13. Simion, Eugen, *Contemporary Romanian Writers*, vol. III, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1984.

14. Sorescu, Marin, *Take Care while Bringing the Piano Downstairs*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1985.

15. Sorescu, Radu, *Octavian Paler's Work*, Didactica Nova, Craiova, 1996.

[58] Nicolae Manolescu, *Travels to Yucatan*, "România literară," Year XIII, no. 43, Thursday, October 23, 1980, p. 9.
[59] Eugen Simion, *Contemporary Romanian Writers*, vol. III, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1984, p. 522.

BDD-A29468 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:09:39 UTC)