

FROM *WOODS AND WATER* TO THE *GRAN BAZAAR*:
IMAGES OF ROMANIA
IN ENGLISH TRAVELOGUES AFTER WWI

ANDI SÂSÂIAC

Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania

Abstract

Although globalization brings different countries and cultures in closer and closer contact, people are still sensitive when it comes to aspects such as cultural specificity or ethnicity. The collapse of communism and the extension of the European Union have determined an increase of interest in Romania's image, both on the part of foreigners and of Romanians themselves. The purpose of this paper is to follow the development of Romania's image in English travelogues in the last hundred years, its evolution from a land of "woods and water" in the pre-communist era to a "grand bazaar" in the post-communist one, with clear attempts, in recent years, to re-discover a more idyllic picture of the country, one that should encourage ecological tourism. The article is also intended to illustrate the extra-textual (historical, economic, cultural) factors that have impacted, in different ways, on this image evolution.

Key words: *image, cliché, stereotype, travel writing, travelogue, history, power relations*

Introduction

According to Latham jr. (25), immediately after WWI, Romania remained a subject of interest to the English-speaking world because of its war debts and because it was a member of the Little Entente (also comprising Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia). Both the cultural and political life of Romania and its relations with the Western countries took a rather paradoxical turn after the accomplishment of the long standing ideal of Romanian unity in 1918. On the one hand, Romania's cultural relations with Britain developed significantly. Of course, the newly established Romanian territory which included Transylvania, received greater attention from the West. On the other hand, though the average British newspaper reader from the thirties, as Deletant (*In and Out*, p. 8) observes, knew two things about this country: one was oil and the other King Carol II's mistress, Mme Lupescu. Only few travelled to Romania, Deletant says, and the British public had to rely on folklorists and writers such as Sitwell and Patmore, while a more specialized public was better served by a number of

journalists and by Seton – Watson – and Samuelson, we should add. Back to Romania, an English department was set up at the University of Iasi, in 1925, another one at the University of Bucharest in 1936, while in 1934 the British Committee for Relations with Other Countries (called the British Council starting with 1938) began its activity as a complementary instrument of foreign policy. Anthony Eden, foreign affairs minister and later on Prime Minister (cf. Ursu, p. 202) believed that the British Council was an indispensable ally of foreign policy. The establishment of the British Council in Romania was a consequence of the Anglo-Romanian societies which were founded in Cluj (1923) and Bucharest (1927) and were strongly supported by the United Kingdom (Deletant, p.16). The Council was paying the salaries of six British professors who were teaching English in Bucharest, Iasi and Chernivtsi (Deletant, p. 22). Translations from Romanian into English continued to be published in Britain in this period. Mention should be made of a collection of *Romanian Stories* (1921) translated by Lucy Byng, which encompasses stories originally written by authors such as Sadoveanu, Slavici, Creangă or Caragiale. Also, Alice Wise translated Rebreanu's *Pădurea spânzuraților* (*The Forest of the Hanged*) in 1930. Professor Dragoș Protopopescu, head of the English department of the University of Bucharest, had a significant contribution to the reception of the Romanian literature and culture in Great Britain, he himself providing numerous studies and translations. Animated by her manifest interest in Romanian folk arts and culture, and by her notorious leftist beliefs, Sylvia Pankhurst translated and published *The Poems of Mihai Eminescu* (1930). Pankhurst's translation went rather unnoticed in the English speaking world and she even had difficulties in publishing her work. Latham jr. (139) mentions that the editor of *The London Mercury* rejected an article on Eminescu proposed by Pankhurst, because of the presumed lack of interest in a "dead foreign poet". However, in Romania, many reputed intellectuals acknowledged and praised the issue of yet another translation of Eminescu's work, and were content with the enduring interest that foreigners had shown in Romania's national poet.

The reception of the British literature and culture in Romania was facilitated by historian Nicolae Iorga, who published *A History of Anglo-Romanian Relations* in 1931. On the other hand, British – Romanian economic relations stagnated. As Deletant (8) shows, Britain declined to make "any but the most generalized commitments" towards Eastern Europe after the First World War. Since Romania was an exporter of food and raw materials and an importer of manufactures, its modernization depended largely on foreign loans and investments. However, Britain had stopped treating Romania as a privileged trading partner, so Romanian products had to compete with other sources. The oil that might have interested Britain was quasi-unavailable, due to the law series from 1924 which established Romanian control over all the mineral resources. Foreign involvement was accepted, but 3/5 of the capital and 2/3 of the

administration had to be Romanian (cf. Hitchins, p. 406). Even so, British investments in the Romanian oil industry were quite significant (by Romanian standards), and between 1929 and 1933 Britain accounted for the most oil exports. Such financial activity was, however, considered modest by the United Kingdom (cf. Hitchins, p. 499), which also considered that, politically, Romania was floating in France's orbit.

Nowadays, many Romanians tend to evoke the period between the two World Wars in an idealized manner. Indeed, the country made some consistent economic improvements, although the life standards were still low in the rural areas – which accounted for the vast majority of the territory. Benedict (32) observes that, in that period, Romania was undoubtedly one of the richest countries from South-Eastern Europe. Despite its improper means of exploiting its resources, Romania was, according to Benedict, the world's second exporter of corn and the fifth exporter of petrol.

Travel Books on Romania between the Two World Wars

The period between the two World Wars had a significant impact on Romania's rating in the West, and the country brought its own input in this respect. Three widely known travel books on Romania were published in the thirties: D. J. Hall's *Roumanian Furrow* (1933), Sacheverell Sitwell's *Roumanian Journey* (1938) and Derek Patmore's *Invitation to Romania* (1939). The question of minority rights in Romania now began to develop as a motif in travel writing on this country. Of course, along with the extension of its territories, Romania's minorities had also multiplied, both in numbers and in diversity. As Boia shows, in the inter-war period, minorities represented slightly over a quarter of the total number of inhabitants (Romanians accounted for 71.9 per cent of the population, according to the census of 1930.) Apart from their number, their insufficient integration was also a problem (*Romania. Borderland of Europe*, p. 102).

As its title suggests, *Roumanian Furrow* is an autobiographical travel book which relates young English traveller Donald Hall's journey in search of a rural lifestyle, which was gradually evanescent in the West. Romania is framed around this motif, a cliché which has survived to this day and is widely used by tourism companies as well as by the friendly foreign media, statesmen or emblematic figures (such as Prince Charles, for example). Even the people lead, in Hall's opinion, a more natural and happier life than the Westerners', who make things harder for themselves by turning work into a standard of morality. Nowadays, Romania is investing considerably in the market segment appealing to the so-called "green tourists", and Hall's travel book pretty much meets the same requirements while also evoking the locals' generosity and hospitality. The author recounts his active participation in the peasants' life and is very impressed with the local customs. However, the British traveler warns his

readers that this *terra incognita*, as it is labeled by the *Folklore Journal* (Vol. 47, No. 3, Sep., 1936) is likely to lose its virgin specificity due to the inroad of the western civilization – again, a recurring motif frequently met nowadays as well. The book also enjoyed a very positive review in the *Catholic Herald* (on 24. 03. 1939):

...I strongly recommend *Romanian Furrow*. This is a plain, straightforward travel book, charmingly written, with a real insight into the culture of this outpost of ancient Rome. King Carol's opinion that this is the best hook ever written on his country is perhaps a biased one; the author is very appreciative and not very critical. Books about peasants are not everyone's cup of tea, but after all, a book about Romania would have to be three-quarter peasant if it were to be representative. Mr Hall makes his friends live and makes them likeable, his anecdotes are amusing and his obiter dicta interesting. The Transylvanian passages will make all good Magyar-phils wild with rage, but the author could speak no Hungarian and the Hungarians would speak no Romanian. This is certainly the book to read if you want to form a good opinion of this little-known and remote, but very important, corner of Danubia.

The book was reedited in 2007 and was fairly advertised in England, at a time when the rescission of work restrictions for Romanians in the United Kingdom was causing much controversy.

The most famous travel book on Romania is most probably Sir Sacheverell Sitwell's *Roumanian Journey* (1938). His enterprise is a result of a private arrangement with the Callimachi family of boyars. Sitwell admits that Romania is one of the least known countries in Europe and assumes that an Englishman's knowledge of the country is limited to Bucharest, Sinaia and the oil wells. This arrangement seems a very wise act of Romanian propaganda, to which it is said that the Government contributed financially, with five hundred pounds (cf. Goldsworthy, p. 194; and Ogden, p. 206). Sitwell spent four weeks in Romania, during which he personally met Queen Marie, an ardent promoter of the Romanian culture, and shows an idyllic picture of the country in the inter-war period. He combines the attraction for the exotic with scholarly historical references, while also comparing the places he visited with those he had seen in other countries. His book is often cited by writers who travelled to Romania later on. For instance, Ogden (2000) frequently refers to Sitwell's work while sharing his own impressions. Although he spent the four weeks travelling in a high class manner, the writer actively participated in the Romanian everyday life. He is very impressed by the churches and tackles the (still surviving) controversial statute of the Gypsies, whom he criticizes for their resistance to conform to the lifestyle of the majority and to the legal and social conventions of the Romanian

society. This opinion is also shared by Newman in *The Blue Danube*, 1935¹. Sitwell explains that in Romania, minorities are treated with utmost respect and benefit from all applicable liberties, yet it would be legitimate for Romanians to claim that they suffer from many inconveniences because of the Gypsies. Overall, the book is very appreciative of the Romanian people, its traditions as well as of Romanian cities, seen as marked by Byzantine influences, rather than western ones. The book became famous enough to cross the Atlantic, being reviewed in the American *Saturday Review of Literature* (vol. XVIII, no. 18, 27 August 1938, p. 22). However, the reviewer considers that the photographs are the book's major attraction, as the writing features too many descriptions of private houses which could not be typical for the whole country. What the American reviewer finds really interesting are the references to oil wells and Gypsies.

Anne Marrie Callimachi² is also responsible for Derek Patmore's visit to Romania, which was followed by yet another book, *Invitation to Roumania* (1939). Patmore's book is different from those by Hall and Sitwell as it concentrates on the upper classes rather than on the rural communities, which had fascinated the previous authors. Like other travel writers, Patmore portrays Romanians as being kind and tolerant, qualities which might have caused them problems. He also makes some scholarly references to Romanian literary works and provides an English translation of the *Miorita* ballad.

In the period between the two World Wars, Henry Baerlein's work is particularly interesting. According to Latham jr. (96), after a failed scholarly attempt, Baerlein became a reputed travel writer particularly interested in the Balkan area, where he frequently travelled in the company of journalists or diplomats. Baerlein covered Romania in no less than three of his travel books: *And Then to Transylvania* (London, 1931; published the following year in New York under the title *Enchanted Woods*); *In Old Romania* (1940; this time, the action is no longer set in Transylvania, but in the so-called "Old Kingdom" – the

¹ However, Bernard Newman is also critical of the way Romanians treat other minorities, such as the Bulgarians, and he promises that he will personally make these persecutions known once he returns to England. He also criticizes Romanian authorities and accuses them of alleged bribery. *The Blue Danube* with its landscapes is pretty much the only positive aspect the traveller can think of. Newman also highlights the Romanians' belief in occult practices, and gives the example of a woman who had been accused of witchcraft and suspected of being a vampire in 1923.

² The Callimachi family had indeed had a significant contribution to improving the image of Romania in the Western public opinion, through travel books. Édouard Herriot (1872-1957, writer, politician, mayor of Lyon and member of the French Academy, admitted that he was their guest in the essay *La Roumanie*, published as early as 1925: "le charme de Bucarest (...) ou le prince et la princesse Kalimaki m'ont réservé un jour l'hospitalité à la fois la plus splendide et la plus touchante (...)") (in Romanescu, pp. 112-120).

historical provinces of Moldavia and Wallachia). Baerlein is mostly concerned with rural life, dealing with traditions, folk wisdom and cuisine; however, the book that Latham jr. (103) considers to be the most important is *Bessarabia and Beyond* (1935), as the eponymous province had been rarely mentioned in travel writing before, and yet it attracted a growing interest due to its recent incorporation into Romania after more than a century of Russian authority. Through the voice of the characters that he encounters, Baerlein mentions that the Romanian treatment of minorities is fair. The positive manner in which Baerlein approached Romania is also noticed by Latham jr. (114), who notices that, besides supporting the Romanian ethnic claims to the province, Baerlein also praised the benefits of the Romanian regime, its cultural and religious tolerance and efforts towards developing the region.

The *enchanted woods* that could be considered as Romania's frame in the first of Baerlein's travel books are similar to (and may well have inspired) the *woods and the water* which became the recurrent motifs in Patrick Fermor's idyllic book on Romania, published fifty-five years later. Moreover, the similarity between the title *Bessarabia and Beyond* and Dervla Murphy's *Transylvania and Beyond*, published in 1992, clearly illustrates how influential travel writing on Romania between the two World Wars was on travelogues written in subsequent periods.

Tolerance is one of the ethnic clichés about Romanians in the travel writings of the 1930s. The constant modernization of the state and its historic accomplishments, as well as the generosity of ordinary people and the beauty of the Romanian landscapes, still unspoiled by human interference, are other features so frequently referred to, that they became positive images of the country. We could well state that Romania had never benefited from a better coverage in terms of English travel books than in the period between the two World Wars, when the cultural relations between Britain and Romania – rather than the economic ones – had become particularly tight. According to Latham jr. (95) other important coordinates of the Romania image are the beauties of new Romanian province of Transylvania, the charming hospitality of Queen Marie at her castle in Sinaia and the abundance of restaurants in Bucharest.

The Second World War

As Romania had been, economically, under the German sphere of influence, through the conclusion, in 1939, of the German – Romanian economic treaty, the British Intelligence Services approved of the creation of a special unit that would plan sabotages in the oil industry, but to little avail (Deletant, p. 73). Faith in France and Britain was shaken by the indifference of these two countries to the country's economic plight during the Great Depression and by their failure to counteract Germany's repeated violations of the Treaty of Versailles. However, as will be seen, the cultural relations between Britain and Romania

were still working properly, while diplomatic and propagandistic activity in Bucharest increased considerably. The action of the two major novels dealing with Romania in those years is settled in Bucharest, in the first sequences of the Second World War. Starting with November 1941, Romania's relations with Britain and the U.S.A. deteriorated significantly. Britain declared war to Romania in December 1941 (after Romania declined the UK and US demand of its army retreat from above the Dniester). Pressed by Germany, Romania declared war to the US only a few days later, although, as Hitchins (559) believes, the Romanian leadership (and Prime-Minister, General Antonescu) had never truly regarded the UK and the US as enemies. Moreover, the leaders of the Romanian opposition made a certain lobby in 1942 and 1943 in order to obtain another territorial guarantee from the UK and the US (the former British guarantee having proved to be of little use), but the two countries refused to make any commitment that would contradict Soviet interests. In October 1944, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin signed the controversial "percentages agreement" in Moscow, through which Romania remained within the Soviet sphere of influence.

The two major literary works that impacted on Romania's war-time image are R.G. Waldeck's *Athene Palace* (1942) and Olivia Manning's *Balkan Trilogy* (1960)³.

In *Athene Palace* Waldeck mainly uses the first person narrative, a feature of the modern, subjective novel. Her novel contains many of the clichés and stereotypes one often finds when reading about Romania. When referring to the so-called Romanian fatalism, Waldeck writes that her impression of Romanians is that of "flexible, realistic, fatalistic people whom destiny had placed on the frontier between Orient and Occident" (287). Waldeck states that Romanians possess to the highest degree the capacity of receiving the blows of destiny and be relaxed. When talking about Romanian bureaucracy, she mentions that she had been informed by locals (an example of Romanians providing clichés about themselves) that "things written on paper had a shorter life in Romania than anywhere else. After a few weeks, the best laws were forgotten or lost their zip because everybody had learned how to get around them" (100). A positive aspect would be the leit-motif of the Romanian beautiful landscapes, this time visible even in the urban areas. The author also adopts the developing stereotype of chronic poverty, suggested through the food that people eat: "The vast majority of people ate 'mamaliga', day in day out, cornmeal boiled in water,

³ In Olivia Manning's *Balkan Trilogy* (1960, 1962), as well as in Rosa Waldeck's *Athene Palace* (1942), there are discernible aesthetic features which surpass the subgenre of travel writing for mere information, and make these two writings be regarded as literary works in their own right; however, Waldeck's *Athene Palace* (1942), may also be read as a reportage, in accordance with the author's profession – that of a journalist.

which they ate without butter, meat, or even salt because they were too poor” (259). Waldeck is critical of the enormous social differences between the rich and the poor and of the opulent life of the city of Bucharest.

Waldeck’s impressions were considered to be pertinent enough to be published on the first page of the section dedicated to Romania in *Encyclopedia Britannica* [7]: “on the eve of World War II, journalist Rosa Goldschmidt Waldeck (Countess Waldeck) described her strongest impression of the Romanians: *Two thousand years of severe foreign masters, barbarian invasions, rapacious conquerors, wicked princes, cholera, and earthquakes have given Rumanians a superb sense of the temporary and transitory quality of everything. Experience in survival has taught them that each fall may result in unforeseen opportunities*”.

Manning’s first two novels of her *Balkan Trilogy* (namely *The Great Fortune* and *The Spoilt City*) are probably the most popular books to provide images of Romania. Although it is fictional, this literary work is clearly autobiographical, as the author met and married Reggie Smith, an employee of the British Council, in the late thirties. As Goldsworthy (190) observes, the story of Harriet and Guy Pringle closely follows Manning and Smith’s odyssey during the war. Manning also presents a dichotomous European and Oriental Romania, a remote space (both geographically and historically) whose vintage atmosphere will never be encountered again. The dichotomy is suggested by the different characters of the two novels, each of them being on one side of this dichotomy.

Manning’s literary work confirms the leitmotif of “following in the footsteps” of previous travellers, which so often occurs in travel writing. The first two books of Manning’s trilogy, which are set in Bucharest, inspired Keith Cushman, an American scholar who was invited as a keynote speaker at the Centre for American Studies in Bucharest in 2004: “so here I am, in Bucharest. And, more or less coincidentally, I am once again reading, for the first time since 1998, Olivia Manning’s *Balkan Trilogy*. I find it really extraordinary to read a book about the place that you are visiting. I ask myself whether there is anyone else who has read the *Balkan Trilogy* twice. I also wonder if these novels are known here” (*Observatorul cultural*, no. 227, June 2004, translation mine).

The Communist Period

The story of the polarization and divergent evolution of the capitalist West and the communist East is quite widely known. It is worth mentioning however that, paradoxically enough, Romania’s cultural links with Britain continued to function, even in the period before 1965, the year in which Romania’s rift with the Soviet Union deepened. Deletant (38) observes the downgrading of Russian as a compulsory language in schools and the increasing number of hours dedicated to French and English, while at the end of the sixties, the competition for places to study English in Romanian universities was more severe than that

for French. To meet this demand, the British Council increased its provision of English language lecturers.

According to Andraş (171), the travel books on Romania that were published during the Communist era could be classified into five categories: procommunist utopian representations; critical or ironic anti-communist representations; apparently detached images; dramatic images of oppression and resistance and dystopian hypostases of communism.

The first category brings together Communist ideologists who favoured the newly installed regime openly at the beginning and more subtly later on. For instance, Jack Lindsay and Maurice Cornforth, two British Marxist writers, published *Rumanian Summer: A View of the Rumanian People's Republic* in 1953. The title, which suggests both personal experience and factual evidence, depicts, as expected, a perfect integration of Romania in a perfect Soviet system. The new regime, as it is described by the two authors, is wholeheartedly welcomed by all kinds of Romanians: soldiers, schoolgirls, musicians, mothers, nurses, shepherds, as well as the retired.

On the other hand, as expected, the American viewpoint was also expressed, for instance, through the work of Donald Dunham, the author of *Assignment: Bucharest. An American Diplomat's View of the Communist takeover of Romania*. The book, first published in 1962, speaks of oppression and resistance and could not, therefore, appear in Romania during the communist period. It was thus published only in 2000 under the patronage of the former Iaşi-based *Center for Romanian Studies*. Dunham was appointed public affairs officer at the American legation in Bucharest in 1947, and, as Latham jr. writes in the book's preface, he was preoccupied with "the nature of the Romanian peasant, and examined travel accounts on Romania by prominent foreigners" (14). As the author admits, his intention was "to show America in a big way" to the Romanians "who were backward and feudal anyway" (28). Dunham often accuses directly the anti-American propaganda. In other cases, he suggests that things were terribly wrong for the Romanians: [because of the Communist takeover] "nobody was laughing or smiling; there was a controlled stillness in the air, half uncertainty, half dread" (29). When he asked a local person what happened to the Bucharest that he had read about, he was told that Communism had killed it, that under "the system no one is allowed the bourgeois luxury of joy" (30). Several widely spread clichés are also provided in Dunham's book, such as that of the hospitality shown by the peasants, who, as the author was told, were "the real Romanians" (50). Moreover, fatalism is also illustrated in the form of a self-cliché: "my dear, we Romanians are born on the brink of fate and I think we never leave it. Fatalism. Oriental a bit" (146).

The lack of travel books on Romania in the Communist years is not surprising. Nevertheless, the end of the 1980s saw the publication of two important literary works, namely Sir Patrick Fermor's *Between the Woods and*

the Water (1986) and Brian Hall's *Stealing from a deep place* (1988). It is interesting to approach the two books bearing in mind that they were published shortly before the collapse of Communism Europe-wide. Despite the apparently detached images that are provided, we may well assign the books to what Andraș categorized as critical and ironic approaches, as well as dystopian representations of Communism. Fermor evokes the beauty of Romania between the two World Wars (the action of the book is set in the early 1930s), focusing on the marvelous places he encountered along the Danube, at a time when the *woods and the water* were best describing the Romanian space. A foreword to the 2013 edition of the book summarizes Fermor's Romanian experience as a discovery of a "wild and beautiful region of forests and mountains secluded from Western eyes during centuries of religious and national complexity", hence the motif of the 'mystical unknown' which Deletant also observed. The preface signed by Jan Morris in the same edition claims that "there are lyrical delights in every part of *Between the Woods and the Water*, but they reach an apogee in the passages that see Paddy at large in the Wild Carpathian uplands" (xi). Thus, along with hospitality, another recurrent positive cliché in Fermor's book is that of unaltered natural habitat: "the industrial revolution had left these regions untouched and the rhythm of life had remained many decades behind the pace of the West – a hundred years, perhaps" (96). In this period, the *preternatural* had already become a cliché – so powerful that it could not be omitted from travel writing on Romania. Fermor, however, approaches the issue in a scholarly manner: "*priculici*, akin to the Slavonic *vrkolak*, were named; they were vampires. And *stafi* and *strigoi*, who sounded like a mixture of evil spirits and ghosts; and witches too, if *strigoi*, like the Italian *strega*, comes from the Latin *stryx*" (138). In terms of rural food habits, Fermor is yet another British traveller fascinated by the *mamaliga*.

Fermor spent most of his time in the company of Hungarian ethnics and, although he does not make it obvious, judging from the toponymy and anthroponymy he used, he frames Transylvania as a former Hungarian province.

According to Deletant ("Romanians," p. 225), the author "pines for a Transylvania and a social hierarchy destroyed by Communism." Fermor expresses, while recounting his journey, his profound disagreement with the aspects of the communist life that he encountered: customs officials, poor infrastructure and lack of food, which he indignantly attributes to a government more concerned with industrialization than with feeding its own people.

Especially in the 1970s, due to some fairly courageous acts of foreign policy (such as dictator Ceaușescu's denunciation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia from 1968), the regime gained positive coverage in Western media and books, and was framed as anti-Soviet and reformist. In *Stealing from a deep place* (1988) Brian Hall refutes this perspective and defends his opinions through his personal experience of Romania: he could thus notice that the

people's standard of living was by no means encouraging. Hall considers that the improved image which the Romanian Communist regime was enjoying was the result of what was regarded as a "bold" foreign policy, and did not tell anything about the country's internal situation.

Travel books on Communist Romania which are not openly propagandistic could also be categorized as follows: books written during the Communist period referring either to the period itself, or to the preceding inter-war age, or books written after the collapse of Communism which, however, refer to that historical era. The latter situation is the case of Georgina Harding's *Painter of Silence* (2012). Harding approaches post-war Communist Romania and evokes the city of Iași in the 1950s, with the newly emerging grey buildings and grimy streets – a place of desolation, as it is reckoned by a review in *The Guardian* (23.03.2012). However, the book should also be related to the context in which it was written, the 1990s and 2000s, a period in which references to Romania's communist past were frequent. A critical portrayal of the Communist regime in comparison to the previous inter-war period is thus subtly outlined.

The 1990s and the Early 2000s

When it comes to images of Romania in Western literature in the post-communist era, the dichotomy is no longer between East and West: Romania has already been set in *the other Europe*, the Eastern former communist block. It seems that the opposition is now between extreme poverty and European aspirations. This can be explained by approaching the new international political context, on the one hand, and the evolution of the media, on the other.

After the breakout of communism in 1989, Romania was regarded with much sympathy by the western countries and attracted, at the same time, increasing interest. However, an unfortunate series of events, such as the miners' riots, the ascension of former communists to political power and the severe economic circumstances from the nineties, made Romania look less congenial. As the country moved towards accession to NATO and the European Union, the spotlight in the media focused on controversial issues such as systemic corruption, poverty and minorities, and, more recently, on the possibility that Romanians would carry all these three aspects with them freely within the EU. According to Deletant (*In and out of focus*, p. 6), the British (and not only them, we should add) question why Romania was admitted to NATO, to what degree it was a strategic action and how far Romania brings to NATO a security bonus. Or how could Romania contribute to the European ideals, given its own issues? The fact that Romania made its airspace available for the NATO aircrafts during the Kosovo War might have accelerated the country's adhesion to the alliance. It is in this period that a huge variety of television and radio broadcast stations, newspapers and forms of new media emerged and fragmented the audience to an extent never seen before. The market economy in the global context determined

media outlets to provide their public with what they wanted to hear, so the images of Romania are often exaggerated/negatively hyperbolized in the media, very much in keeping with the public's expectations.

Dervla Murphy's *Transylvania and Beyond* (1993) is the most relevant travel book that tackles the image of Romania in the 1990s, while Eva Hoffman has also dedicated a chapter of her *Exit into History* (1999) to Romania. Since both authors visited Romania after having been exposed to consistent media coverage on the newly democratic republic, their expectations were not encouraging. Murphy, an acknowledged Irish travel writer who spent eight months in Romania, describes an incident that she suffered at the Romanian border, where her backpack got stolen. The incident, which coincides with her entering the country, somehow announces that life in the newly democratic Romania is not as peaceful as the common European might expect. A stereotype that only started to build-up in this period and developed considerably in subsequent travel writing on Romania (cf. Deletant, "Romanians", p. 225) is the Romanians' inferiority complex, which is explicitly mentioned by Murphy (90). Their hospitality, another deep-rooted cliché in travel writing on Romania, is frequently noticed by the Irish author throughout her two trips to this country. The controversial issue of the Gypsies which, under strong media impact, made its way into travel books in the 1990s is also approached by Murphy. Her opinions in this respect are quite categorical: unlike Sitwell who, as previously shown, tackled the same problem in the 1930s but reached different conclusions, Murphy regards Romanians as 'one of the most racist countries' with regard to Gypsies (143). The author also writes about the smothering conflicts between the Romanians from Transylvania and the Hungarian minority, concluding that the latter have developed much resentment, while the former show understandable insecurity and regrettable vengefulness. Fatalism is, once again, foregrounded as a Romanian characteristic, together with the leitmotif of the Latin heritage of the Romanian language. The images that Murphy provides are endorsed by the fact that, during her journey, she had contacts with a wide variety of people of all ages, professions and standards of living.

The travel writing motif of return is particularly discernable in Hoffman's book, as she validates it through her own experience. The following quotation could well apply to most of the travel writings whose authors decide to return to already visited places:

I needed to go back because I felt that seeing twice is believing. I needed to reassure myself of certain impressions and deepen others, to continue conversations that had gone unfinished, soak up the atmosphere of certain places more fully. But also, going back afforded me a glimpse of how 'the changes' were unfolding in each country a year later (*Exit*, p. xiii).

Otherwise, the very beginning of Hoffman's chapter dealing with Romania is related to Dracula. The Romanian complex of inferiority and self-denigration is also presented in most categorical terms:

The moment we find ourselves on the Romanian side, our passengers begin apologizing. They apologize for the road, the landscape, the poverty. Neither Peter nor I see anything so out of the ordinary, but the habit of national self-deprecation is something I've encountered all through these travels (...) As if they wanted to ward off the immediate humiliation of a foreigner's judgment. At least, they want to indicate, they're not so provincial as not to understand that their country is a poor province (234).

Romania's Balkan-related characteristics are extensively dealt with in Hoffman's travelogue, together with the country's Oriental background. A Romanian's statement *we're practically Oriental*, is repeated three times by the author (239, 243, 244) proving that such stereotypes are not necessarily imposed by the foreign travelers but also self-inflicted. References to previous travel writers also occur in Hoffman's book, who relates the "Bucharest faces [...] pasty, pale, prematurely worn" (256), that she could see in the early 1990's to Olivia Manning's similar remarks in her *Balkan Trilogy*.

Although Tessa Dunlop's *To Romania with Love* came out in 2012, it should also be considered as relating to the 1990s. The action is set in those times, and the stereotyped perspective of Romania which is provided in the book is specific to the travel books from that period, being very much similar to Murphy's and Hoffman's. Dunlop's first impressions of Romania, where she served as a volunteer in one of the appalling orphanages with which the western media extensively dealt in the 1990s, were those of grey blocks of flats, Gypsies and stray dogs:

Our noses pressed against the windows, astonished and appalled by the sinister black city. The train station was its own particular hell. Feral boys came at us and clung to our buff rucksacks, mewling and pulling our fleecy arms. I cried out – we both did. People stared but no one helped. Then a man in a uniform kicked at them with the toe of his foot. 'Gypsies!' He spat on the ground and walked off. We booked an overnight train to Suceava in the Moldavian north. There were dogs everywhere (9).

In an interview for Realitatea.net [8], Dunlop, who is a journalist, corroborates Boia's remarks (2012) that the Communist regime had made the Romanians believe that everything that was foreign was also superior: "Remember that we are talking about the early 1990s, when, in Romania, being a foreigner (especially a Western foreigner) constituted a guarantee of good quality. I was being treated like a princess", she says.

Unlike other contemporary travel narratives, Dunlop's travel book is quite original, as it combines the first person narrative with dialogue and the epistolary style.

The stereotypes of poverty and corruption continued to be propagated after the year 2000, when negative references to the Balkan substratum of the Romanians started to be evoked in a humorous – if not ironic or downright sarcastic – manner. This fact is illustrated by the very titles of the books that were published right after Romania's adhesion to the EU: *Never mind the Balkans, here's Romania*⁴ (M. Ormsby, 2008) or *Notes from a Turkish Whorehouse* (O'Ceallaigh, 2007). Ormsby's book presents the author's everyday life in Bucharest as a sort of adventure in the Romanian capital, sometimes ironically referred to as the "little Paris". The characters that the traveler/foreign narrator encounters are full of variety, from depraved taxi drivers to corrupt inheritance seekers. Formerly a journalist working for the BBC, Ormsby mocks the Romanian democracy by referring to the occasional meetings of the Flat Owners associations and introduces a new category of Romanians in travel writing: those who work abroad – mainly in Spain and Italy in fields such as constructions, agriculture or ménage – and invest their money back home in towering houses, luxury cars and other valuables. They form a nascent social class of people whose living standards are above the average. The image of Gypsies living outside the social norms is also portrayed, although Ormsby also shows different instances in which they are discriminated. Such characters and Romanian characteristics are also present in Ó Ceallaigh's tabloid perspective of Romania. The Irish writer describes at length, precarious law abiding, chaotic urban planning (with communist blocks and newly erected churches between them), stray dogs (of which Pantazzi used to write about decades ago), beggars aggressively exhibiting their physical disabilities, and, ironically enough, the developing Romanian tabloid press. Ó Ceallaigh's book encompasses most of the stereotypes – if not all of them – that developed through the massive Western media coverage after 1989.

A more positive and, I daresay balanced representation of Romania is introduced by Alan Ogden's *Romania Revisited* (2000). Affiliated to a defunct Centre for Romanian Studies based in Iasi, Ogden also published his book in Oxford and Portland. His approach, suggested by the subheading *On the Trail of English Travellers 1602-1941*, is one of citing those travel writers who expressed their opinions about Romania at various times in history, also stating his own viewpoints in a comparative manner. Ogden's book is important not only due to its index of travel writers, but also because it provides a diachronic approach that illustrates the evolution of Romania. The author aims at objectivity when citing literary works that do not put Romania in a truly positive

⁴ Translated into Romanian (uninspiringly enough) as *Grand Bazar România*.

light. However, while describing a wide variety of regions, cities and villages, Ogden insists on the (mainly rural) customs and traditions that would stir a foreign tourist's curiosity. He often refers to Romania's history and culture and promotes Romanian folk literature, of which he seems to be very fond. Although he uses the first person singular, the author refrains from making clear, direct statements about Romanians, and clichés or stereotypes are quite rare even in the quotations from other writers, so it is finally up to the reader to interpret what Romania is like. The positive perspective provided by the book is mainly due to the aspects that the author decided to select – and, we may say, also to those which the author decided not to mention.

Ogden explains his objectivity through the fact that understanding Romania totally is above his power, and therefore he could not adopt a firm position:

Romania is hard to define; it is quite unlike any other country (...). Romania managed to preserve its curious identity. It succeeds in infuriating those who don't know her, beguiling those who do. For the traveller who seeks to enquire, she awaits with open arms; for those who seek the obvious, she remains an impenetrable enigma" (205).

Even so, the positive approach is obvious enough since Ogden makes it clear that only those who do not know Romania could be infuriated by the country.

I believe that Ogden's book deserves more attention than it has received so far, as it may well serve as a half literary half scholarly document of travel writing on Romania.

The Romanian government, through the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, is responsible for the issue of Peter Hurley's *The Way of the Crosses* (2013). As the title suggests, Romania is framed around an Orthodox religious motif which has profoundly attracted the author. Another significant frame is that of idyllic sceneries of unaltered natural environments. As previously mentioned, this motif has been extensively employed by the Romanian governmental authorities and tourism service providers nowadays. However, in his preface the author brings into discussion two recurrent motifs which take the form of stereotypes. One of them is that of self-denigrating Romanians:

Why the hell do you live in Romania? I'm asked this question almost exclusively by Romanians (...) commenting that all they dream about is leaving this country (iii).

The other motif concerns the superficial knowledge that westerners have about Romania:

I'm sure it must be tough now for those new Romanian emigrants. The people they meet, work with or work for, probably know very little about

Romania: they may have vague memories of a dictator called Ceausescu, of a vampire called Dracula, or orphan children and Roma (iii).

The book, which otherwise largely disseminates positive images, was translated into Romanian in the same year.

Concluding Remarks

Images develop in time, and the way they are now presented is a result of their historical evolution which, in turn, was influenced by the dynamics of power relations at particular historical moments. Cultural links, as well as economic relations, as important as they may be in image propagation, are also determined by power relations. As expected, the evolution of the images of Romania in Western literature is directly linked to the power relations between states and the cultural links that were subsequently forged at different historical times.

It is safe to say that Romania had never received a more positive coverage in travel writing than in the period between the two world wars, a period in which the country was mainly framed, among other things, as an idyllic place *between the woods and the water*. Of course the significant lobby made by the Romanian authorities as well as by influential people such as the Callimachis had a great impact in this respect. However, negative clichés such as resignation, apathy and indolence are features that were also frequently noticed by the authors of that period and perpetuated as stereotypes. Deletant (“Romanians,” p. 224) argues that self-denigration was already a deeply-rooted Romanian self-image and kept being propagated by foreign writers in those years, although this feature became even more obvious in the travel books that were published after 1990. The difficulty of placing Romania on either side of an imaginary borderline between the East and the West is also a specific issue in the twentieth century travel writing discourse. Even so, the travel books that we analyzed show a rather positive rhetoric in what concerns the country and its people.

A widely spread Romanian cliché, the roots of which may probably be found in the Western popular press, claims that the public perception of Romania is actually limited to the achievements of tennis player Ilie Năstase, gymnast Nadia Comăneci, football player Hagi, to (the harsh dictatorship of) Nicolae Ceaușescu and Dracula. While references to the communist regime are omnipresent in the books that were published after 1990, Dracula and the sportspeople are also mentioned, more or less frequently. Starting with the 1990’s, though, both the approach and the images provided have changed in a negative direction. The books published after 2000 have mainly adopted a tabloid style and consistently propagate the stereotypes that are heavily used by the media, probably with the intention of reaching similar addressees: what prevails is images of poverty and, especially, of systemic corruption. No longer [*enchanted*] *woods and water*, but ‘a *grand bazaar*’. Sadly enough, as Deletant

(226) contends, the country and its people will continue to carry this negative image throughout the European Union. However, “the mystique of the unknown and the perceived authenticity are likely to continue to lure foreigners”. It is important to bear in mind that these latter aspects were dealt with by the authors from the 1930’s as well. Nowadays, both Romanian authorities – such as the governmental publishing house which released Hurley’s *The Way of the Crosses* (2013) – and private tourism service providers strive, sometimes in joint actions, to promote these characteristics in the foreign media in order to attract visitors.

All these aspects confirm Tim Youngs’s prediction (*Cambridge Introduction*, p. 183), that ethical, ‘green’, eco-tourism will be extensively brought to the readers’ attention in the near future. At the end of 2013, Hurley wrote his book, which can easily be put in this category, and which was instantly translated into Romanian. The translation of Sitwell’s book, first published in 1938, was carried out in 2011. The ethical role of these books resides in promoting the Romanian traditional values – for the English readers, and in calling for a rekindling of those values – for the Romanian ones. It could be that, after a period of confusion and disappointment during the first decade(s) of the post-communist years, both the Romanian publishers and their readers will regain a sense of the traditional values that have lured foreign travellers to the Romanian territories for so many centuries. If this is truly the case, then we may expect a return from the *grand bazaar to the woods and the water* in a not too distant future.

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