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Travelling with Gulliver in the Balkans and Ruritania

The wild are devastated inside by the disappearance of the moon. They cannot realize that the shadow which covers almost completely its shining disc is the projection of their own world. Similarly, we, the civilized peoples of the Occident watch mercifully or contemptingly our non-occidental contemporaries, overcome by the shadow of a superior power, which seems to paralyse their energies, depriving them of light. Generally, we are too preoccupied with our own business to come closer to them, and we go away from them thinking that the shadow which overcomes these sickly forms is the shape of their own past. If we stopped for a moment and examined more carefully the character which rises gigantic and sombre, apparently unconsciously, we would be surprised to recognize on its face the features of our own face.”¹

Arnold Toynbee’s quotation, which contains an extremely suggestive comparison between the image of the savage and that of the Westerners, presents concisely the essence of the relation between Western Europe and Eastern Europe, a set of upside down images perceived as such.

In the light of Toynbee’s quotation and the symbolicity of the journey, the present article aims a double journey

together with Gulliver²: first, the journey made by some British travellers in the Romanian Principalities in the 18th century and secondly, the journey through the text, while we shall try to reshape the real geography of the Romanian lands and its people through the imaginary geography of the travellers’ texts.³

The Journey as Pretext and Text

The need to know turns into the need to change the space and background inhabited by an individual, stirred initially by the metaphysical urge towards the Other. At the beginning, there was one step, then another, then another, which, due to the mirage, steps which won the traveller over and gave him another status, different from the analysed one, from the Other.

The journey means, then, introspection both into the outer and inner affective of the one who assumes the voyage. Analysing the symbols of the journey, from the most metaphoric one to the most prosaic, there is no denying their meanings of initiation, discovery and experience, at least at a personal level, if not at a general one. On such a journey, the analysed entity, according to Martin Buber’s theory, becomes a reified object, loses the initial quality of *You* and becomes the *Other*, which gives meaning to another



world. Consequently, the relation between the Traveller and the subject / object of his journey is one of Identity /vs/ Alter-Identity or Identity /vs/ Alterity. According to the *Dictionary of Symbols*, the primordial meaning of the journey is the search and finding of a spiritual centre.⁴ This is the value of the journey which turns from an apparent purpose itself into a pretext of spiritual experience i.e. from a range of values and codes into another. The dimension of alterity and that of sacrality of the journey is depicted by Dr. Rodica-Gabriela Chira in the following way:

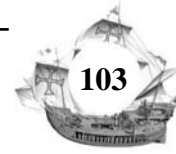
Pour le voyageur, le départ représente l'expérience fondamentale de l'altérité, expérience qui suppose la séparation de l'individu de sa communauté d'origine, du groupe dont il faisait partie. C'est un moment de grande intensité, un moment a caractère sacré.⁵

During the traveller's interaction with the new spaces, appears the process of imagination and re-imagination of the places and worlds according to the traveller's body of knowledge. Along the re-invention of the worlds, the individual is re-invented together with his/her sphere of values, the images are de-composed and re-composed and identities are changed. During the process of identity re-imagination and re-construction, real geography does not identify with imaginary geography, the latter being the result of the confluence between the images prior to the interaction moment and the newly-formed ones. R. Muchembled saw space only in relation with the nations inhabiting it: "*Space does not exist by itself, but in relation with the human communities which populate it and which, moreover, imagine it in the shape of successive compartments [...]*."⁶ Thus, we could say that real geography is included in

imaginary geography, but not vice versa:

Exploration, study, pleasure or business journeys played an important part in extending the geographical knowledge, but their protagonists launched a series of images which are not related to reality but to imagination."⁷

Homo Viator developed during the Enlightenment – the most prolific period of all from the point of geographical discoveries. It was then when both the ritual of starting a journey and the journey itself became expanded. It was a time of journals, diaries maps and travel writings. The young men coming from high social classes had to go through the challenge of the voyage which was supposed to strengthen their survival capacities. However, when putting down the voyage impressions and happenings we meet another mechanism i.e. the journey as text. The journey as text represents the de-construction of the itinerary and of the journey information by the observer and their re-construction according to the interpretation frame of any individual, an interpretation frame which resulted from the decoding of the images received from the destinator. In a very ample study of imagology of the researcher Carmen Andras, *România și imaginile ei în literatura de călătorie britanică*, we are very minutely presented with the activity of the Enlightenment philosophers and travellers which developed the concept of alterity. In the researcher's opinion, The Enlightenment panelled the main coordinates of the absolute differentiation from the Other, and they remained unchanged in the 19th century too, when only the racial differences were added to them.⁸ The maintenance phenomenon of these coordinates is rather easy to understand: the data were transmitted successively from one traveller to another,



each new novice having to follow the old path just because that was the ethic code of the time. This phenomenon was applied in whole Europe. Carmen Andraş described the phenomenon as follows: both the philosopher and the traveller resorted also to the arguments offered by natural science, economics and history so that the alterity representations should be as real as possible and based on science. Once in the circuit of stereotypes, the representations of the Other were transmitted from one traveller to another so we find them again, though more complex and more nuanced, in the British travel contemporary literature.⁹ For illustration, here is the advice of the Enlightenment scholar Samuel Johnson in his essay regarding the preparation of a young man at the beginning of a journey, an essay written and published in the context in which all young men from England, France or Italy coming from high society, had to go through the Great Journey or Le Grand Tour, which marked the age of maturity: *travel books are good according to the knowledge prior to the journey: knowledge of what he is to notice, his ability to compare a lifestyle to another.*¹⁰

Later, Romanticism will, in its turn, alienate the visited spaces just because the imaginary geography of the Romantic travel writings will be infused with an exotic discourse, triggered off by contemplation, exuberance and admiration. Consequently, the texts of the travellers will carry along the touch of the two patterns of thinking, but, despite the difference in approach, they will both marginalise and underline alterities.

Between the Balkans and Ruritania

The researcher Maria Todorova, in the first chapter of her book *Imagining the Balkans*, makes an assertion with the value

of a premise: the fact that the Balkans were described as the alterity of Europe does not need any special argument.¹¹ This sentence marks the fact that not even theoretically, let alone today, the situation could be different. At an imaginary level, when we try to mark a moving line of identities, the Centre lies in Western Europe and the South-East represents the Periphery, with all the hidden or less hidden meanings of the two words with archetypal value.

The Centre, by definition, marks here stability, security, verticality while the Periphery represents their opposite pole, the upside-down image taken as such.

A just as veritable premise is the image of the Romanians placed in this Balkanic space, despite the controversies that presented the Romanian countries as a gate to the Orient. Maybe just because of this passing gate, the Romanians get to be so controversially perceived by the foreign travellers, especially by the British ones, the former representing a strange blending of a Latin language and an Oriental-Balkanic culture (for the moment we do not call it civilisation).

Barbarians by nature and behaviour, by ritual and thinking, the inhabitants of the Romanian space, like all the other Balkanic peoples, become to be colonised at an imaginary level. We need to come back here to Martin Buber's theory concerning the *I – You, I – the Other* relation. This relation of imaginary colonisation lies in the incapacity of the Western Centre to overcome the level of seeing the inhabitants of the Eastern periphery more than “the Other”, more than just an object of study, an object of research, in the impossibility to create a reciprocal relation such as the relation I – You.

Consequently, two complexes are formed in the conscience and they are to be detected rather easily today too: the



inhabitants of the Centre develop a superiority complex while the inhabitants of the Periphery develop an inferiority complex, both of them deepening the differences between the two worlds.

In the 1960's, as a continuation of the Balkanic imaginary, by a mutation of values, Olivia Manning's book *The Balkanic Trilogy* makes Anthony Hope's purely imaginative Ruritania¹² come to include Romania in its space too, identify with the Balkans and cease to be a fairy-tale like space, where unusual but romantic things happen and acquiring the connotations of a space of negative alterity.¹³

Knocking at the Doors of Orient

A controversial land, placed both in the Balkans and Ruritania, moreover a passing gate to another worlds, Oriental or not, Byzantine or not, or maybe both Oriental and Byzantine, a blending of beauty and grotesque, the Romanian land gets to be the target of some imaginary colonies of the British travellers, especially in the 18th century, travellers who suffer of the *Gulliver Syndrome*,¹⁴ Attracted by the Other's life, by his space, by all that this symbol-lexeme the *Other* means, the travellers' journey will generate a game of symbol-images either from the Balkanic space or from Ruritania i.e. a blending of real images and imagined images determined by the need to know. Of course, regarding Eastern Europe, we cannot talk about a real British imperialism, but rather about an Imperialism of representation and knowledge.¹⁵

The texts analysed by us are the product of these two psychic processes, representation and knowledge, though the trajectory should be reversed: knowledge and representation. The stereotype produces

image without knowledge. At a first level – knowledge- the need of the foreigner is to localise the researched space, to put it in certain frames. At this point, we meet an interesting detail in the texts of these travellers, irrespective of their nature and intentionality. The Romanian land is covered in an extreme confusion due to the ambiguity of the land itself, to the language of Latin origin spoken by its inhabitants, something which would normally match Catholicism, not Orthodoxy, as it happened.

The traveller William Hunter who travelled through the Romanian countries in 1792 makes the following statement regarding the geographical position of a village in Vrancea: *These houses from this part of Turkey [...]*.¹⁶ Consequently, Moldova is thought to be situated in Turkey. The fact that in these travellers' psychology the data regarding the Romanians were confused is proved by the following lines belonging to the same traveller and which speak about the region of Buzău:

Fortunately, my brother had with him a pair of English pistols made especially for Turkey and which, though not of good handcraft, they were just fit for the ruler of a Greek town.¹⁷

The confusion is more than clear and proves a shallow attitude from the author who is not at least interested in being constant when giving data which after all speak about real geography.

The case is not singular. We most often meet the transfer of the ethnical meaning of the word *Greek* to the word *Orthodox*, the identification losing its ethnical meaning in the end. The botanist John Sibthorp when travelling together with the ambassador Sir Robert Linston, reaches the lands of Banat, Transylvania and Țara Românească on their way to Constantinople.



When staying for the night in the village Căineni, he tells:

At one moment we entered the Turkish lands and stayed for the night in a small village made up of some awful huts. We dined under the beautiful sky, in fairy-tale scenery. The goats were rumbling around the table, the evening was calm and peaceful and the Olt was murmuring through the valley. A poor Greek offered me his bed but it was so full of parasites that I preferred the ground floor where I slept covered in my cloak.¹⁸

For the traveller, the Greeks and the Turks are mere symbols of absolute alterity. Out of the need to frame the unknown alterity, he appeals to the knowledge of the known alterity, or better said, to the coordinates of framing alterity, where ethnicity and religion are mostly relevant. The Romanians affiliated to the Orthodox Church but to the Turkish sovereignty, are subject to a process of alterisation on account of these two different opposed affiliations. The term *Greek* comes here to acquire the meaning of *barbarian*, opposed to the term *civilised*, which designates the Occident. We are confronted here with a paradox: the word barbarian was born at the heart of the Greek civilisation, designating in fact what did not belong to the Greeks or to those speaking Greek i.e. to foreigners as Julia Kristeva states in her book *Étrangers à nous mêmes*:

Le terme barbare devient alors fréquent pour designer les non-Grecs. Homère appliquait le mot de barbarophone aux indigènes d'Asie Mineure combattant avec les Grecs, et semble avoir forgé le terme à partir d'onomatopées imitatives: bla-bla, bara-bara, bredouillis inarticulés ou incompréhensibles.¹⁹

This transfer is extremely interesting from the point of view of the change of values, or, from the view of the mutations which appear when defining alterity.

Although the Orient and the Balkans were defined by researchers as being two different spaces and cultures, the Romanian Principalities are situated in the real geography, but especially in the imaginary geography of the British travellers at the gates of both worlds, somewhere in between, but without the possibility of tracing the limits. The proof of this statement is given by one of the three university professors who came to the Romanian Principalities in the year 1794, John B. S. Morrit, who is writing his mother from Bucharest the following:

Since I left Sibiu, I have been travelling through a Greek country and all we see seems so new so unusual that we are afraid we might be dreaming about a fairy-tale from One Thousand and One Nights.²⁰

Beside the fact that John Morrit keeps the meaning *orthodox* of the word *Greek*, which represents the first step in differentiating from the Other, we have an extraordinary symbol of the alterity of the imaginary space, but also extremely Oriental: the world of One Thousand and One Nights. The adjective *new* in the fragment above means merely *unknown* or *another*, so different that it seems closer to imaginary than to real. Which could then be the identity of the Romanians, described as Orthodox but oriental, speaking a Latin language, but closer to fantastic rather than to the acknowledged reality? His symbol of the Arabic world appears also in the text of Morrit's companion, Robert Stockdale, which shows a common opinion on the topic:



The city [Bucharest] and all the proprieties in the Romanian Country are in the hands of the Christians, and by all the treats made with Istanbul, no Turk is allowed to practice his religion or bring his family here. Indeed, the Orthodox religion seems here very vivid, there are crosses everywhere. [...] Above all, you are amazed here by those oily cook shops which are in every city of Turkey and which remind you of *One Thousand and One Nights*.²¹

Stockdale's description is interesting from another point of view too. He makes reference to the orthodox religion of the citizens of Bucharest, but he does not say a word about Romanians, though he mentions the Greeks, the Jews or the Germans. The symbol of *One Thousand and One Nights* seems to reunite a series of images which are related only by a huge discrepancy.

However, Morrit enjoys in the end the beauty of the lands: *Yet we are very merry and say such new scenes that they make up for all our pains and we do nothing but laugh and make jokes*.²²

Another coordinate of alterity is the language of the inhabitants of the Romanian Principalities, considered by the British travellers as being an interesting manifestation of their spirit:

Language is one of the components of every mental and social structure. In the relation language-being there is a profound reality. They evolve together and reflect together all the events of a common history: language is the soul of a culture, of a fortress.²³

Taking into account the symbolism of the language of a people offered by the

Dictionary of Symbols of Chevalier's, we shall understand why the language spoken on the territory of the Romanian Principalities is in fact the intriguing element for the British travellers who came on these lands, just because the Romanians' identity does not seem affiliated to the Occidental civilisation; moreover these lands were just a passing gate. The Romanian language so similar for the foreigners to Latin – an element which would guarantee in the Occident a superior status was a misplaced element in the Romanians' image.

Sir William Sidney Smith, an English diplomat who stayed in the Romanian Country and Dobrogea between 1792 and 1793 makes the following statements about the language spoken by the Romanians:

[...] their language is a corrupted form of Latin or Italian, mixed with Turkish or Illyric. The common words are very close to Italian. For example: foc, cald, bou, apa, dulce and a lot others which, together with other Roman constructions represents a proof that the Roman Emperor Traian passed through these places.²⁴

Thus, in the Barbaric image of the Romanians comes this element of affiliation to an imposing civilisation, that of the Romans. The mixture of civilisation in the middle of which stand the Romanians, creates a sort of enigmatic aura around them in the image of the Orientalists have. However, under the circumstances, Romanian creates a communication bridge between the Romanians and the British, the relation of extreme alterity being reduced to one of alter-identity. This image is a counter pole of that regarding imaginary geography, creating a sort of double-balanced representation of the Romanian people, anchored



both in an enclave of Balkanic nations and languages and also in the Western most important civilisation of antiquity, that of the Romans.

Maria Todorova sees the difference between the Centre and the Periphery i.e. the Orient and the Occident in the following way: *“The Orient and the Occident are usually presented as incompatible identities, anti-worlds, but complete anti-worlds.”*²⁵ Yet, we see between the two the Balkanic and the Occidental, another shape, another *Other*, difficult to identify with either of them but bearing characteristics from both, and this third *Other* is the Romanian people.

A Land at the Crossing of Worlds

This place, before the war, had been a considerable town, with six or seven hundred houses, which the Turks, before they withdrew, out of a mere caprice, had reduced to fifty...No matter how extraordinary it might seem, it is yet true that both in Moldavia and in the Romanian Country, during the previous war, the Turks were feared more than both the Austrians and Russians, and not without a reason, as wherever they stave, they left remnants of their greediness and brutality. [...] The entire Maracineni village, near which there is the house, as well as all the people belong to the landlord and when the household is passed over to another lord, the people pass over to him as well, similarly to all other goods and objects. Thus, in this country without fortune, the most reprehensible and horrible feature of the feudal system is left to preserve its primitive force.²⁶

In the lines above we can see several images of the *Other*, as, actually,

there are more *the Other*.

The British traveller William Hunter, while on a journey in the Romanian lands in 1792, makes a clear distinction between two elements of alterity. The most foreign form of alterity is that of the Turks, a perfectly barbarian entity in the vision of the British traveller, an active alterity through its forms of manifestation, not a passive one as the Romanians' alterity, in their attitude towards the Others. As a place to live in, the Romanian land seems perceived under the star of a male chance, the result of the mixture between form and essence, in our case, the Romanian nation and the territory it lives in. We can distinguish two more forms of alterity, those of the Austrians and the Russians, who, from an imagological point of view, have almost the same image as the Turks, but not the same level. The Romanians described by William Hunter in the region of Constanța, the village Rașova seem to be integrating part of their land:

All inhabitants seem to be dying with starvation and are ravished by fevers and numerous other diseases caused by their totally insufficient and poor food. But people's vain is so great...that in this lost corner of the earth, where, according to this description, you would think that poverty levelled all differences, you can see children with their caps fully adorned with coins, while both they and their parents suffer from starvation.²⁷

Here we have a completion of the image presented above, in which nation is just as strange as the land it lives on. Exaggerated images? Difficult to say, but definitely different from where our traveller was coming.

The formula *a country without fortune*, where the term *country* covers here



the terms of *nation, people, territory*, with past and future, generates the image of another entity, placed somewhere at the at the crossing of winds and worlds, and is taken over, even if in different forms, by many other travellers coming in these lands. In the production of these images there is the touch of the superiority complex first of the Westerner and second, of the British, who interposes the distance of alterity generated by the difference from the two worlds.

The English diplomat William Eton came to Iași in the summer of 1789 and he presents the situation of the Moldavians in the same frames, though the intentionality of the text is to present actually the decayed image of the Ottoman Empire:

The excesses made by these undisciplined mobs are beyond any imagination, plundering and ravaging the country and sometimes destroying entire villages and killing the inhabitants who have no defence; this is why it is not unusual for the inhabitants to run in the woods with their most precious things to hide, as soon as they hear of the coming of an army.²⁸

This land at the end of the world, as it was named by one of the travellers is pretty unsafe from the point of view of roads as well, as the travellers fear every moment they might be attacked and killed. On his way to Lugoj, Robert Stockdale describes the unsafe country roads:

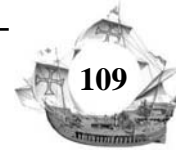
Our road crossed a thick wood where gangs of robbers up to 20-30 persons had recently committed numerous attacks. In spite of that, we saw none, although we had been continually warned by our coachmen, who made

different detours through the woods uselessly.²⁹

Consequently, for a foreign traveller the roads through the Romanian lands represented a true adventure, in which he had to fear both robbers, wild beasts, bad weather and all kind of misfortunes, these attitudes being ultimately understandable in an unknown land inhabited by unknown people.

The imaginary British colonialism manifests constantly the superiority of its identity, almost all the travellers perceiving the Romanian Principalities in the same way. Their image is that of a strange territory, where anything can happen, where roads and places are dangerous, and their inhabitants awkward because of their behaviour and way of speaking. Nevertheless, their opinion is not a totally rejecting one. The enigmatism and exotic beauty of the lands raise the interest and spirit of adventure in our travellers. Lady Craven, the author of a memorable text about the Romanian Principalities, while travelling in these lands in 1786, makes the following statement about the Romanian lands and people, her words confirming the attitude of the imaginary British colonialism: "*This country can indeed be name a wrongly placed piece of jewellery; what it could become if it got in some hardworking and skilled hands*"³⁰ We could understand by the syntagma *diligent and good hands* simply *Great Britain*, whose image is projected by the traveller's simple words, who also suffers from the *Syndrome of colonialism*. The same Lady Craven, who, all along her journey focuses mainly on herself rather than the visited places, being satisfied only to take over information from Raicevich's book, is however impressed by the beauty of the landscapes:

We stayed the night in the house of



another boyar, and, walking along the road, we saw a great Greek monastery, placed on one side of the mountain and surrounded by well ploughed champs. I won't try to describe the wonderful beauties of the mountains, the tall trees and all kind of bushes which ranged all kind of greens. [...]"³¹

Exotism was one of the coordinates of the travellers of that time in perceiving alterity, it was the alternative to a too well known territory. The reverend Edmund Chishull, who travelled in the Romanian territories together with Lord Paget in 1702, manages to render a more balanced image about the Romanians, as he is among the few who do not rush to imagistic representation before going through the knowledge stage. His descriptions of the places are more exact:

May, 3rd. This morning we continued our way and in half an hour we reached the bittom of the mountains, where Dâmbovița flows down into the plains through not very shallow straits which it might have dug partly with its continuous and rushing waters. We go through this valley for seven hours and we cross the winding river for more than twenty times while we are continually charmed by the murmurs of the waters which flow ahead, by the shadow of the hills' walls which form the valley and by the smoothness of the climbing which takes us slowly on the mountain. Finally, we reach a clearing surrounded like a theatre by trees and hills and where there is a village named Cotenești.

The reverend's lines transmit a sort of warmness, a proof of his identification with the landscape, a personal tone of knowledge and closeness to the lands.

These travellers' discourses are somewhat marked by an Enlightenment, which aimed at the knowledge of the Other, even if in most cases this proves to be superficial, and an exciting Romanticism, both generated by the major difference between the image of the Self and the image of the Other.

Between Truth and Anecdote

Exaggeration and hyperbole make reference to a certain re-dimensioning of the focused object, a recreation of its identity units. These two processes extremely frequent when re-imagining a foreign, unknown space represent the form of authority of he who re-imagines, the focused object becoming, thus, a material with a infinitely re-shaping potential. While analysing the two processes in the case of the British travellers regarding their perceiving the Romanian principalities, from an imagological perspective, we can better understand the relation they manage to establish with the focused object, respectively with the Other, whom they represent before reaching the stage of knowledge. According to Buber's theory, it is a relation I-the Other not I-You, where the Other is a reified object, at the disposal of the re-imagining authority.

Frederick Calvert, Lord de Baltimore, tells a truly hilarious story, which happened to him in the region of Iași, when he was sheltered in a straw cottage:

All houses are without floors and awful, only a little better than those in the scattered villages where I stayed on and off during our journey. They are made of earth, except for some belonging to more important boyars. In one of these cottages, after I had been given a



campaign bed to sleep in, when I was about to sleep, a huge cow which was outside my cottage and which must have been looking for some fodder, ate the straw on the roof and stretched its head over my bed; this, together with numerous lice which were everywhere prevented me from sleeping all night long, as well all along the journey...³²

Ultimately, we have a fantastic image regarding the land inhabited by Romanians. And, as in the perception of the Other there is an organic relation the space inhabited by him and his spirit as identity, it is easy to understand, then, the positioning of the Romanians and their lands in the view of the English.

We have a similar account about a fire which took place in a village in the region Vrancea, told by the traveller William Hunter, who invents an improper ending for the Romanian location. The story starts by the affirmation of the authoritarian identity of the traveller as compared to a much inferior nation: "*While we stayed here our compassion was risen to the fullest*"³³. The story is about a fire which burst out at a house in the village, and which is described by the author in terms of horror and pity for the miserable people involved, in the end his attitude changing in one of interest: "*I think never in my life had I seen a group more worth of interest...*"³⁴ His reaction is most interesting, but the unbelievable part of the story refers to the way the fire was put out, by pulling down the house in the neighbourhood, a very unlikely thing as in this region the houses were very far from one another.³⁵

Men nevertheless showed more strength and worked readily to pull down the neighbouring house which was at only a few yards from the one in

flames. This method proved successful, and probably saved the rest of the village from burning."³⁶

Robert Townson's lines are a proof of exaggeration as well. He was an English doctor, naturalist and mineralogist, and, when referring to the relations between nobility and peasantry in Transylvania, which he visited in 1793, makes unbelievable remarks which stir laughter; the same information is taken over by his editor in the preface of his book *Travels in Hungary with a Short Account of Vienna in the Year 1793*:

The clerics and the noblemen are presented as constant representatives of the whole people. They never leave their peasants, but stay on their properties to protect them. They are an example of practical morality: the peasants, the merchants, the farmers and the artisans form together with the clerics and the noblemen a single indestructible and untouchable body.

Obviously, here we have a reference of the traveller to the Romanian identity through the filter of the Hungarian noblemen, together with whom he stayed and travelled. However, there is no denying of the unreality of the information, promoted to Western Europe as well.

A proof of the placement of the Romanian Principalities somewhere at the interference of an imaginary land and of a seemingly real one, Ruritania, is Thomas Hope's picaresque novel *Anastasius*. Thomas Hope visited Bucharest in 1796 and the mentioned novel, different from the other writings of the travellers mainly for his literary intentionality, combines numerous biographic data with other purely fictional. Thus, the way to Bucharest encompasses many fantastic scenes such as:



That of the gang of hideous beggars, grouped together in a rather threatening community and who wander everywhere, sleeping in cemeteries at night etc. and giving the impression they might people coming from hell.

Consequently, in the examples above we are faced with different symbols of the Other, with which the British travellers work when detecting and deciphering the Romanian identity. The process is one of prejudiced frames, with which everyone came here, and which required the confirmation of the apriori data, the message from one identity to the other no longer following the natural manner, being altered either by the code or by a difference of values, or a by a simple superficiality in representing the Other.

A bird's eye view shows that what unifies the two worlds are the stereotypical language forms, the key-images which appear on our imaginary map from one end to the Other, with a high frequency, on the extreme forms of representing the Other, which show the sensitivity in perceiving the real right through their extremity. Hence, on the account of the vascillation of the images between "*phobias and mirage*", as Carmen Andraş puts it, "Imagology desires exactly the relativisation of these representations through their comparative study and the multiplication of perspectives."³⁷

A portrait of the Romanian lands and of their inhabitants as comes out of these descriptions, after eliminating the writing and intentionality circumstances, generated by their nature, be it diplomatic, personal or scientific, is surrounded in an aura of mystery and controversy, rendered by the texts themselves. A people speaking a Romanic language, so strange in the travellers' ears, but anchored in a totally Balkanic land and culture, and with a religion of Byzantine rite, the image of the

Romanian people as *the Other*, vascillates between a rejection due to the extreme alterity generated by these differences and an almost involuntarily closeness due to exactly this hybrid nature of both Here and There, of Far and Close, relativised exactly by the communication channel, the Romanian language, a characteristic of a nobleness unguessed initially by the foreign traveller. The Far becomes somehow Close, and the Other a prolongation of This. The relation eventually changes from one of Identity-Alterity into one of Identity – Alter-identity.

Actually, the representations of the Romanians in the imaginary of the British travellers will vascilate between these two types of relation which give the distance of the approach. The land itself is related to a hard to understand Far away. As habitat of the inhabitants, with houses, churches and roads, the space is a foreing and unwell-coming one, as if placed at the crossroads by destiny itself.

In the proper imaginary, in the representation of the inhabitants, men and women, with their customs, the images are the presult of the two processes: knowledge and representation. Due to the clichés which had appeared a century before, most of the travellers go through representation without first going through the stage of knowledge, and then the images lose their orientation to reality. Due to the British spirit, by definition superior in attitude, the negative images of the Romanians are dominated by a lack of civilisation, by an incurable laziness, their lifestyle is subdued by rituals, which all harden understanding and acceptance. The code of symbols and values is more frequent than different and is rendered by the images themselves.

In all this game of representations and images, beauty lies in this every new discovery of yours in the mirror of the



Other, and also in the reflection of the Other as your own image. The way in this direction is a never-ending one, as well as the images in the travellers' texts.

The journey, as acknowledged step to the Other is a boomerang. Just like the frame story, the physical journey and the journey as text are journeys themselves or journeys in a frame, with an infinite potential. The consequences of such an action of detecting Yourself in the eyes of the Other will mean acknowledging the Other's existence, or in Julia Kristeva's words,³⁸ his bringing in a relation with you, as alterity itself means the love and knowledge of the Other, respectively, yours.

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*** *Identitate și alteritate. Studii de imagologie*, coordonatori Nicolae Bocșan și Valeriu Leu, Reșița, editura Banatica, 1996.

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Notes

¹ Arnold Toynbee *apud* Giorgios Prevelakis, *Balcanii. Cultură și geopolitică*. București, Editura Corint, p. 182.

² We owe the onomastic symbol **Gulliver** to Professor Eugenia Gavrilu, which she used in her book *Sindromul Gulliver*, Brăila, Editura Evrika, 1998.

³ The analysed texts are taken from volumes VIII, XIX and X from *Călători străini despre Țările Române* București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, vol. VIII, coord. by Maria Holban, M. M. Alexandrescu, Dersca Bulgaru, Paul Cernavodeanu, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1983; Vol. IX, coord. by Maria Holban, M. M. Alexandrescu, Dersca Bulgaru, Paul Cernavodeanu, București, Editura Academiei Române, 1997; Vol. X, coord. by Maria Holban, M. M. Alexandrescu, Dersca Bulgaru, Paul Cernavodeanu, București, Editura Academiei Române, 2000.

⁴ Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *Dicționar de simboluri*, București, Editura Artemis, 1994, vol. I, p. 268.

⁵ Rodica-Gabriela Chira, *Cyrano de Bergerac du burlesque à la science-fiction*, Alba Iulia, Editura Ulise, 2002, p.88.

⁶ R. Muchembled quoted in Simona Nicoară, *Eseuri și imaginar. Eseuri de antropologie istorică*, Cluj Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2000, p. 208.

⁷ Simona Nicoară, *Eseuri și imaginar. Eseuri de antropologie istorică*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2000, p. 209.

⁸ Carmen Andraș, *România și imaginile ei în literatura de călătorie britanică*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 2003, p. 63.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p.62.

¹⁰ Samuel Johnson quoted in Carmen Andraș, *România și imaginile ei în literatura de călătorie britanică*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, , 2003, p. 92.

¹¹ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997

¹² Anthony Hope's novel *The Prisoner of Zenda* presnets a mysterious country placed near Great Britain, its description being a mixture of elements belonging to South-Eastern Europe. The name of the country is Ruritania.

¹³ Eugenia Gavrilu, *Sindromul Gulliver*, Brăila, Editura Evrika, 1998, p.93.

¹⁴ According to Eugenia Gavrilu, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ Carmen Andraș, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

¹⁶ William Hunter in *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. I. coord. by Maria Holban, M. M. Alexandrescu, Dersca Bulgaru, Paul Cernavodeanu, București, Editura Academiei Române, 2000, X, p. 1099.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 1100.

¹⁸ John Sibthorp, in *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, coord. by Maria Holban, M. M. Alexandrescu, Dersca Bulgaru, Paul Cernavodeanu, București, Editura Academiei Române, 2000, vol. X, p. 1206.



- ¹⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous mêmes*, Librairie Arthème Fayard, [s.l.], 1988, p. 75.
- ²⁰ John B.S. Morrit, in *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. X, p. 1239.
- ²¹ Robert Stockdale, in *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. X, p.1247.
- ²² John B.S. Morrit, *op. cit.* p. 1239.
- ²³ Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant, *op. cit.*, vol II, p. 222.
- ²⁴ Sir William Sidney Smith, în *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. X, p. 1077.
- ²⁵ Maria Todorova, *op. cit.* p. 34.
- ²⁶ William Hunter in *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. X, p. 1100.
- ²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 1091.
- ²⁸ William Eton, in *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. X, p. 281.
- ²⁹ Robert Stockdale, *op. cit.* p. 1242.
- ³⁰ Lady Elisabeth Craven in *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. X, p. 726.
- ³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 725.
- ³² Frederick Calvert, Lord de Baltimore, in *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. IX, p. 495.
- ³³ William Hunter, *op. cit.* p. 1099.
- ³⁴ *Ibidem*.
- ³⁵ "All scene seems invented. In the villages the houses were very far from one another so there was no need to be pulled down. This method was applied in cities as Constantinopole, where fires were real catastrophies." (Explanatory note to the Romanian critical edition of the text from *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. X, p. 1099).
- ³⁶ William Hunter, *op. cit.* p.
- ³⁷ Carmen Andraș, *op. cit.*, p.15.
- ³⁸ Julia Kristeva, *I think that the dominance of evil and lack of value is not only a phenomenon in the East*, în "Flash Art", vol. XXVI, January-February, 1993.