

## TRAVEL AND ESCAPISM: ELVIRA BOGDAN AND OLGA CABA<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT.** *Travel and Escapism: Elvira Bogdan and Olga Caba.* Olga Caba and Elvira Bogdan are female writers for whom travelling became an escapist strategy. Thus could they express, in diluted Aesopic terms, their discontent with Romania's political evolution in the 1940's and afterward, under the more acceptable mask of longing for other realms. Elvira Bogdan's lyrical outbursts in Rome or on the Valley of the Loire and Olga Caba's enthusiastic soliloquies in Scotland turned into double emphasis discourses under the restrictive travelling mode that prevailed before 1990.

**Keywords:** *travel, gender, France, Italy, escapism, discontent*

**REZUMAT.** *Călătorie și escapism: Elvira Bogdan și Olga Caba.* Elvira Bogdan și Olga Caba sunt scriitoare pentru care călătoria s-a transformat într-o strategie escapistă. În acest fel, ele au putut să-și exprime nemulțumirea față de evoluția politică a României în anii patruzeci ai secolului al XX-lea și ulterior, sub masca, mult mai acceptabilă, a dorinței de a vizita alte țărâmurii. Izbucnirile lirice ale Elvirei Bogdan la Roma sau pe Valea Loarei, precum și monologurile entuziaste ale Olgăi Caba în Scoția s-au transformat în discursuri cu accente duble în condițiile sistemului restrictiv al călătoriilor existent înainte de 1990.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *călătorie, gen, Franța, Italia, escapism, restricții, nemulțumire*

This paper focuses on two Romanian female travellers, Olga Caba and Elvira Bogdan, with a view to pointing out to the multiple potential of travelogues produced by female subjects, travellers abroad, and beholders of

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other realities before and after World War II. Another claim of this comparison is the agency of the female traveller enjoying the privilege of her status: she can watch the world from beyond the imposing immediacy of the natives' contingent. This agency is to be found in the incidents selected for reconstruction in the travelogue and also in the surreptitious signals sent to the reader in the Aesopic discourse of the travelogue.

The connection between escapism and travelling although pretty obvious, in my opinion, has not been too much present in literary scholarship. Rather it has been of interest from the psychological point of view. Probably, Holland and Huggan offer the perspective that is the closest to my own in their study *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections of Contemporary Travel Writing*. I share with Holland and Huggan the idea that travel writing affords "a licence for escapism" (v). Like Holland and Huggan, I consider that an important aim of a project focusing on travel writing is assessing its "capacity to analyze and transform gender perception" (xii). On the other hand, the two scholars consider that travelling also provides an excellent environment "for sexual play and queer performativity" (xii), which is beyond the scope of my analysis. Olga Caba's and Elvira Bogdan's impediments to travelling were mostly of political nature deriving from the very nature of the dictatorships they had to face for historical reasons.

The connection between escapism and travel or travel literature is the focus of two other studies authored by Julia Sanders and David G. Farley. Julia Sanders offers a very competent analysis of the problem in her article dedicated to two early modern English writers: Ben Jonson and Richard Brome. From a political point of view her approach relies on post-colonial theory. This critical grid is much more useful when reading Caba who is aware of the power games that influence the perception of the Other and she foreshadows, in certain details, the (post-)colonial gaze. On the other hand, Bogdan's travelling dilemmas are decisively the result of the political circumstances when she wrote and published, namely before and during the Cold War. Farley's work on modernist travellers talks about "a generation enlivened by travel writing" (2), more precisely about writers who turned to the travelogue as a literary genre that functions "as natural extension of their imaginative work" (3). Farley insists that for the modernist writers "travel was surrounded with an aura of transgression" (10). This article shares with Farley the focus on intellectual writers. On the other hand, Farley's analysis does not go beyond a certain time limit: the outbreak of World War II. Or this is a very important limit for Caba and Bogdan because World War II brought about the supremacy of the Soviet Union and the domination of communist totalitarianism over Romania. Caba's and Bogdan's lives were profoundly influenced by these changes.

Less than two decades separate the two female writers who come, both of them, from an intellectual and middle class milieu. They enjoyed the educational opportunities in Greater Romania after World War I, they went through a period of obscurity from 1948 till after the Communist Thaw (1965), and then resumed their public literary activity more intensely.

Elvira Bogdan was born in Bucharest, in 1904 and died in 1987, also in the capital of Romania. A teacher's daughter, she graduated from the Faculty of Letters in Bucharest, in 1931. Thanks to Nicolae Iorga who also prefaced her first novel *Talismanul de aur* [*The Gold Keepsake*], she benefited from a specialization stage at Sorbonne in 1931 (full studentship was probably considered too much). Upon her return to Romania, she taught at different high schools in Bucharest. From 1940 till 1946 she was a clerk at the Press Committee and after being jobless for two years she got obscure clerical and translation jobs at the Minister of Health and at the Geological Committee. She made her debut in 1928 and she was also editor-in-chief of *Mariana*, a conventional women's magazine (1942-1944). There is a breach in her literary activity between 1947 (the publication of *The Castles of the Loire Valley* [*Castelele Loarei*]) and 1969 when she published *Domnița Ruxandra* [*The Lady Ruxandra*]. Bogdan also published other novels for children: *Aurora, mireasa soarelui* [*Aurora, the Sun's Bride*] (1969) and *Mirela cu voce de aur* [*The Gold-Voiced Mirela*] (1982). Bovaristic in her excessively glamorous style, Elvira Bogdan is, however, a pleasant writer interested in the beauty of her expression and less in a highly original personalized view. Graceful and within beaten tracks... this is Elvira Bogdan.

Olga Caba was born in Valeva, Bukovina, in 1913. Like Elvira Bogdan, she was the daughter of a teachers' family. Caba studied English at the University of Cluj, under the supervision of Peter Grimm and graduated in 1934. During her studentship she benefited from a scholarship in Britain when she visited Scotland. She taught English at different schools in Botoșani, Focșani, Oradea, Bucharest between 1936 and 1952. From 1952 till 1953 she was imprisoned at Mislea and Văcărești with women from the former elite of the country. After getting out of prison, Caba withdrew at Sebeș where she taught French starting from 1954. This is the moment when she met Eric(a) Tecău, a hermaphrodite, and they fell in love (cf. Cârlușea). In 1956 Eric(a) was operated on in Bucharest and got a masculine identity. The two could finally marry in 1958. But this was no end of troubled times for the two lovers. This matrimony caused great scandal among the local authorities of the time. A teacher must be a model of morality! Conventional, prudish morality of course! In a country where homosexuality was punishable by prison, such a marriage could offer a good example neither to children nor to the community. Caba lost her teaching position in 1958 was obliged to live for the rest of her life on a meager pension. She died in 1995, Eric had preceded her in 1994.

Caba made her debut with a travelogue entitled *Vacanță sentimentală în Scoția* [*A Sentimental Journey to Scotland*] in 1944. It is a memorial of the happy times when she visited Scotland as a student. A long period of silence followed in her literary life. In 1970 Olga Caba resumed her literary activity with a collection of poems. Until 1988 she published several novels, as well as a collection of short stories. Then she got silent again. A collection of plays was published posthumously in 2001.

Three travelogues are under scrutiny in this paper: Olga Caba's 1944 *Vacanță sentimentală în Scoția* [*A Sentimental Voyage to Scotland*], Elvira Bogdan's 1947 *Castelele Loarei. Viața de glorie și strălucire din trecutul Franței* [*The Castles of the Loire Valley. The Life of Glory and Magnificence from the Past of France*] republished in 1970, under a slightly changed title, and in a reviewed and enriched version, and Elvira Bogdan's Italian 1976 travelogue: *Prin Italia, patria artei. Note de călătorie și evocări despre Roma, Siena, Florența, Veneția și Milano* [*Through Italy, the Homeland of Art. Travel Notes and Evocations about Rome, Siena, Florence, Venice, and Milan*].

The two writers' temperament and literary strategies are different. Olga Caba is ironical-lyrical and she relies on the intertextual mechanism reinventing Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* not to France and Italy, but to Scotland. Her travelogue turns into a statement with political connotations during World War II. Caba's apparently innocent travelogue talks about a happy period in the author's life before the war: her stage as a student at Durham and her exploration of Scotland. This journey became even more sentimental in 1944 when the book inspired by this experience was published. The travelogue is also an Aesopian text in its own way because it indirectly tries to re-connect Romania to a European and democratic tradition to which it belonged before World War II.

Elvira Bogdan is a more lyrical temperament. Her travel notes are resurrections of personal memories and of important historic personalities associated with the places that she visits. Elvira Bogdan digs up in her personal treasure hoard of memories and turns her psychological experiences into notes which contain both eternally valuable characterological observations and information on the history and culture of the country which she visits. This informative content increases significantly after 1947 when the travelogue becomes a surrogate travel for a readership that was forbidden the actual experience of travelling. The first edition of Bogdan's travelogue to the castles of the Loire Valley (namely, the 1947 edition) ends with the description of Fontenay-aux-Roses, the Romanian school founded by Nicolae Iorga in a suburb of Paris. In its own way it was a "castle" for the young Romanians who had come to France to improve their education. When Bogdan visited it immediately after

World War II, both the visit and the building implied a political message. France had been ravaged by war but it was resurrecting in a new world. Bogdan's love and admiration for France obviously means attachment to the Western values of civilization and hope that Romania will continue to be part of the democratic world after World War II.

Elvira Bogdan surrounds, protects both her text and herself with considerable paratext. This textual threshold invokes the protective father figure of Nicolae Iorga thanks to whom Elvira Bogdan could study in France from 1931 to 1934. The 1970 edition preserves the reference to Iorga and the image of the Romanian house at Fontenay-aux-Roses but they are placed at the end of the 1947 text and precede new travel impressions. These additions are the fruits of a 1969 journey, a privilege allowed by the then establishment, a concession the author is very much aware of and whose price she is eager "to pay." The "Foreword" to the second edition expresses Bogdan's joy when meeting old friends and admiring the same monuments she had admired before the Cold War. They all are impressive and impassive in their beauty. She wishes the past and the present were the same: "... it seems to me that nothing has changed here in the ever imposing grandeur of this great town of the world!" (175).<sup>3</sup> But history makes us all change and we can hear Elvira Bogdan paying tribute to the Communist Romania in the wooden language of that time. "But during those hot years, through our hard, enthusiastic, and relentless work, all of us, heroic, and steadfast. confident in victory, united, all our fiery generation laid the foundations of today's Romania flourishing, powerful, and beloved by all" (1970, 173).<sup>4</sup>

According to a note found on the back cover of the 1970 version of *The Castles of the Loire Valley*, the book was published at the author's expense. The lack of any financial support points to the author's impatience to see her authorship turned to account, but this does not mean less servitude to the exigencies of censorship. The loophole is simply not big enough. *The Castles...* travelogue is dedicated to the author's mother. She is responsible for Elvira's never sated passion for history and culture.<sup>5</sup>

"The Preface" was written by Victor Eftimiu, a writer who had submitted to the exigencies of the Communist regime. He authored plenty of conventional verse but also preserved something from the inter-war atmosphere by his

<sup>3</sup> "... mi se pare că nimic nu s-a schimbat aici, din măreția impunătoare dintotdeauna a acestui falnic oraș al lumii!" (1970, 175).

<sup>4</sup> "Dar prin munca noastră încordată, entuziasă, fără răgaz, cu toții fiind eroici, dârzi, încrezători în izbândă, noi toți laolaltă, întreaga noastră generație de foc puneam în acei ani fierbinți temeliile nepieritoare ale României de azi: înfloritoare, atotputernică, iubită de toți" (1970, 173).

<sup>5</sup> "care mi-a sădit în suflet din cea mai fragedă vârstă, pasiunea pentru istorie, pentru cultură ..." (1970, 5) ["... who aroused in my soul the passion for history, for culture since my youngest age..." (1970, 5)].

manners and appearance (elegant suits and extravagant bows). In his encomiastic paratext Eftimiu appreciates the beauty of Bogdan's style and the suggestive virtues of her historical reconstructions.<sup>6</sup> Victor Eftimiu advised Elvira Bogdan to offer the Romanian readership new presentations of French castles, in other words, enrich the 1947 version of the travelogue, and change the title of the book from the rather passeistic *Castelele Loarei. Viața de glorie și strălucire din trecutul Franței* [*The Castles of the Loire Valley. The Life of Glory and Magnificence from the Past of France*] to the more touristic *Castelele Loarei. Note de drum și evocări din trecutul de glorie și strălucire al Franței* [*The Castles of the Loire Valley. Travel Notes and Evocations from the Glorious and Magnificent Past of France*]. Indirectly, he recommended Bogdan to the authorities of the time so that she get permission to travel abroad again. The preface becomes therefore, not only a text about the book which one is about to read but also a timid attempt to negotiate some freedom with the Authority of the time.

Elvira Bogdan's Italian travelogue also has a consistent paratext. After a dedication to Nicolae Iorga, under whose authority and protection the author places her creative effort, there follows the preface by Paul Cernovodeanu, senior research fellow at the "Nicolae Iorga" Institute of History in Bucharest. Says Paul Cernovodeanu: "For every monument, the author judiciously proceeded by writing a short but enlightening history and then described it artistically, with the inspired quill of a gifted writer" (1976, 8).<sup>7</sup> According to the paratextual author-ity, Elvira Bogdan undertakes a popularizing enterprise<sup>8</sup> - a word so dear to the Communist propaganda which aimed at translating high culture into popular culture apparently for the benefit of the masses. In fact, "popularization" was an exercise of censorship and expurgation in order to adapt high culture to the necessities of Communist propaganda. Cernovodeanu goes on emphasising the author's attitude: she "... did not fail to manifest her patriotic attitude and her profound understanding of the past" (1976, 8).<sup>9</sup>

Both in her 1970 French travelogue and in her 1976 Italian travelogue, Elvira Bogdan informs the reader paratextually that she was a member of the Tiberine Academy in Rome. Unlike Olga Caba who prefers to limit the paratext to a minimum absolutely necessary for the reader's information, Elvira Bogdan uses the ample paratext as an indirect mediation terrain for negotiation and compromise with the Authority. She seeks legitimacy by inscribing her travelogue

<sup>6</sup> "... frumoase pagini de evocări istorice" (1970, 5).

<sup>7</sup> "Pentru fiecare monument autoarea a procedat judicios, întocmind câte un scurt - dar edificator - istoric, și apoi descriindu-l din punct de vedere artistic, cu o pană inspirată de scriitoare talentată" (1976, 8).

<sup>8</sup> "operă de popularizare" (1976,8).

<sup>9</sup> "...autoarea a ținut să-și manifeste atitudinea patriotică și adâncă înțelegere pentru trecutul" (1976, 8).

in a prestigious context of patriarchal power and intellectual prominence. If there is also some maternal source of authority (see the dedication to Bogdan's mother), this is rewarded with loving and affectionate respect, but it is the power of the patriarchal figures of Bogdan's paratext that facilitate her public recognition.

Another difference between the two women writers refers to the poetic quality of the text. With Caba this poetic value comes from the reality it describes, namely the beauty of the Scottish landscape described in Sterne's sentimental mode. Scotland becomes a romantic topos of lost causes – think of Bonnie Prince Charlie! – but at the same time, there is always a touch of irony which brings us back to the prosaic realities of modernity. "Spring had brought me so close to the borders of Scotland that opening my window, which overlooked the hills, it seemed to me that I could hear Bonnie Prince Charlie's bag pipes. Spring is always full of callings although nowadays, there is such heavy traffic on our roads and maps are so good that it is impossible to let yourself be seduced by the illusion that you do not know where you are going".<sup>10</sup> Caba is able to combine, very deftly, irony and fear, horror. For sure, there is no better place for such mixture than Loch Ness. Caba does not want to let herself be submerged by fear but she also realizes that she may lose some of the unique charm of the place by this excess of rationality. She sees no trace of the famous monster. "In vain did I gaze at the smiling and blue water table, I could see nothing, not even a fish, maybe because I was a foreigner and the monster only appears to the natives" (127-128).<sup>11</sup> Another explanation for this banal and peaceful landscape of Loch Ness is a pleasantly ironical self-reference: "[t]he land took revenge upon me for I did not want to believe in fairy queens" (120).<sup>12</sup>

Sometimes Olga Caba's depiction of the Scottish landscape gets impressionistic touches. Loch Ness calls for such a pictorial approach as water has always been a matter of utmost concern for the Impressionistic artists. "Around the lake [Loch Ness] floats a blue and soft mystery of grey mist, the hills, the sky, the lake, they are all blue, the contours melt, and the light of the sun is a little bit steamy because of the humid air. All this subtle landscape would make you cry, or it would simply slip between your fingers unless the massive yellow of

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<sup>10</sup> "Primăvara mă aduse atât de aproape de hotarele Scoției, încât, deschizându-mi geamul înspre dealuri, mi se părea că aud cimpoaietele lui Bonnie Prince Charlie. Primăvara este întotdeauna plină de chemare, deși în zilele noastre drumurile sunt atât de bătute și hărțile atât de bune, încât este imposibil să te lași sedus de iluzia că nu știi unde te duci" (9).

<sup>11</sup> "Eu, însă, degeaba mi-am plimbat ochii pe oglinda zâmbitoare și albastră, nu vedeam nimic, nici măcar un peștișor, poate pentru că eram străină și dihania nu apare decât indigenilor" (127-128).

<sup>12</sup> "[t]ara s-a răzbunat asupra mea, pentru că n-am vrut să cred în zâne" (120).

the flowers nailed it in gold”.<sup>13</sup> Poetry is always at hand when Olga Caba describes the beautiful nature of Scotland. “The lake is quiet and virginal, like a fairy queen who has fallen asleep under her blue veils” (76).<sup>14</sup> At Glen Nevis: “[w]ild waterfalls throw themselves into precipices ...” (108)<sup>15</sup>, at Inverness “[b]lue are the distant hills and blue is the sky looming through the white fog like an eye drowning in tears” (131).<sup>16</sup> The interference of modernity is loathsome, according to Caba’s classical taste. She talks about “the advertisements for the McClelan toothpaste and the Shell oil machines, these ghosts which damage the aspect of the most romantic corners on earth by their unexpected appearance” (43).<sup>17</sup>

On the contrary, Elvira Bogdan is very informative and only occasionally is she tempted to mount Pegasus and let her poetical voice go. Here is, for instance, the passage describing Piazza di Spagna in Rome. “Flowers, flowers, everywhere the most diverse flowers, wherever you might look there is an abundance, a profusion of flowers offered by the beautiful and talkative flower girls full of joy and grace, who smile at you, tempt you, with their slightly singing voice and their friendly, inviting looks, to buy from them”.<sup>18</sup> This poetical passage relies on an association constructed according to the traditional patriarchal recipes associating the flower girl with her merchandise (the flowers), namely with fertility. Selling flowers, in other words selling the sexual organ of the plant, also intimates that flower girls symbolically sell something that bodily belongs to them. They are beautiful, enticing, and slightly promiscuous.

Other poetic passages from Bogdan’s text belong to the romantic poetics of the ruins. Occasionally she also introduces poetical fragments from other authors – all of them canonized males - as if she were looking for support among the confirmed poetical authorities of Romanian literature or world literature. This is how she instrumentalizes Stendhal, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Goethe, Henri de Régnier, or Carducci. These poetical revisitations point to her culture and are also escapes to the world of art and beauty.

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<sup>13</sup> “În jurul lacului plutește un mister albastru și dulce de ceață fumurie, dealurile, cerul, lacul, toate sunt albastre, conturile sunt topite și lumina soarelui e puțin aburită de aerul umed. Tot acest peisaj subtil te-ar face să plângi, sau pur și simplu, ți-ar aluneca printre degete dacă galbenul masiv al florilor nu l-ar fixa cu cuie de aur” (125-126).

<sup>14</sup> “Lacul e liniștit și feciorelnic, ca o zână adormită sub vălurile ei albastre” (76).

<sup>15</sup> “[c]ascade sălbatice se aruncă în prăpăstii...” (108).

<sup>16</sup> “[a]lbastre sunt dealurile din depărtare și albastru este cerul întrezărit prin ceața albă ca un ochiu înneecat în lacrimi” (131).

<sup>17</sup> “reclamele de pastă de dinți McClelan și automatele de benzină Shell, fantome care prin apariția lor totdeauna neașteptată strică înfățișarea celor mai romantice colțuri ale pământului (43).

<sup>18</sup> “Flori, flori, peste tot cele mai felurite flori, cât cuprinzi cu ochii o bogăție, o profuziune de flori, pe care ți le oferă florăresele frumoase, gureșe, pline de voieșie și de grație, zâmbindu-ți, îmbiindu-te cu glasul lor, ușor cântat și cu priviri prietenoase, galeșe – să le cumperi...” (108).

In spite of all the difficulties Bogdan has succeeded in travelling to Italy and she can now admire the glorious ruins. Her enthusiasm translates into short exclamatory sentences or points of suspension because the emotion is too intense. She escapes from the world of the word that must be said.

Rome, the matchless city!  
Rome, the queen of all cities! Rome, the immortal City!  
Rome, beloved by all!  
Rome...<sup>19</sup>

Still, Elvira Bogdan is not so keen on giving the reader her own subjective impressions of the realities she sees abroad but rather offers “objective” information about the famous monuments and the famous owners or tenants of the buildings that she sees in Italy or France. In the 1970 edition she does not forget to add that nowadays the famous castles of the Loire Valley are “the property of the French people” (1970, 274).<sup>20</sup> The political implications are evident and they are meant to please the censor.

A very interesting authority used by Bogdan to legitimize her travelogue is the Romanian historian Vasile Pârvan whom Bogdan quotes several times. On the one hand, this is agreeable to the ears of the Communist censor as Pârvan was instrumentalized in the National Communist discourse growing during those years of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s dictatorship. On the other hand, Pârvan’s verse about his disease – he used to suffer from epilepsy – has a hidden meaning for the reader who used to live under the tyranny of a political pathology, namely the communist ideology imposed as the only possible truth in society: “Every murmur is a disease/ every pessimistic thought is a heresy against the principle of life!”<sup>21</sup>

Like many other travellers Caba and Bogdan also construct their home in national terms and set themselves in contrast with other ethnic identities essentialized as the Others. For instance, Caba feels proud to sign in a Scottish hotel’s guest book as its first ever Romanian guest.

After breakfast the guests’ book was brought to me so that I could sign in mentioning the country I came from. I leafed through two volumes and found people who had come from all the four corners of the world

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<sup>19</sup> “Roma cea fără de seamă în lume!  
Roma, regina cetăților! Roma Cetatea eternă!  
Roma cea îndrăgită de toți!  
Roma...” (121).

<sup>20</sup> “bunuri ale poporului francez” (274).

<sup>21</sup> “Fiecare cârtire e o boală, fiecare gând pesimist e o erezie împotriva principiului vieții!” (11).

but I found no Romanian signature. So I proudly wrote my name as the first from my nation who had reached these lands and I felt like Cook when he first landed in Tahiti.<sup>22</sup>

Scotland becomes a kind of Mioritza<sup>23</sup> land and the Scottish melancholic songs are felt to be close to the *doinas* sung of the Romanian shepherds. The Scots are one of those peoples who still suffer because of some historical defeats. Caba understands this longing for an inexorable historical past that has shaped the present in ways felt to be unfair. "For him [the Scotsman], the past is the present and in any moment he is ready to cry over his favourite Prince Charlie whose exile occurred two hundred years ago, over Queen Mary's sufferings, and the clans' fall" (51).<sup>24</sup> Caba realizes the double nature of the Scots, a sort of double consciousness that is not shaped by race (as in W.E.B. DuBois' famous essay *The Souls of Black Folk*), but by the political balance of power extant in Great Britain. The battle of Culloden (1746) has sealed (at least for two centuries and a half) any dream of Scottish autonomy or/and independence. The Scotsman became a second rank ethnicity in this ethnic puzzle called Great Britain. Caba realizes all these evolutions with amazing perception and sympathy which comes from the Romanian historical experience as well. The Romanians also could not enjoy political autonomy or/and independence for a long time. "The Scotsman lives a double life as he is of a nature composed of two contrary instincts. Being realist, hardworking, and objective, he realizes that his only possibility to live a major history is to make the British cause his cause. At the same time, he is of a sentimental nature which cannot forget the past" (118).<sup>25</sup>

Hotels or youth hostels are wonderful contact zones where Caba constructs her ethnic essentialist observations. Somehow maliciously, she mentions the characteristics of each ethnic group. The passage is quite long but it is worth quoting for its irony, humour, and direct exposure of ethnic stereotypes.

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<sup>22</sup> "După dejun mi s-a adus cartea vizitatorilor să mă iscălesc, menționând țara de unde vin. Am răsfoit două volume și am dat de oameni veniți din cele patru colțuri ale lumii, dar n-am găsit iscălitura nici unui român. M-am semnat deci cu mândrie, ca prima din națiunea mea care umblase pe acele meleaguri și m-am simțit la fel ca Cook, cind acesta a debarcat pentru prima dată în Tahiti (30).

<sup>23</sup> Famous Romanian ballad with anonymous author and transmitted orally.

<sup>24</sup> "Pentru dânsul, trecutul este prezentul și în orice moment e gata să deplângă pribegiile favoritului său Prinț Charlie de acum două sute de ani, suferințele reginei Mary și prăbușirea clanurilor" (51).

<sup>25</sup> "Scoțianul trăiește o viață dublă, pentru că este o natură compusă din două instincte contrare. Fiind realist, sărguincios și obiectiv, își dă seama că singura sa posibilitate de a trăi o istorie majoră, este aceea de a face cauza brită, cauza lui. În același timp, este o natură foarte sentimentală care nu poate uita trecutul" (118).

The Frenchman is considered to be too nervous. His quick and expressive gestures, his lack of spontaneity in action - for example when he meditates, while holding the lid in his hand, whether to put it on the kettle or on the coffee pot - his ceremonial kindness, they fill the atmosphere around him with humour or even malice. The Frenchman notices, gets confused and mad. A new explosion of gaiety. (33-34) ... The silent Scandinavians, always looking like some sailors on land, are very similar to the English except that they are much calmer. (34) ... The Canadians, even if they have English or Scottish origins, are considered to be provincial relatives who do not have the same good quality, had they been born in the British kingdom. Rather they are some distant family treated with some kind of superior goodwill, patted on the shoulder, and generously guided. (34) ... The Englishman is much more at ease than his colonial relatives and somehow he even looks down on them. The accent, the manners, the new customs of the English having lived in the colonies for several generations are, all of them, drawbacks pointing to provincialism and inferiority (35) ... the English of the young generation do not share this prejudice to the same extent and they no longer imagine that one cannot live a human life outside the British Isles or that simply it is not *proper* to live outside England (35). ... But the Southern peoples are considered to be suspect and one should not meddle with them (35-36). ... As for the peoples from the South-East of Europe, the average Englishman, even the cultivated one, knows little, if anything. I was asked strange questions; for instance, if Romania is in Asia or if we speak the Yougoslav language. ... But as I learnt English very quickly and I could sit at table without putting my fingers into my mouth, I may not have offered them the show they expected and they may have said behind my back that I was as civilized as if I had been an English woman, they did say that about poor Pinto, my Portuguese colleague. (36)<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> "Francezul e considerat prea nervos. Gesturile sale repezi și expressive, lipsa lui de spontaneitate în acțiune, de exemplu când meditează cu capacul în mână, dacă să-l pună pe ceainic sau pe ibricul de cafea, ceremonioasa lui complezență, umplu atmosfera din jurul lui cu umor, ba chiar maliție. Francezul observă, se încurcă și se înfurie. Nouă explozie de veselie" (33-34). ... Scandinavii, tăcuți, cu veșnicul lor aer de marinari pe uscat, aduc mult cu englezii, doar că sunt și mai potoliți decât aceștia (34) ... Canadienii, chiar de proveniență engleză sau scoțiană, sunt considerați, ca niște rude de provincie, nu chiar atât de bună calitate ca și când s-ar fi născut în regatul britanic, ci ca membri mai îndepărtați ai familiei, tratați cu bunăvoința cam de sus venită, bătuți pe umăr, ghidați cu generozitate. (34) ... Englezul e însă mult mai degajat decât rubedeniile sale din colonii și chiar le privește cu oarecare dispreț. Accentul, manierele, obiceiurile noi acumulate de englezii trăind în colonii de mai multe generații, sunt tot atâtea defecte, trădând provincialism și inferioritate (35). ... tânăra generație de englezi e mai degajată de această prejudecată și nu-și mai închipuie că în afară de insulele britanice nu se poate trăi o viață omenească și că pur și simplu nu se *cade* să trăiești în afară de Anglia (35). ... Popoarele sudice sunt însă considerate ca oameni suspecti cu care nu e bine sa te amesteci (35-36). ... Cât despre popoarele din sud-estul Europei, englezul mediu și chiar cel cultivat, știe foarte puțin, dacă nu chiar nimic. Am fost întrebată lucruri foarte stranii, de exemplu, dacă România este în Asia, sau dacă vorbim limba iugoslavă. ... Deoarece, însă, am învățat foarte

The perspective of Caba, the traveller, on other ethnicities is influenced by the power games created by history and it is turned into account during one of those privileged instances when the West looks at the East and the East looks at the West. The Scots suffer because of the imperial gaze of the English but they identify with the imperial power and gaze once they can reconstruct the same power game that oppresses them while holding the upper position against others. It is really a kind of see-saw of symbolic power. Olga Caba's mindset is both performative and oppositional. She realizes with almost physical pain the stereotyping of the Southerners and the inclusion of the Romanians among the so-called lesser peoples. Not only do they melt into the undistinguishable sea of ethnicities which are not English, in other words they are not significant, but they also seem to hover on the margins of humanity. While in Edinburgh, Caba records such an incident partly with humour, partly with sadness. Caba put up at a youth hostel. The warden of the hostel was shocked when he realized that a Romanian slept under same roof as himself and his family. "When I told him I am Romanian, he looked at me as if I were the ninth wonder of the world because he had never seen Romanians in his life. He even called his wife to see me" (51).<sup>27</sup> Everybody needs an Other.

Unlike Olga Caba, Elvira Bogdan's writing is much more suppressed and contained. When referring to others, it displays a sort of political correctness *avant la lettre*. In fact, rarely does she offer ethnic observations except when she talks about the Italians.

The Italians are also friendly, full of gaiety, extrovert, warm and generous, ready to present you the object that you like. The Italians are ready to give you even their heart and they seduce you with their sentimental, friendly, and enthusiastic nature, their ageless youth ready to burst out at any moment. (16)<sup>28</sup>

The Italians are the Romanians' brothers. This cannot be forgotten and it leads to an idealization of Italy which inherited Rome and all its virtues. The alliance between Musolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany which led to Romania's loss of Northern Transylvania in 1940 is forgotten by Bogdan, the enthusiastic

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repede englezește și știam să stau la masă fără să îmi bag degetele în gură, nu le-am oferit poate spectacolul dorit și poate au spus și despre mine pe la spate ca sunt aproape tot atit de civilizată ca și când aș fi fost englezoaică, cum au spus despre săracul Pinto, colegul meu portughez (36).

<sup>27</sup> "Când i-am spus că sunt româncă, s-a uitat la mine ca la a noua minune a lumii pentru că nu mai văzuse români în viața lui. A chemat-o și pe soția lui să mă vadă (51).

<sup>28</sup> "Italienii sunt și ei prietenoși, plini de vioiși, expansivi, apropiați și sunt gata să-ți dăruiască, generoși, din ceea ce posedă, obiectul care-ți place. Italienii sunt gata să-ți dăruiască chiar și inima lor – și te cuceresc prin firea lor sentimentală, prietenoasă și entuziastă, printr-o tinerețe a lor, nelimitată de vârstă, gata să izbucnească în orice prilej!" (16).

traveller. One must “keep coming back to Italy, with the burning desire to see its treasures again and discover new ones, like a new Aladin” (12)<sup>29</sup>. Bogdan’s patriotism melts into her incantatory admiration for Italy, and a new alliance is produced. “And never shall we be able to give this wonderful country and its beloved people enough proof of our gratitude, of our love for how much we all owe it!” (12).<sup>30</sup> It is from this point that Bogdan develops an almost obsessive discourse about the Latin/Roman origins of the Romanian people and the sisterhood between Italy and Romania. Historically, both countries have always been at the crossroads between the East and the West. They have always functioned as “gateways” against all sorts of invasions and aggressions. “Beyond anything else, Italy has been our Latin sister. Romania and Italy have always been connected by the closest ties of affectionate friendship. We love Italy with all our hearts and Italy loves us” (13).<sup>31</sup> Such rhetorical effervescence does not exist in Bogdan’s French travelogue which is mostly informative and referential from the cultural point of view.

Olga Caba’s ironical stance differentiates her from Elvira Bogdan. The latter’s repertoire shows a strong sentimental identification with the object of her perception as a traveller. On the contrary, Caba’s humorous wording hovers on the efficiency and the conciseness of the English paradox as cultivated by Oscar Wilde. For instance, the poor and shy Michael Droops carries all Caba’s shopping and does not dare to say a word to her. “The Englishman cannot be a cavalier because he lacks the talent to make compliments. He is so shy that it would be easier for him to hit a woman than tell her something graceful” (61).<sup>32</sup> While visiting the Zoo from Edinburgh, Caba admires Kitty, the turtle. Caba makes an experiment. She lights a match right in front of Kitty’s eyes. The animal makes no movement, it keeps looking without blinking. Caba writes down in her travel notes: “In Great Britain even the turtles have cold blood” (62-63).<sup>33</sup> With charming and humorous detachment, Caba also establishes the rules of hitch-hiking: “limp in order to attract attention” (89).<sup>34</sup> Once somebody took you in his car, the hitchhiker should follow this “dialogue”: thou shall not smoke, thou shall not ask questions, thou shall amuse the driver.

<sup>29</sup> “revii în Italia de fiecare dată cu arzătoarea dorință de a-i revedea comori, de a descoperi altele noi, ca un nou Aladin” (12).

<sup>30</sup> “Și niciodată nu vom putea să îi dovedim îndeajuns, acestei țări minunate și poporului iubit, toată recunoștința noastră, toată dragostea noastră, pentru cât de mult îi datorăm cu toții!” (12).

<sup>31</sup> “Italia este mai presus de orice, sora noastră întru latinitate. Între România și Italia au existat dintotdeauna cele mai strânse legături de afectuoase prietenie! Iubim Italia din toată inima și Italia ne iubește și ea” (13).

<sup>32</sup> “Pentru ca sa fie cavalier, englezului nu-i lipsește decât talentul de a face complimente. E atât de timid încât poate că i-ar veni mai ușor să lovească o femeie decât să-i spună ceva grațios” (61).

<sup>33</sup> “În Marea Britanie până și broaștele țestoase au sânge rec” (62-63).

<sup>34</sup> “limp in order to attract attention” (89)

Olga Caba is very aware of her condition as a woman travelling all over Scotland. The Scottish kilt brings about a feeling of uneasiness. In Glasgow she is sorry that she does not have her trousers with her in order to mark a certain ironical difference between the two sexes. It is a distinction that she feels to be extremely important. The suggestion that sexual identity might be fluid is shocking for Caba, at least in this moment of her life. "In the tourists' home I only found men and they were all wearing kilts, except an American. I was sorry that I had not brought my trousers with me, I felt like putting them on out of a sense of decency and in order to mark a certain distance between the sexes" (67).<sup>35</sup> But the most daring gendered challenge is still to come. The night, the most erotic moment of the day, fills the Romanian traveller with excitement and frenzy. Will her virtue be tempted or not? "When I went to bed, I was thinking how compromised I would be at home if they found out that I slept in an abandoned house, behind God, without keys or locks, in the vicinity of the bedroom sheltering two young men. But I was not afraid for I knew that human love is more powerful than animal lust and humaneness, that angel guardian of the tourists, was at my bedside watching over me" (79).<sup>36</sup>

Caba, the traveller, lives in the most direct and concrete reality. She tells us about the hotels where she put up, the restaurants where she ate, her financial problems and her strategies to save money, Elvira Bogdan is so grateful that the Authority allowed her body to cross borders (physically, of course) that she reinforces these borders mentally and constantly refers to the Romanian officials who act as guides and landmarks during her supervised voyage. For Elvira Bogdan there is nothing more important than returning within the protected borders of Romania and avoiding defection. "I have travelled a lot since my early youth when I left for Paris as a university fellow, alone, far away from my country, among foreigners... And no sooner had I graduated over there than I returned to my country for there is not greater suffering for a true human being than longing for his homeland" (1970, 15).<sup>37</sup> Elvira Bogdan's conformism is obvious, she constantly pays tribute to the ambassadors of (Communist)

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<sup>35</sup> "În casa turistă am găsit numai bărbați și pe toți în fusta plisată, în afară de un American. Mi-a părut rău că nu mi-am adus pantalonii lungi cu mine, mi-ar fi venit să-i îmbrac dintr-un simț de deconță, pentru a demarca o distanță dintre sexe" (67).

<sup>36</sup> "Când m-am culcat, mă gândeam cât de compromisă aș fi acasă dacă s-ar afla că am dormit într-o casă părăsită, la spatele lui Dumnezeu, fără chei și broaște, în vecinătatea dormitorului care adăpostea doi băieți. Teamă nu-mi era pentru că știam că dragostea umană e mai tare decât cea animală și îngerul păzitor al turiștilor numit omenie îmi veghează la căpătâi" (79).

<sup>37</sup> "Am călătorit mult, din cea mai fragedă tinerețe, când plecam ca studentă bursieră la Paris, singură, departe de țara mea, printre străini... Și de îndată ce mi-am terminat studiile acolo, degrabă m-am reîntors în țară mea, căci nu este mai mare suferința pentru un om adevărat ca dorul de Patrie!" (15).

Romania under whose paternalist protection her Italian experience could take place. "True harbingers of culture, arts, and science, Romania's ambassadors prestigiously represent us, they organize, abroad, numerous cultural, artistic, and scientific events, which make us even more thoroughly known all over the world" (17).<sup>38</sup> Sometimes this tribute to the Romanian guardian angels is more personalized. For Elvira Bogdan, Nicolae Iorga is the father figure who supervises her actions from a distant and happy past – her studentship. Bogdan proudly remembers that she was present at the solemn inauguration of the Accademia di Romania in Rome. Among many other guests, "although I was young enough and too little known, I had the great honour to be sent by Professor Nicolae Iorga 'in order to be present and tell how it was'" (114).<sup>39</sup> In 1969 Accademia di Romania in Rome was reopened. Alexandru Balaci, the president of the Accademia di Romania in Rome, made the honours. He is another incarnation of the patriarchal authority, an important source of legitimation for Elvira Bogdan, the Wanderer. The source of Bogdan's enthusiasm is genuine patriotism but this sincere feeling also fits the requirements of the nationalist propaganda of the Communist regime under which she published her Italian travelogue. "Accademia di Romania, this oasis of Romanian feeling in Rome, is Romania's most important cultural centre abroad, a beacon and a banner we are proud of" (114).<sup>40</sup>

Elvira Bogdan's journey seems to be the enterprise of a traveller who does not consider her gender too much. Not much does Bogdan tell about herself as a woman travelling to Italy or France. Still, there are some gendered implications in her presentations of certain tourist sites. While at St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, she cannot miss the opportunity to talk about the women who were granted the privilege of a burial place inside the famous edifice: Matilde of Canossa, Maria Sobieski-Stuart, and Christina of Sweden. Although Bogdan is proud to mention these great women of the past, her characterizations do not go beyond very traditional and stereotypical lines. A good example, in this respect, is the portrait of Catherine de Medici. "Besides these virile qualities, Regent Catherine added, when fighting for victory, other feminine weapons: shrewdness, dissimulation, plotting, slandering the enemy in order to discredit him with rumours or insinuations" (24).<sup>41</sup> When visiting Sienna,

<sup>38</sup> "Adevărați soli ai culturii, ai artelor, ai științei, ambasadorii României ne reprezintă cu prestigiu, organizând peste hotare numeroase manifestări culturale, artistice, științifice, care ne fac și mai temeinic cunoscuți în străinătate" (17).

<sup>39</sup> "deși eram destul de tânără și încă prea puțin cunoscută, am avut deosebita cinste să fiu și eu trimisă de profesorul Nicolae Iorga, 'ca să fiu de față și să povestesc cum a fost'" (114).

<sup>40</sup> "Accademia di Romania, această oază de românism la Roma, este cel mai important centru de cultură al României peste hotare, un far și un stindard cu care ne mândrim" (114).

<sup>41</sup> "Acestor calități virile, regenta Caterina [Caterina de Medicis], în lupta pentru dobândirea succesului dorit, le adăuga și alte arme feminine: viclenia, simularea, intriga, defăimarea dușmanului spre a-l discredita prin zvonuri ori insinuări lansate despre el" (24).

Bogdan somehow imprudently –from the point of view of Communist censorship – pays special attention to Catherine of Sienna, the fourteenth-century mystic. “Catherine of Sienna ... the daughter of a petty merchant ... vivid intelligence ... lots of sensitivity ... strength of character ... an example of virtue and vitality serving the meek” (145).<sup>42</sup> Bogdan does not use the lexem “Christian” forbidden during the Communist regime in a publication referring to a contemporary event, but her wording (the substantivized adjective “the meek”) reminds the knowledgeable reader of the Biblical language.

The increasing disembodiment of the traveller is re-presented by her loss of organic bodily necessities such as eating or sleeping or falling ill. The reader is not informed where Bogdan sleeps, eats or washes during her Italian or French voyage. The sexualized body turns into a sort of ghostly presence and this is evident in the traveller’s purely intellectual interest in female personalities. Flings, amours or any possible erotic attractions are mercilessly repressed in the re-presentation of Bogdan’s voyages.

Carefully does Bogdan record any illustrious Romanian presence in Italy. For instance, while visiting Lido, the island near Venice, she does not forget to mention having seen the flat once occupied, in this enchanting area, by Nicolae Titulescu<sup>43</sup>. She also talks about Asachi’s portrait at Caffé Greco, near Piazza d’Espagna in Rome, a place where the Romanian scholar used to come. “Our embassy has recently inaugurated here Gheorghe Asachi’s portrait, he also used to come to Caffé Greco, this confectionary-café so full of and rich in memories” (110).<sup>44</sup> Proudly she includes in her inventory of Romanian personalities the opera singers. “At Scala sang so many acclaimed opera singers who later became stars, the greatest one being our memorable Darclée” (234).<sup>45</sup>

Caba’s writing displayed some irony and humour when referring to ethnicities. Bogdan prefers a sort of stiff, artificially restrained political correctness occasionally tampered by patriotic and romantic pathos. This evolution of the travelogue is relevant for the literary genres’ evolution and evaluation during the Communist regime: from satire and comedy, to odes and hymns. Caba dares to be ironical in her Scottish reminiscences where the lyrical alternates with the comical. Bogdan feels the need to be almost ecstatic with gratitude for being allowed by the communist gatekeepers to travel to the West, on her own footsteps. Stylistically, the metaphor collapses into metonymy as travelling is

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<sup>42</sup> “Caterina de Siena ... fiica unui modest negustor ... inteligentă vie ... multă sensibilitate ... tărie de caracter ... un exemplu de virtute și vitalitate în slujba celor umili” (145).

<sup>43</sup> Nicolae Titulescu (1882-1941), prominent Romanian diplomat.

<sup>44</sup> “Ambasada noastră a inaugurat de curând aici portretul lui Gh. Asachi, care și el a frecventat această atât de bogată în amintiri cofetărie-cafenea Caffé Greco” (110).

<sup>45</sup> “La Scala au cântat și atâția români consacrați, deveniți celebrități în frunte cu marea noastră Darclée” (234).

more and more a privilege and travelogues become the hashish of the repressed Romanians obliged to stay home and read about travel instead of travelling.

A characteristic of the travelogue is the representation of the self confronting otherness and changing, as a consequence of such radical an experience. Both Caba and Bogdan consider that the Romanian travelling self remains as still as a rock, reinforced in its conviction that there is no place like home. The difference is Caba's explicit awareness that the relations between ethnicities are influenced by political power. Caba's travelogue is tinged with (post-)colonial influences.

The three travelogues under perusal point to the increasing pressures upon the traveller and the travelling author during the increasingly aggressive dictatorship that travelled to and across Romania from the East. Both for Olga Caba and Elvira Bogdan travelling became an escapist strategy. Thus, under the more acceptable mask of longing for other realms, they could express, in diluted, almost Aesopic terms, their discontent with Romania's political evolution during the 1940's and afterwards. Under the Communist regime, Caba was silenced for many years. During the same period, Bogdan had to make amends to the ideological gatekeepers. Elvira Bogdan's lyrical outbursts in Rome or on the Valley of the Loire and Olga Caba's enthusiastic soliloquies in Scotland turned into double emphasis discourses under the ever more restrictive travelling modes. They not only described beautiful and politically remote geographical realities, they also sent a subversive message by creating or maintaining aspirations for free movement and unrestricted knowledge of the world. Elvira Bogdan's intellectually luxuriant and exuberant text, which clearly shows her pleasure of enumerating monuments and the world's artistic treasures, as well as Olga Caba's lucid and ironical comments are signifying discourses marked by the awareness of being observed and observing not only from the cultural point of view, but also politically. Elvira Bogdan and Olga Caba are both travellers and political subjects. Their writing cannot escape from the imposition of Europe's political boundaries often expressed in a subliminal way. While visiting Scotland, Olga Caba foreshadows both autumn and truth in freedom, she hopes that, someday, all ways will return.<sup>46</sup> Interesting is also the analysis of the subsequent editions of Elvira Bogdan's French travelogues. The differences between her 1947 and her 1970 *Castles of the Loire* point much more to certain political relaxations and less to the growing ripeness of the author's style.

Last but certainly not least, this paper points to some gendered peculiarities of the two travelling writers (one of them lyrical and more conformist, the other one more ironical and a future inhabitant of the Gulag). Although they

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<sup>46</sup> Olga Caba: "... presimțeam toamna și în libertate, adevărul că odată toate drumurile se întorc" (74).

make no explicit comments about their own condition as travelling women, in terms of safety prerequisites, or meeting other women, or commenting on women's condition in other countries, Olga Caba's and Elvira Bogdan's travelogues are not completely gender blind discourses. Bogdan writes with great pleasure and respect about the way in which her authority as a traveller was reinforced or actually conferred by some father figures in Romanian culture (Nicolae Iorga, Alexandru Balaci, or the Romanian ambassadors). From the 1940's till the 1960's travelling occurred increasingly under the Eye of Authority. The Romanian travellers did not need to take their *penati*<sup>47</sup> with them for they were constantly in a Panopticum, namely under the watchful eye of the Romanian embassy whose mission was both representation and surveillance. After 1960 some relaxation did occur, but at least lip service must also be offered to the Authority. The two travelogues were inscribed in the power structures of the then culture and society. This burden became almost a kind of gravitational field inevitable to the human condition. Olga Caba's and Elvira Bogdan's travelogues are good samples of the bricolage results of gender constructions and political censorship (more or less internalized) which worked together, under the growing pressure of the Communist dictatorship. All these imposing factors turned Caba's and Bogdan's travelogues into forms of escapism.

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<sup>47</sup> Roman gods of home.