

## **ON PATHS OF WATER AND CONSCIOUSNESS. CAMIL PETRESCU AND THE DIARY AS AN INNER EXPLORATION**

**Veronica Moldovan (Șandor)**  
**PhD Student, UMFST „George Emil Palade” from Târgu Mureș**

*Abstract: Rather than offering a merely descriptive narrative, Camil Petrescu constructs in his memorial Rapid- Constantinople- Bioram a metatextual and meditative framework. where the interplay between external reality and its internal reverberations becomes the central focus of reflection. The text functions as a laboratory of consciousness, in which contemplative lyricism converges with introspective clarity, and the act of reflection is examined with philosophical precision. Within this context, the oriental landscape transcends its role as exotic backdrop and is reimagined as an ephemeral stage for the author's inquiry into the boundaries of perception and representation. It is precisely through this refined balance of lyrical depth and intellectual rigor-hallmarks of Camil Petrescu's distinctive literary style- that the text continues to resonate with contemporary readers, offering not only aesthetic pleasure but also profound meditative insight.*

*Keywords: consciousness, meditation, representation, stream of consciousness, reflections*

Far from being a literary relic of the inter-war period, *Rapid - Constantinople - Bioram* stands out as a genuine exercise in intellectual reflection and artistic sensitivity, in which ideas and experiences acquire a particular density. In a shifting world, in which the journey is often reduced to the visual and the instantaneous, is there not a greater need than ever for a literature that teaches us to look with meaning? Camil Petrescu's memoir becomes a laboratory of conscience, a place where lyricism meets lucidity and meditation on the human condition.

Studies by literary critics note that never has Romanian literature been more open to innovation than in the inter-war period. It was rightly seen as an era of artistic effervescence. There was a need for a literature that reflected the instability and dynamics of the human experience, emphasizing the capture of the moment in its spontaneous unfolding. In this sense, literary creation takes on the function of capturing the inner flow, providing more space for the free expression of the individual's emotional and intellectual transformations.

Analyzing the novel, the diary and the novella as forms of literary expression practiced by Camil Petrescu, we notice an increasingly pronounced essayistic dimension in their internal structure. They frequently include elements of digression, and the subtext is influenced by the Bergsonian concept of freedom, which, in the author's view, has both a spatial and a temporal dimension. In spite of this essayistic tendency, which is widespread throughout his work, the work that best illustrates this orientation is the travel memoir *Rapid- Constantinople- Bioram*, published in 1933. This text stands at the intersection between the memoir proper and the reflective essay, defined by a hybridization of genres and a pronounced introspective vocation. If his diary, *Daily Notes*, published after his death, shows Camil Petrescu as a man harassed by material deprivation, but also by complexes, egos and countless polemical confrontations, the writer's travel diary gives us a completely different vision. As far as Camil Petrescu's work is concerned, from the essay to the drama there is but a step<sup>1</sup>, but the right chronological order is different.

Camil Petrescu has practiced both genres almost simultaneously, the first work considered *serious* by literary critics being a drama, *The Dance of the Maidens*, begun in 1816

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ovidiu Ghidirmic, *Camil Petrescu sau patosul lucidității*, Editura Scrisul Românesc, Craiova, 1975.

and resumed in 1918, followed in 1936 by the study *Theses and Antitheses, Rapid-Constantinople-Bioram* (1933), *Daily Notes* (1975). Tudor Vianu was one of the critics who presented Camil Petrescu as a reflexive author in the work *The Art of Romanian novelists: "From Barbu Șt. Delavrancea and Duiliu Zamfirescu, no author has dared to mix so many general ideas into his narratives and analysis"*<sup>2</sup>.

Beyond its descriptive character, the text *Rapid - Constantinople - Bioram* proposes a meditative meta-structure, in which the relationship between external reality and its reverberations of consciousness is problematized. The writer is visibly fascinated by the aesthetics of the landscape - "*blue mirrors of the sea*", "*melancholic sunsets*", "*the glint of white marble under the sun*" or "*the gold of minerals*" - elements that seem to shape a classical sensory narrative. The representation of reality is quickly minimized by the introspective perspective of the narrator. Constantinople and the shores of the Bosphorus, with all their exotic and historical cargo, become ephemeral scenery, subject to the filter of a consciousness that questions even the validity of perception.

Camil Petrescu explicitly states that "*they are all superficial, like failed dreams*", thus affirming the supremacy of the interior landscape over the exterior. In his view, "*the most beautiful landscapes are necessarily less interesting than the interior ones, which go inside you as in the glowing depths of mine and death*". These words reinforce the idea that the real stakes of the journey are spiritual and cognitive, not touristic or contemplative.

The author continues improvising a sentence worthy of Gelu Ruscanu or Pietro Gralla: "*There is no road on the high seas of the world more filled with excitement, of the unexpected, of astonishing things, and of zigzags more implausible than a woman's soul*". In the preface to the 1974 edition of *Rapid - Constantinople - Bioram*, Ion Cristoiu speaks of the presence of a subject-object mechanism specific to Camil Petrescu, stating that "*in discovering the truth about the places visited, the essential role is played by the traveling subject, who needs to have studied the places before the journey to find it out*"<sup>3</sup>. For him, space is not revealed through direct senses, but is filtered through the lenses of a vast and demanding culture. From the beginning, the text leads us to the idea that external geography is only as valuable as the inner geography acquired through reading: "*Until the world wakes up in this lazy Levant, I read with passion from the books on its life, which I borrowed yesterday in a stack from a Turkish student, who is close to us*".

In his narrative approach, Camil Petrescu employs a subtle strategy of involving the reader, maintaining an indirect but constant form of communication, through an address organically integrated into the flow of discourse: "*I am writing these notes for friends back home*", "*For those who have traveled the crossing from Turnul Severin upwards, an image of the gulf of water that separates Europe from Asia can be painted*" or "*Even for those who know only the gorge from Călimănești to Brezoi, an image can be painted*".

We notice that nature is accepted with indulgence, not too much is asked of it, it is characterized by its naturalness, and contemplation is provoked. The scenery becomes a deliberate respite, an escape from the naturalism of things, from the refined intellectual environment, from the abstraction constructed by the human mind: „*The Bosphorus suddenly widened before us, teeming with dozens and dozens, hundreds of ships, launches, barges, and passenger vessels drifting back and forth—each, no doubt, with a precise purpose, though to us, unfamiliar with it, it seemed like a senseless, unimaginable bustle.*”

Another defining feature of the memorial *Rapid- Constantinople- Bioram* is the deliberate rejection of a linear narrative structure in favor of a fragmented mosaic-like

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<sup>2</sup> Tudor Vianu, *Arta prozatorilor români*, vol. II, Editura pentru Literatură, București, 1966.

<sup>3</sup> Ion Cristoiu, *Prefață la Rapid- Constantinopol- Bioram* de Camil Petrescu, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1974, p.8 .

construction. This approach produces a dislocation of the convention of the travel diary and transforms the text into a space of thought in movement, of the idea spontaneously born from contact with the world. In this way, a dense and nuanced discourse is constructed, which demands the active participation of the reader. Each chapter functions as a nucleus of meaning that the reader is asked to interpret and relate to in its whole.

The author also makes room for a structural element composed of reflections and meditations. The reflections in turn require a cerebral connection with reality, and when this is not possible the author exclaims in annoyance: "*I have no axis, no skeleton to trace/bind what I see*". The need for structure, for concreteness, speaks here too. Contemplation of the landscape, contact with it, takes place in two stages: - the first stage is taken up by historical landmarks, bookish acknowledgments, theoretical framing, and abounds in concrete details, names, years, events, memories: "*It was here that Mohammed the Conqueror first came, to the surprise of the Paleologus who was apparently waiting for him on the Bosphorus side. He came here not only with a land army, but also with many ships, pushed over the hills from the Bosphorus on thick oaken soles oiled with tallow.*"

The second stage of contemplation involves a progressive detachment from the perceived object, followed by a transfiguration of reality into metaphorical impressions. The landscape is no longer described in objective terms, but becomes the support for an inner projection. In this way, empirical observation is transformed into a poetic vision of the new world: "*All the nights lead upward to the edges of the universe, beyond all the stars as big as the worlds, but more than any, leads this night from the seashore*".

Another remarkable descriptive moment is that of the sun rising from the sea, rendered with exquisite visual poetics: "*the sun had not yet risen and only now will it appear. Between the greenish blackness of the tray of liquid craters and the clear, but mostly whitish sky, a sort of red metal hinge emerges, growing hastily, rounded, and rounded, and softly, and deformed by the optical play, it grows visibly without any kind of rays. Now it is like a red-gold egg, as big as a Turkish amphora, which an unseen Columbus is trying to place atop the edge of the huge tray of liquid black water, beyond the edges of which is the void of nothingness. In the middle, alone, sway the masts, the rigging and the ladders of our ship, white and latticed like a metal bridge linking two endless stretches of water.*" The author gradually becomes aware that he is "*different*" and "*elsewhere*". In narrating, the writer dresses his stylistic expression in lyricism and poeticism, he records the passing of landscapes without intense emotion. He does not leave us with memorable portraits, but talks about some historical pasts. The text itself is based on lengthy documentation and a process of impression and reflection.

Irina Petraș, in *Notes for a Portrait*, highlights the almost perfect way in which colors combine in subtle alchemies: "*The sun descends pouring a liquid golden trumpet of blue sky blue over the green pasture of the hills*". White, says the author, is commonplace, of the road, but, although obsessively invoked, the road is not one of adventure with mysterious stopovers in a time of the story, as in Sadoveanu<sup>4</sup>. The symbolic value of the road is charged with emotional and unpredictable connotations, illustrated by a memorable simile: "*there is no road in the wide world more full of emotions, the unexpected, amazing things and more impetuous zigzags than a woman's soul*".

Camil Petrescu set out on his journey with the knowledge of the greatest Byzantinologist, Charles Diehl, author of *Byzantium*. He was also familiar with the work of the essayist Pierre Loti<sup>5</sup>. His work is thus characterized by the *Thousand and One Nights*, a

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<sup>4</sup> Irina Petraș, *Note pentru un portret*, Biblioteca Apostrof, 2003, p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> It is necessary to specify that Pierre Loti is the author of works such as *Aziyade*. The *Phantom of the Orient*, Lisez pour apprendre, the journeys described in these works being real. His literary work is closely linked to his private diary, which was written before his literary work and drawn up with the knowledge of its publication. His work is also based on various letters sent or received, which lend authenticity to his writing. Some authors have attacked the authenticity of these works, but

combination of erudition, lyrical impression and reflection. The author embraces the experience of the journey not as an escape but as an opportunity to suspend the rational gaze, abandoning his analytical tool for a short while in favor of immediate perception. However, the aesthetic principle on which his conception of art is based inevitably returns: beauty, when it is not subordinated to knowledge, does not belong to the essence of authentic art. The viewer returns to his familiar stance as a lucid observer, noting the contradiction he observes in Oriental culture: "*the learned art of the Orient in its taste of earthly pleasures and its contempt for the worldly at the same time*".

### Conclusions

The beauty of this work lies in the fact that for Camil Petrescu, the travel diary no longer functions as a simple tool of escape from reality, but becomes a form of deep engagement within it. The author rejects the idea of a detachment from the events of the time, considering that such a rupture - if it were possible - would amount to a degradation of the spirit. Thus, we can perceive the work *Rapid- Constantinople- Bioram* as more than an aesthetic exercise, but also as an intellectual reflection in which the informative dimension and the inner duration provide the necessary framework to grasp the tension between individual consciousness and historical reality.

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the author, Pierre Loti, states that only the last page of *Aziyade*. *Phantom of the Orient* is invented. In 1876-1877, Pierre Loti rewrote his travel diary, thus giving birth to the "récit de voyage" genre.