

CITIES, “WHITE STONE CEMETERIES” AND “LANDSCAPES OF NAILS”. URBAN REPRESENTATIONS IN MARIN SORESCU’S “AMERICAN DIARY”

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Abstract: *The starting point of my study is a provocative volume written by Marin Sorescu, one of the most important Romanian writers of the second half of the 20th century: Jurnal. Romanul călătoriilor/ Diary. A Travels Novel (1999). The volume that gathers different texts, elaborated during or immediately after traveling to various regions of the globe, has a composite aspect. It includes not only diarist pages, organized according to the topoi visited (the locality, country or continent where Sorescu arrives with socio-cultural or professional occasions: Finland, Mexico, West Berlin, Bari, Warsaw, Paris, Brăila, Cheia, etc.) The book also includes dialogues with cultural personalities encountered beyond the Romanian borders (for example, with Mircea Eliade, Dominique De Roux, Clavo, Horia Damian, Giancarlo Vigorelli), dozens of poems most likely written during these travels and articulated around the space imaginary etc. More than that, even the texts that at a first glance could be considered strictly diaristic (since they open with usual spatial and temporal indications and rely on a certain rhetoric of the pseudo-confession), are rather hybrid, because in most of them the writer nonchalantly mixes different scriptural formulas. In my paper, I focus on one of the most remarkable diaries of its kind: the American Diary which is written in the winter and spring of 1972, when Sorescu visits several cities in the states of New York, Iowa, Illinois and Kentucky. Although he is caught up with various academic and cultural events, the writer – who recommends himself as an “anti-traveler” – has time to leisurely explore, with an interesting mixture of fascination and ethno-identity skepticism, the American spaces that he describes thoroughly and analyzes with lucidity, in a text of real sociological interest. The concrete result of these observations is an ingenious and provocative book of travel literature, in which reflection on the faces of the American city (particularly, the big one or even the metropolis) acquires an essential role. On the one hand, in front of the confusing urban spectacle (which he perceives as contrasting, comfortable, bright, hyper-technological and consequently artificial, sterile, almost frozen), the writer feels the need to retreat, to activate his affective memory and to re-create his native village through writing. It is known that the cycle of poems La Lilioci/ At the Bats was started during Sorescu's year in the USA. But this volume must be read not only in an intertextual key, as an esthetic consequence of his discovery of Spoon River, Edgar Lee Masters' s anthology (as some Romanian critics have mistakenly claimed). In my opinion, La Lilioci/ At the Bats' manuscript – about which the diarist does not mention anything in the American Journal – is also a fertile materialization of the deep nostalgia of the writer who, at a huge distance from home, feels exiled or uprooted. Consequently, he re-transforms the harsh poetry of his native space into a splendid text in which individual memory blends, harmoniously, with the community one. On the other hand, the American Journal resists very well and deserves to be read for itself, as a remarkable travel literature, in which one can identify not only the general features of this type of narrative, but also the particular notes of a spatial and urban representation containing the marks of Marin Sorescu's originality.*

Keywords: *American Diary; anti-traveler; travel literature; urban representation; thanatic imaginary*

1. INTRODUCTION. A WRITING UNDER THE SIGN OF HYBRID

Marin Sorescu – the most titled playwright of the 60th generation and a very important voice of Romanian postwar poetry – is one of the few outstanding Romanian intellectuals who, during the communist regime, could circulate in the most diverse Western European, American, African and

Asian regions. Normally, his travel literature should have interested both the general public and Romanian literary criticism. But, unlike his books of poetry, drama, novels or children's literature, the volume entitled *Diary. A Travels Novel* (1999), in which he collected his circumstantial texts written – during or immediately after – his travels to various regions of the globe, was almost totally ignored critically.

One possible explanation for the stubborn ignorance from the public, be it competent or not, is that the volume has a composite appearance. On the one hand, it includes not only diarist pages, organized according to the visited topoi – the locality, country or continent where Sorescu arrives, with specific, but always recognized socio-cultural or professional pretexts / opportunities: *African Diary*, *American Diary*, *Danish Diary*, *West Berlin*, *Bari*, *Warsaw*, *Paris*, *Târgovistea*, *Brăila* etc. The book also includes dialogues with cultural personalities encountered beyond the Romanian borders (for example, Mircea Eliade, Dominique De Roux, Clavo, Horia Damian, etc.), Sorescu's own translations of poems that he is invited to interpret during cultural events, dozens of poems most likely written during travels and articulated around the spatial imaginary. Finally, tender or friendly portraits, in which the exercises of admiration of the poet or theatre man are visible: *Oskar Pastior or the poetry that speaks itself*, *At home to Emil Cioran*, *An artist: Tan Swie Hian* etc.

On the other hand, most texts that at first glance could be considered strictly diarist, since they respect certain conventions of the genre (for example, they open with the usual spatial and temporal indications and rely on a certain rhetoric of the pseudo-confession), are rather hybrid, when they do not prove so eclectic, that their hasty reading supports the impression of a scriptural entropy with a touristic pretext. The *Dutch Journal* begins with a poem called *Departures*, while the section called *Sweden* consists exclusively of a succession of poems with (apparently) Swedish themes, composed in January 1974: *Lyrical Archipelago*, *The Road*, *Orientation*, *The Map*, *The Bridge*, *The North* or *The Forester's House*.

In my opinion, the most substantial part of the book is the *American Journal*. While in most sections of the volume the distribution of scriptural formulas is uneven, the section written in the winter and spring of 1972 (when Sorescu visits several cities in the states of New York, Iowa, Illinois and Kentucky) is definitely worth reading, especially for the pages where the "anti-traveller"¹ – although caught up with various academic and

cultural events – does more than mapping American spaces. He filters tourism experiences through a series of specific narrative strategies (mostly ironic or self-ironic), makes spatial taxonomies and observations of sociological interest, but also tries to "get out of time" by translating *Annabel Lee* by Edgar Allan Poe or offering *Five Extended Interpretations* from Emily Dickinson.

2. THE "PROFESSIONAL DISEASES" OF THE DIARIST AND THE TOURIST DILEMMAS

The beginning of the *American Journal* is already soaked in the ink of creative scepticism, as the diarist initially feels overwhelmed by the pressure (to the point of total corrosion) of the artificial, in which he sees even the American specificity: "There is no question of writing anything. Too don't be troubled by anything! Everything artificial around – and yourself in an artificial position." (Sorescu 1999: 32). However, he recovers quickly enough to his usual tone and style, so that he can also write some memorable sequences, absolutely conquering from a stylistic point of view, in spite their bitter sociological interest. They are written in February 1972, in a contextually justified fever: Sorescu has just received a letter from the country, from which he learns that he has won the Academy Award for his exceptional dramatic parable *Iona*. The news circulated very quickly, so congratulations from colleagues from other countries come at an embarrassing pace. The natural joy of the writer who thus sees himself nationally recognized is quickly obscured by the overwhelming sensation of belonging to an ethnic otherness that is toxically represented overseas.

Reproduced later in the diary, the mixed emotions that feed the confession are compressed into an almost gnomic structure, announcing both the inclination of the representation and its harmful effects, which the diarist nevertheless tries to shake off through an otherwise creative act – the translation that also gives him the illusion, at least potentially thaumaturgic, of getting out of time:

Today I received a new congratulation from the Head of the English Department, Prof. John Gerber, to whom I must also reply in writing. I've been working on a telegram for a couple of days. It must be modest and ambiguous, as if I didn't get that award, which the local press equates to the Pulitzer Prize. A few articles in the newspaper. (Clippings are repeatedly placed in my cipher mailbox.) This

¹ In the final section of the book, entitled *Anti-traveler*, Sorescu declares himself "haunted by an anti-cultural instinct" and complains about the fact that he travels a lot, although he does not remember anything he explores (Sorescu 1999:325). Of course, such a statement is a form of endearment that many authors of travel books can afford (v. for example, the case of another famous Romanian anti-traveler, Adrian Marino – Ilie 2022: 9-24)

triggered a fit of laughter with Vigi, who says a new song can be written on the subject. After drawing attention to my home country, I begin to receive everything written in the American and Western press about Romania. It makes your hair stand on end. To forget, I'm approaching American poetry. (To study, small.) I also try to translate. Translation always gives me a sense of infinity. The same textual canvas can be infinitely equivalent – if you live multiple lives. (Sorescu, 1999:34)

However, neither the translations inspired by poetic texts (written by E.A. Poe and Emily Dickinson) nor the sympathetic portraits Sorescu makes of cultural or academic personalities he meets (for example, Stavros Deligiorgis and Gayatri Spivak) manage to completely banish the writer's bitterness caused by the usual “professional diseases” (cf. Simion 2005: 272-279). For example, he questions the quality of the diaries he reads, has no confidence in the relevance of his own text, and questions whether the diary is an “abysmal document of personality in progress.” He modestly declares that he does not write a diary, although he nevertheless admits, veiledly, that he likes the entropy of this species:

I think that's originally why this species was born, to capture the chaos, the chaotic. But the modality has diversified, widened its battlefield enormously, and practically haunts as many kinds of journals as there are journal authors. (...) Personally, I am a writer of the genre. (I say, parenthetically: I don't write any kind of diary, because I don't have time, letters, or space.) (Sorescu 1999: 7).

Most of Marin Sorescu's escapes in the Occident have as a pretext the participation in exceptional cultural events and are regarded especially as opportunities to promote his own texts (particularly, his plays). Predictably, each of them turns along the way into what critics of this type of travel diary or memorial call a *journey of knowledge* – that is, in Florin Faifer's terms, “a small-great adventure of the spirit, a useful practice for the mind, learning, and partying.” (Faifer 1993:90). Like any intellectual who arrives in European, Asian or American spaces that most Romanians do not even dream of, the writer visits universities, libraries, bookstores, auditoriums or other spaces perceived as cultural bright places. Shared warmly, his impressions are generally mixed, when not delivered directly in the form of dry verdicts or barely disguised severity:

Past civilizations have a pressed, heavily seasoned character. I liken them to ghiudem. Perhaps also for

their slightly or downright oriental suggestion. They are difficult to puncture. You may as well break your teeth with them. (Sorescu, 1999:73).

More than that, Sorescu dares somewhere to make *The Critical Theory of Travel*, taking care to emphasize the fundamental flaw of the scriptural formula involved in writing travel impressions with a certain frequency. From his point of view, geographical displacement radically alienates those who thus allow themselves to be removed from their true nature and become a kind of admiring appendix of the visited space. The demonstration of the profound gratuity of the trip is done coldly, through a sequence with axiomatic appearance:

Estrangement. In a foreign place you are no longer yourself. It's you, plus that foreign place, that tightens you, so acts on you. (How does it be). Whether you like it or not, it has an effect on you. You admire, you loathe, you are excited, you sigh, etc. In fact, it's that place that stands out, through you. Therefore, it is no longer you, in its pure state, the true one. Therefore, traveling, you do not travel, travel the landscapes, roads, bridges, pillars, orchards that you see. Therefore, you, the one who knew yourself, stayed at home. So if it's still not you, isn't it better to stay home? To stop putting up with fatigue? For fatigue – and the expense of nerves, transport and accommodation, you bear them, you proper (Sorescu, 1999:212).

Marin Sorescu never forgets to return to the problem of the ego that (is) written, with all its natural anxieties and doubts, exacerbated against the background of shortcomings inherent in long journeys in spaces too far from home (and which sometimes he can only reach with means that stimulate his *atavistic* fears). The self-declared *luxury porter* (Sorescu, 1999:214) carries with him not only real baggage of various shapes and weights (sometimes doubled by the ballast of prejudices accumulated through carefully directed readings), but also the burden of a not always harmonious relationship between the two major hypostases of his inner otherness, of which, when he is not copiously amused, he complains with Oltenian grief:

Are we two in one place, or does it seem to me? When I visit a new place, someone else appears, as if out of the blue. *One* who has been there before, bored to death, that he knows everything, has smelled it all, with a dose of déjà vu in his blood, in fine *One* (with a capital U) who knows fads (Rembrandt House for example) and is willing to take everything in jest, looking down on how I look at shoelaces, when I put on my shoes. And *another*

(with a small one, but you'll recognize it), curious as a child in the department store, stupidly good what it is, ready to be speechless at every turn. Yes, resolutely, everywhere I carry *two men* with me, holding hands, quarrelling, and dragging each other here and there—what hinders me, this cleft of personality, prevents me, in the poet's words, from walking. (Sorescu, 1999:76)

Of course, such a statement is not equal to the victorious return of the subjectivity of a split self, but all the more able to look (depending on the case, skeptical or enthusiastic, ironic or tender) both beyond the “treacherous” surfaces of the visited spaces, and into the depths of its own interiority. However, in certain diarist pages, we come across various ephemeris without real meanings or small bursts of circumstantial discontent. There are concentrated in phrases without much stylistic polish, but in which the first person is placed in a central position. He confesses, for example, that he often suffers from “the shock of ethnic de-territorialization” and adds that, paradoxically, just when he should feel the illusion of absolute freedom of the body, he feels trapped in a certain captivity: “I cannot stand the sensations of imprisonment and I have a hard time adapting.” (Sorescu, 1999:47-50).

3. AMERICAN CITIES, “WHITE STONE CEMETERIES” AND “LANDSCAPES OF NAILS”

Such (pseudo)theoretical issues also concern the diarist in the *American Journal* – held, as I mentioned before, in the winter and spring of 1972, when Sorescu visits several cities in the states of New York, Iowa, Illinois and Kentucky. More than that, he adds them a number of additional anxieties, exacerbated by the very special nature of the American space. On the one hand, it seems eclectic, almost chaotic and of a confusing diversity, so it offers an enormous amount of observational material. On the other hand, the writer is aware of the fact that he is not the first Romanian writer to face this spectacle both confusing and conquering. Hence, the worry that he is not the first Romanian writer to face this spectacle that is both confusing and conquering. But also the implicit desire (absolutely natural for a writer of Sorescu's value and recognition) to measure the forces of representation with previous texts:

But we went to the Central Library, as if we had left there, not to get lost in insignificant details and digressions. But what is 42nd Street but a colourful

fantasy of New York? Typical creation of a port and a great cosmopolitan metropolis, it makes (in its glory hours, just before sunset) the noise of Rue Pigalle or Picadilly Circus fade. I feel good in this Babylonian whirlwind. Like a lion hunter in the Sahara. I have plenty of observation materials. (...) Here is the sober Central Library building. (...) I go in to see what else has been written about New York (not to repeat it). I don't know what makes me think I wouldn't be the first, which makes me feel sad. But, anyway, the subject is too handy. Why shouldn't others feast? I see that only in Romanian there are two, even three books: Jean Bart, *New World*, N. Iorga, *Conferences about America*, and G.G. Giurescu, *Diary from America*. This, at the first glance. The bibliography is, unfortunately, enormous². As I do not find myself among those authors who tremble for fear of having their ideas stolen, I finally find in this very incentive to urge me to be more careful in observing America, being in such prestigious company. (Sorescu, 1999:41)

However, regardless of the incentives he administers himself for this complicated process that is *observing America*, the writer does not always manage to maintain objectivity. The *American Diary* contains enough hints of a troubled authorial subjectivity – otherwise, another proof of the visible modernity³ of this travel book. In this provocative text, one can identify various biological or physiological references related to the vulnerability of the one who writes himself, not only writes the city. At first, he complains of almost chronic fatigue, accumulated during the excruciating air travel: “Swollen temples and eyes reddened by airplane fatigue, they couldn't believe they could relax and rest...” (Sorescu, 1999:47). Later, he observes, in either an anxious or cynical manner, the troublesome effects of the noises, smells and impressive crowds of impassive and

² To the bibliography of this type – much more consistent than Sorescu thinks – numerous books of travel literature in America will be added after 1990. Some of them certainly deserve the attention of the researchers interested in various academic fields, from imagology and literary geography to exile studies (v. Ilie 2020): *Late. Californian Notes* (1997) and *Postscript. Notes 1997-2002* (2004) by Vera Călin, the *American diary* introduced by Nina Cassian in the last part of the confession trilogy *Memory as dowry* (2003-2004), *Diary of a Romanian scholar in America* by Grigore T. Popa (2014) etc.

³ According to Casey Blanton, one element of modern travel books is the presence of a narrator that proves himself “a mediating consciousness that monitors the journey, judges, thinks, confesses, changes, and even grows.” (Blanton 2002: 4)

hurried people. But, most of all, he repeats that his typewriter (which knows very well his personality) is missing, especially because he finds it difficult to make notes on his knees – which happens when, however, he has the mood and energy to write. In other words, when he gives up the pleasure of contemplation with hidden ethno-identity or sociological stakes.

Still, the tourist writer always seems eager to validate his existence through writing⁴, although the experience of encountering the Otherness (an essential constant of travel literature) always brings him various joys. Some of them are old Romanian habits. For example, counting dogs, grouping them by breed and imagined dialogues with some friendlier dogs; contemplating the horse studs grazing *blue grass of Kentucky*, but also other animals grazing or playing, quietly, on the plains of Iowa, creating for the writer the illusion that he is on the Bărăgan Plain (“Calves come to blow in your palm, pigs rummage merrily around you, foals frolic...” – Sorescu, 1999:45). Therefore, he constantly complains about the fact that he misses home and feels a certain pressure from the American space. This would induce him *intellectual inactivity* or even turn his writing into a copy of the huge cobweb in which the tourist is trapped. Only Sorescu's benign humour and sanitary self-irony make him get over being trapped and turn his urban reportage into an almost fictionalized description:

I've never heard of a break-in in the few months I've been entangled in the quietest cobweb. (...) Besides, no one locks the front door at night.... It's true, thieves wouldn't even have anything to steal... Maybe the flag that goes up the senate. (All American cities centre on this building that mimics the White House.) At most a stolen kiss to a shameful student with the prejudices of a wild peasant girl. Most students are first-generation intellectuals.... Taxes are high, books expensive... (...) It will seem to the reader that my notes have no order... When I see things idyllically, when I skip some aspects... The fault is not mine. This is where everybody jumps from one to the other with the greatest ease. There is a springboard for everything, even jumping into the Moon. (Sorescu, 1999:53)

Far fewer sensory pleasures, however, are provoked by large cities, where the sense of

⁴ Not coincidentally, the year spent in the United States of America was an extremely prolific one for the writer who returned to his native space with the manuscript that would become the first book in the cycle *La Lilienci/ At the Bats*.

captivity of the stranger becomes ubiquitous. We must not forget that the writer originates from an Oltenian village (Bulzesti, which he later transformed into a key element in Sorescu's spiritualized geography visible in *La Lilienci/ At the Bats*), where he learned the necessity of living under the open sky and gained the certainty that the unmediated relationship to nature is vital. Especially for this reason, Sorescu's descriptions almost completely lack the usual bursts of enthusiasm of Eastern European tourists (accustomed to rigorous rationing of products, poverty or lack of elementary resources), miraculously arrived in a world of overflow and even waste. Nor should we forget that the writer is a “moderately migratory spirit” who “seeks a good place, a quiet corner, and there carries forward (on paper) the themes that follow him like a shadow” (Simion 2002:198). Therefore, the excess noise, the chaotic movement of cars, the crowds of people in a hurry, and the huge number of excessively tall buildings in all the major American cities he visits initially give him mixed moods and negative emotions: “I imagined America quite differently. We all imagine it quite differently. Cornered cities, like mammoth teeth, real Towers of Babel, big madness.” (Sorescu, 1999:44)

Once the general perspective of representation is fixed, the tourist is not willing to change it too easily. On the contrary. In general, Sorescu's urban descriptions – and even more so those of metropolises – follow this pattern. The prose writer only adds, depending on the mood of the moment, other and other attributes meant to complete the essentialized map of an *artificial, arid, cold, frozen* space and so on. This *strange landscape*, as the writer tells us in an emblematic page, is perceived through the eyes of the European citizen, accustomed to different urban configurations, heavier but fuller of vitality. For a writer always inclined towards the aesthetic correction of the sordid real, the deficit of real life, however, needs to be corrected by jumping into the dreamy and even fantastic:

The European, taught with the heavy physiognomy of medieval cities surrounded by ruined and nailed walls, firmly anchored by some gigantic cathedral, is tempted to take these quick troughs as post resorts, as I said. There is somewhere between Iowa City and De Moines, a strange landscape: a flood, which has forgotten to retreat, has turned an entire forest into a setting of horror. Tree stumps rise out of the ice and glitter beneath the crust. The trees, cursed, have the most fantastic appearances... If you happen

to pass by this place at night, and if there happens to be a full moon... (...) Then you have something to see! In the flood of the enormous American plain, the towns have the icy and cold air... awkward and desolate of these tree stumps *trapped* by ice. Haven't I fallen into subjectivism? (Sorescu, 1999:44-45)

If such urban or rural sketches still hesitate between the objectivity of the reportage author and the warmth of the professional storyteller, the New York metropolis is symbolically represented as a strongly negative one. Of course, Sorescu doesn't deny the fact that "the metropolis is the reality and the metaphor of the modern world" (Lombardo 2003: 116). But at the same time, the prose writer's vision of the perfectly constructed and carefully organized space, yet very close to the threshold of dehumanization, is almost dystopian. On one hand, the usual pessimistic tones he uses for describing American spaces take on almost dark accents here. On the other hand, the negative emotions of the visitor (a perfect stranger to this city, understood as a metaphor of alienation, alienation and exile⁵) are exacerbated in the nocturnal environment. Amid a certain sensibility to strong noises and powerful lights, aggravated by a symbol of American consumerism (the bright commercials), Sorescu seems close to the brink of alienation, though he dips his pen in the usual ink of irony and self-irony. More than that, if in the open spaces the tourist could imagine himself half at home, the exercise of benefic comparison seems almost impossible in the city he perceives from the beginning as a huge ant nest. Viewed from an impressive distance, this ant nest seems populated not by zoomorphic creatures, but by giant, strange concrete creatures of alien origin. Overwhelmed by the number, size and strangeness of these elements of urban bestiary, the anti-traveler has the impression that he can only save himself by the quick exercise of cultural analogy or of voluntary literary creativity:

Skyscrapers roam on huge wooden feet through New York. Like a colony of aliens, they stop in a huge anthill to investigate, on the spot, if there is life. I hear the wailing footsteps of Empire State Building, surveying the island from Gulliver's height into the

land of dwarfs. "Dwarfs" are also bigger, blinking astronomical telescopes, more interested in the mystery of the Bronx or Harlem than in lunar craters. A landscape of nails of huge proportions, placed sometimes with the flower up, sometimes with the flattened head like a flower down. (This is the architectural variation.) Spikes sometimes hammered into the granite of Manhattan by the formidable tenacity of the American. No wonder, then, that sleeping for a few weeks in a hotel on 42nd Street, I felt a fakir pleasures. I tortured myself at night on commercials. (...) Wheels of fire, tongues of light piercing the curtains, with the roar coming in waves from the street and trying to muffle in my ears. Here's for me, I thought to myself! If I was looking for a cool experience...! Here I am, used as a guinea pig, for electromagnetic waves research! (Sorescu, 1999:36-37)

Only on the surface, the representation of the other American metropolis Sorescu visits for a while, San Francisco, seems to be somewhat more optimistic. The writer directly recognizes the major difference between San Francisco and New York, emphasizing the benefic brightness and transparency of the first, in a powerful contrast to the darkness and opacity of the second. The intelligent metaphoric analogy uses, again, discrete references to the Romanian rural space: "The first one is like a grain of dew gleaming in the morning on a cactus sheet by the ocean. The other is like a puddle of fuel oil in which cars and people and cattle get bogged down." Standing on a famous bridge in San Francisco, he contemplates the city differently, and slides into an oppressive thanatic imaginary that also darkens the ending of the *American Journal*:

The same brightness that envelops you in the Bay of Naples or on the deck of the boat that takes you to Capri, leaving behind a trail of foamed silver from which fish jump as at the urging of a trainer's wand. (...) As they stand, white, not so different in size as to spoil an impression of monotony, the houses look like crosses. The whole city is one big white stone cemetery – where the dead walk through crosses, all the way up in the elevator. The same monotony. Could San Francisco be the white ghost of the Pacific Ocean? (Sorescu, 1999:60).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Regardless of the reasons that stimulate it, Marin Sorescu's travel literature involves a fertile exercise of creative freedom, resulting from the ingenuous crossbreeding of several forms of self-diction, placed in the line of a poetics of certain

⁵ Of course, this is one of the most common representations of the foreign city: "Desire and viewing, and the telling of presence and the past, on the street to the future: along with its speed, its orgiastic longing and its potential for narrative understanding, the city is manifest in its own frequent emptiness, its own enforced exile from other place" (Caws 1991: 10)

complexity and polyphony. It is true that his view of the travel diary or memorial is rather traditional; the *anti-traveler* repeatedly claims to prefer, in such a text, the impersonal, and hurries to announce, firmly, that he despises the overbidding of the ego. But the subjectivity he inserts into the text exponentially increases its attractiveness. Moreover, beyond the literary strengths, visible everywhere (the well-known portrait talent, the usual (self)ironic pigment or the ability to capture, from just a few descriptive touches, the specificity of a foreign place), the small strategic games with identity interface – such as staging a confrontation between *One* and the *other* – transform it, in places, into a provocative literary work.

Particularly in *The American Diary*, the deep reflection on the faces of the foreign city acquires an essential role. On the one hand, faced with the confusing urban spectacle (which he perceives as contrasting, comfortable, bright, hyper-technological and consequently *artificial, sterile, almost frozen*), the prose writer feels the need to retreat, to activate his affective memory and to recreate his native village through writing. It is well known that the cycle of poems *La Lilieci/ At the Bats* was started during Sorescu's year in the USA. But we must obviously see this volume as more than a happy consequence of the discovery of *Spoon River*, Edgar Lee Masters 's anthology (as some Romanian critics have mistakenly claimed). In fact, the manuscript of this book – about which the diarist does not mention anything in the *American Journal!* – is also a fertile materialization of the deep nostalgia of the writer who, at a huge distance from home, feels exiled or uprooted and consequently re-transforms the harsh

poetry of his native space into a splendid text, in which individual memory blends, harmoniously, with the community one. On the other hand, the *American Journal* resists very well and deserves to be read for itself, as a remarkable travel literature, in which one can identify not only the general features of this type of narrative, but also the particular notes of a spatial and urban representation containing the marks of Sorescu's originality.

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