

**IRISH-ROMANIAN  
CULTURAL CONNECTIONS**

**TRAVELLERS, WRITERS AND AMBASSADORS**



**NICOLETA STANCA**

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The author





## FOREWORD

I remember with great pleasure the day in April 2015 when I was offered the position of Ambassador of Ireland to Romania. If I knew as much then as I know now about the geography, history and rich culture of this wonderful country, I might have been even happier and more excited - if that were possible. However, that would have denied me the pleasure of gradually discovering Romania for myself over the past few years as I travelled extensively and engaged with the culture and people of this incredibly beautiful and endlessly fascinating country, over 2,000km from home.

Of course, one of my first duties as Ambassador is to promote Ireland's own rich culture. This can be challenging in some locations. However, in Romania I was delighted to find that some aspects of Ireland and Irish culture were already well known and appreciated here. That was especially the case for our music, dancing and literature. I also discovered that the phenomenon of the "Irish Pub" had long preceded my arrival in Bucharest and elsewhere in Romania, providing venues for resident and visiting Irish musicians and Irish dancers to perform in front of appreciative local audiences eager to experience the spirit of Ireland. I have also seen for myself the huge appetite that exists for tickets when legendary Irish dancing spectacles visit Bucharest and other venues throughout the country.

One of the many things that Romanian and Irish people have in common is our love for literature, and both countries have produced many talented authors and poets. I was delighted to learn that James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, Oscar Wilde and Seamus Heaney, among others, were enthusiastically studied in the faculties of letters, foreign languages and literatures of most Romanian Universities. I soon came to the conclusion that the passion and enthusiasm for Romanian and foreign literature that I came across must be directly attributable to the quality of teaching in Romanian schools and universities. When I met Professor Nicoleta Stanca

the picture became even clearer. Professor Stanca, who has a PhD on one of Ireland's greatest literary figures, the Nobel prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney, keeps Irish literature close to her heart. I have been bowled over by her depth of knowledge and enthusiasm for Irish literature and how she manages to engender a love for all literature in her students. Professor Stanca generously gave me the opportunity to bring academics from Ireland to lecture on the work of famous Irish poets and writers, thus strengthening the cultural bridge between Ireland and Romania.

The particular popularity of James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* in Romania also provided me and my predecessors with opportunities to celebrate *Bloomsday* in Bucharest on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June every year. The day is named after the main character in *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom, who famously went walking around Dublin city (in Dublin we would say he "rambled" around the city) on 16 June 1904, which was also the actual date of Joyce's first outing with his wife-to-be, Nora Barnacle. Bloomsday represents a celebration of James Joyce's life and works through the reading of passages from his novel, eating some of the culinary delights that Joyce relished and singing some of the songs with which he is associated. The nature of the celebration in Bucharest has varied from year to year, from concerts and readings in theatre halls to displaying the Embassy's 22-panel Joyce Exhibition in metro stations and even in the Brâncuși Hall of the Palace of Parliament.

Apart from Irish literature, I also found that Irish films were popular with Romanian film lovers. Not only does the Embassy participate in various international and local film festivals throughout the country, but we also bring Irish feature and short films to Universities for viewing by students and academics, including Ovidius University in *Constanța*. The Embassy also annually organises the *Irish Film Days Festival of Bucharest*, which celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> year in November 2018 with the screening of *In the Name of Peace – John Hume in America* directed by Maurice Fitzpatrick who was present for the occasion. John Hume was one of the main authors of the peace process in Northern Ireland, which in turn led to the "Good Friday Agreement" that regularly featured in media coverage of the Brexit negotiations between the UK and the EU.

From film I move to theatre. Over the years many Irish theatre companies have travelled to Romania to participate in theatre festivals

organised in various cities. Plays staged here by talented Irish theatre directors have been very successful, whether written by Sean O'Casey or interpretations of the work of Anton Chekhov. The link between Irish and Romanian cultures was further reflected in the work of a number of well-known Romanian theatre directors, such as Silviu Purcărete who staged Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* in Sibiu and Alexandru Dabija who staged Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* in Bucharest, both challenging but highly successful productions.

For the Irish Embassy, the busiest time of the year by far is around St Patrick's Day, our National Day which arises on 17 March. Irish people love to celebrate their heritage and culture and they are always happy when others join in. The size and geographical spread of our diaspora means that every year St Patrick's Day is celebrated from Dublin to New York and from London to Sydney - and everywhere in between! Members of the Irish government also try to visit as many Irish communities abroad as possible around St Patrick's Day and I was glad that Bucharest was included for the first time in 2019. St Patrick's Day also provides Irish Ambassadors with the opportunity to host National Day receptions for the local diplomatic and Irish communities and other friends of the Embassy, which are always most enjoyable occasions.

The Embassy's collaboration with the STEYsha Irish Dancing School of Bucharest is our most enduring cultural partnership. They are always willing and ready to represent the Embassy and Ireland at festivals and other events, large and small, especially around our St Patrick's Day but also throughout the year.

In the context of Romania's Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first half of 2019 I should also mention that the Irish Embassy gladly participates annually in cultural activities associated with Europe Day, and other events connected with the EU that are organised by the Romanian Foreign Ministry, the EU Offices in Bucharest and others in and outside of the Capital. Against the background of Brexit it is good to get together regularly with representatives of the other EU Member States and celebrate the values that we share and that the EU upholds. These events sometimes have a broader scope - the Embassy's participation in the World Experience Festival held last summer under the auspices of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was one of the highlights of our cultural year.

Together, my heightened experience of Irish culture and my gradual education in Romanian culture added huge value to my assignment in Bucharest. I will never forget my unique Romanian experience and I owe a huge gratitude to my good friend Nicoleta Stanca for assisting and guiding me in my journey. She had done astonishing work in examining the parallels between the Irish and Romanian cultures, providing vivid pictures of real life in our two countries and weaving them together. She also completed an excellent synthesis of the cultural activity of the Irish Embassy in Romania and managed to make our contribution look much better than we deserved. Above all, Professor Stanca has helped the Irish and Romanian people to cross the bridge between our two countries, using culture as a vehicle through which to hugely increase awareness and enhance the reputation of Ireland in Romania, and of Romania in Ireland.

Derek Feely  
Ambassador of Ireland to Romania

## INTRODUCTION

The context of this volume on Irish-Romanian Cultural Connections is both very personal and academic. It is academic because I teach elective courses on Irish literature in the English major undergraduate program and the MA program at Ovidius University Constanța, the Faculty of Letters, and since 2012 the Embassy of Ireland in Bucharest has supported all my efforts bringing the two institutions together, the Embassy and the University. Yet, the book is also very personal because, throughout these years, there has been a generous and warm-hearted group of people at the Embassy, who trusted me and encouraged me and I am grateful to: Their Excellencies Ambassadors: John Morahan, Oliver Grogan, Gerard Corr and Derek Feely; Deputy Heads of the Mission: David Costello, Andrew Harwood and Patrick Coleman; PA to Ambassador and Cultural Officer Anamaria Suciu and the entire team at the Irish Embassy. Thus, my work at the university, in a permanent collaboration with the Embassy, has revealed one vital meaning of the Irish-Romanian connections, i.e. truly dedicated individuals who are open to embrace otherness and graft it on their identity so that the communion becomes relevant for both parties.

This book is divided in four chapters: chapter I, “Travel and Cultural Diplomacy, Literature and Identity: A Transnationalist Approach to the Circulation of People and Texts as Ambassadors of Culture”; chapter II, “Journeys through Romania (Travel Writings by Irish Men and Women: Patrick O’Brien’s *Journal of a Residence in the Danubian Principalities in the Autumn and Winter of 1853*, Maude Rea Parkinson’s *Twenty Years in Romania* and Peter Hurley’s *The Way of the Crosses*)”; chapter III, “Irish Writers in the Romanian Space. Highlights of the Reception of W.B. Yeats, J. Joyce and S. Heaney” and chapter IV, “Ireland-Romania Relations: Cultural Initiatives of the Embassy of Ireland in Bucharest”. The key characters of my account of the Irish-Romanian Connections are travellers, writers and their books and ambassadors. They all travel; if it had not been

for their journeys – real, mental, spiritual, cultural – the connections would have been poorer. Getting back to the academic layer of my book, this is the purpose of the first chapter, to demonstrate, through theory, the vital role of the circulation of people, writers, texts and Embassy representatives in order to highlight the true value of interconnections and interrelations.

Chapter II, “Journeys through Romania (Travel Writings by Irish Men and Women: Patrick O’Brien’s *Journal of a Residence in the Danubian Principalities in the Autumn and Winter of 1853*, Maude Rea Parkinson’s *Twenty Years in Romania* and Peter Hurley’s *The Way of the Crosses*)” presents the travel journals of three Irish “travellers” through Romania in different historical ages, from mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the contemporary period. Both volumes by Patrick O’Brien and Maude Rea Parkinson have been more recently brought to the attention of the Romanian readers by Professor Constantin Ardeleanu from the History Department of the Lower Danube University of Galați. He translated O’Brien’s book and co-translated Rea Parkinson’s volume with a colleague from the same university, Oana Celia Gheorghiu. Taking into account the interest of the historian’s in the British economy and political interests at the Danube mouths (1829-1914) and the foreign trade and navigation on the Lower Danube (1881-1900), it is easy to realize the value of his in-depth introductions to the two volumes.

Patrick O’Brien’s book was initially published in 1854, one year after the journey, and the book was translated into Romanian and published in 2016, but fragments had appeared in the Romanian translation of Constantin Ardeleanu in the volume *Călători străini despre Țările Române în sec. al XIX-lea*, vol. 6: 1852-1856, Editura Academiei Române, București, 2010 (pp. 79-103). Maude Rea Parkinson stayed in Romania between 1889 and 1916, published the book in English in 1921, when she was back home, and in Romania it was printed in translation in 2014. Peter Hurley’s travel journal, *The Way of the Crosses*, covers his 26-day Ulyssean journey through the Romanian mountains and villages in the fasting period before Christmas 2012 and he published the book in English the following year. The Romanian context of the writing of the three travel journals is completely different, yet, through the perceptions of their Irish authors, a certain sense of continuity of identity could be discovered.

In 1853, the international background was that in which the Russian army occupied Moldavia and Wallachia. Between 1828 and 1834, the Romanian Principalities had been under Russian military occupation as the latter were constantly targeting the straits at the Black Sea and the Western powers became more willing to counter its force in the region. The Russian domination was visible through the quarantine measures at the mouths of the Danube and the taxes and trade control in the ports of Brăila and Galați. Further and stronger control by the Russian Empire was manifested in the period 1848-1851 in exchange for the loss of the domination of the Holy Lands at the expense of the Catholics, a situation used as a pretext for the Russians to invade Moldavia and Wallachia in 1853, when Patrick O'Brien was in the area.

*Twenty Years in Romania* was written a few decades later in an equally difficult context, that of the Great War and Romania's participation in it in 1916. The public opinion in the West in general and in Britain in particular was favourable to the goal of the Romanian independence and union, the framework for it having been created through the work of the Anglo-Romanian Society, publications and the official propaganda of the Romanian authorities. Maud Rea Parkinson's volume brings a personal contribution to the warm, yet, picturesque, image of Romania at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1889-1916). The focus of her descriptions is mainly on townlife, especially Bucharest in full process of modernization, social layers, pastimes, institutions, politics, education, beliefs and customs in various parts of our country.

One century later, in 2012, Peter Hurley, this time an Irishman who eventually settled in Romania in 1994, embarks on a journey on foot through Romania, from north (Maramureș) to the capital city, Bucharest. His travel journal gives an answer to the question the Irishman is constantly asked mostly by Romanians and which he mentions in the preface to his book *The Way of the Crosses*: "Why the hell do you live in Romania?". This is the Romanian context at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, meaning a "quiet cataclysm", according to Hurley (*The Way* iii), that of Romanian migration all over Europe and even all over the world. For the Irishman, it rings bells of an entire history of Irish migration. But, the counterargument to this reality and the answer to the question previously mentioned is offered by Hurley's entire experience on the way from Săpânța to Bucharest: the

spirituality of the places given by the humanity and generosity of their inhabitants and their stubbornness to preserve a traditional way of life in spite of all obstacles. This is what gives meaning to the lives of those who chose to stay in Romania in spite of the difficulties and this gives a sense of continuity to the travelling accounts from 1853 up to the present.

I began writing chapter III, “Irish Writers in the Romanian Space. Highlights of the Reception of W.B. Yeats, J. Joyce and S. Heaney”, as a presentation of the reception of the great literary voices of Irish literature in the Romanian space and as I was looking for information on when texts by Yeats, Joyce and Heaney were first read, translated and appreciated in our country, I realized that the story of reception is also one of movement and circulation, similar to that of the travelers in chapter II.

Thus, the earliest instances of Yeatsian reception date back to the 1930s, when the visionary poet was in full maturity and still writing. The same decade, the 1930s, witnessed the first translations into Romanian from Joyce’s *Dubliners*, with the entire volume translated in 1966. There is proof that *Ulysses* had reached English language specialists in Romania in the 1930s, but its journey of translation and publication was more difficult in a context of communist censorship. And Seamus Heaney was introduced in our country in the 1990s when he was first translated by the poet Ana Blandiana and presented by Professor Mihaela Irimia.

Beyond the initial encounters of the Romanian reading public with each of these writers, the odyssey of their reception continues: through conferences in Romanian universities and attendance of summer schools in Ireland by Romanian academics, through concerts, exhibitions, lectures organized by the Embassy of Ireland in Romania, through more recent translations or further editions of older translations and all sort of other publications related to their works and last, but not least, through the legacies of Yeats, Joyce and Heaney for Romanian writers, to which the third chapter refers.

The last chapter, “Ireland-Romania Relations: Cultural Initiatives of the Embassy of Ireland in Bucharest”, rightfully crowns the volume as the contribution of the Embassy of Ireland to the present richness of Irish-Romanian connections has been the engine to start the journey of my book. And what other people than the ambassadors and representatives of Ireland, supported by an entire Romanian team in the institution, could offer better



examples of joint projects, initiatives and have ideas for cooperation and collaboration?

St. Patrick's Day, the EU Irish Presidency in 2013 (interestingly, Romania's turn is in 2019), Bloomsdays, film festivals, concerts, theatrical productions, book launches and literature festivals, lectures and travelling exhibitions all have given opportunities for cultural diplomacy, which the Embassy of Ireland in Romania has fully made use of. By contributing to better knowledge of Irish culture in our country and developing a stronger profile of Ireland in this space, the Embassy, also thanks to the networks activated, manages to strengthen the Irish-Romanian relationships and enhance socio-cultural cooperation.



## CHAPTER I

### **Travel and Cultural Diplomacy, Literature and Identity: A Transnationalist Approach to the Circulation of People and Texts as Ambassadors of Culture**

#### **Transnationalism and Memory Culture**

Literature, history, cultural diplomatic relations and the media should be looked at as transnational phenomena today in a complex context in which there have been changes in the media technology and the Internet functions as a global mega-archive. It has all resulted in a cultural amnesia – since everything is there – and a corresponding “memory boom” of the media and popular culture products shaping the way we think about the past. “Cultural memory” (culturally mediated memory) and the idea of the past as a human construct and as raw material for memory have come to the fore in this world of permanent movement.

Since contemporary critics refer to the importance of studying the movement of people, objects physically and through the media, it would be interesting to consider Steven Vervotec’s *Transnationalism*, in which he considers that since the 1990s the transnational has become increasingly important in many domains: communities, identities, cultures, spaces, capital, networks, societies, organizations, services, politics, trade: the actual ongoing exchanges of information, money and resources that members of a diaphora may undertake with others in the homeland or elsewhere in the globalized ethnic community (137). I would add that the concept also covers the case of individuals not necessarily feeling part of a strong diasporic group somewhere, but whose flexibility of identity enriches a personality as well as a nation through more diverse categories.

The focus in contemporary society seems to have shifted from sites of culture and memory to the movements of people and culture, and from roots to the routes taken by stories, rituals and images. “Transcultural memory” (Crownsaw in Erll 65) “travelling culture” (Clifford in Erll 65) and “travelling memory” (Erll 66) have acquired this transnational dimension. “In a world of transnational mobility and spatial dislocation, no enclosed community –neither university nor region nor nation- can define itself in a separatist manner” (Paul Giles in Manning and Taylor 18). From the point of view of our research it will be relevant to look at the transnational dimension of Irish and Romanian identities as revealed in the travel books of Irish travellers through Romania, the reception of major Irish writers in Romania, images of Irishness in the Romanian media reflecting cultural events and through a presentation of Irish-Romanian cultural diplomatic relations. Writers, politicians, diplomats, ordinary migrants, generally moving and characterized by malleable identities, act within a fluidity of constructed styles, social institutions and practices, described by theoreticians in relation to syncretism, bricolage, cultural translation, crossover, hyphenation, third space, multiculturalism, transculturalism, diasporic consciousness and hybridity (Vervotec 7, 70), within a global public space of emotional ties and more recently of rapid communication facilitated by technology and of identity politics.

If the term “international” (Portes in Vervotec 29), as activity of nation states, seems more appropriate to describe Patrick O’Brien’s voyage through the Romanian Principalities in mid-19 century, Peter Hurley’s walk through Romania in 2013 may rather fall in the “transnational” category (of non-institutionalized actors and networks across borders) (Vervotec 29). To give only one example, in his attempt to promote Romanian authentic values as we should not see transnationalism as a negation of one’s belonging to a nation, Peter Hurley is trying to attract adepts of Romanian folklore using virtual connections, the cyber communities coined by Vervotec (49) or “computer supported social networks” (Wellman in Vervotec 49) and digital archives seen as participatory, communicative and inclusive. Equally, we could invoke the dual identity/ citizenship for those individuals like the Irishman Peter Hurley and the Englishman Mike Ormsby, who eventually settled in Romania, yet the issue is much more complex as they still regard themselves as legitimate members of the