

*We move forward by putting one foot in front of the other, as we do with words –
interview with Grégory Rateau*

From France to Romania. And between the two, maybe a few stops in Ireland or Lebanon. This is how we can think of Grégory Rateau, the French writer who has been wandering around Romania for some time and who does not hesitate to reveal us what we ourselves have forgotten to see in our own country. So I contacted and asked him a few questions without too many generalizations.

Your book, *Hoinar prin România. Jurnalul unui călător francez*, has been wandering around Romania for more than one year. What opinions, emotions, reactions have you gathered all this time since its publication?

I met a lot of people during different events that were very enthusiast. The press too was responsive to the book. The writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau inspired me for my writings, it is a declaration of love for the territory of childhood. I feel Romanians have therefore rediscovered perceptions that they had sometimes forgotten.

You mentioned, in many interviews, why you chose Romania. But going further, why does the genuine traveler is prone to return to the origins of nature, to simplicity, to the countryside, giving up urban comfort? How can the individual who experienced comfort live without it for a long time?

It is necessary to run away from a certain comfort, to give it up voluntarily for a while in order to try to find oneself. To perceive again the essence of things, of beings, and to reconnect with its sensations, to no longer be parasitized by the hubbub of the world. We are all in a staging, this planetary desire of being finally validated on the web and by the greatest number. It's an incredible waste of time. You have to start by living for yourself and, along the way, you meet people sharing the same convictions.

What kind of intimacy do you find in a journey? How can it help you discover and rediscover yourself? Do you find the same intimacy in writing?

Travel is an endangerment, like writing, we move forward by putting one foot in front of the other, as we do with words. We do not always know what we are going to find, we take the risk of exposing ourselves: of being subject to the judgment of others for the writing for example, and of getting out of our comfort zone and opening our door wide to the unexpected during the travelling.

What was the biggest difference between what you thought you would find and what you actually found in a journey, in a certain place?

Sometimes we look for adventure, a form of exoticism and we find something else, we have to tame everyday life again. Living far from home forces us to face the following sad reality: we don't necessarily change, we just open our eyes to who we are.

How do you address and emotionally explore 'the sensitive realities' of society, as poverty, for example, compared to the other 'showy, more exuberant realities'?

I will speak more specifically about my experience here, as I have been living in Romania for 5 years now. As soon as I arrived, I traveled around the territory a lot, trying to stay as lucid as possible. I also had to make it out by starting from scratch, I had no work here and little prospect. By working in offices I had to confront the same reality as Romanians and that brought me closer to them I think. It's been 3 years now that I'm running a french about Romania, LePetitJournal.com Bucharest, and my job as a journalist consists precisely in depicting this reality on a daily basis without judging it, but also promoting those who try to change things.

How far does the admiration for a writer go? Given the fact that you came to Romania, following the footsteps of Panait Istrati and wearing a hat as a sign of admiration for Jack London?

I love Jack London, I reread his masterpiece, Martin Eden, 15 times. The hat / beret is anecdotic, I've always worn one, it's a bit out of shyness, the accessories protect me. Admiration indeed plays a very big role in the construction of an individual. You can radically change your life to be like the character in a novel or become someone better to live up to a figure you admire. Istrati, like so many others, showed me that you have to be ready to give everything to live up to your dreams. The sincerity and the sense of friendship being the most beautiful values conveyed by this "heavenly tramp".

How do you see the challenge of living from day to day, nourishing a less planned lifestyle with limited certainty regarding the future? Can this also cause the traveler some kind of anxiety? Doesn't the traveler also need its own security of living, of knowledge, of planning?

I can't really speak for "travelers". As for me, I decided to settle here in Romania to write, and do my work in the media. I have anxieties like everyone else but I am lucky to be able to materialize them by writing as I have just done with my latest novel, "Noir de soleil" (published by Maurice Nadeau).

What are the most relevant obstacles and dangers that a traveler might need to tackle in his way? What about a writer?

For the traveler: boredom, a health problem. For the writer: mediocrity, and general indifference I imagine.

Regarding the traditions you have observed in Romania, do you have a favorite one? I must admit that the passage with the sacrifice of the pig was a real delight to read.

Thank you, yes, but the pig was excellent (laughs). What I also like are the large religious gatherings at Easter, the moments spent with friends in the village who are like a second family. But also this famous "dance of the bear" which I do not speak about in the book but which I had time to discover by writing articles about it.

Do you feel attached to other Romanian writers who were in exile in France, such as Eugen Ionescu, Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade or others?

I really like the intellectuals / authors that you quoted, I worked on the letters of Cioran confiscated by the Securitate, and I also read it a lot during my adolescence. To be honest, the Romanian writer whom I venerate today is Mircea Cartarescu, a master, a model to follow because he goes very far. Immense respect for this genius artist. Romania, Romanians have so much to offer ...