

## 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY ORADEA: THE REFLECTIONS OF A MULTIETHNIC CITY IN BRITISH TRAVEL LITERATURE

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**Abstract:** The British travellers who visited Oradea in the 19<sup>th</sup> century observe its multiethnic structure and refer to all ethnic groups of the city. The architecture of Oradea is also carefully described. The travellers present the ecclesiastical character of the city and the religiosity of the inhabitants, but, at the same time, are impressed by the life-loving attitude of the people who often manifest their joy of living.

**Key words:** Imagology, British Travel Literature, the Image of Romania, Transylvania, Oradea

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### INTRODUCTION

The British travellers who visited Oradea in the 19<sup>th</sup> century depict a multiethnic city with a rich history, an important ecclesiastical centre, and at the same time a place where the inhabitants' life joy is expressed every day. In my article I shall refer to several travellers who published their impressions on the city, such as Robert Townson (1797), John Paget (1839), Charles Loring Brace (1852), Andrew A. Paton (1862), John Arthur Patterson (1869), Nina Elizabeth Mazuchelli (1881), and Major E.C. Johnson (1885). Robert Townson was an English scientist, a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh who travelled widely as a gentleman scholar; he visited Oradea at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and presented his experience in the volume *Travels in Hungary with a Short Description of Vienna in the Year of 1793*, published in 1797. Robert Townson's references to Transylvania had a significant impact on Western readers, as his book was published in Great Britain and then translated into French. His "short residence at Groswardein" (152) is read and referred to in William Bingley's book *Travels in North Europe: From Modern Writers, with Remarks and Observations* (1822).

John Paget was an English doctor married to a Hungarian baroness, who moved to Transylvania after his journey in this region and received the Hungarian citizenship later on. He published an extensive book in two volumes on Hungary and Transylvania, which served both as a travel guide and a source

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of inspiration for the British travellers who visited Transylvania after him. Charles Loring Brace was an American minister and philanthropist who visited Hungary and Transylvania in 1851 and published the volume *Hungary in 1851: with an Experience of the Austrian Police* (1852). The British consul at Dubrovnik Andrew Archibald Paton, who synthesised his travels in several travel memoirs on Egypt and Syria and the Balkans, depicts Transylvania and the Banat in the volume *Researches on the Danube and the Adriatic: or, Contributions to the Modern History of Hungary and Transylvania, Dalmatia and Croatia* (1862). The writer Arthur Patterson, foreign member of the Kisfaludy Society, published in 1869 a volume entitled *The Magyars*, in which he presents his visit to Oradea and its surrounding region, which took place in 1864.

Another traveller who describes Oradea in very beautiful words is Nina Elizabeth Mazuchelli. The wife of an army chaplain, Mazuchelli is a courageous explorer, one of the first British ladies who travelled far into the Eastern Himalaya and published the volume *The Indian Alps and How We Crossed Them...* (1876). Her travels in Hungary, Slovakia and Transylvania are described in the travel memoir *Magyarland...* (1881). *Magyarland...* and *On the Track of the Crescent: Erratic Notes from the Piraeus to Pesth* by Major E. C. Johnson were some of the main books consulted by Bram Stoker on Transylvania during his work on the novel *Dracula*. In Major E. C. Johnson's volume, Transylvania has a central place, and the description of Oradea is also included. Bram Stoker's working notes for *Dracula* prove that the novelist read Johnson's pages on Oradea carefully and took several notes from them.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century British books, the city appears with its German and Hungarian names: Grosswardein (sometimes spelled Gross Wardein) and NagyVárad (spelled Nagy-varád by Mazuchelli 62 and Nagy Várod by Johnson 205).



**Figure 1.** Sketch of Oradea by Mazuchelli  
(Source: *Magyarland*, p. 62)

### **ENTERING ORADEA, THE DOOR TO THE TRANSYLVANIAN WORLD**

For the British travellers, Oradea means “the frontier of Transylvania” (Mazuchelli, 59), the entering place to a region different from what they have seen before. “The Land Beyond the Forest” (as Transylvania is often named in 19<sup>th</sup> century British literature) is sometimes introduced to the English reader by comparisons such as “the mountain region of Transylvania, which is a sort of Switzerland to the Carpathians” (Paton, 134).

The travellers who often come from the Hungarian plain are attracted by the hills and the mountains in the neighbourhood of the city. Before his visit to Oradea, Robert Townson had planned to stop his journey at Debrecen, but the high mountains he saw at the horizon make him move eastward. He is disappointed to see at his arrival that the mountains of which he was told are actually hills and explains that the confusion came from the polysemy of the German word *berg*. However, Townson admits that he “was not displeased at having made this mistake”, because “Gross Wardein is one of the prettiest towns in Hungary” (250).

All British travellers have a good first impression when they discover the *pleasant* city (Patterson, 337). Paget writes that “Gross Wardein is really one of the prettiest little towns I have seen for a long time” (518). Patterson explains his English speaking readers that Oradea is (in the 1860s) “the chief town of Bihar, the largest county in Hungary”, a district which “amounts to about 300,000 souls, of whom 180,000 are Magyars and 120,000 are Wallachs” (Patterson, 337). Richard Bright writes that Bihar comitat is “the most fruitful in Hungary, having everything in abundance” (Appendix XIII). The other travellers are also fond of statistics: John Paget writes that the city had 18.000 inhabitants in the 1830s (519), and Charles Loring Brace informs his readers that the city has about 20.000 inhabitants in 1851 (272). Paton, who also visits Oradea in the 1850s agrees to the same number: “20,000 souls, half of whom are Magyars and the rest Daco-Romans, with some Slovacks and Jews” (134). In the 1880s Mazuchelli writes that the city “contains 36,000 inhabitants, the majority of whom are Wallachs”, while Johnson is less precise and writes that “this pretty town has about 30,000 inhabitants” (194), noting also that Romanians are the majority.

If in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the travellers reached the city by coach, while the English visitors in the 1870s and 1880s are usually entering Oradea by train. A hard experience is Paton’s journey from Ciucea Pass to Oradea by diligence, which is “rather a sort of Irish car, protected from the weather by leather curtains” while “the thermometer fell to twenty-four degrees Reaumur” (132). Even if it is slow, the train is much more comfortable and especially the travellers who come from nowadays Hungary or from Timisoara take this choice. The train station of Oradea is depicted both in Mazuchelli’s and Johnson’s books. In *On the Track of the Crescent...*, the entrance in the station is clearly marked: “At four we puffed, snorted, and reached the station of N.V. – eight hours from Pesth” (194). Johnson’s enthusiasm at the sight of the distant mountains is diminished by the road from the station to the city centre. Travelling in a “small omnibus” into which he was “pushed, with fat women, bundles of all sorts, and the inevitable priest with Don Basilio’s hat”, the British Major cannot help to exclaim: “Oh, what a road! what mud! what ruts! Even the Sussex lane, in which a horse and a cart are said to have disappeared, leaving nothing but a bubble behind, might envy it” (195).

Not only Johnson is surprised by public conveyance in Oradea. Mazuchelli also notices the peculiarity of these conveyances: “more strange by far than any we have yet seen in Hungary are the vehicles met with here, which, though apparently belonging to a class far above the ordinary peasant, are so different from any found in the rest -of Europe, that we might have arrived at an altogether new world” (66).

### **AN IMPORTANT ECCLESIASTICAL CENTRE**

One of the main features of the city is its ecclesiastical aspect. As Johnson puts it, the city “bristles with church spires, as it is an ecclesiastical see, and the residence of three bishops. Of these, one is a Roman Catholic, another one a United Greek, and the third a Non-United Greek” (Johnson 194). Mazuchelli also presents Oradea as “one of the most ecclesiastical places in Hungary, full of churches and convents” (62). The British concern for statistics is shown when they write about churches too: Mazuchelli writes that there are thirty churches, whilst in the past were seventy. For Patterson, Oradea “is an ecclesiastical place, abounding in convents and seminaries” (337), and Paget also considers that “the glory of Gross Wardein is in its gilded steeples, its Episcopal palace, its convents, and its churches” (519).

The British travellers pay attention to several religions and write about the Orthodox population, the Roman Catholics, the Greek Catholics, the Protestants and the Mosaic believers.

Oradea is considered an important centre of the Orthodoxy. In a short note about the religion of the Romanians in Transylvania, Francois S. Beudant mentions the city as an important place of the Greek Orthodox Church and the see of an Orthodox bishop (*Travels in Hungary, in 1818*, p. 23). Many other travellers have discussed this aspect, but the one who pays the greatest attention to the Orthodox rituals is Nina Elizabeth Mazuchelli. She enters the Orthodox cathedral in Oradea and assists at the religious service on the Good Friday. The “opportunity... of witnessing one of the gorgeous services of the Greek Church” (70) is described minutely in her book and a whole chapter is entitled after this event: “Good Friday in the Greek Church”.

The “splendid vestments” and the imposing ritual filled the English lady “with a new delight” (70). Mazuchelli is impressed by the Orthodox music: “The music was heavenly, the grand old Ambrosial chants, begun by a long-robed priest whose beard extended far below his chest, being taken up by the fresh young voices of the choir, which welling upwards in a flood of melody, echoed through the vaulted roof” (70). Her description of the Orthodox music is anthological:

*It is impossible to give any adequate idea of the imposing ritual of the Greek Church to those who have not witnessed it, or of the apparent devotion and ecclesiastic adoration of the people as they prostrate themselves until their faces touch the marble floor, whilst the singing of the unseen choir seems to be that of a company of angels come down to earth to join in the Christian worship.*

*It was this music, the most beautiful and touching in the whole world, that melted the stern, cold heart of the Russian prince of old – the Great Vladimir himself – causing him to give up his pagan gods, and was the indirect origin of the Greek rite becoming the national church of the northern branch of the Slavonic family” (71).*

The British witness observes the whole ceremony at the lights of the tall tapers which burn at the shrine erected for the celebration in the centre of the

nave. The shrine is approached “by a pathway of trees and flowers growing in large tubs – oleanders, geraniums, roses, lilies, and a variety of other plants, too numerous to mention, but all out of keeping to our thinking, for it was anything but a pathway of flowers which *He* trod, whose sufferings and death the people were commemorating” (72).

Mazuchelli notices the discipline of the believers, in spite of the numerous participants in the ritual: “... there was perfect stillness and a hush almost supernatural, and our hearts were moved by the strong faith and love which the people evinced in and for the Holy Hero of the day, as they crossed themselves, and gently and sadly turned away to make room for other worshippers” (73).

Her conclusion is memorable: “I have travelled in many lands, but it is in Hungary alone that I have observed such intense devotion of the people. To them the religion they profess is no mere shadow, but a deep, great, and abiding reality” (73).



**Figure 2.** Sketch by Mazuchelli representing women praying in the Ortodox Cathedral of Oradea (the Moon Church)  
(Source: Magyarland, p. 72)

In the Orthodox cathedral there is no sermon, because the Orthodox bishop was dead, and Mazuchelli crosses the market place to enter the Greek Catholic cathedral. Here she assists to the sermon and notices the people “standing and listening attentively to the old, old Story” (73). She is impressed by the “earnestness in devotion” (73) of the Greek Catholics and the image of their service is represented in her book in a sketch drawn by the author.

The British travellers also pay attention to the Catholic Church. Patterson notices that the palace and cathedral of the Roman Catholic bishop surpass those of the Greek Catholic bishops. When Townson visited the bishop, the Episcopal palace was not finished yet. They all refer to the richness of the Latin bishop who is considered “a very great lord”, holding the lordship of ninety-nine

manors, whereas “his palace and cathedral, from their great size, do give an air of importance to the town” (Patterson 338). Sometimes anecdotic moments are mentioned: for instance Paget writes that a gouty old Englishman had come all the way from England to be cured of his gout by the Prince, but his enterprise was unsuccessful. The British interest in statistics is shown when they speak about the richness of the Catholic bishop too, as many of them write the income of the bishop (300,000 gulden, or £25,000 a year – according to Mazuchelli, 65) and sometimes compare it to the income of the Greek Catholic bishop.

Mazuchelli describes the vigil of a high festival day, the first day of May, in the Roman Catholic Church. The churches are decorated with flowers, and in the streets the young girls carry offerings to the Virgin's shrine. The British lady visits the church of San Franciscan Friars, “a gorgeous edifice all tinsel and gold, with life-size, gaudily- painted figures of the twelve Apostles, the Virgin, and the Holy Women, all so natural that they seem endowed with sound and motion” (73). She is able to see the essence of each form of religious manifestation. When she visits this Catholic church, Mazuchelli is impressed by the statues “so marvellously life-like that as we look at them we tremble lest they should break their little necks by toppling over on to the floor of the nave below” (74). These representations are “bewildering to the devout mind” (74). The traveller notices the same precise representation of Christ on the cross, with blue lips and livid face, an “expression of agony all so wonderfully depicted as to be painful to look at” (74).

The lady traveller notices the specific of a Catholic funeral, which she observes in the street: the boy dressed in white surplice and black cassock who bears the cross accompanied by other small boys, the priest, the men in the ancient costume of the Magyars, the bier drawn by white horses draped in blue cloth and the carriages followed in which were the ladies.

The British and American travellers have strong contacts with the Protestant population of the city. Charles Loring Braces is hosted in the house of a Protestant intellectual and he has references from Protestant clergymen. Patterson also discusses with several clergymen of the region. The religious and cultural links between the Protestants of Transylvania are frequently emphasised in 19<sup>th</sup> century British travel literature.

Not only the Christian manifestations of religiosity are observed in British travel literature. Mazuchelli also notices the devout Jews who are “hastening to their synagogue” (74) at the beginning of their Sabbath. One of the chapters dedicated to Oradea in Mazuchelli's book ends with the image of the sun which sets over all church steeples, Christian and Jewish: “As we returned to our hotel, the sun just setting was gilding with impartial glory alike the temples of the Christian and the Jew” (Mazuchelli, 65). This symbolic image is characteristic for the author's ecumenical vision.

### **HARD TIMES IN THE PAST AND PRESENT**

The British travellers are interested in the history of the city. Paton mentions that “Grosswardein was a great city in the middle ages, having had, according to tradition, seventy-two churches, and having been the residence of several kings” (134). The Turks destroyed the medieval city, and built the fortress. According to Paton, “the Royal Hungarian or pre-Turkish period” is characterised by “abundant traces of castellated feudalism” and he imagines the ancient city as “a large collection of wooden houses, with a barbaric pomp in

costume, armour, horse caparisons, and personal ornaments...” (134). Paton also praises the courage of the inhabitants who defeated the citadel against the Turkish siege in 1598 and refers to the several battles between the Turks and the Austrians. After the city is conquered by the Hapsburgs “a complete alteration took place in the appearance” of the region (Paton, 253), and many of the representative buildings (such as the Catholic cathedral) are built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But some dramatic events also took place in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: Townson refers to the Revolt of 1785 and to the cruel execution of the peasants’ leaders.

The travellers emphasise the role of the city in the revolution of 1848, and their attitude usually sympathises with the Hungarian revolutionaries. Patterson shows that the fortress was “the scene of the great, the almost incredible exertion made by the government of Kossuth, to provide arms, cannon, and all other munitions of war for the Hungarian armies in 1849” (338). When he sees the fortress, Patterson is reminded both of the revolution and of Charles Loring Brace’s imprisonment.

Paton and Brace describe the city in the years which followed after the revolution and they notice that it is strictly controlled by the Austrian Police. This atmosphere affects all aspects of social life and even the balls and the carnivals have a melancholic note. People avoid any discussion on politics, and when the commander of the district meets Paton at a ball, he opens a discussion about the condition of the country, to save the traveller “the trouble of making any approaches to politics” (136).

When he enters the city, Brace notices that people speak guardedly with one another and any political topic is carefully avoided. As the American traveller explains, Oradea is at the time of his visit “one of the great military stations for the Austrians” and their rule is “more lawless and strict” than anywhere else (272). Nobody seems at ease in the city, as the streets and hotels are full of Austrian soldiers and policemen. When the American visitor talks to his friend during the dinner they take at a hotel, their dialogue is overheard by two people who work for the Austrian Secret Police. When his friend asks him about Ujhazy’s Hungarian Colony in America, Brace answers in a general way, in order to avoid any political turn in the discussion. But this short dialogue was enough for the Austrian police to arrest the American and to keep him in prison for a whole month.

The pages in which Brace describes his gaol experience are memorable and his experience was read by several travellers who were reminded of his imprisonment whenever they saw the fortress. Like an Oradea’s Count of Monte Cristo, his captivity is full of exceptional facts and people. He is astonished to see that the police treat him like a common criminal and incarcerates him in insalubrious conditions: a dirty cell with filthy beds filled with fleas. The Court behaves like the Inquisition and their only aim is to make him confess that he was organising a complot against the Austrian rule. Everything he did since he came in Europe is interpreted as a piece of an international conspiracy against Hapsburg authority.

The auditor, who bullies Brace and turns his words, cannot accept the idea that somebody comes from America only “with the purpose of studying the character and manners of the people” (280). The charges have also a subjective motivation, because the judge shows his indignation at the American sympathy for the Hungarian revolutionaries. “Entangled in meshes” from which he cannot escape, the American prisoner is requested repeatedly to confess that he acts as a secret representative of the Democratic Union and is employed as an agent of

Ujhazy “for the purpose of spreading Revolutionary movements” (288). Only the American Chargé to the Austrian Empire could help him get out of the prison.

### **HOUSING IN ORADEA**

For the tired traveller who comes from far places, the inn is a quiet haven in which he gets the deserved rest and makes plans for the following days. Benumbed by the freezing weather, Paton opens the door of the inn of Oradea with a degree of satisfaction he “never experienced on entering the most luxurious hotel” (133). Although the stove is filled with faggots, the bolts of the doors are covered with hoar frost, because that was the coldest winter in Oradea for seventy years.

In the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ‘Grüner Baum’ is considered the principal inn of the city. Johnson considers himself lucky to find a room here, and as he does not complain about it, we can imagine that he was satisfied. Although the most hotels and restaurants are run by Jewish owners, some travellers are put up in Romanian houses too. Mazuchelli likes the Romanian guesthouse where she was accommodated, but is intrigued by the expensive tariff which is adjusted to its real value only after a hard quarrel.

### **THE ARCHITECTURE OF ORADEA**

The architecture of the city makes Oradea “one of the prettiest little towns” Paget has ever seen (519). It has wide and well built streets with one-storied houses, and several market-places. Mazuchelli compares Oradea to Timisoara: “Like Temesvar, the town of Grosswardein is exceedingly pretty with long streets and numerous marketplaces” (62).

Patterson emphasises that the architecture is in Hungarian style, with large open squares, wide streets and many gardens and orchards (337). This architecture is opposed to the German style with narrow streets (Paget 518).

For Paton, Oradea is “a very scattered place, extending on both sides of the river Koros”, where “there are no purer specimens of architecture to be seen” (Paton 134). According to him, the most compact part of the city is the principal square next to the Greek Catholic church, an area which is surrounded by houses in the Viennese style. He realises that this dispersion of the city is because most of the houses have gardens and admits that the scenery must be charming in spring or summer.

A remarkable note in the architecture of the city is that it “bristles with church spires” (Johnson 194). But the particular view of Oradea is the mixture of churches belonging to different religions: “From the bridge which crosses the Koros, a good view is obtained of the town with its glittering steeples of black and gold, together with that of the new Catholic Church which, standing by the dome of the Jewish Synagogue, looks like a huge coronet of gems” (Mazuchelli 63).

The ecclesiastic buildings are distinguished in the architecture of the city, as the “abounding convents and seminaries” have walled gardens attached (Patterson 337). As Paget puts it, “the glory of Gross Wardein is in its gilded steeples, its episcopal palace, its convents, and its churches” (518). Most of the British travellers write about a number of about twenty churches.

Among the buildings of the city, the Roman Catholic cathedral and palace are distinguished. According to Patterson, their great size gives “an air of importance to the town”, although he does not appreciate the “debased rococo style of architecture” (338). Besides the exterior elements, the travellers also pay attention



to the inner elements of the cathedral. Townson informs his readers that in the church there are the tombs of several Hungarian kings and of Saint Ladislaus.

According to Paton, the cathedral is a modern large edifice in the style of Louis Quinze, but “not very remarkable for its good taste”, although it gives “a sumptuous and town- like air to the place” (134).

Mazuchelli also notices the grandeur of the “princely palace” (65) and the harmonious park next to it. Her impression at the view of the cathedral is remarkable, as she discovers “a building so vast in its proportions that, as the doors are thrown open to admit us and we stand beneath its lofty roof, rising one hundred and twenty feet above, we almost lose our breath” (65). She notices the cruciform shape of the church (in spite of the Doric style) and describes the roof as “a succession of arches culminating in an immense central dome; the whole a gorgeous blaze of splendid colour, very rich and harmonious” (65). However, for Mazuchelli the style of the Roman Catholic cathedral is “not adapted to inspire devotion.” In her view, devotion is associated with mysticism and she finds the “garish and sensuous” Catholic churches “better fitted for the gorgeous worship of some heathen goddess or their Pagan Magyarok Isten (ancient Magyar deity) than for the pure and simple worship of Christians” (65).

The British travellers also pay attention to the fortress of the city, which is used as a barracks for the soldiers. Patterson shows that it was the headquarters of the Turks (338), and Paton observes that “the present fortress which adjoins the town, and is on perfectly level ground” (Paton 134). The one who knows the fortress the best is the American Brace who is imprisoned here. Although the old castle had been a massive structure in the middle ages, in the 1850s it had no importance in a military respect. Brace’s description shows the authorities’ lack of interest in the preservation of the building:

*The old wall was all crumbling and falling into the fosse; the arches under the towers are in many places broken down, and the vine growing over the ruins. Under a part of the outer works wine and beer shops are now built, and as a whole, one may say, the old Fortress has pretty nearly lost its original character. In the revolution the Hungarian ministry chose, with very good judgement Gros Wardein as the central manufacturing depot, and this castle was turned into a gun manufactory. Now it is used by the Austrians as a great barracks for the soldiers, and a state prison for political offenders (311).*

Other buildings which draw the attention of the travellers are the Casino (mentioned by Paton and Brace) and the Ridotto hall (described by Paton), the place where the carnival balls are organised.

A particular aspect is noticed by Mazuchelli, who observes that although each church steeple possesses four dials, none of them agrees to the time and none of them show the right hour (75).

### **A CITY OF GARDENS AND PARKS**

The British travellers observe that the city is characterised by its numerous gardens and nice parks. Mazuchelli notices that in the suburbs of the town each house is surrounded by a garden and orchard.

The fact that the city is built on both sides of the Cris, which are connected by two bridges, increases the picturesque aspect. The river is navigated by long rafts of, and the women wash the linen energetically, “with a big stone, and with a vigour and perseverance as if every blow were aimed at a Turk's or Austrian's head” (Mazuchelli 63).

The cityscape is also described by night. Mazuchelli depicts the scene with an obvious literary talent:

*It is nightfall at Grosawardein and the fires of sunset have faded into cold grey ashes. All along the river Koros the stealthy vapours, following its leaden course, are slowly rising. Shadows deepen on the plains. The gilded steeples no longer glisten in the evening light, but stand out black and sullen, like huge sentinels, against the pale grey sky. Everything in nature is sad and gloomy. Within the town, however, "high carnival" is nightly kept. (57)*

Among the parks of the city, the "fine large park" of the Episcopal palace is distinguished (Brace, 271). The park has "broad straight walks and long avenues of chestnuts, under the shade of which at eventide the Dom Herren may be seen sauntering in the cool still air" (Mazuchelli, 65).

### **THE ETHNIC STRUCTURE OF THE CITY**

All British travellers perceive the multiethnic structure of Oradea, speaking about the importance of each group in the configuration of the city. The writers often highlight the role of the Hungarians in the organisation of the locality. According to the British travellers, the style of Oradea is "quite to the taste of the Magyar, who loves not the narrow lanes and high houses of his German neighbours" (Paget 518). Patterson also writes that "the town itself is very Hungarian in its appearance, with several large, open squares, and a great number of gardens and orchards. Your true Magyar dearly loves his *rus in urbe*" (337). The importance of the Hungarians in the history of the city is often emphasised, and when the British travellers refer to the revolution, they usually sympathise with the Hungarian perspective.

Special attention is also paid to the Romanians of the Oradea. As the travellers usually come from the Hungarian plain, it is the first time when they meet a compact group of Romanians, and many times they present to the British reader a general perspective on the Romanian language, history and other general aspects in this regard.

According to Mazuchelli, Oradea has 36,000 inhabitants in the 1880s, and the majority of them are Romanians (62). She is impressed by the beauty of the women and tries to sketch some characteristics: "the delicate and refined features, the pouting lips, the broad, low forehead, the lithe figures of the women, and the deeply sunken eyes, long hair", (58) whereas the males are distinguished by aquiline noses. Mazuchelli is disappointed to see that the national costumes of the Romanian women are sometimes altered by Western elements. Her attitude shows her appreciation of the folk dress and her concern for the perpetuation of the tradition:

*... the ancient costumes of the people and their characteristic traits are fast departing under the facilities which, in these modern days, are afforded for travel. The railways, extending their iron arms into the very centre of Transylvania, are gradually weaving this former terra incognita into the duller web of Western civilisation, and the beautiful and graceful costumes, which so delighted us once, are day by day becoming absorbed and replaced by those Gallic abominations invented to conceal and render hideous the human form" (58).*

Johnson also depicts the costume of the peasants, discerning a similarity with the elements he saw in the Kingdom of Romania and at Mehadia: the coloured apron in front and behind (200).

All British travellers emphasise the Latin origin of the Romanian language and the similarity with the Italian. Mazuchelli speaks Italian to the Romanians and has no difficulty in understanding or conversing with them (61).

Many travellers examine the different attitude towards work of the Romanian male and female, emphasising the diligence of the latter in contrast to the indolence of the former. On her way from Oradea to Băile Felix, Mazuchelli describes two scenes which give emphasis to this stereotype: a woman makes bricks, while her “lord and master” stands beside her, smoking and “languidly watching her movements”, and a little farther on another woman is hoeing whereas “her inferior half” (67) sits on the doorstep and nurses the baby. Mazuchelli’s conclusion is that “in this country it would seem that ‘women must’ not only ‘weep’, but women must also work; whilst, by an inversion of the order of things, the men remain idle (67).

Mazuchelli notes a temperamental difference between the Romanians and the Hungarians of Oradea:

*The Magyars, as we have seen, possess a tinge of melancholy even in their most joyous moments. This, however, cannot be said of the Wallachs. There surely never was such a gay and pleasure-loving people; whilst in their love of dancing they far exceed even the Magyars themselves (57).*

Patterson is also aware of the particularities of the Romanians during his journey in the region of Oradea, the first time when he travels in an area with Romanian population. He is struck by the way in which his Magyar driver can distinguish between the Romanian peasants and the Magyar ones. The distinctive element is not the dress, but the features. The traveller synthesises some of the main characteristics:

*A typical Magyar and a typical Wallach are, it is true, easy to distinguish, but then so many Hungarians and so many Wallachs are not typical, and the types fade away into one another so gradually as to render the task of discrimination very delicate. The Wallach, I may here observe, has the more finely chiselled features, a broad, often low, forehead, and prominent nose. He is generally, though not always, darker than the Magyar, sometimes taller, but seldom so stoutly built, nor are the limbs so well-knit (341).*

A criterion to differentiate between the two nationalities is their behaviour on the road: if the “independent and self-asserting” Magyar takes no notice of the traveller (341), the Romanians greet him and take off their hats respectfully. Another difference noticed by Patterson is the position of the cemetery in the Magyar and Romanian villages: if the Romanians bury their dead close to the church, the Hungarians have the graveyard outside the village. The Calvinist driver is surprised when the British traveller tells him that in England the tradition is similar to the Romanian custom.

Most British travellers who visit Oradea distinguish the presence of the Romany population. Brace notes that “the gypsies appear to frequent” the region of Oradea (169), and on his way to this city he passes several little encampments. All travellers appreciate Gypsies’ talent for music and their contribution to the entertainment life of the city. Brace hears about an English traveller who visited the Gypsies of the region and made friends with them, and thinks that it must be George Borrow, who was fascinated by Gypsy music, dance and customs, and wrote several books on this topic. As most of the British

travellers discover, the vivid night life of the city is owed to the Gypsy musicians, whose fiddles entertain everybody.

All British travellers remark the Jewish population of the city. The Jews of 19<sup>th</sup> century Oradea formed one of the most active Hebraic groups in the whole Austro-Hungarian Empire, both from cultural and economic point of view. Mazuchelli is attentive to the Hebrew elements in the structure of the city, and observes the discrimination of this population, showing that "although Jews are no longer taxed as being such, but are permitted to enjoy all the rights and privileges common to the Gentile, they often find it difficult to hold their own even here against the antipathy so universally entertained against them" (64). The British lady visits the Hebraic quarter, where she finds many shops, but is often struck by the poverty of the population. In the following fragment Mazuchelli presents her visit in the Jewish quarter:

*All is bright and clean in this prettiest of towns save in the Hebraic quarter, which is full of marine stores where every kind of bric-a-brac is to be met with, even crucifixes, in dark dens which one would fear to enter. The Jew is the same here as elsewhere, the same miserable-looking, down-trodden outcast he has continued to be ever since Pompey the Great entered the Holy City and struck the first blow at the Israelitish nation. How, even to the letter, has the prophetic curse been fulfilled in this once "chosen people"!*

*The specialite of the Hungarian Jew in this quarter, as in all others devoted entirely to the class, is 'ole clo," and inside their hovels are found not only dirt and muddle, but pictorial rags, whilst over the doorways are seen such names as the following, Lowenstein Jukab, Koln Mozesne, Fured Jozsef, and Szep Abraham, and on the walls sentences are written in Hebrew characters (64).*

Mazuchelli also concentrates upon the Hebrew physiognomy and to some typical life scenes are included in her book:

*...the type of Hebrew physiognomy is more marked here than in other parts of Hungary, a consequence possibly of there having been less intermarriage with the Christian community than elsewhere. Wherever we look we observe the long aquiline nose curving into the moustache, which only partially conceals the protruding lips. Now and then a fair young Miriam may be seen crossing the road and picking up a dirty little Moses who is wallowing in the mud; neither are Hagars and Ishmaels wanting, nor old Sarahs, fat, ugly, and repulsive-looking in their grease-begrimed garments (64).*

The travellers draw attention to an anti-Semitic attitude among the inhabitants of Oradea too. During her walks in the suburbs of the city, Mazuchelli is intrigued to see that a Romanian old woman complains in the street for the fact that her husband has been sentenced to condign punishment for having accidentally killed "only a Jew" in a street quarrel (63). The lady traveller is astonished to see such an attitude.

Although Mazuchelli is partially influenced by the negative stereotypes of the time, she has a different approach, expressing tolerance for Hebraic religion and indignation for the discrimination of the Jews. The image of the sun setting on the Christian churches and the synagogue (at the end of one chapter) is significant in this regard.

An impressive scene in which the British traveller gives up these prejudices is Mazuchelli's entrance in one of the many cafes kept by Jews. She experiences their hospitality, because the Jew and his young and handsome wife are glad to entertain her. When the foreigners take seats in the pub, the lady offers them a

surprise, calling for her four children, between the ages of four and nine, who will offer a dancing performance. The interethnic peaceful cohabitation is symbolised by the four children dancing czardas to the music of the Gypsies.

The interethnic harmony is strongly expressed among the prisoners who are incarcerated because of their democratic views in the fortress of Oradea. During his imprisonment, Brace is helped to write his secret letters to the American consul by a Hungarian and a Romanian. All prisoners feel connected by the wish to live in a democratic world. The Hungarian, the Romanian, the Pole, the Italian, the Jew, the Frenchman and the Croat he meets in the prison are connected by common aspirations. This attitude arises Brace's admiration: "I shall always respect European Democracy more, from what I have seen of these men. [...] their best side – their religion, if I may call it by such a name – connects itself with these great ideas of Freedom and Brotherhood. [...] My respect for human nature is increased by what I have seen of them all" (308 - 309).

Besides the main inhabitants of the city, the British travellers also meet immigrants. For instance, while strolling alone through the streets of the city, Paget notices "a pair of bright black eyes" belonging "to a very pretty woman" who addresses him in Italian and asks him if he is not going to Italy. She hoped that Paget was going to her native country and could also bring her with him, because she regrets that the circumstances brought her far from Italy and says that if she goes back, she would never leave her region again.

On the other hand, other travellers notice the tendency of the locals to emigrate. Brace notes that in the period after the revolution many Hungarians emigrated in Italy or the United States, and many Magyars imprisoned at Oradea think that their wish to live in a free world will be fulfilled if they emigrate in America. In the 1880s, the emigration does not seem to have political connotations anymore. Mazuchelli's departure from Oradea station is detained by a train which was leaving "with a crowd of emigrants on their way to the United States" (77). She read in a Romanian newspaper that there was a tendency of immigration in the whole Austro-Hungarian Empire, as "8000 Slovaks had also started from the north of Hungary for the same happy region, after having sold their property for a mere nothing" (77).

### **SOCIAL CLASSES AND CATEGORIES**

The travellers whose works I analyse succeed to depict the complexity of the social life of 19<sup>th</sup> century Oradea, as they describe the behaviour of several social classes and are fine observers of not only of the aristocratic manners, but of the street life too.

Townson is received by the deputy lieutenant of the county "in the most polite manner" (251) and is invited to attend the meeting of the county and dine with the aristocrats of the region. The Englishman notices the elegant Hungarian dresses of the participants, which make the meeting "a very brilliant assembly" (251). The problems are discussed calmly and after the meeting, everybody is invited to dinner. Townson is also introduced to the ecclesiastic personalities of the city, and the Catholic bishop invites him to dinner for the next day. The traveller emphasises the hospitality of Oradea's inhabitants: the lieutenant of the county was very kind and offered him assistance in all he needed and many aristocrats invited him to their places. His conclusion is significant: "I know not if ever an English traveller was at Gross Wardein before; but I was here made as much of as though I had been a very great personage" (257).

In the British pages depicting Oradea's street life the multiethnic character of the city is often observed. Johnson discovers the city in the period of the elections, which coincides with the market day. The images are vivid, as "the streets swarmed with farmers in gaudily braided patrol-jackets and immense boots, surmounted by the prosaic German and English "billycock" (195).

The colourful market place is a mirror of the multiethnic character of the city, as Hungarians, Romanians, Jews and Gipsies sell and buy all sorts of products. Mazuchelli presents the picturesque aspect of the animal market, where she observes "milk-white oxen" and "hundreds of black swine with long noses and high backs, surrounded by swarms of piglings, the funniest little creatures imaginable, each with its back arched like a cat, and its tiny white legs and little black hoofs looking like shoes and stockings" (66). The market is also crowded with ambulant sellers, and wherever one turns there are gipsies selling baskets and wooden utensils" (66).

For Mazuchelli, the people on the street are to a certain extent detached towards some events which do not concern them. All the elements of the funeral procession described by Mazuchelli (the costumes of the participants, the gilt cross, the white horses draped in light blue cloth, the carriages, the silver coffin etc) indicate that the dead was a remarkable person in the town. But when she asks a passer-by whose funeral it was, she receives an indifferent answer: "*Only that of some citizen*, he replied, and without doing more than turn his head, went on his way" (74). The bystanders who watch the Romanian woman who wails for her husband was convicted for having killed a Jew do not show any attitude towards the grave situation, as they "appeared to take no small interest in the case" (63).

### **LEISURE AND LIFE OF THE STREETS**

All British travellers are impressed by the coexistence of two different facets which define the city: the ecclesiastical life, on the one hand, and the vivid way in which the inhabitants express their love of life. As Johnson puts it, "in spite of being thus priest-ridden, the people seemed exceedingly lively" (194), and the first scene which he sees and the station is characterised by great bustle and excitement. Townson also notices that in this city "everything looked gay; music and dancing were heard in every house" (250). Both aristocratic and street leisure are presented in the British books.

Paton participates in one of the aristocratic balls held in the Ridotto hall and notices that the nobles enjoy dancing in spite of the intense cold. He is impressed by the beauty of the Hungarian ladies and by their "native costumes", and remarks the belle of the ball - the Countess Wallmoden, the governor's wife. Although he is warmly welcome and a participant in the ball talks to him in English, his reaction is not so enthusiastic and he considers that the event was not a real success, because of the cruel weather and of the bad lights of the hall. The atmosphere is affected by the sad attitude which characterises the city in the period which follows after the revolution of 1848. The next paragraph depicts both the attitude of the participants and Paton's reaction when he sees the dancers:

*... although the waltzes and quadrilles succeeded each other in rapid succession, it was the most political ball I ever was at, and the grave situation of the country seemed to occupy the people much more than the carnival I here saw danced in perfection the csardas, or national dance of the Hungarians, which is certainly not ungraceful, beginning very slow and gentle, like the gavotte, culminating in spirit as it goes on, and at last ending with quick and brisk motion like a Scotch reel, the music of which, from beginning to end,*

has a character quite distinct from that of the west of Europe, and closely resembling Turkish music (136).

Another place for leisure mentioned by the British visitors is the Casino, which has good reading-rooms with many newspapers and some billiard tables.

The travellers also depict the way in which the inhabitants celebrate some of the main events of the year. Mazuchelli describes the celebration of May Day, when the day is opened by the military band which plays in front of the Palace of the Catholic Bishop, according to an ancient custom. The whole city “wears a joyous appearance” and the trains, “are decked with robinia boughs, and full of holiday-makers on their way to a village a few miles from Grosswardein” (75).

But what makes Oradea special is the way in which its inhabitants enjoy life. The parties of the city are irresistible for the curious traveller. In the evening the cafes are full and everybody enjoys the music of the gypsy bands. The heart of the British traveller is conquered by the “exquisite melody”, and they cannot help entering the pub and joining the party (Mazuchelli 75). Excited by the gypsy music, the people who can help dancing sip their coffee, smoke like chimneys and applaud, whilst the streets are crowded with promenaders and cheerful with the laugh of girls. The whole city seems to share the joyous atmosphere, as music and dance are noticed everywhere, not only in the cafes or in the streets, but in many of the houses too.

This life-loving attitude is specific not only to Oradea, but also to the villages next to it. When Mazuchelli returns from Băile Felix, she hears the sound of the bag-pipes “as they droned out their wild, weird music to the night; whilst from a distance reached us the rich, deep throb of the cymbals”. She is impressed by this joyous attitude of the simple people: “In many of the houses there is dancing and revelry, and accustomed as we are to the quiet and sullen habits of our own peasantry, we regard these pleasure-loving people with astonishment” (70).

### **THE BATHS**

Most British travellers who visit Oradea make a trip to Băile Felix. The bathing establishment is usually referred to as “Bishop’s Bath”. Situated about half an hour distance from the city, the “charmingly-situated watering-place” lies in a picturesque valley surrounded by hills and forests (Patterson 339). Mazuchelli is welcome in the resort by the numerous nightingale trills, which will be replaced by the folk music later on. The pretty sight of the bathing place reminds her of “*Fetes Champetres* in olden times”, as she notices that two hundred people enjoy the music of the gypsy band and many youths are dancing.

The travellers appreciate both the scenery and the curative effect of the waters, whose qualities are emphasised. Patterson shows that the high temperature of the water is maintained throughout the year and praises its content of salts of lime and free carbonic acid gas, comparing it to the properties of the water of Bad-Gastein (339). The travellers point out the presence of the *nymphcea thermtalis*, brought here by the Turks during their occupation of the region, and Mazuchelli considers herself lucky to see these flowers in full blossom, in May.

Mazuchelli informs her readers that the resort has a hotel with eighty rooms with private baths. But she is impressed by what she sees in the large public baths, where the lower classes benefit from the qualities of the water. As

the prices for the common public are quite acceptable, those baths are full with people, some of them coming from great distances. They enjoy water so much that bring their provisions with them at the bathing place and take their meals in the water. The “aquatic picnics” (Mazuchelli 69) are sometimes accompanied by music and dance, and some of the bathers even bring musical instruments. These simple people enjoy bathing so much that they remain in baths eighteen hours per day. When they become faint because of the long bath, they lie down on the ground wrapped in their cloths, and after that return to water again. Probably influenced by the enthusiasm of the bathers, Mazuchelli does not leave “this singular locality” (70) until late in the evening, when she takes her way back to Oradea.

A different attitude towards the bathers can be read in Townson’s book (written almost one century before Mazuchelli). For the English naturalist the baths are the place where he discovers both social and sexual Otherness. Coming from the aristocratic circle of Oradea, Townson meets here the Transylvanian simple man for the first time, and as they are bathing, the observed ones seem to have nothing to conceal. In Townson’s lines we can read much of the superiority shown to the Transylvanian peasants by the British travellers.

The external eye of the visitor notices the common people who enjoy bathing, and his attention is drawn to the women who “were without their shifts, yet not without their petticoats” (253). The feeling of superiority towards the Other is expressed in the lines which describe the body of the old women. Ironically, he requires his male readers not to envy him for what he saw, because “much you have not lost”, as “old women here prevailed, with pendent flabby dugs, and withered skins” (253). Townson’s attitude and style show that 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> British travel literature was often deprived of proper deontological bases: “...if you will drive your pigs into a horse-pond, and view them with poetic fancy, your pleasure may equal mine: disgust, not desire, was raised at this sight” (253). Although some of the women have children in their arms, the scene is observed with the same attitude. The racist perspective continues when Townson describes the young Gypsy women, who “were as dark as Mulattoes: no doubt with this colour they came into the world” (253). What may strike the reader is that the naturalist uses specialised terminology in this vulgar context, as if discrimination was dressed in a “scientific” envelopment: “In *zoological terminology*, *Mamma pendentes flaccidæ marcescentes, rugosa tuberculata furfusæ rosa- flavo-fusca*” (253). And this is the attitude of a British scholar, whose works were read worldwide! Among the British travellers who wrote on Oradea, such racist approach is also found in Johnson’s attitude towards the Jews of the city, already presented in this paper. As Carmen Andraş shows, several English travellers in Transylvania “belong to the category of detached observer, who uses his lenses ‘made in England’ as a filter for value judgements. As a result, we enter the territory of prejudices, stereotypes and clichés, with their decisive effects upon the representations of the Other”.

But probably the modern reader should not judge the young naturalist Townson to the standards of the 21<sup>st</sup> century deontology. However, his dislike of the old woman body is counterbalanced by his strong attraction for a young beauty, whose physical qualities are enthusiastically observed: But this was not all I saw: this odious sight only served to set off to greater advantage a solitary nymph in another bath; and now you have cause, reader, to envy my good fortune. For here alone, and only under the grey canopy of heaven,



'whilst evening drew her crimson curtains round,' and the serenity of the air and the melody of the neighbouring woods awakened sweet sensibility, friend to our pleasures, but often -enemy, alas! to our peace; separate from the vulgar throng and all alone, as if conscious of her superior beauty, the loveliest girl sure Nature ever formed lay quite exposed, reclining in a shallow bath in the very attitude of desire. A thin short petticoat, which the tepid water trapped close about her limbs, or else wantonly spread wide abroad, as if, proud of its beauteous guest, it was eager to shew her delicate shape, or else expose all her charms, was the only covering she had on. Youth, the youthfulness of eighteen years, sparkled in her eyes and glowed in her lovely countenance; and her heaving bosom and swelling breasts announced that she had reached that happy period of life, at which kind Nature having invested her fair offspring with their brightest charms, warms them with love, and teaches them to exult in being loved. She suffered my enamoured gaze, and smiled; and by her melting looks expressed she felt the presence of the God of Love and her own frailty. *Oh! che boccone!*

The sight of the young lady makes Townson begin a long meditation on the difference between duty and desires, which takes more than one page. Filled with hedonistic considerations, his reflection ends with an invitation to philosophers to "to teach us a morality more compatible with human nature, [...]for what is this world, viewed even on its fairest side, with all its pomp and glitter, undiminished by the detracting eye of experience, without the delights of love, but insipidity, or toil and drudgery ?" (255).

### CONCLUSIONS

All British travellers who visited Oradea in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had the satisfaction of discovering something new related to people, architecture or landscape. They were impressed by the structural design of the city, the multiethnic composition of the population, and the religious devotion of the inhabitants. But what moved the English visitors most was the people's life-loving attitude, which made their sojourn at Oradea an unforgettable experience.

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