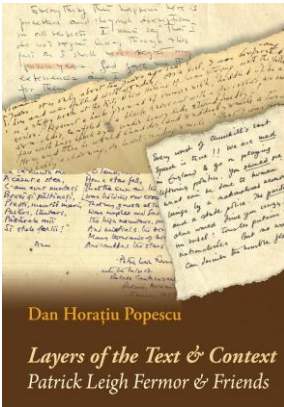


A Cultural Trip: Dan Horatiu Popescu's *Layers of the Text & Context. Patrick Leigh Fermor & Friends*

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The travel literature genre most definitely benefits from one particularly new and fresh study authored by Dan Horatiu Popescu: *Layers of the Text & Context. Patrick Leigh Fermor & Friends* (University of Oradea Publishing-House, 2020). The book is in itself a journey, a fascinating literary and multi-cultural trip meant to diversely explore the years Patrick Leigh Fermor has spent in Romania before World War II, a temporal frame and an experience little known by the public more or less familiarized with the writer's profile.

Conceived in a rather academic-essayistic style, *Layers of the Text & Context. Patrick Leigh Fermor & Friends* is an open invitation for the readers to embark in a reading adventure and thus to discover not merely denominators, but mostly connotations and hidden meanings of both the text and the context as far as one of the XX-th century masters of British travel fiction is concerned. Ab initio authorial statements would clarify both the researcher's focus and his inner process of connecting the dots in his intriguing endeavour: the effort was made in uncovering as much as possible out of the British writer in question has spent in Romania in those years before W. W. II burst out, while the primary purpose of the study lies not necessarily in analysing the several critical interpretations on the writer's work or on the multitude of the literary genre's approaches, but rather on casting more light on a series of fragmented pieces of literary history. That's why, the book combines under its generous umbrella different *-isms* and fashionable paradigms, such as: cultural memory, identity, stereotypes, anti-Semitism, nomadism – all in an attempt to reveal the not so obvious keys which are usually perceived as necessary tools in regards of any itinerant and solitary experience such as travelling; thus, the book's intrinsic emphasis is on the spiritual quest dimension of the journey itself.

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In its argumentative structure/ construction, Dan Horatiu Popescu chose to reveal from the very beginning the seed of his interest in the topic, respectively in the British writer's profile of Patrick Leigh Fermor: "... John Drew, the independent scholar from Cambridge and former British Council Lecturer, who on a September afternoon of 1996 in Budapest, presented (...) a pocket book accompanied by the following recommendation: *You will have to read this.*"; that's how *Between the Woods & the Water* eventually found its rightful place within Dan H. Popescu's academic syllabus of travel literature paradigm. Plenty more research has been done during the next years, many individuals have been contacted since and so much documentation has progressed before the actual publication of this study. As the reader processes the chapters, he/ she would step by step identify essential issues related to the intimate process of writing, as revealed in Patrick Leigh Fermor's *A Time to Keep Silence* and also in his correspondence with various figures of the time; he/ she would make an idea both on the writing craft ingredients and on some major political issues of that particular time, on the Romanian ties of Patrick Leigh Fermor and Sacheverell Sitwell, as both British authors wrote books on our country's realities of that particular period, including references to Romanian culinary customs. The reader would progressively discover other real characters who populated that given temporal frame and space and their family histories, as well. Iconic depictions and cultural x-rays on the Gypsies, on the Jews are also to be found within the study, much to the delight of our contemporary audience; one would engulf the perspectives on nomads and on migration encompassing the so-called narrative of displacement as odd attempts of the writers to attach themselves to places and times, while capturing their mobility within their journey they are so keen on completely performing. Hints on the particular process of writing and on the very birth of a text are revelatory as well, given the fact that there is a frail balance between style, accuracy and events, on one hand and the constant threat of fading memory, on the other hand. The study would ultimately underline the inner relationship between the artistic calling/ vocation and the spiritual quest, as this fragility constantly breaths within the works of the British artists mentioned and presented in the book. The point of the research is to emphasize the inner connection between the writers' sense of attachment to a collective mentality specific for their time and their individual recipe in uttering their perceived reality.

The narrative pattern in Dan H. Popescu's envision of his research points out his constant documentation, his synthetic ability and his consistent attention to details that are meant to reveal the hidden connotations and the invisible dots that ultimately give consistency to

any text and context. The researcher in question proves gifted enough in coming up with intriguing metaphorical titles and subtitles for each chapters, the majority of them being displayed in the rhetorical question form that would eventually generate an active participation of the reader to the study itself (“A romance interlude?”; „The devil is in the details”; „A later and much younger traveller: the Sublime?”; „A glow of retrospective magic?”).

Nevertheless, Dan Horatiu Popescu’s *Layers of the Text & Context. Patrick Leigh Fermor & Friends* would also act – and the author himself confesses it: “My book is, in fact, an *opera aperta*. (...) The findings made during the last five years of research have proved provocative and worth rendering in what we envisage as a web of texts & contexts, a series that might be remembered, we hope, as *Patrick Leigh Fermor’s Romania*.” – as “an *opera aperta*”, in the sense that it is opened for further debates and completions and it is an open invitation for the possible readers to formulate their own opinions and especially get involved in the adventure, become travellers themselves and rediscover cultural and literary habitats with their eyes wide opened.