
***ALTĂ LUME, ALT FASON: INTERWAR ROMANIAN TRAVEL
NARRATIVES IN THE UNITED STATES***

Lavinia Popică*

Abstract

The article presents a series of travelogues written by Romanian authors who visited the United States of America during the interwar period and recounted their American experiences.

Keywords: Romania, the United States, interwar period, travelogues.

Travel to distant lands and travel narratives have been around forever. The travel narrative designates both travel narration and travel. Travelers also recount the differences between cultures and civilizations. The travelogues translate the experiences in a different country through the lenses of their own culture. The travel narratives raised tremendous scholarly debate inside the fields of history, comparative literature, and cultural studies. The British travel narratives in particular and Western travel narratives in general were the main focus of research because of the number of travelers as well as their achievements in imposing stereotypes and formulas. Yet recently an interest in travelogues from Eastern Europe has also emerged. They do not necessarily need to be read as “reverse travel”, or “writing back” against “European” discourse, but emerge from and contribute to a series of interrelated but as yet insufficiently understood cultural traditions¹. Moreover, this chapter argues that interwar Romanian travel narratives must be understood as a part of the European cultural tradition of travel writing.

Romanian travel narratives claim identification first with European readers and then particularly with Romanian readers, with the exception of Queen Marie who claims European royal identity first. Romanian travelers wrote these narratives within the European tradition. They engage with ideas about America formed in Western Europe. The travelogues make apparent the diffusion of cultural ideas within European culture. Furthermore, travelogues mention other travelers in the United States and their descriptions. To take a few examples, Dr. D. I. Vasiliu

* Doctorand Universitatea din Montreal.

¹ *Under Eastern Eyes. A Comparative Introduction to East European Travel Writing on Europe, 1550-2000*, edited by Wendy Bracewell and Alex Drace-Francis, Budapest, New York, Central European University Press, 2008, p. VII.

mentions and quotes Paul Morand's description of the Statue of Liberty as well as an unnamed Frenchman who lived at the Waldorf Astoria; Andrei Gheorghiu quotes Louis Hennepin's description of Niagara Falls; Dr. Begnescu underlines previous writings of Paul Morand and Blasco Ibanez; I. Vion is also aware of European travelers in the United States such as Tardieu, Duhamel, Siegfried, Achard, and Morand, and he quotes Siegfried explaining how prohibition contributed at raising American workers' standard of living; V.V. Stanciu quotes André Tardieu regarding America's economic power post WWI; C. L. Flavian quotes Georges Duhamel and André Tardieu. P. Comarnescu sets himself apart in his writing also in this regard. He quotes Gorki about America being a sad country as well as Duhamel for the slaughterhouse in Chicago. He read in some detail Duhamel's work about the United States, thus he sets himself apart by critiquing his point of view. First, he presents Duhamel as "mean and cowardly"² for underlining slaughterhouses as odious only in the United States. He points out "the Americans have the only fault of being organized and civilized in this barbarity, making the animals suffer less, nobody eating something cleaner"³. Second, Comarnescu addresses the oldest and biggest critique of the United States - its materialism: "And we talk so easily of American 'materialism', their lack of spirituality. How narrow-minded and one-sided we are in those moments! I was talking in Los Angeles with Pierre de Lanux who as well as I thinks that attitudes such as Duhamel's can only be detrimental"⁴. Third, he emphasizes Americans are "unfair thought as perpetual children"⁵.

Along with quotes from French or German travelers in the United States in their own narratives, Romanian newspapers also published French or German travel narratives for example *Universul* published Maurice Dekroba's travel writing *Realitatea Ilustrata* also published German travel narratives. Supporting this point of view is also the collections of Romanian libraries, which carry French and German travel narratives about the United States.

Regarding the existent literature on travel narratives, this chapter focuses on studying interwar Romanian travel narratives and the representations of the United States they created and imposed within Romania. Those travelers were part of Romanian intellectual elite - more often male, their writings were a success. Many of those travel narratives were published in Romanian newspapers or presented as conferences about the United States before being published as books. Therefore, they contributed to the creation of images of the United States in Romania. The idea of cultural, spiritual, historical Europe, superior to materialistic,

² Petru Comarnescu, *America văzută de un tânăr azi*, Editura „Adeverul” S.A., București, 1934, p. 155.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 155-156.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 217.

⁵ Petru Comarnescu, *Homo Americanus*, Editura Vremea, București, 1933, p. 107.

technological, and young and naïve America dominates the majority of these travel narratives. “The view of modernity as violence against nature, which humanity must eventually expiate and repay with the sacrifice of its humaneness and its existence is central to many of the texts.”⁶ On one level this text focuses on the technological development in the United States, yet the threats of mechanization overshadow the accomplishments. On the other level, the rise of mass consumption society creates uniformity, decadence of culture. Using Tzvetan Todorov’s classification of approaching alterity, this study argues that most travelers understood the United States at an axiological and praxiological level rather than epistemic level. The axiological level refers to value judgments of the other, the praxiological level includes distancing or identifying with the other and the epistemic level is the level of better understanding. Yet, Petru Comarnescu took a step further in understanding American civilization, addressing alterity at the epistemic level, also through the nature of his trip: he spent almost 3 years in the United States, obtaining his doctoral degree at Southern California University.

The travelogues are very careful in recounting the administrative details of their trips, the company they traveled with, where did they embark, the difficulties of crossing the ocean. Crossing the ocean is almost as a rite of passage, an adventure in itself, most of travelers seem to have faced the danger of a storm. Furthermore, the difficulty of taking this kind of trip because of financial reasons, difficulty to obtain American consulate visa, but also the time necessary of crossing the ocean are also presented in detail. The trips are pretty standard, mainly visiting big American cities: New York, Niagara Falls, Detroit, Chicago, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, few of them describes also West Coast, especially Los Angeles and San Francisco.

N. Lupu, a Romanian politician, travels for the second time in the United States for three months in autumn of 1922. He first published his impressions in the newspaper *Aurora*. He underlines the United States’ characteristic as melting pot, transforming in 10 years the illiterate peasants, offering a new standard of living, surpassing any European correspondent. It is a world in continual movement, an “organized giant”, work being its power⁷.

Paying his visit shortly after the end of First World War, the position of Europe is weakened, the United States increased its position of domination. Lupu also underlines few contacts between Europe and the United States which led to lack of knowledge and understanding of their civilizations: It is said in general that Americans do not know Europe and it is very true. But it is even truer and graver: Europeans do not know America and Americans. Weakened and crushed by the

⁶ Jean-Philippe Mathy. *Extrême Occident. French Intellectuals and America*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993, p. 55.

⁷ N. Lupu, *Jurnal American*, Editura Institutului European, Iași, 1991, p. 125.

Great War, torn by the postwar hate, a total confusion in organization, exchange, production, transport, poor people of old and civilized Europe look at 'rich' America with humility, with lack of dignity and with servile respect of a humble servant at the rich master, of an insolvent to the creditor of 18 billions \$. This master we should know. He is not the American people; it is only a part of it⁸.

Among the good qualities of Americans are their idealism and practical sense, their generosity. Yet the desire to gain limits their generosity: "the American is idealist and practical at the same time. Good and helpful, especially if he also profits"⁹. "In the end the individual liberty is holy, the mass is conscious, it rules and Americans, in politics, as well as in business are expeditively, do not loose any time and, as they say, they are efficient"¹⁰.

Through the voice of a friend he describes Ku Klux Klan. Although he notices they kill African Americans, he presents an overall positive image: "They are composed of pure Americans. They are neither savages nor unfair. They have a very developed sense of justice [...]"¹¹.

Among less understood and appreciated is the American belief in God. Unlike Europe, "Christian science" in the United States debates science. Their position towards Darwin explained through the example of Mr. William Jennings Bryan, former candidate to U.S. presidency, who put to vote Darwin doctrine, evolutionist doctrine, because it did not match the Genesis from the Bible. Moreover many religious people dropped their subventions to universities, which did not renounce at Darwin doctrine. This worries N. Lupu because of the United States' position in the world.

Princess Alexandrina Cantacuzino (1876-1944), important representative of Romanian feminist movement, traveled in the United States to attend Washington Congress of the International Council of Women. Her conference, *Conferința asupra călătoriei în America* was published in 1925. Princess Alexandrina Cantacuzino's discourse and activity too are shaped by this contradiction between the actual need to "modernize" the status and role of women in society and the preservation of the traditional women's roles in society to ensure the perpetuation of the nation¹². Following her public discourse of nationalist feminism, she states that American realities make her reflect upon Romanian realities and following American example she became more nationalist: "I say it loud and clear I came back from this trip more orthodox, more nationalist than I

⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 243-244.

⁹ *Ibidem.*, p. 134.

¹⁰ *Ibidem.*, p. 243.

¹¹ *Ibidem.*, p. 155.

¹² Roxana Lucia Cheschebec. "The <<Unholy Marriage>> of Feminism with Nationalism in Interwar Romania. The Discourse of Princess Alexandrina Cantacuzino", available from <http://www.women.it/cyberarchive/files/cheschebec.htm>.

left, with the belief that nations have the duty to defend their national life and *decided to use all my powers for ethnic, social, cultural, and political strength of my nation*”¹³.

Discontent with the reception at White House where Ms. Coolidge spent only two minutes in talking to her and lady Aberdeen, notices one more time Romanian ‘soul’, idealization of peasants’ dignity.

That is what happens in the so called democratic countries, there you can enter only with poor titles of noblesse, ridiculed, dragged into mud in the whole Europe; there if you are not an actor, singer, artist or king, real or false prince, Americans do not take you into account.

If the word snob who comes from the Occident will not exist it would be necessary to be invented. What a difference from our peasant whose dignity and pride came in my mind and once more we discover its soul treasures of Prince Charming of an old descendant¹⁴.

Besides beautiful landscapes, Washington D.C. and San Francisco are among the most beautiful cities in the United States. Moreover, Washington D.C. is the most beautiful city in the world after Paris and Rome. “Washington is the only city in America, which is not American and it has the sense of proportions and equilibrium, of simplicity in the highest degree.”¹⁵ The other cities in the United States, Cleveland, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh “are real factories, blackened by smoke”¹⁶. Cantacuzino’s depiction of New York shows an image refracted through her Latin, Romanian, European identity. She suggests New York, thus the United States represents the future, yet a threatening future, dominating by dehumanization. New York is the epitome of what United States represents, not impressing through its architecture but its power.

New York it is by itself a country; 6 millions of people of all nations, crowded there, searching for wealth, accomplishment of dreams of richness; New York makes you see what the future looks like, when machines will completely mechanize humans! I am indeed too European, too Latin, too much the daughter of our fields not to look with joy at our ox chariots, quiet life, old lady with distaff, at dreamy shepherd on Carpathians acmes. In New York you are caught by hysteria of running, everybody runs on the street, chewing gum to calm their nerves.

Paris is just a small town compared to New York [...] It is impressive this modern Babylon, lacking real aesthetics, but magnificent through the great power New York represents. New York is the brain and nerves of America; is the

¹³ Alexandrina Cantacuzino. *Conferința asupra călătoriei în America*, Tipografia Cărților Bisericești, București, 1925, p. 27.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

synthesis of American conception; it is still the most European city from America; meaning the one you can find the easiest a sparkling of our life¹⁷.

For the first time United States affirmed their position as a world power, yet American provincialism and their position towards Europe, interested mainly in debt and loan issues, refusing to ratify treaties and to join the League of Nations created discontent in Europe as well as in Romania. Their lack of interest in Europe is explained through the size of United States and European politics.

During the fifteen days lived in Washington I had the pleasure to see a fair part of important American personalities and from the discussions with them; I felt they have a kind of coldness, aversion, discontent toward Europe and Europeans! They are so far from us, they barely take an interest in what's happening in Europe, thus you can not find any European newspaper at any Palace Hotel, at no newspapers stand and you have to go to a special store which receives them all. [...] In American newspapers of 50 pages, which are like a big book, there was only a column for Europe and usually discusses only the problem of unpaid debts of any state to America¹⁸.

American are described as "childish, naive, megalomaniac, but they are working, good friends, loyal, sentimental, optimists, enterprising, courageous, sinewy, young at soul and violent in their hidden sentiments under a masque of moderation"¹⁹. Another nice characteristic is their welcoming nature, welcoming in their houses, but also helping you on the street when you do not know the language.

Alexandrina Cantacuzino, as most Romanian travelers, briefly mentions the American man, but she describes in details women, their position in the society, the relations between men and women in the United States. Giving her feminist interest, she notices American women beauty, yet she focuses on women position in the society. Although relations between young women and young men seem liberal, women's protection is higher than in Europe:

Men, less sympathetic, the women very attractive, in majority beautiful, full of life, having a sense of reality, covered under indifference aspects. About them is said a lot of bad and good things. Something is sure. The marriages are done and undone really fast. The woman rules there; the laws are all made for her protection. One of them was telling me: "here there are not kings, only queens!"

Young girls are free to go out with young men; they have the right to kiss her, without parents' disapproval. Yet if they dishonor her are forced to marry her or go to prison²⁰.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 30-31.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 17-18.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

Unlike in Europe, woman is man's equal.

About the marriage and conjugal life, the opinions are diverse; but what you can say is the man is working like a machine in order to produce money. Life being very expensive, he stays from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m. at work, at the office or at the factory, without interruption. From there he leaves, does sports, and comes back to dinner exhausted. At night they all go to bed, generally, early. The woman lives at his side, is his companion in business, sharing winnings and losses; but during the day she searches for fun activities or work²¹.

Romantic love, marriage, conjugal life are less important than production, work, and money. Innate mercantilism dominates American civilization. "Romance, love which in our old Europe still plays an important role, does not have the time to happen. You get married, you divorce, you get married again, second plan things. Work, production, creation, money; this is the purpose of life. People do not waste their time to sing at windows, to dream, to have any sorrow."²² Yet, they do not lack emotions and feelings showing their delicate feelings in the cult of mothers and the cult of children. They also impress through "the respect they have for America's founders [...] they have the cult of the past and tradition"²³.

Alexandrina Cantacuzino remarks the cleanliness in the United States, not seen as an obsession, but a positive example. Cleanliness not only as hygiene, but also cleanliness as reflecting the superiority of American standard of living, the definition of cleanliness as well as poverty are different between Europe/Romania and the United States.

But what is really unknown in Europe is American cleanliness. The most clean things and people in Europe seem dirty there; that clean is everything; even blacks are shining clean.

The railway stations are a must see, real palaces, without a piece of paper on the ground, everything as new, service officials, waterside workers, all well dressed in uniforms which would be always new. Ragged fellows do not exist and *indeed poverty cannot be sensed anywhere* (italics in original text); everyone has his automobile monthly paid, *his bathroom*. The soap is free in all hotels, trains, and railway stations. One morning I was at the fresh market in Los Angeles and *I remained speechless*; whole market composed of pavilions, with porcelain walls, marble counters; no drop of blood on the ground, no piece of paper, all vendors in white as cooks. I ate there at the counter, oysters, dried fruits, as if I was at the best restaurant in Europe, that clean it was²⁴.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 20-21.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 21.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

She notes racial relations in the United States, the progress black population was making from slavery to the right to vote, and yet living entirely segregated defined their status. An incident and a visit to black theater, however, shows that racial problems are not yet solved.

Alexandrina Cantacuzino is a keen observer of American politics. Voicing Romanian discontent with international and especially American harsh critiques of Romanian (mis)treatment of minorities (especially Jewish minority), she underlines United States' double standards, claiming democratic practices and calling attention on other countries' policies while racism and restriction of immigration because of fear of communism were common:

I could not help noticing how people change their morals across continents. Americans disregard us as intolerant and lacking humanitarian sense regarding our minorities when they treat Blacks, Indians, and native population with a moral cruelty that leaves you speechless. They defend themselves savagely, when a national need is in danger. They made legislation to confiscate Japanese wealth, to banish Chinese and Japanese who started to establish on Pacific coast. They legislated against immigrants, when they started to see in them the Bolshevik danger and we are not allowed to close *our borders to strangers who rule us?*²⁵.

In spite United States' shortcomings, innate materialism and racism, they could be a model. Increasing connections with United States are sought, cultural exchange.

It is true what is said that United States is not a country but a continent with which unfortunately we have so few connections. It is needed, despite the expensive rate exchange, to send our boys in this country at the school of work, energy, tenacity, the school of social civism, where pity does not exist and only improving through oneself. All social works have at their basis the principle of giving work to a person, to give them the possibility to win with honesty and humanity his life. Great Ford, which hired a million people makes a work of social assistance bigger than any charitable institutions; he represents an active force of social production. This is the real concept of solidarity, the only one that can last without downing moral level²⁶.

Queen Marie's (1875-1938) friends Loie Fuller, William Nelson Cromwell, Samuel Hill and many others advised her to pay a visit to the United States. As soon as April 1921 there was a plan for visiting it, yet the private visit took place only in October - November 1926. She traveled, with an entourage and accompanied by her two children prince Nicholas and princess Ileana, at Samuel Hill's invitation to be his special guest at the dedication of Romanian room in his Maryhill Art Museum in Goldendale, Washington state.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 36-37.

Queen Marie expressed her desire to visit the United States in 1926 in a newspaper article: “Since ten years this desire to come to you has been growing and growing till at last I felt I could put it off no longer. I just have to come to you”²⁷. She continued in a letter to an unidentified American friend: If only we can keep the American plans for this autumn! Oh! I do want to go, and I tremble when I think of all the difficulties that might still rise to prevent it. Just think what it would mean to me to make that wonderful journey with all those many hearts ready to take me into theirs, all those many hands ready to clasp mine! Think what a remembrance for the rest of my life. What an impression to bring back with me and what a new outlook for my country I could create. Your great people all being so superbly practical and also so open to sentiment and that is what makes me love them, their spontaneous, open-hearted way of living their friendship and their love. Oh I hope I may come²⁸.

Her diary was not published in interwar period, she constantly read from it to her family, but a writer herself she definitely wrote it with publishing in mind and she intended to publish it as she discussed with Ira Nelson Morris and his wife²⁹. “I hope that my impression on my American journey will appear in a small volume, it will be amusing to have. I have left the arrangements in the hands of Morris”³⁰. Romanian newspapers such as *Universul*, followed closely her voyage and published a series of articles covering the trip. Unlike other Romanian travelers, her visit in the United States was very much publicized, participating in numerous receptions and making numerous public apparitions. “The Americans have made a sort of hero out of me in their hearts and minds, and I am received as such by a nation of hero-worshippers”³¹.

In 1927 an American article criticizing her attitude, she answered reiterating her admiration for the United States: “If I can be accused of anything, it is of having seen America and the Americans with over-rosy spectacles. So in love were we with all things American that when we came home my children and I had to be careful not to praise everything too much for fear that our admiration should seem criticism of things at home”³².

From the beginning Europe and the United States are two distinct world, difficult for an European to understand American way of life: “But American customs, regulations, habits are disconcerting, you just have to wipe out all your

²⁷ *America seen by a Queen. Queen Marie's Diary of her Voyage to the United States of America*, edited and with an introduction by Adrian Silvan-Ionescu, Bucharest, Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, 1999, p. 11.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 161.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 28

European conceptions to fit into new ones”³³. Or “This is certainly a relentless country and difficult for a European head to grasp”³⁴.

Despite the positive description of American who dominates Queen Mary’s journal, the distinction between European “mature” civilization and American “crude” civilization is prevalent in her account. Although not directly specified the United States are young as continent, young as a state, thus young in their manifestations. Not only their civilization is young, lacking maturity, but also their behavior. Unlike Europeans, Americans are “children” and incomprehensible for Latin civilization: The Americans are strange people. Devoted, with a rare sense of friendship, they are builders, inventors, workers, conceivers, but they in many ways are still astonishingly crude. Their joy and emotions, their pleasure and anger is quickly roused and when they are moved they do not find it strange to weep, man and woman alike. They are like great children and do not keep their emotions and passions in check, like the calm Britisher. They interest me, I like being with them, I even have a feeling of love for them and their frankness suits me as I also have frankness that feels at home with theirs but all the same they are disconcerting sometimes, and for Latins they are often utterly incomprehensible. I am learning all the time, but there are moments of great difficulty as American conceptions are really confusing³⁵.

Americans impress through their efficiency, practical spirit, yet the most important thing remains material values. American materialism overshadows their accomplishments. “They mean no harm, it is just their way, but money means so much to them que tous les moyens sont bons [...] Nicky of course is quite madly interested dans leur étonante manière de faire les choses - so efficient, so quick, so practical, so astounding, but it is material things that count, they are the most inventive people I have ever met, et tout en grand!”³⁶.

Like Cantacuzino’s account, Queen Marie does not see the poverty, only the comfort of American civilization: “I cannot say that I have observed any poverty anywhere amongst any class in America yet”³⁷.

Queen Marie appreciates the audacity of New York skyscrapers, celebrates their grandeur: “proceeded on the streets of New York of which one has heard so much, with those gigantic inimaginable sky-scrappers towering above us. I must say they are much more noble than I would have thought, there is a grandeur about them I did not expect”³⁸.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 49.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 181.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 131.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

As well as most Romanian travelers queen Marie was impressed with the beauty of Washington D.C. “Washington is ever so much more beautiful than I was ever told and all its public monuments are exceedingly imposing and tasteful and most built in snow-white marble”³⁹ or “the Arlington churchyard is one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen. [...] I have not seen anything better or more tastefully done anywhere in Europe”⁴⁰.

American landscapes reminds her of England “the country has a strange resemblance to a broadened out England without hedges”⁴¹, but also of Zane Grey landscapes, cowboys like in Wild West movies, and meeting with Native Americans in North Dakota reminds her of childhood literature showing the importance of American movies and literature in creating representations of American society.

Jean Bart (1874-1933), a Romanian writer, emphasizes the mechanization of American society. A new soul, society was created, yet it is not superior to European society. Unlike European society, which is spiritual, appreciates art, American civilization is automatic, dominated by materialistic interests: “This exaggerated automatism has something sinister and cold. This crazy run after winning, transforming the mean in aim, tainted the souls, destroying all that can make the existence beautiful. This electric atmosphere, terrible agitation, the thirst for richness, which sets everything in movement, is true it created a new soul, but not superior”⁴².

New York is a chaotic city, with “ugly buildings, no style; some towers made after the same plan”⁴³. The explanation offered through the voice of an American is their interest in quantity not in quality, their efficiency, interested nor in architecture or art, but in gaining money. Although, he voices the predominant opinion of American women ruling in the United States, men being producers and women consumers, Bart acknowledges “only women activities make finer this commercial American democracy”⁴⁴. Under the line America another world, another shape, he argues that Americans are the slaves of the machines they invented “Here the purpose of life is getting rich. [...] Here people know how to make money but they do not know how to spend them”⁴⁵.

Racial discrimination makes its presence through the paternalistic view of an old American. “There where blacks are in contact with whites and under

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

⁴² Jean Bart, *Peste Ocean. Note dintr-o călătorie în America de Nord*, Editura I. Brănișteanu, București, 1926, p. 68.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

guardianship, they progress. Left alone, independents, they regress and tend to go back to the primitive stage of Congo”⁴⁶. Despite racial segregation, the old white American argues that African Americans “here are happier than some poor class in backwards European countries”⁴⁷.

V. V. Stanciu, a Romanian lawyer, who published the review *Brazda*, visited United States in 1926 with a group of Romanian intellectuals, under N. Serban leadership. The first contact with Americans happens on the ship “Americans that I can observe here on the ship, although very democrats among themselves, they have a note of arrogance in their attitude regarding all Europeans. Citizens of great states have something of the bailiffs’ pride at ministers’ offices”⁴⁸. Among other negatives features seen on the ship is also the abuse of alcohol because of the prohibition: “You would say they are wild beasts unfed, locked in a menagerie. And they are only the freest citizens in the world, who party”⁴⁹.

From the beginning United States represents a fairy tale land, the land of opportunities, the freest country in the world, the country of immigrants, welcoming everybody: “From the fog, you could see, with a charming uncertainty of a fairy tale, the famous Statue of Liberty. She gave her blessing to all travelers, no matter their nation and religion, and it ascertained them that in the hospitable land of America, homeland of liberty, everybody is welcomed”⁵⁰.

The difference between the United States and Europe stated through the example of a young man who left Romania at eighteen: “This man in our old Europe would have been seen as an adventurer here he is a winner [...] Caution is not always a good decision. And I think if it did not exist a big imprudent, the new continent would be unknown today”⁵¹.

Advertising amazes him; creating a fairy tale atmosphere; yet the lights and advertising dazzle him. The characteristic street of New York is of course Broadway, the street of stores, newspapers, theatres, music halls, and movie theaters. It is the biggest street of the biggest city in the world. It is the most interesting in the nighttime. An ocean of lit commercials. A mosaic of light bulbs. Harmonization of colors in order to be penchant and aesthetic is a special, not easy science. I look at a department store, so beautifully lit, as it seems part of a fairy scene. [...] The American, who became the jaded child of a premature civilization, is not surprised anymore. Looking straight forward, he goes where he has business to do in a hurry that characterizes his entire life. Yet, for the newcomer, these lights

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 86.

⁴⁸ V. V. Stanciu. *Altă lume. Însemnări dintr’o călătorie în America*. Editura „Curierul Judiciar”, București, 1927, p. 11.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

get him dizzy like a butterfly and giddy he does not know where to look and where to enter first. It is a rush of impression to which you hardly resist⁵².

In New York, V. V. Stanciu notices continual movement, fast pace. Numerous cars increase the movement: "An intense circulation as you can not find nor in London nor in Paris. A multitude of people, all in a hurry"⁵³ or "Here action. Unstopped movement. Everywhere motorized traction. Even the regularization of circulations is automatic"⁵⁴.

Automatism found everywhere seems to be also found in human relations "Beautiful women are passing by. Nobody stares at them, nobody turn his head and not even want them. European charm of "accrocher" and the poetry of love for a moment are unknown on the new continent. Nobody speaks loud, nobody gesticulates. Not even a smile."⁵⁵ He develops on automatism theme, seeing the mechanization as a positive development from a point of view of standard of living, yet it affects the spiritual life: "I was watching the multitude on the streets and reflecting over the beneficial mechanization, which sometimes humiliates people, replacing them as something obsolete. Armies of waiters replaced by a mere machine"⁵⁶. Moreover, workers and clerks are working without pause; even they seem mechanized "Frown foreheads of worries. Tired eyes look only forward. Figures crispate in the spasm of work without pause. I am scared this social life would catch me in his huge gearing."⁵⁷ Machines corrupt life, by work. In the United States, there is a cult of work; work is "the purpose of life". American men limits themselves at working routine: Here you do not live, here you work. New York is an immense factory, where each individual works regularly and precise like a screw. Those who stay here work to get rich and after they are getting rich they continue working, because mixing the mean and the aim they forgot how to live. In general the American does not know how to have fun. [...] If they want to have fun they have to go to Europe. Social life is organized so it is preoccupied with using human energy. The alcohol is prohibited; love escapades are impossible as only staring at a woman is an offence. Otherwise, practical American is far away of appreciating the woman as we Europeans do and to give her the time that we give⁵⁸.

The fundamental difference between Europe/Romania and the United States lies also in their leisure activities: "Because they did not have the time to develop the refinement of partying, Uncle Sam's nephews are not pretentious in

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 21-22.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 31-32.

their usual leisure activities. They have a child's soul. They are characterized by a naivety and curiosity for the smallest things."⁵⁹ Furthermore, even jazz and Charleston which was appreciated across Europe, V. V. Stanciu describes them with contempt: "Charleston the favorite dance of Americans is vulgar and brutal, characterized by violent movements in order to best imitate blacks' dance. One Charleston receives more enthusiasm than ten intelligent speeches"⁶⁰. His disregard for American popular culture stems from the traditional distinction between low and high culture. Popular culture is characteristic of a "young", undeveloped civilization. Dichotomy between old, cultured, refined European civilization and young, superficial, naïve American civilization: The programs of spectacles are very varied, which is probably an indication of public's superficiality. In the same night they show a movie, an act from a piece of theater, solo music, choral and instrumental music, dances wonderfully executed but lacking European elegance and grace. [...] Everywhere you can find in the public the same naivety of a child with baby tooth⁶¹.

United States also lacks originality and imagination in art and architecture, only the size impresses there: Art is not the characteristic of new continent. Lacks the originality, which you cannot see it even in architecture. The style of great buildings is borrowed from one or more European countries. The originality is only in size. America is the country of big sizes. For example a college is a house in gothic style, ten times bigger and more solid than ours. The other houses, including the famous skyscrapers are simple and of an exasperating uniformity⁶².

"American press is less intellectual than European press (Western) but it is well organized"⁶³. Furthermore, even museums of art do not impress: "I went to see Roerich museum, which Americans are proud of. [...] In spite my good intentions not to contradict European guests' manners I could not declare myself content. Where is not about art, museums are interesting for specialists"⁶⁴. Witness to the difference between intellectual life or rather the lack of it in the United States is also the difficulty of European intellectuals to adjust there, he quotes a Romanian intellectual saying that "America is heaven for workers and hell for intellectuals"⁶⁵.

The fascination with American technology, the standard of living and the apparent lack of poverty, the existence of bathroom, seen as a luxury in Romania, are among the most admired qualities of the United States. Among the virtues of

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 36.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 132.

Americans inventiveness and practical spirit: America is the country of human machine and the country of perfect comfort. Americans have as motto ‘Don’t make a person to do what a machine can do’. Thus, they developed automatism at maximum, eliminating the waste of energy. Ingenuity along with practical spirit, the two characteristics, they invented all possible machines. Nowhere the standard of living is more comfortable [...] Here a good standard of living is not a luxury, reserved only to privileged as one on the old continent. It is human necessity to which any human being has the right. Therefore it is not much of a difference between Rockefeller’s lifestyle and the comfortable life of any worker. Each worker has a spacious, bright, airy and clean, in a word hygienic place. The bathroom is always there; in many instances you can find elevator, central heating and telephone. The telephone is widespread and very cheap⁶⁶.

United States embodies also the ideas of democracy, liberty, and equality. Democracy in Europe and democracy in the United States have differences at their core: “While us European talk a lot about these ideas [i.e. liberty, equality, fraternity], because we have a platonic democracy, Americans do not live it abstractly but they feel practically their democracy”⁶⁷. The essence and superiority of American democracy is the lack of class, the equality of chances and conditions and “the self made men are the proof that America is the country of real democracy”⁶⁸. According to V. V. Stanciu, there is not difference based on nationality, religion or social class. Only sporadically he mentions “race continues to create inequalities in fact if not in law. For example, blacks, little respected, are used for the most difficult jobs”⁶⁹. Liberty and equilibrium characterizes American life: “What strikes our European spirit is the ideal equilibrium established between work and capital, between individual and social, between those notions in conflict on the old continent”⁷⁰. Democracy is superior in “the young republic.” Unlike earlier when young was use to better accentuate the dichotomy young old regarding American and European civilization, V. V. Stanciu does not use young pejoratively. Moreover, he sees American republic as continuing and building upon Old World tradition or rather attempts at democracy.

The difference between Romanians and Americans is also the difference between people of Latin origin and American Anglo-Saxon spirit: Anglo-Saxon spirit individual imparted profound characteristics to American people. Anglo-Saxon does not rely on family, or on state, as we of community spirit. The human being has value only through his work, energy and tenacity. [...] Respected man, gentleman, is the man who succeed alone, without anybody’s help. We Romanians,

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 97-98.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 126.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 112.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 112.

we are along with the whole Orient/East at the opposite end of Anglo-Saxon spirit. Anglo-Saxon character developed in America in whole his purity, as it could not stay in British islands. Indeed favorable conditions of life on the new continent, vast terrains and the lack of any class of privileged, allowed this. [...] In public life Americans excel because of the same Anglo-Saxon spirit. Lacking any tradition they could rely only on themselves. Imbued with vigorous individualism, American does not wait to be organized, but he has the passion to lead and organize alone (self government). He has the sense of organization in his blood. Look at him in his daily activities. In front of an office, no matter how big the crowd, he stays in line, wait his turn, nobody cuts behind and keeps the order, without the presence of a policemen⁷¹.

United States is the most civilized country in the world because of the unmatched technological progress and the high standard of living, yet the mechanization contributes to the dehumanization of people: Civilized country? Yes, without a doubt. It is the land where the fruits of civilization are more widespread than anywhere. Automatism satisfies the needs of modern man and, suppressing the inutile loss of time, accelerates even more the hurried rhythm of life. But mechanical life tends to create man - machine. American people started to become the slave of the machine they created, like the pagan who build the statue of God, forgetting he did it, fell on his knees, praying to his new God. Civilization dominates despising culture. Intellectual life and soul satisfactions, which old continent has them in what we call culture, lack on the new continent⁷².

V.V. Stanciu argues that the United States could be the best model of modernization for Romania. The desire to appropriate American values characterizes his discourse. The rhythm of work from the United States will complete Romanian 'soul': Without diluting the great qualities of our race, let's try to transport something from the rhythm of life across the ocean. To want persistent and to work disciplined. The American example would serve us more than any other. The great soul of Romanian people would be emphasized. With the help of new work methods and their mentality, we could change Oriental aspect of our country because Orientalism is not a question of geographical position of the country, but of moral position of the people. We have to learn something from epic American effort that succeeded to pulse a new life⁷³.

Romania could take an example from Americans and how much they work: "I think with sadness at what we Romanians could do if we work only half as Americans do. We have sharp minds as not many people do, and we also have a rich country maybe richer than Americans did. Through work they subjected

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 117.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 131.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 133 - 134.

nature, while we are still its slaves”⁷⁴. He is also interested in exchanging students seen as a “occasion for our intellectuals to know American civilization, which enriches the experience and matures the sense of reality, to enlarge souls’ horizon at the light of human race great ideals, whose realization happened here more than anywhere else”⁷⁵.

Alex. Lupeanu-Melin in *Minunatele întâmplări ale lui Niță Zdrengea la București, în America și aiurea*, is a humoristic account of a Romanian immigrant in the United States, expressing Romanian official point of view giving examples of people who returned rich from America; the difficulty to obtain a job, remarking the fast pace from the United States; the sacrifices immigrants make for gaining more money.

N. Iorga (1871-1940), a well-known historian, took a three months trip in the United States in 1930. Unlike V. V. Stanciu, he admires American museums. He also questions the materialism of the United States through the prism of museums: Can you say in front of these treasures [i.e. museums] so carefully put together and gifted so generously that this is the country of only commerce, of exclusive business, of ‘business’ and of “money”! There is so much love for beauty, so much diligence in searching and it become its proprietor, so much noblesse in the generosity of artistic building that the society gives so many benefactors in such a high field that can reject with indignation the offense of an unfair critique, trying to make out of it a kind Cartagena for arts works⁷⁶.

Although United States is compared with a factory, Iorga puts into perspective even their obsession with material gain: “Close to the cities cemeteries are covered with red flowers: rarely any tomb is forgotten: can you say that in this never tired factory, in this fury for gaining lacks poetry, even the most delicate?”⁷⁷.

Visarion Puiu (1879-1969), a metropolitan bishop, wrote his account about the United States under the pen name I. Vion, *București Spitzberg N.Y. Reportaj de călătorie* recounts his visit in New World, reality surpassing the books he read about the United States. He remarks the extreme difference between Romania and the United States: “French, English or German travelers can, putting together the new continent with their countries, not to have many surprises. We, from the gates of the Orient, we have more”⁷⁸. Yet, traveling in the United States is one of most

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 96.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

⁷⁶ N. Iorga, *America și românii din America. Note de drum și conferințe*, Așezământul Tipografic „Datina Românească”, Vălenii de Munte, 1930, p. 29-30.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

⁷⁸ I. Vion, *București Spitzberg N.Y. Reportaj de călătorie*, Atelierele Grafice Socec & Co., București, 1931, p. 57.

desired trips: “Who was not tempted by the desire to convince himself of the dream, the height of skyscrapers and agitated life of American cities?”⁷⁹.

The metaphor of anthill, most likely borrowed from Georges Duhamel, “refer to the functional side of modernity that represents collective consumption of material and symbolic goods”⁸⁰. The ants suggest the loss of individuality, the conformity produced in American society by the same aims - the desire to get rich.

Anonymous ants in a huge anthill, black points agitate in all parts. How you can not understand ant’s thoughts which tries to carry a grain of wheat, how you are amazed that the little creature has an organized plan in its movements, that it executes the plan with persistence and an impressive will, that way you are amazed by the agitation - seen from high of the sky – of the ants of New York streets, moved as the real ones by the aim: to gather wheat grains!⁸¹.

C. L. Flavian published his impressions about the United States initially as articles in newspapers. Although the United States is a wonderful country, he prefers to admire it through short visits rather than staying there. He sets his position from the beginning, arguing that Europe has culture and the United States lacks high culture: “Europe’s “shortcomings” have their own charm. I was born with an old preconceived opinion that of culture...”⁸².

Duhamel’s influence upon his work is obvious from the first pages, when he presents New York as the city of future. The standardization dominates American society, from their politeness, education, and their membership in diverse associations to their smiles. Moreover, movies not seen yet as the seventh art, represent the standardization of art: “As Rockefeller created Standard Oil, as everything is standard in America, from shoes to smile, that way Mr., Mayer, Mr. Lasky, Mr. Zukor and all screen magnates realized, the standard of art. The actor to have physic and sex appeal, the rest is directing, carton, illusion. The standard of feelings for a standard public”⁸³. Even the future is standardized: “Tomorrow generation is the copy - in different clothes, in different houses, in different comfort – of the previous generations”⁸⁴.

Unlike N. Lupu, Flavian critiques Ku Klux Klan. Moreover, it sees is as representative for American society, present in mainstream legislation in the United States in the form of structural racism: “Ku Klux Klan Doctrine? In one word: xenophobia: with more: anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, anti-Black, anti-European. [...] Neurosis passed, authorities meddle, Ku-Klux-Klan masquerade is in agony. The idea remains. It speaks in Washington Senate, lives in the laws

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

⁸⁰ Jean-Philippe Mathy, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

⁸¹ I. Vion, *op.cit.*, p. 71.

⁸² C. L. Flavian, *Impresii din America*, Editura Vremea, București, 1932, n. p.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 127.

against immigration, in prohibition, in all encroachment against individual liberty, in national exclusivism”⁸⁵.

He is a keen observer of American consumer society and its excesses. “The order word is to produce as much as possible. Industry rationalizes. Taylorism is at its peak. Needs are created. The luxury democratizes. It is the real spectacle of a civilization extended over all”⁸⁶. The Depression put an end to the idea that consumerism and production could increase unstopped, the end of American optimism.

Petru Comarnescu (1905-1970), a Romanian art critic, traveled thoroughly in the United States. He starts his account, *America văzută de un tânăr azi*, by recounting his position towards the United States. “I used to condemn the United States in the name of culture and disinterest. I was not going to the cinema because the majority of movies were American. And I wanted to demonstrate to G.D. the inutility to leave. Later I was not so sure I was right”⁸⁷. Under the guise of a French doctor he reiterates common imagery of the United States: United States is business, even people’s mind become mechanized and the sentiments become materialist there. They invented the scholarships to Americanize European young’s. They want to Americanize the entire planet⁸⁸. Yet, later on in his book, Comarnescu emphasized that American mechanized everything, including the passing of history.

When first in New York, he “feels like Gulliver in giant’s country”⁸⁹ and fifth avenue shop windows impress him through luxury and fantasy of commerce and art. It is a world of skyscrapers, unnatural world, robotic world.

All seems a great accident because skyscrapers correspond to spectacular necessity of modern man, even at the beginning they were built because of lack of terrain, winning the breadth of atmospheric space. Everything seems an arranged chaos. Building from a mystery lacking interior life. These giants do not speak to us, they do not humanly move us, but they dominate us, scare us as supra-natural beings. [...] In New York nothing seems natural. Everything is grown, forced to surpass itself. Mute beings of reinforced concrete, with nerves of wire and electrical blood, sky scrapers are impressive trough their solidity, trough their geometrical perfection, trough their good taste not to be full or inutile ornaments⁹⁰.

Although Comarnescu argues he is writing a different account, outside contemporary stereotypes of America, his European self in representing the American other is also present in his description of United States as a young and

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 110.

⁸⁷ Petru Comarnescu, *America văzută de un tânăr azi*, Editura „Adeverul” S.A., București, 1934, p. 12.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 12-13.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 79.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

democratic society or in Americans' inability to have fun, leisure being a chore, an automatic response: "But I do not see happy people. Each figure, from the crowd seems sad, tired, bored, going to have fun because they must"⁹¹. Furthermore, Americans lack critical spirit: There at Williamstown I felt how open and talkative are Americans, how they are ready to receive and new knowledge and information; they lack this old sufficiency that in Europe not only old people have it, but also young people. On the other hand they are ready to receive everything too fast in order to fully understand. Also they do not have a very developed critical spirit. And they believe everything it comes from the source⁹².

Americans contributed to the development of modern art, yet in their architecture they are practical first, and then artistic: "Americans contribute to renewing modern art through the play of electrical or natural light, as well as glass decorations, subtle and gentle. But that in America the architect is first engineer than artist it is something I do not intend to deny"⁹³.

Europeans and Americans are different in their manners, in their proportions, their hopes.

Americans built their life in different proportions and images than Europeans. The long and hard crossing of the Atlantic, used their eyes with other lines and different patience and tenacity than European and Asian. Breaking new grounds, in a scientific and mechanized world, gave them different measures and different ambitions for their work of adventure and courage⁹⁴.

In his fascination for the United States, Comarnescu overlooks even racial problem. He describes Harlem accentuating the standardization: On the surface streets from the black neighborhood are the same as in the one inhabited by whites. Standardized and monotone, usually with two floors, having a small entrance common in the middle and with the help of a small platform and some stone stairs in the street. Despite this you feel in another world. Here people are more playful and they know how to laugh, children run on the street, with the same joy and liberty as in a park for sports. People are dress in rich colors, loving ostentation and luxury. I refer to the young ones who earn well as doormen in hotels, trains and washing rooms, workers in factories or as artists. Old people and children are sometimes with ripped or torn clothes, but with the same lively and dreamy eyes.

In his first book about the United States, *Homo Americanus*, Petru Comarnescu intends to differentiate himself from other accounts about the United States. Although about the United States were written many books even couple in Romanian, none of them and not all of them can exhaust the truth. [...] For the

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 86-87.

⁹² *Ibidem*, p. 130.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 90.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 87-88.

author remains the contentment that he presented with sincerity and in good faith a social reality about which, most of the time, much was said, in a shiny form but narrow minded and full of prejudices, and were made all kind of wrong interpretations⁹⁵.

He identifies ten social types representative for American society: the businessman, the clubwoman, the clergyman, the college professor, the student, the sportsman, the modern woman, the intellectual, the policeman and the gangster, the black, the Jew, the immigrant. Unlike most travelers, Comarnescu discusses in detail American male focusing on different male personages. He starts by comparing the United States with a big modern factory: United States of America are a big modern factory. [...] Americans have only one direction: that of work. Only one reason to live: life, activity. They never stay without doing anything. Dream is rare and even then they dream about working and movement, constructing a narcissism of wizard apprentice, lost in the world of cars and banks. [...] They do not think history they make it. Attentive, curious, always asking, interested in knowing what it is offered, but lacking cosmic curiosity, they fight for unity, equilibrium, and happiness⁹⁶.

Petru Comarnescu openly admires the United States and through the voice of Mr. Smith, a business man, reiterates one of American myths, the American individualism and self-made man: "In America anybody who works and is smart cannot not succeed. Who does not succeed it means he is helpless, lazy, and thus worthless and deserves only the torments of unemployment. Richness is the reward of hard working, blessing from God. Prosperity is the sign of ability"⁹⁷.

Americanization, seen as the desire of even average American, is not presented with fear, rather Comarnescu emphasizes the values United States would transmit. It claims that what is good for us is good for everybody: democracy, consumerism, and popular culture: John Smith wants in the bottom of his heart all world to Americanize, every men becoming a businessman, with Rotarian principles, efficient, hard working, honest. Because romantic and idealist in his own way, American citizen thinks that this world is good for everybody who knows how to dig its treasures, to lead its forces, to gild its winds, to produce its indications⁹⁸.

Furthermore, "the American sees things not as they are but as they should be, how they can become. His realism is dynamic like the imagination of an artist. Time means creation for both the American and the biologist"⁹⁹. Besides realism,

⁹⁵ Petru Comarnescu, *Homo Americanus*, Editura Vreimea, București, 1933, p. 10.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

practical spirit defines American nation “wanting to surpass life, the American exaggerates action and its purpose. This is practical idealism of the American¹⁰⁰.”

Two characteristic types of American women: the clubwoman and modern woman allow Comarnescu to expand on women and family life in the United States. “If any American man is a virtual businessman, at her turn every American woman is a club-woman”¹⁰¹. Unlike Europe, Romania where traditional gender roles define woman first as a mother, then as a wife, in the United States women are not secondary to men.

The American woman puts in second place the role of mother: killed her role as a nanny and reduced to maximum household chores in order to become intellectual and free as a man. [...] The modern American woman has different perspectives and methods. She works in the large frame of nation and humanity. Lacking unconditional respect for tradition, she let herself lead by the ideas of time and the discoveries of science. Intellectual and volunteer, in a country of active people, American woman has a public activity and sustains everywhere reforms, innovations, changes for the better. Her power is always greater. Through vote, discussions, through the authority she has over her husband and children, American woman effectively controls the destiny of her country. Therefore the belief that in the United States starts a new period of matriarchate is not unusual¹⁰².

In the voice of Mrs. Smith, in the United States there is no need for a feminist movement anymore, they reached a post-feminist period. Family relations were also transformed in the United States, both man and woman working in order to obtain a better standard of living: You are laughing on the matter [i. e. he mentions a law to protect men from women]. Yet, talking seriously, we admit that women emancipated too much. Because of that I am not a feminist anymore, there is no need to be. I and my friends we fight for something else now: for the equality of sexes because as in the past the arbitrary power of men was bad, now the abuse of power of women is not good...Humanity has to be equalized. As the home¹⁰³.

He considers young women/modern girls more intelligent than men, yet obsessed with gaining and longing for money, tempted to evaluate everything in money. Yet, it is not the materialism that he critiques, Comarnescu uses them to emphasize the importance of money for giving them independence and even happiness.

Material independence and spiritual liberty offered by the democracy in a less imperfect way than in European countries to the woman, made her more dignified, more sincere, more spontaneous. Animality beautifies and spiritualizes

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, p. 49.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, p. 50-51.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

faster in America. Even though sport masculinizes and liberty simplifies her existences, taking her mystery, American woman starts to become spirit, because there is an individual will for happiness, through knowledge and love. [...] American woman does not want to suffer because she believes in happiness. She does not have the notion of sin. Nor of life's diabolism. She is naïve and optimist if by these we understand closeness to nature health and empirical waiting¹⁰⁴.

Briefly he mentions the complexity of social and cultural life in the United States, expressed in the education "In the United States the education is totally democratic [...] In America the professor has to give to average man maximum of education he can receive"¹⁰⁵.

Petru Comarnescu also addresses Romanian stereotypes about the United States "when millions of Romanians judge America after sensational news about gangsters and fatal women popularized by press and cinema, communication's instruments good and bad at people's will and intelligence - sin dreadfully against truth"¹⁰⁶.

Talking about racial relations in the United States, he sees as a "modern tragedy". In civilized, modern, scientific America they discriminate against African Americans. He synthesizes racial issues, through the voice of an African American.

We have the right to entertain the world through jazz bands or dancing on scenes, but we hardly can enter in social and political life. Our skin color is a barrier we cannot pass. All doors are closed when we want to consider equal citizens with the other citizens of this country. Our destiny is to be always in an inferior position even though our intelligence and culture is above some white's intelligence and culture¹⁰⁷.

Andrei I. Gheorghiu, a professor of commercial science, recounts in *Note de călătorie. București - Statele - Unite* a trip he took with a group of Romanians in 1933. During this trip because of limited time and material resources, they visited some representative big cities from the United States such as New York, Chicago, Detroit, Washington D.C. "If I will raise any interest among my fellow citizens, urge them to take this trip or if they will be content reading this work, it will be for me a great contentment, because what follows will be useful in this long and pleasant voyage, being it real, or imagined, as their material means will place them"¹⁰⁸. He further details the importance of this trip because of the destination

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 153

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 106.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 174.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 193.

¹⁰⁸ Andrei I. Gheorghiu, *Note de călătorie. București - Statele Unite*, Tipografia „Jupiter”, București, 1935, p. 6.

point, the United States being “the continent where technical progress is taken to a maximum known by world civilization”¹⁰⁹.

Civilization, comfort are the main characteristics of the United States. “The impression made from this trip: a civilization and comfort taken to extreme. A prodigious activity in all fields, technical progress without competition, admirable streets, motorized vehicles. Cultivation same as ours, but agriculture is made rationally. The weather is also like ours¹¹⁰. Yet, giving increased number of Romanian immigrants in the United States, he follows the official position, praising Romania’s richness and the abilities necessary to become an important economic power: Old adage ‘east west home is best’ can be applied here too. But it is necessary to leave our standard of living. We have in our country richness that we cannot find anywhere, crowded in big quantities and different varieties. We miss only Southern fruits and plants. With the elements of success: work, will, order, and perseverance, we could surpass any other country in the world, or at least compete with any of them. Under the impulse of this trip, poor people in a rich country, to become respected people in the rest of the world¹¹¹.

First impression is the fast pace in the United States, especially in New York City. “We stayed in the late night hours in Times Square. People keep coming, never ends. The multitude is the same anytime, any hour, both day and night”¹¹².

Fast pace of the life, but also fast pace in building: “Big construction are made of steel; steel skeleton is built in factories respecting engineers sketches and when the pieces are finished are brought at the site and put together fast as only in America happens. Similar to this is Palatul Telefoanelor (Telephone Palace) from Bucharest, whose steel skeleton was made at Resita and mounted in Bucharest, after the blue prints executed in the offices¹¹³.

Watching the movie Pilgrimage, he remarks that United States is not a “soulless” society: “Returning towards the rest of spectators, I noticed that Americans also “have soul” because handkerchiefs started to be used, in those moments, in the whole hall. I noticed that you can be “cold” when is about business, but human feelings are the same no matter what part of the world is the man subjected to this kind of event”¹¹⁴.

Andrei I. Gheorghiu as most Romanian travelers visits Ford factory, which impresses him through its organization. The last technological developments are to be found in this factory. He describes in detail the production - 3000 cars were

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 73-74.

¹¹² *Ibidem*, p. 20.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

assembled by day in 1933, during better days were 10.000 cars, the minimum wage is 5\$ goes as high as 10\$ (1200 lei), 95% of workers have cars, and a car built in 46 hours; mounting in an hour. It is cheaper to build the car in Europe than transport the car already built from the United States, thus the price will lower to 50.000-80.000 lei.

He addresses black situation, without depth, rather using racial stereotypes: They are in the city (i.e. Washington D.C.) 100.000 blacks, dirty people, who will give a lot of work to white leaders of America in not very far away future because of their extraordinary reproduction. They have now their own doctors and lawyers, rights equality with whites, their own political leaders, finally everything they need in order to form a unitary people.

Dr. Florin Begnescu published his impressions about a trip he made in the United States in order to attend the International Congress of Veterinary Medicine, in August 1934 at New York City. "It is understood that the description of this trip does not have the pretention to be high literature. It is only a story, presenting facts, of course without being able to recount all reality, sometimes, impressive grandeur of seen things"¹¹⁵.

As Visarion Puiu, Begnescu reiterates the ant hill metaphor: "It seems that American is not content with this formidable movement seen only in American big cities and which for a newcomer European seems an amalgam of ransacked ant hill at one moment in his depth by one magic hand"¹¹⁶. The only places where you can find peace, quiet are cemeteries.

He visited Ford factory, which is the perfect example of mechanization in the United States. "Industrial automatism and distributed by specialization has here the ultimate expression. In the noise of machines the work is continual, each worker does always, always the same thing he became himself almost an automat/machine. I do not think there is more perfect allocation of work and allocation of benefices influences all machines and human machines"¹¹⁷.

Furthermore, this automatism characterized other factories in the United States. The slaughterhouse Swift & Co, Chicago follows the same pattern of technological progress: "Here as well as at Ford factory everything is automatic, each worker has a specific role facing the animal, after sacrifice he goes further. Same thing repeated thousands and thousands times becomes automat, dexterity is taken to extreme and everything passes in determined time"¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁵ F. L. Begnescu, *25 de zile în America. Impresii de călătorie*, Editura Universală Alcalay, București: 1936, p. 3.

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 60-61.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

The influence of American civilization upon Romanians is obvious in Begnescu's account. And...I confess that the first thing I did not think to ever do it was that of having checks no matter how small, to take them out to pay as most Americans do, baron of dollars [...] the second thing it is the one seen so often in American movies, to sit on tall and small chair climbing 2-3 steps and wait to be served at one of thousands American bars strung in the tumult of well known Broadway. Movies take their scenes from this street, which has the greatest circulation in the world¹¹⁹.

There is the rhythm of continual movement in the United States of America, the standardization, the mechanization imposed even to the animals: We see in our heads those monumental buildings and cities, those grandiose constructions of architecture and un unsurpassed engineering, that automatism taken to excess and instilled even to the animals, that ending towards the American tends, interested only in the final result, that of production, often not taken into account the soul, which sometimes works without any other ideal than of standardization of everything it produces but which tends always toward greater lines as big as great lines of American land. We see that continual trepidation of people and cars of any kind, that fantastic movement of great cities, of big factories of products that seem to make the American always discontent¹²⁰.

Although very simple named Americanisme, American accomplishments impress Romania traveler, their energy, inventiveness and courage contributes to their evolution: [...] We see that 'no parking' which seem to address not only pedestrians and vehicles on the street but the entire American people which with its energy, courage and mentality goes always further, towards fantastic accomplishments which us sometimes we are content to named them banally: Americanism¹²¹.

Dr. D. I. Vasiliu, a Romanian doctor, published *Colindând cele două Americi* after first writing about his trip in South America was a success. He traveled with professor Gh. Marinescu. Thus, "knowing a little United States will make a comparison with South America, with similar beauties/landscapes, but with different mentalities"¹²². The trip is a dream come true, it acquires mythical features: "Debarking in Europe, we had the impression we are coming back from enchanting lands suspended in the sky, which the ones who were lucky to visit, want to see them at least once in their lifetime"¹²³.

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 93-95.

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 123-125.

¹²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 125.

¹²² Dr. D. I. Vasiliu, *Colindând cele două Americi*, Tiparul Cartea Românească, București, 1939, p. 111.

¹²³ *Ibidem*, p. 211.

He takes the time to recount the new accomplishments of aviation such as Lindbergh crossing Atlantic Ocean, Italian expedition lead by Balbo, noticing that the ocean would be crossed in two days in about 10 years. America will be accessible, it will be then at small distance from Europe, time is money from a commercial and industrial point of view and crossing the ocean that fast will be a great accomplishment¹²⁴.

Then D. I. Vasiliu describes his crossing the ocean, noticing “a little bit of fury was necessary otherwise we would not have had the impression we were crossing the Atlantic, rather we did a trip on Danube or Como Lake”¹²⁵. Crossing the ocean is an experience in itself, important part of the trip in the United States. Facing great danger in their trip makes the visit to the United States also an accomplishment. Travel in the United States is also difficult because of numerous formalities at the United States consulate, with many requirements such as medical certificate, swearing in front of the consul that you will not remain in the United States, showing strong connections with the country, you have good economic standing, you have relatives, and honorable occupation, money in the bank and that guarantees that it will send you money if you need, relatives in the United States, valid passport, residency certificate, morality certificate, four photographs, a ticket¹²⁶.

The first contact with the United States is the arrival at New York. First he noticed the skyscrapers and Statue of Liberty: “The clouds covered from time to time the sun, changing the colors of skyscrapers, which rise majestic towards them”¹²⁷. American big metropolis impresses him, has the same power as Byzantium Empire had. New York is a modern empire, attracting through the promise of a better life: “If medieval Byzantium attracted with a magic power hundreds of barbarians in order to rob and destroy it, modern New York attracts, with not less magical force hundreds of thousands visitors to make them rich”¹²⁸.

The myth of self made men, the possibility to become a millionaire through hard work, easy to move from a class to another, the lack of social classes, in a way the United States seems a classless society: “It is said that in America did exist only two social classes: manual laborer with roll up sleeves and the ‘millionaire’. Today, although the latest class degenerates and it is forced to go back to roll up sleeves. Not few did it without any shame, hoping their sons will be again millionaires”¹²⁹.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 117.

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 120.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 125-126.

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 122.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 157.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 127.

Travelers are also amazed at American comfort: “In America, obviously, American system...everything is practical, elegant, comfortable¹³⁰. “Comfort and order have always been Americans’ characteristics. The motto ‘time is money’, made them to automatize and to perfect everything to the maximum”¹³¹.

Furthermore, Dr. D.I. Vasiliu remarks the bathroom and compares it with European, Romanian habits. Unlike, Duhamel who critiques and overlooks American bathroom and the meanings of bath in their civilization, Romanian travelers in general and Dr. D. I. Vasiliu in particular assign importance. The cult of bath in the United States and its development is noticed: Each room has its own bathroom; as a matter of fact in America this thing can be seen differently, it is a fact, a reality. Not only in hotels, but also in any house as modest as it is, and any atelier, any institution, has to have a bathroom for its personnel. To take a bath, in America, even for workers is similar with the habit of washing your eyes and your hands for us¹³².

He further remarks new inventions, which led to perfecting technological accomplishments in the United States: “Going to wash, I notice that instead of two faucets as at all hotels in the world, at American sinks they are three. Namely, besides the faucets for warm and cold water, there is a third one, between them, with a button, which functions when pushed and it was written “Aice”(i.e. ice)”¹³³.

The superiority of American standard of living manifests itself in the mere existence of air conditioning: “Americans thought and have remedied this calamity (i.e. extreme heating) as well through numerous ways. First, they put electric fans in rooms and offices. Then, in order not to drink warm water from the faucet and not to run for a piece of ice to stop their thirst, they “Americanized” the question totally satisfactory for citizens”¹³⁴.

American materialism is one of main concerns of a tourist. Money-oriented people, they lack spiritual life: “In America, because ceaseless and concentrated concerns to obtain charming gold, where each individual’s motto is time is money, the spiritual life was completely neglected”¹³⁵. He further critiques Americans of lacking religious and historical sense, resulting in numerous, small sects and churches. The time spent in the United States led also to misunderstandings, religious intolerance.

It happen that the fundamental principle of moral sect to be falsified. Under the mask of questionable morals, they hide the most horrible bestialities unworthy of human beings and even less by church. The most expressive example

¹³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 129.

¹³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 190.

¹³² *Ibidem*, p. 131-132.

¹³³ *Ibidem*, p. 132.

¹³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 132.

¹³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 133.

is the sect of Mormons, founded in the year 1827. They form a small state in Utah, on the shores of the well-known lake Salt Lake City. Under the mask of propagating Christianity, they practice concubinage and debauchery on a large scale some representatives setting a record in the number of ...children. Polygamy was interdicted through a bill in 1887¹³⁶.

Lacking history influences also their cultural institutions. If they have few original pieces, they do have replicas of important works and monuments.

If Americans do not have their own history to be proud of and to embellish with their museums as French did at Louvre, Italians at Rome, Venice and Florence, Spanish at Padua, Viennese at Schönbrunn, Germans at Potsdam, yet, in their desire to educate their future generations, they build a museum reproducing European museums or spending enormous sums to obtain valuable pieces from other countries museums. It is well known the fight they put in the last time to obtain the mummies discovered in Tutankhamen tomb¹³⁷.

Being a doctor, D. I. Vasiliu visited and described in great details hospitals in the United States. He pictured not a very flattering image for European or Romanian hospitals. At the same time, he remarked couple of the difference in people's attitude towards hospitalization and disease: To talk about hospital in Romania or in Europe, means to feel the smell of phenic acid or iodoform, to feel the pain, to hear the screams, to feel the misery and sufferance. At us the notion of hospital is synonym with terror. This word evokes at us despair and death. On one hand, it is true that in Romania the internments are made only when it is very late or only when the patient is agonizing. If he dies, the blame is on doctors and the hospital. [...] In case of need at the hospital comes, without fear, from the family of United States president until the humble worker. What is different is the price of the room and the comfort according to price. [...] We would think rather at a big, luxurious hotel than a hospital¹³⁸.

He described in detail Sloane Hospital Vanderbilt, the surgeries and procedures, elaborate description of Rockefeller Institute and he remarked the possibility to improve Romanian medicine and research "How good it would be to exist in Romania at least a little nephew of Rockefeller!"¹³⁹.

Under the chapter named "American motto: The Biggest in the World", he argues that "in a great degree we became convinced that in all Americans did, even because of strict necessity, they had an ambition: that of becoming more important than the similar object in Europe, at least in dimension, to have the pride to say that

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 134.

¹³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 135-136.

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 137-139.

¹³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 149.

it is the biggest work in the world”¹⁴⁰. Niagara Falls is a wonder of nature, impresses, yet it failed to be the biggest in the world, thus disappointing Americans in their quest.

The superiority of Europeans over Americans manifests itself in the fine spirit, in their culture. Describing Paramount, mechanization overshadows the spirit of spectacle: Magnificent spectacle here, with an orchestra on mobile platform, making yourself to wonder why Americans are running to Folies Bergère from Paris, which comparing with sumptuous setting from here seems as shabby as our Tanase seems compared to Folies Bergère. It is true Americans do not have spirit in their musicals. All is reduced to luxury and extraordinary setting and perfect ballet, sober and almost automatic. Moreover, they are not pretentious; they are laughing and amuse at the least joke/spirit or better said at circus amusements and “Mosi”¹⁴¹.

In the chapter “In Black Neighborhood” he expresses his interest in knowing the places characteristics of original jazz, thus he visited the black neighborhood Harlem. Unlike other chapters accompanied by pictures of various buildings, the pictures accompanying this chapter represents a black woman, half naked carrying a black child in her arms; characteristic of images representing Africa/Africans; the other named “From black beauties” shows again two black women, half naked, with long floral skirts and head dress, situated in a place resembling an African village. They visit an elegant black local, with an orchestra only of blacks. “Couple of female dancers with big lips with naked breasts and legs and couple of male dancers with teeth like pearls, succeeded one another making different wry faces in the savage rhythm of jazz”¹⁴².

One of the few comparisons he makes to Romania regards the number of readers in Romanian libraries and New York Public Library: Interesting is the fact that 40.000 visitors research daily this volumes. This is a great record; if we calculate that at us the number of all readers from all libraries in the country, for a population of 18.000.000 inhabitants, does not reach by far away the number of readers from only one library from New York¹⁴³.

D. I. Vasiliu is keen to notice American imperialism and its relations to South America, presents American Association as an interesting way to have closer relations between the United States and all Latin American countries, whose richness always interested North Americans which - partially - they won.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 154.

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 162.

¹⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 166.

¹⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 169.

Vasiliu could have not overlook the problem of traffic, which was one hot topic in Europe giving the increasing number of cars and higher speed, thus he presents traffic light system as an innovative system.

Describing the fact there is no human control in autobuses, trams or subway “Automatism to excess excluded human hand from everywhere”¹⁴⁴. At Chicago World’s Fair they build in two hours a Chevrolet, Chrysler or a Ford, therefore he underlines “extraordinary mechanization of human being and its specialization sometimes ridiculous, because there are workers specialized not only in cleaning the windows or open and closing the doors, to apply a fusible plug of essence or radiator”¹⁴⁵. Yet, with all the rapidity of fabrication and reduced cost from there, these luxurious cars reach Bucharest with prices 3-4 times greater. Unlike other travelers who connect automatism and mechanization with the lack of soul, culture or spiritual life, D. I. Vasiliu sees machines as making people obsolete, increasing unemployment: “Because of excessive automatism both at these transportations I laid eyes on as well as in fabrics and heavy industries, as you will see in the description of an automobile at Ford factory, without a doubt hundreds of thousands of people are pushed in unemployment”¹⁴⁶. Yet, even people unemployed in the United States are not perceived as poor: “Unemployed people in America are not beggars, nor unkempt, nor dirty, to inspire you sorry and disgust like in European countries or at us”¹⁴⁷.

He also takes a bit of time to discuss Roosevelt’s new policies in order to get out of economic crisis, but also the impact of the crisis in limiting American products in Europe. He also notices workers salaries and compares with Romanian standards: “You see how high is the standard of living of American workers if a worker is suppose to receive 10.000 lei (60\$ per month), almost the salary of ministry director, superior officer or university professor at us”¹⁴⁸.

American woman’s privileged position in society as well as the distinctions between European and American women: “In America woman rules. If in their republican country there is not only one king, but also many kings of different products, yet those kings are in a limited number. Yet there are queens without a number. Each woman is the queen of her husband, some even “queens of districts” or of “state. [...] Woman’s sovereignty is absolutely like a queen’s sovereignty. Her word is order”¹⁴⁹.

Although most of the time comparing United States and Romania seems difficult, Romanian architectural beauty surpasses United States architecture: “If

¹⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 173.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 196.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 174.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 175.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 176.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 179.

Sturdza palace or Cantacuzino would have the proportions of White House, then they would be more beautiful than the house of the president of biggest republic on the continent¹⁵⁰.

Among the peculiar habits he also recounts is chewing gum: American women as well as American men have a habit, which at the beginning seems curious but you get used to it, moreover you adopt it. All day long they chew in their mouth chewing- gum, a kind of rubber which does not melt and never consume [...] The madness of this habit was and it is widespread in all walks of life, men, women, girls and children, which you see chewing on the street, at the theater or at cinema¹⁵¹.

The dichotomy between materialist America and cultural Europe manifests itself in most of these narratives. The average American is represented as absorbed with the accumulation of wealth. Americans preoccupied with mechanization and consumerism, ignore, culture and art. The travelogues idealize the American standard of living, the perceived lack of poverty. The United States stand for inventiveness, creativity, and the ability to create a better, more comfortable standard of living. Most travelers assert European cultural superiority, while acknowledging American material superiority. Romanian travelers address American alterity mainly at axiological level, few of them such as Alexandrina Cantacuzino or V. V. Stanciu express the desire to embrace some American values such as work spirit or civic spirit, ultimately addressing alterity at the praxiological level. At the beginning of their trips most Romanian travelers address American alterity at the epistemic level, wanting to better understand the United States, yet they resort to axiological judgments in their descriptions. They express their commitment to European/Romanian cultural values, while admiring American technological progress. Petru Comarnescu addresses American alterity at the epistemic level; his Romanian, European intellectual self embracing in many circumstances what is perceived to be American self. The most significant traits of Americans are their practical spirit, inventiveness, hard work, efficiency, unmatched technological progress.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 200.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 180.