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TRAVEL WRITINGS AS MEANS OF INTERCULTURAL TRANSLATION

Abstract: As a literary genre, the travel literature was considered a literary hybrid made of several other sub-genres, or a literary sub-species made of the autobiographic writings (Paul Fussell) or of the ethnographic writings (Patrick Holland). Being defined on several axes, such as fiction/non-fiction literature, internal/external travels, poetical/historical form, time/space perspective, the travel writings differ not only in terms of narrative strategies but also in terms of method or purpose of writing. The travel writings belong both to cultural studies and to translation studies, allowing the association of the traveller's functions with the functions developed by the translator in the process of trans-positioning all the elements from the foreign culture in his own. Thus, the act of cultural translation becomes the act of constructing the self in a foreign culture. The aim of the article is to analyze the manner in which travel writings develop their narrative strategies in the act of intercultural translation.

Keywords: travel writing, cultural translation, contact zone, identity, otherness

Few Reflections upon Travel Writing

In the attempt of giving a suitable definition for the phrase *travel writing*, it is necessary to give few reflections upon travel.

The concept of travel[1], as part of the history of civilizations, includes all sorts of people mobility and migration together with their intentions in the new topographies. Not only each journey, pilgrimage, exploration but also any form of exodus, emigration or dislocation of populations is considered an important event belonging to the history of travel. Being voluntary or involuntary, travel was seen as a recurrent displacement that usually follows the well known scheme *home – abroad – home* or only *home – abroad* in the case of exile. The term *travel*[2] also stands for the negotiation between two different geographical spaces and cultures: one very familiar and one that expects to be explored, understood, explained and, sometimes, assimilated. At the same time, the reception of travel experiences is due to their recording under various forms such as travel accounts, travel documents, maps, letters, journals, illustrations, photographs, films, travel guides, etc. According to Michel de Certeau, most travel narratives constitute "interdisciplinary laboratories" where a vast range of fields are interconnected in order to cover many aspects of sharing the experience of travel (Certeau 1991, 115).

As a literary genre, travel literature could be considered a literary hybrid made of different other genres and sub-genres. Being placed between fiction and non-fiction and belonging to autobiographic writings as well as to ethnographic writings, it usually borrows from other literary species, specific features and specific strategies trying to create its own. There are various forms of writing travel narratives because of their uncertain literary status. Referring to actual places, people and events and interspersing stories of dubious provenance, from fictional or mythical sources, most of the travel writings function as mediators between fact and fiction. This type of writings claims validity when referring to real places and events but the purpose is to assimilate the same places and events to the writer's highly personal view. That is why travel literature could be seen as a space of discursive conflict generated by the author's need to report the world as it is, or as he sees it, and the intension to make

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[1] Travel, as a theme of scientific research, was approached from different perspectives among which travel studies, imagology, cultural and postcolonial studies, history, geography, cartography, cultural anthropology, sociology, political sciences, literature, and other related domains.

[2] In the process of defining the concept of travel it is necessary to refer to its border status and to relate it to other dichotomous concepts like identity/alterity, subjectivity/objectivity, representing the other/representing the self, difference/sameness etc.

the world correspond to his preconception of it. In this respect, travel writing could be considered a form of interference based on its subjectivity. The writer gives his personal interpretation on a documented reportage or as Hayden White wrote, travel literature is nothing but fiction of factual representation (Holland 2000, 14). Thus, travel writing has an intermediary status between subjectivity and objectivity.

As some types of narratives, most of the travel writings rely on the authority of the writer as witness whose function is to persuade the reader of the authenticity of the facts that were reported. Writing from the eyewitness' perspective becomes a rhetorical strategy which takes the narrative closer to a self-conscious literary genre. The author interferes into his own discourse self-consciously displaying his multiple personas: the traveller/the observer, sometimes the participant, the reporter/the writer. For example in Chatwin's *Naipaul*, the writer is only an observer who prefers to hide behind the characters he describes, but in *Trouble Again* by O'Hanlon, the author becomes one of the characters. Each of the two cases[3] is defined by the lack of introspection and the need to present the self through motifs of caricature, investing the narrative with an anti-biographical aspect. In this respect, the focus is not on the author but on the places, the peoples and the events that are to be described in a more subjective manner or not.

In order to present the specific "place of work" of a travel writer, James Clifford introduces the term *field*, viewed as an ideal and concrete place of professional activity, of controlled observation and experiment (Clifford 1992, 99). Dwelling with such a place is always a work in progress meant to develop the personal, communicative and even cultural competence. The traveller as the one who was displaced from his native home and sent to a new place tries to appropriate and transform the unknown into a home away from home. The cultural experiment that the travel writer is facing when dealing with a new field, can be seen as a mediation which is based on two main constituents: the native, as a cultural figure and himself, as an intercultural figure (Boon 1990, ix). Writing about a new culture means learning that culture, even more, adopting that culture, at least for a while. Thus the

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[3] It could be said that Chatwin seems to be more self-effecting, while O'Hanlon more self-obsessed in their writings.

field becomes a place bounded in space and time, functioning as a chronotope, as a setting for organizing space and time in a whole form.

According to James Clifford, the idea of culture as a set of unchanging and coherent values, behaviours and attitudes has given way to the idea of culture as negotiation, symbolic competition or performance (Clifford 1988, 23-24).

Each culture stands for a plurality of codes and languages, generating various discursive practices as means of intercultural translation.

Travel Writing As an Act of Translation

In a strict literal definition, translation means to travel from one place to another and going further, it may also stand for travelling from one discourse to another, from text to another implying a dialectic involvement between the process of recognition and the process of recuperation of difference. Translating supposes mediation between at least two codes systems. In a usual process of translation, a text that was formulated in one code equates with the source language is later reformulated in another code that equates with the target language. There are certain rules that make translation possible and they depend on the actual situation, on the function and also on the purpose of the translation (Lefevere 1999, 75). These rules belong to two intertwined grids: conceptual and textual and they function as a result of the socializing process. In the case of travel writing, the author is able to find ways of manipulating those grids in such a way that cultural communication[4] is made possible and attractive for the reader.

Travel writing could be considered an act of cultural translation which resembles the traditional process of mediation between two texts. In representing other peoples' cultures, the writers of travel accounts translate one cultural field/zone/space into another. Similar to a literary transposition from a language into another, cultural translations take place in an intermediary space where both cultures meet, define or reject, understand or reprehend each other generating the *space-in-*

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[4] The cultural communication can be determined by these grids, which, in their interplay, may influence the manner in which reality is constructed for the reader, not only of the translation itself, but also of the original.

between (Duncan 1999, 2). This space of cultural translation is not entirely neutral but influenced and determined by the author's self. The process of cultural translation becomes a "domesticating method" in the attempt of reducing the foreign culture to target the cultural values of the writer, bringing him back home, or a "foreignizing method" applied in such a way that it would generate the pressure on those cultural values that would make possible to register the cultural difference of the foreign culture, sending the reader abroad (Venuti 1993, 210).

As hermeneutic activities, both translation and travel writing are involved in similar processes of exploration and discovery. Translation, in general, could be characterized by its performative nature. Being an act of cultural communication, translation refers not only to the process of constructing the self in a foreign culture, but also to developing certain issues of inclusion and exclusion, of adapting the meaning to the context. Thus translation is seen as a process of negotiation that supposes the texts to change their language and also their cultural frame of reference. De-contextualisation and re-contextualisation are the two sides of the same double process which is translation. It involves two steps: first it reaches out in order to appropriate something new and then it develops the act of domesticating the foreign elements. In a similar manner, travel writing[5] is an activity that supposes different types of cross-cultural contact.

Most of the times, travel writing was associated with recasting the foreign for the readers in a visual and textual form. Similarly, translation deals with transporting the foreign from the source language and culture into the target language and culture, adapting it for meeting the target audience and to correspond to the audience's capability of recognizing, understanding and assimilating the new. It is the writer's responsibility to make his writings very easily accessed. By analogy, the translator has the same purpose. Both, the travel writer and the translator are figures of moving between languages and cultures. Therefore, travel writing may share with ethnography an interpretative view of foreign cultures while translation retracts the act of interpretation somewhere further (Hulme 2002, 227-230).

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[5] Right from the beginning, travel writing involves some form of translation. It is already known that several early travel accounts attempted to render the language of the explorers as it was, emphasizing the undiscovered, the unfamiliar and the new as it was found and revealed to the reader in an accurate form.

The success of cultural communication for both situations depends on the writer/translator as well as the reader for the fact that they agreed to play their assigned parts in connection with the same texts. The important problem that may appear when dealing with all types of translations and cross-cultural understanding may be sum up in the question whether one culture is able to really understand another culture on that's culture's own terms or not; or even more, whether the writer's/translator's attempts of adapting the new, of making the new accessible and understandable, recognisable and assimilated by the audience could define the manner in which cultures will be able to understand each other, to inter-act with each other or not.

Travel Writings as Means of Intercultural Translation

Generally speaking, translation is considered to be represented by a series of operations of which the starting point and the end product are important significations and functions within a given culture. In the case of travel writing, the needed elements belonging to the process of intercultural communication are entirely related to the whole cultural context as it may be seen in figure 1.
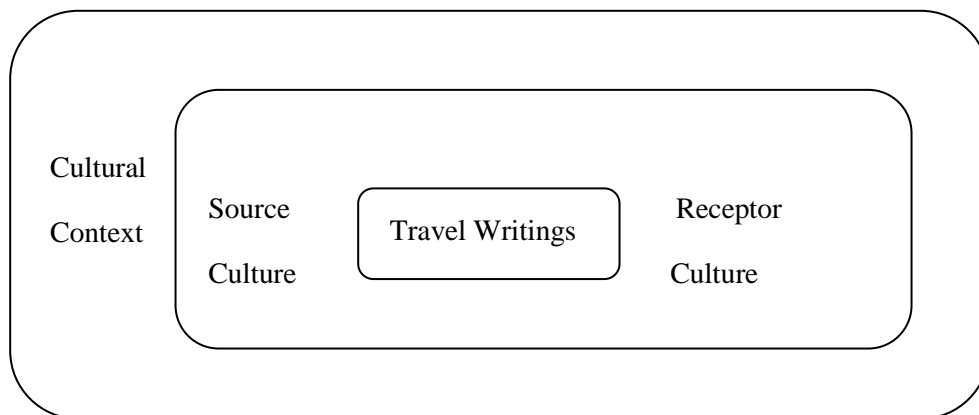
Figure 1

The cultural context includes the following components: the source culture which is to be explored described and explained, the receptor culture which includes the readers/the audience whose purpose is to understand and assimilate the new and foreign culture and the travel writings which function as a mediator or a negotiator between the two cultures, linking them on an intercultural level.

The communicative relationship developed in the process of textual/cultural translation shows that the text/travel writing generated by the translator/travel writer is both the end of the source culture and the beginning of the receptor culture. In this respect, travel writings become a chain of intercultural communication between these two cultures (Bassnett 1980, 45).

Considering the basic model of translation, in any act of communication that takes place within a source language, any text is designed to fit the channel capacity of the original receiver; but in the second language, the channel capacity is less than that of the original[6]. It is the translator's aim to make the new text fit the channel capacity of the receivers for the translated text.

In the case of intercultural translation, the author of the travel writings has the same purpose as the translator: to fit his text to the channel capacity of the readers, involving them in the process of intercultural communication. The process of fitting the travel writing to its receivers could be understood as a process of adaptation which implies selection, adjusting and explanation of the source cultures. The writer is raising the cultural information from an implicit to an explicit level, adding new pieces of information all the time.

The travel writing may resemble an expanded translation which has to be dynamic[7] so that it can fit the channel capacity of the receptors to the same extent as the source culture fit the channel capacity of the original receivers. In the process of

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[6] This may be true only if the languages belong to entirely different linguistic families or if the cultures are different. If the languages belong to the same linguistic family or if the cultures share a similar context, the channel capacity is only particularly reduced.

[7] In the situation when a culture is perceived as dynamic, then the terminology of social structuring has to be dynamic too. According to Lotman, the semiotic study of culture usually considers culture functioning as a system of signs and every relation of the culture to the signs and to the signification comprises one of its basic typological features (Lotman 1978, 230-232).

translation, the communicative relationship involves the translator both as a receiver and an emitter that links the two separated channel capacities, that of the source language and that of the receptor language. Transposed in an intercultural context, the writer of travel accounts has the same task as the translator. He decodes and re-encodes everything of the source culture that is accessible and selected by him, as it can be seen below:

Text 1 – Translator – Text 2 – Receiver = Source Culture – Travel Writing – Receptor Culture – Receiver

When taking into account this scheme, it is needless to say that there is no full equivalence through translation. Considering Jakobson's definition, the translation proper represents an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language. This type of inter-lingual translation is a semiotic transformation which constitutes the replacement of the signs encoding a message of signs of another code, preserving invariant information with respect to a given system of reference (Jakobson 1959, 233-239). Thus, travel writings are not expected to give full cultural equivalence of cultural information taken from a source culture and transposed into a receptor culture, but the writer's interpretation and adaptation.

The model of the intercultural translation process illustrates the stages involved (figure 2).

Source Culture   Receptor Culture

Travel   Cultural Translation

Culture Analysis   Restructuring
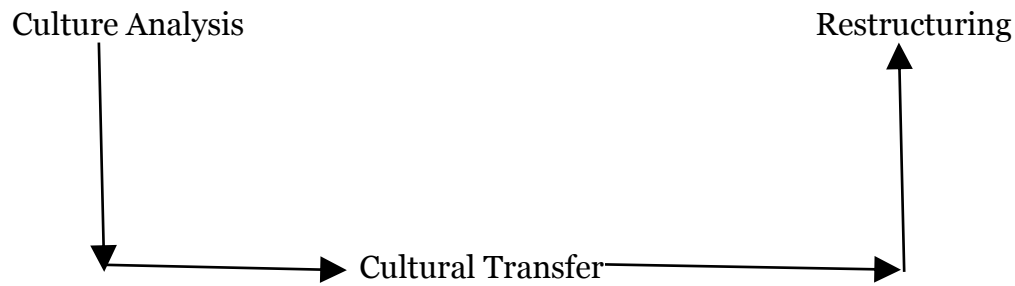

                    Cultural Transfer

Figure 2

The moment of travel represents the starting point in the first stage of elaborating the necessary material for the travel writing. It is a period of gathering the information, of selecting the new, important, representing and most interesting places to be described, people and their traditions and/or customs, events that belong to a certain period of time or a particular area. Then, during the stage of cultural transfer, the analyzed material is transferred in the mind of the author from the source culture to the receptor culture. The last stage involves the act of restructuring the transferred material in order to make the final form of the travel writing fully acceptable in the receptor culture. While the stage of culture analysis implies specific activities such as discovering and understanding, the stages of cultural transfer and restructuring are based on the act of transcription[8] of the codes in which a particular piece of information is embedded, which, at the same time, constitutes its main horizon of intelligibility as a cultural artefact.

The intercultural translation could be considered as both a process and a product. Discovering and understanding new cultures may imply an act of interpretation made by the travel writer. Going even further, the act of translating the foreign culture represents an activity based on the transferring the cultural information through the codes in which the source culture was embedded. This transposition of the original culture into the receptor one could be realised by the

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[8] This act of transposition from the source culture into the receptor culture could be considered an act of interpretation and translation done in the purpose of grasping by a different community. That is why the interpretation needs to be in close relation to both cultures, mediating between them and also negotiating the space-in-between.

travel writer in his/her travel narratives, generating different genres of re-interpretation which depend on how the space between original and translation was negotiated (Bruyn, 2012, 102) Every foreign culture becomes for the travel writer a changing context of movement, encounter and interaction, during which the author negotiates its status.

When translating from one culture into another, the travel writer changes different positions according to the stages that belong to this process, as in figure 3.
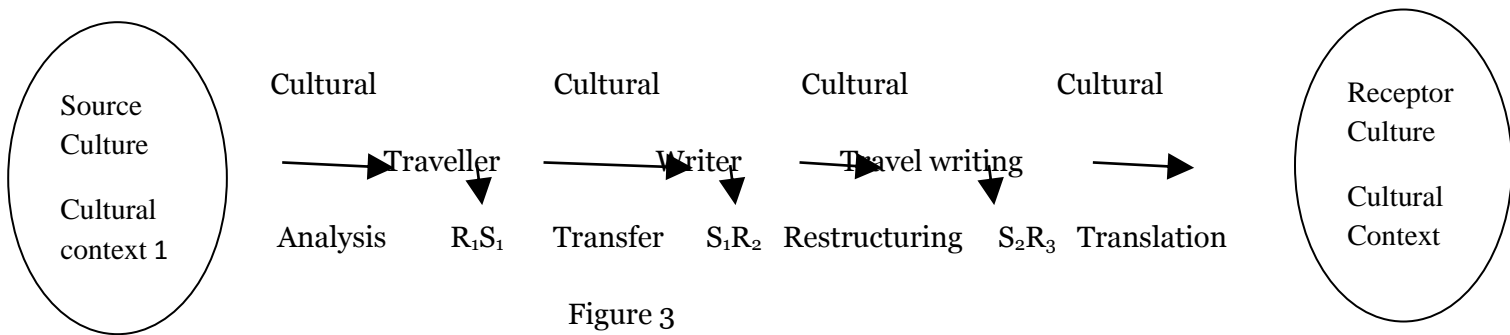

Figure 3

The process of intercultural translation is based on the existence of the act of cultural analysis which determines the act of cultural transfer which generates the act of cultural restructuring which implies the act of cultural translation. When dealing with a new culture, the traveller assumes the position of R_1 (receiver 1), who becomes S_1 (source 1) for the act of cultural transfer. For the act of cultural restructuring S_1 (source 1) becomes R_2 (receiver 2) who also assumes the function of S_2 (source 2) for the act of cultural translation which finally become R_3 (receiver 3) for the cultural reception in a new and different cultural context. Thus, the travel writer is usually involved in acts of analysis, transfer, restructuring and translation. The last receiver is expected to respond in certain ways which are essential and hopefully similar to those in which the original receiver R_1 responded. In other words, the travel writer projects his/her expectations not only on the target readers or audience but also on peripheral receivers, which means that the author has to reproduce all the cultural messages given by the source culture as travel narratives so that the last receivers may have, more or less, the same cultural respond[9] as he/she had in the first place.

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[9] When there is a time gap between the cultural context 1 and the cultural context 2, the travel writer can only be a kind of proxy R_1.

Taking into account the previous diagram, translating could be considered a process which consists in producing in the receptor culture the closest equivalent to the cultural messages of the source culture first in meaning and secondly in identity.

The Discursive Construction of Travel Writings

In general, a discourse could be understood as a set of images, vocabularies and material conditions used to express truth claims about the world, attaching the texts and utterances to the social, political, cultural and economic forces that, in return, determine their production, circulation and value (Lisle 2006, 13-14). The act of writing gives meaning through prevailing discourses because it is meant to order meaning on an otherwise ambiguous reality. Definitely, travel writings are no exception. One of their purposes is to order the world into a seemingly incontrovertible reality. From a political perspective, travel narratives tend to mask those processes of discursive ordering and try to offer their observations as neutral documentations of a stable and ordered reality. Using Michel Foucault's method of discourse analysis, when examining most of the travel narratives, it can be revealed the manner in which power arranges certain topics, subjects and/or objects and meanings in order to fit an incontrovertible reality, at the same time, excluding other possible ways of being and knowing (Foucault 1984, 110-126). When assuming the fact that discourses are about linguistic and textual matters this may lead to the expectation that the analysis of travel writings would be limited to the formal, aesthetic and stylistic questions which require the answer whether a particular text was well written or not. In the act of cultural transfer, restructuring and translation, a travel writing orders the foreign reality investing it with meaning so that it may be recognized, understood, accepted and maybe assimilated by the receptors.

Besides the fact a discourses is never about only textual strategies, rhetoric and language, they are also meant to determine important political links between representations and their material effects[10]. Stating Foucault's point of view, in any

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[10] In most cases, the receptors of a discourse could easily accept the discursive construction of meaning according to the grid of power and knowledge but they are less willing to agree to the fact that the same discourse can shape the material reality.

society, the production of discourses is controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures, whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its formidable reality (Foucault 1984, 109). Considering the discursive field as infinite, everything may be interpreted as being a discourse, covering the linguistic as well as the non-linguistic areas.

The discursive approaches, including travel writings, have started from the premise that cultural products reflect and also produce their social context. Any cultural product is impossible to be received and understood in isolation from its social and political environment.

In the attempt of revealing the discourses at work it may seem necessary to track the continuity of statements and meanings which are considered both true and real. When gathering the statements, most of the discourses become hegemonic[11]. In the case of travel writings, the discursive construction usually develops simultaneously in two directions. One of these directions reveals the manner in which these discourses are incomplete articulations of power that determine compelling moments of resistance while the second direction shows that the discourses through which desired visions are expressed become politically interesting and in doing so, they may achieve hegemony, emphasising the fact that they are repeated over time in such a way that surely they would acquire the authority of truth (Lisle 2006, 23). Thus, it is accurate to say that travel writings could be characterized by this double narrative strategy, which may be unfolded through a detailed examination of the discourses involved in the construction of the narrative that shapes the same travel writings.

Based on its discursive feature, travel writing shapes and influences the way receptors understand the world. The genre itself has changed in time but, as literary representations of journeys across the world, travel writings, always, express the political commitments that are scarcely visible beyond their status as a minor literary genre.

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[11] Foucault argues that discursive hegemony is able to continue because it was created is such a way that it could assimilate and sometimes neutralize the forces of resistance that was encountered (Foucault 1984, 127-136).

The discourse developed by travel writings represents a combination of factual statements and fictional descriptions which made these narratives popular with their readers both of history, science and current affairs and fiction. The factual statements, as representations of real life, made the travel writings accurate and authoritative. At the same time, the fictional descriptions give to travel narrative a descriptive, enlightening and entertaining character.

Like any other non-fictional narratives such those on history or politics, travel writings are engaged in delivering space and time specific facts and events to receptors in easy recognisable and intelligible ways. That is why they make use of similar narrative strategies[12] in order to give meaning of the historical/geographical/cultural/political record when being translated from one cultural context into another. At the same time, the narrative strategies that are mainly used in fiction are also needed in order to romance facts into existence as conditions of certifying the real. The narrative structure of the travel writings is contained in the journey and vice-versa. The beginning, the middle and the end of the travel accounts coincides with the pattern of the journey which is home – away – home. Despite its indeterminate literary status, travel writing is governed by a hierarchical discourse of literary genre, having the ability to write across literary genres.

All travel writings were determined by a journey metaphor which expresses the affliction of wanderlust. In most cases, this metaphor has a central position around which the whole discourse develops. Moreover, the central point of the journey metaphor is based on the way people and cultures locate and identify themselves in the reality they live.

Conclusion

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[12] Historical writings use narrative strategies mainly to deliver and interpret historical facts, and not to present a sequential order of these facts according to their chronology. That is why historical narratives are shaped by four main literary tropes: metaphor, metonymy, irony and synecdoche, all of them being able to narrate time and space specific events in a structure which could translate the nature of the past as it was. Travel writings borrow these narrative strategies when it gives its representations of life.

From a literary perspective, travel writings as genre have changed in line with important global shifts. When looking back, the eighteenth century travel accounts usually categorised foreign plants, animals and peoples into ordered taxonomies, which the Enlightenment confidence dissipated by the late nineteenth century (Pratt 1992, 26-32). Any type of representation of a foreign reality is never a simple literary event. Reading about a foreign culture, interpreting and writing about it are political acts that involve complex power relations between the writer and his/her readers shaping the reality of the world they inhabit. The difficulty with the literary formulation is generated by the fact that it reproduces a correspondence understanding of the representation, because in the case of travel writings, texts shape reality and reality shapes the texts. In other words, it is assumed that there is a single incontrovertible reality awaiting documentation by travel writers and each travel account would be judged for the manner it represents reality.

When translating a foreign culture the travel writer has to place himself/herself in a specific area which is common for both the source and the receptor cultures. He is generating the *contact zone*[13]. Taken from linguistics, the notion of contact zone becomes the cultural space where people from different cultures create connections and relationships, where meeting the other could be a way of discovering yourself. Being a mediator between different cultures, the travel writer discovers, recognizes, interprets and translates the foreign cultures, following the process of de-contextualisation and re-contextualisation. In return, the reader or the audience has to be placed in the same contact zone in order to de-code the discourse of the travel writings.

Both the writer and the reader are involved in similar processes of discovering the *other* but, at the same time, of discovering the *self*. While searching deeply in the numerous layers of the self, the travel writer, as well as the reader, construct and reconstruct his/her identity. Being in a continuous process of redefinition, the travel writer and the reader locates himself/herself in complex relations to the culture of origin and to the foreign cultures met during the journeys. Travel can also be

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[13] Historically, contact zones have grown out of colonial domination and have been characterized by conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict. Lately, the Western society has turned into a huge contact zone, where intercultural relations contribute to the internal life of all national cultures (Pratt 1992, 6).

considered a metaphor of individual freedom and personal experience. Temporary dislocation and absorption of what seemed a different identity usually is not related to an alienating experience but to the freedom of mobility and choice.

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