

Corin BRAGA (ed.), *Enciclopedia imaginariilor din România. Imaginar literar [The Encyclopaedia of Romanian Imaginaries. Literary Imaginary]*, Polirom, 2020, ISBN 978-973-46-8184-6, 439 p.

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With the aim of outlining a wider outlook concerning a culture's characteristics, the area of literary studies tends to develop large projects, which encompass the state of national literature over time. Simultaneously with international studies that highlight the place of Romanian literature on the global stage (*e.g.* the volume edited by Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru and Andrei Terian, *Romanian Literature as World Literature* or Delia Ungureanu's research project, *From Paris to Tlön: Surrealism as World Literature*, which contains a chapter about Mircea Cărtărescu), national cultural studies have produced large-scale projects using up-to-date bibliographies, which allow a higher degree of accuracy regarding cultural phenomena. Probably the most substantial project of its kind, *The Encyclopaedia of Romanian Imaginaries* is a collection of five volumes, structured according to five major areas (literature, linguistics, history, religion and arts) directly related to the concept of identity "within European interculturalism" (Braga). Therefore, based on cultural specifics, the major objective of the *Encyclopaedia* is to provide an overview of the internal dynamics of cultural movements/currents in Romania.

Edited by Corin Braga, the director of the entire project, the first volume about literary imaginaries is built in line with the concept of *glocalisation* (in opposition to the uniformising direction of *globalisation*) defined by Roland Robertson as the "co-presence and simultaneous action of both universalist and particular tendencies" (Braga, 11). Written by twenty researchers, this volume, which investigates suitable areas for the development of Romanian literature and, moreover, for the exposure of socio-political and historical tensions in different times, sheds light on the salient features of national literature in relation to the idea of "Romanian literatures" or "microliteratures" (Braga, 18). This project goes beyond the inflexible temporal landmarks of some literary/cultural currents or movements in favour of a free flow of elements, according to the network model, in literary works belonging to other periods

than the one in which these notions had been developed. This point of view is founded on another concept underlined in this project: the “semantic basin” theorised by Gilbert Durand. According to the French anthropologist, this notion “refers to elements of representation, imaginary content, images and symbols, and not to structural, formal and organisational elements, prescriptive schemes and poetics, cultural and administrative establishments” (Braga, 19). As the structuring criterion of the volume, this concept is meant to trace the shape of “the main *Weltanschauungen* and fictional representations that intertwined and succeeded each other in the few centuries of literary and artistic creation in our space” (Braga, 20).

The first two studies of the volume trace the folkloric imaginary and the religious one. Entitled *The Folkloric Chronotope* and signed by Eleonora Sava, the theoretical roots of this article may be found in Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideas. Viewing Romanian folklore as “a fictional world model,” which deserves, according to the theorist, the name of a “large chronotope” composed of a boundless number of smaller ones (23), Sava structures the article using three variations of this theoretical concept and gives examples from specific situations in Romanian fairy tales: “chronotopes of balance” (the house, the garden and the village), “chronotopes of crisis” (threshold, gate, window, oven, funnel, fountain), to which she adds the “liminal spaces” (crossroad, frontier, road, bridge) and “chronotopes of clash” known as “the other realm.” In addition to this, Sava identifies certain strategies of temporal modulation such as “the rejuvenation motif” and “the resurrection one,” the expansion or suspension of time, or the reversal of chronology.

Working within Walter Benjamin’s theory of constellations, Laura Lazăr investigates the religious perspectives from the beginnings of ancient Romanian literature until present times. Positing a dual system of religious representation based on *identity* and *continuity*, the author describes an interdependent relationship between “faith/religious denomination as a way of legitimising national identity” (47) and the transmission paths of these desiderata. At the same time, spiritual manifestations represent an extended field from the beginnings of local literature, based on religious education, to the young authors of the 2000 generation like Marius Ianuş or Adrian Urmanov. Attention is also paid to the communist period, during which atheism was institutionalised.

Lionel-Decebal Roşca offers a sweeping overview of Romanian historical fiction. Beginning with the image of Troy, “which underlies European myths, history,

literature and civilisation” (77), he traces the ways in which “narrative history” is represented and identifies “three possibilities for the fictional thematization of history”: firstly, recourse to it (pre-text), secondly, the exploration of history (arche-text) and, finally, its instrumentation (hypo-text).

Moving on to the Age of Enlightenment, the semantic basin linked with “the constellation of nationalist imagery,” Adrian Tudurachi shows that the influence of this major cultural current and its reception overlapped with “the emergence of nationalism” (99) in Eastern and Central Europe. Starting from the main figures of “Școala Ardeleană” [Transylvanian School], who are commonly associated with the ideas that dominated the late eighteenth century up to the post-war context, Tudurachi points out that there are two major imaginary branches along which “the imagination of the Enlightenment was crystallised in Romanian culture” (102). One is “a nationalist branch,” which involves an ethical and teleological dimension, and the other is a rationalist and civic branch, whose major prerequisites for an ideal model of societal organisation are order and legislation.

Informed by Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, which reorients the West’s (pre)conceptions about the East, Călin Teuțișan is interested in the Levantine imaginary of Romanian literature. The distinction between three concepts which are often confused — Orientalism, Byzantinism and Balkanism — clears up the fact that Balkanism is not a current, but it is invested with the quality of being “an atmosphere of the spirit” (117). Under this metaphor, the author identifies certain particularities of this manifestation: precarity and the obsession with gaining power, ambiguous ethics and identities, the poetics of territoriality, an ethics of violence and the image of the wiseman.

Ioana Bot remaps the import of French Romanticism into Romanian literature by discovering a “duplicitous model” (135) whereby local poets engaged with the new sensibility by using ancient forms to express it. Whereas European Romanticism had been faced with “the anxiety of influence” because of its reaction to a previous current, Neoclassicism, in Romania, “the absence of a local tradition against which Romanticism could manifest itself” (137) prevented the onset of anxiety as a dominant phenomenon. In addition to this, the article retraces the “myth of the Romanian national poet” by referring to the image of Mihai Eminescu as a local fiction. It also creates a (counter)balance between the Romantic imaginary with its literary themes

and “the visionary imagery assigned to Eminescu” (149), which caused significant turn in the evolution of Romanian poetry.

Directly related to the social imaginary, the image of the revolution, according to Sanda Cordoș, appears as “a guiding thread” which “spans Romanian literature almost in its entirety” (153). Thus, Cordoș makes a metaphorical distinction between four types of revolutionaries, largely based on the different cultural trends that influenced people who participated in revolutions or just imagined doing so: those who wore top hats (specific to the nineteenth century), those who wore suits (in the first half of the twentieth century), those who wore neckties (in the second half of the twentieth century) and those who wear jeans (in 1989). By proposing this taxonomy, the author points out that the idea of revolution aroused the interest of all literary generations (from pre-Romantic authors to contemporary writers like Bogdan Suceavă, Mircea Cărtărescu or Ruxandra Cesereanu). Sanda Cordoș draws another distinction between the “theme of revolution” linked to “a rich journalistic activity, as well as memoirs” (154), and “the image of revolution,” which is mostly used in fiction.

Corina Croitoru explores the decadent imaginary, starting from Christian images of decadence and moving on to a decadent imaginary which “is consolidated in the major European cultures in the late nineteenth century in order to restore the increasingly acute feeling of the decline of Western civilisation” (174). It is worth noting that this current was appropriated in Romanian literature as “a Decadent movement without decadence” (176) according to Mitchievici. With Hasdeu and then with Macedonski’s poetry, the decadent field expanded beyond its temporal boundaries (the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). In contemporary Romanian literature it permeates the works of Radu Aldulescu, Dan Lungu, Ionuț Chiva and Adrian Schiop.

The next two studies focus on rural and urban literature, respectively. While Cosmin Borza retraces the major lines of the rural imaginary in conjunction with the local modernization process, Ligia Tudurachi brings into discussion the subordination of the Romanian urbanized semantic basin to “the confluence of several currents” (214) – symbolism, modernism and the avant-gardes. Borza’s article focuses on the (un)idealised image of the peasant, so this type of imaginary must be perceived in keeping with the distinction between *rural* and *rustic*, given the ideological movements of nationalist origin which configured the Romanian village as an archetype and manipulated it. Concerning the second paper, Tudurachi relocates the

configurations of the urban imaginary according to the “modernist branch,” which is a fertile zone for the metamorphoses of the city (“the city of mysteries” or “fortress city”), and the “proletarian branch,” completely different from the first. Thus, the latter could be spotted between the workers’ movements of 1930 (interwar literature) and the literature produced in the 1980s and 2000s, when this type of urbanism exhausted its resources.

Corin Braga investigates the case of psychological fiction by highlighting the process through which the theories of Freud, Bergson or Husserl were imported in interwar local criticism and determined the evolution of Romanian prose. This way, “this imaginary constellation changes from the outer reality to the inner one, implying a shift of authorial perspective” (232), thereby favouring subjective narratives, the main examples being Max Blecher’s interwar prose and Camil Petrescu’s Proust-inspired theorising of “the new structure proposed by the psychological novel” (232).

Considering the major impact of the avant-garde in Romanian literature, Ion Pop’s article, *The Challenges of the Avant-garde*, explores the conditions that led to the development of “Romanian extremist modernism” (251): the socio-political modernization process, the sources of the literary avant-garde imaginary, and its three main sources: constructivism, integralism and surrealism. In short, the avant-garde manifested itself in a relatively short period of time and the surrealist group was the only one which “managed to outline a consistent programme” and “a coherent imaginary” (270).

Adriana Stan’s research is based on the literature of authenticity, exploring the variations of this concept in accordance with the evolution of paradigms and literary currents in Romanian literature. Focusing on the interwar period, the author analyses major writers such as Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Mircea Vulcănescu, and Constantin Noica. As Stan contends, for these authors authenticity was related to “multiple philosophical and political paradigms” (273), determining “the intellectualist strand” (281) of their writing. Regarding the post-war and post-communist periods, Adriana Stan points out the emergence of a gradual difference: the presence of some “authenticity effects” (283) for the 80’s generation, and a paroxysm of authenticity for the 2000’s generation, as the latter assumed literature “as a form of living” (285).

Laura T. Ilea investigates the imaginary of exile and diaspora, beginning from Joël Des Rosiers’s concept of “metasporic canon.” In a nutshell, this notion interrogates the relationship between global and local elements, privileging the former

due to certain debatable issues from author to author: the transition which was or was not caused by “a radical rupture,” the problem of an adoptive language and finally the role of diaspora in the writer’s rebranding process. Starting from Nicolae Milescu and Dimitrie Cantemir, considered to be the pioneers of early Romanian literature, Ilea identifies an interesting movement from a transnational (“the overwhelming influence of the Orient”) to a national imagination. The article sheds light on several important representative writers whose careers were deeply (re)shaped within an international context. Martha Bibescu, Elena Văcărescu and Anna de Noailles, who are associated with French culture, Panait Istrati, epitomizing the so-called “great vagabond,” the self-exiled artist of the avant-garde (Tristan Tzara, Paul Celan, Ilarie Voronca etc.) or writers of the 1927 generation, such as Emil Cioran, Eugen Ionescu and Mircea Eliade. All these illustrated the expansion of this canon beyond national borders.

Interested in Romanian socialist-communist literature whose ethics were downright questionable, Horea Poenar revisits the novels of the “obsessive decade,” which tried to break down the narrow ideological frames of the time. Thus, starting from the assumption that the strategy of “double discourse” has become a cliché used by post-communist literary critics in their analyses of these novels, Poenar concludes that not all authors were anti-communists: “The phenomenon is not purely Romanian, but it reflects the neoliberal reluctance to accept the fact that not all authors (or not all valuable authors) were anti-communists” (314). Moreover, the novels of this totalitarian period appear as the “privileged place of negotiation” (315) that facilitated the development of the “political novel,” a genre that “openly assumes the role of discussing history and socio-political forms” (3016).

The following two studies discuss the imaginary of Hungarian and German literature in Romania, respectively. Levente T. Szabo’s article is centred around “the idea of Transylvanianism” and the connections established between Hungarian literature *per se* and Hungarian literature from Romania. Concerning the other research topic, Dana Bizuleanu shows that many factors – geography, language, the socio-political context, demographics – have contributed to creating a specific-literary zone for the German community, a zone that she places under the sign of “cultural hybridity.” According to Szabo, the first international journal of comparative literature, *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* (1877-1888), appeared in Cluj-Napoca thanks to Hugo von Meltzl and Samuel Brassai’s endeavours. Moving further in time, the interwar period was marked by at least two major representatives,

Károly Kós and Áron Tamási. The post-war landscape provided “a long and interesting tradition of the representation of urban Transylvanian space” (337). Dana Bizuleanu focuses on what individualizes the literature produced by writers of German expression (such as the poets of *Aktionsgruppe Banat* or Herta Müller): “ruined spaces, the dimensions of trauma and the plea for a collective memory” (360). All in all, these configure a type of literature that is committed to its socio-political context.

Mihaela Ursa’s take on the postmodern paradigm revisits the notions of textualism and textuality “as forms of a theoretical imaginary” (362). In this sense, there are several theoretical models which are key to Romanian literary criticism. Probably the most influential and fruitful are the “critical metaphors” used by Mircea Martin (“humanity as the origin of creation”), Nicolae Manolescu (“architectural metaphor”) and Ioana Em. Petrescu (“phenomenological configurationism”), actually developing “a narrativist perspective on criticism and theory” (364). Additionally, under the influence of Roland Barthes’s model of the “text as texture,” Romanian textualism is commonly associated with two major directions: the literary critic Marin Mincu, whose background was that of semiology, and the local “80’s textualist current,” strongly influenced by poststructuralism.

Based on theories developed in memory and trauma studies, Alex Goldiș’s article depicts the violent effects of the transition from communism to post-communism in the literature of the 2000s. Thus, poetry seems to best accommodate the representation of trauma through Marius Ianuș, Elena Vlădăreanu, Ruxandra Novac and Dan Sociu, in whose works personal hardships are coupled with the troubles of the socio-political context at the millennial turn. On the other hand, Goldiș remarks that “prose appears as a language of counter-memory” (384) by using several strategies such as the nostalgic remembrance of communism (in Dan Lungu’s *I’m an Old Commie!*) or the exploration of childhood imagery through the trauma of totalitarianism and the “issue of transition” (for example Liliana Corobca’s *Kinderland*, *The Little Girl Who Played God* by Dan Lungu, *Parents* by Diana Bădica or *Good Night, Children!* by Radu Pavel Gheo) or, conversely, the anti-nostalgic reconstruction of the communist past in Lavinia Braniște’s novel, *Sonia Raises Her Hand*.

Finally, Marius Conkan’s article about SF and fantasy literature as “alternative worlds” maps the “Romanian SF Chronotope.” On the one hand, the roots of Romanian proto-SF go back to the second half of the nineteenth century and are

impregnated with a powerful patriotic dimension. On the other hand, during the interwar period, due to imports from the Western World (“SF movies, , massive translations from H.G. Wells, futurology projects,” 400), Romanian SF might speak about the outline of a subgenre often considered minor in Romania. During communism, SF writings were instrumented as “platforms for scientific and ideological popularization” (401) through a mixture of socialist realist aesthetics and translations from Russian SF literature. Ultimately, the end of the twentieth century represents, according to Mihai Iovănel, “the period of this genre’s genuine professionalization” (403), leading to a steady defamiliarization of “the Romanian cultural geography” (408).

To conclude, with these twenty brief forays into the Romanian literary imaginary, the Encyclopaedia outlines the major semantic basins around which the history of Romanian literature may be re-envisaged. To conclude, it is important to mention that a broader orientation which is not limited to traditional approaches of literary history may enable an exploration of the ways in which cultural imports and transfers have generated particular and nuanced contents and phenomena in Romania.