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Corin Braga (ed.), *Enciclopedia imaginariilor din România I. Imaginar literar*. General editor: Corin Braga. Iași, Polirom, 2020, 440 p.

The Encyclopaedia of Romanian Imaginaries, Volume I: Literary Imaginary, edited by Corin Braga, has the makings of a watershed moment in the history of Ro-

manian literary criticism. Across twenty chapters focusing on different domains of representation in Romanian literature, the volume aims for a panoramic “glocalization” (in the sense defined by Roland Robertson in 1995) of the country’s literary output on the European and world stage. Each of these articles traces and synthesizes the history behind various movements, trends, and aspects of Romanian literature through a frame-

work which fuses different theories on the imaginary, as outlined in Braga’s introductory chapter. Thus, constellations of symbols and images are explored through Gilbert Durand’s notion of the “semantic pool”, understood as “elements of representation, imaginary content, images and symbols” (19). Such “pools” can irrigate further trends across history, but also end in attrition (as in the case of the

nationalistic imaginary). The list of contributors to the volume includes: Eleonora Sava, Laura Lazăr, Lionel-Decebal Roșca, Adrian Tudurachi, Călin Teuțișan,

Ioana Bot, Sanda Cordoș, Corina Croitoru, Cosmin Borza, Ligia Tudurachi, Corin Braga, Ion Pop, Adriana Stan, Laura T. Ilea, Horea Poenar, Levente T. Szabó, Dana Bizuleanu, Mihaela Ursa, Alex Goldiș and Marius Conkan. Since an attempt at covering all the twenty chapters in the limited space of this review would do justice to none of them, I will only focus on those that I think would help me paint a better



picture of how the volume manages to articulate Romania’s position within universal and European constellations of images, as well as the literary imaginary through which its contemporary society processes its troubled present and perplexing past. To start with, one of the defining lines of reasoning behind this conceptual framework is informed by Umberto Eco’s notion of Europe as a “work in

progress", waiting for its transnational myth to be created (12). In light of this conception, certain chapters stand out in their immediate relevance to Europe's current geopolitical predicaments. Adrian Tudurachi's "The Semantic Pool of the Enlightenment and the Constellation of the Nationalistic Imaginary" coherently contextualizes the country's past engagement with nationalism within the wider frame of European Enlightenment. However, the author also deftly identifies the idiosyncrasies of Romanian nationalistic literature, such as the functions of lamentations and declarations of disappointment in one's own country, both of which are articulated throughout the semantic pool of the Enlightenment according to an "ideological association between the act of education and communitarian trauma" (108). Tudurachi is also careful to indicate the attrition of this imaginary, lacking "the capacity to reinvent itself" (113). As far as the literature of Romania's minorities is concerned, Levente S. Szabo traces the evolution of a "vindicative" (326) Hungarian imaginary, bent upon championing the Transylvanian culture and natural landscape, into an exceptionalist view of its object, under the influence of historical contingencies and various ethnographic anthologies. However, this "classical Transylvanianism" (328) is also deconstructed by disillusioned Hungarian authors in the nineteenth and twentieth century, with brief, though powerful results. An unexpected, but convincing and relevant twist in this synthesis is the author's ecocritical contextualization Transylvanian cultural hybridity in Áron Tamási's *Abel* trilogy, indicating the novels' "[integration of] the nonhuman, especially nature, in identity games" (335). Laura T. Ilea's article "The Imaginary of Exile and

Diaspora" will potentially become a landmark in the study of Romanian diasporic literature, as it traces the country's "metasporic canon" (following Joël Des Rosiers), which explores "the relations of belonging which do not fit into the cultural references of their native country, nor do they overlap to the point of blending in with the new world" (290). However, the metasporic canon is permanently seconded by the "exilic and diasporic canons," with writers whose experiences as outsiders are "labyrinthic" (290). As such, Romanian diasporic literature is guided, among a host of other elements, by the authors' "rebranding strategies" (296) in the country of their immigration, an issue masterfully analyzed through works by Eugen Ionesco, Mircea Eliade, and Emil Cioran, as well as their relation to a "genealogy of trauma," in the works of Herta Müller, Norman Manea (309). In another chapter, Dana Bizuleanu illustrates how Romanian born German authors deal with the paradox of being cast into a paradoxical liminal position as one of "minority" by critics in their native country, and "marginal" by those in "German speaking countries" (360). Nonetheless, the essay also points to the "radiography, reassembling, and reinvention of the German language" constructed by authors who overcome this predicament as they "map the imaginary of multiple spaces" (361).

On the other hand, Corin Braga also emphasizes the straining self-imagining of European nation states under sociopolitical developments which run from "bottom up, as well as from the top down" (12). With such an attention to a nation's social system, the volume also offers an insightful perspective on the state of contemporary Romanian literature by

tracing the evolution of different imaginaries in the context, as well as the aftermath of the Communist era. A particularly intriguing example is the chapter "Revolution and the Social Imaginary" by Sanda Cordoş. The article follows the constellations of images pertaining to revolutionary scenarios from the nineteenth century to the present, with an increasingly suspicious problematization of the revolutionary figure under the "autonomization of literature from the political" (164) during what has been called the Obsessive decade. After 1989, the recurring revolutionary figure becomes a manipulated agent of an "unseen and unknown conspiracy", as the "mess at the Revolution" is seen through the lens of its marginal characters (167). Disillusioned contemporary authors thus deconstruct the imaginary of this event with an eye to its nefarious political agents. The issue of literary political resistance and retrospective literary appraisal is the focus of Horea Poenar's "Literature as History and Truth (1965-1989)." Through a nuanced close reading of texts which the author organizes according to three identified genres (historiographic, aesthetic, and melancholic realism), it is proven that the Romanian novel between 1965 and 1989 circumvents "explicit politization" as a gesture which not only subverts the political orthodoxy of the Communist regime, but also "[delegitimizes] Western propaganda" (324). This conception runs counter to what Poenar sees as the obviously ideological "black and white reading," (314) which categorizes Romanian authors of the Communist era as either accomplices of the political establishment, or its subtly subversive dissidents.

Adriana Stan's thrilling chapter, "The Authenticist Imaginary" offers a different, though equally convincing perspective on the matter of truth in Romanian literature. Here, the authenticity of the 1980s Generation is proven to stray from the tenets of Western postmodernism, since it "fortifies the role and position [of subjectivity] as the world's (sole) center of coherence" (282), with a focus on the "biographical persona of the author" (283). However, the achievement of an ontological equivalence between "the authenticity of feeling" and "literary artifice" drastically restrains the author's desired capacity to "engage with the real" (284), already compromised by the Communist regime. The conundrum is resolved by the "anti-utopic and post-historical imaginary" (285) outlined by the authenticity taken up by the 2000s Generation. This last point brings us to one of the most politically urgent articles of the volume, "Trauma and Memory in Romanian post-Revolutionary literature", where Alex Goldiş argues that the "analysis of the complex negotiations between consciousness and outside event, between text and context, represents a priority in Romanian literature after 1990" (377). Through an insightful analysis of contemporary novels and poetry (focusing on the "fracturists" (379), Goldiş argues that the semantic interdependence between trauma and the "imaginary of memory" (378) informs the contemporary Romanian novel's capacity to function "as a privileged form for enacting the democratic nature of symbolic forms" (391).

As dazzling as it is methodologically focused, the volume's lasting impact on the Romanian cultural landscape is assured by its renegotiation and subversion

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of its country's literary canon as it has been presented to the general public. Nonetheless, while accessible to a large audience, the volume is far from a mere taxonomy of visual and psychological motifs across the history of Romanian literature, as none of the syntheses falls short

of either attaining radically original assertions on long researched topics, or constructing complex conceptual frameworks in order to bring into frame domains of the literary imagery which have not been given proper attention in the public sphere beforehand.

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