

**“GEORGE EMIL PALADE” UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE, PHARMACY, SCIENCE, AND
TECHNOLOGY OF TÂRGU MUREŞ
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF LETTERS, HUMANITIES AND APPLIED SCIENCES
FIELD: PHILOLOGY**

DOCTORAL THESIS

Abstract

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**THE PHENOMENON OF MIGRATION IN
CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN PROSE**

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Keywords: *migration, identity, alterity, imagology, foreigner, the Other, imagotype*

Migration is a complex socio-cultural phenomenon which, in the current context of globalisation, has become an omnipresent reality. It plays an increasingly important role in shaping societies, altering cultural boundaries, influencing economic realities, and changing destinies. In the case of Romanians, migration initially represented an economic impulse, although it was limited by factors such as distance, resources, and linguistic or cultural differences.

This study starts from the premise that migration has expanded to such an extent that its implications have become visible in the most diverse fields, and Romanian literature is no exception. Literature expresses the influences and consequences that migration has on a society or, more narrowly, on an individual. Texts addressing this subject allow us to explore the phenomenon in depth, discover different perspectives on it, and understand, to a certain extent, the factors that sustain it on the scale it has reached today. Moreover, literature is itself a form of expression of the diaspora, which is why we consider the study of literature dealing with this theme relevant. Migration does not remain merely a social and economic phenomenon mimetically reflected in literature; it becomes an imaginary nucleus that generates meaning, through which literary texts articulate specific forms of identity, alterity, belonging, and memory.

The purpose of our research is to examine how this phenomenon is represented in literature and how literature provides a mirror image of reality, faithfully rendering the experiences, emotions, and processes through which individuals pass in their attempt to construct an identity in an environment dominated by change. We undertake a systematic analysis of representations of migration in the selected corpus by means of imagological tools, paying particular attention to the discursive mechanisms through which the imagotypes of the destination space, the space of departure, and especially the migrant individual are constructed. We have sought to highlight how the experience of migration generates recurrent scenarios—rupture, attempted adaptation, partial integration, and failure—as well as various imagological typologies in which identity is constructed processually and relationally. Thus, the research consistently aimed to identify the main types of imagological representation of migration within the proposed corpus; to analyse the narrative and symbolic mechanisms through which the identity of the individual involved in migration is constructed; to reveal the relationship between the imaginary of migration and different forms of alterity; and to formulate conclusions that may contribute to consolidating a theoretical framework applicable to imagological studies of recent literature.

The motivation for this research arises from the need to move beyond strictly thematic or sociological approaches to the phenomenon and from the desire to propose a reading that foregrounds its symbolic and imaginary dimensions. Although migration is frequently discussed, the concrete application of imagology to contemporary prose remains relatively underexplored, particularly with regard to the relationship between the imaginary of migration and the construction of narrative identity.

The originality of the thesis is significantly enhanced by the fact that the selected authors belong to diverse categories, allowing multiple openings through their different perspectives on the phenomenon: the sociologist's perspective (Dan Lungu), the perspective of the migrant settled abroad (Bogdan Suceavă), and that of the individual unable to adapt to the host society (Radu Pavel Gheo), among others. Furthermore, the chosen texts belong to recent literature and therefore accurately capture the phenomenon's current implications. Throughout the research, we have consistently sought to establish an explicit correlation between migration studies and literary imagology, systematically applied to contemporary prose. Migration is treated not merely as a theme, but as a fundamental principle organising narrative discourse.

The approaches used throughout the research are varied, beginning with bibliographic documentation and continuing with an interdisciplinary perspective: the texts are examined through the connections among sociology, politics, economics, literature, and imagology. Comparative analysis is also employed, since migration is viewed both from the perspective of the present and through the lens of its evolution; both from the standpoint of those directly involved in migration and from that of those who remain in the place of origin; and, comparatively, through perspectives of the migrant and perspectives on the migrant.

The thesis is divided into two parts—theoretical considerations and analyses—organised into five chapters. Chapter I, *The Phenomenon of Migration. Conceptual Delimitations*, explains concepts related to migration: causes, types, theories, stages, integration mechanisms, and others. Migration is a means of global interconnection. The theoretical section presented in this chapter highlights and briefly analyses the basic notions associated with this omnipresent phenomenon. It is impossible to confine migration within the limits of a single definition; consequently, we present multiple perspectives. The theoretical framework approaches the phenomenon from economic, social, cultural, and political viewpoints. Following general considerations on this large-scale phenomenon, attention is given to the causes that triggered and sustained it, especially after 1989. The factors underlying migration are demographic, economic, and/or political. The impact of each

factor on Romania's population is detailed on the basis of existing specialist studies. A substantial part of the chapter is devoted to theories and types of migration, as well as to the phenomenon of brain drain. The exodus of intellectuals is caused by diverse factors, ranging from the lack of opportunities to political instability and economic crisis. We therefore propose a detailed analysis of the factors that initiated and maintained this phenomenon, identify its defining features, and compare it with the exodus of the labour force.

The discussion then turns to several concepts essential to the topic: exile, migration, and diaspora. The final part of the chapter considers the evolution of migration both globally and in Romania. The phenomenon is approached from the general to the specific: after presenting a broad global context, we focus on migration within the European space and subsequently on Romanian migration. The current state of the phenomenon is presented through the analysis and interpretation of specialist studies, statistical data, and its cultural, social, and demographic effects.

The first chapter concludes with a detailed presentation of mechanisms for migrant integration. This section does not overlook an element that contributes substantially to the integration of Romanians in host countries and to the formation of large Romanian communities abroad: the importance of religion and priests, both as factors of community cohesion and as sources of social and emotional support. Diaspora churches often function as community centres, providing assistance and contributing to emigrants' well-being and integration. The bibliographic sources used in this first chapter include works by Remus Gabriel Anghel, István Horváth, Alexandra Bucur-Ioan, Mihai Iovănel, and others.

Chapter II, *The Imagological Sphere*, presents imagology and the approach it entails. Imagology provides the methodological framework required to understand how contemporary Romanian literature reflects and configures the image of the Other and the self-image. The study of the imagological sphere reveals the constructive, dynamic, and reflexive character of images of alterity, showing that they do not reflect objective external realities but result from cultural and ideological processes through which a community defines its own identity in relation to the Other. The imagological sphere must be understood as an intermediate space between the real and the imaginary, where cultural facts and symbolic representations intertwine in a hermeneutic tension: the image of the Other is always a form of self-definition. Imagology thus becomes an indispensable critical instrument for understanding how identities are constructed, negotiated, and asserted within cultural discourses. It offers a solid methodological framework for analysing modes of representing

alterity and dismantling the mechanisms through which stereotypes are naturalised, thereby contributing to a more ethical and nuanced reading of contemporary texts and cultural contexts.

Chapter III, *Romanian Literature after 1989 and the Phenomenon of Migration*, serves as a bridge between the theoretical concepts presented earlier and the analytical chapters. The theme of migration emerges as an effect of the freedom of movement acquired with the opening of the borders. Through literature, an external phenomenon is transformed into a complex field of moral, affective, and symbolic tensions. The experience of migration frequently organises the deep structure of the narrative. Leaving the country and all the consequences generated by this decision become mechanisms that shape conflict, character psychology, and the text's internal logic. The migrant character undergoes an existential rupture and is marked by ambivalence, by the tension between hope and disillusionment. This character's identity is unstable, continuously reconfigured between here and there, and therefore cannot be assimilated either to the classical figure of the exile or to that of the individual fully integrated into a new culture. The migrant is a character of rupture, incomplete adaptation, and problematic belonging. Other essential themes derive from the migration experience: the dissolution and reconfiguration of the family, childhood profoundly affected by parental absence, precarity, social shame, gender vulnerability, the memory of the place of origin, and the permanent tension between the idealisation and disenchantment of the West.

Chapter IV, *Representations of Migration from the Perspective of Those Left Behind: Absence, Affective Dislocation, and the Destabilisation of the World of Origin*, analyses the following novels: Dan Lungu's *Fetița care se juca de-a Dumnezeu* (2014), Andreea Răsuceanu's *Vântul, duhul, suflarea* (2020), Liliana Corobca's *Kinderland* (2013), and Filip Florian's *Toate bufnițele* (2012). For each novel, two aspects are considered: the author's biographical background and the influences visible in his or her work, and an imagological analysis of the selected novel.

In *Fetița care se juca de-a Dumnezeu*, the narrative construction may be approached from a complex imagological perspective. In Dan Lungu's novel, the image of the child becomes a vector for projecting a family imaginary distorted by the parents' departure for work abroad. During a crucial stage of her development, Rădița lacks a parental model capable of influencing her. Consequently, in the parents' absence, she projects a model of identity; through the imaginary, certain objects—such as the old sweet tin—and personal myths come to replace the much-needed parental model. What emerges is a mental image, a representation crystallised around parental alterity and determined by the absence of the maternal figure. The novel's imagological effectiveness is also created through the alternation of registers: the child represents sensitivity,

imagination, and fabulation; the migrant adult represents pragmatism and social negotiation; the community left at home establishes a regime of norms, judgement, and gossip; while the host society and the working environment in Italy outline hierarchies and various reciprocal stereotypes.

In *Kinderland*, the emphasis falls on the effects of migration on those left behind at home. The centre of gravity of representation thus shifts from the migrant individual to the affective universe of absence. Childhood becomes a space vulnerable to the consequences of departure, while the family imaginary is deeply fragmented and demythologised. The figure of the migrant parent is constructed almost exclusively through absence, projection, and substitution. The domestic space loses its protective function and becomes a place of instability and premature maturation. A tense image of the West takes shape, although it is not represented directly, but only through the indirect effects it exerts on the space of origin. Alterity thus becomes an indirect yet decisive agency capable of reorganising the imaginary of family and community relations.

The imagological analysis of *Kinderland*, grounded in the theoretical coordinates provided by the anthropology of the imaginary and Ricœurian hermeneutics, demonstrates that alterity cannot be reduced to intercultural relations. Instead, an internal map of alterities is produced, within which family and social relationships are traversed by strong symbolic tensions. In the novel, the Other is the absent mother, the father deprived of authority, the vulnerable siblings, the child-adult abandoned by society, the resigned community, hegemonic foreignness, or absent institutions. Alterity is therefore not merely an effect of difference; it is presented as the result of a profound structural rupture caused by economic migration.

In *Vântul, duhul, suflarea*, migration is problematised differently: the border, the attempted crossing, and absence become symbolic nuclei of the identity experience. The novel highlights the dramatic suspension between worlds, between shores, and between incompatible forms of belonging. Migration is associated with irreversible rupture, historical trauma, and the impossibility of return. Moreover, the subject is denied full reconciliation between the desired space and the inhabited space and remains permanently suspended in uncertainty. Alterity is foregrounded through its symbolic dimension, while space is no longer merely a setting for crossing but a surface on which memory and loss are powerfully inscribed. Migration becomes a way of living between worlds without the possibility of genuine identity stabilisation.

Toate bufnitele proves to be a novel of diffuse mobility, of biographies reshaped by departure, illness, and memory, and of distances that cannot be reduced to the border. It reveals a network of existential fissures, while the biographical centre is marked by instability. Filip Florian

does not portray the classical case of the national foreigner; instead, he develops a discourse on proximate alterity, treated ethically, subtly, and contextually, without privileging stereotypes.

Identity is constructed through closeness to the Other rather than through reference to existing differences. The text shifts the emphasis from ethno-cultural alterity to relational and temporal alterity. The characters and the past itself become figures of the Other, constructing both idem-identity and ipse-identity through narrative and transmission. The symbols encountered generate a series of images that lead towards the nocturnal regime of the work, while the imaginary uses memory to reconstruct those existential aspects affected by devastating time. Migration, imagology, and memory intertwine densely, generating a poetics of absence and transmission. Imagological discourse is oriented towards intimate alterity. The imaginary has a functional role: it seeks to mitigate the devastating effects of history and mobility and becomes a form of identity survival.

The text therefore integrates migration into a more subtle narrative construction, in which mobility and the relation to alterity compose a universe where the social effect of departure remains in the background and primary importance is assigned to its inner and cultural reverberations. Here migration is linked to the dynamics of relationships and to the ways in which proximity and distance alter the perception of the self, others, places, and time. Identity is formed through contact, comparison, and the internalisation of difference, while the Other becomes an agency that compels the individual to redefine his or her position in the world. The selected novel completes the picture offered by the other texts and nuances the idea that migration is also a form of mobility of consciousness, an opening towards multiple identity perspectives.

Chapter V, Representations of Migration from the Perspective of Those Who Left: Mobility, Encounter with Alterity, and Identity Reconstruction, is devoted to the analysis of the following novels: Radu Pavel Gheo's *Noapte bună, copii!* (2010), Bogdan Perțache's *Visul canadian* (2023), Bogdan Suceavă's *Avalon. Secretele emigranților fericiți* (2019), and Gabriela Adameșteanu's *Fontana di Trevi* (2018). The chapter follows the structure of the preceding one and, for each author, presents biographical aspects and influences on the author's work, followed by an imagological analysis of the selected novel. This analytical chapter introduces a change of perspective, since the texts represent migration from the standpoint of the individual directly involved in it.

In Radu Pavel Gheo's *Noapte bună, copii!*, the imaginary of the West is constructed as a space of freedom, escape from existing constraints, and promise. The differences between the imagined West and encountered reality create fissures in the characters' consciousness. The

destination space becomes the background against which the characters confront their own limits, while the constant oscillation between fascination and lucidity significantly shapes identity. From an imagological perspective, the novel is relevant because the image of the West initially functions as the myth of a compensatory space and later becomes a raw, demythologised reality. The narrative traces in detail the process through which concrete contact with alterity profoundly modifies prior representations and produces a more realistic view of the Western world.

The novel constructs migration as a total and comprehensive mechanism: economic, symbolic, affective, and bodily. Departure automatically entails a reordering of memory and a rewriting of the self in relation to the Other. The border functions as a central nucleus of migration's meaning, a threshold between two worlds, but also a space of violence and identity reconfiguration. The novel's imagology is constructed along the self-Other and here-there axes, while the continuous alternation of voices connects migration with an imaginary of childhood that remains unresolved even after more than a decade. Childhood returns as phantasm, guilt, or inheritance, while "beyond" is no longer merely an idealised space, but a way of being.

Visul canadian makes significant use of an imaginary of success, emphasising its gradual erosion and demythologisation. Migration is related to an external model initially perceived as a saving solution. Later, once internalised and confronted with external reality, this model loses the attributes that made it so desirable and reveals its fragility. The individual's displacement is accompanied by the degradation of a collective fantasy, and the West ceases to be seen as a salvific space capable of resolving the social and personal crises of individuals arriving from the East. The analysed text shows that images of foreign countries circulate as formulas of prestige, hope, and compensation, but are revised when they encounter direct experience.

Migration is organised and presented as a succession of borders that are not merely geographical, but also institutional, cultural, economic, and affective. The imagological approach proposed here illustrates how these borders produce particular imagotypes of the West—seen as order, sanction, and filter—of Romania—marked by bureaucracy and improvisation—and of the migrant as an identity negotiated in motion. With regard to identity and the consequences of migration upon it, ipseity is reconfigured through ruptures, promises, and the reordering of significant relationships. At the narrative level, the imaginary takes shape through the tension between antithesis and demythologisation. The specificity of Bogdan Perțache's novel lies in his ability to place projection and disenchantment, hope and limitation, dream and administrative procedure within the same narrative frame.

Avalon. *Secretele emigranților fericiți* foregrounds the continuous and direct confrontation between the appearance of success and the subtler layers of estrangement. It problematises the rhetoric of the intellectual emigrant's success and questions the image of smooth integration without affective costs. The emigrant's world is constructed through attempts at adaptation, identity duplication, and permanent negotiation between appearance and depth. Migration produces social and cultural changes as well as identity fragmentation. The subject is compelled to live permanently on the fault line between the public image of achievement and the intimate truth of dislocation. The cliché of the fulfilled, successful emigrant is destabilised, and the novel proposes a more critical reading of integration.

The novel presents the displacement of a young intellectual which, in imagological terms, also generates a displacement of images. Familiar stereotypes that recur in migration prose undergo a mutation here. The Romanian emigrant is no longer vulnerable but competent and passes through a process of self-reconstruction; America moves from idealisation to concrete experience, while Romania becomes a space subjected to renewed critical questioning, and the image of home is constructed through professional and affective configurations. Against the background of post-communist academic migration, Bogdan Suceavă constructs powerful self-images and hetero-images. The purpose is not simply to represent alterity, but to show how it profoundly restructures the subject.

An imagological configuration is built around five important nuclei: the self-image of the anxious Eastern European, vulnerable to suspicion and attentive to his own evaluation; the hetero-image of the West as an agency of control; the hetero-image of Romania as a space of professional limitation; the centre–periphery relationship; and the redefinition of home as an ambivalent space, loved yet necessary to leave. The text idealises neither America nor Romania, but highlights the tension between the two spaces, showing how migrant identity is reconstructed through a process of passage.

The identity crisis arises from the individual's constant need to justify himself, explain his name, and prove his worth. All these generate anxiety when the protagonist relates to the new space, yet they may also produce happiness when he relates to the space of origin. Identity is constructed in the tension between one's gaze upon oneself and the gaze of the Other, between the desire for self-assertion and the melancholy of separation. The Romanian migrant's identity emerges at the intersection of self-image, hetero-image, the border space, and the imaginary of a new world. The “happy emigrant” in the title is a critical and ironic figure: behind apparent happiness lies a rupture,

and behind the rupture lies the laborious process of reconstructing a self fragmented between two worlds.

Bogdan Suceavă's novel is constructed along three dimensions: from an imagological perspective, it is an imagotypical text; from a hermeneutic perspective, it is a discourse that stages meanings of emigration; and from the perspective of identity, it is a novel of the self reconstructed through alterity.

The final novel analysed, *Fontana di Trevi*, offers a distinct view of migration, presenting it in close connection with memory, biography, and the depth of affective attachments. Movement between two spaces also involves crossing temporal, existential, affective, and symbolic layers. The author traces in detail how the experience of foreignness influences the perception of the past, of relationships, and of one's own becoming. Alterity cannot be reduced to pure exteriority; it forms part of a broader process in which the subject is compelled to reconfigure herself through the accumulation of successive distances from the place of origin, from the past, and from earlier versions of the self. The relevance of the text lies in its ability to capture the interference between the image of the other space and the retrospective image of one's own life.

The concepts central to our analysis—imagology, migration, identity, and the imaginary—converge in the novel. The sequences depicting conversations between Letiția and Sultana or between Letiția and Petru describe the reciprocal production of images of others and of stereotypes. The imaginary is organised especially around the house, the fountain, and return. Identity appears as a fragmented construction composed of spatial and narrative layers. The novel becomes an extensive meditation on the impossibility, for a being detached from an original condition, of ever fully belonging again to a single place, a single time, or a single self.

In this sense, the text may be read not only as a novel of migration, but also as a novel of internal alterity and of differences produced within the same community. The novel succeeds in shifting alterity from a strictly geopolitical plane to the ethics of memory. The problem of alterity no longer centres solely on the Other, the foreigner, but directly concerns the individual deemed entitled to speak about the past and claim a legitimate memory. The unequal distribution of historical experiences is exposed, together with the manner in which this generates differences of identity and discourse. The imagology of the external foreigner is relegated to the background, while the emphasis falls on the imagology of a proximity that has become difficult to recognise. Exile and trauma dissolve the essence of the community and transform it into a space of differences. In the

novel, the Other is the Romanian who left, the Romanian who remained, the post-communist young person, and also the self.

The analytical chapters confirm that contemporary Romanian literature has thematised migration in a complex manner, avoiding its reduction to documentary value and transforming the experience of mobility into fertile ground for reflections on identity, alterity, and the social imaginary. A field of representations emerges in which hope and trauma, fascination and disillusionment, rupture and reconfiguration coexist. Migration is illustrated as an experience that profoundly transforms relations between the self and the world, while displacement results in the fragmentation of the worlds left behind, the resemanticisation of spaces of belonging, and the permanent negotiation of identity.

Each selected text highlights the ambiguity of migration: it may signify escape, success, failure, disappointment, or the loss of balance and identity. One of the central ideas of the research emerges from the ambivalence presented by the analysed novels: migration is not represented as an idealised phenomenon, but as one that destabilises previous certainties and compels the individual to live among multiple cultural, affective, and symbolic codes.

Throughout the research, migration has been presented as a phenomenon that exceeds the simple meaning of geographical displacement and becomes an experience of identity rupture through which the relations between the migrant individual and family, society, language, and memory are radically reorganised. In the Romanian context, the phenomenon developed significantly after 1989 and is directly linked to the removal of restrictions on movement and to the social and economic transformations specific to the post-communist transition. Through migration literature, the transition period becomes a means of projecting and observing mobility, uprooting, identity dramas, and problematic returns, as experience is internalised within a new literary theme.

Migration does not always produce only loss; in most situations, it also brings about social and identity recalibration. Circumstances force the migrant individual constantly to compare himself or herself with others, negotiate identity, reassess abilities, and live permanently within a regime of doubleness, oscillating between a here and a there. In the texts that make up the analytical corpus, migration becomes an epistemological device for understanding literature after 1989.

Thus, in contemporary Romanian prose, migration is an experience of existential rupture that changes identity, family, the relationship to the concept of “home,” and social relations. From an imagological perspective, it activates self-image and the image of the Other—that is, the ways in which the space of origin, the destination space, and the relationship between them are represented.

In Romanian literature after 1989, migration becomes a central theme because it expresses the tensions of transition particularly well: freedom and uprooting, hope and loss, departure and estrangement. Post-1989 prose transforms migration into an essential means of understanding identity and alterity.

When brought together, the images offered by the analysed novels form a complex map of Romanian migration after 1989. The texts tell different stories and thus capture most of the implications of migration. Dan Lungu and Liliana Corobca show the cost of migration for the child left at home; Andreea Răsuceanu radicalises the theme through the tragedy of an illegal border crossing and the figure of the border-crosser who disappears; Radu Pavel Gheo discusses the seduction and demythologisation of the American imaginary; Bogdan Perțache explores departure as a dream of identity reconstruction; Bogdan Suceavă captures intellectual migration and the irony of success purchased at a high price; and finally, Gabriela Adameșteanu traces the biographical sedimentation of migration within a consciousness shaped by transition.

Migration has become one of the major thematic and imagological sources of contemporary Romanian literature. It compels the text to rethink family, childhood, memory, and self-image. Moreover, migration literature produces a new type of character: the mobile, fractured subject who can no longer be understood outside the relationship between here and beyond. In this kind of literature, migration is not merely a subject, but a principle that restructures narrative sensibility.

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