

An Englishman in Romania: An Imagological Reading of Mike Ormsby's *Never Mind the Balkans, Here's Romania*

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Abstract

*Connecting back with an already well-established tradition of scholarly explorations of images of Romanianness, as emerging from (non)fictional representations of cross-cultural, Anglo-Romanian encounters, the present paper focuses on one of the most recent textual productions foregrounding an English traveller's gaze on his Romanian hosts, namely Mike Ormsby's collection of short stories *Never Mind the Balkans, Here's Romania* (2008). Applying an imagological grid to it, the paper aims at providing evidence in defence of the idea that, at least after 1989, the English observers' attitudes towards and, implicitly, textual mirroring of Romania have undergone significant changes. In doing that, it reflects upon the 'game' of auto- and hetero-images at the heart of the narrative discourse as meant to point to both an awareness of cultural differences and the need to overcome cultural biases in one's mind with a view to successful intercultural communication in the context of globalisation-driven societal transformations.*

Keywords: travel writing, imagology, cultural anthropology, Romanianness, stereotype.

Introduction

Though speaking of a Romanian 'school of imagology' may seem somewhat far-fetched, it is undeniable that, especially over the last two decades, interest in the study of textual representations of identity construction and cultural differences influenced by (more or less successful) intercultural communication within and across Romanian borders has increased, determining more and more Romanian scholars to make use of the conceptual tools provided by imagology, now a fully-fledged interdisciplinary research field, for the investigation of a wide range of texts. The lack of Romanian contributions to further

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(re)shaping, theoretically, imagological analysis grids has been, nonetheless, made up for by the issuing of numerous studies in applied imagology dwelling on representations of Romanianness as seen in the foreign other's 'mirror' and/or as defined by multicultural interactions [1]. Some of the most noteworthy of these studies focus on texts that foreground Anglo-Romanian encounters and they seek to cast light on various discursively constructed images of Englishness and Romanianness as intrinsically related to and determined by various factors characterising the context of both text production and text reception.

The present paper aims at taking further the tradition established by this particular trend in imagological studies: it sets out to examine the account of an Englishman's 'adventures' in post-communist Romania – Mike Ormsby's *Never Mind the Balkans, Here's Romania* (2008) – in order to highlight the dynamics of discursively-constructed images of the English observer (self-images or auto-images) and the Romanian observed other (hetero-images), in full awareness of their subjective, intertextual nature but also of their being "properties of their context" (Leerssen n.d.), therefore deeply anchored in recent transformations influencing political and social realities, attitudes and behaviours in a Romanian society that is still seeking the 'right path to follow' after the 1989 change of regime.

What's in an Image?

Even if their origins are traceable as far back as the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries (Leerssen 2007: 17-20), image studies – in the frame of which 'image' is understood not as a mere instrument of visual communication but as "the mental or discursive representation or reputation of a person, group, ethnicity or 'nation'" (Leerssen 2007: 342) – have gradually emerged throughout the twentieth century, not without being, at times, more or less virulently attacked [2], but ultimately managing to demonstrate the validity of a comprehensive, composite type of analysis in which the methods and concerns of literary studies (to be more specific, comparative literary studies), cultural studies and anthropology blend. The latter half of the twentieth century, in particular, witnessed the rise of different European 'schools' of imagology whose leading figures are Hugo Dyserinck (at the University of Aachen), Daniel-Henri Pageaux (at the Paris-Sorbonne University) and Joep Leerssen (at the University of Amsterdam). Their models of imagological investigation

(two of which – Pageaux’s and Leerssen’s – are obviously influenced by Structuralism) share the premise that the object of imagological research is not empirical reality but a set of textual tropes, subjective representations of national and/or cultural differences articulated in and disseminated primarily by literary texts (though recent research has proven that imagology may be successfully applied to other forms of “imagined discourse” such as film or some genres of journalism – Leerssen 2007: 26-28), in certain historical and cultural contexts. In other words, their strength lies in their drawing on the complementarity of auto-images and hetero-images (whether stereotypical or not) as discursive constructs which, moreover, better reveal their complexity when contextualised, perceived as links in a literary tradition as well as markers of social and cultural dynamics triggered by intercultural contacts/ cross-cultural encounters within a certain spatial and temporal frame.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that, while the imagological grids of Dyserinck, Pageaux and Leerssen are reminiscent mostly of developments in literary and cultural studies related to concerns about identity and alterity, an equally valuable contribution to enlarging the ‘umbrella’ of imagology has come from social psychology and cultural anthropology, hence from the examination of the force lines underlying national and organisational cultures with an aim at accounting for “*the how and the why* of a certain representation of the foreign other” (Gavriliu 2002: 6). Due mention must be made, in this respect, of Geert Hofstede’s analytical model, which has developed over the years to include, next to the four cultural dimensions initially identified by the Dutch scholar, i.e., power distance, collectivism/individualism, femininity/masculinity and uncertainty avoidance, further distinctions based on “the choice between future and present virtue” and the “attitude towards time and traditions” (long-term orientation/short-term orientation) (Hofstede, Pedersen, Hofstede 2002: 39), as well as on “indulgence/restraint” (Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov 2010). Of course, Hofstede’s theory has been subject to criticism, yet its conceptual patterns may turn out useful for the better understanding of the mechanisms behind one’s cultural biases and, implicitly, of the subjective textual representations of the other that one observer of a foreign culture may put forth in various types of discourses. That is precisely the reason why Hofstede’s cultural dimensions model has been integrated in the imagological grid applied for the analysis of Mike Ormsby’s text in the next subsections.

Tropes of Romanianness in British Writers' Texts - a Diachronic Perspective

One of the points that should be made about Joep Leerssen's imagological theory is that it articulates more clearly than those of his predecessors, Dyserinck and Pageaux, the importance of the intertextual nature of self/other representations at the discursive level. Therefore, part of the imagological exploration of any text that reflects upon cross-cultural interaction should be dedicated to identifying the tradition to which it belongs, laying stress on the principles of appreciation/depreciation that underlie images of otherness as textual tropes (Leerssen 2007: 28). In this particular case, that implies reconsidering representational practices in discourses on Romania prior to the last decade of the twentieth century.

Especially when it comes to texts produced in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, such an endeavour may benefit from the impressive amount of work carried out by Romanian imagologists interested in Anglo-Romanian intercultural interactions. Their analyses seem to converge toward the conclusion that, as Pia Brânzeu points out in one of her most recent imagological studies, these accounts relied extensively on negative stereotypes of Romanianness, emphasising Romanians' inferiority and the serious discrepancy between Eastern Europe, Romania included, and Western Europe.

Whether diplomats, merchants, or simple tourists, such eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travellers as Lady Elizabeth Craven (*A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople*), Adam Neale (*Travels through Some Parts of Germany, Poland, Moldavia and Turkey*), William MacMichael (*A Journey from Moscow to Constantinople in the Years 1817, 1818*), William Wilkinson (*An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia*), Patrick O'Brien (*Journal of a Residence in the Danubian Principalities in the Autumn & Winter of 1853*), and J. W. Ozanne (*Three Years in Romania*) avoided going beyond a superficial contact with the local population and preferred to perpetuate what Karl Heitman calls "imagological clichés": the lamentable economic situation was due to foreign domination and local indifference; the aristocracy was, in spite of its French education, too immoral to be interested in the progress of the principalities; both men and women were very religious, but too easily involved in love affairs; the hospitality of both the aristocracy and the simple people was proverbial and had a long tradition; and the landscape was invitingly romantic, in spite of the terrible roads (Brânzeu 2010: 550).

The sense of superiority of the English/British travellers to the Balkans and, therefore, to countries like Romania, which stretched at 'the edge of Europe', caused them to project in their texts a stereotype-ridden image of their hosts echoing orientalist discourses centred on the relationship between the colonisers and the colonised (though Romania was not a colony of the British empire).

Following the evolution of images of Romania in twentieth-century British texts, Pia Brânzeu remarks that, as suggested in fictional writings like Olivia Manning's *Balkan Trilogy*, in the early decades of the twentieth century, the representation of Romania as an exotic, yet underdeveloped, 'barbarous' country populated by uncreative and morally dubious people endured, indeed, yet it was counterbalanced by positive images of Romanianness (praising the hospitality, the wit and humour of the Romanian people), which contributed to "deconstruct[ing] the myth of the primitive periphery" (Brânzeu 2010: 551).

In the post-World War II historical and ideological context, the clusters of textual tropes dominating representations of Romania in the English/British (non)fictional 'mirror' unavoidably incorporated images related to the consequences of the totalitarian communist regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu on the Romanian economy, societal structures and culture. More often than not, they served to sustain the same 'old' conclusion: that the "inhuman, decayed East" was no match for the "liberal and democratic West (i.e. Britain)" (Brânzeu 2010: 551).

However, British travel literature and fiction produced after the fall of the communist regime have revealed significant changes in the British observers' attitudes towards the Romanian other. Pia Brânzeu finds in the works of Paul Bailey, Georgina Harding, Alan Brownjohn, Hugo Hamilton or Dervla Murphy an eagerness "to transcend the clichés of colonialism", to consider Romanians' otherness less threatening and to embark, more open-mindedly, on a quest for self-knowledge as well as for knowledge about a different culture (2010: 553). It is in the light of this major change in British writers' attitudes towards the other – that Pia Brânzeu circumscribes to "a larger post-colonial trend" (2010: 553) – that the emergence, in Mike Ormsby's *Never Mind the Balkans, Here's Romania*, of fresh combinations of positive and negative images of Romania, mostly aimed at deconstructing 'old' stereotypes of Romanianness, yet occasionally still reviving them, more or less explicitly, or hinting at the 'birth' of new ones, will be further considered.

Mike Ormsby's Text in Context

The relationship between text and context is of utmost importance for imagologists as they embark upon the process of decoding textual representations of self and other. Even when the imagological grid does not explicitly foreground it, it is always implied in the way in which the exploration of the meanings of the text in focus is carried out, systematically going back to historical and ideological frames, anthropological information and intertextual connections. For instance, though there is no literal reference to 'context' in Daniel-Henri Pageaux's presentation of his model of imagological analysis in *La Littérature générale et comparée* (1994), the emphasis that the imagologist places on "the ideological and political conditioning of the 'image'" (Kapor 2011: 405), his awareness of the fact that "at a given historical moment and in a given culture, it is not possible to say or to write anything about the Other" (Pageaux qtd. in Kapor 2011: 403), as well as his interest in images as an expression of the dialogue between literary traditions and texts point to the inherent need to move, in the process of analysis, from the micro - linguistic - level to the macro-level of the context in which the text is encoded and decoded.

Again, Joep Leerssen has the merit of putting forward a more systematic consideration of the relationship text - context in imagological terms. Not only must images be connected to the tradition of "a given national representation as trope", but they must also be: "contextualized within the text of [their] occurrence" (taking into account the text type, the genre conventions at work as well as the status, prominence and function of the identified national tropes within those parameters); subject to "historical contextualization"; and, last but not least, commented upon from the perspective of the reception of the text (identifying the target audience and the impact of the text on it) (Leerssen 2007: 28).

Therefore, if conducting a survey of tropes of Romanianness present in (non)fictional texts produced, from (at least) the eighteenth century to the present day, by British writers, may help establish the intertext of certain representations of Romania in relation to which Mike Ormsby's images of the Romanian other should be considered, for the full contextualization of Ormsby's text, further steps must be taken.

One of them is identifying the genre that Mike Ormsby's *Never Mind the Balkans, Here's Romania* is illustrative for. Recording the author's experiences as a traveller within and, occasionally, across the Romanian borders, the text may be easily labelled as a travel book. The disclaimer below the bio note that opens the book seems to confirm it: "These stories

are based on fact. Spooky but true.” (Ormsby 2008: 2) Indeed, Mike Ormsby’s book is hardly a traditional travel journal or diary: it is structured into 57 short stories in which the boundary between fact and fiction is definitely blurred. Despite the disclaimer’s insisting on the accuracy of the information provided by the English observer (otherwise expected from a former BBC reporter and trainer of journalists at BBC School in Bucharest), the book impresses less by its reportage dimension and more by the skilfully-crafted story-telling. Seeking to present the information in an enjoyable manner, the writer opts for various literary devices, chief among which the dominance of showing over telling, in order to reconstruct his encounters with Romanians in a vivid, sometimes intriguing, sometimes amusing manner. For all its unusual structure for a travelogue, Mike Ormsby’s *Never Mind the Balkans, Here’s Romania* fits perfectly into the definition given to travel writing as a genre: offering, as Paul Fussell puts it, “a ‘creative’ mediation between fact and fiction” (qtd. in Thompson 2011: 30), it is definitely “a constructed, crafted artefact, which should never be read naively as just a transparent window on the world” (Thompson 2011: 30).

Given that Mike Ormsby, the journalist and freelance writer, assumes in *Never Mind the Balkans, Here’s Romania* the two, potentially conflicting, roles of a reporter and a story-teller (see Thompson 2011: 27), the text may, at the same time, be ascribed to the genre of creative nonfiction. Lately in vogue, this genre has been given numerous names: ‘literary journalism’, ‘new journalism’, ‘literary/dramatic nonfiction’, ‘new nonfiction’, ‘literature of fact’, ‘literature of reality’ (Rees Cheney 2001: 1), ‘docufiction’ (Brânzeu 2010: 553), etc. Aimed at teaching and, simultaneously, entertaining the reader, creative nonfiction – irrespective of the form it takes (travel writing included) – must abide by what Lee Gutkind calls a “cardinal rule” that “cannot be violated”: “You cannot make this stuff up!” (*Creative Nonfiction. True Stories, Well Told*. Online magazine 2012). In this light, Mike Ormsby’s above mentioned disclaimer actually functions as “an artistic statement” meant to establish “a bond of trust” between him and his readers (Miller and Paola 2005: ix): his is a hybrid text that, in terms of Lee Gutkind’s “five Rs” (qtd. in Miller and Paola 2005: x), combines the meticulous reporter’s ‘Research’ on facts with imagination and ‘Reflection’ on personal experiences and the world, in order to convey, through ‘Riting’ that is heavily shaped by the use of various literary devices, a truth - the writer’s truth - about ‘Real Life’, to be benefitted from through ‘Reading’.

As a matter of fact, the categorisation of *Never Mind the Balkans, Here's Romania* as creative nonfiction is sustained not only by the disclaimer, but by the major characteristics of the text which fit into the pattern described by Barbara Lounsberry in *The Art of Fact* (1990). First of all, it tackles what the critic calls "documentable subject matter chosen from the real world as opposed to 'invented' from the writer's mind" (1990: xiii). Through "historical contextualization" (Leerssen 2007: 28), this is revealed to be related to the process of transition from communism to capitalism in post-1989 Romania, which brought about radical changes in the country's economy, social and political structures, as well as in the Romanians' cultural practices, sense of identity and attitudes towards the others, against the background of which massive emigration (characterised by the constant modification of emigration trends) and the endeavours to meet the conditions for joining the Schengen Area and the European Union must be particularly considered.

Secondly, the text is the result of Mike Ormsby's "exhaustive research" (Lounsberry 1990: xiii-xiv), carried out throughout more than a decade – from 1994, when he first visited Romania as a BBC reporter, to 2007, the moment of Romania's accession to the EU, when he had already been a resident in Romania for years – which allowed him "novel perspectives" (Lounsberry 1990: xiii-xiv) on Romanians at home and abroad and helped him construct convincing images of Romanianness. That Mike Ormsby definitely managed to lend his narratives credibility is confirmed by several reviewers of his book for various Romanian newspapers or (online) magazines: they praise the "high degree of professionalism" characterising his presentation of "the facts as they are" (*Expatriomania.ro* qtd. in Ormsby n.d.) and his subtle knowledge of the slightest nuances of everyday life in post-communist Romania (Bittel 2008), remark that he "sees Romania very clearly" (Spineanu qtd. in Ormsby n.d.) and definitely recognise in his book "a mirror, made in England" of Romania (Mititelu qtd. in Ormsby n.d.), "neither a façade, nor caricature, but reality – today's Romania" (Bittel 2008).

Thirdly, *Never Mind the Balkans, Here's Romania* abounds in scenes; that is another characteristic which Lounsberry presents as crucial in defining creative nonfiction. Taking distance from the guide book structure, which lays particular stress on places that tourists should know about and visit, Mike Ormsby's text demonstrates interest, above all, in the people he meets and/or is told about. It is true that the book contains several descriptive passages focusing, at one extreme, on the wild natural

landscape, of a dazzling beauty, almost “too good to be true” (Ormsby 2008: 217), of the majestic Carpathians and of the hills in Transylvania (especially in the neighbourhood of Sibiu), and, at the other extreme, on heavy and loud traffic or puzzling urban landscapes, mainly from Bucharest – which is the setting of about two thirds of the short stories in the collection, a mixture of cultural and historical buildings, old churches and parks, fancy hotels and sports bars, government and public administration buildings, but also “crusty apartment blocks” (Ormsby 2008: 162) or “dilapidated villas” and rough land patches (Ormsby 2008: 175). However, the role of such descriptions is rather that of providing a background for interactions with people (whether in Bucharest or other Romanian cities/towns, in the countryside or on different locations abroad): the impressive gallery of vignettes that the book consists of relies extensively on the narrating I’s vividly reconstructing the encounters with more or less friendly figures of (un)named Romanian others, showing the latter in action and giving them voices to speak for themselves, thus, favouring dialogue over summarising narration.

Actually, this third characteristic should be seen in direct relation – if not subordinated – to the fourth and final essential feature of creative nonfiction in Lounsberry’s terms, namely “fine writing: a literary prose style” (1990: xv). Apart from using scenes, writers of good creative nonfiction are expected to write dramatically, compress information, combine various means of characterisation in order to develop character portraits, etc. (see Rees Cheney 2001: 2). Mike Ormsby does all these things and even more. As various reviewers of his book remark, one particular feature of Ormsby’s style that arrests the readers’ attention and makes them read through the text, whether they like or dislike the message it conveys, is humour: his contemplation of the incongruities of life in post-communist Romania is, more often than not, characterised by “subtle irony” (Craiu and *Expatriomania.ro* qtd. in Ormsby n.d.); he “write[s] humour out of [his] bad experiences” (see Miller and Paola 2005: 101); he seduces by his, typically British, use of understatement and repeatedly surprises the readers by ending his stories on a funny note (Stere 2008 qtd. in Ormsby n.d.). That is the reason why he has even been referred to as “a British Caragiale” (Ion qtd. in Ormsby 2008: 1 and Ormsby n.d.).

Moreover, there are other aspects that lend a particularly personal touch to the way Mike Ormsby crafts his travel *experiences* into travel *text* (see Thompson 2011: 27) and that point to a wider range of

forms of intertextuality at work in *Never Mind the Balkans, Here's Romania*. To be more specific, Mike Ormsby's working for several years as a professional musician (1983-1990) and a script writer (2000-2007) (Ormsby n.d.) is likely to have influenced his conception of various components of the book.

On the one hand, the organisation of his collection of 57 short stories might remind one of a combination of episodic series and serial narratives, characteristic of television film series patterns. Episodic series are basically defined by the fact that "each episode is relatively independent - characters, settings and relationships carry over across episodes, but the plots stand on their own, requiring little need for consistent viewing or knowledge of diegetic history to comprehend the narrative" (Mittell 2007: 163). Serial narration, though, relies on "continuing story lines traversing multiple episodes, with an ongoing diegesis that demands viewers to construct an overarching storyworld using information gathered from their full history of viewing" (Mittell 2007: 164). Mike Ormsby's *Never Mind the Balkans, Here's Romania* displays a typically episodic series structure, with most of the short stories presenting consistent narratives, with self-contained plots, that can be read separately and in any order the reader prefers. Nevertheless, one may also identify "multiple-episode plotlines" (Mittell 2007: 165) making up narratives arcs that run across the 'series'. Two such notable examples are the two-episode narrative arc developing on the story of Tanti Aneta, Lumi's aunt from Brăila, her ill husband Gheorghe and her manipulative and greedy brother-in-law Virgil ("Brotherly Love" and "Peace"), and the three-episode narrative arc detailing the adventures of Mike and his Romanian friends from Sibiu, George, Alina and their eight-year old daughter Catrinel, on a hike to a glacial lake at Cindrel ("Sacrifice", "Too Good to Be True", "People from Bucharest").

On the other hand, the very title of the book may acquire different connotations if seen in the light of Mike Ormsby's interest in rock music. It seems to be moulded on the title of a very controversial punk rock album of the famous British band Sex Pistols, i.e., *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's Sex Pistols*. Recorded and released in 1977, at a time when the contrast between the working classes, on the one hand, and the aristocracy and monarchy, on the other, increased dramatically, the album was regarded as the musical manifesto of a young and angry generation, "perfectly articulat[ing] the frustration, rage and dissatisfaction of the British working class with the establishment" and

violently attacking “pretentious affectation and the very foundations of British society” (Huey n.d.). The title of the album – a phrase deemed obscene, actually “a working-class expression [for] ‘stop talking rubbish’” (Wikipedia 2014) – was not only intended to appeal to the young listeners but also to symbolically hint at the rebellious statements at the heart of the band’s songs. Mike Ormsby’s play on the title of the Sex Pistols’ album is undeniably intriguing. It might have been dictated, on the one hand, by the similarities between the 1977 British society and the post-1989 Romanian society, both class-ridden and divided, torn by increasingly greater differences between the old and the young generations, between the rich and the poor, and, on the other hand, by the writer’s intention of using a humorous pun to question Western stereotyping of the Balkans, in general, and Romania, in particular. This might be Mike Ormsby’s form of subtle protest against the revival of old Western stereotypes of the Balkans as a ‘powder keg’ of Europe, a facile substitute for the Orient itself (Todorova 2000), “a European periphery (sometimes called a ‘Savage Europe’) which threatens the entire continent with its endless mutual conflicts” (Simić 2013: 114), and the re-emergence, against their background, of prejudice against Romania, as part of the Balkans, perceived as a place of crime, corruption and a source of migrants ready to invade the ‘civilised West’. After all, the book subtly invites the readers to open-mindedly gaze on the multicultural Romanian society in order to discover, guided by the ‘idiosyncratic voice’ of the narrating I, a greater truth: that, as a Sternean character put it, “*Le POUR et le CONTRE se trouvent en chaque nation; there is a balance [...] of good and bad everywhere*” (Sterne 2001: 59).

Auto-images and Hetero-images in Mike Ormsby’s Text

Referring to the ‘basic pillars’ of successful intercultural communication, Geert Hofstede emphasises the importance of the ‘triad’ of *awareness – knowledge – skills* for the potential participants in cross-cultural encounters (2002: 18-19). To particularise for a traveller setting out for a foreign cultural space, that implies that (s)he should be, first of all, aware of the differences between the base and the observed cultures, as well as of the dangers of (mis)judging the latter in the rigid terms of the stereotypical representations of the other, as perpetuated by certain mental software patterns specific to the group that (s)he belongs to. Such awareness may be strengthened by the traveller’s willingness to acquire – prior to and during the journey – knowledge of the observed culture

and its underlying force lines. That may help the traveller overcome more easily, especially if a long stay abroad is intended, the 'barriers' raised by: language differences; the unavoidable tendency – that seems inherent to human nature – of fitting the others into preconceived, generalisation-ridden representations based on previous experience and/or her/his own cultural bias; and, last but not least, the level of stress caused by the contact with a new, different environment where the hosts' reactions can be but guessed, not fully anticipated. Ultimately, when put into practice, the knowledge acquired of the foreign other's culture and mental programming may allow the traveller to develop the skills that (s)he needs in order to adapt to various situations of intercultural communication.

Mike Ormsby's fictional projection at the level of the narrative discourse, i.e., the narrating I whose voice shapes the representations of self and other in *Never Mind the Balkans, Here's Romania*, does not provide the reader with details about how much (theoretical) knowledge of Romanian culture and Romanianness he had prior to his arrival in Bucharest in 1994. What it does hint at, though, is the belief in the principle according to which "travel broadens the mind" (Ormsby 2008: 254); that may be interpreted as a proof of his awareness of the cultural differences between his home (Britain) and the target culture (in this case, Romania), as well as of his personal conviction that, by travelling and interacting with the other, he may acquire more knowledge of and skills to communicate with, or even to adapt to, the new cultural environment. While travelling abroad, Mike Ormsby's greatest hope seems to be that of freeing his mind of the coloniser's sense of superiority, considered until not long ago a defining feature of Englishness, and not remaining deaf and blind to the relativity of cultural values and patterns of thinking and behaving. His narrating I makes it clear that he is aware of the mechanisms underlying (especially negative) stereotype construction. Ideology and previous personal experiences may make one prone to abusive generalisation ("they're all the same." – Ormsby 2008: 155), as shown, for instance, in the short story entitled "Free", which implicitly warns against the tendency to embrace negative stereotypes of otherness in the Romanian society and against the ensuing danger of discrimination, affecting Roma people. In addition, in the short story "Three Beers", the conversation with a Romanian professional soldier who was sent on various missions in Iraq and Africa highlights the importance of the traveller's attitude to

otherness – which could vacillate between the extremes of xenophobia and xenophilia (Leerssen n.d.) – and of the impact of its change under the influence of the cross-cultural encounters experienced in a foreign cultural space. It is the perfect context for the narrating I to put forward the confession that he was once in danger of becoming xenophobic and had to leave the host country (definitely not Romania) to prevent that from happening: “... by the time I left, I knew I’d stayed too long. Something was changing inside me, and I didn’t like it.” (Ormsby 2008: 259) So, one should read between the lines that, in the aftermath of such an episode, avoiding the trap of negative thinking about the other and being open to cultural diversity and intercultural communication have become the leading principles by which the English traveller decides to act whenever coming in contact with a foreign culture.

As a matter of fact, it is not easy to cope with cultural differences even when being aware of them. Therefore, many of the short stories actually trace back the different stages of culture shock (honeymoon/euphoria; disorientation; irritability and hostility; adjustment and integration; biculturalism - Hofstede, Pedersen, Hofstede 2002: 20-23) that the English traveller-observer goes through while living among Romanians. Consequently, in order to understand their succession, one should try, first, to reconstruct the temporal frame of the narrative discourse.

The 57 short stories are not arranged chronologically, as expected in the case of a traditional travel journal or diary, and that is another proof of Mike Ormsby’s using literary techniques to creatively shape his travel text. In fact, relatively few short stories provide concrete details about the time when the events narrated about happened. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that they are numerous enough as to avoid creating the effect of timelessness, of the action being projected in what Pageaux calls mythical time (2000: 92), which may be associated with a tendency towards stereotyping. The events experienced by the English traveller in *Never Mind the Balkans, Here’s Romania* are set in an explicitly historical frame that can be retraced by putting together the temporal markers indicated in short stories like: “Not So Lucky” (which juxtaposes images of Gara de Nord in Bucharest, in 1994 and 2007); “Why Not?” (that dwells on the growth of the friendship between Mike Ormsby and the members of the Romanian rock band Why Not?, after their first meeting at a rock festival in Craiova in 1995); “Democracy” (which details on “the block meeting for 2007” that Mike and his neighbours are invited to attend);

“Welcome to the EU” (a presentation of the way a Romanian family celebrated, on December 31, 2006, the New Year’s Eve and Romania’s becoming an EU member state); “Buried” (bringing forth, among other things, Mike’s memories of his first days in Romania in 1994); or “Three Beers” (with its reference to Vasile’s participation in the Iraq war, which implies that the story time must be set sometime after 2003) [3]. It results that the period throughout which various stages of culture shock are experienced by the English traveller to Romania is 1994-2007.

The references in Mike Ormsby’s text to his interactions with Romanians in 1994-1995 are rather scarce. Yet, they allow to the readers to discover an English traveller experiencing a mixture of euphoria and disorientation. For example, in “Why Not?”, he is very excited to discover how talented Romanian rock musicians are and, as an artistic manager of the band Why Not?, he has the chance to meet “the veteran Romanian rocker, Adrian Ordeanu” (Ormsby 2008: 76). In “Not So Lucky”, he is surprised to find out the ‘hard way’ that good intentions (warning a gullible American tourist that he should not exchange money at the station) are not always rewarded, quite the contrary (he is punched in the jaw and threatened by the Romanian dealers with being stabbed if he interferes again).

Obviously, most of the short stories, even when not explicitly related to a specific moment in the interval 1994-2007, draw the readers’ attention to the slow process of adjustment to and integration in the Romanian environment. The variety of the situations that the English observer must learn to handle and of the characters that he interacts with offers to him plenty of opportunities to acquire better knowledge of the Romanian culture and to develop skills to communicate with his hosts. He appreciates Romanian hospitality and enjoys Romanian food (“Bubbles”, “Someone in the Village”, “Three Beers”). He is very happy to discover Romanian arts, whether literature (Mihai Eminescu and his translator into English, Corneliu M. Popescu, in “Buried”, or Caragiale and his stories featuring Mitică in “Sunday Best”), music (Adrian Ordeanu and the Why Not? rock band in “Why Not?”, or opera performances in “offoce@operanb.ro” and “Faith, Hope and Chablis”), ballet (“Fairy Tale”), or painting (“Faith, Hope and Chablis”, “Sunday Best”). He is a keen observer of and participant in old Romanian rites (baptism in “Faith, Hope and Chablis”, funerals in “Why?” and “Peace”) as well as ‘new’ customs of the fancy urban circles (going to night clubs in “Summer of Love”, watching football with friends in sports bars in “Șpagă” and “The Result”).

Still, the degree to which he manages to accept other cultural differences is directly influenced by his Englishness, that, no matter how open-minded, he cannot ignore. Set within a spatial frame organised along such binary patterns of (supranational) characterisation (Leerssen 2007: 29) as West (Western Europe, in general, and Britain, in particular)/East (Romania), at the macro-level, and centre (Bucharest)/periphery (other Romanian towns like Sibiu, Brăila, Ploiești, Buzău, Craiova, Constanța, even Tușnad) and town/countryside, at the micro-level, some of the scenes presenting the English traveller's encounters with (un)named Romanian characters provide evidence of the fact that, although he is trying to take distance of old clichés of Romanianness, he is still tributary to them, hence the persistence of a certain sense of inadequacy. Romanian products are inferior in quality to English ones, especially when it comes to tea (his mother has to send him some from England, in "When We Get Organised"). Natural landscapes are exquisite, yet too wild and threatening (the hikers' lives may be endangered by wolves, bears, striking lighting but also by the fierce dogs of the shepherds, in "Too Good to Be True"). Though significant developments may be perceived in Bucharest and other major cities (like Sibiu), part of Romania – the smaller towns and the countryside – is still perceived as populated by primitive, superstitious people ("Why?"). Service providers are lazy and indifferent to their work (like the clerks at the post office in "When We Get Organised" or the employees of Cinema Z in "Labyrinth"). An aura of criminality and/or corruption continues to spoil the image of Romania and the narrating I records the victimisation of Western new-comers (himself included), on the one hand, by criminal groups like that of the currency dealers at Gara de Nord in 1994 ("Not So Lucky"), the dishonest taxi drivers at Gara de Nord, the Henri Coandă and Băneasa Airports and not only ("Not So Lucky", "Domnul!", "Travel Broadens the Mind"), or the Roma kids robbing "unsuspecting strangers" (Ormsby 2008: 177) in the neighbourhood of the Parliament building ("Happy Holidays"), and, on the other hand, by unscrupulous employees (e.g. the manager of the sports bar at Costalot Hotel in Bucharest, in "Șpagă"). Last but not least, probably the clearest evidence of the unsurpassable breach between Western/British and Eastern/Romanian mentalities is the alien observer's dislike, often barely disguised, in a typically English style, behind the mask of irony, of the total disregard for laws and rules in the post-1989 Romanian society, whether it comes to speed driving (e.g. "Europeans Are Stupid", "Chivas Life", "Latin Driver"), noise pollution ("Tranquillity") or, simply, to standing in the queue at an airport gate ("Travel Broadens the Mind").

It is worth noticing, however, that, for all the difficulties encountered in various situations when the traveller feels 'the burden' of cultural differences, irritability and hostility are never given free vent. For, unlike other foreign traveller figures in his book that remain stuck in negative stereotyping and severe differentiation from the Romanian culture, e.g. the French Marie-Paule and Philippe in "Faith, Hope and Chablis", Mike Ormsby belongs to the category of travellers who are willing to come to terms with cultural differences, accept (even if they do not like) the coexistence of bad and good things in every culture and, hence, learn to live under the conditions specific to the target culture. One may go even as far as saying that this particular English traveller reaches the stage of biculturality, remaining attached to the English - source - culture and learning the ability to understand Romanians by their own standards. Yet, he does not identify with the Romanian culture to the point of becoming native. That seems to be confirmed by the narrating I's use of the term 'home' in relation to Romania. The short story "People from Bucharest" opens with what appears to be the statement of an alien transformed into a native Romanian at the end of a successfully completed process of acculturation: "I have wanted to walk these peaks and valleys since my first visit to Romania in 1994. The land I stumbled on by accident. The land I now call home" (Ormsby 2008: 232). A few pages further, though, a shred of uncertainty surfaces in the discourse about Romania as *the* 'home': "Travel broadens the mind but it's always good to be home, if that's where I am" (Ormsby 2008: 254). The traveller may feel comfortable with both the English and the Romanian cultures, but the latter has not come to 'usurp' the former's position as Home.

As, undeniably, the success or the failure of the acculturation process largely depends on the traveller's scrutinising various facets of the host culture, in order to fully understand the abovementioned succession/juxtaposition of culture shock manifestations in *Never Mind the Balkans, Here's Romania*, one must equally focus on the details that the narrating I accumulates at the level of the narrative discourse while catching, throughout his encounters with Romanians in a wide range of circumstances and locations, glimpses of the societal changes in Romania after the fall of the communist regime. Hofstede's model for the analysis of cultural dimensions may turn out useful at this point in identifying the main force lines of post-1989 Romania's profile, as perceived through the English traveller's gaze.

Most obviously, particular interest is taken in the evolution of power and identity-related issues in the process of Romania's transition

from communism to capitalism. As a matter of fact, one cannot fail to remark that, from the very first short story (“Jogging Is Good for You”), the narrating I subtly points to democracy being the keyword of the text. Much of the process of observation of the Romanian host culture is then aimed at seeing to what extent steps have been taken away from the typically large-power distance system of the communist regime (that is actually considered the source of many ‘evils’ that the post-1989 society must overcome) and how the small-power distance, more democratic pattern has been implemented. So, contemplating apparently unimportant aspects of daily life in Bucharest, like speed driving, excessive noise, the drivers’ lack of respect for passers-by (joggers included) or the race for a better place in traffic, the narrating I subtly advances an idea that the whole structure of the travel text subsequently endeavours to defend: that post-1989 Romania has undergone an incomplete process of democratisation.

Running alongside the Senate, I’m somewhat surprised to find three cars driving straight at me, down the wide pavement. Presumably they don’t want to queue in the traffic, on the street nearby, like everyone else. I yell at them and wave my arms, hoping they’ll slow down.

They brake, perhaps thinking I’m a traffic cop in my lime green top. As I past edge, between the crawling cars and the Parliament wall, I notice the last one has DEP plates. That means the driver is a Deputy, a Romanian MP; probably heading home after a hard day’s democracy.

There are still a few miles to go. (Ormsby 2008: 15)

This particular situation may be read as heavy with metaphorical connotations. In their light, *Never Mind the Balkans, Here’s Romania*, as a piece of creative non-fiction endowed with an educational function, appears as Mike Ormsby’s ‘yell’ at the Romanian readers (for they seem to be, above all, the target audience of the book) meant to draw their attention on the fact that ‘jogging’, i.e., moving ahead towards a different type of societal structure like democracy, is good, but that the process of implementation of this kind of structure must be based on the thorough assimilation of the fundamental mechanisms of democracy (that, as the exponent of a Western society with a long tradition in the practice of democracy he is very familiar with). In their ‘rush’ to enjoy the freedoms granted by a small-power distance system, Romanians have grown excessively ‘independent’ and have misused the principle of ‘equal rights for all’ to the point of cultivating mainly their rights and minimising their

responsibilities to their in-group/out-group fellows. That is why they still have “a few miles to go” to fully comprehend the essence of democracy.

In fact, the process of transition from a predominantly large-power distance to a predominantly small-power distance system in Romania is significantly slowed down, in the years immediately following the change of political regime, by the survival of power, status and privilege-ridden structures, functioning by the principle ‘might is right’ (Hofstede, Pedersen, Hofstede 2002: 36, 98-99 and Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov 2010: 53-88). State officials and VIPs are arrogant, thinking themselves better than the rest (“Jogging Is Good for You”, “Bubbles”, “Domnul!”, “Romania Has Cancer”). Customs officers are corrupt (“Good Cop, Bad Cop”) and corruption seems to spread like a disease at various levels of the social hierarchy affecting even bar managers (“Șpagă”), dealers in the flower-selling business (“Peace”) and priests (“Peace”). Severe divisions oppose the dominant centre (Bucharest) to the periphery (“Transylvania was not considered very hip in those days [in 1995]. The real action was down here in the sophisticated South.” - Ormsby 2008: 77), and power, wealth and status go together, causing the Romanian society to be profoundly class-ridden (“The Result”, “Romania Has Cancer”). Theoretically, important steps have been made towards the successful ‘importation’ of the small-power distance kind of societal pattern favoured by many Western countries. In practice, the radically different nature of the Romanian society, characterised by large-power distance relationships inherited from the former communist regime, has made the results of this process of democratisation rather doubtful. Actually, in *Never Mind the Balkans, Here's Romania*, the best example of a hybrid kind of structure in which the large-power distance features contaminate the small-power distance ones, a metonymic, small-scale representation of the Romanian society, is the community of block residents that the English traveller is integrated in, after settling in Bucharest. The interactions with the block residents of the block administration representatives, chief among which Mr. Vlaicu, the administrator, are focused on in four short stories: “The President Wants to Meet You”, “Democracy”, “Right and Wrong” and “Cooperation”. The second, in particular, makes very clear the division between the leading group of “petty officials” made up of the President, the Vice President and the administrator (Mr. Vlaicu), “faceless, eternally re-elected Committee members and, then, the regular people, ordinary residents [both Romanian and foreign], who put forth suggestions and ideas for improvement that are, almost overwhelmingly,

ignored" (Kelleher qtd. in Ormsby n.d.). Making use of satire, this short story points to the flaws of the newly founded Romanian democracy and "manages to condense a good deal of political criticism into a very small word count" (Kelleher qtd. in Ormsby n.d.).

Considering the connection between power distance and collectivism as major cultural dimensions, Geert Hofstede remarks that statistics seem to suggest that "the two dimensions tend to be negatively correlated: large-power distance countries are also likely to be more collectivist, and small-power distance countries to be more individualist" (2010: 102-103). Of course, he does not exclude exceptions. Post-communist Romania, as seen by the English observer, seems to fall into this latter category, coupling a mixture of large-power and small-power features with the emergence of strong individualism. The ties between the members of the Romanian society have definitely loosened, the independence of the individual being valued above loyalty to the group.

Numerous short stories indicate that this passage from collectivism (otherwise surviving mostly in criminal organisations or in the old-fashioned families and the countryside communities which also favour restraint over indulgence, e.g. "Someone in the Village") to extreme individualism has affected especially the young generation. Set in utter contrast with the middle-aged and the elderly shown as accustomed to collectivist mentalities based on loyalty to the group (the family in particular) as well as long-term orientation, devoting themselves to hard work and saving (e.g. "Chivas Life", "Not So Lucky", "Someone in the Village", "Number Three", "The Result"), Romanian youth is most often revealed in a not very flattering light. Most of the youngster figures in *Never Mind the Balkans, Here's Romania* (whether anonymous, as in "Europeans Are Stupid", "Chivas Life", "And Christmas Presents", "Summer of Love", "Nice Sofa", or neatly sketched and better individualised like Sami and Dinu in "People from Bucharest") are portrayed as characterised by short-term orientation, self-interested, lacking restraint, luxury-addicted, selfishly and snobbishly indulging in wild entertainment, drinking, smoking and speeding, thinking too highly of themselves and having excessive expectations when applying for a job, manifesting little or no regard for the others' needs. (An extreme manifestation of this disrespectful attitude is cruelty to animals, as exemplified in "Lucky".) The young generation's embracing individualism has a direct and, more often than not, negative impact upon family ties: parents are blamed for the children's own mistakes

("Baby") or abandoned by children too concerned about making their own lives ("The Wrong Place"). Even when the parents seem to encourage their children to adopt individualist values, especially in well-off families in the urban environment, family ties are weakened by the lack of communication between parents and children ("The Result").

Actually, as the English observer has plenty of opportunities to notice, the 'mirage' of individualism spreads widely among Romanians, sometimes irrespective of age, affecting their attitudes to work and engendering arrogance, superficiality, lack of interest in the job, disrespect for the customers, hostility towards competitors, lack of institutional collaboration (e.g. "When We Get Organised", "*Lupa Capitolina*", "office@operanb.ro", "Stuck", "Labyrinth", "Happy Holidays", "Keep Off the Grass", "Back Door Man", "Romania Has Cancer"). In addition, individualism may be said to function as an incentive to emigration and, within the Romanian diaspora, as a major cause of hostility to other Romanian fellow-migrants ("Capra vecinului", "The Result"). The case of Iulian, the barman in "The Result", provides one of the clearest examples of clash of collectivist and individualist behavioural patterns related to migration: he works four years for Royal Caledonian Cruises and enjoys travelling and making money, but he chooses to return home to help his wife raise their children after his parents get ill; that definitely makes him different from the young migrants who succumb to the temptation of illegality just to live the 'American dream' and who risk "spend[ing] the rest of [their] life living in the shadows" (Ormsby 2008: 201).

Such major changes in thinking and behaving in post-communist Romania are not entirely approved of by some of the very members of the Romanian society (and the English observer tends to agree with them). Two of them stand out, in particular, in the short stories "People from Bucharest" and "Romania Has Cancer". The first is Mike Ormsby's friend George who, displeased with the selfish and disrespectful behaviour of Sami, Dinu and the rest of the group of teenagers they met at the Cănaia mountain refuge and on the way back to Sibiu, reaches the conclusion that "Romania is changing. [...] And it's not all good" (Ormsby 2008: 242). The second is one of the few decent taxi driver figures in the book and he shares George's pessimism regarding the consequences of the post-1989 transformations in terms of power-distance and group-individual relationships in the Romanian society. This "articulate spokesman for the downtrodden, the oppressed and the

huddled masses" (Ormsby 2008: 268) - whose 'angry' statements might remind one of those at the heart of the Sex Pistols album that inspired the title of this travelogue - rages against the Romanian politicians, whom he sees as "a sham, a national disgrace" (Ormsby 2008: 268), the insolent behaviour of the youngsters who "don't respect anyone or anything" (Ormsby 2008: 268), the speeding drivers who do not care about traffic rules and the rich "crook[s]" who look down on the masses. His representation of Romanianness re-establishes a connection with the Balkanic frame to which it is culturally circumscribed, with all that it implies: an awareness of its multicultural nature, but also a constant quest for identity at the crossroads of Western and Eastern influences.

Don't forget we're Latin, but not French or Italian. We're also Slav, but not Serbian or Russian. We're a mixture, screwed-up and insecure. We still don't know who we are, not yet. So we copy from everyone else, usually the bad bits, because that's easy. That's the problem. (Ormsby 2008: 270)

The narrating I repeatedly tries to deter this character from his pessimistic line of thought, explaining that "[d]emocracy doesn't happen overnight. Even in Britain, it's still not right" (Ormsby 2008: 270). That makes it the voice speaking in favour of a more moderate attitude based on awareness of the fact that there is 'good' and 'bad' everywhere and whose ultimate message (implicitly addressed to Romanian readers as well) is: "Try to be more positive!" (Ormsby 2008: 271).

One of the dimensions of the Romanian culture that did not suffer major alterations in the process of transition is related to gender role distribution. It has remained essentially masculine and Mike Ormsby's text provides plenty of evidence in this respect. Gender roles are clearly ascribed to family members: men are family heads and (more or less) active participants in the public sphere, while women are stereotypically seen as weak and confined to the domestic sphere. The behaviour of Lumi's parents - Anna and Mitu - when receiving guests ("Someone in the Village"), Tanti Aneta's difficult relationship with her husband Gheorghe and her rapacious brother-in-law Virgil ("Brotherly Love"), Mamaia's struggle for survival and her putting up with the character flaws of her three husbands ("Number Three") are examples that prove the endurance of patriarchal relations, characteristic of masculine societies, especially in middle-aged and elderly couples. Yet, even the way in which Adrian ("Why Not?"), the former leader of the

Why Not? band, describes the changes in the lives of the rest of the band, after they split up, seems to sustain the same conclusion, that Romania is still a masculine society: the number of details about the paths taken, after their separation, by the male members of the former rock band is significantly larger than that of the details given about the only female member of the band and point to the former's new professional choices and, implicitly, to their participation in the public sphere in contrast with the latter's confinement to the domestic sphere as a mother. The differences between the English and Romanian societies in terms of gender role assignment become most obvious during Mike's visit to Vasile and Monica's place ("Three Beers"): Mike's offer to help Monica wipe the dishes while chatting in the kitchen is indicative of his coming from a "care-oriented" society (Hofstede, Pedersen, Hofstede 2002: 103-104) and puts him in utter contrast with Vasile, the Romanian husband, the exponent of a masculine culture, who expects to be served and makes no attempt to assume any of the domestic chores (though his wife is pregnant and would appreciate the help). If one adds to that the references to the young generation (young men in particular) valuing material and social success and to women engaging in the social competition, adopting a socially 'masculine' behaviour (like "Miss Lawyer"), one gets a full picture of the profoundly masculine nature of the Romanian culture.

Ultimately, a set of interesting conclusions is drawn by the narrating I regarding Romanians' ability to face uncertain and unknown situations, in brief, in Hofstede's terms, "uncertainty avoidance" (Hofstede, Pedersen, Hofstede 2002: 105-108). In this respect, too, the Romanian society seems to be divided. On the one hand, there is the category of Romanians who show interest in what is new and different and who, consequently, show the foreign traveller not only tolerance but even friendship. (Lumi and her family hold a particularly privileged place in this category.) On the other hand, there is still a too large and heterogeneous category of Romanians who cannot overcome their suspicions and distrust of whatever/whoever is different and who, consequently, develop a wide range of attitudes that could be included under the umbrella of high-uncertainty avoidance or intolerance: anti-Semitism ("Anaesthesia"); misogyny ("Anaesthesia", "Fairy Tale"); xenophobic attitudes towards the foreign other ("The President Wants to Meet You", "Democracy", "Domnul!", "Norwegian Wouldn't"); or ethnic discrimination (which functions in both directions, i.e., from the

Romanian majority towards the Roma minority in “Free”, and from the ethnic minorities – especially the Hungarian one – towards the Romanian majority in “The Wrong Place” and “The Result”).

In this context, travelling abroad as a means to grow aware of cultural differences, to learn to accept them and to develop weak-uncertainty avoidance may be benefitted from especially by Romanian emigrants. At an earlier point, the paper emphasised the narrating I’s belief in the “travel broadens the mind” principle and showed that it failed to function in the case of other foreign travellers to Romania referred to in the travelogue. The collection of short stories offers enough opportunities to check the validity of the same principle in the case of the Romanian hosts turned foreigners in other cultural spaces to which they decided to emigrate. Interestingly, though many of the examples of Romanian migrants who fail to learn from their hosts or to change their attitudes towards the other are numerous, it is still a Romanian migrant who most clearly articulates in *Never Mind the Balkans, Here’s Romania* the importance of moderation and tolerance:

‘It’s the experience that changes you, not the money.’ [...] ‘I changed my attitude towards work and towards people.’ [...] ‘Good and bad everywhere.’ [...] ‘Live and let live, eh?’ [...] ‘The only place I changed’, he concludes, tapping a finger against his temple, ‘is up here. If you get out there and work in the world, the world works on you.’ (Ormsby 2008: 198, 199, 202, 203)

This is one of the basic lessons that the fictional voice of the English traveller-observer and writer seeks to convey through his text.

Concluding Remarks

Mike Ormsby’s *Never Mind the Balkans, Here’s Romania* is a valuable and noteworthy contribution to what one might call a recent trend in writing about the Romanian other as seen in the British ‘mirror’. Its combination of travel impressions and journalism, shaped by means of various literary techniques, charms by its subtly humorous reflection of and on Romanianness, as discovered in Romania and abroad, in the most various circumstances, which seeks to question old clichés and stubbornly resists stereotyping. Its interplay of complementary auto-images and ambivalent hetero-images simultaneously at work serves to demonstrate the relativity of cultural patterns and mental programming, and revives the belief that travelling (unlike tourism) may offer excellent opportunities to reconsider

one's identity, but also to acquire more knowledge about different cultural spaces and, furthermore, the skills necessary for successful intercultural communication.

Notes

[1] The relatively few theoretical studies on imagology by Romanian scholars (e.g. Gheorghe Lascu, Vasile Voia) mainly enlarge on the basic instruments of imagological models of analysis and discuss their relevance within the frame of cultural and literary research. As for the Romanian studies that aim at 'building' a bridge between theory and applied imagology to ultimately lay more emphasis on the latter, several major directions of investigation seem to have developed, tracing representations of: the Romanian other in the British 'mirror' (e.g. Eugenia Gavrilu, Pia Brânzeu, Carmen Andraș, Emilia Vancu, etc.); Romanian identity in the multicultural context of the Balkan area (e.g. Anton Dumitriu, Mircea Muthu, etc.); or the minority other (e.g. the Jew) as seen by the Romanian majority (e.g. Andrei Oișteanu). See Gabriela Iuliana Colipcă (2009) *Synthesis Research Design for "National Identity and the Media" (WP4)*, available from <http://www.gemic.eu/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/research-design-media.pdf> (p. 7).

[2] For instance, despite the success in Western Europe of the late 1940s and early 1950s French School of comparative literature (best represented by Jean-Marie Carré and Marius-François Guyard), in the terms of which imagology was proposed as a post-national, trans-national, anti-essentialist and inherently interdisciplinary approach to literature (see Leerssen 2007: 22), in the fields of literary studies and social sciences, there were scholars – especially American but not only (e.g. René Wellek) – who reacted against this form of text investigation precisely for its interdisciplinarity.

[3] The movement back and forth in time characteristic of Mike Ormsby's collection is not limited to the interval 1994-2007. There are short stories, such as "Number Three" or "Buried", which extend this time frame in order to include in it different moments of Romania's history that Mike Ormsby hears about from some of his Romanian hosts, chief among which Romania's participation in World War II, the communist period and the devastating 1977 earthquake.

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