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**SUMMARY OF PHD THESIS**

with the title

**ISLAND AND INSULARITY.**

**Poetics and Politics of Representation in Romanian  
and Universal Prose**

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## KEYWORDS

*Space, island, topos, contextualization, hypostasis, insularity, isolation, imaginary, dream, reality, symbol, rewriting, intertextuality, utopia, dystopia, paradisiacal, infernal, sacred, profane.*

## INTRODUCTION

This paper proposes an exegetical stay on the symbolism of the island space identified as a privileged space in the great literatures of the world and, with specific particularities, in Romanian prose. The island is, in the well-known artistic imaginary, the utopian/dystopian privileged space with a potential of consistent significance, by the offer of solitude and absolute identity retreat, the man being always dominated by the temptation to escape in a fascinating, provocative alternative space, different from his world. The island, seen as a space of dissensions, of fusion of worlds, of rediscoveries, but also of alienation, manifests an inexorable attraction on the human imaginary through its very dichotomous nature. That is why the island spaces have become spaces that attract, fascinate and influences the literary imaginary, especially from the perspective of symbolism and archetypal density. Thus, we try to establish a classification of the types of islands/island spaces, proving that the space has lost its concrete features, acquiring new abstract valences, which offer multiple perspectives of analysis. (corpus of texts brought to our attention is eloquent in this respect).

The paper entitled *Island and insularity. Poetics and Politics of Representation in Romanian and Universal Prose* was elaborated as a result of some questions and hypotheses regarding the theme of space, especially the space of the island, a theme extremely offering as an allegorical potential for the creative imagination and a source of meanings always alive. The theme is as offering as it is attractive and allows a wide range of possibilities for interpretation, for art in general, and, by excellence, for literature facilitating imagining various spaces that constitute a complex representation of the created worlds that have been established by their uniqueness in the collective imagination, being understood as compensatory/adjacent/alternative spaces to reality.

## MOTIVATION OF RESEARCH

**The reasons for choosing this topic** are both subjective and objective in their nature. From a *subjective* point of view, the analysis of the island space, we confess that has preoccupied us since the master's studies, when we discovered the ubiquity of island landscapes that contradict certain ideological and cultural anxieties, perfectly formed for drama, so a perfect destination for fiction, and objectively, the subject has been insufficiently approached, leaving space for a wide range of possible interpretations by activating a varied analytical instrumentation, which gives it an actual character, always fresh.

**The novelty and originality of the research** are given by designing new interpretations regarding the insular space as a privileged topos in literature, delimiting various types of islands and the phenomenological principles that substantiate the poetics and politics of insularization as an ontological act. Both the proposed theme and the hierarchy of these types of spaces resulted from a concentric hermeneutic exercise, with a multiple instrumentation, with interdisciplinary openings, anchored in the area of thematology, comparativism, theory of imaginary, archetypology, theory of mentalities, literary sociology, philosophy and religion. The intention was to revisit a territory of universal and Romanian creation, assumed diachronically and synchronously, from the perspective of the influence of chronotopes on the destiny evolution of the characters, pointing out that, in the narrations that make up the corpus of the thesis, it is obvious the validation of space not only as a theoretical foundation, but also as an supra-character-actor, of referential core type.

The corpus of texts was based on a strict, comparative sorting, so that it included papers-landmark, which project the matrix symbols of the island space and belong to different periods of universal and Romanian literature. Also, the selected papers were analyzed succinctly and comparatively, following, in particular, the theme, the dominant element in terms of space, but also the character typology and its evolution in parallel, complementary or, most often, in perfect symbiosis with the assumed space, depending on the policy of intended placing, marked at the level of *histoire*. We note that the lyric - although extremely offering, in its turn, in our direction of research - is not found in the target of our research, as such an extension of the corpus would require allocation of a much too large space for analysis.

Elaborated in three chapters, this paper tries to delimit, in its own comparative-analytical way, similarities and differences regarding the insular space of the selected papers, realizing that each paper has a unique status and implicitly, it enhances the artistic imaginary of the art receiver. It should be noted that not only a purely descriptive analysis of the types of

island spaces was pursued, but also an annotation that aimed to draw a point of view by highlighting the basic features and meanings, with an emphasis especially on the establishment of the insular space not only as a background-support of the narratives, but also as an actor, as a super-character who has, in its essence, a role similar to consciousness in the destiny of the characters.

The first chapter, *Insular space – an offering chronotope. Its functions and dynamics in the artistic imaginary*, aim to deepen the theoretical framework of space issue, so we proposed the idea of an analysis of the essential meanings of the term of space according to specialized dictionaries, then the idea of a multidisciplinary approach, consulting various well-known theories of the matrix researchers in this field, in order to highlight how the junctions between complementary disciplines can be more efficient in literary research, the migration of analytical tools from one code to another, enhancing the hermeneutic journey.

The analysis had as a starting point certain theoretical notions, namely the definition of the term and fixing the concept itself, followed by the analysis of its derivatives in various cultural fields such as religion, philosophy, mathematics, physics, history, geography, sociology. Then, the concept is discussed in literature, proposing an evolutionary perspective on the term. We considered useful to fix the theoretical framework starting from the explanation of the meaning of the term, consulting various specialized dictionaries and focusing on the major contribution of famous theorists from different areas of research. Of course, the comprehension of the concepts is rooted in the areal of myth (from the biblical imaginary and Homeric epics, to Euclidean theories or Platonic projections), passing through Leibniz's theories of space and the transcendental ideality of space, as Kant theorized it, for who the space is an *a priori* representation). The evolution of the *space* as a product of the imaginary, was followed, considering the theories established by important researchers such as Gaston Bachelard (who introduced the term *topoanalysis* defined as a study of the places of our intimate life, difficult to reach, from a psychological point of view), Michel Foucault (who defines the term of *heterotopia*, which explains the heterogeneous nature, especially of the space in which the individual lives), Mihail Bahtin (who launched the idea of *chronotope* as a significant association of the two indissoluble elements in the literary work, namely space-time), Edward T. Hall (who demonstrated the consubstantiality of the individual with space and opened the long life of *proxemics* as a relevant paradigm), Bertrand Westphal (who applied the geo-critical method in literary analysis, focusing on the study of geographical space) or Maurice Blanchot (who spoke of *an environment of fascination* or *an absolute*

*environment*, present in any work, the equivalent of the space of action). The attempt to explain and clarify these provocative terms by their semantic substance is the central idea of this part of the paper, which theoretically prepares and anticipates the research in the following chapters. I mention the fact that in the analysis of the space from a multidisciplinary perspective, I interspersed some text sequences from articles published by me during my doctoral studies, articles that fall within the theme of the thesis.

In the second part of the first chapter, I highlighted the two extremes of the utopian/dystopian island space, presenting definite examples from Romanian literature and universal literature. It circumscribes the origin, definition and evolution of the notions of utopia and dystopia in the field of literature. I reviewed the evolution of this genre in literature, highlighting both the specific aspects of utopian papers and the differences in the way the societies were organized.

As a result of the analysis, I came to the conclusion that there were several types of communities and several lifestyles, and their imagination (utopias/dystopias) was nothing more than a critical analysis of each contemporary society to each author, resulting a variety of types of islands/island space, that offer multiple analysis perspectives.

In line with the classification established by Gaston Bachelard in the paper *Water and Dreams*, followed by many other researchers, as a novelty I interspersed a sequence about *the archetypal otherness of aquatic space*, trying to demonstrate the multiple valences acquired by the tangent element and characteristic for the island space located in our center of interest (*primordial water as an element of Genesis, miraculous water as an element of life or death, water as an element of eternal life and invincibility, water as an element of metamorphosis, water as a destructive element, water as a purifying element, water - border between worlds*). As can be seen, I approached the role of the aquatic element especially in the mystical, spiritual place.

The second chapter, ***Short incursion into the evolution of the island imaginary in universal literature***, proposes a stay in the island space as a privileged space in universal prose, as a result of the selection of a corpus of papers from different periods, which showed a great influence on the creations of successors. Following the selection of a corpus of works from different literary periods, the evolutionary analysis of the marks of meaning offered by the supporting texts, highlights, at the edge of the two extremes of the island space - utopian framework and dystopian framework - the recurrence and migration of several archetypal structures: *island-ideal fortress (Atlantis - Plato)*, *odyssey islands-mythical islands (Odyssey - Homer)*, *utopian urban island-a new Atlantis (Utopia - Thomas Morus)*, *island-space of exile*

*and rebuilding of the Center (Storm - William Shakespeare), island-space of the Others (Robinson Crusoe - Daniel Defoe), island-space of adventure (Two years of vacation - Jules Verne), island-space of the pagans (Penguin Island - Anatol France), dystopian society-a false insularity (One thousand nine hundred and eighty-four - George Orwell), island-space of dehumanization (The Emperor of Flies - William Golding) and island-space of the deconstruction of modern individualism (Friday or limbo of the Pacific - Michel Tournier).*

In the second part of the twentieth century, we can see an interdependence between literary fictions, respectively any literary text is in a relationship with other texts, projecting new concepts of great force, fundamental to our research: *rewrite; intertextuality (term imposed by Mihai Bahtin and developed by Julia Kristeva); transtextuality (intertextuality, paratext/hypotext/hypertext, metatextuality and architextuality)* - with the acceptations proposed by Gérard Genette.

By the corpus of selected texts it was intended to identify models of **island chronotopes** type, in various periods of creation, an exegetical gesture based on a comparative protocol. Referring to a comparative exposition, we noticed that the *descriptive* of the island space occupied a significant place in highlighting the aesthetic vision of nature and the individual. Regardless of the typology of the character, once in relation to the new space, of retreat and separation from the common space, it is subject to major transformations, so the island space seems to have not only a simple role as a frame, but also an eventual engine.

We found an evolution of the concept of *island space* from a measurable surface to an abstract notion that exerts a great influence on the human imagination and is in a continuous transformation, to the interference between real and unreal. Starting from the premise that man relates to the island space in a subjective/symbolic way, because the island is a space easy to model and offers a possible escape from reality, we try to approach the concepts of *utopian/dystopian*, proving that the island can be found in literature under two hypostases: as a utopian, paradisiacal space, the place of a new beginning, of a spiritual and material evolution and, respectively, as a dystopian, infernal space, the place of a gloomy experience, of an involution.

Based on the findings, we will be able to talk about the existence of a true distinct literary genre that enriches literature with intertextual allusions. Therefore, the problem will remain open, and the directions in which the research will be able to continue can target, on one hand, the island imaginary in the great literatures of the world, and on the other hand the analysis of different island topos in Romanian prose.

In the third chapter, *Poetics of island topos in Romanian prose*, we paid special attention to the works of Romanian literature that staged *the frame of the island*, which allowed the construction of a common network of symbolic brands, recurrent in the imaginary of the revisited authors. As a microtopos, the island has a strong symbolic value and has prevailed over the macrocosmos through its conservation value, being less exposed to vulnerability. From a symbolic perspective, this space is characterized by the assumed dichotomous levels: love-hate, stability-instability, freedom-captivity, thus becoming a space that attracts and impresses and has a great influence on the creative imagination. We followed a classification of the types of islands/island spaces, proving that the space has acquired new valences, becoming, from time to time, an abstract concept, which requires to be decrypted efficiently (proof are the works we chose to insist on: *Cezara*, *Avatars of Pharaoh Tlà*, *Poor Dionysus* by Mihai Eminescu; *Thalassa* by Al. Macedonski; *The Serpent* by Mircea Eliade; *The Equinox of the madmen and other stories* and *The Black Church* by AE Baconsky et al.). And in the perimeter of Romanian literature, the evolutionary analysis of the supporting texts highlights the substantiation of the two extremes of the meaning of the insular space (utopian and dystopian), facets of an imaginary Janus. On this bipolar axis, we identified the ability to generate large allegories/parables, based on different types of island spaces such as: the island - *spiritual center of the ancestral couple* (*Cezara* - M. Eminescu), the island - *compensatory avatar space at the end of the maze* (*Avatars of Pharaoh Tlà* - M. Eminescu), the island - *a dreamlike island space of exile* (*Poor Dionis* - Mihai Eminescu), the island - *a mythical space of returning to origins*, the island - *prison, a space of extremes* (*Thalassa* - Al. Macedonski) and the city - *a space of damned urban insularity* (*The Equinox of madmen and other stories* and *the Black Church* – A.E. Baconsky).

Mihai Eminescu approached in three selected works, three types of sacred spaces, spaces of mythical fullness, having a configuration of *axes of the world*, endowed with mythical attributes. The topos of the spaces is a sacred one with a sumptuous decoration, of a fabulous vegetal lushness, the contours of every thing now have dreamlike reflections, the mirage of the dream throws on the objects and elements of nature pale and magical glows, and the repetition of the real-unreal succession gives the suggestion of an infinite cyclic reiteration of space and time. The island of Euthanasius, from the short story *Cezara*, has a topography similar to the Island of the Blessed, it is a center, a living microcosm; it is the space with a transcendent character, where the perfection of existence is reached, the space that has a paradisiacal dimension that opposes the ordinary reality.

The fantastic speech of the short story *Avatars of Pharaoh Tlâ* establishes another vision of the world, giving up to the real elements of space, which leads to the establishment of the miraculous, by bringing to the fore of another matrix space, the pyramid-tomb, an improbable space, semi-dark and dull, in which death is a life-generating power. The island space in this paper is a compensatory avatar space, a topos of perdition, but also of rebirth, in which life and death intertwine, shaping souls, in accordance with the cosmic order, so that later they can be released.

The short story *Poor Dionysus* is a dreamlike-metaphysical short story in which the hero tries to re-create the primordial space, bringing to the fore the celestial paradise in which time stops as if it is suspended in infinity and the terrestrial-cosmic distance is annulled. All the elements of the dreamlike nature of this space are pure and invested with magical powers, the result of the incredible imaginative power to create new universes. The imagined space depicts a new *Creation*.

The preference for the island imaginary as a primordial paradisiacal space and the exit from concrete time is also found in the fantastic prose of Mircea Eliade who was captivated by myths. In the micro-novel *The serpent*, Mircea Eliade uses, for the first time, the technique of parallel universes, the fruit of his creative imagination. Parallel universes lend themselves to a game of translations. The human being oscillates between the fantastic and the myth, striving towards the cosmogonic and paradisiacal beginnings, thus making known the perpetually nostalgia of humanity. The contoured island space is a transcendent one, full of magic, a parallel universe that makes possible the connection between concrete (profane) and fantastic (sacred), giving the impression of returning to the origins. The island of the reunion of the original couple preserves many elements corresponding to the space described by Eminescu, configuring a primordial island, with the lush Edenic vegetation, another variant of the island of Euthanasius, accessible only to the initiated ones.

The insular space in the novel *Thalassa* of Alexandru Macedonski represents a wide image of the topos that oscillates between sumptuousness, polychromy and the catastrophic of the unleashed elements, which give the sensation of a terrestrial hell that merges with the image of the aquatic and transforms the hero into a prisoner of the island. The island and the sea are topos generating love and death, punishment and purification, but also graves. The restoration of the primordial unity is conditioned by the supreme sacrifice of the lovers who have to go through the caudal forks of the couple's life. Macedonski's intention was not to write a novel about the grotesque dimension of the human spirit, but about its colossal, fantastic dimension, about the decomposition of the Cosmos and its reunification.



In opposition to the traditional conception, which demonstrated the need for man to create utopian worlds, in which to escape and be able to fulfil itself, other representations of the world imagined by writers with polemical attitude appeared, namely dystopian worlds or utopian inversions, inspired from the model of contemporary societies, fallen both politically and religiously.

AE Baconsky's prose has the role of shaping the image of society caught in a process of sick insularization of the individual. Both papers, *The Equinox of the madmen and other stories* and the *Black Church*, analysed for this purpose, give the feeling of permanent slipping from one nightmare to another, a nightmare from which the hero can not wake up, but which he can only accept, this being the only way to continue. The hero lives an experience of frustration and remains an eternal prisoner in the city-prison, the victim of an absurd existence in a cursed space, where progress and ascent are felt as immersion and involution. The man undergoes a series of mutations until he transforms into a schematic tool, he is devoid of individuality and soul feelings, having a single identity, namely political identity.

The utopian space and dystopian space represent two worlds in contrast like the *dream*, fantasy as a form of the inner world, unlike the *nightmare* materialized in a cruel reality. In short, what we have done in this paper is a thematic inventory, starting from different types of spaces, with related subspaces. The space imagined at the level of prose becomes a constant space subject to transformations, influenced, in particular, by socio-cultural factors, given that the progress of society, recorded over the centuries, has led to great transformations in the development of humanity (wars, territorial changes, forms of government, etc.).

I assigned the end of this chapter to the communist ideology that resulted in the morbid insularization of the individual, which was reflected in the literature of the twentieth century, a literature subject, sequentially, to doctrines and totalitarian ideology. I reviewed several representative works in this regard, signed by authors-former political prisoners or persecuted by the system. Ion Eremia, for example, in *Gulliver in the land of lies*, exposes a false insularity of the world of cities and villages, characterized by otherness and the opposition of some concepts: theft vs. virtue, abuse vs. care for man, lie vs. truth. The imaginary totalitarian space is a country called Kukunia, a strange citadel where the individual goes through a process of human degradation, a space-time of terrifying pain and humiliation, being accused of crimes he did not commit and for which he must serve harsh punishments. The author also talks about an imaginary fall of the communist regime, caused

by an unexpected revolt, foreshadowing in great detail the end of the Ceausescu Golden Age. I.D. Sîrbu, in *Goodbye, Europe!*, places the action in a fictional region belonging to a country subordinated to the Ottoman Empire. The hero is outcast in a city where he feels the insularity acutely, because everything works in the form of a network that established fear through the style of leading and supervising the whole society that suffers from hunger and cold. The role of this intrigue is to expose, using a grotesque comic, the decadence and cynicism of totalitarian leadership in a small space of a hostile city and the turmoil that takes place in all socio-human levels.

Octavian Paler's novel, *Life on a Platform*, reflects the need to isolate the individual when reality no longer meets his expectations, making a harsh critique of the totalitarian system of the time. The narration is an image of the members subordinate to the established regime, false beggars devoted to a dark *religion of fear* with a role in overseeing the population, but also of the maladapted, such as hero-narrators, who are forced to withdraw from the prison city in an abandoned train station.

Oana Orlea, in *Perimeter Zero*, outlines the image of an unnamed totalitarian space, a forbidden, deserted city, in which any feeling is suppressed. The protagonist is condemned to isolation after understanding that evil invades her conscience.

Bujor Nedelcovici in *The Second Messenger*, places the action in an island space represented by a barrack called "Victoria Island", like a psychiatric hospital, a real hell with an extreme climate, where unimaginable events take place. The center where all actions are coordinated is the Institute which aims at re-education.

An allegorically approached theme was observed, in which the maladapted individual is condemned for life to live his own drama generated by the acute feeling of losing adherence to the society of which he is still a part. The worlds drawn in these dystopias symbolize different types of insularization of the individual and of societies incapable of finding saving solutions. Citizens are strangers to city-citadels, victims of various dictatorial regimes.

In the context of what has been stated and argued above, we consider that the island space is in a continuous rediscovery due to the changing position in society of the individual and the perception of the island, this type of space being constantly subject to change and at the same time open to a multitude of interpretations due to its permissiveness in always accepting other meanings, depending on the fluctuations of the creative imaginary, also dependent, in turn, on ideological mutations and movements of history or aesthetic paradigms. The overlapping types of island imaginary synthesize both the importance of the civilizing experience of enlightened ideas that have the power to change the world, and the patriarchal

harmony not mutilated by the invasion of modern society, giving unlimited credit to the power of literature to change the world for the better. Being aware of the complexity of the subject, we proposed to use this research direction further, considering that it is a personal beginning in proposing new hypotheses.

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