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East≠West: Revisiting Travel and Cultural Mobility

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This issue invites us to revisit the East-West paradigm based on a variety of written and audiovisual texts approached from a range of intersecting disciplines including historiography and political science, literary and cultural studies, film studies, linguistics and digital humanities, with a focus on travel and cultural mobility.

As we travel far and long, with the change of whereabouts comes an enhanced awareness of the physical and mental borders and bridges on the way, which are consequently reinforced, crossed or altogether broken. In our cultural encounters home and abroad, distinctions become more visible, but also permeated and negotiable. Hence difference is both ideologically marked and assigned to a generic other, and internalized as our own.

Our increasing cultural mobility opens up spaces for contrasting narratives and self-reflection. In the ensuing challenges and exchanges stereotypes and misconceptions are built and broken, given identities are questioned and recast in relation to the grand determiners of nation, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, morality and even humanity. Individualities emerge as layered intersections and entangled networks in global motion.

The physical and cultural mobility that constitutes the fabric of this journal issue brings forth the resulting composite, fluid or transgressive

identities, in their textual making. It bears visible marks of colonialism and imperialism and shows equal prospects of conflict and cooperation; it also points to future crossovers and transcendence. What these identities have in common is a recast East-West paradigm, which reframes the interdependence of East and West, revealing the intricate connectedness between the hierarchical opposites of a formerly centric imagination.

Considering the global expanse of this East≠West issue that connects Western Europe, the Black Atlantic, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the Far East, it may come as a surprise that several of the contributions revisit Romanian culture; this is no coincidence: eventually the journey holds the mirror up to the travelers.

The issue begins with a historical re-assessment of the European East-West ideological divide. In “Culture as Bridge Between France and Romania in the Early Period of the Communist Regime”, Cristina Preutu illustrates how cultural diplomacy functioned as both a bridge and a battleground between the Western and Eastern blocs. The article reveals that, despite their ideological opposition, France and Romania relied on cultural exchanges to maintain dialogue and to exert mutual influence. It also draws attention to the asymmetry of these relations, which is shown to reflect both Eastern European ideological controls and the France's strategic interest in maintaining cultural influence in the East.

The issue continues with a literary exploration of diasporic identity refusing to submit to the East-West dichotomy. In “THE HEART’S PASSAGE IN SALMAN RUSHDIE’S *EAST, WEST*”, Simona Catrinel Avarvarei re-reads a postcolonial classic that celebrates hybridization and self-invention. The author highlights how each section of the book explores different forms of displacement and cultural tension: the East is depicted as a site resisting outdated Western imaginaries; the West reveals superficial belonging and imperial hypocrisy; the bridging section *East, West* becomes a space for in-between identities, where characters grapple with their fractured selves and experience moments of connection and self-realization.

The next article offers another approach to hybridisation – and its impact on the literary canon. In “BRIDGING THE BLACK ATLANTIC: CARIBBEAN POETICS FROM CALYPSO TO THE BRITISH CANON”, Monica Manolachi explores cultural hybridity as a source of literary innovation and

canon expansion. The author discusses the rise of Caribbean British poetry to a recognised literary form and provides an overview of several Caribbean poets who use performance and live poetry as both cultural assertion and a tool for sociopolitical activism. An analysis of the innovative poetic forms that blend Creole, standard English, and various musical and oral traditions highlights the poets' negotiation of diasporic identities.

The issue continues with an examination of how travel (and) literature shaped national identity amid relations between East and West. In "THE INFLUENCE OF TRAVEL LITERATURE BETWEEN KOREA AND THE WEST", Alexandra Bija explores the reciprocal impacts of travel literature between Korea and Western countries from the late 19th to the mid-20th century. The author argues that travel literature became a vehicle for the transmission of ideologies between East and West. The article overviews Korean travelogues to the West as a source of modernization efforts and Western travel accounts to Korea as a means to construct a catered image, generating orientalist visions of Korea.

The issue moves to an intertextual exploration of the haunting entanglements between Europe and the Middle East. In "ANXIOUS ENTANGLEMENTS: GOTHIC MONSTROSITY, ABJECTION AND WORLD-SYSTEMS IN *FRANKENSTEIN IN BAGHDAD* AND *THE JEWEL OF SEVEN STARS*", Bianca Mihaela CRIȘAN demonstrates how Gothic literature employs monstrosity to symbolically confront profound cultural anxieties, particularly around imperialism and historical violence. The article shows that Bram Stoker's and Ahmed Saadawi's works utilize resurrected Gothic beings to interrogate East-West power dynamics, suggesting that the ghosts of empire continue to inhabit the contemporary world.

The issue then addresses an iconic modern myth of the Eastern other: the vampire and its latest revival proposing an inversion of the East/West binary. In "THE PLAGUE SHALL BE LIFTED": REPRESENTATIONS OF EAST AND WEST IN *NOSFERATU* (2024), Monika Leferman explores how the 2024 film reverses the narrative of the East as savage and the West as civilized. The article showcases the clash between modern scientific reasoning and ancient magical thinking and emphasizes that the narrative privileges old-world knowledge and folklore as the only means of combating the supernatural threat. The vampire is discussed as a composite symbol of otherness, cinematographically crafted as an

apocalyptic figure that destabilizes boundaries between life and death, science and myth, self and other.

In “BRIDGING CULTURES AND CHALLENGING PREJUDICES: THE RELEVANCE OF VASILE ALECSANDRI’S BALTA-ALBĂ IN CONTEMPORARY LITERARY DISCOURSE”, Ioana Lacrimioara Pelea approaches the 19th century Romanian author Vasile Alecsandri to suggest that his work proposes empathy and critical thinking as means to bridge cultural gaps. The imaginary journey of a French architect to Romania offers the pretext for a critique of Western Europe’s romanticized and often ignorant views of the East. The article argues that Alecsandri’s crafted interplay between different cultural identities accounts for the contemporary relevance of his text as an early warning against reducing complex identities to monolithic stereotypes.

The issue continues with a demonstration of how digital tools can map transgressive literary itineraries, bridging the real and the fictional. In “CROSSING THE GRAND ROUTES: HIGHWAYMEN ON THE ROADS OF THE ROMANIAN PRINCIPALITIES IN THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY”, the authors Mihai-Bogdan ATANASIU, Constantin RĂCHITĂ, Ana ODOCHICIUC and Roxana PATRAȘ propose a geo-literary approach to spatially analyze Romanian hajduk genre fiction by overlaying historical maps, criminal records, and literary data. Two distinct spatial typologies, hence two modes of banditry are identified: static and romantic in Wallachia (forest-based) vs dynamic and factual in Moldavia (road-based). The authors thus confirm that highway robbery was closely tied to historical trade routes, further indicating that geography and infrastructure influenced both real criminality and its fictionalized hajduk account.

The issue concludes with a critical discourse analysis on stereotyping the other in literary discourse. In “HOW ABOUT LEXICALLY MEASURING EASTERN EUROPEAN LITERARY GYPSYLORISM? DUAL OTHERING AND LINGUISTIC STEREOTYPING OF ROMA FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE MODERN ROMANIAN NOVEL”, David Morariu argues that Roma female characters are strategically used in fiction to construct and negotiate Romanian cultural identity. Developing on the concept of Eastern European literary gypsyism, whereby the characters are both exoticized through Western-influenced tropes and marginalized through autochthonous discourses, the

author demonstrates how literature perpetuates racialized and gendered stereotypes through linguistic patterns that reinforce cultural othering.

Travelers, from diplomats and tourists to diasporans and exiles, take on a distinct identity, accommodated in an interspace that engenders transgression. Travelers move between places, motives, customs, mores, ideologies, between the familiar and the strange; movement thus becomes their nature. (Un)bound by the many boundaries of society, they may try to escape; in that sense outlaws and monsters are their kin. They originate in a home – a place, an idea – and carry it with them along the grand routes or off the beaten track, to never return. Because no traveler ever steps on the same road twice.

