

Imagology Profiles

Imagology Profiles:

The Dynamics of National Imagery in Literature

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INTRODUCTION

This volume seeks to highlight the importance of imagology, currently one of the most popular areas of research in contemporary comparative studies. The concepts of imagology have been entrenched in contemporary literary theory since the appearance of the seminal works of the representatives of the so-called Aachen School, namely Hugo Dyserinck and his successors Karl Ulrich Syndram, Manfred S. Fischer, and Joep Leerssen. Because national identities and collective images and views circulating in the public sphere are mutually dependent, contemporary imagology posits that it is all the more relevant to explore the problem of national identity through the dynamics of literary imagery. Although imagology is currently experiencing an intense revival in literary studies, in the humanities it has not yet received adequate theoretical or practical attention in the European East-Baltic periphery. The papers in this collection seek to attract greater attention to this field by reinforcing the key concepts of imagology (imagery, auto-image, hetero-image, imageme, prejudice, and stereotype), thereby problematizing our understanding of the role of national identity in literature.

The topics chosen draw a wide trajectory from classical to marginal images, from national heroes to (un)conventional aspects of gender, from ethno-imagology to the broader dimension of intercultural references and epistemological post-poststructuralist changes. The contributors from Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Russia, Poland, Ukraine, and Croatia propose new means of academic analysis to create critical attitudes towards the development of imagological studies.

The volume strives to widen the field of imagology by introducing concepts such as “geo-imagology” and “imagology of gender,” and by linking imagological strategy with the power principle developed by postcolonialism and with the fictional project of an imaginary utopian society. The essays selected for this volume include case studies focusing on the works of individual authors, as well as broader insights concentrating on regional, national, and transnational identities that experienced a change of imagery due to historical, political, and social shifts. The editor has decided to pay particular attention to the aspects of mobile imagery, the emergence of peripheral identities related to gender, class, ethnicity, or race, and the detection and assessment of well-

established stereotypes. Many of the individual contributions take on a comparative or transnational approach. Special attention is devoted to the imagery surrounding the mutual dependence of Poles and Lithuanians, as well as Latvian-German and Lithuanian-Latvian relationships and the aesthetics of the global North intrinsic to the Baltic consciousness. The scope of the topics discussed and the variety of periods covered in the volume imply the universal nature and versatile applicability of literary imagology.

The collection of papers aims at:

- (1) providing a theoretical and historical overview of imagology and its methodological relevance to literary studies
- (2) examining national self-representations and self-images, and how these impact the formation of national identity
- (3) exploring the idea of national character and how it is established in the literary imagination through the concepts of cultural difference and a conscious relation to the Other
- (4) analysing the literary concept of the Other and constructions of the Other in national imagery, including their evolution and related stereotypes

The opening essay by Laura Laurušaitė (Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore) offers an introduction to the main theoretical and conceptual ideas, many of which are further explicated in the subsequent contributions, while Zrinka Blažević (University of Zagreb, Croatia) proposes a broader definition of the key imagological concept of “image,” bringing imagology more into accord with the epistemological imperatives of post-poststructuralism.

The second section of the volume, “From National Imagination to Utopia,” is devoted to the discussion of the controversial overlapping of national discourse and utopian imagination. Pauls Daija (Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia) links the categories of colonialism and imagology to discuss the paradigm of the Enlightenment in Latvian literature. Using a wide range of literary texts (mostly written by Baltic Germans), he uncovers the ideology (or, rather, imagology) of well-educated German colonists who observed the society of the Latvian majority and tried to manipulate its public opinion. Zane Šiliņa (University of Latvia) discusses the literary and philosophical quest to create a national hero in Latvian literature as a crucial strategy for both building a collective sense of identity and forming a national paradigm.

The next two papers, by Maxim Shadurski (Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities, Poland) and Jurgita Katkuvienė (Vilnius University, Lithuania), offer an extension of conventional imagological research by turning their attention to the utopian visions of eugenics. Through a thorough analysis of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), Shadurski examines the ways in which utopian fiction reveals the dynamism of national images. Delving into the fantasy satire *Siegfrid Immerselbe Rejuvenates* (1934) by the Lithuanian author Ignas Šeinius, Katkuvienė highlights the ideological concept of turning an old Nazi into a young Jew and introduces a certain deconstruction of the idea of the "pure race" and the "superior nation." She offers an original theoretical insight in order that, in satire, "the representation of national character can also have an additional function of artistic expression."

The next section of the volume, "Transgressing Real and Imaginary Boundaries," introduces the geo-imagological aspect and proposes theoretical links between imagology and literary topography. It strives to reveal how crossing existing topographical borders influences the crossing of the imagined ones. Vigmantas Butkus does so by drawing an anthropological portrait of the Lithuanian-Latvian border community. He demonstrates that the phenomenon of the boundary is actually imagological in nature, because the borderline region is an "imagined" space of interaction among several cultural traditions. This linguistic and customary interaction results in people "migrating" between the territories of two countries not only physically (they commute to Riga), but also mentally. At the centre of the argument presented by Radosław Okulicz-Kozaryn (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland) lies the premise that Lithuania and Scotland bear real and imaginary ties (e.g. a small village called Szkocja being located in the area of the Polish-Lithuanian borderland, or a Polish-Lithuanian aristocrat, Ludwik Pac, bringing some five hundred artisans and farmers from Scotland). The professor suggests that a type of imagination evolved in early Romanticism that was common to all Northern European countries, and the countryside is singled out as the key element constituting the national character of that time and as a source of this nostalgic imagery.

Two other papers in this chapter point to the war and refugee camps as representing a shifting of geopolitical borders and as a performativity of the national identity brought about by those experiences. Discussing the depiction of war in Enn Kippel's fiction as an imagological arena, Anelli Kõvamees (Tallinn University, Institute of Estonian Language and Culture) addresses the question of stereotypically negative representations of Russians. The section closes with the essay by Taisija Oral (Lithuanian

Social Research Centre) who chooses the so-called “Scandinavian Trilogy” (*Hanuman’s Journey to Lolland, Bizzare, and The Sleepwalker’s Confession*) by the Estonian-Russian author Andrei Ivanov as her research object, and demonstrates how an experience of migration and living in a multicultural refugee community transcends individual ascriptions of the nation. The complex interplay between the auto-image and the hetero-image allows her to identify *inter*-national imagery as a basis for the modern migrant identity and the principle of polyphony as a structural element in the narrative of novels. The methodological value of her paper lies in the fact that by capturing the multiplicity of the narrator’s voices she develops the connection between imagology and narratology.

The third section, “Gender Identity as an Imagological Resource,” is devoted to discussing the formation of gender in contemporary society as an illusory (imagological) process. Two case studies examine the way in which gender becomes inscribed in and affected by national images. The section begins with an essay by Margarita Malykhina (Herzen State University of Russia, St. Petersburg) who examines the prose of Nick Hornby, a representative of the so-called “new lad” trend in contemporary British fiction, in order to show how the masculine identity of modern times is constructed under the influence of mass culture and consumerism and succumbs to the norms of popular image-building. Natalia Isaieva (Taras Shevchenko National University of Kiev, Ukraine) reflects on the novel *Feathered Serpent* by the modern Chinese writer Xu Xiaobin who “created a dynamic generalized imagotype of the twentieth century Chinese woman” at the end of the 1990s. In her essay, Isaieva unravels the process of the destruction of the traditional views of female identity and the formation of new ones.

Taking positive and negative stereotyping as a point of departure, the last section, “Stability and Changeability of National (Stereo)types,” discusses the manifestation of entrenched conventional views about other peoples’ ethnic and national characters. In her essay, Gitana Vanagaitė (Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences) contributes to the inversion of the negative hetero-stereotypes surrounding the notion of Lithuanianness in the correspondence between the representatives of the Holy See at the Apostolic Nunciature in Lithuania and the Vatican. Viktorija Šeina (Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore) is concerned with the question of how a particular set of images connected to the Poles and Polishness is determined not only by historical, social, and political circumstances, but also by the folklore tradition and the historical memory of serfdom, continuing to carry negative meanings in the interwar Lithuanian society. Manfredas Žvirgždas (Institute of Lithuanian Literature

and Folklore) discusses the formation and conceptual shifts of Scandinavian imagery in Lithuanian poetry. Exploring poetic sketches of northern landscapes, he unravels a spectrum of northern imagery ranging from the traditional stereotypes of hostile topographies to the cold Scandinavian climates as a metaphor for Soviet stagnation. Algis Kalėda (Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore) unravels the relations between Lithuanians and Poles through the emergent imagery of Vilnius in modern poetry written by the Poles of Lithuania. He argues that the imago-myth of “majestic and dear” Lithuania, which was apparently highly influenced by Czesław Miłosz, continues to this day in a wide variety of forms. As Kalėda’s close examination shows, the Vilnius cityscapes are closely linked in the imagination of numerous Polish poets. All contributions included in this section bear witness to how negative stereotyping contributes to creating boundaries between nations, while positive representational patterns help to blur these boundaries.

FOCUS I

THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES, TERMS, AND DEFINITIONS

IMAGOLOGY AS IMAGE GEOLOGY

LAURA LAURUŠAITĖ

In his book *Įsivaizduojamybė* [The Imaginary] (2013), the Lithuanian philosopher Kristupas Sabolius offers a Middle Eastern folk tale about the thirteenth-century wise man Nasreddin, in which a rich man passes away and leaves a will bequeathing his wealth, including seventeen camels, to his three sons. The will states that the eldest son would own half of the seventeen camels, the middle one would get a third, and the youngest would get his share of the camels as one-ninth. The sons are stunned and unable to execute their father's will, as the wealth cannot be divided into equal parts unless they chop one camel in half. They therefore go to the wise man Nasreddin for advice. Nasreddin adds one camel of his own so that the total number of camels equals eighteen. He then divides them as per the deceased father's will: the eldest son is given nine camels—that is, one half—the middle son receives a third, or six camels, and the youngest is left with a ninth part—two camels. When added up, nine, six, and two make seventeen. The one camel added by Nasreddin is taken back (Sabolius 2013, 17). It is that one camel that is the potential of imagology—the (discursive) truth that simultaneously exists and does not exist. The phenomenon of the synergy of existing and non-existing immediately implicates the terminology of an unauthentic simulated relationship—opinion, anticipation, expectation, preconception, speculation, generalization, and the like—which conveys the dependence of the national character on people's attitude. However, imagology also involves concentrated collective codes and models defining such underlying structures of a nation's solidarity as myths or symbols. The functioning of all these images of a virtual nature, and their archetypal accumulations in the imagological context, resemble Nasreddin's eighteenth camel: they do not succumb to the unambiguous logic of being or non-being.

As indicated by the notional component *imago*, imagology focuses on the complicated relationship between reality and imagination, between the image and its projection, and merges the spheres of perception and reality. In the cultural field, the concept of imagology functions with an ambivalent meaning: first, as an academic model of culture, and second as

a common contemporary tool of power and a principle of manipulation in the consumer society. In both instances, imagology is a mental arena of the construction and re/deconstruction of ethnic, national, racial, and cultural images. Literary imagology, or “image studies,” entered the field of vision of methodological dispersion after the Second World War and with varying degrees of intensity has been functioning on the European methodological map for almost fifty years. In recent decades, the concept of traditional imagology has undergone significant transformation. Its development and relevance are obvious in both the latest works of theorists and practitioners and the conferences organized to discuss the strategies, practices, and continuation of the method.¹ Since 1992, the publishers Rodopi in Amsterdam have been publishing a methodologically oriented series of academic research called *Studia Imagologica*. Over twenty works have already appeared that lend imagology a new interdisciplinary and transcultural (translocal) perspective. *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters. A Critical Survey* (2007)—a programmatic work in imagology and a critical-analytical compendium of national, cultural, and ethnic images and stereotypes of different nations dedicated to the conceptual “father” of imagology, Hugo Dyserinck—is an important landmark pointing to a renewed interest in this field of comparative literary studies in the twenty-first century.

So far, literary scholarship in the Baltic countries has approached national images without a conceptual reference to imagology; that is, as individual literary motifs, as reputations of nations contrasted on the basis of the comparative principle, and as universal wandering plots. Modern imagology gives an impulse to expanding intercultural analysis by taking a literary scholar to the transcultural space of image taxonomy. Imagology makes it possible to discern deeper and differently from other research

¹ For example: “Imagology and Cross-cultural Encounters in History” (Finland, Oulu, 2007); “Imagological Aspect of Modern Comparative Literature: Strategies and Paradigms” (Ukraine, Kyiv, 2009); “Imagology Today: Achievements, Challenges, Perspectives” (Croatia, Zagreb, 2009); “Translation and National Images” (The Netherlands, Amsterdam, 2011); “History as a Foreign Country: Historical Imagery in South-Eastern Europe” (Croatia, Zadar and Nin, 2012); “Cultural Identity and Alterity in Time. International conference on Imagology” (Romania, Miercurea-Ciuc, 2013); “Imagology Profiles: The Dynamics of National Imagery in Literature” (Lithuania, Vilnius, 2015); and “Imagology and Comparative Studies: About the Images of Otherness in the Culture of Central and Eastern Europe” (Poland, Poznan, 2016), “New Perspectives on Imagology” (Austria, Vienna, 2018).

methods employed by literary historians to analyse the potential of images. This is because imagology prioritizes the perspective of another nation and brings self-identification (you are what you identify with) to the foreground; it allows for a closer look at the impact of stereotypical perceptions on our national imagination.

The aim of this article is to position the method in the field of other disciplines of literary theory and analysis, to critically discuss the essential theoretical approaches of literary imagology, to introduce its underlying concepts (self-image, hetero-image, stereotype), and to outline the imagological parameters of the representative context of the Baltic countries by identifying its specific aspects.

Defining Imagology by Location

When attempting to localize imagology in the coordinate system of other methods, references are made to comparative literature as “the disciplinary homeland of imagology” (Blažević 2014, 355). The contemporary liberal academic atmosphere, which supports multiplicity and the crossing of methods, was favourable to the interdisciplinary starting positions of imagology that took shape in a broader field of other disciplines. Having crystallized as a triad of three disciplines—psychology, literature, and history—addressing issues close to anthropology and social sciences, interdisciplinary comparative imagology² marked a qualitatively new methodological format of the discipline of comparative literary studies. Traditional comparative literary studies examined national and ethnic images and stereotypes in isolation (nation X in the literature, folklore tradition, or historiography of nation Y). The modern strain of the method engages itself in embracing the whole imagery of a certain culture or artificially shaped political formation (e.g. the European Union) during a defined period of time in recording its shifts and the historical variability of representations. Imagology made its way to a beneficial meta-theoretical soil because imagination as a principle of conceptual perception of the

² In this paper the term “literary imagology” is used in the sense applied by the representatives of the Aachen school of imagology—Hugo Dyserinck, Manfred Beller, Joep Leerssen, and others. The French school of imagology (Jean-Marc Moura, Daniel-Henri Pageaux) associates imagology not so much with the trend of contextual as with textual analysis (semiology, narratology, semiotics, phenomenological hermeneutics). Pageaux even went so far as to try to elevate imagology to the poetic level.

world through images, texts, and discourses has recently pervaded ever more varied branches of scholarship.³

Imagology is not a methodology oriented towards the nation state; it perceives a nation as a territorially undefined formation of the imagination where the national character is treated as a totality of images connected by contextual and intertextual associations. Consequently, imagology questions deterministic national essentialism by rejecting the existence of a nation as an individual exceptional unit (Leerssen 2007, 379). From the imagological point of view, all nations perceive one another differently, and therefore an endless network of mutual representations and reflections comes into being. An image is the result of this networking.

The rise of literary imagology coincided with the weakening of the power of the nation state and a turn from ethnocentrism to post-nationalism declared in the academic environment. Imagology shares its intellectual genealogy with Edward W. Said's "imaginary geographies" (1977), which are defined not as a territorial but a constructional unit and are the foundation of the concept of Orientalism. In the model of Orientalism, imagining functions as a power tool for subordinating the Orient by attributing preconceived pejorative meanings to it, and by emphasizing the patronising relation of the West with regards to the East. Said recorded how the Europeans stereotypically describe the Orient as exotic and barbaric in order to gain an advantage over it, while the Orient has internalized this attitude and accepted it as a negative self-image. Incidentally, in addition to other conceptual flaws,⁴ imagology has attracted criticism due to its exaggerated Eurocentrism (Perner 2013, 32) and adoration of Europe as a coherent unity.

The component of imagination in imagology and Benedict Andersen's classic model of "imagined communities" (1981) features not only linguistic but also etymological-conceptual coincidence. Both these theoretical paradigms are united by the similarity of the relationship between imagination and reality. The incursions of imagological research into the imagined reputation of a nation are based on the analogous idea

³ A mutual correlation can be traced between, for example, the "imaginary homelands" of the classic postcolonial writer Salman Rushdie, the "imagined cartographies" of Donald Leech, and the "imaginäre Topographie" of the German literary and cultural scholar Sigrid Weigel.

⁴ During its lifetime, imagology has been accused of having a too-broad field of research, a simplified attitude to other nations, a static approach, immunity to globalization and a constructivist turn in the humanities, an inadequate package of analytical tools, and, in general, being a deficient concept when compared with other disciplines of literary analysis, in particular postcolonial studies.

that ethnic communities are not homogeneous and geographically defined concentrations of people, but discursive practices and projections existing in the collective consciousness. Speaking of the fictional aspect of imagology, Hugo Dyserinck appeals to Karl Propp's World 3, which consists of the abstract output of the mind (myths, histories, models, networks) (Dyserinck 2003). Imagined communities are not assumed or made-up nations, but this imagination-driven energy of the mind that ensures communion with people who you might never meet is a condition for their existence. For this reason, imagology, like the imagined communities, is a peculiar medium between reality and the imaginary.

Based on the priority of the principle of imagination, the field of vision of imagology encompasses utopias as imagination-produced projects of the ideal society or an unfeasible social order. However, unlike realistically existing "imagined" communities, these communities are artificially designed, made up, and "imaginary," although their prototypes can be existing society models with recognized cultural meanings. In such cases, literary utopias function as satires or allegories that not so much create the model of an ideal society as criticize the existing social order.

The discussion mostly concerns the status of imagology and postcolonialism as adjacent or even related disciplines. Some theorists consider imagology as a variety of postcolonialism from the Old Continent as a "dominantly European and less assertive older sister of postcolonial studies" (Dukić 2012a, 15), while others claim that the self-awareness of the twins is overrated (Perner 2013; Blažević 2014). Without seeking to reduce both theoretical paradigms to a common denominator as organic synthesis, we must admit that although they emerged in different continents—yet parallel to each other—both methods are politically oriented and related from the point of view of identity differences and interruptions, the cultural debate about Self and Other, and power relations. It is nonetheless obvious that by declaring transcendental national boundaries (the so-called "supranational standpoint") and maintaining the view that culture as a totality of micro-universes is more homogeneous, differently from the postcolonialists who raise the issue of the juncture of creolism and hybridization, imagology is engaged to be ideologically more moderate and more ethical than postcolonialism (Perner 2013, 32; Blažević 2014, 356). We could add another essential difference: having emerged as a strategy for deconstructing the culture of colonial empires, postcolonialism is based on binary logic and is oriented towards the study of the bilateral relationship between the dominated and the dominant. Meanwhile, imagology proposes multidirectional research into the interactions of the images of various nations.

A Repository of Images

The central term of imagology and the smallest unit of imagological analysis, the image, is used in imagology in the meaning of imagining and perception, as a mental image of Self or Other. Various prefabricated images generalizing (exaggerating or simplifying) certain aspects of national belonging— cliché, prejudice, stereotype—function in the theory of imagology. These concentrated images of illusionary nature are like ready-made mental items that fill our thinking, providing a framework or at least guidelines to our identity or to the perception of the Other. Imagologists should view these fixed representative models as their working analytical material, neutrally and without negative bias: “There is no escaping from stereotypes and rather than fight them, we should treat them as a cognitive material in imagological thinking” (Dąbrowski 2011, 97).

The adepts of theoretical imagology understand the image as a discursive representation of Other (hetero-images) or Self (auto-images, self-images) in literature. Imagologists are the geologist explorers of national/ethnic images who weave the tapestry of collective images characterized by inherent ambivalence where the Self is the warp and the Other is the weft. This bilateral dynamism between hetero-images and the self-image immediately offers two anthropological viewpoints to the scholar: the spectated and the spectant, although, paradoxically, the imagological image tells us more about the preconceived notions and assumptions of the spectant rather than the target group of the spectated (Chew 2006, 182; Perner 2013, 31). Each national identity is basically an ethnocentric repository of characteristic images, which from the imagological point of view is non-finite and virtual because it can be decentred in a juncture with other national identities. Imagology highlights the relativity of national imagery, its direct dependence on the image of the nation created by the people of that particular nation, the perspective of other nations, and previously written texts which serve the authors as a (un)conscious stepping stone in constructing or deconstructing certain images.

There have been attempts to nuance the polarized notion of the auto-image and the hetero-image by introducing the notion of the meta-image, which the Other has with regard to my nation (Millas 2001; 2006; Leerssen 2007, 334), also by focusing attention on the specific situation of the (non)belonging of the emigrants:

There is another distinction that has to be made when discussing ethnic images in fiction. The imagologists' classification of images into just two groups is incomplete. The authors ignore the points of view of exiles, i.e.

the images of immigrants, who are initially outsiders in a community, but get partially integrated, and the images of the emigrants, who were once insiders, but have more or less lost contact with their native community. We shall call the former infra-images and include them within self-images, the latter alo-images and include them within hetero-images. These points of view combine involvement with detachment and adapt the images of otherness to suit self-images. (Brinzeu 2000, 19)

For rethinking the image in the global cultural environment from the perspective of “transcultural imagology” and “global challenge” (Blažević 2014, 356), imagology offers a conceptual transition from the studies of national identity to those of national difference and national diversity. The mindset of the modern subject is of high (ambi)valence since it is dominated not by indicators of pure origin and frequently not even by the regime of hybrid images, but by eclecticism of identities and/or a void caused by the inability to choose suitable identification. Imagology tracks the imaginary nature of not only emigrational but also contemporary identity, as well as reconfigurations and (trans)formations of contemporary identity; however, it lacks respective terminology that would appropriately respond to these challenges. Let us say that such established oppositions of binary thinking as Self/Other or local/foreign can have in-between variants of identity-turned-other, when what is alien is attempted to be made one’s own, to penetrate what is unknown, to integrate alien elements (for instance, “one’s own other” or “self-in-and-through-others”). The feeling of emotional attachment and of belonging to a certain community, which was the basic condition for the existence of “imaginary communities,” can be replaced by feelings of partial belonging or imagined non-belonging (for example, the declared demeanour of the citizen of the world). Still, by rejecting canonical images, what is “dissociated from” often emerges as the counter image (Leerssen 2007, 343).

The image in imagology is understood not as an individual element but one associated with group identity, as a symbolical foundation of collectivism that conveys the ideological and cultural programme of a group of individuals. As a rule, a whole set of preconceived representations involved in the creation of the meaning of a society or the national character of a nation is examined. Contemporary imagology focuses not on actual images but their imagined context and structural ties with other images of the same culture; that is, on cultural imagery. Cultural imagery is perceived as a group of images, attributed to a certain culture at a certain time, which makes up the symbolical foundation of national identification. Although images evolve and change diachronically, they are usually analysed and reconstructed synchronically

by performing a cross section of some specific and conditionally static period in literature. When literature contains some unique national information, the imagologist must be prepared to examine the deep mechanism of its expression rather than just the surface of the literary image:

Image is only the tip of the iceberg. When facing foreign images, one needs to carefully examine the historical and cultural factors that constrain image variations. (Cao 2013, 188)

Yet I would suggest not underrating the significance of the individual image (stereotype) in the process of meaning creation and including it in the imagological amplitude as the smallest analytical category of imagological analysis. The extensive quantitative examination of images (imagery) can be more representative, but a vertical deep analysis can be no less productive at the level of the individual image because a representation of one member of some nation can lead to the reconsideration of a foreigner-formed canonical vision of a whole country: to rehabilitate its image or compromise it. Attention should be paid to the close correlation between the individual and collective image, between “our” and “mine,” each of which can function as a substitute of the other. The individual image can reflect the attitude of a whole social group with which the author/narrator/character identifies, while the characteristic (in particular negative) addressed to his or her nation can be accepted in a very sensitive and emotional manner as a personally attributed quality. The analysis of personal identities is highly interesting when the national character finds expression through one individual as an information carrier functioning as the agent or mirror of the whole nation. I discern a challenge to imagology as a group examination of national and ethnic images due to the fact that in our times each individual maintains personal control over reality, and is engaged in self-creation and image engineering: individuals fashion themselves by espousing the respective fictional features of “I,” including markers of national/ethnic identification. As people identify less and less with their nation and national myths, other supranational identities, such as class or profession, take hold (Florida 2012).

Imagology between Fact and Fiction

The most complicated contradiction in literary imagology, which has triggered a number of discussions in the method’s development stage and has not yet been entirely resolved, is the relation between objective (living) reality and literary depiction; in other words, the theoretical

dilemma of whether the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) can be recognized in literature, or whether the quest for it is a methodologically erroneous step. The answer is both “yes” and “no” if we speculate according to the logic of Nasreddin’s camel. It has become a methodological axiom that a nation’s imagological “emblems”—certain assumptions, images, or stereotypes prevailing in the literature of a given period—are perceived as imagined. In the terminology of Jean-Marie Carré, one of the pioneers of imagology, these are mirages rather than factual—sociological, anthropological, or historical—data. Many paradigms critical of imagology (starting from the famous opposition of Carré and René Wellek) refer to the danger of assimilating reality with literary representations produced by the writers’ imagination.

Imagology does not accept that original content and primary unmodified truth are hidden on the reverse side of an image because the national character as such is perceived as an imagined construct that is impossible to distinguish: singling it out is considered a symptom of national essentialism and determinism (Dyserinck 1982, 36–7). Following the established tradition, the leading contemporary Dutch imagologist Joep Leerssen claims that only the literary text as such can be the imagologist’s research object, dissociated from any ambition to relate a writer’s interpretations found in the text with identity traits that actually circulate in a nation. He expands on his arguments and draws a demarcation between the imagined national stereotyping and the factual message, and suggests the following generalizing example:

- (1) “Spaniards are proud” as an easily recognisable stereotype
- (2) “Spaniards are mortal” as a simple fact. (2007, 284)

Such arguments resemble reasoning of a rhetoric or scholastic nature because, first of all, mortality is not a national or ethnic quality reserved for Spaniards alone, and therefore it is not accurate to choose it as an analogy; also, some religions believe in the immortality of the soul, for which reason the second statement is also more imagological in nature than factual.

One can understand imagologists striving to dissociate themselves at any cost from compromising accusations to the effect that imagology departs too far from the discipline of literature and is just a masked history of culture, social psychology, or ethno-psychology. However, the ambitions of interdisciplinary imagology that were previously seen as a limitation and a danger to the method’s literary origin and mission can now be seen as its advantage and strength. It seems that the demonization of historical or social reality in the text arises from methodological self-

defence. This possibly explains why Leerssen was extremely sceptical with regards to historical imagology: he emphasized that imagology examines only representations, the secondary literary (artistic) depiction, and not society as such or a nation's character, which led Dukić to conclude that "history does not possess, at least from the point of view of the Aachen School, the status of the sister discipline of imagology" (2012b, 120–1). In the imagological context, there was a suggestion to use the term "representation" instead of "mentality" due to the obscurity and vulnerability of the latter (Gorun 2007, 22).

I also discern a terminological discrepancy in the aspiration of imagologists to set themselves aside from the examination of social and political reality in the text. Questioning the reality of the literary image and suggesting it should be called a representation, they object, in terms of terminology, to the statement that:

Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real (even if this equivalence is utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of the sign as value*. (Baudrillard 1995, 6)

According to the inadequacy of the image in literature declared by the imagologists, its projection should be called a simulation rather than a representation. Leaving aside the ambition to directly identify an artistic work with reality and treat it as a form of reality dubbing, we still argue that the fact that imagology perceives the image purely as a discursive product does not methodologically contradict the imagologist's aspiration to try to grasp the reflection of "reality" in literature, even if admitting it possesses the utopian character pointed out by Baudrillard.

By combining different contextual analysis approaches (social-historical, ethno-psychological, and cultural-political), this method could become more effective and more universally applicable. It is important to remember that imagology assumes a political mission to deconstruct nationalist reasoning and thus combats nationalism in literature and seeks a better mutual understanding between nations (Dukić 2012b, 118). In cross-cultural diaspora studies, migration studies, transnational studies, and globalization studies, this provision contains prospects for imagology in shattering stereotypes that set nations against one another, and searching for bridges of mutual understanding. Against the background of intensified regional conflicts and global terrorism, imagology as a socially engaged methodology is assigned an exclusive position in the network of methods:

“If ever a scholarly field had direct relevance to contemporary social issues, it must certainly be imagology” (Chew 2006, 180).

There can be no doubt that the sources of imagology are always subjective, yet it appears possible and feasible to identify the most characteristic traits of a nation from the abundance of textual and discursive data, so that subsequently, following the boomerang principle, these data could be channelled to social reality and used for the practical purpose of reducing ethnic and religious tensions. We would support Blažević, who makes an essential contribution to the development of imagology by provoking the established notion of the image and proposing an extensive elaboration on the theory of imagology: “a wider definition of image, which might be conceived as an interferential configuration of mental images, textual and non-textual representations and practice patterns constituted within a particular socio-historical context” (Blažević 2014, 361).

Of particular importance in the present discussion is the fact that literature is a bidirectional medium that contextualizes and programmes our thinking at the same time. On the one hand, textual representations actualize reality; on the other, writers themselves can be considered architects of reality because by establishing images they contribute to the construction of reality, and “people are formed by what they read” (Spiering 1992, ix) This raises the issue of the representativeness of a literary work for imagological research: *fictional* works intentionally create a different alternative existence; therefore, as an aestheticized margin of error of reality, they do not possess enough imagological potential. The field of the imagologist’s activity consists of marginal (faction) genres such as the historical novel, ego-documentary genres like (auto)biography, epistolary genre, diaries, or *pseudofactual* genres such as travelogues, history textbooks, and the like, in which representative material for the examination of the stereotypical structure and a nation’s changing self-image can be found. In addition, literary imagology finds itself between the poles of national individuality and universality: between the intensifying global centripetal trends of nationalism and particularism that acquire extreme literary expressions (dialectal writing, literary regionalism) at one end, and at the other the wearing-off geographical, linguistic, and national boundaries with multiplying literary texts void of specific national markers and dissociating from the particular culture in which an image was born. Such texts, although more universal and better understood against the background of cultural expectations of foreigners, supply the imagologist scholar with less material. The supranational term “global literature” as a global literary field also postulates universality

over national distinction and traditions. The “Euro-novel”—the meta-national idea that was born and established itself as a product of European integration and cultural levelling—functions along the lines of a similar principle.

In the twenty-first century, the range of theoretical contacts of imagology has been broadening and now encompasses journalistic writing, research into traditional and contemporary folklore, political rhetoric, managerial discourses, the informal culture of daily life (ethnic jokes), and the like. Sources are becoming more intermedial, bordering on visual imageries: films (historical, political, and geographical documentaries), modern media genres, caricature, and advertising. The importance of imagology in translation studies has been acknowledged, and research is being conducted on the role of the translator as a mediator, the transfer of the national through translation, and image-building and image modifications in translation (Hung 2005; Doorslaer, Flynn, and Leerssen 2016). This kind of research actualizes the complex issue of reception: images may be not only inadequately written down but also subjectively read, and their primary meaning might be lost in the process of translation and reproduction.

Imagology as a Principle of World Construction

Literature can function in a manner similar to that of a modern newspaper or social networks, which do not *recreate* an event, but rather *create* it (instead of simply reporting it). A typical example would be Umberto Eco’s novel-satire *Numero zero* about a non-existing newspaper, *Tomorrow*, which is invented to demonstrate how disinformation can be spread, and how news is constructed not to inform but to form an opinion even if there is no factual basis whatsoever. Imagology can operate as a power-relation-based algorithm of programming, disciplining, or machination (such as jokes about other nations created on the basis of extreme stereotypes and political agitation, and extreme forms of such a relation would be political propaganda and ideological censorship). In this way, imagology opens the perspective of additional existence that is, at the same time, a provocation of existence.

The Czech writer and dissident Milan Kundera was the first to introduce the neologism “imagology” to fiction in his 1990 novel *Immortality*, and used it to define a new systemic contemporary phenomenon. He revealed the ideological transition from political ideology to imagology, a new tool for the power and mass media of contemporary consumerist societies, which is a dictate of image building,

fashion, and advertising, a production of public relations, and a creation of pseudo-mythology. In the epoch of popular culture, the primary picture and autonomous reality lose their meaning in general: they are pushed out by representation and the construed facade image. In the modern world, it is not the essence but its attribute, the external shell, and not existence but the appearance that replaces it, that become important:

Philosophers can tell us that it doesn't matter what the world thinks of us, that nothing matters but what we really are. But philosophers don't understand anything. As long as we live with other people, we are only what other people consider us to be. (Kundera 1991, 142)

This idea echoes the thesis proposed by literary imagologists, to the effect that in contemporary multicultural society it is no longer identity but identification that matters; or, in other words, not what you are, but what you choose to identify with (Leerssen 2007, 27). It is just a function, a fabricated mask designed not only by the environment and invisible professionals (mass media, camera lenses, and camcorders) but also by the efforts of the individual. Although trivial and changing, the imagologists' systems are also powerful in their great challenges to stealthily penetrate and overwhelm the individual's consciousness:

Imagologues create systems of ideals and anti-ideals, systems of short duration which are quickly replaced by other systems but which influence our behaviour, our political opinions and aesthetic tastes, the colour of carpets and the selection of books just as in the past we have been ruled by the systems of ideologues. (Kundera 1991, 130)

In the epoch of the media, which can also be called "the era of imagology," the principle of reality is questioned in general. Nearly all daily life falls into the imagologists' sphere of power and is subjected to their logic of reality-building. Therefore, the simultaneous existence and non-existence of Nasreddin's camel, constant dialectics of the authentic versus the inauthentic, represent a symptomatic contemporary condition which can also be considered the capital and driving force of literary imagology as a research method. In such a system, it is important to foresee the possibilities of all conceivable relations and causalities and to perceive the phenomenon of double dependency as the power of imagology.

I therefore suggest a rethinking of the imagological approach stating that literature should be researched separately from reality, and complementing it with the effect of Nasreddin's camel. In other words, I

propose merging the strengths of Kundera's social imagology as the doctrine of an imitation surrogate worldview and literary imagology as a method of literary scholarship.

Imagology in Eastern and Central Europe

As a method of literary analysis, comparative imagology arose and was institutionalized in the academic centres of “the first world,” but in the twenty-first century it entered the field of vision of the cultures belonging to the “second” cluster of European literature—the Balkan and the Baltic countries, eastern Slavs, and the like. The collection of papers *The Essence and the Margin: National Identities and Collective Memories in Contemporary European Culture* (2009) addressed the identification models of contemporary supranational Europe and actualized the complicated notion of common European identity, yet it must be admitted that the imagological (ideological) juxtaposition of “Western Europe” and “Eastern and Central Europe” still exists in contemporary Europe. The post-Soviet/post-socialist nature of the latter lies at the base of this division. Any empire or union demands collective solidarity and creates myths of territorial and national unity, whereas liberated states seek to demythologize them by redistributing resources of power and by rehabilitating national images. When the Baltic countries, which recovered their independence in 1990, went through the stage of developing and substantializing their nations—thus demonstrating that national sentiment can be more powerful than ideologies, imagology, keeping pace with the humanitarian fashions of the time—this was the declaration of an epistemological turn away from ethnocentrism. One might claim that the downgrading of nationalism is more prominent in the countries of the “first world” than in post-communist cultures, or, in the words of the Russian critic Leonid Bachnov, in “Europe B” (2015, 525). Constantly coerced, the nations of Europe B have not yet had enough time to outline their cultural boundaries while they are being thrown into the supranational European “melting pot.”

On the map of nations drawn by the most influential literary imagologists (*Imagology* 2007), in which each nation is introduced as a case study, the Baltic region and the national character are totally unrepresented, although the nations of Central Europe (Czechs, Hungarians, Romanians), the Eastern Europeans (Poles and Russians), the Scandinavians (Fins, Swedes), and others are represented by separate chapters defining different ethnic groups and proposing the historical outlines of their development. One might presume that the failure to include the Baltic

countries in the general list implies that they are attributed to the grand narrative of the USSR: they are denied a sovereign history, a distinctive cultural substrate, or an individual national character. We would like to hope that by doing this imagologists are not questioning the very fact of the independence of the Baltic countries, but are questioning their content and importance (by attributing a status which the postcolonialists would call “marginal”). Therefore, just like the non-existing existence of Nasreddin’s camel, they are stereotypically seen as passive, small actors in a bigger game and the mainstream debate. Neither the spread of information technologies, nor changed political circumstances (the Soviet Union that collapsed twenty-six years ago), nor the universal processes of globalization were capable of eliminating this enduring habit of mapping the Baltic nations in the Soviet space, with the accompanying “package” of images: “Lithuania = Russia. I receive the imaginary identification card: cold and vodka (only the bear is missing)” (Grainytė 2012, 68). Such territorial allusions and ideological “reading” of the national character automatically play the role of social labelling. In the official political field of European memory and the hierarchy of values of a Western European that is metaphorically defined as “between the West and the rest,” the Baltic countries are assigned the generalizing status of *homo sovieticus* and the ethnicity of an Eastern European; they are not differentiated and seen as a whole united by a set of identity qualities common to other Eastern European—post-socialist and post-Soviet—countries. The stereotype of the Eastern European is a deep-rooted issue in the division between Western and Eastern Europe. Just as in Said’s model of Orientalism, Western Europeans mostly attribute negative images to “the rest,” and these negative images generate negative self-characterizations and deepen the crisis of self-perception.⁵ In order to refute these arguments of the normative Western discourse, the countries of the Baltic region enter the struggle of narratives for their self-definition⁶ and the inclusion of their independent histories in the culture of European memory, and attempt to define their identification as a result of the confrontation of East/West

⁵ Following the analogy with Said’s Orientalism, such deprecating terms as Balcanism or Balcanization have established themselves in the academia of the Balkan countries. Maria Todorova revises them in her book *Imaginary Balkans* (2006).

⁶ On January 6, 2017, the ambassadors of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia to Germany drafted a joint address in response to a publication in the German news portal *Zeit Online* in which the Baltic countries are called “successors of the statehood of the USSR.” The ambassadors pointed out that neither in legal nor political terms can the Baltic countries be referred to as former Soviet republics.

identities. Seeking the disappearance of national identities by employing the supranational principle in the construction of the Soviet person, the communist regime achieved partial success only on the level of the hetero-image, because the surviving Baltic nations proved their “unmeltable ethnics,” paraphrasing the title of the famous book by Michael Novak.

Imagologists perceive a nation as a construct affected by sociocultural and geopolitical circumstances, or, in Leerssen’s words, as a group of individuals that is inter-subjectively associated by common self-identification caused by a common feeling of cultural and historical continuity (2007, 379). At this point, I would like to pose a problematic question: how long should this “common” historical and cultural continuity last in order to qualify as a sufficient base for cultural and psycho-social identification? Where should the Baltic countries position themselves when their history is more affected by interruptions than by continuity? Culturally-performative literatures of the Baltic region could be an excellent source for imagological studies because historically they were forced on numerous occasions to recreate their identities when they first faced various outbreaks of power, and later the ghosts of historical memory. They experienced the influence of Germans (Latvians and Estonians) and Poles (Lithuanians); from 1918 to 1940 they created nation states; they experienced half a century of sovietization, which fundamentally affected the mechanisms of their world outlook, behaviour, morals, habits, and psychological responses; they re-established their independent states in 1990; and, finally, in 2004 they joined the European Union and accepted the European element as an important extension of their nationality. This historical synopsis shows that the constantly shifting position of the “centre” has layered the identity structure and brought about flexible boundaries of national/ethnic images. Although the Baltic countries have spent much effort in dissociating themselves from the legacy of their past (in particular, the Soviet past), they still cannot prove their Western qualifications, either to themselves or to the West. The Latvian sociologist Mārtiņš Kaprāns observes that “the Latvian émigrés played an important role in the process of creation of myths and collective images, because living with an uninterrupted consciousness of the Latvian statehood they hardened a fundamental anti-Soviet ethos” (2014, 43). In this complicated schema of identities, it would appear to be more effective to highlight strengths and idiosyncrasies and to reveal the alternative potential of the imageme⁷ lying in the deep cultural layers that could

⁷ Imagemes are ambivalent and polar images defining a national character. According to Leerssen, the deep semantic structure of the imageme hides a binary opposition determined by the ambivalence of values—the Janus-faced ambivalence.

become a new impetus for identifying and self-identification, rather than attempting to prove the Western character of the Baltic countries or contrast them with Western Europe, because that would establish even more strongly the stereotypical polarization of Eastern/Western Europe. In my opinion, the most productive way forward would be to examine what the “small” literatures of the Baltic countries say about their glorious past encoded in historical and mythical memory, to actualize the ethnic substrate of the Baltic countries, and to demythologize the hetero-images of these countries constructed by the Other. This would help in shaking off the inferiority complexes that are fed by historically evolved serf ideology and traditional comparison with the large actants. Or, as Jordan Ljuckanov suggests, to examine pairs of small literatures by comparing them as “a ‘cross-marginal territoriality,’ instead of the a-territoriality of universalist comparative literature and the one-side-of-the margin territoriality of, for example, Balkan studies” (2014, 296). Presumably, a comparison with the paradigmatic experiences of other communist countries (e.g. Cuba) would highlight not only the distinction of Eastern and Central European countries and their positive identity, but would also enable the identification of specific phenomena such as “Soviet globalization.” And last but not least, one of the main tasks of Eastern European imagologists should be producing knowledge about themselves, which would help small nations to enhance their visibility, to engage Nasreddin’s camel (e.g. the Baltic countries) as former participants in the division of the USSR who nonetheless recovered their integrity and exist in reality.

Conclusions

At present, imagology is a promising field in that it addresses not isolated images but their relationships and associative links with other images, the chronological boundaries of image dispersion, and the shifts of the content elements. Yet it is claimed that, at times, the method lacks methodological flexibility and a prompt response to the social changes of the world, which explains why this paper proposes several revisions of imagology or possibilities for its expansion:

(1) With the diversity of circulating identities growing on both macro (European, cosmopolitan) and micro (local, regional, ethnic, national) levels, and with the forms of their interaction becoming more complex, it

One side of the face dominates a particular context while the other side remains as a potential that can be activated in an appropriate situation. Imagemes can consist of different, sometimes even opposite images (2007, 344).