Olivia Manning and the War Exile:
A Memory of Ontological Wound

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Abstract: In British literature, Olivia Manning is a prodigious novelist who wrote an incredibly valuable and attractive autobiographical masterpiece, *The Balkan Trilogy* (1960). The hereby work commences with generic literary traits of Manning's war novel, which represents the complete setting for the life and authorial views. Furthermore, the study will tackle the traumatic ontological experience Olivia Manning suffered, especially during the travel from England to Romania, crossing the Balkan area. This fact converts her expertise into an unwilling and stunning initiation through a hostile runaway. Additionally, the author of the present work will demonstrate the way Manning, creates an authentic, divergent, and subjective approach to the war spaces the British author recalls. Subsequently, the article hints at the utmost pain of a young war refugee in Bucharest. The paper will also highlight Olivia Manning's strive to survive in a controversial world, where gradual acceptance of new values and habits becomes a fierce surviving struggle. Accordingly, the article will emphasize the authorial pain as an unforgettable life lesson. The work concludes with a genuine interpretation of the emotional and psychological background of the dramatic condition that the exile provides, especially as an absolute necessity of surviving beyond any rational reason.
Keywords: *exile, trauma, hostile, pain, wound.*

1. **Introduction**

The present work is a study meant to emphasize the complexity of survival as a war immigrant, the affective consequences the British novelist Olivia Manning suffered along many years, and her literary reflections in the autobiographical novel The Balkan Trilogy. The author of this article considered the sum of physical factors (places), psychological ones (journey impressions, adapting to new life conditions), and the moral consequences of creating a traumatized woman writer.

2. **Aims and scope of the study**

This study offers an original approach to the effects war has on immigrants, especially in the case of journalist refugee Olivia Manning. A fundamental element in this interpretation is how one accepts life in a hostile environment, striving to adapt to new mindsets. The focus is also put on the traces that a traumatic experience like being a war refugee may have and the form of immortalizing it in a literary creation. The article aims to spot and

analyze the stages of survival, mentally and spiritually, to reflect on the concept of the Other, the deracination, and trauma, all of which applied to the British author's trajectory as a war immigrant.

3. A War Novelist, Olivia Manning and The Balkan Trilogy

Olivia Manning, one of the most prolific and genuine British writers of the 20th century, is known among numerous literary and artistic directions as a keen war observer. Hence, many famous critics focused on her writings, especially her two masterpieces, the autobiographical novel *The Balkan Trilogy* (1960) and *The Levant Trilogy* (1980).

Undeniably, Olivia Manning belongs to the generation of writers who lived and wrote about war. However, part of these writers was displaced geographically due to the conflict. They originated an engaging writing style inspired by the landscapes of the places they visited, such as Norman Douglas or Manning herself. At the same time, at the beginning of WWII, another different class of writers was born: one based on military and diplomatic experience and burdened by a sense of responsibility for a decaying Empire and vanished political liability.

Additionally, due to the international conflict, Olivia Manning, accompanied by her husband, R. D. Smith, was forced to spend six dark years in exile in Eastern Europe (Romania), Greece, and the Middle East as war correspondents.

In his article *The Novel Now* (1971), Antony Burgess referred to *The Balkan Trilogy* as "the most important long work of fiction to have been written by an English woman novelist since the war…one of the finest records we have of the impact of that war on Europe." Jeremy Treglown completed Burgess's point of view a few years later. He asserted: "no other novelist has described these crucial arenas of the war with such scope and immediacy." Burgess was stunned by the incredible size of the trilogy, its details, and its plot. He considered Manning a writer who owns "humour, poetry, the power of exact image, the ability to be both hard and compassionate, a sense of place, all the tricks and impersonation and finally, a historical eye" (Burgess 1971: 95)

Moreover, in her work *Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War. Signs* (1983: 422-450), Sandra Gilbert mentions that women writers related their imagination with the urge to feel free while creating. Thus, they can provide a different, opening artistic approach to war based on sexuality (a specific and intimate behavioral treat that Manning would methodically adopt in her novels) and build a thrilling personal vision of emotional engagement. Based on this assertion, Gilbert mentions that:

> Significantly, however, where male writers primarily recounted the horrors of unleashed female sexuality and only secondarily recorded the more generalized female excitement that energized such sexuality, women remembered, first, the excitement of the war and, second (but more diffusely), the sexuality to which such excitement led. Thus, where most male writers—at least after their earliest dreams of heroism had been deflated—associated the front with paralysis and pollution, many female writers imagined it as a place of freedom, ruefully comparing what they felt was their genteel immobilization with the exhilaration of military mobility. (Gilbert 1983: 438).

Another interpretation of Olivia Manning's war writing belongs to Hermione Lee (1978). Providing a deep analysis of how Manning tackles the war in her trilogy, Lee stated in *The Observer* that no other woman novelist could embrace and utilize this writing pattern. She interprets the war scenery as a conceivable narrative structure in which the reader feels part of the reality circumstances.

Consequently, in his article *The Sum of Things by Olivia Manning* (1980), Graham Hough understands why Olivia Manning's novels are captivating and exciting. Nevertheless, the reader would not have many reasons to continue until the end. Striving to provide a logical explanation, Graham Hough admits that the British writer developed an outstanding personal vision of the war, not as a physically damaging one, but as a life survivor. In the article, Hough puts it clearly: "Not its causes, or its purpose, not primarily its horrors and cruelties, but its all-embracing scope, the way it has swallowed up like a flood innumerable lives" (Hough 1980: 203).

Following this path, and within the same topic, war literature, Eve Patten observes in her work Imperial Refugee: Olivia Manning's Fictions of War (2012) that the compositional timeframe of Manning's novel transforms Manning into a war chronicle writer alongside writers such as Evelyn Waugh, Anthony Powell, and Sigfried Sassoon. This assertion is solid proof that writing consolidated and joined chronological parameters. Concerning this statement, Victoria Steward asserts: "The social, cultural and psychological impact of the events of war cannot be contained within the temporal span of 1939-45." (Patten 2012: 36). For Manning, writing about the war was a great chance to construct a trilogy.

Finally yet importantly, in her book *British Women Writers of World War II Battlegrounds of Their Own* (1998), Phyllis Lassner considers several alluring angles of Olivia Manning's trilogy. Lassner knows that Manning had an acute war experience as a press officer in Bucharest, Athens, and, later, in the Middle East. For this reason, through the authorial accuracy lens and contemplative memory, the reader notices Harriet's fight to spot the social reality of women's marginalized position in the odd manner men see war. Inside the epic's elaborated performance of characters, fictional plotting, and historically grounded events, Harriet Pringle (Manning's alter ego in the trilogy) rules the author's full picture with an ironically dramatic denial, appearing to be passive in her affective conflicts (Lassner 1998: 233).

Apart from the already mentioned criticism, Olivia Manning deployed her most original version of a war refugee in her trilogy, providing an incredibly valuable emotional legacy of a life lived at its hardest.

4. The Hostility of Otherness: an Ontological Effect through Unwelcoming Places

This chapter suggests an authentic account of the orbit otherness causes on social communities (war refugees, immigrants), principally in specific physical, mental, and spiritual areas and time momentum. Guiding points will be individuals settled in a hostile environment in unfriendly circumstances. Many of these facts will be presented from a general backdrop following a well-

defined trajectory, eventually aiming at Olivia Manning's position as a sheer representation of the Other.

The distance from home and the psychological impact these causes represent a straight and clear-cut line in people's choices or destiny to quest other spaces, be obliged to survive, or merely travel. This matter is precisely Olivia Manning's case.

The present article attempts to prove how marginality, otherness, and alienation perfectly match Olivia Manning's writing profile. As a war refugee, her main concern is survival; the British author needed to experience a painful living process over almost a decade, which inspired her to create *The Balkan Trilogy* and *The Levant Trilogies*, known as *The Fortunes of War*.

However, Manning's path against her will mainly comprises the typical alienation course, which involves breaking contact with one's origins, precisely home.

This work will strive to demonstrate the complete process of what is hidden behind the concept of the Other, considering facts, moods, challenging elements, and psychological involvement.

The hostility and sense of otherness design an acute effect through the antagonism provided by unwanted places, usually abroad or far away from home. Notwithstanding, in Olivia Manning's case, this concept meets three different directions, all interlinked and emphasizing the undeniable connection between space, journey, and trauma.

4.1. The Balkans, Dissimilar Approaches of a Wounding Space

The Balkans have always been considered an antithetical spot, geopolitically and socially. Tom Gallagher's work *To Be or Not to Be Balkan: Romania's Quest for Self-definition* (1997: 63-83) fully hints at this idea. Gallagher states that the Balkans is a place where:

> has been a zone of danger and discord not only because of the failings of communist rule but because of long-term problems connected with state-building on nationalist models, structural underdevelopment, and the prevalence of conflicting ethnic aspirations. The region has also suffered from the involvement of neighboring larger powers in its affairs. (Gallagher 1997: 79).

At first sight, the Balkans represent a simple name, a proper noun; however, as a lieu, it sends to a frontier; it comprises an evolution, a limit, a presence. Due to positive or negative life factors, entering into contact with unknown spaces and finding refuge design the creation of inner and outer frontiers, an empirical shield. Referring to this aspect, Alain de Bottom asserted in his philosophical insight into art travel, titled *The Art of Travel* (2002) that "Journeys are the midwives of thought," (de Bottom 2002: 57). Earlier, in his study, *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* (1951: 143-162), Martin Heidegger alleged, "A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing." (Heidegger 1971: 144).

The travel writings, which are dissimilar in subjectivity and objectivity, are a true testimony of the travel to the Balkans. In his study, *East-West Colonial*

Encounters: Centrality and Marginality in British Travel Writing on Romania and Romanian Travel Writing on Britain in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century (2019), Andrei Călinoaia refers to travel writing, placing the term "home" in the context of "elsewhere." According to Călinoaia, travel writing was the first and the essential form of creating and enacting stereotypes in the collective imaginary because those writers were bestowed with "eyewitness credibility", creating a brief of the foreign culture for the home and translating it into comprehensible concepts. Nevertheless, despite these general conjectures, travel writing has always been indeterminate and ambiguous because it tended to mix "subjective and objective styles, fictional and non-fictional discourses, plot-driven and episodic narratives". Travel writing has also been called a "frontier genre", as it tackles reporting methods with narrative techniques, often relying on uncertainties and even forgeries (Călinoaia 2019: 2).

If one refers to Eastern Europe, this has a different interpretation for Larry Wolff, Maria Todorova, and Vesna Goldsworthy, among others. Wolff, in particular, proved how travel writing created this imaginary binary border between enlightened and civilized Western Europe and its barbaric, wild Eastern counterpart.

According to this dichotomy, among the many imagological valid nicknames attached to the region, one could find "Land of Discord", "Savage Europe", "The Burning Balkans", "Wild and Beautiful", "The Other Europe", and "The Embers of Chaos", which all embodied the Western fascination with the region as an exotic fairyland, equally irresistibly alluring and undeniably dangerous.

Even though there is no consensus about whether or not Balkanism (as Todorova defined it) is simply a variation of Orientalism, scholars agree on defining this area as "semi-", "semicolonial", "semibarbaric", "semicivilised". Nevertheless, this stage of in-betweenness was the defining element of this region. (Călinoaia 2019: 3). This fact originated in a traumatic identity of East Europeans seeing themselves as "failed Europeans", as neither Asian nor European (2019: 3), which led to an exhaustive fulfillment of self-repression and an endless sense of obligation to mimic the superior Western model and of self-colonization. "The Others, i.e., the neighbors, Europe, the civilized World possess all that we lack; they are all that we are not." (Călinoaia 2019: 3)

Goldsworthy proved that this type of representation was less motivated by colonialist ambitions, as in the case of Orientalism, but by the need to have an *Other* against which to define true "Europeanness." In a rationalized and civilized Occident, it was necessary to bring into light its counterpart, the opposite.

A similar idea to that of Călinoaia's, distinct, however, and seen from other angles of view, belongs to Eugenia Gavriliu. In her book *Sindromul Gulliver* (Gulliver's Syndrome) (1998), the Romanian professor admits that the outside world is opposed to the secure and comforting space of the home, symbolically represented by the mead hall, where the chiefs were chosen, the fighters told their battle stories, and where peace and friendship were the dominant components of the people (Gavriliu 1998: 13). Gavriliu also proposes analyzing the other employing an original term, imagery, unanimously accepted as a component of contemporary thought, especially provided by the writer travelers, and strictly linked to an ecocritical interpretation of the Other, as a physical space.

Imagery involves the communication mechanisms between cultures, establishing at the same time the manners and causes by which images of the stranger constitute a national culture. Similarly, cultural imagery illustrates how the outsider operates within the collective mind and whether these causes and modalities are reflected in the culture that inspired them. The focus on the outsider's image allows for an adequate acknowledgment of the moment when the changes in a cultural structure begin to foster contacts with other cultures than a study of literary influences and receptions alone could.

An imagery study involves images, clichés, and stereotypes projected into a natural background. It structures these elements into research directions that create era-specific visions. Because it is based on concepts taken from social psychology and the ethno psychology of prejudice, imagology demonstrates the correlation between the description of the other and one's representation (between hetero stereotype and self-stereotype), the perception of the other continually operating through the prism of one's value system, which gives the whole process a self-referential character (Gavriliu 1998: 3).

Basing on imagery, Eugenia Gavriliu invents a specific operational concept: the Gulliver syndrome, which hides under the mask of the insular superiority complex, the attribute of the British ethnic image. Gulliver, as a hypostasis of otherness, uncomfortable with the value system of his cultural code, travels the road from alpha to omega, from inclusion to exclusion, to end up a stranger in his own culture.

In essence, Gulliverian commentary perceives the realities of the culture regarding the rest of the world as ridiculous and awful. This case is the perfect Harriet's embodiment, Manning's hero, displayed throughout *The Balkan Trilogy* since she first steps out of the train until she leaves Athens. Hence, it is clear that one separates sets limits in attempting to qualify and compare.

Following this path, the concept of limit can also appear as a borderland, for instance, in Lucia Boia's work *Romania, Borderland of Europe* (2001). According to Boia, Romania's image corresponds—or at least is comfortably close—to existing connotations fo the people about themselves. According to Oana Godeanu, in the essay *The Construction of Exoticism in Olivia Manning's Balkan Trilogy — An Imagological Approach* (2005: 199-210), these perceptions appears as auto images (the image Romanians have of themselves) and hetero images (the image of Romanians as visible in works originating in other cultural spaces) (Godeanu 2005, 202). What Olivia Manning writes in *The Balkan Trilogy* proves the authorial originality of inventing a new view of exoticism mirrored by stereotypes, which becomes a referential point in the descriptions of a new space or, why not, a dissimilar ecocriticism writing, due to the correctness of the landscapes the British traveler woman assimilates during her exiling travel. This fact can also be an outcome of the surviving subjectivity manifestation the British writer displayed in her trilogy.

The following quotation from the trilogy demonstrates this assertion:

> A pine forest came down to the edge of the track: the light of the carriages rippled over the bordering trees. As she gazed out into the dark heart of the forest, she began to see small moving lights. For an instant a grey dog-shape skirted the rail, then

returned to darkness. The lights, she realized, were the eyes of beasts. She drew her head in and closed the window. (Manning 1998: 14).

Furthermore, Manning's observations of the Balkans spot individual places or generic areas. For instance, Bucharest is (even if expressed in a sarcastic hint) "the Paris of the East" (1998: 30), "the edge of Europe, a region in which [Yakimov] already smelt the Orient." (1998: 16), an unsafe country, because "[t]hese Balkan countries are wild" and, as one of the non-Romanians says, "[t]hey have dangerous wild beasts" (1998: 99). Romania is an uncivilized legacy of the Ottoman Empire. The lack of safety is due to its geo-political location (the unstable, seething, dangerous Balkans) and the inherent wild shape of its fauna and climate (Godeanu 2005: 203-204).

Eventually, because of unwanted circumstances, war exile, for example, the act of forced traveling to foreign places, causes never ending mental, spiritual, and even physical pain and suffering. This unpleasant experience has a subjective effect on writing descriptions if one may refer to literature as a cathartic form of perceiving reality. For Olivia Manning, a young woman recently married, Europe found on the eve of war designs a special connotation, a memory that the British female writer would never forget.

Every country Olivia Manning had visited, even if as a short dynamic film in front of her eyes (by train, several days), brought its seal on a remarkable mind but affected soul. Afar from the already known home social and cultural values, the traveler immigrant Manning was influenced by Western superiority and had to embrace the Other, aka the Balkans, Romania, antagonistic expanses. However, these wounding spaces had a crucial role in shaping a daredevil survivor and forming an excellent writer.

4.2. Olivia Manning and the Journey of Pain

Traveling has been associated with legends and myths since ancient times. Oedipus, for instance, initiated a dangerous journey to the Underworld to take back his beloved Eurydice. Similarly, Ulysses, the everlasting traveler, courageous and experienced, guides his men to endless perils in order to fulfill his mission.

Still, if one considers antagonistic factors, such as modernity, immigration, war, exile, and Others, or if the concept of men traveling is transposed to women, things change considerably. The woman, closely related to her home, passes through any logical limit.

There are innumerable works emphasizing women's travel experience. Inés Carvajal Argüelles mentions this fact in *Las Mujeres y sus relatos de viajes* (2022), in which the authors, Carmen Mejía Ruiz, Eugenia Popeanga, and Rocio Peñalta Catalán propose the reader an excellent overview of women 's travel experiences (Popeanga et al. 2022: 35).

The book of Margery Kempe (1436) describes the same adventure in great lines—nevertheless, Kempe's book fixes as the first autobiography in English. Later, in the eighteenth century, a different and more evolved type of travel adventure is narrated in *Letters During Mr Worthley's Embassy* (1763), which is, in fact, Lady Mary Worthley Montagu's travel story (2022: 35).

A specific characteristic of the women's travel narrative hints at an evenness between imagination and realistic considerations, enacting a balance between affection and exoticism.

Concerning women's writing as a cultural manifest deployed to surpass the negligible condition in society, the array of subjects is quite diverse. Hence, several authors, among whom Sara Mills, Tim Youngs, and Mary Louise Pratt, investigated the patriarchal and imperialist tinges, and, following precise writing approaches, their positions in different aspects converge. For Sara Mills's vision, during the colonial period, the women writers adopted a more passive attitude as home guardians. In contrast, others, such as Edith Durham or Olivia Manning herself, focus more on women's social status, using an anti-imperialist tone (Popeanga et al. 2022: 38).

In the case of Olivia Manning, a young woman writer who had never been in the situation of living these situations, less as a war refugee, the travel from England to Eastern Europe turned into a personal story. The horrors of war, the fear, and the people's uncontrolled agitation and despair contaminated the inexperienced war journalist (Manning and her husband, Reggie D. Smith, were sent as British Legation war correspondents to Bucharest).

Consequently, normal travel by train changed into a nightmare, a vivid and almost Dantesque show of social mutilation: war refugees, people hiding or running, trying to escape from danger and disaster, saving their lives. Everything seems unavoidable like a doom to be intensely sensed. The sum of all this scenery will be frozen later in *The Balkan Trilogy*. Nevertheless, Manning's autobiographical eyes and witty mind transform those dark war moments into exoticism mingled with Gothic. The exoticism originates from the Gothic, as a congruence between darkness and travel literature. A relevant example is embodied by *Dracula*'s novel main character (1897), who travels with a Baedeker guide. The real or imaginary travel was a typical scaffolding to implement the stories into a Gothic backdrop. Jonathan Harker, Dracula's character, recalls the feeling of entering the East during his travel to Transylvania: "leaving the West and entering the East" (Stocker 2014: 6). The same fact materializes in *The Balkan Trilogy* (1960), which begins, according to Olivia Manning, "somewhere near Venice" (Manning 2004: 3).

Moreover, when reaching the destination in Bucharest, Manning witnesses the same Gothic sensation of gloom and negativity as in the rest of her European travel by train. Scenes such as: "The horse - revealed by the street lights as a phantom horse, a skeleton in a battered hide - was not disturbed" (2004: 27) have the same intensity as "In the confusion of a newly created war, the train was stopping every twenty minutes or so. Harriet looked out and saw girders, darker than the twilit darkness, holding an upper rail," which takes place near Venice, during the same travel (2004: 3). This imagery is similar to that described by Edgar Allan Poe, in *The Fall of the House of Usher* (2017). Poe's work perfectly shows how he used Gothic elements to describe nature. "I looked up upon the scene before me—upon the bleak walls—upon the vacant eye-like windows—upon a few rank sledges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees... the bitter lapse into common life—the hideous dropping of the veil." (Poe 2017: 3).

A fascinating aspect of Manning's journey of pain is that the action of traveling can be interpreted as a character in itself. The journey consumes the woman traveler, an authentic homo viator, but, at the same time, it provides her with a culminating life experience, a keen observer of her fate, and a world citizen. What seems to be impacting and rejected by Olivia Manning turns sequentially into a normal acceptance of actions due to the initiation.

Finally, social interaction and people's continuous movements cause inevitable consequences, which is part of human lifelong learning. Unfortunate moments create exceptional experiences, precious comprehension of hostile environments, and the forging of one's personality. Pain is part of destiny and must be accepted.

4.3. Trauma, Deracination, and Narrowness in Romania

Olivia Manning meets the first temporary setting as a war refugee of almost thirteen months in Bucharest, Romania's capital city. This period plays a vital role in the emotional background and leaves a deep psychological trace at a personal and artistic level.

The Balkans, as a whole, and Romania, or Bucharest, as individuals, represent an inexplicable and contrary universe opposed to the British imperialist world. The foreign experiment, an undesirable action imposed by the upcoming war, forces people (the British Legation members, in this case, such as Manning and her husband) to accommodate in a space where pain and suffering speak the same dialect and, consequently, has the same impact on everyone.

The British author's vivid transposition of reality as a gifted narrator transcends her trauma as a war refugee. Her perception and awareness as a survivor become hostile for at least two reasons: one, she was obliged to endure hostility (socially and culturally) abroad, and the second, it was a severe type of hostility, an unexpected life experience that she had never imagined. The consequence of these two factors will cause unique anguish and long-term social complexes during a lifetime evolution.

Hence, Romanian space, perceived as a buffer area between East and West, is highlighted in Sorin Alexandrescu's book *Identitate în ruptură* (2000). The work claims that Romanian cultural space is presented not as marginal, assumed to have been the norm, but as a space of interference at the border of at least two pairs of distinct cultural realms—the East and the West, the Catholic, and the Orthodox.

Furthermore, identifying two spaces means limiting them and crossing a line. The concept of limiting or sensing narrowness becomes a mental and spiritual borderland. Lucia Boia's work *Romania, Borderland of Europe* (2001). The Romanian writer sees Romania as:

> [...] a country only partially integrated into European civilization, a country of the margins, still characterized by a pronounced substrate of primitivism and a strange amalgam of modern urban life and rustic survivals. [...] The Romanian space presents itself as a marginal one. Throughout history it has always been on the edge of great political units and civilizations [...] whether in relation to Russia, Germany and Austria or Turkey, the Romanians have always been on the margins and now they stand on the

margin of the European Union, as candidates whose chances of being integrated into the European construct remain uncertain. (Boia 2001: 9-12).

In Boia's view, Romania's image corresponds—or at least appears to be tight—to existing auto images (the image Romanians have of themselves) and hetero images (the image of Romanians as visible in works originating in other cultural spaces). What Olivia Manning uses as narrative material in *The Balkan Trilogy* proves the authorial originality of inventing a new view of exoticism mirrored by stereotypes, which becomes a referential point in Manning's descriptions of a foreign environment.

In her study, *The Construction of Exoticism in Olivia Manning's Balkan Trilogy—An Imagological Approach* (2005), Oana Godeanu presents a unique view of Balkanic exoticism. She points out, "To the British imagination, this space, if it existed at all, evokes all the features of a dystopia, a lost world, a reverted paradise, now under the empire of dark forces" (Godeanu 2005: 199). For example, Bucharest is (even if expressed in a sarcastic hint) "the Paris of the East" (Manning 1998: 30), "the edge of Europe, a region in which [Yakimov] already smelt the Orient." (1998: 16), an unsafe country, because "[t]hese Balkan countries are wild" and, as one of the non-Romanians says, "[t]hey have dangerous wild beasts" (1998: 99). Romania is an uncivilized legacy of the Ottoman Empire. The lack of safety is due to its geo-political location (the unstable, seething, dangerous Balkans) and the inherent wild shape of its fauna and climate (Godeanu 2005: 203-204).

Oriental is synonymous with otherness, alienation, limit, border, or darkness. The myth of an 'Oriental' Romania, placed at the frontier of Europe, springs in Manning's trilogy precisely because 'Oriental' is the critical term in defining the Romanian imaginary space. A contact zone of the Orient of Turkey and the gloomy, less assimilated Orient of Russia, Romania, or at least Manning's Bucharest, oscillates between images of lush decadence and mystical diffusions (Godeanu 2005: 205). Picturesque figures, such as that of the *Skopit trăsura driver*, illustrate the barbarous, wild streak of the Romanian spirit (Manning, 1998: 30), while the indolence and the frivolity of Bucharest women, the general passivity of the people, as Edward Said specifies in his work *Orientalism* (1978), and the colorful accounts of the streets and local customs seem to allude to the conventional feminine representations of Orient in western literature (Said 1978: 206).

Bucharest's architecture displays as a specific feature Eastern part of Europe: "The market area around the river had a flavor more of the East than of the West. Guy had brought her here and shown her the houses, built in the style of Louis XIII, once the mansions of Turkish and Phanariot officials, now doss-houses where the poor slept twenty and thirty to a room" (Manning 1998: 122).

However, this unfamiliar space, an exotic mixture of East and West, is reduced to tinier, recognizable pieces; thus, the center of Bucharest life is the territory of the British Legation, and the spoken language is just like Italian (Manning 1998: 16); the peasants, viewed as mere ethnographic artifacts, are rendered familiar by alluding to their Roman cultural legacy, a legacy that is nonetheless presented as dying in front of the unifying wave of western influences:

> Newly arrived in the city, the men were still in tight frieze trousers, short jackets and pointed caps — a style of dress that dated back to Roman times. The women wore embroidered blouses and fan pleated skirts of colours that were richer and more subtle than those worn by the gypsies. As soon as they could afford it, they would throw off these tokens of their simplicity and rig themselves out in city drab. (Manning 1998: 64).

Climactic contrasts tear apart this land on the eastern side of Europe. The weather is a mixture of extremes — scorching in summer, freezing in winter; *the Northern crivăț*, a hint at the Russian winter not too far away, opposes the melting sun of the South, whose destructive power exposes men and plants alike to its fierce torture. It is an intolerably cold or hot climate, fact that focuses on the backdrop of the specified place of the novel. "With late November came the "crivăț," a frost-hard wind that blew from Siberia straight into the open mouth of the Moldavian plain. Later it would bring the snow, but for the moment it was merely a threat and a discomfort that each day grew a little sharper" (1998: 107). In summer, the city becomes a climactic hell: "Everything seemed to give off heat. Harriet half expected the canna lilies, in great beds of sulphur, cadmium and read, to roar like a furnace" (Manning 1998: 63).

Pointing at the ethical side, the Romanian low morality is questioned: girls losing their virginity too early and women selling their honor for money. Scandal is another side of a corrupt and decadent Romanian society.

Similarly, the oriental stereotype of lasciviousness is played on when the behavior of young Romanian girls and the local secrets of the institution of marriage are explained to Harriet by a British official:

> [T]hese Romanian homes are hot-beds of scandal and gossip. It's all very Oriental. The pretence of innocence is to keep their price up. They develop early and they're married off early, usually to some rich old lecher whose only interest is in the girl's virginity. When that's over and done with, they divorce. The girl sets up her own establishment and having the status of divorcee, she is free to do what she chooses. (Manning 1998: 39).

Manning's attitude towards a haughty society results as a sign of Romanian superiority, which turns into a type of avoidance of their stereotype of idleness and inferiority. This aspect reverses the negative imagological stereotype of the foreigners rejected by 'the real Romanians' and its interpretation as proof of a positive feature, automatically situated on a superior hierarchical position regarding culture and civilization. Those whom the 'real Romanians' reject are those who are, in fact, their superiors, and by rejecting them, the Romanians would be trying to avoid a confrontation with their autostereotypes of laziness and inferiority (Godeanu 2005: 208).

Therefore, the wholeness of these psychological, physical, social, and cultural facts gathers and forms Romania's Oriental image of alienation or otherness. Apart from war consequences, the hostility of Balkan exoticism threatens and shatters the British conception of social and individual security. It divides the colonial authority, bordering it and throwing it into a keen survival. Olivia Manning emphasizes all these aspects as a first-person experienced subject, which proves fundamentally enriching for the no-so-far

foreigner surviving life conception. Firstly, the exoticism and its image, once acknowledged, set their place in the trilogy. Secondly, the narrative details cross the boundary of observation to the narrative world of fiction and literary detail.

Depicted in negative tones, the Romanian world of the late 1930s appears as a turbulent memory momentum. Manning drew herself into this fictional background and let the reader know that, despite the hardships of fate, everyone can survive, which could be an essential life lesson. Unknown people, nature, and customs symbolize diversity, the opposition to the known world, and the face of the unseen life adventure.

5. A British Surviving Woman Immigrant

Before arriving in Romania, Olivia Manning had some cues about the places, people, and habits: her husband had been a teacher for a year, teaching English to young Jews preparing to do business in Europe.

Moreover, the young writer, a war journalist, informed herself about the Balkans, especially Romania. Manning reports this fact, transposing it to Harriet, her main character and alter ego in the trilogy: "Before she left England, she had read books written by travellers in Romania who had given a picture of a rollicking, open-hearted, happy, healthy, peasantry, full of music and generous hospitality. They were, it was true, mad about music. Music was their only outlet. They made themselves drunk on it" (Manning 2021: 132-133).

Although half charmed and half baffled because Olivia Manning and her husband decided to leave England and begin an unbelievable adventure, they feel this is the most delicate moment of their lives. The sense of wartime causes the distortion of personal time and the strive to find safety and overcome all the trouble. The following paragraph, which describes a scene in Bucharest, demonstrates it, "The next morning, walking in the Cişmigiu, Harriet suffered again from uncertainty. She had made an appointment to see a flat, that mid-day. If they took it, they would be required to pay three months' rent in advance. She was unwilling to risk the money. Guy said: 'Don't worry. We'll be here at least a year.'" (2021: 115).

The Pringles (Manning and her husband in the novel) are aware of their exile, and the call for native places and time sequences come to their mind as an instinct of survival. The author expresses clearly her intention:

> 'Where is the war now?' Harriet asked.
> 'As the crow flies, about three hundred miles away. When we go home at Christmas…',
> 'Do you really think we will?' She could not believe it. Christmas brought to her mind a scene, tiny and far away like a snowstorm in a globe. Somewhere within it was "home"-anyway, England. Home for her was no more defined than that. (Manning 2021: 67-68).

Furthermore, the main hero's panic attack is caused by a terrible political murder. One of the most signifying historic moments that would mark the beginning of turbulent political and social events in Romania, also for British journalists, is Armand Călinescu's assassination executed by King Carol II. The consequence of this event obliges Manning and her husband to find a place to settle and embrace the identity of everyday citizens without being visible.

The writer's perception of the new and contradictory Romanian universe and her low social profile creates an inner surviving battle that favors the approach and assimilation of a new temporary home. Manning sustains this assertion and puts it straight: "For the first time she felt her life becoming involved with the permanent life of the place. They might be here for six months. They might even be allowed a year of settled existence - perhaps longer. With so much time, one ceased to be a visitor. People took on the aspect of neighbours. There was a need to adjust oneself". (Manning 2021: 123-124)

Thus, the Pringles marvel at Bucharest's charm, especially one of its most iconic avenues, Calea Victoriei. They spot similarities with the Western world, specifically with Paris. The Romanian capital city, where people are joyful and open, now appears as "the Paris of the East".

As a fervent nature lover, Olivia Manning is a perfect detector of places to relieve the perpetual insecurity of a war immigrant: in Bucharest, she discovers Cişmigiu, a beautiful old park. This place turns into a seducing corner of nature where the young Harriet finds peace, beauty, and hope. The description the author elaborates is detailed and creates the reader a powerful visual sensation of relaxation and comfort. Here is part of the depiction Manning realizes: "The path through the thicker led to the lake café, which was situated on a pier built out into the water. On the flimsy, shabby structure stood rough chairs and tables with paper tablecloths. The boards creaked and flexed where anyone walked across them. Just below, visible between the boards, was the dark and dirty lake water" (2021: 65-66).

A distinct perception of the local places focuses on the river Dâmbovița. The author introduces the exact spatial coordinates similar to Paul Morand, in his book *Bucharest* (1993). The fact proves the likelihood of Manning and Morand's descriptive visions regarding the physical part of Bucharest in those years. The surrounding area also illustrates poor. In this background, Manning contrasts the glorious past of the Romanian capital with the degrading present one. The British female writer specifies:

> Not wishing to return to the empty flat, she took a taxi down to the Dâmbovița. The market area around the river had a flavour more of the East than of the West. Guy had brought her here and shown her the houses, built in the style of Louis XIII, once the mansions of Turkish and Phanariot officials, now doss-houses where the poor slept twenty and thirty to a room. The windows were still barred against thieves and rebels. The Dâmbovița River, that ran between them, had no beauty. Once navegable and the heart of the city, it was now dwindling from some failure at source, leaving high bands of clay. It was unused and in places covered to make a road. (Manning 2021: 131)

Apart from the description of physical places, Manning also targets the mediocre habits of the old Romanian aristocracy, the gypsies, mostly beggars, and the lazy Romanian peasants, all of which form an opposite background compared to the natural and peaceful element. The young British novelist and survivor accepts the antagonistic world displayed before her eyes. The opulence faces the poverty, the natural challenges, the artificiality, and the gloomy dares in front of the exotic; however, Manning acknowledges the wholeness of an environment that would last in her memory and forge a better comprehension of the world.

Eventually, immigrant time and space dimensions draw a different destiny, an unforgettable one. All that time that Olivia Manning overpassed with success strengthened her trust in human survival skills, no matter where, when, and how one has to stay alive. As a young female writer, Olivia Manning or Harriet Pringle was a war immigrant survivor.

6. A Sense of Pain as Existential Understanding

Carl Yung once said that *There is no coming to consciousness without pain,* words hinting at the fusion between mental suffering and its mental acceptance. One's endurance of hardships, especially from the nearby environment (natural conditions, people, habits, historical circumstances), invades the awareness comprehension levels, surpasses them, and forces an immediate readaptation to a new and undesirable situation. This process turns to a point where the suffering subject entirely changes the perception of the world, ie, Olivia Manning's personal war immigrant case.

For the British writer, the impact caused by urban hostility coincides with many concepts and develops a wide array of meanings and directions. In Patricia Diaz Pereda et al.'s work, *Representaciones del espacio hóstil en la literatura y las artes* (2017), Carmen Dominte provides an excellent vision of how urban spaces could be material and abstract if taken as a singularity. Therefore, this lieu emerges according to its definition. It involves two oversights: one regarding space as a product of reality and another representing space as an outcome of imagination (Diaz et al. 2017: 159).

Differently, Henri Lefebvre explains in his work *The Production of Space* (1991), urban spaces may refer to a mental space defined by mathematicians and philosophers and a physical space related to the human perception of everything natural, palpable, and sensorial (Lefebvre 1991: 27). More explicitly, Lefebvre's theory shows that the urban space develops as the spatial practice needed for the material direction, producing and reproducing the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic to each social formation.

Besides, city spaces as a spatial production are the representational point originated by the symbolisms revealing the hidden features of the same spot and many artistic archetypes, which can turn into a code of the representational space. This idea reveals why the representational space needs metaphors, symbols, and images to be comprehended. Being always set in the realm of the imagination, the representation of the urban space adopts all these elements to create a symbolic system of signs (Diaz et al. 2017: 160).

In the period between the two world conflagrations, Bucharest's society experienced new political, cultural, and economic changes, which several writers of that time pictured in detail. These changes have not always been benefitial for the citizens; conversely, many caused adverse outcomes, even trauma. In the study *La ciudad hostil: imágenes en la literatura by Popeanga et al.* (2015), the streets, parks, shops, and neighborhoods have intensified the citizens' lives (Popeanga et al. 2015: 135-136). Thus, Bucharest appears as a mixture of opposite visual, mental, and logical perceptions; it is two or more universes in one. In the eyes of the traveler or the newcomer, especially in an unstable period like WWII, the capital of Romania is a shelter, a wasteland, a

limit, a place where everything is possible and touchable and where the game of contrarieties devours everyone.

Regarding it carefully, Olivia Manning's personal and emotional background materializes from her origins. In *La ciudad amable y hostil: Bucarest al borde de la guerra* (2008), Ruxandra Oancea notices that Manning' depaysée condition originated from a problematic British-Irish background. The British author explained that her writing appears as a need to justify an existence lacking the sense of belonging: "From my very earliest days, I've felt the need to explain myself, because I've felt myself so acutely in the wrong" (Oancea 2008: 188). Oancea observes that in and out of the war context, Olivia Manning deliberately made a chronicle of her time, interpreting the novel as "perfectly adapted to the expression of our bewildered and self-conscious civilization." In *The Balkan Trilogy*, she juxtaposes the political dissolution and the chaos produced by WWII, vividly concretized in time and space, in her first-person experience and sorrow, evoking the hardships of life in times of war (2008: 189).

Following this trail, Bucharest frames as Harriet, the *other* Manning, sees and perceives it. The authorial first impressions about Bucharest are conflictive, an attitude that emerges almost instantly. However, all these reflections consciously invade the limits of her perspective.

Considering the city market, Manning faces a keen stressing factor, a pain maker: "The market area around the river had a flavour more of the East than of the West. Guy had brought her here and shown her the houses, built in the style of Louis XIII, once the mansions of Turkish and Phanariot officials, now doss-houses where the poor slept twenty and thirty to a room". (Manning 2004: 131)

Furthermore, the most picturesque side of the city, Lipscani, "primitive, bug-ridden and brutal," is the territory where aggressive merchants and beggars live; it is now one of the most emblematic scenes of the trilogy when the young British woman is literary trying to escape, running in a carriage. While she is holding her breath, she meditates:

> Heavens above, how did done settle down to life in this society that Doamna Teitelbaum had recommended for its comfort? [...] Before she left England, she had read books written by travellers in Rumania who had given her a picture of a rollicking, open-hearted, happy, healthy peasantry, full of music and generous hospitality. [...] The peasants in this city were starved, frightened figures, scrawny with pellagra, wandering about in a search for work or making a half-hearted attempt to beg.[...] She shivered, feeling isolated in a country that was to her not only foreign but alien. (Manning 2004: 133)

Manning's Bucharest is a place of war, a city that attacks and alienates, where other refugees try to find refuge. The Romanian capital lacks empathy for the affected ones in favor of its elegance: "Here were parked a dozen or so of the Polish refugee cars still streaming down from the north. [...] The well-dressed Rumanians, out to appreciate and be appreciated, looked affronted by these ruined faces that were too tired to care.'. (2004: 24).

The image of Romania's capital as the "the Paris of the orient" displays as a city of contrasts, fascinating through the people mixture and the Balkan picturesque, but disastrous through corruption and misery, is emphasized and

profoundly highlighted realistically, employing a pure naturalism. The contrasts are shocking and grotesque. The opulent buildings in the city center are placed near shabby huts, where peasants dressed in traditional clothes sell their merchandise. Treasures of Byzantine architecture are rising through Carol's demolitions. Romania is a country of abundance, where the food is "the cheapest in Europe," but dirt is everywhere, and the rest are costly; the beggars are on the streets. As a sensitive political barometer, the population is happy and benevolent, optimistic or moody.

The sensation caused by the sum of these images results in a world where survival is not an option but a fundamental right one must have to achieve the next day.

Hereafter, the enumerated hostile factors decline a clear authorial conclusion. Bucharest is a city with no personality or identity, a giant spider web with many separated parts, full of false appearances drawn between contrasts, a Balkanic melange. In the backdrop of the international conflict of those years, it converts into a necessary and desperate surviving background, where the Other is shaped, fed, and forced to survive. For everyone, especially in Manning's case, surviving will not conclude in a simple life lesson but in a crucial experience of pain and perpetual adaptation. The clash between native values with a controversial world involves one's personality at its full. However, accepting reality, following its natural course, and attempting not to force anything could solve an earlier and welcoming issue in discovering yourself before an unfriendly background.

7. Final considerations

The extraordinary memory and intense existential turmoil, apart from a literary natural gift, endowed the British female writer, Olivia Manning, to leave a complete legacy of past times. The author of The Balkan Trilogy is an original and detailed fresco of hard moments, the war period between 1939, when Manning and her husband, as war corresponds, arrived in Bucharest, and 1940, when they left Athens.

As a war refugee, Olivia Manning experienced the adversity of an international conflagration, summarizing the entire string of hostile factors: places, people, and the urgent need to transform life into a surviving scene.

In the trilogy, Harriet, Manning's alter ego, was not completely abandoned; she was accompanied by R.D. Smith, her husband, Guy Pringle in the novel. Yet both participated in the majority of events that occurred in Bucharest and Athens. However, one's instinctive and logical sense of loneliness immersed the British novelist spiritually and mentally in a deep ontological experience. Recently married, in the real and autobiographical background of the trilogy, Harriet contemplates the painful condition of the Other, a fact that impulses the young woman to learn fast the lesson of adaptation in a controversial world.

Moreover, the endurance mechanism fully activates as the subject or the immigrant deepens in personal trauma, boosting the sense of deracination and otherness. In 1939, Bucharest represented the purest Balkanic essence: opulence versus poverty, natural splendor versus urban ugliness, strange social

habits versus native values, and unpredictable political events versus stability. Besides, the marital status also had to adapt to a new and turbulent life.

Nevertheless, time heals everything. Hence, Manning successfully accomplishes her war refugee condition and completes the survival process effectively to move on to the next stage.

The fierce refugee circumstances Olivia Manning lived in provided her with an immense existential understanding, which served as one of the most precious life lessons and literary inspiration.

Beyond everything, the utmost purpose of immediate reality remains accepting one's condition by striving to overcome it. The human being's singularity is defined as the ability to act in front of unseen situations, be aware of the efforts one is obliged to make, and always find a resolution, even for the impossible.

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