

## FOREWORD

I met Lucian Boia thanks to aliens and to professor Charles-Olivier Carbonell. Not that we shared the privilege of one of those mysterious “close encounters of the third kind”, and neither was there any connection between the honorable French historian and aliens coming from outer space! In fact, it was at a meeting of the International Historiography Commission—which Ch.-O. Carbonell was president and L. Boia vice-president of—that professor Carbonell introduced me to Lucian Boia, as he knew Mr. Boia was preparing a work on the plurality of inhabited worlds at the end of the 19th century and that I was also researching the belief in flying saucers and aliens.

From that meeting in Montpellier in 1983 a solid friendship was born, this year celebrating its 15th birthday. There was instant sympathy between us, especially because we realized immediately that we shared the same conception on the imaginary. Briefly stated, let’s say we were persuaded—and we are still persuaded today—that human societies are built, for better or for worse, on distorted ideas, or ideas that are impossible to prove, which we shall call “myths.”

The study of *mythical thinking* is a great achievement of the social sciences of the last forty years: this thinking is “symbolic imagination” to

philosophy<sup>1</sup>, “savage thinking” to ethnology<sup>2</sup>, “natural thinking” to sociology<sup>3</sup>, or “social thinking” to social psychology<sup>4</sup>. As *mythos* is opposed to the *logos*, mythical thinking is different from rational thinking: it is a collective product (rather than individual), it manipulates concrete representations, marked by feeling (rather than abstractions), anyway, it functions by way of analogical reasoning (rather than according to formal logic). Mircea Eliade—whose work is undoubtedly to be linked to the Romanian people’s special sensitivity to the imagination—has commendably explored the world of religious myths, but mythical thinking goes far beyond the field of religion and it mostly takes shape now, in the contemporary epoch, in profane forms, which may even seem scientific.

The research conducted by Lucian Boia in historiography—which is the history of History—has revealed to him the imaginary, the ideological side of the historians’ work through the ages. He then naturally crossed over from the imaginary of History to the history of the imaginary. This approach converged with the evolution of the research into the imaginary fueled by Gilbert Durand in the 60s: first centered on a-temporal archetypes (Eliade, Jung, Bachelard), the studies on the imaginary later began, little by little, to take into account the variations and temporal and social incarnations of symbolic thinking. This evolution is very clear in the two landmark books by Gilbert Durand: *Les Structures anthropologiques de l’imaginaire* (Paris, Gallimard, 1960), which laid the foundation for a “general science of archetypes,” while *L’Introduction à la mythodologie* (Paris, Albin Michel, 1996) establishes a method to analyze mythological movements over long periods of time, which are comparable to economic trends. Historians were the most conspicuous absentees from the research of the imaginary, which is basically an interdisciplinary current. This is why we must hail Lucian Boia for creating in 1993 the Center for the Study of the Imaginary with the

Bucharest University Department of History. In 1994, this center was acknowledged and included in the CRI network (**Centres des Recherches sur l'Imaginaire**, presided by Gilbert Durand.)<sup>5</sup>

A friend of French culture, like many Romanians, perfectly speaking and writing French, Lucian Boia has published most of his works on the imaginary in France. These can be globally classified into three categories. First, there are the books that deal with the **imaginary space** and its legendary inhabitants: the extraterrestrial space in *Das Jahrhundert der Marsianer* (The Century of Martians) (Munich, Wilhelm Heyne Verlag, 1984, in cooperation with Helga Abret) and *L'Exploration imaginaire de l'espace* (The Imaginary Exploration of Space) (Paris, Découverte, 1987), but also the terrestrial space, with *Entre l'ange et la bête. Le mythe de l'Homme différent de l'Antiquité à nos jours* (From Angel to Beast. The Myth of the Different Man From Antiquity to the Present), Plon, Paris, 1995. Whether it is a question of the centaurs and mermaids of the Antiquity, monopodes and Savage Men of the Middle Ages, or Martians and the Yeti of our contemporary times, the imaginary of legendary peoples embodies both an archetype ("a regression dream and a thirst for perfection," *From Angel to Beast*, op. cit. p. 40) and an individual incarnation: "Each culture, each epoch, each generation, each ideology produce their own Different Men. To the historian, this is an essential indicator. The history of the Others, deciphered, re-becomes our own history." (*idem*, p. 42.)

The second category of books deal with the imaginary of time: *La Fin du monde. Une histoire sans fin, The End of the World. History Without An End*, La Découverte, Paris, 1989, proves that the same myth of destruction takes various shapes expressing the fears and anxiety that are specific to each society and each epoch; *Pour vivre 200 ans. Essai sur le mythe de la longévité* (To Live for 200 Years. An Essay on the Myth of Longevity),

(Paris, In Press, 1998) analyzes the ups and downs of this crazy hope entertained by humankind, from the Biblical patriarchs to modern drugs against old age, passing through the miraculous Fountain of Youth.

Finally, a third category includes Boia's works dealing with the imaginary of societies and its founding myths: *La Mythologie scientifique du communisme* (The Scientific Mythology of Communism), (Caen, Paradigme, 1993) proves that in communist countries ideology pervaded all sciences—natural, physical, social—and perverted them into pseudo-science, whose dogma was beyond question; two recent works explore the imaginary of the Romanian national identity, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească* (History and Myth in the Romanian Consciousness Bucharest, Humanitas, 1997) and *Jocul cu trecutul. Istoria între adevăr și ficțiune* (Playing with the Past. History Between Truth and Fiction, Bucharest, Humanitas, 1998.) These two books were best-sellers in Romania, so they proved wrong the saying that “A prophet has no honor in his own country”!

Recently, Lucian Boia wrote chapter 4, “History and the Imaginary,” of the collective book edited by professor Joël Thomas and entitled *Introduction aux méthodologies de l'imaginaire* (Introduction to the Methodologies of the Imaginary) (Paris, Ellipses, 1998). This work, with about 20 French and foreign professors contributing, proves the study of the imaginary is now very vigorous and bears witness to its globalization (Portugal, Romania, Brazil, Korea.) The same year, his book *Pour une histoire de l'imaginaire* (A History of the Imaginary) was published (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1998), which makes Lucian Boia the expert in this field of research.

As a coincidence, the cover of the book edited by Joël Thomas and the logotype of the collection that published Lucian Boia's last book include the same picture, the “Diver of Paestum”, an image from a Roman tomb of the 5th century B.C. According to the publisher (Les Belles Lettres), this image is the

symbol of the plunge into the primordial waters, the plunge that has created the world, "the archetype of all mythical, ritual and athletic plunges." So, here is well-wishing for the reader: plunge into this anthology of texts by Lucian Boia and come out as an initiated person, to decipher the myths surrounding us!

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert Durant, *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1960, and *L'Imagination symbolique*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage*, Paris, Plon, 1962.

<sup>3</sup> Georges Auclair, *Le Mana quotidien. Structures et fonctions de la chronique des faits divers*, Paris, Anthropos, 1970.

<sup>4</sup> Michel-Louis Rouquette, "La pensée sociale" in Serge Moscovici (editor), *Introduction à la psychologie sociale*, volume 2, Paris, Larousse, pp. 298-328.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Bulletin de liaison des Centres de Recherches sur l'Imaginaire*, no. 3, 1994, pp. 60-62 (University of Bourgogne, Faculty of Letters, office no. 142, 2, Gabriel Blvd., 21000, Dijon, France.)