
Looking for Ourselves while Dreaming of the West.

(On Mircea Mihăieș's *Atlantical imaginar / The Imaginary Atlantic* (Editura Universitatii de Vest, Timisoara, 2023))

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Mircea Mihăieș's *Atlantical imaginar / The Imaginary Atlantic* is both a reflective and insightful collection of essays. Initially published in 2002, in a reduced version, the present and extended book delves into the cultural, political, and literary landscapes of post-communist Romania, offering a critique of its aspirations, on one hand, and a philosophical examination of the country's place in the world, on the other hand.

The title itself, *Atlantical imaginar / The Imaginary Atlantic*, denotes rather a symbolic "Atlantic" that embodies Romania's aspirations to integrate into the broader European and Western cultural and political spheres. This imaginary Atlantic thus represents the ideals of modernity, democracy, and prosperity - values usually associated with the Western world; yet, for Romania, this particular ideal seems to obstinately remain elusive and difficult to fully attain. Mircea Mihăieș would consequently use the metaphor of the "imaginary" to highlight the distance between Romania's post-communist realities and the often idealized vision of the West.

The essays included in the volume cover a wide array of topics, from literature and culture to politics and national identity, all framed by the context of Romania's transition after the fall of communism. They explore a diverse thematic, such as: the search for a Western Ideal (At the heart of Mircea Mihăieș's work one can identify the quest for a cultural and political identity that is closely linked to Western Europe. This desire to belong to this promised land of the "Atlantic" world is to be found in Romania's very attempts to align itself with European standards and values, both politically and culturally. However, Mircea Mihăieș chooses to present this pursuit with a sense of skepticism, noting the challenges Romania faces in reconciling its rich historical traditions with the demands of modernization and integration into the

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European Union); cultural and literary reflections (As a literary critic, Mircea Mihăieș explores Romania's cultural production and its place in the broader European context. He scrutinizes the nation's literary canon and the possibilities for Romanian literature to gain international recognition. In this respect, the essays function as a reflection on how Romanian writers and intellectuals actually engage with both the legacies of the communist past and the uncertainties of the post-communist future. There's also a persistent tension between a desire for cultural autonomy and the pressure to conform to Western intellectual trends.); national identity in transition (Another major theme of this book hints to the evolution of Romanian national identity. Mircea Mihăieș mirrors the profound shifts in national consciousness following the fall of the Iron Curtain, as Romanians attempted to redefine themselves in a world that was increasingly interconnected. The volume raises important questions about the complexity of forging a national identity that is modern, open to European values, yet respectful of tradition.); critique of post-communist Romania (Mircea Mihăieș suggests a critical perspective on the post-1989 political and social transformations in Romania. He describes the transition as one marked by both optimism and disillusionment, with the country struggling to balance its hopes for a prosperous future with the harsh realities of economic hardship, political corruption, and social fragmentation. The transition to democracy and the pursuit of European integration are presented as complex, often contradictory processes, revealing the difficulty of overcoming the legacies of authoritarianism.).

Mircea Mihăieș's writing is an erudite, deeply analytical one, and often tinged with irony. He draws upon a wide range of cultural references, both Romanian and international, to illustrate his points. His approach is at once intellectual and accessible, with a mix of literary critique, historical analysis, and personal reflection. His tone is both critical and self-reflective, often probing the gaps between idealism and reality, particularly in the context of Romania's post-communist journey.

Atlantical imaginar / The Imaginary Atlantic has been well-received in Romanian literary and intellectual circles for its depth of insight and its honest portrayal of the country's struggles with its identity and its place in the world. Mircea Mihăieș's essays are thought-provoking, raising important issues not just for Romania but for Eastern Europe as a whole. His work resonates particularly with readers interested in post-communist transitions, European integration, and the complexities of cultural identity.

In all these respects, *Atlantical imaginar / The Imaginary Atlantic* proves to be a compelling exploration of Romania's on-going transformation in the post-communist era. Mircea Mihăieș masterfully weaves together literary analysis, cultural criticism, and personal reflection to offer a nuanced and critical perspective on the aspirations and challenges of a nation seeking its place in a globalized world. For readers interested in Romanian culture, European politics, or post-communist studies, *Atlantical imaginar* provides an intellectually stimulating and richly layered perspective on the search for national identity, the allure of Western ideals, and the difficulties of reconciling tradition with modernity.