

**PASSIA, Radoslav – BARBORÍK, Vladimír, eds.:  
LITERÁRNE KRAJINY BRATISLAVY.  
OBRAZ MESTA PO ROKU 1918  
[LITERARY LANDSCAPES OF BRATISLAVA:  
THE IMAGE OF THE CITY AFTER 1918].  
Bratislava: Veda, 2023. 455 pp.**

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/slovlit.2025.72.4.11>

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From a historical standpoint, the 20<sup>th</sup> century holds significant importance for the territory that is now Slovakia. This period was marked by a succession of historical events that had a profound and lasting influence on the people of this region. For Slovaks, these events were largely viewed as positive within their national narrative, contributing to the accelerated process of becoming a modern nation. For other groups living alongside the Slovaks – particularly the ethnic Hungarians, Jews, Germans, and Czechs – these events often represented dramatic and even tragic milestones. Some were stripped of their homeland, others of their property or sense of purpose, and some even lost their lives.

The timeframe of the book *Literárne krajiny Bratislavy. Obraz mesta po roku 1918* [Literary Landscapes of Bratislava: The Image of the City After 1918] spans just under one hundred years. The “plot” begins in 1918, a significant sociopolitical turning point, specifically at the end of that year, as little groundbreaking literature emerged immediately after the First World War had ended in November. The temporal scope of the publication then extends into the first decade of the twenty-first century. From a standard

chronological perspective, this constitutes a coherent historical period that allows for the presentation of transformations over a continuous timespan. The book is certainly a significant contribution to understanding the evolution of the image of Bratislava in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Slovak literature. Its original perspective stems from its interdisciplinary approach and its literary emphasis on urban *topoi*. Consequently, it provides a fresh approach and the first comprehensive analysis of the topic. Having said that, it focuses not on the city as an objectively defined entity but rather on its variants as meta-images created through the imaginative reflections of writers. Indeed, the term “literary landscapes”, already present in the book’s title, effectively sets the reader’s expectations.

Developed through the collaboration of a diverse team of authors – including Radoslav Passia, Vladimír Barborík, Katarína Badžgoňová, Michal Habaj, Vladimíra Mravcová, and Viliam Nádaskay from the Institute of Slovak Literature at the Slovak Academy of Sciences; Anikó Dušiková and Matej Masaryk from the Faculty of Arts at Comenius University in Bratislava; Jaroslav Šrank from the Faculty of Education at Comenius University; and Jana Pátková from the Faculty of Arts

at Charles University in Prague – the book presents selected chapters that explore the literary portrayal of the city. It does not seek to address all potential thematic lines; one notable omission is the theme of the city’s literary representation in memoir prose. Additionally, the variety of possible research questions is indicated by the sources and literature that is referenced. Further research need not be restricted to literary theory and history; as the book’s interdisciplinary nature suggests, it can also incorporate historical, cultural, and sociological approaches.

Most books on Bratislava’s history provide an overview of key events in the city’s past, highlighting the significant figures who influenced its development. They are typically linked to the official interpretation of history and represent the “current” version of the national narrative at the time they were published. *Literary Landscapes of Bratislava* takes a different approach and offers a unique perspective through its literary lens. The book examines a depiction of the city that maintains the true outlines of its physical urban layout – its streets, squares, and buildings – yet it presents Bratislava as more imaginative than realistic. The portrayal of the city is shaped by the imaginations of the writers who set their literary works in Bratislava itself. The book’s value is enhanced by the fact that, alongside prose – where the connection to place is usually an integral element of the narrative – the authors also focus on poetry.

The book’s title accurately reflects its content; however, the phrase “literary landscapes” concerning the city can also be interpreted as an invitation to explore a fresh perspective on urban space. While the depiction of the same section of the city’s layout may vary across different literary works, it is generally feasible to pinpoint the particular area referenced in a given passage. Consequently, the book acts as a literary guidebook, encouraging readers to discover the hidden gems of Bratislava in innovative ways. Although

these layers are primarily imaginative, the city nonetheless acquires a new dimension as its space is enhanced by an unconventional perspective.

The arrangement of the texts in the book also significantly contributes to the layering of multiple perspectives. This scholarly book is structured with traditional, comprehensive chapters that are either analytical and interpretive or survey-based in nature. These are accompanied by two types of shorter texts: thematic excursions that elaborate on the main topics of the corresponding chapters, and explanatory glosses that provide various literary or historical contexts. Both these excursions and glosses introduce thematic threads that enhance the text’s flow, providing the reader with opportunities to pause and suggesting additional avenues for future research. (For instance, they look at things such as Janko Alexy’s connection to Bratislava Castle and Andrej Plávka’s relationship with the city.) At the same time, some are thematically or motivically surprising and seem unfamiliar or unexpected within literary contexts; examples of this include the motif of musical Bratislava, the Slovnaft refinery as a vision of hell, Ondrejský cintorín [St Andrew’s Cemetery], and the bombing of the Apollo industrial complex at the end of the Second World War. While both types of shorter text are organically integrated into the flow of the chapters, they are not listed in the book’s table of contents and are quite literally “discovered” while reading. Perhaps this is a playful gesture by the editors and the book’s graphic designer towards the reader.

The book satisfies all criteria for an academic monograph, while also holding the potential to resonate with a wider audience beyond literary scholars and cultural historians. It is a visually captivating publication, having a thoughtful graphic design, a creative cover, and particularly a rich visual appendix that includes artworks and photographs related to the themes of each chapter as elements that complement the text.

*Literary Landscapes of Bratislava* presents a narrative on the ways in which the urban environment shaped literature, as well as how literature responded to urbanization and various social processes. The result is a multifaceted view of how today's Bratisla-

va evolved from Pressburg, a provincial city on the outskirts, into becoming the modern centre of Slovakia. All of this is set against the backdrop of its literary scene.

*Translation John Peter Butler Barrer*

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