

**Incursiuni în imaginar 9. Poxemica în literatură/  
Incursions into the Imaginary 9. Proxemics in literature**

**Ovidiu IVANCU, A literary analysis: “Between the shades of gray” and “The book thief”**

**Abstract:** In *The Crowd: a “Study of the Popular Mind”* (1895), Gustave Le Bon wrote: “It is only the uniformity of the environment that creates the apparent uniformity of characters. I have shown elsewhere that all mental constitutions contain possibilities of character which may be manifested in consequence of a sudden change of environment”. The present paper understands the concept of “literary space” not only as “setting” or “territory.” A three-dimensional reality cannot convincingly delineate the entire universe of a narrative. At the beginning of the 20th century, Albert Einstein introduced a new variable into the equation – time. Thus, “literary space” or, if we are to use Le Bon’s terminology, “environment”, in our understanding, also encompasses the concept of time. Both novels that we analyse are set during the Second World War. Regarding the proxemics, however, they diverge fundamentally. While in “*The Book Thief*” (Markus Zusak), the nine-year-old Liesel Meminger shapes the space, in “*Between the Shades of Gray*” (Ruta Sepetys), the fifteen-year-old Lina Vilkas is shaped by the space. What does it take for a character to subdue the space-time, and how does the reader perceive the connection a character has with the space he/she occupies? Both characters being children, an analogy between the way they occupy/ let themselves being occupied by space proves to be relevant and insightful. They both step outside the comfort zone forcibly and have to handle the fundamental threat the war poses, i.e. losing humanity. They both find refuge in writing or reading. While Liesel Meminger designs a space of tranquillity, subjected to her own will and desire (a basement where she shelters Max), Lina Vilkas’s private space is shrinking by the day. It seems like a minor detail, but, for what it is worth, it might be a significant twist in the narrative.

**Keywords:** Proxemics; Space; Literature; Spacetime;

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