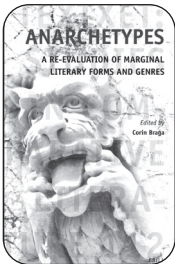


## REBELLION AND STRUCTURE: REASSESSING AND EMPLOYING THE ANARCHETYPE

Corin Braga (ed.), *Anarchetypes: A Re-Evaluation of Marginal Literary Forms and Genres*, Leyden, Brill, 2026



**Abstract:** Every era of literature has seemingly had its misfits, works that failed to be integrated into the canon and that became anomalies among their peers. At the same time, these works resemble each other in certain ways. The common thread that links these pieces of rebellious culture can be found in the collective volume *Anarchetypes: A Re-Evaluation of Marginal Literary Forms and Genres*, edited by Corin Braga. The editor's eponymous concept of the *anarchetype* is refreshed here, gaining a clearer and more comprehensive definition while also being augmented by the addition of four basic structures that anarchetypal texts can be fit into. In addition to this, the collected articles open to a grand amplitude the possible avenues of utilizing this concept, instrumentalizing the archetype in studies tied to specific authors or genres, but also in research that aims to re-evaluate the development of forms of literature.

**Keywords:** Anarchetype; Genre Theory; Corin Braga; Postmodernity.

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Corin Braga's concept of the *anarchetype* has been recently furthered by a new collection of articles, titled *Anarchetypes: A Re-Evaluation of Marginal Literary Forms and Genres*, published under the *Textxet: Studies in Comparative Literature* collection, published by Brill. This concept, coined by the researcher in a previous paper, becomes here more defined, receiving a system of sub-categories into which anarchetypal narratives can be distributed, and possible avenues of use for it are being showcased through the diverse panoply of studies collected. As a volume allowing for the breakthrough of a concept born within the Romanian academic landscape, *Anarchetypes* thoroughly succeeds in making apparent and accessible the appeal of the archetype within international comparative literature discourse, providing within a single volume both an initiation into a fairly complex yet inherently interesting area of study (atypical narratives, characterized by rebellious source material and unsatisfying or flat-out inexistent theoretical frameworks), and providing poignant examples of its uses, ranging from studies on specific authors and genres to re-evaluations of the development of forms of literature (specifically the novel). Considering all of the above stated, we can safely conclude that prospective readers, namely researchers interested in looking at narratives from a perspective detached from traditional (modern and pre-modern) viewpoints, have plenty to gain from perusing this volume, plenty of which is

unlikely to be found or surmised from someplace else.

In this survey I will begin by seeking to analyze Corin Braga's concept of the anarchetype from a critical perspective, establishing its meaning and source, while also looking to reveal weak points that may have been uncovered in other studies. Following this, I will be discussing the way in which the term has been further developed within the work reviewed, intending to also reveal yet unexplored ways in which the concept could be pushed further. Finally, I will show how the concept is being employed throughout all the remaining chapters of the book.

To begin with, the concept of the anarchetype, as it is discussed in *De la arhetip la anarhetip* (not its debut in Braga's work, but undoubtedly its breakthrough into wider discourse), seems to have emerged from a perceived dead-end of genre theory. Braga notes that, seemingly, genre theory has reached a sort of finality in postmodernism, one that has yet to be opened up again for reconstruction and reassembly, and that already left the area of study in a position of declining interest and passion.<sup>1</sup> Considering that this side of literary studies has its roots in Aristotelian poetics (specifically of interest to us here being their firm entrenchment into the idea of mimesis as a standard practice of culture-creation), it follows that a re-examination of this foundation could lead to finding offshoots still fertile for analysis. As Braga himself notes, the anarchetype finds its *raison d'être* specifically in questioning Plato's idea of mimesis as base for his metaphysics, as:

Anarche-types involve the activity of an anarchic mimesis, which refuses to

conform to ideal types and produces fortuitous, irreducible, singular entities – a gallery of “monsters.” In such a situation, the emphasis would fall on the quiddity of concrete existence, on unrepeatability of individuality, which does not depend on a pre-established project or typology of a metaphysical, anthropological, psychological, cultural, or other nature.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, we cannot say that this concept has been conceived solely as an exercise of imagination, considering it was always meant to deal with a specific and (although not clearly) defined set of narrative. These works (notably not only of the literary realm, the anarchetype being extended by Braga into music, film and forms of visual art) are characterized by their refusal from previous systems of categorization, having their value questioned and often under-appreciated specifically due to their failure to fit neatly into traditional forms.<sup>3</sup> Pulling all of these strings together we can see how Braga attempts to construct within the anarchetype a mechanism akin to a *deus ex machina* of genre theory, a saviour-concept conceived to establish an alternative to the archetype while also allowing for the recovery of narratives previously disregarded. While the dichotomy of archetype-anarchetype seems to reach a state of stability, Braga uncovers through it a third concept, almost akin to a result of dialectical synthesis, the eschatype, that is characterized, similar to the archetype, by a coherent inherent structure. However, this structure fails to reveal itself, much like the anarchetypes rebellious construction, though for the eschatype this failure of internal coherence is avoided by its being subverted towards the

completion of the narrative, structure revealing itself through a longer process.<sup>4</sup>

One other important thing to mention regarding the anarchetype and archetypal narratives is that Braga notes how these transcend historical paradigms, while also seemingly becoming more prevalent in contemporary times.<sup>5</sup> As mentioned above, this fulfills the function of the anarchetype as a recovery-concept for previous works while also enabling it to become ever more relevant within the seemingly unending postmodernity we are currently experiencing. Worth noting as well is that archetypal and anarchetypal works have always coexisted, though in various ratios, this imbalance between the two being dictated mainly by the cultural conditions of a given era.<sup>6</sup> As such, with the introduction of this new concept, archetypal and anarchetypal narratives are bound to always exist in relation to one another moving forward.

Coming back to the anarchetype, looking to define this term implies first and foremost differentiating it from the archetype, and secondly, discussing the way in which it can be approached and analyzed. Braga defines the anarchetype as such:

Gravitating around this enlightening source, and alongside works dominated by a single, central authorial subject, an alternative set of works has emerged, featuring a multiple, de-centered subject and departing from the archetypal model, which is thus left suspended in the void, as it were. These works are likely to confound readers who try to summarize them or grasp their gist. They cannot be reduced to a sentence or an “abstract” not because they are deliberately dense

or sprawling so as to test the reader’s predictive skills, as in some detective novels, but rather because their substance eschews the *logos* – the organizing rationality that endows them with meaning. Their poetics behave anarchically or anarchetypally, pushing in centripetal directions that fail to cohere around a central meaning.<sup>7</sup>

As predicted, the two terms are completely intertwined, practically needing each other to be able to exist, maintaining less a sense of stability and uniqueness in themselves and existing in a state of difference. Following from this, we can ascertain that a similar relation would be present for the way in which each of these categories of narratives are to be analyzed. This is, however, the point at which the concept of the anarchetype starts to encounter push-back, most of it stemming specifically from Dan Pătroc’s “Some Notes on the Concept of Anarchetype.”

The researcher, in his thorough examination of Braga’s foundational works regarding the anarchetype, discovers a series of weaknesses in the theory, starting from its flawed approach to defining the current paradigm of culture, moving on to the ethereal nature of the archetypal structure and its misplaced reliance on an ideally theoretically-equipped and knowledgeable researcher, and ending by questioning Braga’s assertion that a non-modern interpretative method could possibly exist. While the first has been alleviated in this most recent publication we are discussing here, although not by addressing the previous blind-spot of the difference between postmodernity and postmodern theories that Pătroc highlights,<sup>8</sup> the other two seem

to remain integral to Braga's model of the anarchetype and its analyses, the latter being predicated upon anarchic modes of psychoanalysis, therefore a decidedly modern approach to interpretation.<sup>9</sup> The former, while more ethereal of a weakness in itself, still seems to hold true, as anarchetypes are primarily negatively defined in relation to archetypes, as proven a number of times above, and can therefore be difficult to surmise by researchers that aren't intimately familiar with genre theory, or at least particularly entrenched into the paradigm they are attempting to study. Unfortunately, *Anarchetypes: A Re-Evaluation of Marginal Literary Forms and Genre* leaves these vulnerabilities wide open, opting instead to enrich the concept of the anarchetype by defining four subcategories of anarchetypal forms.

In the work at hand, Braga proposes four distinct, effective, and very productive forms of anarchetypal texts: the cluster, the domino, the LEGO game and the mycelium. All of these will serve to facilitate connecting the term of anarchetype to specific texts or sub-categories of genres, as we now have a better and less ethereal mode of recognizing the non-archetypal nature of specific narratives (although the need of familiarity with archetypes remains). We also notice at a glance how all of these categories imply fragmentation from the outset, once again tying them strongly to postmodernist theory and thought. The cluster, a name of hard-science inspiration, denotes those narratives defined by an atomized core ruled by chaos, visible and intelligible only taken as a whole.<sup>10</sup> The domino, more complex due to its apparent structure, can be defined by a failing linear development, unable to maintain a

structure capable of developing meaning.<sup>11</sup> The linearity of the domino is subverted by the LEGO game structure, its defining characteristic being precisely its capability to be altered at any point in the 'past' of its structure, never being truly stable or finalized.<sup>12</sup> The mycelium changes the frame of reference significantly, referring not to a singular type of structure in which anarchetypal texts tend to be configured, but describing a substrate of narratives that nourishes itself and pushes itself towards innovations and anarchetypality, substrate that has been present since ancient times and that continues to exist, morphing with time but remaining under-appreciated.<sup>13</sup> These structures aid also in re-defining the concept of the anarchetype, to better illustrate authorial agency in its creation:

The anarchetype describes therefore a poetic mechanism that rejects the logos. In an archetypal work, episodes, scenes, and images are attuned to the overall meaning. An anarchetypal text avoids, with every unpredictable plot deviation or ramification, a logical cohesion of scenes or images. The creative impulse of an anarchetypal author is not rational or cosmological, but "affectual," in the sense that it is based on mnemonic, synesthetic, phantasmal, oneiric, or "illogical" associations, typical, we might say, also of mystical or mythical 'enchanted thought'.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, these new subcategories are being put under intense use in the following chapters of the book, with them being utilized in almost all of the collected studies, the authors showcasing their

versatility and efficacy through a various range of literary eras and with a variety of scopes of research, looking at the work of particular authors and positioning them as anarchetypal writers, tracing anarchetypal tendencies throughout literary sub-genres and genres and analyzing genre theory through the lens of this concept.

Taking these additions into account, I believe it important to highlight some other key ways in which the concept could be further developed or questioned. Chief among these would be to establish whether the forms of the archetype could be said to have become dominant in post-modernity, and whether their prevalence could possibly lead us to reconsider how rebellious and undervalued they are when compared with archetypal narratives. One other thing that warrants our attention would be to address the criticisms brought forward by Dan Pătroc's "Some Notes on the Concept of Archetype," specifically the need of an ideally-equipped researcher and trouble of the modern ways of interpretation implied by the use of psychoanalysis adjacent approaches in researching anarchetypal narratives. The first of these seems to be impossible to properly address as it becomes an implied need when we define archetypal narratives through their differing from archetypal ones, but the four structures proposed by Braga in the book we are discussing serve as a possible alternative to the need of a researcher of the archetype to familiarize themselves first with archetypes. Secondly, while Pătroc's assessment of the sub-psychoanalytical modalities of research proposed by Braga as being decidedly modern holds in the face of scrutiny, he fails to provide any direction towards

a better-suited theoretical framework. I believe that, considering how archetypal texts are spoken of in terms of their counter-canon nature, a materialist approach to these narratives, aiming to determine the conditions of their creation and their goals, could prove itself fruitful and could keep the concept relevant in today's comparative literature landscape.

Approaching the end of this survey, we will be taking a short tour throughout chapters two to ten of the book, highlighting the aims of the studies collected. These cover a diverse range of topics and literary era and, within them, the uses of the concept of the archetype are valuable to varying degrees. However, before we begin, I consider it important to mention that papers integrating the concept of the archetype have already broken through into international journals, one such example being Maria Barbu's "A Journey with no Destination: Archetypal Patterns in Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*", published in Transylvania, and, as such, this area of research is seemingly heading towards a period of significant fertility.

Starting with chapter two (as we have already discussed the contents of chapter one previously), "Archetypal Novels of Late Antiquity", Corin Braga looks a number of ancient works, among which *Satyricon*, *The True Histories*, and a number of menippean satires written by Lucian, tying these together as archetypal works in an era when the archetypes themselves were still being developed. Chapter three follows, with Radu Toderici delving into the non-canonised literature of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in France, aiming to question the chaotic taxonomy of the time. In chapter

four, Carmen Borbely looks at three instances of utopian writing (*The Description of a New World*, *Millenium Hall* and *The Woman of Colour*), using these as examples of a general trend towards anarchetypality in the long eighteenth century, showcasing an effervescence that can be seen most clearly in such transgeneric works. Chapter five, written by Marius Conkan, aims to introduce Braga's concepts of the archetype and eschatype, into the universe of fantasy literature, tying these concepts together into a wider theoretical framework that includes other ideas of genre theory, chronotopology and heterotopology, framework which is used to analyze the makeup of fictional worlds, such as those of Lewis Carroll and J. R. R. Tolkien. In chapter six, Alex Văsieș deals with maximalist novels (specifically *Infinite Jest*, *The Pale King* and *Gravity's Rainbow*) and their anarchetypal tendencies, placing maximalist and anarchetypal writing in a theoretical deadlock, showcasing their inherent similarities. Chapter seven brings our attention back to local writing, Ruxandra Cesereanu delving into Mircea Cărtărescu's *Blinding* and *Solenoid*, showing that their construction bears many similarities to the way in which anarchetypal narratives are developed, revealing a common architecture between the works and the concept. In chapter eight, Maria Barbu utilizes the structures of the domino and LEGO game to showcase the anarchetypal qualities of North American travel narratives, specifically here Cormac McCarthy's *Border Trilogy* and *The Road* and Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*. Chapter nine, written by Călina Părău, puts forward the interesting idea that anarchetypal texts have the quality of modifying

the way in which space can be perceived in literature, looking towards postmodernism *flânerie* as the point of meeting for spatial and anarchetypal narratives, generating liminality but also highlighting the new responsibilities of the *flâneur* and the *flâneuse*. In the final chapter, Laura T. Ilea uses the work of four writers (Mohamed Mbougar Sarr, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Elif Shafak and Norman Manea) to analyze the way in which nomadic writing can integrate the concept of anarchetypality, focusing mainly upon how the chaotic and precarious lived experienced of the writers fits in with anarchetypal writing.

Looking back over all that has been stated throughout this survey, it becomes plain to see that Corin Braga's *Anarchetypes: A Re-Evaluation of Marginal Literary Forms and Genre* proves itself to be an important new node in not only comparative literature discourse, but also in genre theory areas of research. Furthering an already emerging concept and providing examples of methodological frameworks as well as possible primary sources to be studied, this collection can easily serve as a jumping off point for researchers looking to integrate their own areas of interest in the network of archetypal/anarchetypal/eschatypal narratives. The various studies included, although complete and valuable in themselves, work together to legitimize Corin Braga's eponymous concept, by showing its validity throughout the ages of literature. Overall, the volume at hand is a well constructed and articulated collection of studies, built upon a solid theoretical foundation that, while not entirely flawless, shows great potential for further developments.

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## NOTES

1. Corin Braga, *De la arbetip la anarhetip*, Iași, Polirom, 2006, p. 273.
2. *Ibidem*, p. 277. All translations belong to the author, unless otherwise noted.
3. *Ibidem*, p. 279.
4. *Ibidem*, p. 283.
5. Corin Braga, "Anarchetype: Reading Aesthetic Form after 'Structure'", in Matei A. – Moraru C. – Terian A. (eds.), *Theory in the 'Post' Era. A Vocabulary for the 21st-Century Conceptual Commons*, New York – London – Dublin, Bloomsbury, 2021, p. 134.
6. *Ibidem*, p. 127.
7. *Ibidem*, p. 125.
8. Dan Pătroc, "Some notes on the concept of anarchetype", in *Annales Philosophici*, no. 1, 2010, p. 37.
9. *Ibidem*, p. 5.
10. Corin Braga (ed.), *Anarchetypes: A Re-Evaluation of Marginal Literary Forms and Genres*, Leyden, Brill, 2026, p. 13.
11. *Ibidem*, p. 16.
12. *Ibidem*, p. 20.
13. *Ibidem*, p. 23.
14. *Ibidem*, pp. 25-26.