

BOOK REVIEWS

Enciclopedia Imaginariilor din România [The Encyclopaedia of Romanian Imaginaries], vol I., *Imaginar literar* [Literary imaginary], ed. Corin Braga (Iași: Polirom, 2020)

The volume *Imaginarul literar* [Literary imaginary] is part of the *Enciclopedia Imaginariilor din România* [The Encyclopaedia of Romanian Imaginaries], an encyclopaedia that undoubtedly represents one of the most ambitious projects of multidisciplinary academic research undertaken in Romania in the past few years. Structured in five volumes, the encyclopaedia aims, overall, to analyse our *tangible and non-tangible cultural heritage* and, by investigating the great fields of spirituality: literature, language, history, religion and the arts, attempts to map and inventory the representative elements that make up the constellations of the *Romanian* imaginary. From a strictly formal viewpoint, the term *encyclopaedia* is fairly adequate since, in the good tradition of encyclopaedism, the work aspires to completeness, representativity and compositional coherence. These features thus confer a unitary nature to the five volumes with respect to their *genre*, and the assumption of the analysis perspective characteristic to the imaginary sphere also offers it a necessary, but solid conceptual articulation.

In the clarifying preface of the volume, Corin Braga explains the idea from which the entire project came into being; he enumerates the primary work principles, traces the methodological directions followed by the work collective and sketches the outline of the volume overview. Benefiting from the now classic studies in the field of the imaginary (Gilber Durand, Gaston Bachelard, Wunenberger, etc.), as well as from the more recent ones (Peter Turchi), the volume dedicated to the imaginary is not, as Corin Braga also insists, another type of Romanian literary history, but, by avoiding the danger of the repetitiveness and sterility of the historical research method, the work brings to light, for the first time in Romania at a systematic, academic level, the newest approaches and critical methods in the literary imaginary field. The group of twenty researchers, reunited in this volume, is compiled of the following: Eleonora Sava, Laura Lazăr, Lionel-Decebal Roșca, Adrian Tudurachi, Călin Teuțișan, Ioana Bot, Sanda Cordoș, Corina Croitoru, Cosmin Borza, Ligia Tudurachi, Corin Braga, Ion Pop, Adriana Stan, Laura T. Ilea, Horea Poenar, Levente T. Szabó, Dana Bizuleanu, Mihaela Ursa, Alex Goldiș and Marius Conkan. The

analysed themes are configured around an *imaginary universe*, treated in its diachronic dimension, and they each represent a chapter, or an *entry* in the encyclopaedia of the Romanian imaginary. Thus, with a unitary conceptual vision, this volume introduces, in the analysis of the literary phenomena, extraliterary systems of reference (the field of the imaginary), thus permitting the identification, in the evolution of the Romanian literature, of certain dominant themes, or *semantic pools*, that represent the object of each research. Amassing into large architectonic structures that configure the Romanian literary imaginary, the studies present in this volume recompile the overview on Romanian literature, thus conferring it profoundness and depth. By using concepts such as *cultural and social imaginary*, *symbolic constellations* and *imaginary worlds*, the volume aims to trace the evolution and development of the main imaginary pools of Romanian literature and to describe them in their entirety. Surpassing the methodological restraints of literary history that circumscribe the historical evolution, the research of the imaginary is also located outside the eternal dichotomy: the descriptive history of literature versus the critical and subjective history.

As a result of the need for maintaining the conceptual unity of the research methods, all the studies contain a repositioning towards the historicity that is characteristic to literary history and to the evolution of the literary forms, but, at the same time, regarding the analysis of the constellations of images identified by the authors, the imposed research method also assumes the diachronic dimension that actually represents the main direction for navigating through the semantic pools formed around the terms under scrutiny. In the articles that compile the volume, all of the authors operate with the same research instruments and critical methods and, by investigating the *semantic pool* that is the Romanian literature in its entirety, they identified the basins of the tributary streams that flow into the great pool of the imaginary and that, at the same time, represent the *entries* of the encyclopaedia. These entries are as follows: the semantic pool of folklore, literature of religious inspiration, literature of historical inspiration, the classical and Enlightenment pool, the pool of literary Balkanism, the Romantic pool, the decadent pool, social literature (on the subject of the revolution), literature of rural inspiration, literature of urban inspiration, psychological literature, the literature of authenticity, the literature of the Avant-Guard, the literature of minorities, but also that of the exile, or the newest one of textualism and Postmodernism. In a word, all of these great themes, each with its specifics and stages of evolution, of growth and adaptation to the nature of the Romanian literary realities compile the map of the evolution of Romanian literature from its beginnings to the present day.

Each theme, or encyclopaedia entry, follows the same basic principle, namely the identification, in accordance with the diachronic dimension, of the literary works that, in time, allowed for the evolution of the *semantic pool* and offered the *theme* magnitude, enriching it with new meanings in relation with the

evolution of literature. This research endeavour adds a new dimension to the traditional literary history, that of depth and profoundness, conferring amplitude to the historical method of literary research and, implicitly, specificity, through the effect produced by the evolution of a theme, or the *imaginary* associated with a theme, to the successive generations of readers. If we were to graphically represent this method of analysis, we could imagine the technique of depicting real three-dimensional objects within a certain environment and, despite the somewhat non-canonical nature, the similarity of the means of the technical operation cannot be overlooked. Thus, if the traditional history of literature renders the successive evolution of the literary movements, bringing together events and works, without, however, being able to also depict the literary form of relief, the method of researching the semantic pools, by inserting a new, additional dimension of depth, manages to record the structure of our literary landscape, following the example of a three-dimensional map. Through the *volumetric* perspective, on such a map, the eye perceives an embossed image, since it can identify details regarding all three dimensions – the impression of wholeness is thus created. However, the encyclopaedia dedicated to the Romanian literary imaginary presents itself, as the reader traverses it, in the form of a *diaphragm* that, as opposed to the technique of rendering a flat image in three dimensions, has the attribute that, as the viewer moves, the 3D image also changes in his mind, just as when we view a real object: new details appear on one section of the image, while on the other, they are lost behind the new ones. The impression of a diaphragm is, however, shown only if the reader takes in the entire volume, encountering, from one entry to the next, new details of the Romanian literature landscape. This depiction technique is also important from another viewpoint. Only thus can the enrichment and the concrete growth of literature can be observed, not only depending on its historical development, but also through analysis, within the entire semantic pool of the great ideas that fuelled its evolution, can the complex literary landscape be reconstructed, a landscape that is, in fact, impossible to render in its entirety.

Therefore, by combining the newest acquisitions in the sphere of the current literary research with the perspectives that today's thought on the imaginary revealed to the researchers, the volume dedicated to the literary imaginary fulfils, in our opinion, three main functions. First of all, it has a normative function, by conferring a systemic theoretical legitimacy nature to the analysis principle adopted individually until now, in disparate studies. Second of all, this new type of encyclopaedia implicitly fulfils a poetic function, by asserting itself both through the adopted critical perspective and through the expression and form, like a sensible, notable modification of the current critical consciousness that can no longer be ignored. An essential note, characteristic to the new thought paradigm, is the recognition of the fact that, far from being homogenous and stable, the constituent images from a certain semantic pool suffer, in time, semantic reshaping and

reconfigurations due to the often-sinuous motions of the main pool, or of the tributary streams, that determine, in some cases even independent from the tendency of the main stream, its trajectory. As long as the idea of the Romanian literature understood as an immense semantic pool surpasses the inevitably limitative nature of literary history, the entire process of reconstructing the literary landscape and of recovering its imaginary in the ensemble of culture will be carried on further and, through the connections with the other imaginaries (linguistic, historical, religious and artistic) it will offer a unitary encyclopaedic view on the Romanian imaginary universe. From this viewpoint, the entire project of the encyclopaedia of the imaginaries represents a work of major importance to our culture today.

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