IMAGE AND REPRESENTATION IN THE ROMANIAN FOLK TALE

Maria CHIVEREANU[6]

Abstract: *The present work aims to define and identify the concept of image as it appears in the Romanian folk tales. It shows some of the images which outline the Romanian collective consciousness on life and world. For an overview, there will be exploited mythical images whose symbolism indicates universality of the folk tale. Interpretation of the images can be correlated with symbolism of motifs.Therefore, the short analysis of images in the Romanian folk tales demonstrates the narrator's ingenuity to combine bright landscapes with shadowy forests, in order to capture the reader's attention, using the suggestive power of images.*

Keywords: *image, representation, folk tales.*

According to the linguistic norm, the term image designates "a sensory reflection of an object in the human mind in the form of sensations, perceptions or representations" (DEX, 1996: 475). It may also mean "an artistic reflection of reality through sounds, words, colors, in music, literature, and fine arts" (Ibidem).

Imagination seems to fascinate in relationship with literature. According to Jean Burgos "everything seems to go by itself or almost by itself, at least as long as we do not agree with the most modest thorough analysis of this fascination, whether it be to keep it intact, taking shelter behind all too persistent poetic mystery or to reject it from the outset, resorting to any attenuating explanatory system, to the extent to which it becomes reductive" (Burgos, 1988: 27).

What really matters within the meaning analyzed by specialists is the image as expression of a reality hitherto unlived. In relation to a text, imagination works by the word that conveys more than in the beginning. Therefore, "the meaning of the word *image* in discourse overlaps with a plurality of meanings or facets that make it resound, while leaving around a reality that would never have come to exist without it; reality from language, but probably not only language whose background merges reality with the poetic act, be it writing or reading" (Burgos, *op. cit: 28).*

G. Bachelard is not investigating but recording the nature of the image. He is "not indifferent to the mechanism of images creating from each other, to their organization in constellations activated by their composing elements, while making the written text dynamic- a mechanism whose study is an essential task for the poet" (*Ibidem: 61)*. Also in his opinion, "the explosion defining images, like any manifestation of a vital dynamism cannot be compatible with any way of structuring, regardless of its level" (*Ibidem: 65)*.

A suitable definition of the term *image* should be sought neither in theoreticians, poetry practitioners nor analysists only interested in its chemical reality. Therefore, Jung proposes the following definition: "When talking about the image, I do not understand its simple mental copy of the external object, but an immediate representation well described by the poetic language, an imaginative phenomenon which maintains only indirect relations with the perception of objects; rather the product of imaginative activity of consciousness, it has a more or less sudden manifestation, like

[*] University of Pitești, mchivereanu@yahoo.com

BDD-A24512 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 21:59:18 UTC)

a vision or hallucination without having a pathological character, i.e. without ever being part of the chemical picture of any disease" (Burgos, *op. cit.: 166).*

For Jung, however, the image is mainly an immediate representation, allowing its detachment from what is called a metaphor. Furthermore, the author points out that the imaginative phenomenon different from metaphor derives from the imaginary activity of the subconscious.

To understand how to organize text space schemes, Burgos makes an analogy between the poetic and mythical, bringing a series of arguments also pertaining to Eliade. The author resumes a special kind of suggestion that the myth has in relation to time: "it might be said that myths keep us out of the profane, chronological time while making us enter a qualitatively different, sacred time, both absolute and indefinitely recoverable" (Eliade, 1978: 18).

It was highlighted that our subconscious is not only mythological, but its contents can mirror the destinies of life and living matter. Mircea Eliade points out that "the only real human contact with cosmic sacredness is carried out subconsciously, be it its dreams and imaginary life or creations that spring from the subconscious" (Eliade *apud* Burgos, 1988: 179).

Making a careful analysis of the mythologist's research, Burgos believes that "the perfect history that the myth recounts will reveal a certain arrangement of different adventures to its final conclusion; but also any ritual will extract its meaning from here, because symbolically repeating the original event will become possible by improving the contents hitherto insubstantial" (Burgos, 1988: 181). The religion historian's research aim to add some cosmic values to individual values, implying symbolic content that myths live on.

In terms of mythical image origin, some researchers found out it has no meaning and can be sought in individual experience or social life, in the subconscious or in history. Moreover, it was stated that "while the myth sets up as a tool that uses common language structures to comply with in its development - condition of its existence as a story – mythical images, on the contrary, cause continued disintegration of these structures due to their symbolic nature, diversity and alternation" (*Ibidem:* 186*).*

Symbolic images can be understood as metamorphosis of concrete representation through a permanently abstract meaning. From this perspective, the symbol is a representation that causes a concrete meaning. Similar to mythical images, symbolic images indicate universality of the folk tale: the image of the rescuer hero who dies and resurrects or the image of the hero in love.

Furthermore, it must be highlighted that motifs' symbolism in folk tales can be correlated with interpretation of images during the day and night (Durand, 2000: 118). In daytime (solar) one can integrate images such as: the charmed bird of the palace, of the bright castle, of daytime landscapes, of golden-haired children. These images found in the texts of folk tales highlight the power of collective mind.

The image of the charmed bird is represented as a bird with magical forces, having a royal rank. Ispirescu's text highlights this aspect. Furthermore, it sings only at the sight of the shepherd, a character with an exceptional destiny: "everyone was surprised at the beauty of that bird in thousands and thousands of colours; its feathers shine like mirrors in the sun; the church tower does no longer fall down; the bird makes its nest in the tower" (Ispirescu, 2010: 23).

The image of the castle is the centre of the ideal space. Penetration into that space is possible only after passing different tests, involving dangerous places, usually a dark forest or a deep abyss. The beauty of the palace dominates the architectural image.

BDD-A24512 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 21:59:18 UTC)

The dragon, fairy or king's palace, are made of bronze, silver or gold ,,Aurul cu care erau poleiţi stâlpii şi ciubucele de pe lângă streaşină licărea de-ţi lua ochii" (*Ibidem*).

The image of the golden-haired children surprises beauty in the superlative. Ispirescu's folk tale *Înşir'te mărgăritari* is eloquent in this respect. The superlative character is shown through an adverbial phrase ,,doi feţi- logofeţi cu totului totului de aur" (*Ibidem*: 46), " cu totul şi cu totul de aur"(*Ibidem*: 50).

The image of the wise occurs frequently in the Romanian folk tales, especially in those in which the hero is the smart girl or the wise king. The term *wise* can be replaced by the synonym *old man*. In popular mentality the king is wise, having the status of leader: "Acel împărat mare şi puternic bătuse pe toţi împăraţii de pimpregiurul lui şi-i supusese… ; Toată împărăţia se fălea că o să aibă un împărat înţelept şi procopsit ca Solomon împăratul" (*Ibidem: 14)*.

The nocturnal register is made up of chromatic images: *green* "is assimilated with calm, rest and maternal profundity"(Durand, 2000: 219), while black, white and bright red have a destructive role. Among the elements making up the nocturnal register, there are shadowy forests populated with negative characters such as dragons or giants; Muma Pădurii, wasteland, mountains.

The image of the forest develops a variety of interpretations. According to G. Durand the forest is "centre of intimacy" (*Ibidem*: 240). In the folk tale the forest is thought of as an intermediate space between the here and the beyond; it is represented as a large and opaque space: "Această casă este înconjurată de o pădure deasă şi înaltă, unde stau toate fiarele cele mai sălbatice din lume..." (Ispirescu, 2010: 10), "Când ajunseră acasă la porc, care era într-o pădure mare" (*Ibidem*: 9); "trecu prin nişte păduri mari cu buştenii ca butia"(*Ibidem*).

The correlation between forest and Muma Pădurii aims to highlight the relationship between space and characters. The character takes on attributes of the environment he lives in and can sometimes undergo metamorphosis.

The image of the wasteland belongs to the nocturnal register, especially by the existence of the hole. It is those holes that separate the sacred space from the profane. The space in the folk tales allows the religious man to understand how human beings go beyond the spiritual realm.

The metamorphosed human being in the folk tale goes beyond the sacred space by passing tests of initiation. The profane space is obliterated while achieving spiritual eternity. In this regard, it is noteworthy Făt- Frumos's search for eternal youth.

Reaching the wasteland, the hero parts with his soldiers and explores the place, which is assimilated to a new level in his initiation: "După ce trecu afară de împărăţia tatălui său şi ajunse în pustietate, Făt – Frumos îşi împărţi avuţia pe la ostaşi şi, luându-şi ziua bună, îi trimise înapoi" (*Ibidem:* 8).

The image of the mountain, which became stereotype in the Romanian folk tales is a space inaccessible to mortals: "Şi mergând lupul aşa, ajunse la graniţa iadului, unde se bat munţii în capete ca berbecii..." (Pop – Reteganul, 1986: 112); "La munţii ce se bat în capete este apă vie şi apă moartă" (Ispirescu, 2010: 29). The image of the mountain is stylistically presented by means of descriptive metaphors: , "munţi de cremene din care ţâşneau flăcări de foc; glodurile, colţii de munte care erau tot de cremene" (*Ibidem:* 12).

The brief analysis of images in the Romanian folk tales shows the narrator's ingenuity in combining bright landscapes with shadowy forests, with a view to capture the reader's attention, using the suggestive power of images.

BDD-A24512 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 21:59:18 UTC)

Bibliography

Bachelard, G., *Poetica spaţiului,* Piteşti, Editura Paralela 45, 2003
Burgos, J., *Pentru o poetică a imaginarului,* Bucureşti, Editura Univers, 1988
Coteanu, I. (coord), *Dicţionarul explicativ al limbii române, Ediţia a II-a,* Bucureşti, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 1996
Durand, G., *Structurile antropologice ale imaginarului,* Bucureşti, Editura Univers, 1977
Eliade, M., *Aspecte ale mitului,* Bucureşti, Editura Univers, 1978
Ispirescu, P., *Basmele românilor,* Bucureşti, Editura Curtea Veche Publishing, 2010
Pop – Reteganul, I., *Basmele românilor,* Bucureşti, Editura Curtea Veche Publishing, 2010.

BDD-A24512 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 21:59:18 UTC)