

INTRODUCTION: PHENOMENOLOGY AND LITERATURE

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Is there a relationship between phenomenology and literature? The question is a legitimate and problematic one, if we take into account both that which properly pertains to the literary sphere and that which pertains to phenomenology, as well as the complexity of attempts to define the practices associated to either. Without engaging into the intricacies of literary theory and meta-phenomenological research, one needs merely to mention Husserlian phenomenology's claims to scientific rigour and the importance of poetic inspiration within literature to grasp the distance that separates them. Because of this, their dialogue is condemned to remain a frail bridge, joining two mountains which conceal from each other the volcanic spark of their vitality.

An impossible, precarious dialogue? What we have tried to argue for in this new issue of *Studia Phenomenologica* is, on the contrary, that the dialogue between phenomenology and literature is different than the one usually taking place between two disciplines as imposing as they are distant. This premise allowed us to hope that the one engaging in the field of either of the two is not necessarily condemned to ignore events taking place within the field of the other. The reflection upon their relationship was not initiated, therefore, starting from that which sets apart the phenomenological and the literary endeavours, but from observing what they had in common before being founded as separate disciplines. However, we didn't allow ourselves to be guided either by the intention to draw up an unprecedented profile of a literary phenomenology or a type of phenomenological literature. This is why, deliberately, we didn't choose to ignore that which distinguishes phenomenology from literature. An inquiry into what these two spaces of the mind offer each other encouraged us to think, rather, that their kinship could shed light on the specificity of their respective endeavours.

The attempts to grasp different types of phenomenological reduction and of neutralising experience, sensitive and intellectual intuition, imagination and the imaginary, as well as the major themes and motifs that emerge throughout

phenomenological and literary creation, guided us in our quest for the place where the two disciplines meet, by means of the concrete practice they presuppose, before being defined in theory. Thus, we found out that, even if their “visible” bodies are discrete, their roots are intertwined in the same soil, that in which the accuracy and verticality of thought shoot forth sprouts into the misty horizon of reverie. There is a dream state peculiar to both literature and phenomenology, which inspires them to bravely cross into an universe which is parallel to actual reality, in which the latter’s core truth may shine forth. This dimension is, as Husserl clearly pointed out in the third *Cartesian Meditation*, that of latent possibility, which accompanies and supports any empiric process. However, it can be grasped only under certain conditions, which we strove to understand in light of the double initiation that phenomenology and literature jointly afford.

We thus came to realize that the crux of their relationship lies in the contribution of the imaginary to phenomenological description and the status that the former holds herein. It is hardly sufficient to separate the pure imaginary from the empiric imaginary, so as to associate the former to phenomenological analysis and the latter to literary creation. For it is just as obvious, on the one hand, that literature doesn’t engage into a mere empiric description, which sets forth only facts, oblivious to their meaning and essence, and, on the other, that there is an empiric realm of description – be it purely psychological or “natural” – which alters the purity of phenomenological description with an obstinacy that resembles necessity. Opposing superficial distinctions, which attribute a predetermined position to each discipline, we dared to argue that literature is just as concerned as phenomenology with grasping essences and meaning and that it displays the same desire to seize them in their very phenomenality. This thematic and stylistic kinship implies a methodological kinship, insofar as literature is, just as phenomenology, bound with more or less self-conscious means of neutralising experience. However, the latter’s hidden meaning is not revealed in literature under the terms of a rigorous endeavour, but flowing, more often than not, from the spontaneity of the story or the emotion stirred by the poem. Here lies the anticipated paradox, that of realizing that the process of neutralisation may prove most successful when the articulation of its finality is, itself, bracketed, when, rather than rushing to reach a realm of apodictic certainty, we lose our way in the meandering possibilities which unfurl around empiric reality. Aren’t we confronted, perhaps, within the field of literature, with a purer version of *epoché*, insofar as it is not defined as an abstract assay of essence from fact, but as a glimpse of its dimension as event, lived as such, unavoidably, in experience? If this hypothesis is verified, the phenomenological hermeneutics of literary works will be of interest not only to literature, but also to phenomenology.

The risk attending such an endeavour is that of denying the peculiarity of literature as opposed to phenomenology and that of fusing their practices

within the selfsame realm of descriptive “sciences”, which narrows the scope of both literature and phenomenology. And this risk would have been taken if there hadn’t existed the possibility to discover a specificity of literature *in respect to phenomenology*, which, therefore, brings them closer together rather than separating them: literature can describe appearance (*Erscheinung*), which can be grasped by the senses prior to any idealization. Thanks to this peculiarly phenomenological quality, literature cultivates the openness to remain in the life-world (*Lebenswelt*), a world which Husserl was seeking for beyond the superimposed layers of idealizations so as to find the unique sparkle of actual reality and to cling to it. If we take into account the critical distance that genetic phenomenology takes from the process of founding abstraction, insofar as this process “conceals” the formation of meaning (*Sinnbildung*), we may argue that literature could play a crucial part in this line of research. As one of the authors of this volume boldly argues, literature could be considered, in this respect, more phenomenological than phenomenology itself, as it accepts to descend to the deeper levels of the imaginary. Thus, it allows itself the possibility to encounter the real in its most illicit and compelling becoming, rather than settling in a supposedly intangible space of fiction.

The line along which the phenomenological and literature are fused, that which inspires us to often speak about a phenomenological vein of literature and a literary sensibility of phenomenology, was that which sparked the idea for this volume. We were happy to find it emerging at the heart of the reflections that came to flesh it out. Thus, articles in the first section approach the relationship between phenomenology and literature, analyzing the legitimacy of the endeavour aimed to grasp “the things themselves” by a hermeneutics of literary texts in terms of the importance granted to the imaginary (Claude Romano) and assessing the distance and proximity between phenomenologists and writers starting from a study of ways in which one bestows meaning to the lived experience (Ákos Krassóy). The ontology that Edmund Husserl acknowledges as pertaining to cultural objects and which imposes an interpretation that takes into account both their historicity and their ideal dimension (Samuel Dubusson) and the system of relevances in light of which Alfred Schütz analyzes the relationship between the literary text and reality, as well as the meaning that is created through the process of reading (Denisa Butnaru), these act as illustrations of the way in which phenomenology comes to acknowledge the specific concreteness of the literary work. However, this acknowledgment implies, on the one hand, the engagement of literature in issues developed within phenomenology – be it the relationship between freedom and death in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, analyzed both in *L’Être et le néant*, as well as in dramatic works written at the time the former was conceived (Marc Crépon), be it Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the reversibility of chiasm, inspired by his original reading of Proust (Rajiv Kaushik).

The second section of this issue is dedicated to phenomenological hermeneutics: the phenomenon of reading emerges thus as a central element in Hans-Georg Gadamer's analysis of the universality of language, and literature is revealed as a paradigm of phenomenological hermeneutics (Ilya Inishev), while the theory of meaning developed by Edmund Husserl is set against the one proposed by Paul Ricœur and enriched by a new theory of translatability, which acknowledges the dynamic dimension of meaning, made apparent both in concrete experience and in literature (Pol Vandavelde).

In the third section, the analysis of perceptive fantasy (*perzeptive Phantasie*) and of the relationship it creates between perception and virtuality allows for a re-evaluation of the poetic element (Marc Richir), and the attention to the emotional content of the poetic image – as revealed by a close reading of a poem by Nadia Tueni – proves that the latter's capacity for synthesis is not empiric, but transcendental (Jad Hatem). The autonomy of poetic creation in respect to reality is made apparent by the analysis of contradictions underlying desire in the poems of Luis Cernuda (Roland Breuer), while the ethical dimension of the aesthetic gaze is problematized in the reading of a poem by Geoffrey Hill (Kevin Hart).

The last section of this issue is opened by a study which makes manifest the passion for description which inspires both literature and phenomenology, with an attention to the novels of Claude Simon (Jean-Baptiste Dussert). The tension between meaning and non-meaning, cultivated by Gertrude Stein in *Tender Buttons*, is analyzed as a form of *epochè* which frees the gaze from the conventional objectivism in which it is trapped to make apparent the "fine substances" that are usually concealed from it (Ariane Mildenberg), while the hunt for the invisible in the novels of Pascal Quignard illuminates the essence of the gaze, as a way of relating to absence, articulated progressively in idolatry, love, art and contemplation (Vincent Giraud). The complex mood of *hüzün* described in the novels of Orhan Pamuk is interpreted as an expression of the basic states-of-mind (*Grundbefindlichkeiten*) of fear and anxiety, described by Martin Heidegger (Tobias Henschen), and the state of nihilistic mocking which the protagonists of Bret Easton Ellis's novels surrender to inspires a meditation upon the forgetting of the world, grounded in Eugen Fink's phenomenology (Olivier Lahbib). A reading of Théophile Gautier's journey through Russia as a practical treatise of phenomenological education of sensibility (Martina Stemberger) and the analysis of the way of relating to space in the mountainous, sea- and desert scapes depicted in the novels of Thomas Mann, Julien Gracq and Dino Buzzati, as a condition of change in the temporal regime (Hervé Vautrelle), close the reflections that make up this volume.

At the end of this journey, one realizes that grasping the essence of living does not pertain exclusively to phenomenology, but rather to the concrete world, that phenomenology and literature share, a world which may guide the experience of each and every one of us. The study of this practical community

presupposes a reconsideration of the status of phenomenological reduction and phenomenal essences, but also of the question of the meaning of living, which is keenly different from the question of the grounding of meaning. This is why literature can act neither simply as an illustration of the philosophical precepts in phenomenology, nor merely as a field of experiment, but rather as a space of fertile *criticism*, which goes along with a call for openness and flexibility, which it addresses phenomenology.

This critical predisposition of literature towards phenomenology is legitimized, on the one hand, by the fact that the phenomenological life, which Husserl tried to make us aware of, feeds on the imagination that literature knows, better than any other human activity, to set loose. On the other hand, the freedom of thought, the conditions for which phenomenology has ceaselessly tried to prepare and ponder upon, is present more poignantly in literature's way of being rather than in the ordinariness of the natural attitude.

The dismantling of the latter's naiveté could, thus, be replaced by an attentive observation of the spontaneous phenomenological *practice* which a different type of naiveté, the literary one, affords, thus allowing for a carefree exercise into phenomenology. The meaning of experience, which phenomenology tried to make apparent along the path leading from intuition to significance, will emerge as that which is always put to the test and made anew in the novels which accompany our acknowledged and unacknowledged becoming, in the plays that display our deepest doubts and questions, in the poems which illuminate our hourly meditations. Can transcendental life possibly be separated from the life revealed to us, unsuspectingly, in the mysterious endeavours of reading, creation and interpretation? For our part, we tend to doubt that ...

(Translated by Mihaela Doagă)