MAGAZINE OF CULTURE
published by Alba County Council
and the 'Lucian Blaga' Alba County Library
under the aegis of the Union of Romanian Writers

HONORARY DIRECTOR: ION POP

DISCOBOLUL

INTERNATIONAL



NEW SERIES, YEAR I | NO. 1, DECEMBER 2025

DISCOBOLUL
INTERNATIONAL

MAGAZINE OF CULTURE

DIGITAL EDITION



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DISCOBOLUL INTERNATIONAL

MAGAZINE OF CULTURE

PUBLISHED UNDER THE AEGIS OF
THE UNION OF ROMANIAN WRITERS

FOUNDED 2025
ALBA IULIA

NEW SERIES, YEAR I
NO. 1, DECEMBER 2025

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ISSN: 1453-8881

With the assistance of the ȘCOALA ARDELEANĂ Publishing House
Layout design: Paul BURCIA

A project by the 'Lucian Blaga' Alba County Library

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VARUJAN VOSGANIAN

Word of Praise

THE *DISCOBOLUL INTERNATIONAL* ANNUAL IS a praiseworthy initiative on the part of *Discobolul*, a wonderful magazine published under the auspices of the Union of Romanian Writers and with the generous backing of Alba County Council and the Lucian Blaga County Library. The magazine has a tradition of three and a half decades behind it and its founders, Aurel Pantea, Cornel Nistea and Mircea Stâncel, continue to be members of the editorial board.

Discobolul International, a project that encapsulates *Discobolul* magazine, aims to lend a broader, European dimension to contemporary Romanian literature, particularly that written in Transylvania, the native or adopted region of the majority of the texts' authors. Before us we see a panorama of contemporary literature from Transylvania, as well as other regions, which encompasses poetry, prose, the essay, and translation. For those

who wish to discover contemporary Romanian writing within a single literary bundle, *Discobolul International* is not only an epitome, but a work of the highest cultural standard.

This initiative on the part of writers from Alba Iulia sets an example for Romania's other literary magazines, both as regards how to achieve such a compendium of literature and as regards how better to position contemporary Romanian literature within the European context, where our nation's literary output ought to be familiar and widely read.

We ought not to suffer from cultural complexes. In order to know that one mountain is higher than another it is enough to look at it and measure it. But how can you know whether one well is deeper than another? You need to taste its water, and it is according to its cool clarity that you will be able to gauge its depth. This is why I say that there are no major and minor cultures. I don't suffer from any complexes on that score. There are only cultures that are well known and others that are not so well known: wells from which others have not drunk enough to be able to intuit their depth.

Viewed in this way, *Discobolul* is the best possible guide: the pages of this substantial anthology of Romanian culture find living water in the soil of Romania's ancestral regions, soil that is not only patient but also fruitful.

DINU FLĂMÂND

Dostoevsky

For Vlad

My son reads Dostoevsky. A discovery he made
thanks to a philosopher on the Internet, who broadcasts
lectures all over the world.

I've got nothing against that, even though, backward-looking
as I am, I'd rather he encouraged people to read
unabridged texts. Forgetting makes sure
to reduce them to excerpts…

The raving old codger is still trendy,
gathers around him curious folk from every age group.
It doesn't surprise me that free will still seems topical,
and the unjust slaughter of the innocents
can once more arouse the indignation of those
yet to resign themselves.

The lukewarm still undergo the metamorphosis into pigs,
and as ever ingenuous idiots are still immobilised
by real life's electricity, we'll still be struck dumb
when we come before the Grand Inquisitor,
still high and dry we'll weep at our old dumbfoundedness,
and as for the question of whether Raskolnikov
does or does not have the right to murder pointless lives—
even getting the wrong person—we still don't have an answer.

It's good that tormented Karamazovs are paraded on the net
in the 'people' category, to universal outrage.
I still have a tender weakness for Dmitri,
few were those like him who could squander your money
with such vast euphoria on vodka and *kazachok*,
with Grushenka's buttocks jiggling on his knees the while!

I remember my soul was on Alyosha's side
when I was his age,
I too dreamt of cleansing my sins in lye;
he understood neither his times nor his family,
a mystic poet he was probably also an onanist.

In Fyodor's great opus the only thing left incomplete
is the algorithm for how to win at roulette;
it wasn't to be, both he and we have been losing
ever since we can remember.

But God forgives all,
if you stretch yourself as wide as life encompasses.

Pavese

I asked for the same room at the hotel in Rome.
The key was handed to me in vague trepidation,
my face wasn't that downcast, but who knows…
maybe I was someone just back from the South Seas
to weigh anchor in one place once and for all.

The lift boy, somewhat more at ease,
gave me that story about the words, 'I forgive everyone
and ask everyone's forgiveness'; the book was on the table,
along with the poem 'When Death Comes,
It Will Have Your Eyes',
and the recommendation, 'non fate troppi pettegolezzi.'

… Beautiful eyes, but only he could have told us whose,
suicides are criminals beneath contempt
given they never explain themselves, and from the likes of him
what else could you expect,
when he turned his life into a precarious occupation
sufficient only to keep himself alive?

He may have thought that pre-birth he'd inured himself
to inexistence, so it wouldn't be anything new, and it wasn't
worth perpetuating the tautology of a life in which he could
no longer find the wherewithal to wait

while a further despair was lurking for him.
Which is what usually happens to many of us,
albeit not all of us…

Turin, 2010 (?)

A Piece of Paper

Gathered around the post-prandial Kremlin dinner table,
rather bloated with a reasonable tally of glasses
of vodka, they abruptly got down to the nub of global affairs,
since things were coming to a head all over
the theatre of operations (and the Neo-Greeks could not
harvest their olives, wavering between neo-king and neo-
republic)…

they felt that history
couldn't wait, so they set about
re-carving up the world:

you ninety per cent in Romania, us the same in Greece,
and fifty-fifty in Yugoslavia and Hungary
for both parties plus Bulgaria, you seventy-five per cent,
since you're fellow Slavs, and for us the remainder,
the Polish question we'll settle later,
if a question it still remains.

The pockmarked one doesn't have to think long: *khorosho*…
he even ticks the scrap of paper presented by the Briton,
happy to see him wade willingly into the mire,
even if the lord may feel some lingering remorse
sensing that whatever he's scribbled there
may later be interpreted
to mean that they engaged in 'settling rather cynically
matters on which the fate of millions depended'
(maybe not all of them Europeans, true, given
many were from the Balkans)… bagatelles

anyway nations don't get to choose their own
fate and what does 'people' even mean, few can cope with
the Latin *uti possidetis*, let alone the fact that the *ius*
is open to interpretation… but enough with the complications.

So, the British pen guided by the holy spirit
of power amid the cigar smoke decided…

'No, don't light it, keep it for later'… the honeyed
irony could be heard from beneath the Georgian moustache
of the one who knew that history is always party to villainy,
delighted at the unexpected complicity on offer to him
both of them henceforth pals, like two wee lads
arms around each another's shoulders standing side by side
in front of the same (future) wall
and happily piddling together

then one of them went back to his studies in linguistics,
the other to his literary work…

VIOREL MUREȘAN

Lacework and rain

these hands
all night they glued gold leaf
to a stray thought
nestling inside a naked bird

here
I tug my rain by the eyes
you show the wind lacework

between us there's as much silence
as the cabinet-maker
could measure in a day
with all his set squares

after which you'll reach out a hand to pluck
the hat of a drowned sailor off the water

White

your heart whispers to you
that it wants to be alone for a while
like the bark of a dog in a forest

my heart is a raven's egg
left out on a mountain

a poem without end
or a church without bells
is this fir cone
which with pensive fingers
you snap from a branch
as a gift to yourself

let your hands clothe it
in new snow

Sloping surface

hours like pigeon lofts

today even poetry will be
like a bird hit by a bullet

that flees the sun
with my first death in its beak

its white eggs
in the knots planks hatch chicks

there was also that night in the sky
a night passed in trumpet songs

then my gaze that of a harried old man
slowly settling into glass honeycombs
and the shadow that in an empty room
every day unfurls
into dry leafage

let's go
treading this carpet of apples
with tensed hands dragging storks' legs
from a cloud

Field with scales

from the window could be seen a few men
kneading in their hands
the ruins of a circle

in the sky could be heard in places
a creaking of pulleys
and the wax mannequin in a black dress
drew the curtain aside
where until just yesterday
the sun used to rise

today on the streets
I will count the beggars' fingers again
from which it hasn't rained for months

Sunlit armchair

in the wake of our steps
the darkness spreads among the trees
the way you'd set up a brass band

I listen
crunching the ice
with the roar of a collapsing house

across her cheeks
two arcs spread
and meet at the corners of her eyes
after so many years' back and forth

and the fingers
of the hand left to dangle
over the chair rest
slowly waggle in mid-air
as if hesitant to cross a bridge

Umbrella

in the rustle of her velvet dress
she felt how she bitterly regretted
having spoken

then she waved at me repeatedly
to say
that the snow had just come down
from the clouds to bring me
the umbrella

and the two wings
that I'd left behind at birth

Bible and mirror

the day waned like a woman receiving
a flower

for an hour the chestnut leaves applauded
that rotten blood-red sun

I could still hear you swimming
on waves of green stone
and on waves of grey stone
the way you might confess in passing
to a murder

slowly
I too became a window
that opens and through which
passes your white summer dress

I bought you a cloud

the whole of my life up till then
was moving out
like an owl vacating a chimney

from there it looked at me once askance
while thorns of light
sprouted from its eyes

every night there was a hallway
along which I ran
wrapped in a towel

in the morning
silence betwixt doors and windows
irony
would spread its wings
regard me
with pigtails and a thousand faces
among the eyes of a basket of cherries

I bought you a cloud
she told me
as she left

Dadaist

for days and nights I listen to a horse
clopping across a wall

I sign my latest painting
by looking at it
from the roof of a mountain
that's about to cave in

the way you'd try to recount
the most beautiful death from a region
I hang by my eyelashes
from a feast day in the calendar

then I look at the lines on my palm

my hand looks like
a ladder plunging
into a whirlwind of hollow
noises

(From the collection, *O cupă cu versete* [*A chalice of poems*], in press at Editura Junimea)

GHEORGHE GRIGURCU

‘A “neither-nor” person’

Old age. With the passing years, the life lived up until the present seems to you shorter and shorter. Might it be bashfulness on its part in the face of the eternity that will follow thereafter?

Pride: the refinement of selfishness.

The feeling of infinity that one privileged moment can sometimes give you, as if Time’s figure of style.

‘As a Faustian, Western man, it’s hard for me to understand or to practice the Eastern philosophies which I know to confront evil passively. The malign history of our times makes me actively oppose attacks on freedom and life. I realise, however, that the energy expended in doing good can be very well compared with the energy wasted in doing evil. A dedicated creator—

an artist, politician, impresario, worker, professional—brings to bear as much energy and experience in achieving good as in destroying it.' (Carlos Fuentes).

Relations with the future are generally inequitable. The future lays claim to a superior position.

The grandeur of unconscious Destiny. The animal, tree, stone have such a Destiny, which, unlike ours, dramatic by self-reflection, pours itself directly into the cosmos.

Scriptor. Not one moment of existence is ultimately devoid of an identity of its own. All that is needed is to find the intuition to draw it out of anonymity.

Celestial kitchen. The dough of these white clouds, kneaded by the wind.

'Evil is the shadow of good. Every real good, having solidity and substance, projects an evil. The imaginary good alone projects none. As any good is bound to an evil, it follows that, in the event that you wish for the good and do not want to spread the corresponding evil around you, you are forced, as long as the evil is unavoidable, to focus it on yourself. In this way, the desire for the consummately pure good implies the acceptance, for oneself, of the ultimate degree of wickedness. If you wish only the good, you find yourself in opposition to

the law that binds the real good to evil, like the illumined object to its shadow; as long as you find yourself in opposition to the universal law of the world, you inevitably fall prey to wickedness.' (Simone Weil).

Old age. Weary voices, weary silences, weary lights alike.

'Sometimes you reckon a thing to be good because it could have been much worse.' (Chinese proverb)

The first day of Easter, 2022. Since morning, people outside in their Sunday best, going to church or coming back. Nearby, a parked van with the surreal inscription on one of its sides: 'Metal *popi* [poles, but also priests] for hire.' Is that so!

The feeling of freedom you can experience only in relation to the meaning of certain hypostases of existence, only as a derivative. Otherwise, in the Edenic gratuity of the beginning, you don't perceive it.

'Is the habit of placing myself in other people's souls also what makes me see myself as others see me or as they would see me if they paid attention to me? Without a doubt! And as soon as I understand what they would think of me if they knew me, it is as if this were really what they did think. To live next to others is torture for me. For, I too have others within me. Even when far from them, I am forced to live next to them. Even when I am

alone, the crowds surround me. I have nowhere to run—unless from myself.' (Fernando Pessoa)

Texts encourage competition. In the end the creator's 'I' resides in being not a referee, but a witness.

A knife plunged into an aesthetic organism the same as into a human one.

A 'neither-nor' person is actually one that you dislike, even if you avoid coming to an awareness of your reaction. The prolonged appearance of neutrality works against it.

'Alas, how many confusions are made between sincerity and *sans-gêne*.' (Gide).

N.B. A gesture of goodwill on your part may more often than not be treated as one of weakness. The weakness of the Other is in fact reflexively transferred onto you.

'In a letter (to Goethe, I think), Schiller writes of a 'poetic state of mind'. I think I know what he had in mind, I think I recognise it. It is the state of mind in which we are receptive to nature and in which thoughts seem as alive as nature. It is strange, however, that Schiller did not produce anything better (or so it seems to me) and that is why I'm not at all convinced that what I myself produce genuinely has any value. It is wholly

possible that my thoughts might receive their radiance only from a light shining from *behind* them. That they *themselves* cast no light.' (Wittgenstein).

Old age. The stupefaction that one feels when faced with things that become ever more elementarily painful, that can no longer find expression. Things doomed to remain exclusively acts of life. A vindictiveness or generosity on the part of the elementary?

A day darkened by initial mists that seems thereby to provide a pretext for its own ending. Another day intensely luminous, which seems to commence in order never to end.

X introspective, Y inwardly invisible to himself.

'Bad words cling to you like a burr, good words stay where they are.' (Albanian proverb)

'According to Marcus Aurelius wisdom is therefore not so much a conquest of himself through the use of well-governed, healthy reason—such a view of things underlines his anachronism—as much as it is an imitation of the gods who have very little in common with reason and the rational. His enterprise is closer to hermetic philosophy and the mystery cults than rationalist philosophy. At the opposite pole to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Marcus Aurelius is initiated into the Eleusinian

mysteries, he develops within a religious universe! [...] Marcus Aurelius therefore conceives of philosophy as an initiation that allows access to the art of resembling the gods. Within such a logic, life means death, and death, if we have been initiated, means life.' (Michel Onfray).

A.E.: 'Lately the whole week seems to consist of Saturdays and Sundays. I hope you understand what I mean to say.'

A.E.: 'You wouldn't believe what I saw. On the street, a young, athletic-looking man leading a small child on a leash, like a nice little doggy.'

In early youth, the world offers itself to you with compassion, but you cannot reach out your hand to pluck it like a ripe fruit. Subsequently, you acquire the energy of experiences, but the world withdraws. At both ages, you remain the loser.

'Perfume is the most intense form of memory.' (Jean-Paul Guerlain)

'To listen to a cat purring becomes a mystic experience. Great French veterinarian Gérar Lippert studied feline purring, which is a sign of contentment and at the same time soothes others. The psychological origin of purring continues to be a mystery. Some experts claim it comes from the vibration of membranous folds behind the cat's vocal cords. Others say that it is produced

by blood flowing up to the heart, causing vibrations in the thorax and trachea. Whatever it may be, Lippert observed that purring is modulated in a rhythm of sixty beats a minute, like the human heart. There are also similarities between purring and the throat vibrations of Tibetan sacred chant, which is so close to breathing.' (*Formula AS*, 2023).

Intuition: an accommodating intelligence that allows the inner being to take the first step.

Intuition: a discreet alarm signal before the storm.

Intuition: a divination that nonetheless does not wish to claim for itself the laurels of the abnormal.

S. died, a painful day. G.: 'Resign yourself to it, it's the law of nature.' But don't the negative things that are 'the law of nature' hurt all the more, by avoiding the redeeming exception?

I have lost someone dear to me. The world is concomitantly the poorer and the more fulfilled, with a being having made the transition to its ideal hypostasis.

'French proverb: the devil is obsessive, he always strikes in the same place. Because he knows what he is doing: 1) monotony aggravates suffering. The Fourierist system of flitting from one job to another would lead to relief even in the case of suffering;

2) monotony exacerbates even the best of intentions, it wearies compassion, provokes disgust.' (N. Steinhardt).

A.E.: 'Although I couldn't fault X for anything specific, he used to make an impression on me that was quite disagreeable. I commented on his writing as favourably as was possible, I maintained relations with him over the telephone. All until one day something revealed to me his real face irrefutably. I acquired certainty.' Don't you regret having humoured him? 'I continue to humour him by republishing what I wrote about his texts.'

The black-capped chickadee (*Parus atricapillus*) has seventeen different notes in its usual song, each with its own meaning.

'From the word of the gospels have grown countless legends and beliefs, which have nourished the spiritual life of Christianity. The symbolic value of these texts is considerable. The symmetry and symbolism are perfect in their coherence. But these symmetries were divined and greatly savoured by our ancestors. They lived in a noetic cosmos, far vaster and more coherent than the mental madhouse of the moderns.' (Mircea Eliade).

The cursive sky of the clear river.

A.E.: 'The gentle hypocrisy of illusion.'

Old age. And nothing remains, nothing of *that which was not.*

Mutations of the psyche like colours that naturally arise from other colours: pink from red and vice versa, grey from black and vice versa, azure from bright blue and vice versa. But sometimes also, like an innocent impertinence, the emergence of red or blue from violet.

'Excessive reading can lead to the risk of developing one's own opinions.' (from a film)

'The real temptation of the thinking man is to fall silent. Through falling silent, thought acquires the supreme dignity: it no longer pursues anything. It explains nothing, it does not expand. Thought that encloses itself in silence renounces all contact. Maybe such a thought would even be capable of killing. It does not know it, however. It did not want that. It is not dead set on survival.' (Elias Canetti).

16 January, the Feast of St Anthony, the patron saint of animals.

Things that are pointless and precisely for that reason awaken the interest. A reflex of charity or of aesthetic gratuity? Or somehow both in combination?

'You have no notion of the dangers of health and the advantages of sickness.' (Pascal).

The growing obscurity of a meaning long demonstrated.

Try to forget yourself, the way an object, redemptively, forgets itself.

'Many need success in order to perfect God's work: among them, some have learned to stop demanding it in order to advance; others, fewer in number, discover even in their unsuccess a means to demonstrate their love of God.' (Monseigneur Vladimir Ghika).

Between dream and reality, the boundary, perfidious more often than not, is being itself.

You have long travelled towards a goal, you have travelled intrepidly, as if the goal existed.

'I don't know whether God exists, but with all my strength and without ceasing, I hope He does. Because it is clear to me that somewhere there must exist *something* which, being better than what we have here, resembles the justice and truth that we never stop seeking, that we must constantly grope for, even though we will never attain them. I have to admit that from time to time doubt pushes hope aside. Also, from time to time, hope emerges triumphant. This terrible state of uncertainty, this *fluctatio animi*, to use Spinoza's term, will not last infinitely. Glory be to God, in the end I will die.' (Jean d'Ormesson).

In ancient Egypt there existed the belief that bees sprang from the tears of the god Re. A Christian variation: they are supposed to have emerged from the tears of the Mother of God.

X is a demagogue even with himself.

An individual of grossly vulgar habits with whom you must often deal. The circumstances of the limited life granted to you prevent you from detaching yourself from him, continuous indisposition prevents you from detaching yourself from yourself.

On the Literary Canon, in Alba Iulia

In lecture theatre A9 of the 1 December 1918 University, *Alba Iulia, before a packed audience, the* Contemporary Romanian Novel Colloquium *was held on 10 October last year. The topic of the colloquium was* 'The Canonical List of Last Century's Romanian Novel'.

On behalf of the Union of Romanian Writers, the speakers were writers Nicolae Manolescu, Gabriel Chifu, Gabriel Coșoveanu, Daniel Cristea-Enache, Florina Ilis, Adrian Lesenciuc, Angelo Mitchievici, Cornel Nistea, Irina Petraș, Flaviu George Predescu, Vasile Spiridon, Răzvan Voncu, and Mihai Zamfir.

We publish below transcripts of the talks given by Nicolae Manolescu, the chairman of the Union of Romanian Writers, and Răzvan Voncu, the editor-in-chief of România Literară *magazine.* (**The Editor**)

NICOLAE MANOLESCU

I **THANK ALL OF YOU, PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND GENERATIONS,** for having come in such large numbers, and I confess that having taught at university for fifty-seven years, I no longer experience stage fright in front of a full auditorium, although I still feel nervous. We have been talking about the project that Gabriel Chifu presented to you briefly. The question is why we felt the need to create such a project. As my colleague already said, it was because of the disorder in matters of cultural values, and literary values in particular, as it is such values that we are talking about, given we are not experts in every area of culture. I hope that we are experts in literature and that we have demonstrated this as far as possible. There is a certain disorder, which does not strictly depend on the more general disorder in Romanian society today. Elsewhere, too, be it in Europe, the United States, or who knows where else, uncertainty reigns when it comes to values, when it comes to cultural standards, which are both artistic and moral, if you like, a disorder that derives from the evolution of society itself, which, thanks to the globalisation that it is so often talked about, is not limited to just one country, but encompasses almost every country, regardless of its level of development. This also relates

to education, which has begun to look the same both over the ocean and in Europe, in the West and in the former communist countries, in the countries of Africa, everywhere, in Australia, in New Zealand. Unfortunately, I cannot say that education is better now than it was before, nowhere is it better, something has been lost in matters of education at every level, starting with teachers. I myself was a teacher, I retired after fifty-seven years in education. I continued to teach even after I retired, for another two or three years, when, I have to confess, I gave it up, I went into retirement, feeling, at least in that respect, that of education, a certain dissatisfaction. I could no longer read the faces I saw in front of me at Bucharest University, in the Literature Faculty. I had learned over the course of time to read certain things on the faces of each person: interest, disinterest, although these are superficial things, every teacher immediately senses them if he has a little experience. I'm sorry, nowadays it's called expertise. Experience is done with, now we employ expertise, laboratory expertise, but anyway… And I realised that I couldn't read anything on my students' faces. In the past, I was able to say: look, so-and-so, in such-and-such a row, usually a young lady, because there a very few young gentlemen in the Bucharest Literature Faculty, I don't know why, but anyway, the Bucharest Literature Faculty has been feminised for a long time now: 'Young lady, you come from a home where there are a bookcase and books' or 'You come from a house where there was not one book or publication, nothing of the sort, ever.' She would ask: 'But how do you know?' 'I just know.

I was right, wasn't I?' 'About right, yes,' she would reply, which was clear, to me it was very clear. Now, I can't sell you the secret of how I used to do it. The ones in the front rows… students always flee from the front and go to the back, ever since I can remember, the front rows usually remain empty. Luckily, your teachers had the courage to come to the front today.

What can I say? It's quite sad in a way to conclude that you can't read any more, my whole life I've read books, true, I've read people more poorly, I'm not good at it, I don't have the ability to look at a person and say… but when it comes to culture, I catch on quickly. So, it was quite sad for me to conclude that I no longer know how to read… I would look, I would see the same charming young women, better dressed than they used to be—to think what my generation was like, what the women in my year at university were like… Mihai Zamfir, who was a student when I was will be able to remember, but the way we were dressed… I can't tell you. It was very depressing. Quite simply, I no longer experienced the same communication and so that was when I asked myself, to what end? After which I started missing education and whenever I receive an invitation and they tell me: 'Come and meet the students, the pupils, the teachers,' I'm there straight away! Even though I no longer have the same energy as in the past to jump in the car straight away and… I'm still nostalgic for it.

It all comes down to the same confusion as to values, primarily criteria of value. What we aimed to establish through the canonical list was precisely to establish whether there

might exist a given order in matters of literature and what it might be, for poetry and prose for the time being, to be followed by criticism, theatre, and whatever other genres there will be in future. Literature is an order that is not passed down from somewhere up above, it is an order, but we don't know how it is created, we know that it is created, but we don't know who creates it. From time to time, every few decades, we think, 'Who created the current order in Romanian literature? Who are we going by?' In my opinion, we go by two people: Eugen Lovinescu in the late 1930s, in *The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*, one volume, and George Călinescu, *The History of Romanian Literature from its Origins to the Present*, 1941. These two seem to have created the order that we call the canon. When we got down to work, we were curious enough to look it up in the *Explicative Dictionary*, to look up the senses of the word canon. We found a number of senses, mostly religious, we didn't find anything that referred to culture, even though a canon has been talked about for a very long time, books have been published, studies, everybody knows this meaning of the word, but it isn't in the dictionary.

This shows how good the dictionary is, it's the umpteenth edition, the fifth or sixth, of the *DEX*, but the word *canon* isn't there. It has *canonicus*, for example, which is unrelated, there's a religious *canon*, but not a cultural *canon*. So, it's not in the dictionary, but it exists in reality. The canon is precisely this order, since a history of literature isn't made up of all the works that have appeared over the course of the centuries, in our case, let's

say, over five hundred years; there are literatures where it is a question of many hundreds, sometimes thousands, of years. A *History of Japanese Literature* was published here in Romania, in three volumes, by a professor from Tokyo, and the first volume is titled 'The First Thousand Years.' Wonderful! Anyway, we have about five hundred years' worth of literature in the Romanian language. I'm sure there are others who say that Romanian literature began longer ago, even that it began with Ovid: the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, after all, refer to the Euxine Sea, so he was a Romanian poet. Well, Latin. Romanian. The Romanian language didn't exist, but it doesn't matter: he's a Romanian poet. These are rather like literary-historical jokes. The idea of a canon arose precisely from the need to establish an order, because no element of culture, no cultural domain, can be chaotic. There is a cosmos not a chaos, and a cosmos has organisational criteria and reference points, fixed points. Fixed not for all eternity, let us understand, or as George Călinescu said, 'When I know that Sirius will explode, how will a book, a sheet of paper, last until the next millennium?' The millennium to which Călinescu was probably referring has now passed and the sheets of paper endure. Under such circumstances the canon of course changes, but when it changes we don't know. The conclusion we drew now, for example, in creating the proposed list, around thirty-five critics replied—active critics, critics who study Romanian literature, who have written books, who have written studies on individual authors and periods—we concluded that canon of Lovinescu and Călinescu has not changed after all this time.

Think about it: since 1940, 60 plus another 19-20 years, 80 years, it hasn't changed. They're more or less the same. And it's very simple for us to see Rebreanu's *Ion*, the poems of Ion Barbu, Arghezi's *Fitting Words* and others, and so on and so forth, are the same. The bad part is that they are no longer as well respected as before. Respect comes from education. As long as the Romanian literature syllabus at school cuts back on the number of hours for Romanian literature, as long as it excludes important works… I was amazed to discover that a large number of these great writers who wrote canonical works are no longer part of the syllabus, no longer in the textbook, let us understand. Ever since we've had optional textbooks, of course, you can put in them whatever you like, within certain limits, Eminescu should be included at least once or twice, Creangă shouldn't be missing, Sadoveanu shouldn't be missing, but apart from that, school teachers can do whatever they like, they can teach according to the level of the class, not just of the school, but of the class. There are classes where you can do Eminescu's *The Lucifer* and classes where it's better to do his *Sleepy Birds*. You've no idea how a philosophical a poem *Sleepy Birds* is and how long it took for people to notice what the poem is about. Mihail Dragomirescu, a famous aesthetician and literary critic, contemporary with Călinescu and the other interwar writers, commented on it as a philosophical poem, but he didn't observe that short line at the end, 'dormi' (sleep!): he read it as, 'Dorm în pace' (They sleep in peace), the birds, whereas it is, 'Dormi în pace' (Sleep in peace), which means it's a lullaby. Well, what I want to say is that

surrounding the works of Eminescu and others there is a hurly-burly of critical interpretations, sometimes more spectacular and more interesting than the works themselves. There are famous plays—who reads *Răzvan and the Otter* any more? I did it in lycée, I did it at university. Nobody reads it any more. Surrounding that work there are fantastic commentaries. Budai-Deleanu's *Tziganiad*, written around here, in Cioara, in this area. Nobody reads the *Tziganiad* now, except specialists, although you ought to know it's full of flavour, the thing is to pick up on the rhythm of the phrasing and the ideas. Surrounding the *Tziganiad* there are amazing, conflicting commentaries, everything you can imagine has been said about this heroicomical epic, absolutely everything possible, it has been compared with all the epics in the world, not that in Romania we really had any, we looked abroad. Extremely interesting. All these things, education doesn't point them out, if you don't read, how can you know? If you don't read, how can you like a book? It's a vicious circle. In order to read, you have to like to read and in order to like to read, you have to read. Nowadays, they keep saying that people don't read any more, that everybody prefers to look at their computers… tablets are thing of the past, we have telephones… You can do whatever you like with a telephone, but not culture. This is where a major problem of contemporary society arises, a confusion, a confusion between information and knowledge. All the elements I was talking about, technical, modern elements, allow us to use information to be connected with anything at all in real time. While we're talking

here, by looking at our phones we can see whether or not the government has fallen today, for example. Yes, but this isn't information, it isn't knowledge. It's the raw fact; knowledge is the net fact. Knowledge is filtered information, it has passed through countless filters; culture means a filter, a sieve. If we don't have a sieve, we don't have a culture. The canonical list aims to establish this, let's call it an indisputable axiom: no sieve, no culture of any kind. We can't mix values together, it's a catastrophe, we lose everything and turn culture into what? Into entertainment! I mean, look: this is why I'm so glad there are so many of you here today, because usually some singer or other turns up, good, bad, don't ask me because I don't know anything about that music (I like Schubert, I like Mozart), I don't understand a thing; I don't have a musical ear. They pack out concert halls and stadiums… That's entertainment, not art. On the other hand, only a few people go to concerts at the Athenaeum, only those who genuinely love music. The late Iosif Sava, in his broadcasts, when he heard about light music, as it was called at the time, the whole of that musical entertainment, he would laugh and say: 'That's not music, don't talk to me about music, in my opinion, music is classical music.' Obviously, that's an exaggeration, even light music is a kind of music, but just as there is also a kind of literature that isn't genuine literature and which unfortunately is based on something normal in so complex a society, such as contemporary societies, which is the confusion between value and success. Not every book that is a success has value, not every book that has value is also a success, they're two completely

opposing things. What examples can I give you? Van Gogh never sold a single painting or only one painting in his whole life, via his brother, and after his death, a Van Gogh painting has come to be worth the budget of a whole country… This ought to make us stop and think, the fact that such fame, such success, is a huge trap, it actually leads us to a dead end. Culture isn't allowed to have dead ends, culture has to be open, alive the whole time, for which there have to be criteria, there has to be order, there has to be cosmos, not chaos. But the biggest danger at present is that we mix everything together to produce a hotch-potch, everything, absolutely everything is mixed up, exceptional writers with seventeenth-hand writers, semi-literates with genuine writers, it's all chaotic. And the root of the evil, forgive me if you think I'm exaggerating or mistaken, but after so many years spent in education allow me to say that the root of the evil is school. School no longer teaches the elementary things that we have to know and without which we are unable to find our direction in culture, school gives us the compass, school shows us the straight road down which we have to travel. If school doesn't give us that, then it's over, we get lost and start believing that everything is possible, that everyone who claims to be a writer is a real writer and so on. It's a great danger and this is also valid for the other arts, for culture in general, not only for literature, let us understand. Take architecture for example, look at the monstrosities being built, look at how there is no plan, no concept of urbanism, of urban development, what is happening is absolutely the same as in past centuries when cities were just big

villages. Today there ought to be order, but there's nothing of the sort, a terrible chaos which, instead of making our cities look better, makes you wonder where on earth they came from, because they don't knock together, as the folk saying goes, nothing fits with anything else. The same thing also occurs in literature, which is why we decided to draw up this canonical list. We don't claim it's infallible, we don't claim it's definitive, or at least, for the course of the lives of elderly people like myself, of course it's definitive, I won't live to see another one, but you young people here today might live to see it. But in order to see another canon you will have to think very carefully about what you want, about what your criteria are, what you like. what you wish for, and, let me repeat, not depending on social success. In life, it is important to do what you are capable of doing, what you like doing, not a profession that makes you a lot of money and which bores you to death. Look at what happens to all these children born rich in current society who end up criminals overnight. Why? Because education hasn't taught them how to behave, their parents haven't taught them anything, they send them to drug and alcohol detox centres, they buy them cars worth hundreds of thousands of euros because they've gone to detox, from which they played truant, and in the end, they run down and kill somebody in the car. Unfortunately, I know a lot about one such case, and the boy's father, I know what business he was in, and so, I can tell you that that's the source of the evil. The boy was raised badly and at school he didn't learn anything. A long time ago they used to say… my parents were teachers, so

I have lived in a didactic environment ever since I can remember. My parents, back in their day, people used to say something very simplistic: the teacher is a model for the pupil, to a greater extent even than the parent. Girls copy the make-up, hairstyle, nails of their Romanian teacher, their maths teacher, the teacher they like, that's what it used to be like, I don't know whether you still have such models, I fear not. I look at the boys' haircuts and I have the impression that their fathers didn't comb their hair like that, but anyway, that's another discussion. This is why I ask you to believe that the question of the canon is not just any question, one we move on from, once we've discussed it, once we've published it, once we've chosen the works, and that's the end of it, no, it's vital to literature. If you want us to carry on having a literature for future generations, when your children will go to school, then you ought to think a little about the criteria that we absolutely need.

Thank you!

RĂZVAN VONCU

We're here before an audience made up mainly of young and very young people, and I'm happy to see it.

I shall begin with a recent event, not one from the dim and distant past, but one which has to do precisely with your age group. One of the better cultural magazines in our country, *Apostrof*, from Cluj, published in its latest issue a selection of work by young and very young writers, i.e., from the seventeen- to eighteen-year-old age group, lycée pupils and first-year students. The selection was notable not so much for the literary quality of the texts, since here there is work to be done: as Professor Manolescu says, 'at the age of twenty, everybody has talent, after which it remains to be seen what is sifted from that talent.' The selection was interesting because it combined with a second segment, a literary questionnaire in which these young people were subjected to a barrage of questions about what they wanted to achieve in literature, about their outlook on literature, about their reference points, their models. And one of the questionnaire's respondents, a poet of eighteen, when asked who her literary models were, gave two names. I won't tell you who they were, not just because I have reservations about the authors in question, but also because if I revealed them, they

would mean nothing to you; you would never have heard of them. Right then, I was tempted (a temptation quickly supressed, however) to telephone Marta Petreu to ask for the girl's number so that I could call her and ask her the following: 'Miss, as a teacher, critic and literary historian, I advise you to reconsider. If you follow these two writers, you will never get anywhere. Why not? Because you can only become a writer by learning from the great writers. You can only become a writer by confronting, by doing battle with the major models.' As Constantin Noica told Gabriel Liiceanu in the 1980s: 'Gabriel, if you want to become a philosopher, you don't fight the valets, you fight the gods!' Why is that? Because if the world record for the high jump is 2.47 metres, and you set out to jump 1.50, you'll never manage to jump even two metres. You have to set your target higher! You have to learn literature from those who know what literature is, and only the great writers know what literature is. They know, in a way that often has not been formalised or conceptualised, that it is a craft that you steal. But only by doing battle with the great models will you manage to achieve anything, only by doing battle with an established literary code, configured by the texts of great writers, can you reach the point of configuring your own new literary code, and if you don't configure one, even if only in your own literary awareness, then you are nothing but an imitator. So, if you don't find yourself by confronting these models and learning the craft, you will never truly become a writer.

Our canonical list is, among other things, a guide for those who want to know what literature is, by means of this

vehicle which belong to us, to Romanians: *Romanian literature*. Who want to know how prose has been defined over the last hundred years, how poetry has been defined over the course of a hundred years, through what Romanian literature has created.

In addition, the list is both a protest and an impetus. We are not belligerent by nature, we are polite, civilised people, but we are genuinely very upset by developments in Romanian society, by developments in Romanian education, and by the chaos which, in fact, we ought to call by a different name. It is a question of *promiscuity*. What Professor Manolescu spoke of as the mixing together in literary life of outstanding writers and pseudo-writers, of people who know what they are talking about and ignorant people who give lessons before taking them themselves, is extremely deleterious to literature and, above all, to its readers. The canonical list aims to be a protest against this situation, a protest in the name of value. We wanted to show that everything is not the same pond in which all are equal, but that this Romanian world of ours, such as it is, with its victories and defeats, its historical disasters and its miraculous resurrection in the last hundred years, was capable of producing summits. Summits that define us all. Not all of us like all these authors, we do not necessarily identify with the whole list, but together they form a map of Romanian creativity, and this map ought to be more widely known, among young people in the first place, and it ought to be better promoted in school. Parents can give you an education, but school gives you the *knowledge* that Nicolae Manolescu was also talking about. Of course, parents

too can give you knowledge, but if parents were sufficient for the *transmission* that Irina Petraș was talking about, we wouldn't have invented school; mankind would not have needed such an institution. It is clear that these two elements, family and school, have to go hand in hand.

In addition, our list also has a side to it that is a *warning*. As most of us are teachers, we are all aware of another serious confusion that can be found in the education system. In students', and, I believe, also schoolchildren's, essays you often find chaotic references. If, let's say, the topic is 'The Historical Novel in the Work of Sadoveanu', you will see that the student naturally quotes Nicolae Manolescu's *Sadoveanu: The Utopia of the Book*, but also some school inspector from the 1990s who published a volume of commentary. This confusion derives from another equally grave confusion, which such a critical examination as the canonical list would be capable of doing away with: the confusion between value and freedom of expression. Not everything that is in print or circulates online exists because it has value: more than ninety per cent has no value, it appears only because we live in a democracy, where freedom of expression functions, and it is a good thing that it does function. Naturally, there shouldn't be censorship. Unfortunately, along with censorship, as Nicolae Manolescu also said, self-censorship vanished: people not only write whatever enters their heads, but also *as soon as* it enters their heads. In the absence of censorship, we need to exercise this critical filter.

This canonical list exists not because it is the expression of the will of two or three people; it was a sociological, statistical examination, carried out not necessarily scientifically, but as rigorously as possible, within a space of opinion. For the two lists we selected only literary critics who are also university teachers, authors of fundamental works on the history of Romanian poetry and prose. You will not find prose writers or poets among those who answered the questionnaire, except in the rare cases in which these prose writers or poets are themselves critics. At present, in most publications, particularly those that do not appear under the umbrella of the Union of Writers, poets write about poets and praise each other dithyrambically. Such and such is compared with Nietzsche, such and such is compared with Goethe: these are examples that you find in the current literary press. Restraint no longer exists, responsibility no longer exists.

To take part in making our list, we selected only specialists who know what they are talking about and only critics capable of transcending their own personal preferences and idiosyncrasies. Not all those who responded to the prose questionnaire also responded to the poetry one, and vice versa. One notable critic was a little put out at the fact that we did not consult him on the prose questionnaire: we consulted him only on the poetry one. He is a critic of Romanian poetry, but with all due respect, he has not written with as much authority and understanding on prose. So, the *România Literară* list is a statistical

examination, in which we merely put questions, received answers, counted up those answers, and proceeded exactly as you would proceed in compiling any other statistics, based on the frequency of the responses and their convergence. In our innermost selves, not one of us is in agreement with this list in its entirety. It is an impersonal result, it does not even represent a private interest on the part of *România Literară* magazine or the Union of Writers, but rather it is an image of Romanian literature in the last hundred years as formed by the arithmetical collation of the opinions of the most authoritative critics and literary historians.

There are of course also absentees among those who answered the questionnaire. I was asked, in a different context, why such-and-such is there but not such-and-such. Well, the absentees are those critics who, despite persistent requests, were unable (for deep-seated reasons), could not be bothered, or did not want to respond. Unfortunately, we live in an indolent society, where people no longer want to participate, they no longer feel solidarity, they no longer feel the responsibility that they carry on their shoulders along with the real or symbolic position they hold. Responsibility towards others, not only towards one's own personal interests. Consequently, there were no criteria for exclusion other than the disinterest of those whom we invited to respond but declined for reasons that concern only them.

Of course, the list is an imperfect achievement. At the same time, however, we have no remorse of any kind, such that the list

might be undermined by elements that are personal, subjective in the proper sense.

We will continue with the list in future: we will also examine criticism, literary history, and theatre, and we will fight for it, in the first place with the Ministry of Education. The disparity between this list and the school syllabus is inadmissible. It is inadmissible in two directions: a *quantitative* disparity—there are too few valuable works and too few important writers on the list that are studied at school—and a *temporal* disparity. One of the evolutions of the canon that this list has highlighted is that after the Lovinescu-Călinescu canon, the list opened up to contemporary literature. Despite this, at school and university, scandalously little contemporary literature is studied.

But if you don't supply the lycée pupil or the university student, at least in their final years, with an opening onto literature that reflects their sensibility, you cannot hope that you will ever stimulate them to read, that you will encourage them to enter, once in a while, a bookshop, to see the latest books to have been published. At Editura Cartea Românească, we are going to publish editions of the works from the canonical list, we will promote them and request that the Ministry of Education purchase them for school libraries and to place them in circulation. The editions will more than just republications of the works: each of them will have an introduction by a critic active in the field, which will provide a fresh look at the writer in question.

In teaching, as I was saying, you have to teach, that is, you have to pass on *knowledge* to pupils. Before you teach them communication, you have to have something to communicate, before you teach them to take a critical *stance*, you have to provide them with the basic *reference points* on which they will be able to construct that critical stance. We have inverted the pyramid and we're amazed when it falls down on our heads. It's inevitable that it should fall down! So, the sense of this canonical list is not bellicose, but it is *militant*, it is a polemical list, it is a warning, and at the same time it is also a comparison. At least from curiosity, read what you find on the Writers' Union website, *uniuneascriitorilor.ro*. Consult it, at least to convince yourself that it you didn't come out of nowhere and is not heading into nowhere, that you have not only behind you, but also contemporary with you writers of whom you can be proud, writers who can provide you with hours of delight, writers about whom you can talk to friends from abroad. In other words, you have an *identity*: and this is what it is actually all about. We have a cultural identity, a literary identity on which you can rely, in the attempt to stand tall, to stand upright, in the face of the trials of today's world.

Thank you!

MIRCEA STÂNCEL

Gala Anthology

THE SAME AS EVERY SUMMER FOR THE LAST FEW YEARS, the most recent edition (the fourteenth) of the Gala of Contemporary Romanian Poetry was held at the by now famous Principia Museum in Alba Iulia, on 12 June 2024. In the lively presence of a public in love with literature in general and poetry in particular, Gabriel Chifu, Vasile Dan, Dinu Flămând, Horia Gârbea, Gabriela Gheorghișor, Vasile Igna, Ion Mureșan, Aurel Pantea, Marta Petreu, Ion Pop, Adrian Popescu, Nicolae Prelipceanu, Andreea Iulia Scridon, Liviu Ioan Stoiciu, and Varujan Vosganian provided a highly contemporary lyrical gala, reading poems from their most recent work. As ever, Cornel Nistea, the chairman of the Alba-Hunedoara branch of the Union of Romanian Writers, opened the latest edition to warm applause from the audience. On this occasion, in the absence of the founder of the annual galas, Writers Union chairman Nicolae Manolescu, who has departed

from among us, critic and literary historian Răzvan Voncu and well-known journalist Cristian Pătrășconiu presented, in a highly original way, the sixteen poets selected from a number of regions around the country to represent the Union of Romanian Writers in Alba Iulia. There were also pleasant musical interludes featuring Dan Liviu Cernat on violin and Cristian Alexievici on piano. The organisers this year were Alba County Council, the Union of Romanian Writers, and the Alba County Lucian Blaga Library. The Gala enjoys funding from the Ministry of Culture and is held in partnership with Alba Iulia City Hall.

GABRIEL CHIFU

Bodies of mine lined up along the side of the road

I clench my gaze
and carefully look back into the distance.
Lined up along the side of the road I see
bodies of mine lying there,
the bodies which I have shed.

Some look like ramshackle buildings.
Others are bathed in tears.
Of some I'm ashamed, and rightly so.
But in some the heart still beats strong.
(Like a disused atomic power
station in a world laid waste.)
What kind of electricity is this?
Idiot love? Wide-eyed dreaming
of new realms, of chasing rainbows?

I've no idea how to judge. I don't even know
which of these bodies
still fits me now that I'm hard pressed.
Is there one of them
that I can recycle, in which to take shelter
so that I can carry on walking?

Old book of heavenly creed

Lifted from that forgotten chest
in a nook of the world cold and unblessed,
an old book of heavenly creed,
which I open and am about to read.

But its letters in ice have been laved
and in earthly heat will they melt,
and my eyes in mist are now swathed.

Melted, text in the pages that was enclosed
like a river all of a sudden flows
and, unread, is lost, away it goes.

I wonder: this book whose letters freeze
and within a story like pearls are threaded,
that book of mine, was it ever real?
Or was it just a dream, a deceptive breeze?

Now we swim along a vertical river

Long, long ago we left it seemed
and never arrived
in the place we dreamed.

Or maybe we did arrive shrouded in cold,
while scent of jasmine tobacco
and gentle breeze did unfold
healing musics, disimbounded,
now we swim along a vertical river
that flows upward to the sky
and the things that never die.

Now all we knew we have forgotten
and unhoped-for we recall
that which never we knew or learned at all.
Now, our minds in lofty heights
float like fairy sprites
and glitter like the stars,
theirs are the worlds, the unworlds,
the eternal hosts that their wings unfurl.

A rabbit encircled by hunters

Late at night I hear the door to my room as it opens.
I do not glimpse anyone enter.
(My voices from past or perhaps future
cry out something I cannot understand:
as if they spoke the keening, accusing language of the wind.)
I remain huddled within myself,
frozen in fright
like a rabbit encircled by hunters.

Even so, I'm certain, I cannot be mistaken:
someone unseen has slipped inside the room
and now breathes the same air as I do.
And soon it will go farther than that,
that someone will find a place in my body,
will extend as far as heart and mind,
will be right at home.
Will take my place, by imperceptible degrees,
will take my place, without my being able to oppose.

She

Oh, how radiant is her face, like the star,
and how radiant are her eyes.
In her body she has gathered—but how?
so much radiance that, I don't doubt,
if ever there were an electricity outage,
she could replace the power station
and light up every bulb in town.

Oh, and how many men
she has bewitched, ravished, vanquished
with the alchemical power of her beauty,
her almost superhuman beauty.
(Including me, I'll admit!)

Oh, and how many secret love affairs
lie buried in her huge, welcoming heart,
the way chests of gold pieces and jewels
from sunken pirate ships
lie on the sea bed.

Who, who, will ever be worthy
to bring them to the light of day
in vivid and immortal verse?

GABRIELA GHEORGHIȘOR

The widow pays double

The widow pays double, says Mother,
a single woman is conned by all—
mechanics, decorators, plumbers—
she knows she's being conned, but has no choice,
she has to pay the surcharge for solitude,
a kind of value-added tax.

Mother was widowed young,
for a time she wore black,
after which she hid her grief
and paid the price of not being single.
As for me, I'm the young widow not in mourning,
almost merry, almost single,
everything gradually breaks in the widow's house,
but freedom is a steely suit of armour.

Mother buried her husband in the flower of youth,
a time when love is still large,

the blood, still hot,
and desperation, atrocious.
As for me, I bury myself in books,
my lover is a golem made of paper,
and melancholy takes the place of drama.

Love in a belated world

It's said that in old age love
is less torturous
like when you've had a rotten tooth pulled
and your mouth is still numb from the anaesthetic.
First you feel discomfort, then slight pain,
but the blood soon clots and the wound closes up.

It's not the same in long marriages,
says a character in a novel,
prolonged proximity welds bodies together
the way lacerated tissue eventually knits back up,
and when spouses are parted it's like a gash
gushing blood.

I myself was never capable of marrying,
nor did Orpheus make descent to hell,
I write merely an insignificant tale
from a belated world, a twilight of the gods.

Love is no longer an aura
that you break at the evening meal
like communion bread.
It's only a dark spectre
coiled around the flesh.
A wisp of smoke
in which I clothe my naked anatomy
once all the skin has been flayed.

The battle

I girded myself for war.
I polished my armour,
too heavy for my female frame.
I sharpened my sword,
passed down from my male forbears.
I ordered a lance from the blacksmith,
without knowing how to wield one.
I rummaged in the cellar for a shield,
its blazon worn from blow after blow,
but the cross and crown I wore on my brow.
I'd have liked to be a horse, if not a unicorn.
But I didn't need to be,
I wasn't off to conquer the world like Alexander the Great
or Napoleon.
I wasn't like Joan of Arc, either,

I wasn't haunted by grandiose visions.
I think I looked more like a comical hoplite.

No, I didn't want to conquer anything,
I was waiting for you,
waiting for you like Alexander the Great,
waiting for you like Napoleon,
or maybe, having wearied, I was waiting for you
like the Bastiani Fortress waits for the Tatars.
Actually, to be honest, I was waiting for you like a little
girl, smiling as she played with toy soldiers.

And you came.
No legendary army,
no parchment-skinned elephants,
no sweating barbarians and mercenaries.
Where they'd got to, I didn't know, just as nobody
knows where the ninth Roman legion vanished.
You were alone.
Nothing but huge walls rising before and behind you.

I was obliged to ungird,
to take off my armour, lay down shield and arms.
To dig a pit under the walls,
to crawl on all fours.
I skinned my elbows, knees, tore my fingernails,
broke my teeth, swallowed mud.

Outside the walls there was none but I.

HORIA GÂRBEA

in the ash of silence

The song hummed
on the riverbank
strokes morning's
leaves
banishes death
casts at it
jagged little
red pebbles

where then is life?
beneath the waters
that merrily flow?
in the clay from which
can be moulded
imaginary animals?
in the brittle trees?

you'll never know
you carry on
along the stream
affrighting the birds
stridently they sing
like those women well
paid to wail at funerals
and determined
to give value for money

the isle of the blessed

on reaching
the isle of the blessed
nothing gave me the right
so much as to set foot ashore
here the waters are limpid
they are crystalline
even the clouds seem painted
by some celestial hand
nothing to disturb your peace
not even a mosquito
even the wild beasts
are tame and let you
stroke them more readily
than any cat in the world

day after day passed
with nothing
to bother me
to injure me
even to scratch me
I'd have liked at least to see
another person and tell them
how beautiful it all was to tell them
about the joy of its perfection
for us to show each other the sea

weeks passed then months
and I started to pray
despite not being one for saying prayers
I prayed to be able to show
somebody else even a dog
the serene daytime sky the wonderful
stars on the cool nights

all until one morning
when from somewhere a bored voice
called out to me what's with you
don't you know these are the rules
on the isle of the damned
on the islet of damnation

VASILE IGNA

Wheel (tells no story)

Tells no story but learns to write
figures rigid letters soft
walls of Cave a papery height
with lines rings hooks crammed aloft
from which dangle two by two
angels scorched by flame of frost
and swiftly does them strew.
Soar they then like hawk once tossed
on damp speluncar breeze borne higher
whirl they in the madcap gyre
that solid Wheel does dream itself to be.
Loftier still than pasture of day
where nor grass nor shadow sway
sprouts mercy's gnarlèd hand
outstretched to Boundary of the land
by two thieves 'tis nailed with lances blunt
like two posts that do uphold a jamb
o'er which Mountain-ward wends each Lamb

where having escaped the narrow byre
they turn to cloud as they go higher
and come down when evening's nigh
to tell their stories and to die.

Spoke (in ancient times)

In ancient times when all things were aligned
with primal darkness Vale went off to seek
a partner and that she might stand still she span
within herself which is to say not like number one
or like some other number which dividing itself
by zero grows really small and vanishes into a flock
without trace each becoming either a brother of nought
or a suckling sister of the Big Dipper.
Swarm upon swarm of galaxies made themselves felt
all of them alive and below the horizon elements seethed
like a band of ghosts to the tune of two cuckoos and
a Nobody writing an equation using only prime numbers
so as to toss them back in the trash into a kind of
pressure cooker which to this day has remained
without law or custom. But Vale at the time a spoiled
brat of a lass rolled away like wheel blown onward
by wind-gust over Earth where anon she arrived
with the first word incarnated not long after the snake
shed its skin and a little before the month of Februa

when Dea had baptised that princess
by the name of Gold.
Her indeed who knowing not whence she came
could have been anyone: a naiad on a reedbed a hind
with golden antlers a bird as big as a tailor's thimble
or even a flower with petals set on fire by a stray
comet and then blown out by a centaur
with poor eyesight from a constellation barely
risen at the edge of a cloud of hailstones.
Here the wheel slowly came to a stop. The end. Vale!

Respiration (in fact he)

In fact he
is an old skeleton in Vale
which the fishes seek
in pockets meek
hoping that there be hermit's cell
or Philia the large wheel that rolls along
the dream or unlocks the strong
room hidden treasure for to gain
that glints like mirrored lighthouse pane
and wedding suit for sunset stitches the while
from dazzling sleights of guile.

Oh, and the evening and the morn
are of unripe fruit another day.
Then once more night's bourn
now released from break of day
by the cries of trading folk
loaded with eggs is each shoulder yoke
and with dewy mushrooms from the woods.

Until one day did find
seaweed for to bind
with translucent threads
the gunny of bone shreds.
The tadpoles of croak-
-ing turtles then choke
and carapaces they do them whisk
from wool spun by new-born odalisque

Oh, all again is the same
as this summer air
when supernovas flare
with waxen wings which beat
at need like bird its end about to meet
at gates of Vale and bear the weight
of another Vale and another gate.

Wheel (not in nest)

Not in nest sat bird-bird Bird
she of the dappled tail
but on his shoulder was she heard
to sleep and thence rose she without fail
when dawn-dark strove to tuck
tail feathers 'neath his shirt collar
as it might a winding sheet
or black tie for funeral meet.
That it might silence him by lopping his words
at root, as it might choke him there
with knot of disgrace and despair.

And she, Bird, she alone should feel
the throb of his head as it does swell
like sea-murmur in belly of shell
or frost's asthmatic-hermit breath
or, betimes, the jabbering talk
of Seaman.
That drowses between horns of Vale
along with Mister or is sometimes found
secretly aslumber with the hound.

LIVIU IOAN STOICIU

I'm a beneath

Not taken to communion from an early age—I grew up
all by myself, disappointed, angry, sad, astray
on a path that had nothing to do with me,
I look neither back, nor on high to ask for help.
I walk at random, without
thought of rehabilitating myself in my own eyes,
nothing left to be done, I've grown old
little by little, I've gone beneath myself, I'm a beneath.
As if I'd never been another,
as if I'd never been here, where flames leap and the pig
is slaughtered for the winter holidays. At least that much.
I walk ahead with my head bowed,
I write to you in blood, that is, an unfinished dream,
my eyes have started to see black, I now hide away
in the maize field at the edge of the village, because
yet again someone has turned up

inside me who on his knees begs that
I kill him and yells at me: 'You're not brave enough!'
You're not brave enough!'

Bad

Splay-legged, grandfather, in royal gala uniform, rips
a fresh chunk from the mouldy maize porridge, he
crumbles it and shares it with an invisible someone
on the porch, returned from the beyond for no more
than an hour: he's not hungry or thirsty, has no hankering
for a woman or tobacco, which is a bit thick, given
how cheap life is in his native village… Hello
there, old man John, back again today too? In the lane
the village madwoman passes by: it was me
who saw you first! First and last, lass. What're you up to?
I'm dishing out left and right, giving alms
in remembrance, 'cause my kinfolk have forgotten me.
Never mind, I'll light a candle for you, if the church
is open at this hour… What about you, Maria? My head's
splitting. Got any grog, old man John, to stop me feeling
bad?

A wrenching of the mind

Pierced by cold, gazing uneasily from the edge… He likes
the glow of the monk in front, who beats the semantron,
he'd give anything to have a taste of that
blessedness of his. A pang of the heart, praise heaven, his
inner engine is running again, he's stopped shivering,
he unwittingly wrenches his mind. Awkwardly,
he joins the other people in the procession,
he's embarrassed and doesn't know what he's doing there.
Now he feels better. Calmer. Why? It's a secret
joy, which heals your anger and your grief, he hears
behind him. He also hears the gnashing
of teeth. 'It is essential that we draw to us the grace
of the Holy Ghost'… No, he's no business being there.
He leaves his row at a run and doesn't stop till he comes
to a vacant bench in a square, hides his face in his coat,
chokes on his tears. A good thing too, the only way
to cool off, his soul is too full… Whatever he might do,
he gets nowhere, whenever he runs away, he hopes
to escape. He thinks that like that he rids himself of
something insidious inside, which clings fast. But he can't
escape the regrets. Nor does he find any
comfort in it. In sacrificing himself on the altar
of natural science. He's now of an age, he's convinced that
every day he decays.

MARTA PETREU

The redshift of the homeland

Writers die. Poets die. Oho
Oho. They're cannon fodder
in the silent war now being waged
Look how their hair lights up

We know: they're people like any others
They stand out by writing. They carry
on their shoulders uncorrupted brains mortal brains
I know: their brains
like my father Augustin's brain
yes—they rot away
like a library in flames
their bodies moulder in the earth

And they keep coming. Keep dying. Cannon fodder
they write they describe
how the earth grows old:
just as galaxies perish in redshift

Below ground above ground libraries burn their nerves
burn trembling

And they keep coming. Keep dying.

The land of solitude

She stands alone leaning up against herself
like brethren of the cross lean up against each other
like enemies prop each other up on their hatred

Yes. She stands alone and in her enchanted solitude grass
grows on her threshold as if on her future grave
there's mint and green wheat all the way to her door
red poplar catkins rustle at her windows
She's ended up talking
to the sap of flowers
the way you talk to a queen
She is sister to the dew
to wormwood to poppy to elderflower
and her hand delicately picks madam caterpillar
talking to her in amazement like Alice

Oh. She likes it. She confronts lifedeath
wandering alone all on her ownsome
and barefoot

on life's red-hot stove-top
She tramples death like a flayed man stepping into the sea
On the dyke the dogs howl at the moon
Yes. All alone she tramples herself underfoot

It hurts. She's happy. She defies all mercy and has no
need of anybody

Destiny

She's arrived in the perfect land
Like the hunted hart driven
by the shrilly barking pack
she has finally arrived in this perfect land
where arnica millet hemlock grow

She knows that the game is lost
that she has been thrashed
that she has been spat on
and that tomorrow she will be stoned
She knows she's at war with the human

But she stands defiant wearing her defeat like armour
knowing the armour is her own skin
and that her skin has been flayed sevenfold
and lots have been cast for it
just as lots were once cast for that shirt

And here and now she defies life and death
wallowing in her great solitude
as if in silk

The red poplar catkins hang at her window
She is alone at last all on her ownsome
Happy

The natural water cycle

He is silent. He knows how to be silent
He looks at me as if at a bulging drop
of water
on his left hand
He knows. He knows exactly what's in store for me
He knows there's a life-and-death struggle inside me
He knows my cells are greedily gobbling each other

He is silent. He does nothing at all
Destiny has caught me like a fish in a net
I lie beneath fate
like an empty expanse of water
beneath the stone sky

… and the evening and the morning were the first day…

But he knows that in me is the eighth day
and that love is no more

And I know there is no love. It is good
Nothing binds me to anything else: myself and I
stand face to face in dumb silence

But a black noise of wings batters my eardrums:
maybe birds—I say to myself—maybe angels
maybe my heart ripping itself from the knot of veins

He knows. He is silent. He does not love me
Nor am I joined to him in love
but rather in pure anger brought to the boil

He is silent. He is tall. He smiles
He has a face like the dark side of the moon
He looks at me as if at a drop of water

But today what is a drop of water
of blood
what is a human being
and what is that thing—love?

He is silent. He knows how to be silent
He looks at me as if at a drop of water
absorbed
by the natural cycle

VASILE DAN

Proper-name micro-poems

Celan

Death's tango he danced only in syllables and syncope.
Anyone at all is a Jew if it comes to it.

Cioran

In India spitting is taken as a declaration of love.
It's the other way around in Europe for some reason.
Cioran is the only one it's saved philosophically.
Then in his seventies he suddenly fell in love
with an eternal German infanta.
Cioran only ever ate ascetically, I forgot to say,
like every other eternal scholar of the void.

Melville

I discovered Moby Dick in a barracks
for land army conscripts in Zalău, 1977,
with translator Marcel Pop Corniș
transfigured in Romanian.
The White Whale left me too without the left leg
with which I wrote the walk of a wounded soldier.

Manolescu

Actually, how many leaves does an autumn
tree have in the end?
I think only God counts them unknowingly.
Manolescu would know them only by their burnt veins
and vegetally vivid pallor.
Even the ones in a state of levitation.
A history of literature is also a fruitful tree
a host never definite in number.
In spring a part is still there
alive another part buds anew.

Dostoevsky

Alyosha, will God be able to forgive Putin?
For the children snatched from their parents' homes?
Will He, as he resolutely desires, speak to him
only in Russian?

Brancusi

Hard to believe, but sometimes he sang in the choir
of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Paris.
When Nicolae Titulescu was chairman
of the League of Nations in Geneva,
that time he invited him to the famous Hôtel Diplomat
he himself timidly asking him:
'Master Brancusi, could you tell me
what those works symbolise,
the ones so brilliantly lathed
and named Magical Birds?
What should I tell
my counterparts, famous ministers
from East and West, North and South,
who keep asking me?'
'Tell them from me, Your Excellency,
only this:
nothing!'

Turcea

A
snow-
flake.

Herman Hesse

Before *The Glass Bead Game*
I didn't understand music.
But then I was enlightened:
it's the world's secret geometry.
A drug.
Not yet banned.

AUREL PANTEA

***

People on the street, the way you sense them, like a paste,
oozed by an uneven pulse, distant and awfully inhuman,
with voices reverberating from a deplorable state
of the imagination, they're the end, the day of death,
reality without recourse,
wrought from things external to them,
among the dead you'll find them, you see them
through your old appetites, they crop up
in the ophidian flow of the senses,
in spasms, clouded apparitions,
like senses long fallen out of use,
there comes a time when you're ashamed of your own
body, when you can't bear it any longer
light on the skin, when from the arms slips
a living creature that abandons
the world in us, if we could raise it up with our veins,
if we could, in indecency,
experience ripples and tones
in resorption,

we would see using the skin,
we revert to pure matter, lipless,
with soil filling the mouth and with sentences
we become one with the black password,
at the beginning of a day that will never come to birth,
after disfiguring transactions the faces give off
an illicit light, like the midday of the dead, there,
a ground undulating like emotion
calls us by our true name

***

Ejaculated biographies,
voices from a collapsed mouth, I'm placed in my age
as if in a noose, my veins and sentences are nooses,
a sun suppurates in the dregs of language.
Instincts smoulder, women's choirs,
death passes by and looks at itself.
To look into the heart of evil, where
there is no heart, but only sulphuric serenity,
it's that that devours my poem

***

An old man sets up shop inside me, gradually occupies
every nook and cranny,
for the time being we cohabit, we have the same vices,

we like the same women,
but he waxes larger on the things I give up,
at certain moments,
when language itself has a shadow, I hear weary breaths
and then I say:
my God is digesting me, my God is hungry,
my God is taking drugs, my God is swearing,
he lacks
judgement,
he's brusque, spits in your face, suffers, his immediate
languages are
scorn, love and revenge
he's not into politics, he puts up with and defies it, my
God hangs around with all
the whores,
he's in with the pimps and all those who love him,
and he says that they'll all be resurrected,
and they're all a little less fearful of when they'll die,
my God uses me day after day
for his death and resurrection practice, and I couldn't love
him more,
people also need to love, don't they,
most people speak of my God
in a superior sort of way, he's a God who's hard to put up with,
because sometimes he stinks,
and besides he's got a lot of dead people on His great
conscience, and not all of them reconciled,

my God is just like me, He can be surly and aggressive and
even violent
and vicious, talking about him, I compare him with me,
which might be a sin, but
I feel him closer to me that way, he comes to birth in my
weaknesses, as a rule,
in them dwells nothingness or something so uninterested
in meaning
that it resembles nothingness, but he loves my nothingness,
he's always bowled me over with that, he knows that my
nothingness
is the seed of the annihilator that wants me silenced

***

I practised a long time, grew tired of seeing them all as victims,
I'm him from the evenings when there's no other solution,
when intentions suddenly age like mistresses of yore,
and we're in livid time, the codes are putrefying,
your face spews into mine, we plot,
and the victim of the plots
grows up, breaks every window, bursts his banks, speaks in
our languages, tells us stories, our lives return
exhausted, an exhausted life is a child badly beaten, and he smiles,
and we plot, we bring it on,
uncertain among dense, watery silences, like the weather
when you're mirrored in a mother, the annihilator won't

shut his gob,
the road to your heart is long, your heart is very far away,
a mad ballerina amid the large rooms of yesteryear

***

For Cis and for shepherd Ioan Moldovan

The kernel of the awareness of death
tumbles deep down inside us,
you and I are very far away and we gaze on
the fields' expanses and the reapers,
in great death, debauchery grows,
the pillaging flower

ADRIAN POPESCU

Warm blood and photons

Now they can no longer do him any harm,
but they did him every harm conceivable,
men and demons alike, taking it in turns.
In great sorrow I write to you, my friend.
They lowered him. He was heavy. He lies below.
From the new tomb, dug from the rock
(this too the gift of a discreet disciple)
he awoke a living man near morning, however.
He rolled up his shroud in silence. Or time?
The red stream from his chest had stopped.
Touch it! It's not only pure energy,
it's body and wave, warm blood and photons,
the glory of flesh transformed into a ray.
Yes, he moves through locked doors, still,
but his wounds remain and they throb.
He rends spacetime, the curtain of aeons,
he moves closer to the wrinkled face, yours,

and murmurs your name, with utmost softness.
Yes, the mist of breath comes from his mouth,
he is diaphanous, but He preserves His wounds.

Unwritten understanding

The understanding is clear and abided by,
in order to lift poetry up off the ground
however much at all, you must suffer.

Young women know this best,
dreaming of lengthening their legs,
they willingly agree to the apparatus.

Iron, leather straps, mediaeval
instruments, which through torture augment
their abstruse charm and mystery.

Humiliation and pain can sometimes produce
a few centimetres squared or cubed or
new beauty, but they require your patience.

Losing one's voice

I was a young man in whose mouth did the words
Throng, my voice was clear, brimmed with life,
with the seethe of young blood that lets nothing slip,
A voice now quenched like hot iron in water dipped.

Voice that my poems dictated, it teaches me still
the spurt of seething lava's precious thrill.
The ancestral spiral is borne on shoulders of father
and son, dwindling scions ever fewer things recall.

All things perish, and ultimately every voice?
Little by little will we forget the voices that we loved?
The threnos of world's ancient choir silent will fall,
but not the Voice of Him who Adam will call.

Language of refuge

O, my language where I take shelter in time of need,
Learned in Perugia, at the Palazzo Gallenga, but also
On the stone steps of San Lorenzo cathedral, amid
Clattering whirl of the students' cooing doves.
Sweet tongue, not of conquerors with swords of steel,
Tongue of architects, fishers, glassblowers, poets, tenors,
Tongue of the Franciscans of Umbria, of winegrowers,
Of navigators and linguists, of painters of the ineffable.

Language of café and library, of the scriptorium,
Yours are pearls of grappa and aroma of Lavazza,
Birds on bough, granates, lemons and olives in words,
Elder sister of my home, my mother language.
If my neural network gradually collapses, burns out,
And the liquid floods the brain's islets, you
I will not forget, syllabifying you, language childlike
And stern. Language in which, you see, Love changes all.

DINU FLĂMÂND

Advice to an old poet

First of all, you survived. Bingo!
And you still cast amorous glances at the muse who
sleeps at your side—next to your morning pill
she's left a note asking you not to wake her
for trivial stuff about symbols similes sibylline language
and other metaphorical trips…

I don't know whether you still believe in public transport
(or, as the Athenian bus network is actually known:
Metaphor, because it takes you out of town
and always in the literal sense).
And of the two of us I can't tell whether I'm more suited
to teaching you or you me—what's for sure is
that I was the first to raise my hand;
so, I have the intrepid but reckless man's presumption
of innocence that he then has to put the idea to bed

Rilke and a few others as vain deemed that they had
to give advice to young poets. They'd have been better off
urging them promptly to skin their knees and elbows
and to come crashing down without aesthetic safety
nets beneath them like the elegant acrobats
of the world's circus; concerned nonetheless with not
finding themselves suddenly attacked by some inwardly
mediocre feeling as Dr Benn rightly warned against.

How can you tell somebody he needs to feel?!

Ah, the conjuring tricks with imagery
… the holding your breath at key moments
plus the unexpected coda that smacks of a piss-take
exactly
where the text ripens its dramatic effects
… plus the pose of sensitive indifference
simulating that oxymoronic suffering oozes its pus
while a D.J. goes off the rails amid the most desolate
metallic landscapes—let this cup pass from me—
you teach them with minimal methodology…

But how to feel? Good God… this
amazing insufficiency when in you even its presence
is lacking but you have no idea that it is…
so that the words wouldn't even
be able to sense it in you (could it be

that from the very start you were languishing
in such a euphoria?)

Don't talk to me about Pessoa—he knew
he ought to have felt but didn't know in what way
inuring himself to something that leads to writing
before he wrote and onerously accustoming himself
to feeling variously as if summoned to the last
judgement…
—in amazement that just by constantly hiding
weighing avoiding inventing himself
ignoring destroying gathering himself
marginalising and diminishing himself
tenderly ironically and in secret desperately adding to
his store tens of thousands of provisory definitive texts
not actually destined to be literature…

You, old man, must have sensed something. Which is why
you persist in your renunciation of lending
any more importance to words
so that at the crack of dawn
you clean old brushes and sharpen old pencils
convinced the ineffable is still there
waiting for you in the wings.

It's hard now for you to believe it… Were I
to give you any advice I'd say only to carry on

doing it with all your heart not resignedly
or out of caloric inertia but with primary enthusiasm
be it even simulated but utterly convinced deep down
that the mystery can preserve an instant and the trace
of your hesitant but authentic footstep
in the dust of the stars.

The mirage of a sweet fruit. . .

'The mirage of a sweet fruit
encloses a bitter seed,' wrote Blaga
with that lilt of the imagination that brings together in
poetry
the words and images and the mystery scrabbled from
underneath
the river's green pebbles and that sifts through a sieve of
melancholy
the miracle of an impossible communication
well-hidden in the depths
but also flickering
with ephemeral bubbles on the surface…

and the poem—an infinite pollination.

Lightning rod

… and if you're stupid enough to want to explain pain
or to explain yourself thereby
you need to achieve the indifference to push you
over the threshold of letters where what hurts
in your flesh burns more than you know it burns
or ought to hurt you
and doesn't even hurt

And such banality is the recurring lightning bolt
that never hits the mark
the lightning conductor in you or around you
even though it discharges itself into your incommunicable
chasm
and intermittently lights up only below the horizon line
of the neighbouring village where
you think
only the shepherd from other fields is thwacked by fate
right on the top of the head
while his fears carry on grazing for a while
alongside the Lord's sheep…

ION MUREȘAN

The dance

At least that's how we conceived the world: a dance
of the lame outside the door
(lame we were, among the lame we danced).
And beside us in the grass the sugar child,
the fat child of misfortune.

Bitterly will we weep, o love, bitterly!

Otherwise we knew: through the planks will he poke
his hands,
Our heads will he lacerate,
he in whose mouth there are no teeth or molars
but streetlamp lit next to lit streetlamp,
and his tongue—a green branch and a smoking
coal.

Bitterly will we weep, o love, bitterly!

He showed us the pink fingernail rising from the source
and the bloody veins followed by little bones advancing
among boulders
and water welling from sand knitting together
like flesh and
the river rising heavenward like a finger.
And here and there
still living fishes and people and beasts struggling
half caught in the skin. And up above
at great distances there glinted the loops of the bridges
and the chains and…

Bitterly will we weep, o love, bitterly!

This was it, in a few words:
a red sheep beneath the willows
spins in small circles (humility?)
a light-brown wolf, a damp wolf beneath the willows
spins in small circles (aggressiveness?)
we at least, one behind the other, a luminous
snake,
we crept along the walls of the buildings,
beneath the ever whiter, unbudging gunpowder-like smoke,
in the dank twilight.

Your humble servant, Scardanelli

(A song of Alexandru Vlad)

Dross atop the books—go on, sing it—
'Dross atop the books'
And browbone slipped between pages like stone blade.

Yoo-hoo, yoo-hoo! nature's laws have sunk their fangs
in my imagination—go on, sing it—
'Yoo-hoo, yoo-hoo! nature's laws have sunk their fangs
in my imagination'
And the devil has never looked more dapper:
green as a lizard.

I saw orange kernels dotted all along
the horizon—go on, sing it—
'I saw orange kernels dotted all along
the horizon'
and the road—'twas said—thick with dust, horns
and hoofs.
It's nice in the garden, in beribboned garb,
among the trees to play
with hankies—go on, sing it—

'It's nice in the garden, in beribboned garb,
among the trees to play with hankies'
and my mouth homes in on poetry as if on a bunch
of nettles,
and these things I remember things
that I've never seen before
and before it's too late, I hereby sign myself:
Your humble servant, Scardanelli

Love poem

I've ended up at the heart of delirium, inside the sack
of hair,
inside the uterus of ice from which stream
red ants,
among the old folk, in the abandoned house,
I've ended up kissing your eyes that seep blood
like the beds in the clinic
where, in younger days, we whored.

ION POP

Theme with variations

Bee, you strike me as absurd.
I just read somewhere
that you will only live
fifty-four days
(yes, four and fifty!)
and I start pondering and counting,
one, two, three… among the buzzing zigzags
and pollen dust and wing glints,
my ears filled with shattered sounds,
my ears hunting in the mist till they ache—
in vain, I cannot guess
amid so many swerves, amid such
a confusion of broken lines,
your route to the honeycomb,
to the mysterious Hexagon.

When I see you flying hither, where
with your little burden and sweet golden legs,

frail, as if fearful, lost—
and just now, as you bumped into my window
and try to recover, perhaps dazed,
giving yourself up to a frail gust,
I'm gripped with a kind of fear.
Not for you, but for myself,
among so many baroque variations—
whither, where, how, until when—
towards the mysterious Hexagon.

I can compare you only with Bach, the terrible,
pecking, you'd think, the keyboard with slender fingers,
or striking, as if in a dance,
with organ cudgel
to break into glittering shards
the thrum from the depths—
so that we almost fail to notice
that he sprays blood all around,
stubbornly intent on reaching
the bone. This is what
interests him, in fact,
when he carves splinters,
casting from me
a thousand coloured shards. To turn us
into stained glass windows and stone columns,
that is what he wants.

I'm not so sure, but, perhaps, ultimately,
maybe I too am part
of the family. I too spread
around me a kind of buzzing, I too trace
all kinds of zigzags, I scatter myself
in words, words, words,
prattling about myself
the same as in Bacovia, as if about Something Else.
'What do you give, what do I give…
Will I really hear myself?
And there has remained
not very much to give.'

This is why, yet again,
I call for your help, S.O.S.,
Bee and Bach. I'm relying on you,
I, the younger brother,
who, from carelessness or ignorance,
trembling, stumbling, groping,
delay and push into the mist
some Hexagon or other.
I live
the same as the two of you lived. Erring,
but, perhaps,
with a kind of exactitude.

This is why I also take hope
that I might be forgiven. But nevertheless,
I think that ultimately
unknowingly you found them,
you too find the unknown
ways of the Lord.

That's why I'm relying on you.
On you, bee,
on you, Bach.
Both of you as absurd as me.

Shirts

I look at my shirts
accumulated over the years,
placed on hangers, as if they were
marching in line, in silent step.
My body is not in them, I can
only imagine it, with my old heart, beating
beneath the left breast pockets.
But even so, at times it's as if they puff up slightly.
As if in a breeze from Beyond.

NICOLAE PRELIPCEANU

eminescu existed

but the lake in the woods is blue no more
I saw it with my own eyes all badly silted up
the only thing blue is our situation
the woods too have been lopped
and rather than some lad from ipotești
it was the tree trunks that were sent to austria
but pointless seeking an eminescu there
because eminescu existed
it's plain for the eye to see
the eyes of those able to see
but illiterates with PhDs can carry on believing
that eminescu didn't exist
that he's only a nickname given to times past
which were worthy of the chroniclers and the rest
and if we think about it it really is like that
'such days were worthy of chroniclers and rhapsodes
our age is filled with sleight-of-hand artists and herods'
and if we think about it even more carefully

the sleight-of-hand artists have hijacked it from us
so that nobody knows which way it's going
yes
no matter how strange it might seem
eminescu existed
thank the lord
otherwise we'd be even poorer in spirit
than we are already

2 iunie 2023

the great magnet

the day will come when the great sleeping magnet awakes
and drags up all the bones of the living creatures buried
in the earth on which we tread
was the earth once translucent wondered lucian blaga
in a poem
from long ago
and underfoot we'll feel something akin to the ripples of a lake
which we thought solidified for all eternity
and we'll see rising heavenward the bones of the parents
of our great-grandparents' grandparents
of dogs cats bears boars friends
of enemies strangers all the bones
of doves and rats
all the bones all of them

not one glance will they cast at us the so-called living
in their haste the quicker to reach the assembly point
like a secret army

mind your feet as you walk
lest you find yourselves toppled over everything that
enters your heads
all of a sudden
and as there are billions and billions and billions of bones
down below
the earthquake won't subside in a few minutes a few hours
a few days
maybe from now on it'll always be there
because we too have the right
for our bones to go to heaven
after after after
after what
and they too will fall the walls beneath which lie prehistoric
and pre-prehistoric bones
and they too will collapse the tall buildings and houses
and shops and garages
and the supermarkets and hypermarkets and markets and
hospitals
and the palaces and ministries and presidencies
to make way for the upwardly moving bones
and we'll soar we'll dance unwittingly we'll we'll what

well look that's what we'll do because we know what'll
happen even if
our earth was never translucent or like wind-ruffled water
but maybe it will be maybe it will be maybe it will be who knows
and the sky will be darkened by flying white bones
but not even this time will we the ones down here see the magnet
attracting them
we'll be sure that next time definitely
defi-next time-nitely

24 March 2023

a happy land

in which there'll be no more presidents prime-ministers
MPs senators
or mayors
or a national poet and they'll all be national poets
all equal all equal
all equal?
there'll be no more directors of schools or consciences
no influencers no talk-show hosts we'll all speak all at once
as if in a choir without a conductor because why should
he conduct us rather than me
there'll be no more chairmen or foremen or engineers
it'll be a country of the unqualified but happy
nobody will finish school or consequently university

diplomas will be handed out to whoever wants to have
one

a happy land
a happy land
a happy land?
there'll be no more astronauts or air-traffic controllers
aeroplanes will fly wherever the pilots and passengers want
the passengers will pilot
the pilots will *always be asleep*
or maybe they'll fly
the railways will be abolished
I mean why should we go only where they want us to
the trains will head off through the mud and the woods
because it's good to get a breath of nature
there'll be not a single genius
not a single talent I mean why him and not us
there'll be no more me
everywhere there'll be only us
a happy land
a radiant future
aaaaah past that no longer exists

26 February 2023

VARUJAN VOSGANIAN

III

We suffered from the same eye ailment, Borges and I, a kind of hen's blindness, as it's called in the countryside, or, to put it in a more elevated way, cataracts, how strange that word sounds, which simultaneously expresses an impoverishment of the light and an abundance of water leaping over rocks, at my age Borges had been blind ten years, when he was not Homer himself, he used to meet him in the fiction about the immortals, I am ashamed when I turn the page I have just read, he could no longer read, only listen to the books he would have liked to read, he plunged into their labyrinth, on the shelves of the library of Babel packed with books of sand, that labyrinth had no outlet onto the sea, for, unlike the pampa or the desert of the two kings, the river showed the outlet from every labyrinth

We suffered from the same eye ailment, Borges and I, for a long time he read with his face so close to the book, the same as the peoples of the yellow seas almost touch foreheads when they talk, but the cure was given only to me, I think that the cure did

an injustice to those born before me, but it is not as if I would have abandoned Borges in the midst of the storm, he would have remained to wander in the light, while I have remained to grope through the dark, the world that I see, I share it with others, his world, only he alone sees

VIII

I remember the day when they demolished the St Venera church, the people looked at the wrecking balls smashing the walls the same as the Jews once looked helplessly at the destruction of the Temple, before the exile in Babylon, except that after that we did not go into exile, we went through a fresh descent of the steps whence leaving became impossible, a likeness and a difference in all things, in the place where the altar had been candles burned for days on end, the people collected the bricks and wrapped them in white linen, they collected them the way others were to collect stones from the Berlin Wall, except that that was a demolition that opened up, whereas the demolition of St Venera was a demolition that closed in

for the greater part of my life I have lived between myself and the wall, don't look at the wall, the Voice told me, its inverted image in my eyes begins to bud in my brain, after a while you become the wall you look at, a wall impossible to demolish, the only chance of escape is to clamber up it and throw yourself off,

a likeness and a difference in all things, one autumn evening I climbed the hill to Petru Vodă monastery, I walked with sunset on my shoulders, the shadows spread in front of me like a clean sheet, smelling of rain-washed mint, abbot Justin urged me to press my ear to the wall, to listen with my eyes closed until I heard the sap of the hard wood, like the Cedars of Lebanon, not every demolition frees you, he told me and I thought that it was too late for me, the skin of my fingers was already chafed, and for a monk, with a shrunken body and halo of white hair, it had been too late long ago, he caressed the wall of the monastery from the inside, there are also walls that can help you be free

CLI

What would it be like for me to be immortal and to write poems, I have chosen a tutelary god of poets, too immortal to be a poet, I have chosen the muses of poetry, they didn't write poetry either, I have exchanged immortality for poetry, the muse that inspires me is death and this does not make her the more indulgent

I see them, candles left to float on the water, burning lamps, rising heavenward, the small lights of the night of the Resurrection, my soul, the body of a greater soul, my infinite half, from the place of falling down into the world, the poems move into the distance, saved from shipwreck, poetry can be born, but not destroyed, as the poet well put it, I learn to die for as long as I live, if I die without this, I shall never know what death is

ION POP

The World as Theatre in the Manifestos of Tristan Tzara

It is well known that 'manifesto' as a general term is defined as a 'text of rupture and foundation', 'an act of legitimisation and conquest of power', which 'violently takes a stance and between addresser and addressee establishes a flagrantly imperious relationship.'[1] The literary manifesto—and

1 Claude Abastado, 'Introduction à l'analyse des manifestes', in *Littérature*, October 1980, p. 6.

the avant-garde manifesto all the more so—as radical in its attitudes of 'opposition and rupture' (as Eugène Ionesco describes them) as in its innovative programme, likewise foregrounds a special rhetoric whose efficacy ought to ensure that its ends are met. All its authors or analysts are in agreement that this rhetoric expresses maximal demands, that it demands a raised voice, strident and thundering cries, pathetic lamentation or ardent exaltation, the use of hyperbole as one of its most effective stylistic figures, and a confidence in its assertions or negations that suggests unshakeable conviction. To be heard or received as such, it is self-evident that the author of the manifesto needed a large public, a wide audience, provided for him by resounding means of communication. But industrial civilisation, in full swing at the beginning of the twentieth century, which was starting to define itself as a 'society of the spectacle', as Guy Debord was later to put it, encouraged publicity, commercial advertising, without forgetting the traditions of the improvised popular performances given in front of the motley crowd at fairs, the *commedia dell'arte*, carnival, and so on. The Dada manifestos, read in public in the period from 14 July 1916 to 12 December 1920 were able by then to take advantage of changes in public communication due above all to the Futurist precedent, which had established a style of persuasive public discourse, and were boldly delivered in a setting that was, in essence, to be that of the Cabaret Voltaire, established in Zurich in February 1916. To be more precise, a space for spectacle, akin to the variety

theatre or café concert, which F.T. Marinetti had praised in his October 1913 manifesto, *Il teatro di varietà.*

By the time Tristan Tzara composed his *Dada Manifestos*, he was already a habitué of the Cabaret Voltaire, where, with his friends Hugo Ball, Marcel Janco and Richard Huelsenbeck, he presented this kind of provocative light performance in entertaining form. He was fully aware of the fact that in launching his programme of demolition, he was actually putting on a performance for an audience that frequented the Cabaret or was familiar with what went on there. In the *Manifesto of Monsieur Antipyrine*, the first in the series, he aimed at a theatrical means of constructing his discourse as a stage performance before an audience invited to pay attention to propositions read aloud by a character appearing at the front of the stage and to be provoked in a spectacular way by his rhetorical excesses and comically exaggerated, caricatural gesticulation. Half-serious, half-parodic militant exaltation and derision went hand in hand to suggest a radically relativist attitude toward a cultural heritage pushed to the brink of nihilism. And it is highly significant that the speaker of this discourse appeared here from the outset beneath the mask of 'circus ringmaster' talking about a space akin to that of the fair, which in fact recomposed a heteroclite, picturesque, miniature 'theatre of the world… within the European framework of weaknesses', erasing the boundary between sacred and profane, the solemn and the serious, the real and its fictions, all under the sign of the practical joke. 'We are circus ringmasters and we whistle among the winds of the fairs, among monasteries

and prostitutes, theatres, realities, sentiments, restaurants, ohee, hoho, bang, bang.'[1]

Already in the abovementioned text by Marinetti, which 'exalted' variety theatre, one could read statements such as the following: 'Here can be found the ironical decay of all the worn-out prototypes of the Beautiful, the Great, the Solemn, the Ferocious, the Seductive and the Terrifying', as well as a call to 'encourage the genre of the clowns by every means possible.'[2] 'Collaboration with the audience' is likewise invoked, a collaboration that was polemical and in the nature of the *buffo*, situated within the 'decadent' post-Symbolist poetic tradition of Jules Laforgue, who through the mouth of his character Lord Pierrot had declared that 'the time has come for us to be reborn through mockery' of the illustrious emblems of Literature and Art. The attendance of the same bourgeois spectator ironically railed at in Trista Tzara's manifesto ('look at me, darling bourgeois') was here understood, since the Pierrot of the *Complaintes* (1885) reworks the figure of the *sad clown* who beneath a comic mask disguises real suffering, all too aware of the incomprehension of his philistine, limited audience. As Jean Starobinski famously put it, this was a process whereby the condition of the artist was transformed: 'Since Romanticism (but not, of course,

1 Tristan Tzara, *Manifestul Domnului Antipyrine*, in Tristan Tzara, Şapte *manifeste Dada, Lampisterii, Omul aproximativ*, trans. Ion Pop, Ed. Univers, Bucharest, 1996, p.7.

2 *I Futuristi*, a cura di Francsco Grisi, Roma, Newton Compton Editori, 1994, p. 92, 98.

without a particular symptom), the *buffo*, the *saltimbanque* and the clown have been hyperbolic and deliberately *distorted* images that artists have been complicit in providing about themselves and about the condition of their art.'[1] When he wrote poetry in Romanian, Tristan Tzara too situated himself among the descendants of Laforgue, alongside his poet friends Ion Vinea and Adrian Maniu, the second of whom wrote, in 1916, a *Ballad of the Hanged Man*, whose protagonist confesses with bitter irony that he has been nothing but a 'joking clown' who mocked his own pain 'to get a laugh from the gallery'.

The fact of being 'seen' proves to be essential in the discourse of the young frondeur who had lately mounted the stage of the Cabaret Voltaire, and it is a verb used profusely throughout the *Seven Dada Manifestos*. He himself and his Dada confrères always felt as if they were onstage, they needed an audience to rile and insult, engaged as they were in a radical project to overthrow traditional values. The 'lecturer' became a performer in his own right, he replaced the professional actor, dispensed with him, brought about a transfer of status: he made up his performance as he went along, a series of lines whose rhetoric was otherwise articulated very lucidly and whose persuasive effects were anticipated point by point. It was what the author of the *1918 Dada Manifesto* frankly tells us, a text that daringly opens in humorous, comical and somewhat cynical vein with a kind of recipe

1 Jean Starobinski, *Le portrait de l'artiste en saltimbanque*, Paris, Flammarion, Genève, Albert Skira, 1970, p. 7.

similar to the one that will later be put forward for 'making a Dadaist poem': 'To launch a manifesto, you have to want A, B, C, to thunder and fulminate against 1, 2, 3, to become enraged and to sharpen your wings so that you might triumph and disseminate a, b, c's small and large, to sign, to shout, to curse, to structure your prose in an obviously absolute, unassailable form, to prove that you are the *nec plus ultra* and to claim that the new resembles life the way the final appearance of a tart proves that which is essential in God.'[1]

It is true that the speaker soon steers what he is staying towards the absurd, instantly compromising his discourse's ability to persuade, turning it all into a kind of gratuitous, purely ludic project. But this does not preclude premeditation and transparency, in the sense of a mise-en-scène conscious of its conventionality. And the text carries on in the same direction: 'to lay down your A.B.C. is a natural and therefore regrettable thing. Everybody does it in the form of crystalbluffmadone, monetary system, pharmaceutical preparation, barefoot making an invitation to hot and barren springtime.'[2] And further on: 'I write this manifesto to prove that we are able to perform opposing acts simultaneously in a single fresh breath.'[3]

From this viewpoint, 'bourgeois' life as a whole is taken to be a conglomerate of theatrical scenarios derived from a

1 See *Manifest Dada 1918*, in Tristan Tzara, p. 10.

2 *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

3 Ibid., p. 11.

conventional way of life and shaped by the mediocrity of such 'characters' who construct their 'plots' according to what they find 'convenient': 'every bourgeois is a miniature dramatist, he concocts unusual sayings, instead of placing convenient characters at the level of his intellect, chrysalids on chairs, he chases after causes and ends (pursuing the psychoanalytic method that he practises) in order to cement his plot, an occurrence that speaks and is defined.' In turn, 'every spectator is an intriguer, if he tries to explain a word (to know it!).'[1]

This, then, is a way of devaluing or relativising any claim to Truth about contemporary society or about oneself within it. There is thus a return to the vision of life as *theatrum mundi*, here a derisory spectacle, a world of sets and actors eternally exchanging rôles. As for the quality of this universal spectacle, the apocalyptic element is unsurprising, since for a quasi-nihilist programme that wanted to make of the 'old world' a tabula rasa, as Apollinaire said, statements such as the following seem utterly normal: 'We rend, wrathful winds, the linen of the clouds and of prayers and we prepare the great spectacle of disaster, fire, decay.'[2] Further on, there is the following return to the image already evoked in the first manifesto, of the 'universal circus': 'everywhere to demoralise and to cast the hand of heaven into hell, the eyes of hell into heaven, to re-establish the fecund ring of a universal circus in the real powers and the imagination of

1 Ibid.

2 *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

every individual.'[1] The fact that life is seen as a 'nasty joke, without purpose and without original birth' cannot be surprising under such circumstances, nor can statements which hold that 'only prattle counts at present.' A kind of merry apocalypse is therefore proposed.[2]

On every page it may easily be seen that Tzara's manifestos steer rhetoric towards buffoonery. The same as any other programme made public and in a space where which there is direct communication with an audience, by which is always understood a stage, be it in a variety theatre or a *café théâtre*, such as the matrical space of the Cabaret Voltaire, the Dada manifesto is intended as a kind of stylistic mixture of multiple languages, from the 'serious' and exigent language of the public or electoral 'proclamation', with is solemn tones, invoking aims capable of transforming a country or society, to more relaxed, relativising, familiar kinds of discourse, demanding the understanding of a popular audience in search of mere entertainment. The Dada manifesto combines a little of all these things. The word *proclamation* is all but obligatory here, in its hyperbolic dimensions: the manifesto is at one point defined, with great fanfare, as a 'message to the whole world', in a tone suited to the circumstances, one of well-crafted 'prose' elegantly laid out in the form of 'verse', of the yell or curse ('yell, curse!') or of flippant, slyly complicit 'prattle'. Nor are the stereotyped phrases of commercial

1 Ibid.

2 *Op. cit.,* p. 19.

advertising or the fairground barker calling the crowd to witness sensational feats lacking, but are ludically, parodically hijacked: 'ladies and gentlemen roll up buy and don't read you'll see the one whose hands hold the key to niagara the man with a blunt paw in a chest with hemispheres in a suitcase with his nose shut up inside a chinese lantern you will see you will see you will see the belly-dance in the massachusetts barroom.'[1]

It is important that this chameleonic strategy should succeed, should achieve the desired goal through the 'absolute evidence' of final judgement and truth. This in principle, since it is obvious at every step, from one sentence to the next, that Tzara is mining the terrain across which he advances, copiously contradicting himself, ironising every statement that might risk being taken seriously. The principle that guides him, the only god before which he bows, is that of 'Dadaist spontaneity', which demands you express without censorship everything that enters your head. He does not hesitate to contradict himself and even makes contradiction a kind of topsy-turvy principle, nonchalantly proclaimed as such, an acknowledged irresponsibility, but also given that the world itself is topsy-turvy, devoid of coherence or authentic substance: 'Because I, chameleon change infiltration with convenient attitudes—multicoloured for every occasion size and price—I do the opposite of what others set out to do.'[2] In fact, he is playing at the *comedy of language*, and, in

1 *Dada manifest despre amorul slab și amorul amar*, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

2 Tristan Tzara, in *op. cit.*, p. 30.

doing so, he mocks everything, Truths with a capital T, the great principles, since 'all is relative'. It is better in such circumstances to be 'stupid', and therefore unsullied, naïve, *authentic*, in a word, outside the system, in opposition to all the endless 'prattle' that surrounds us and falsifies us. There is a lot of Nietzsche in such statements that rest on doubt, statements which shift to the foreground a viewpoint at odds with safe realities. Ultimately, we find here a universal scepticism with regard to the 'pretentions', 'ambitions', 'pride' of the man whom death awaits, whence a sentence that recurs as a refrain in the *Manifesto of weak love and bitter love*, pronounced with cynical, aggressive frankness: 'this is why you're all going to croak.'

But such statements also invite comment on the very particular relations between the militant/orator/actor and his audience. Above all else, what is highly significant is the way in which the enunciator of the discourse/manifesto presents himself before the 'spectators'. As we observed above, the 'actor's' first mask is that of the *sad clown* performing in the ring of the universal circus or at a country fair. Tzara presents himself—to describe it in more general terms—as a *histrion* apt for all kinds of imitations and metamorphoses. Possessing only a seriously weakened authority in this epoch of demystification, he can no longer pose as the 'prophet' or 'apostle' of a new religion, or at least not in the case of the Dada movement, since the messianic tone is not lacking in the programme and rhetoric of other manifestos. In Romania, in a text dating from 1916, Marcel Janco imagined a *Dialogue between the dead bourgeois and the apostle of the new*

life, the second obviously being the proponent of the new art; in the pre-Surrealist group linked to *unu* magazine in the 1930s, avant-garde precursor Urmuz was compared with Jesus, with Ilarie Voronca seeing in the poet an innovator bringing, like Moses, the Tablets of the Law down from a new Mount Sinai; in a 'ballad for later' composed in 1908, Ion Minulescu defined himself as an apostle driven from the City by a populace impervious to the messages of the new poetry… From this point of view, Tzara may be classed, contrariwise, among those poets who have fallen from their former dignified position of romantic geniuses, as if forced to descend among the ordinary crowd, initially to feign that they have reduced to the level of the vulgus, in order subsequently to have their revenge, proffering curses and defying the otherwise deeply despised bourgeois public. When he demands that the 'darling little bourgeois' look at him, he seemingly agrees to debase himself but in exchange swiftly flings a barb at this pseudo-'peer and brother': 'Take a good look at me!/ I am stupid, I am a joker, I am big-headed. Take a good look at me!/ I am ugly, my face says nothing to you, I'm small. I'm the same as all of you!'[1] And on the same page he uses the plural to balance somewhat the invective seemingly shared with this bitingly ironised public: 'all of you see with your bellybutton—why do you hide from it the ridiculous performance we're putting on for it?' Nor is self-irony lacking when, in a text titled *How I became likeable, charming and delicious*,

1 Tristan Tzara, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

published as an annex to the *Seven Dada Manifestos*, he concludes with the sentence: 'I think I'm quite likeable,' repeated in the *Dada manifesto about weak love and bitter love*: 'I still think that I'm quite likeable.'[1] Here too we can read the following (self-) ironic lines: 'A few days ago I happened to be at a gathering of imbeciles. There were a lot of people there. Everybody was charming. Tristan Tzara, a small, stupid, insignificant character, was giving a lecture on the art of becoming charming. He was actually quite charming.'[2] And he goes on: 'Tristan Tzara says to you: he very much wants to do something different, but he prefers to go on being stupid, a joker, a big-head.' These are pirouettes performed by the same clown, the same hobbling buffoon whose smile has changed to a grimace. True, sequence XVI of the manifesto is taken up by the verb *shout*, repeated two hundred times, and he signs himself beneath this shout, which is thereby authenticated, an ambiguous, piercing, defiant shout of rage and rebellion, as well as being the scream of a man totally alone and in despair. We may compare it with the line from the *Manifesto of Monsieur Antipyrine*, mentioned above: 'We are not free and we shout freedom.'

It is known that the play whose nominal protagonist is the same Monsieur Antipyrine had first been performed by the author himself in front of a few Dada friends, which led Henri Béhar to make the following significant observation: 'Performed

1 *Dada manifest despre amorul slab și amorul amar*, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

2 *Cum am devenit…*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

by professional actors, [the play] would lose all authenticity. Worse still, we would be carried away by its poetry, the humour of its absurdity, and we would mock the audience at the première, which paid Dada the most handsome homage by taking it seriously.'[1] The status of the author, like that of the actor, is therefore fundamentally altered: it is a change of 'rôle' both theatrical and existential, for, in ensuring that the fictitious character present in the flesh and blood should have a kind of authenticity, Tzara at the same time embraces its decayed opposite, that of the mere comedian making himself the neutral means of transmission for a language that in a sense speaks by itself, no longer having any connection with the one who utters it. The tangible reality and the cancelling out of reality go hand in hand to insinuate in the extreme case the dual precariousness of language and of the person who has been turned into a character, two interchangeable conventions in the great theatre of the wold.

Mutatis mutandis, all these also remain valid for the Dada Manifestos proper, whose theatricality strikes the eye. But as we have seen, it is a question of an essentially parodic and burlesque theatre, which to a large extent makes use of improvisation, somehow reminiscent of the *commedia dell'arte*, amusing or vaguely elegiac harlequinades, automatism of gesture and language, comic situations verging on the absurd—all of which are convoked in the Dada Manifestos in order to undermine and compromise the conventions of so-called 'bourgeois' life and

1 Henri Béhar, *Étude sur le théâtre Dada et surréaliste*, Gallimard, Paris, 1971, p. 157.

the art that corresponded with it. Theatre and anti-theatre meet on the same stage and simultaneously deconstruct each other, in the name of a life that is itself contradictory, lived under the sign of spontaneity, but which barely disguises a kind of anxiety arising from the awareness that everything that exists is relative and destined to die.

While it has been possible rightly to speak of the emergence of the avant-garde manifesto as a true 'literary genre', to be received as a text valid in itself, with specific features, it should be emphasised that such a literature sooner depends on 'theatricality', on a mise-en-scène similar to burlesque comedy and farce. The author of the *Bald Soprano* (preceded in Romanian a few years before by *English Without A Teacher*) was not to forget the example set by the Dada Manifestos with regard to an aggressive/mocking attitude towards the audience. Whoever reads, for example, passages from Ionesco's collection of essays *No*, published in 1924, will immediately remark upon the clownish overtones in the author's self-portrait, where he grimaces in the mirror, not without melancholy, systematically contradicts himself in everything he says, resorts to linguistic play, exhibiting himself with a kind of gaiety combined with a feeling of vulnerability—like a harlequin, a Dadaist 'practical-joking clown', or a Lord Pierrot for whom 'everything is relative.'

IRINA PETRAȘ

Ants and Stars, or, On Story

THEY SAY THAT CHAPLIN, TALKING TO HIS GOOD FRIEND Georges Simenon, wondered why there were so many insane people in the world. Simenon, whom I picture with the wise, good-natured features of Maigret (Jean Gabin), answered him more or less as follows: The thing is, we'd be as insane as they are, but I have my books, you have your films. They don't have any way of reconciling their anxieties, fears, confusion. To the reader and the cinephile I would straight away add the consumer of art in general. Those who, in other words, have Art as a remedy for life's hideousness, as Flaubert would say: 'La vie est une chose tellement hideuse que le seul moyen de la supporter, c'est de l'éviter.' With the less-quoted continuation:

'Et on l'évite en vivant dans l'Art, dans la recherche incessante du Vrai rendu par le Beau.' Taking the same thought further, I would say that life is hideous only if you separate it from its essential corollary, death. People forget that it is the deathliness that is hidden away which casts the long shadows, the death that is not openly accepted, acknowledged. Once taken, such a step would show them that life's beauties are many and have value precisely because the end looms over them. And the road to death (a one-way street) can be beautiful if you travel it thinking feverishly about everything that appears along the way, avoiding deceptive dogmas that offer themselves as substitutes for thought and taking the suggestions that Art gives you, even legitimating your transient life, which, as can be seen, leaves traces behind it.

I'm reminded once more of how the same Simenon answered questions he thought too simple and verging on the ridiculous: Why read? Why go to the theatre? He applies the term *novel* to 'all the works of the imagination, poetry, theatre, painting, not to mention the extensions made to the old forms of art by new technologies: the cinema, radio, television.' In order to provide an answer, he tells a little story in *L'âge du roman*. What would an entomologist think if he witnessed half the denizens of an anthill suddenly stream outside; if he saw those ants, at an hour when normally they would be asleep, heading in a column to some mysterious rendezvous. Our observer would soon discover that they were not advancing into battle against some enemy or to capture some coveted prey, but expectantly assembling in a clearing where the ground had been laid out in terraces.

He will be surprised to observe that in order to enter this area, each ant has to leave a part of its winter provisions at the entrance. Why have they left the shelter of the anthill? Why have they come such a long way? And, ultimately, why the sacrifice of a particle of what the next day they might have need of? What are they waiting for in such anticipation, their eyes fixed on a circular patch of bare earth illumined by the moon? Our entomologist will be shocked when he sees two or five or ten ants, all of them looking exactly alike, enter the lit-up area and, to the almost religious, breathless silence of the audience, mime a scene from the life of the ants… Well, says Simenon, it is a phenomenon to which we ourselves are witness every day, wherever human beings exist:

'The theatre and the cinema, above all, are certainly the two means of expression that supply us with the most striking images. […] Others, at home, watch the same images on the small screen. Others are content with the voices on the radio, while others still, even more solitary, reconstruct for themselves voices and images, thoughts and feelings with the aid of the signs printed on the pages of a book. […] We seek fiction everywhere, that which we have translated using the word *novel*; the evocation of a slice of human life by human beings in front of other human beings. […] Why do people read? Why do they have a hunger for fiction as great as that for Bread, a hunger for the spectacle of other people prey to the same passions, the same doubts, the same cowardice and discouragement as they are? Why every three or five years do they tremble in the gloom

wondering whether the sun will ever return? There will always be someone to tell them, yes, it will.'

I have repeated Simenon's story on many occasions as an illustration of people's need for Story and, implicitly, as encouragement to seek answers in Art, in Literature, that can be personalised. What I now notice is that there are at least two overlooked details that change the story. The ants make ready *especially* and go to the place of the performance in excitement, in eager anticipation of revelations. It is a ritual to which they submit, and are even ready to make sacrifices (payment of the entrance fee). They abide by a tacit pact, but one no less powerful for that. They trust in the explanations that Art can provide for their anxieties as mortal creatures. Then, too, the ant actors are fascinating not for the ordinariness of the human gestures that they imitate, but for what I would call the prismatic vision their performance art brings to the ordinariness of existence. Every detail acquires depth, resonance, they reverberate and convey the essential. They delight, yes, but they also stimulate thought. The performance takes place under a starry sky to which their lines allude, transcending narrow everyday gestures. It is art that brings together the two major dimensions of the human: on the one hand, the often-laborious occupations that ensure survival. Everything counts, everything vies to gain yet another respite for life. But man, with his active mind, also has access to the great mysteries of the Universe, he can explore the unknown, he can discover or learn the laws that set the wider World in motion. The industrious ants therefore have

the opportunity to lift their eyes to the stars. It sounds rather poetic, but this dual measure is the strange law itself of human life. You cannot remain only in the lofty spheres, no matter how good a knowledge of the poles you have in a 'necessary and indifferent reality' (Camil Petrescu), since you still have to overcome the little obstacles of everyday life, some of them dramatic, others pathetic or even humiliating. But at least from time to time you can lend your ephemeral thought a *boundless horizon*, ever augmenting the quantity of intellect, of knowledge.

Someone once thought Simenon's realism one that rejoiced in the smallness of human lives, taking pleasure in telling people and even making it its aim to do so: 'You're small! Stay that way!' In other words, supporting a non-revolutionary programme predisposed to a rigid understanding of greyness, even extracting sickly savour from the existential grey. But to judge it in this way ignores the quantity of well-disguised intent that his prose contains. It does not demand that man change, but shows him his smallness with such gentle fervour that the 'sabotage' operates indirectly, and the major meanings rise to the surface like oil. Man is mortal and alone, and truth and freedom are matters that don't take a capital letter because they don't warrant one. To the question of whether the sun will rise again tomorrow, the only answer is and has ever been a Story. And the stories that last are the ones that ignore neither the ants nor the stars.

Why do I say all this now? Because of a presentiment. The novels that I have kept seeing in more or less canonical

lists over the years stick to the principle of dual valency. I have written about Romanian prose, including the periodic upsurge of short prose in every run-up to a great burgeoning of the novel. In brief, Ioan Slavici's *Mara* and Duiliu Zamfirescu's *Comăneștenii* were a substantial and durable conclusion to the nineteenth century. Before them came short prose, from Negruzzi to Vlahuță and Delavrancea. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, life entered literature in fine-detailed ordinariness, but with surprising latencies and profound meanings. The same as in the novellas and short stories of Caragiale, the work of Bassarabescu, Brătescu-Voinești, Gârleanu, and Galaction, but also that of Cezar Petrescu, Agârbiceanu, Sadoveanu, and Rebreanu, the great novelists that were to come later. In the two-decade interwar period, the Romanian novel made significant advances in every thematic area, in every stylistic register, it constructed and experimented, in step with the world's great literatures. In the novels of Rebreanu, Camil Petrescu, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, Mircea Eliade, Mihail Sebastian, and Anton Holban it was social, historical, atmospheric, fantastic, erotic. After the war, granted, novelists wrote to political orders, but with a few amazing exceptions: the novellas collected in Marin Preda's *The Meeting between the Lands* and his novel *The Moromete Family*, Eugen Barbu's *The Pit*, Camil Petrescu's *A Man Among Men*, Radu Tudoran's *Hoist the Sails!*, Constantin Chiriță's *The Cherry Pickers*, and George Călinescu's *The Poor Ioanid*. With the against-the-grain short prose of the likes of Bănulescu, D.R. Popescu, Fănuș Neagu, and Titus Popovici

the inner world of the self was brought back via the oneiric and the fantastic. In the years immediately following, the novel set up camp almost exclusively within the social: *hierarchies* were established, *self-importance* was roused, *delirium* and *confusion* dominated the fashion of the day. Eighties-generation prose now makes its entrance. Massification and the narrowing scope of individual influence are explored with the provocative experimentalism of an ontic 'elephantisis', in the name of rehabilitating human interiority. After 1989, prose does not keep up with the new openness. As a literary year, 1990 did not necessarily mean a turning point, because authentic literature does not lose or regain its validity depending on the historical moment. The novel of 'looking back and the fugue', which seeks the lost aromas of a better, more settled past, prepares the stage entrance of the novel in the broad historical sense, which has the power to reconstruct and to construct broad epochs, in books that go the distance, of the same value as their interwar counterparts. In *The Mirror and the Road* and *On Watch among Books*, I described and grouped together according to various criteria a few dozen works of prose from recent years. From *The Sluice Gate* and *Provisory State* to *The Book of Whispers* and *The Wings of the Dragon*, from *On the Road to Ikaria* and *Parallel Lives* to *The True Chronicle of the Death of Yeshua Ha-Nozri* and *Bitter Rains*, from *Manouk's Inn* to *Life's Secondary Effects*. Thus, we have always had a prose that does not ignore the fate of the ants and is capable of projecting their real and apparent insignificance onto the firmament rounding out an exemplary Story.

As for the self-enchanted dis-enchantment of the egographies, it's a perfect fit for the confusion of diminished third-millennium humanness. Here too I sense a danger lurking. I won't give examples, for the time being, the danger may be merely the sign of a new turning point, and my suspicion may be merely unfounded. But even so, I have been able to identify a few symptoms that to me are alarming: for quite some time, works of prose have been highly rated which exalt insignificant personal vapidity, not to draw from it a modicum of meaning, but, in the manner of Facebook, churning out page after page of undigested egography under the influence of the internet social media, which not only encourage you to make public everything that enters your head, but even make it a debt of honour, as Umberto Eco said, to insist on displaying your own insignificance. Under the onslaught of instant, unthinking social-media likes and, more often than not, mere graphic eructations, the connection between thought and word weakens, snaps, no value judgement is respected or even allowed. In the mindless haste of the contemporary world, everything occurs mimetically, superficially, tolerating any deviation from the rules of language and therefore good thinking. I have previously talked about the *poetry in full view of the world* which, overwhelmed by visions, is no longer capable of seeing the anthill or of imagining long-range visions. Today's prose has plenty of examples not of healing the greyness by exacerbating the greyness, as the eighties generation did, but of delivering up the greyness as authentic and ideal. The whole world is informed of every single petty gesture—information that

is plain, pointless and devoid any in-formative aim or intent. The trivialities of existence will no longer *open onto something greater*. The little *moth in the lacework* (as George Călinescu would say) a personal, narcissistic moth, is a mindless exhibitionist. It wants to be seen and instantly acclaimed. Nothing else. I don't think the vogue for reality shows, a kind of contagious social voyeurism, is accidental. Genuine literature offers you human existence artistically processed in forms that demand repeated thought and interpretation. It is *exemplary* in the sense of exemplariness as a reference to the universally human. The live broadcasts now fashionable serve up the five-o'-clock news or mere trivialities that tell you nothing, teach you nothing but merely satisfy the pride of a false participation in the life of the world. There are books about *cases*, without the possibility or even the desire of having an *effect*. Moreover, they are launched with distracted enthusiasm. One that captures the bustle of the ants only schematically and does not even have the time to gaze at the stars, since the *flux* stands still not even for the space of a thought.

Tell me that I'm exaggerating.

NICOLAE OPREA

The Revolted Poet: Ion Monoran

In 2013, commemorating two decades since the premature death of revolutionary poet Ion Monoran (born in 1953), his friends from Timișoara, Viorel Marineasa and Daniel Vighi, published the posthumous collection *Dear poetry*, after the title of 'Martyr Hero of the Anti-Communist Revolution' was bestowed on him post mortem. Having survived the bloody revolution that began in his city of adoption, Ion Monoran was due to have made his literary début with an anthology of his work titled *Locus periucundus (1971-1989)*, but he died on 2 December 1993, before its publication. Three decades after Monoran's death, and also after his colleague Daniel Vighi passed away, Viorel Marineasa has now published *Dear Poetry* (Humanitas, Bucharest 2023), a collection restoring the

poet to public attention and bringing together *Locus periucundus* (1994), *Like a tramp in a red sweater* (1996) and *I myself* (2009), the last of which was compiled from manuscripts in the family archive. Monoran's discourse, 'now epic, now lyrical' (as it has been described) reconstructs in its essential points the tumultuous life of an author who in his lifetime was virtually unknown, at least at the level of critical references and his contributions to literary magazines. He made his début in 1976 in *Student Forum*, a Timișoara university magazine. And in 1978, he became known nationally thanks to a page of poems published in *Amphitheatre* magazine at the prompting of Equinox poet Dinu Flămând.

The effigy of the restless, rebellious poet, constrained to live in a hostile environment, is solitude, as he states at the very beginning: 'Solitude made me great.' In a poem from 1980, his abbreviated autobiography is placed under the sign of a Destiny convergent with Solitude: 'the strange childhood with feet in the storm/ the machinery of diabolical becoming/ in world-conquering adolescence/ erupting from the depths of volcanos/ with love and pranks/ and the highroad always the only solution/ with a stomach rumbling from water and fried potatoes/ through a Transylvania that (for me) had the morality/ of feudal epochs/ expelled from lycée/ a locksmith five months a lathe man another ten/ and in the army unloading wagons of limestone ballast/ and bricks/ after which at evening rollcall they would call us/ the dregs of society// a small world/ selfish and extinct too soon// a small world—of Destiny/ and Solitude/

with darknesses known only to me/ on the outskirts of this city of the plain.' Monoran was not a solitary, however, as proven by his impassioned attendance of the Pavel Dan Cenacle in Timișoara, along with Mircea Bârsilă and others. In another poem from the posthumous cycle *I myself*, the poet sketches a self-portrait reflected in time's mirror: 'This poet/ I say/ in a waistcoat/ made of static-charged synthetic fibres/ that turns the buttons/ into vortices of hatred with the soul/ pulsating among sufferings/ and eyes as happy/ as a shop window lit up by gazes/ he actually thinks of poetry/ always expecting a sadness/ to save him from Solitude.' In another stylistic register, imbued with irony, he completes the portrait of the rebellious poet, in the poem that lends its title to this collection, *Dear poetry*, employing an original epistolary form: 'What I can tell you about myself is that I am unmarried and employed at a factory in Timișoara. So, I am not a student or some forty-year-old poet a young hope/ of Romanian poetry.// Despite all that I'm determined to make a date with you [...] I have just one request: don't come wearing a socialist-realist frock or one of those blouses in the style of contemporary poetic verse/ embellished with the faces of the great voivodes of the nation.'

Although he was marginalised after his failed attempt to leave the country, as a pariah of communist society Ion Monoran became all the bolder in expressing his rebellion against the coercive system, even if he knew that his poetry would never be published in magazines controlled at that time by the censors. Resigned to perfecting his work for the desk drawer, he was

somewhat akin to I.D. Sârbu, a prose writer from a different generation, the author of the anti-totalitarian novel *Farewell, Europe* and the *Journal of a Journalist without a Journal*. He in no way accepted conformism, standing apart from his contemporaries, who 'hid in their own lies, just a few centimetres/ from real life' (setting out *From a theme by Bacovia*). Defiant satire of communism, masked in a personified image of a country enslaved, is in *The Romanian Socialist Republic* (1981) lucidly expanded into a series of anti-Communist poems: *Locus periucundus* (I and II), *Dear Poetry*, *Madame Lyric*, and others, to which were added over the course of time compact cycles of corrosively critical poems without titles (marked with a symbolic epsilon): *The Dacian forefathers headed by the Party* and *Circle- or square-based extravagances*. Against the dark backdrop described in such poems, it remains to the disillusioned poet only to write a *Hieroglyphic poem* or, better still, to give himself up to the bohemian life of *Spleen*: 'You sit in the tavern and drink/ deluding yourself with the thought that at least like this/ in one way or another you'll be able to find peace and quiet/ when actually you're revolted by the pigswill of existence/ the labyrinth you're forced to navigate/ so that you'll be able simultaneously to become/ and remain yourself/ through the window of always another illusion/ looking at the infinite space of the cabbala/ that is your life—the years of your youth/ when, lo and behold, you'd rather drink/ than love or write.'

Feverishly searching for his *Locus periucundus*, the consciousness of a poet born in the country ('The Banat with dyed Easter

eggs with Christmas cakes and sausages/ with the feast of Peter and Paul every 29th of June in the village of Petroman/ where I was born') is thrown into confusion by the extinction of the traditional village under Communism: 'The villages have died/ and many of those that survive/ run from the city like in the times of the ancient Greeks/ seem to hang like little lamps/ on the sides of which on closer inspection/ you can find engraved the struggle for survival.' The poet obsessively returns to the ravages inflicted by Communism on rural life in a later prose poem (found in the family archives) of great satirical, caricatural incisiveness: 'It's summer./ Like brood hens the leaves enfold the fruit/ and not a day goes by but production increases in the factories. In shop windows/ plaster salami and loaves tactfully illustrate allusions to happiness./ If it rains, with what flows there might sprout (as thick as Whitman's leaves)/ that which even Ivan Turbincă was unable to believe. Every-/ body dreams of a villa in the south (like the Central Committee's) and a car/ .../ It's different in the country there a strong wind seems to have flattened everything/ engraved on a sky immaculate only at night/ is a splash of dreaming./ The tractors came and the peasants fled. After/ thousands of years they preferred the lathe of pitchforks from nineteen-seven./ Socialism ought to be a bit kinder to them./ Here they are: morning after morning, disappointed/ like indentured labourers, listening to the urgings of comrade Brigadier.' By symptomatic coincidence, Ion Monoran's vision of the desertion of the Romanian village coincides, at the level of inspiration, with that of Miron Cordun, a poet of the

previous generation, from Pitești, awarded the Writers Union Début Prize in 1972. His 1978 collection, titled *The Empty Village* in manuscript, was rejected by the Communist censors, but a drastically cut version was printed as *Sunday on the roads*, at the proposal of Editura Cartea Românească editor Florin Mugur.

The construct of the rebellious poet is almost always projected onto the screen of the involution of socialist society: 'a muzhik like his dad (at the age of twenty/ you're fearful of remaking yourself) and in overalls/ on which the sputtering motor spits and belches/ …/ life runs around decrepit regions/ the blue hail of the furnaces darkness your eyes/ black smoke black gas greenish-blue or yellow/ floating over the dais of the most aberrant history/ heroism brass bands pennants—a world of vortices/ within a future like pond scum/ or young vigorous reeds.' Eager to escape 'this middle ages of the words in which the Province languishes', Monoran criticises just as intensely the socialist-realist phase of Romanian literature: 'Who would have thought that the new poetry after L. Blaga/ would be infested by socialist realism/ of which ultimately literary history has preserved nothing./ N. Labiș without you everything would have looked even more horrific/ in that period of slogans when poetry was written/ solely using epithets and comparisons./ N. Labiș your premature death/ changed the whole course of a literature.' Nor does he spare the socialist-realist poets loyal to the Party ('deşliu tulbure breslaşu a. toma beniuc/ clinging like grim death wanting to be our shepherds until deep old age/ and a child Labiș mown down prematurely by the tram/ that was to

pull us from anonymity'), stating his own poetic creed by way of contrast: 'anyway they no longer even have validity the orange cigarette paper poems of reality the word light cannot/ by itself hold up/ a patriotic poetry/ or the bones of the ancestors even/ if you shove the metaphor into/ the depths of oil wells/ and as for me before reaching it/ I had to battle the world/ solitude.' In an *Imagined poem of Mayakovsky* from 1974 he categorically adds: 'It's hard to write poems about workers/ It's hard to sing/ what they sing/ …/ Socialist realism must/ vanish/ socialist realism and/ engine-oil-stained poetry.'

Configuring his own poetic personality by means of original delimitations, in a series of poems conceived along evolutionary lines Ion Monoran relates to the *Master* in the penumbra of the Library invoked in the poem *Veto!* which opens the present anthology. After a Rimbaud-esque poem, the young poet describes the 'enfants terribles of our age' in *Garcia Lorca, Brecht, Neruda and others*: 'I saw the angels—/ the enfants terribles of our age/ as real as a separation or an effect of sadness/ on pavements/ defying recipes/ experiencing from aerial reference points/ reality and the dream/ in their poems like nurses/ on the outskirts of the big cities.' From *Rereading Coșbuc*, with its mirror of the traditional village, passing through the 'pitch darkness of German expressionism,' he imagines 'a slow death/ that once upon a time would have been called Bacovia' and naturally reaches the end of the road *At Eminescu* (the title of the poem): 'I think of you, Wee Brother, at the bough/ above your mouldering grave/ like you I dream the phantasms of poems filled with

light/ Bucharest with its mute façades seeming to me that it is you/ and even though so many years have passed/ —pointless telling you/ in the meantime they've died/ Arghezi/ and Blaga/ and Bacovia—/ who thinks it would still be possible to wage/ war against you/ I refuse to understand/ in you lies all our hope—/ even though a thing like this/ might still do you a lot of good.' And from Labiș ('Traveller through the land of Nicolae Labiș') he arrives at Nichita Stănescu in *Stănescian Angel*: 'Haunted by his spirit/ I seek the shade of small urban settlements/ with streets jaunty but without reflexes/ shifting expectations onto a landscape of ideas/ with stupidities and desires among rejects/ of glorious existence; stern and alone…'

Endowed with a moral vocation for freedom, in both thought and deed, the poet plunged in the depths of reality realises in *Dear Poetry* an organic tissue that is a cross between dramatic autobiography and gloomy image of Communist society. *I Love concrete life*, declares the poet of complete honesty, categorically (and programmatically) rejecting the inclination towards melancholy or the tendency towards metamorphoses that superficially adorns the everyday reality. As he defines them in a poem without a title: 'My poems demand to be written with the shovels and pickaxes/ with which in the army we dug pits and ditches in December/ …/ my poems are journeys of the soul very far away/ about which anybody else would have nothing to say.' Genuinely overwhelmed by 'the imaginary despair of a character/ now epic, now lyrical/ which you carry within amid sufferings/ along the section of ever-shifting identities,' the genuinely revolutionary

poet manifests himself at the confluence of lyricism and invective. Also illustrative is the lyrical self-portrait from the cycle *I myself*: 'I was born in the provinces// I didn't study philosophy law/ nor am I the author of famous chansons/ a poet of commitment or a magazine contributor// I love the concrete life/ the hymn of the muscles the freedom of the kiss// this city a being about which I've spoken to you before// I'm a young birch tree// I go down into the street/ without regrets// my journey contradiction hope/ has only just begun.'

IULIAN BOLDEA

Ștefan Augustin Doinaș.
The Ceremonies of the Text

THE POETRY OF DOINAȘ RESTS UNDER THE SIGN of a constructive vocation, illustrating a need for harmony and transparency, aesthetic coherence, clarity, and sublimation of the idea. What is conveyed in these simultaneously statuesque and musical poems, is the mystery of the world, the hum of passing moments, serenity in the face of destiny, and contact with essences, with the lyricism in fact emerging 'from *the experience of an exercise*' (Eugen Simion). Beyond the vibration of the ideas and the metaphysical reveries, the refined ceremonial of the text seems to be the distinctive feature of the poetry of Ștefan Augustin Doinaș. In the allegorical poem *Symposium*, the emotion is captured within a spectacular framework, within a suggestive dance of ideas that reflects the image of an archetypal

'banquet' with 'uncalled' guests brought together by unpredictable fate. The whole is transposed in an allegory of existence in which people are called at random, from the horizon of the virtual, without predestination, without finality ('From the start, the banquet had not been/ intended for any one of us./ The wine in the goblets was not new,/ nor did oysters gleam on the tables./ Older than the world itself is the banquet./ Appetite and idleness there are alone/ and the clay masks of the guests'). Destiny is an exuberance of living, the 'clay' masks, the gestures, the whispers and the songs suggesting life's repetitive spectacle: 'We were brought here, a fait accompli,/ drawn by a whisper among whispers, a song/ that came to resound in us ever louder./ Don't you think the wine has a bitter taste?/ Gazing hypnotised into our glasses,/ we chortle as we clink cups with our neighbour,/ but we know not for what or for whom./ What a senseless, immoderate celebration!' Caught up in the Dionysian enthusiasm of the senses, the guests feel the inertia of an overwhelming force from beyond them, above them, the blind will to live making them repeat gestures, words, rites and deeds also lived before by others, through primordial attitudes: 'Look, the tables gleam with grease,/ bearing out the sitting down to libations/ of other now sunken generations/ and the gliding of the barefooted men/ that feasted before you.' Existence is therefore the hallucinatory spectacle, its actors having chimerical embodiments, carnivalesque gestures, incomplete outlines, on the boundary between the illusory and the tangible ('Ah, all is a dream, another world./ And in young

costumes we act out/ a grey-haired rôle, as there is no other…/ So I would tell you if I had the word./ But alas! I too will be flattened by the wind/ that will blow over the diners. I too/ will rise heavily from my place,/ relinquishing it, according to the great custom,/ to the strangers that will enter the dining room,/ themselves feverishly impatient to drink/ the mystical nectar made by the gods/ and given to all according to justice'). At the end of the spectacle, 'dregs' and leftovers remain, after which the farce of existence is endlessly repeated with different actors, different masks, different rôles, fragile and redundant. *Symposium* is a suggestive allegorical parable of existence, remarkable for the suggestiveness of its ideas and the musical harmony of its poetry. Another parable, *The Sun and the Seashell*, has metaphysical meanings, recounting the symbolic scenario of failed communion between two entities from opposing, irreconcilable realms, the same as in Eminescu's *Hyperion* and Ion Barbu's *Riga Crypto and the Lapp Woman*. The first sequence introduces us to the time and space of the 'story', suggestive of a mythical auroral atmosphere. The protagonists of the erotic parable are the sun, symbol of transcendence and light, and the seashell, a creature from the spheres of the deep, the shadow, aquatic impenetrability ('In younger nameless times,/ when the stars were not at all shy/ to blaze their orbits through the world/ like azure birds with beaks of flame,/ a new sun, flying bevel/ that screamed in clouds, reviled by storms,/ found a gulf of water like a breeze,/ heated with girdles of brown light-bearers,/ in which, ruling over the pearls/ and over green scalloped seaweed,/ brought at

random from other oceans/ by cuttlefish or by glittering fish,/ a princely, virtuous shellfish,/ in blue enamel and mother-of-pearl/ for thousands of years cultivated in her house/ penumbra like cloth on a loom'). Two worlds, two hypostases, two attitudes are configured and which confront each other: one hypostasis circumscribes the dynamic of the solar, the lofty, asserting itself as a will to ascension, rationality, elevation, the other is static, inhibited, withdrawn into the depths, the instinctual, the languid shadow of the aquatic. Of course, betrothal of the two worlds is impossible, and the sun's regression to the aquatic causes the seashell to retract, threatened by the solar rays: 'As the sun hurried on, a raw ray, barely flickering,/ he penetrated silks and brocades/ momentarily pointing the spear at her./ But the seashell, dazed and confused,/ wishing to protect her delicate frame/ and the sparkling pearl which, pregnant,/ thrilled her virgin womb,/ fled to the depths, leaping down steps/ to the wave furnished with leafage and glimmers,/ with which the water, simple and wise,/ both scatters and gives birth to illusions./ When the sun came at even, tender,/ with wings blazing above him,/ and descended to sea-bottom like a diver/ encased in a strange greenish suit,/ the poor seashell, in ideal canopies,/ in tents that resounded, all alone in the ocean/ she suddenly sensed him spiralling/ like an amorous, cunning snake,/ which holds its old eye at a distance/ and extrudes its red tongue between its teeth,/ as he boldly approached her/ on the shoulders of the hot tides.'

The allegorical figuration unites contrasting dimensions (the sun as Apollonian symbol and the seashell as gentle creature of the aquatic shadow) meant to be eternally separate due to the impossibility of their transcending their own condition: the sun is forever destined to the heights the shell is condemned to the deep shadows, to the languid slumber of the water. What is traced here is the parabolic line of a universe with a predetermined, ideal geography in which the elements are eternally fixed, unable to abandon their realm, their regimen of existence, their condition, which has been decided once and for all. The end of the poem amplifies the ambience of the uniqueness of the elements ephemerally attracted to each other, situated within a position of irreconcilable contrast. ('Wherefore, fleeing affrighted/ through gloomy constellations, she awoke/ on the other side, starting from its socket,/ a place where never is it day./ And the sun, dreaming a utopian gulf,/ for thousands of years still finds no peace,/ but abruptly plummets to tropic depths,/ blinded by beauties and sin,/ splashing flame in tapering tents/ the world's pilasters, seaweed up above/ that weeps against the sky and sparkling calls him/ to kiss it once he sets'). An allegory of an impossible marriage and a metaphor of reconciliation with one's own condition, *The Sun and the Seashell* is an illustration of a lyricism possessed of a metaphysical substratum and an epic-dramatic structure, featuring diaphanous scenes and interiorised musicality.

A parable of writing, the poem *Ars poetica* reveals the writer's state of captivity within the fabric of his own creation, within

the original horizon of the moment of grace that is elevation to the transcendent and immersion in the abyss. The poet is, suggests Doinaș, a prisoner of his own edificatory drive, captive in his own work and in his own flesh. What is significant here is the network of suggestions, meanings and symbols of ascension, with elevation investing essences with transfigurative new meaning: 'With the coming to life of the white birds/ in the pattern of this Oltenian carpet/ a legend finds its beginning and its end./ I myself am held captive therein./ Do not ask me more. Radiant,/ like any star, it can be the presence/ of the vowels, and that which rotates/ around them is the fruit of despair/ at establishing contact. White birds,/ negating their own weave, but not/ also flight…/ In this realm rules/ the shadow of the beheaded tyrant.' The end of the poem reveals the image of the dematerialised creator, devoid of biography, who identifies himself with his own creation to the point of annihilation, nourishing himself on his own writing ('A prisoner, I breathe only in the broad/ back-and-forth of the loom's shuttle'). *Ars poetica* is a superb lyrical miniature that stands out for the economy of its stylistic ornamentation, the conciseness of its expression, reduced to the point of minimalism, diaphaneity and symbol purged of existential figuration. In the poems of Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, lyrical emotion is mediated by the intellect, passion is embedded in harmonious structures, affective eddies acquire a solemn timbre, transposed into ceremonial as they are, such as in the poem *A god of boundaries*, in which the kiss is distilled in the ritual alembics of memory. Eros, memory, time coexist

in the translucid filigree of allegory, as communion between beings is forbidden by the subtle but nonetheless implacable boundaries between them: 'A god of boundaries between us does sit./ The kiss has been left on his shoulders/ and lies there forgotten, rotting like the apple/ from which once we both bit.' The terza rima of the sonnet expresses melancholy, nostalgia at love having ended, but also a clear awareness of limits ('Now you are far away, and the dream turns to ash./ A wave rich in smoke and disaster/ The slab where we sat does wash.// Now I understand that until the death/ of age of fire, hearts, stars,/ a god of boundaries does part us'). Time, the 'god of boundaries', gentle and atrocious, is what unravels the spell of the Eros, destroys kisses, whispers, dreams and memories, all described in a delicate lyrical register dictated by transparency and delicacy. In the poems of Ștefan Augustin Doinaș are interwoven scenographies of the ideal and confessional rituals, experiences reborn through memory and transparencies from which affective impurities have withdrawn, with the intemperance of sensation being worked into poems that are clear, fresh and harmonious.

OVIDIU PECICAN

The Literary History of Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Wallachia: *Loisir* and Aesthetic Pleasure

Throughout western europe, the middle ages saw the birth of those literatures referred to, for want of a better term, as 'national'. In fact, it is a question of literatures that aimed to meet the cultural needs of the diverse populations that made up the demographic and cultural landscape of the Western Europe of those times. Unfortunately, a more suitable term than 'national' has yet to be found for mediaeval

ethno-cultural crystallisations, although in the current Romanian specialist bibliography on the subject we refer to carriers of the same tradition and speakers of the same language using terms such as 'people' and 'nation'. This despite the fact that such terms are actually modern projections onto relatively late realities, when the 'small homelands' and identities connected to them had already blurred into a far broader consciousness of belonging to a larger collective that functioned under the rule of the leader and administration of a single state apparatus, regardless of how rudimentary or sophisticated. Such crystallisations were long drawn-out processes, unfolding over many generations and centuries, as only extended periods of time allowed communities of traditions and languages that differed from each other—radically differed, more often than not—to come together within a single language. They were otherwise hindered not only by the ethnic diversity that made up the identity in which they came to be absorbed, but also by racial and religious differences and social projections. In the Latin-speaking Middle Ages, *natio*, as is well known, did not have the meaning of an ethno-cultural nation, but rather denoted the aristocratic, the noble condition.

It is a question of 'national'—preserving the necessary quotation marks—in the sense of the gradual distinction that took shape in the period after the Carolingian Empire between peoples speaking different languages and forging for themselves different historical destinies within the framework of their own states. On the other hand, I use the term 'national' in this context to mark the emergence and circulation of themes, motifs and even

sentiments expressed in a written or oral form which undoubtedly relate to the aspirations of ethnic-linguistic communities smaller than the empire, without any connection with the imperial idea, smaller even than the state of which they were part. in the Kingdom of England, for example, each of the old states of the Heptarchy brought its own spiritual legacy, likewise across the Channel, in France, the south and the north were each proud of their separate cultural heritage and the individuality of their regions, while Burgundy had a distinct identity and features all of its own.

We may therefore speak of a mediaeval Romanian literature in this sense: a literature written or unwritten, sung, spoken or recited by Romanians wherever they happened to be, but also including a literature whose origin, although to be sought elsewhere, was adopted and 'consumed' by Romanians (often with notable alterations). Such an approach, in keeping with the West's view of its own Middle Ages, allows us to treat as Romanian even works written in the sacred language of the region and of the local Church, Latin or Slavonic depending on the case.

On the other hand, it should be pointed out that there should not even be any discussion of a Romanian literature except in such terms when the period is that prior to the mid-seventeenth century and even later, when, in the eighteenth century, high culture increasingly tended, given the circumstances of Phanariot rule and the increasingly authoritarian domination of the Ottoman Empire, to be produced in Greek. In these centuries of early modernity, at the level of the élites of the Romanian principalities, there begins to show through a consciousness of

an ethno-linguistic, religious and cultural Romanian unity, and the Romanian language begins to make more decisive inroads into ecclesiastical and administrative affairs.

Previously, the subjects of Moldavia and Wallachia, as well as the Transylvanian Romanians, took their awareness of their own collective identity no farther than the boundaries of their province, if that far. And even this is uncertain, given that in each of the principalities, state unification entailed multiple successive stages and only gradually absorbed the various regions into the unitary life of the state as a whole.

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To understand literature in an aesthetically restrictive sense as a collection of texts intended to delight, rather than serving useful purposes, means, as we shall see, placing before the researcher a by no means easy task:[1] that of seeking to understand what exactly *loisir* might mean and the feeling of private well-being experienced by people of those times who had access—as readers or who benefitted from being read to—to the contents of manuscripts

1 I touched on the question of applying the aesthetic criterion to mediaeval and Early Modern cultural artefacts in the introduction to my *Troia, Veneția, Roma. Studii de istoria civilizației europene* (Troy, Venice, Rome. Studies in European Civilisation), Cluj, 1998, pp. 19-20, reproduced in the second edition, published in Bucharest by Editura EuroPress Group, 2007, pp. 39-40. Other studies on the same subject from this volume can be found in chapter two, 'Is there a Romanian mediaeval literature?', pp. 41-49 (2nd ed., pp. 57-63) and the sixth chapter, 'Romanian literature from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries', pp. 71-78 (2nd ed. pp. 76-81).

or printed books. That pleasure chiefly related to *loisir*, it did not find a place among obligations and had nothing to do with work of any kind, not being the result of any pragmatic view of living, but rather of a hedonic one. As for leisure, this was the reserve of the class on top, be it lay or ecclesiastical. Part of life at court, *loisir*, consumed between banquets, hunting expeditions or knightly jousting, certainly also included literary entertainments, taking pleasure in readings from books deemed amusing or able to move their listeners.

In a predominantly illiterate society, was reading, however, a private act, one of personal joy, or did it relate to a collective ceremony, such as what took place in church when the priest read from the Scriptures, not being forced by his own ignorance to recite what he had learned by heart? Could readings also take place in different settings, for example in boyar residences, where the master of the house did not know how to read and so called on the services of a priest, deacon or his children's tutor in order to read to him How many of the boyars and merchants—let us not forget that Neacșu of Cîmpulung wrote *manu propria* a letter in Romanian anno 1521, which thus demonstrates that he also knew how to read—engaged in solitary reading? It is hard to say at present, but there is also no hope of obtaining an answer if questions of this kind are not even asked.

What type of reading might arouse pleasure and joy, in other words aesthetic reactions, rather than simply fulfilling the task of conveying information, serving some use, educating? Without a doubt, certain books of the Bible, such as *The Song of Songs*,

Job, *Ecclesiastes*, and, in particular, the *Psalms* satisfied not only religious feeling, but also stimulated reactions of an aesthetic nature, giving pleasure, provoking awe, conjuring up the sublime. In proximity to these sacred texts, consecrated by the Church, should also be placed hagiographic legends recounting the lives of the saints and the miracles they performed. They were intended not only to commemorate the saints in question, fostering readers' or listeners' pious sentiments, but also to arouse admiration, pity, exaltation in their hearts. In the category of creations that might arouse enthusiasm, affective participation, we must also, however, take account of oral and/or written works in prose or verse that evoked the glorious past, the heroic deeds of ancestors or exemplary figures of long ago. Within this category undoubtedly fall epic songs of valour, ancient ballads, legends, fairy tales, and even legendary/historical descriptions. There were also major narratives in verse or prose about adventures of a universal appeal, which, without necessarily having a connection to a people's past or its own cultural heritage, enjoyed an attention that led them to circulate from one people to another, ensuring them universal renown. In this category can be found those texts known as 'popular novels', whose presence within the Romanian cultural horizon is indirectly attested as early as the first centuries of the existence of the mediaeval Romanian states, if not earlier. At stake are primarily two legacies of Antiquity, albeit adopted and circulating in the Middle Ages in much modified forms compared with their known prototypes from ancient times: these versions of the great theme of war and

peace were *The War of Troy* and the *Alexandria*. Received via Latin and Slavonic, from Central Europe, but also from the Balkan Peninsula, true adventure novels—in places downright unbelievable—the two novels nurtured a taste for martial adventure, for the fantastic, and for great heroic deeds. Up until the seventeenth century, the two major martial adventures were taken as true stories from universal history, and it was not until Miron Costin, Stolnik Constantine Cantacuzino and others after them that their fictional nature was grasped. Despite this, the fact that they were believed to be histories did not prevent aesthetic reception of their content, with the adventures resonating in their audience's minds both when based on reality and when produced by the author's imagination. They were joined by other novels, the antiquity of whose circulation is less clear, such as *Barlaam and Josaphat* (which in the sixteenth century Neagoe Bassarab drew on when writing his treatise on governance and which was known earlier than this within the Romanian sphere), *the Aesopia* and *Archirius and Anadan*.

All these, each in its own way, developed in those coming into contact with such content, be it read, be it recited, be it sung, inner reactions, *experiences*, that may be situated within the area of aesthetic participation.

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There can be no doubt that the style in which Radu of Afumați's chronicle in stone was composed reflects not only an aim to inform—one that is clearly stated ('Let it be to your

knowledge…'—but also that it is an attempt to move the soul. Not only is the list of the prince's battles, one after the other, intended to fix them in the memory, but also it is a quantitative, cascading accumulation, whose stylistic effects aim to arouse a reaction to the voivode's greatness. At the same time, the accumulation of so many battles, also helped by the image of the prince on horseback carved on his tomb, aims at confirming that he is a knight of Christendom and a hero in the ancient and mediaeval sense: a warrior for a just and noble cause:

'Let it be to your knowledge, the wars that I wish to tell you, which I waged in the battle with the Agarians, at la Glu[bavi], in the village of Ștefeni on the Neajlov, at C[lejani], at the fortress of Bucharest, at Tîrgoviște, at the River Argeșel, at the [village of Plata], at Alimănești on the Teleorman, and the fiercest and hardest of all the wars at Grumazi [with 7 sanjaks], at Nicopolis, at Sișstov below [Poenari Fortress] with the peasants, at Gher[ghiţa], again at Bucharest, at the town of Slatina, at [Bucharest Fortress], with Vladislav Vodă, [at Rucăr], at Didrich. After which I was endowed [by God with a kingdom and a sceptre], they decked me again with girdle and with porphyry [and with a crown they crowned me and with honour] in abundance and with much gift-bringing greatness and with the host of the army being surrounded, and to many I stretched out the hand of assistance, to all I distributed charity, and now I lie in a sole tomb alone, awaiting the voice of the Archangel, the last trumpet, the resurrection of all the world, the unleashing of the elements,

and I ask those that God wills to come hereafter that they preserve this small place of rest and that the house of my bones be undisturbed.'[1]

It is an artistic procedure intended to impress, in which the reader is presented with the contrast and antithesis of the coronation, on the one hand, and the solitude of death, on the other. On the one hand, porphyry and girdle, riches and title, armies, on the other, the isolation of the grave as its tenant awaits the resurrection and salvation. The emotional impact is guaranteed because the anonymous author of the text knows how to muster and mete out the elements brought to bear in support of his literary construct.

In chronological order, the funerary text about Radu of Afumați precedes by a few decades the chronicle of Macarius, where we find artistic intention in the stylistic premeditation of its imitation of the Byzantine chronicle of Constantine Manasses, throug the copying of expressions, solemn, periphrastic utterance, the ceremonial air of the account, the omnipresent rhetoric of exclamation, and so on. The first part of the sixteenth century consequently stored up texts intended for lay and religious reading alike, but displaying the intention and literary procedures specific to belles lettres. It is true, however, that all these are specific to texts written in Slavonic, according to the mediaeval pattern.

1 Grigore Tocilescu, *Biserica episcopală a mănăstirii Curtea de Argeș*, 1886, p. 46, modern translation in Teodor Palade, *Radu de la Afumați*, Bucharest, 1939, p. 89.

CORNEL NISTEA

Markó Béla and the Hypostases of Self

FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS, I HAVE FOLLOWED WITH INTEREST Markó Béla, the man, the politician, and the Hungarian-language writer, admiring his aristocratic bearing, that of a cultivated, introverted man, but one nonetheless ready for dialogue, measured in his statements, while at the same time full of substance, and remarkable for his serenity. At present, senior figure Markó Béla gives rise to a feeling of admiration and confidence, even if his poetic texts are partly in contradiction to this serenity.

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Receiving a book by the distinguished writer from Tîrgu Mureș, you experience the joy of having been granted the honour of entering via a work the hidden intimacy of its author, of a reading of profound depths through a reflexiveness that always arouses not only affectivity but also, more particularly, the rationality that is suggested by metaphor, with questioning, paradox, perplexity arising not infrequently.

The handsomely designed 150-page volume *Whose Am I?* recently published by Editura Curtea Veche in Romanian translation by Kocsis Francisko collects new poems that are arranged in a dynamic albeit random order, beginning with a faux *ars poetica* titled *Prayer for Poetry* and ending with no more no less than a *Divine Poetics*. Two poetic boundary posts? Hard to say.

This is from *Prayer for Poetry*: 'Love even now like snowflakes/ slowly falling from the high heavens. Nothing but/floating, swift touches, teardrops/ on the skin. Let my poetry be/ as light!'

Structured in six subsections with suggestive titles: *Symphony*, *Clean Window*, *Yes, yes, no, no*, *The Power of Imagination*, *The Heart in the Loudspeaker*, and *Divine Poetics*, the collection reveals a poetic state that unfolds in modulations of great diversity, from confession of the real to depths of the self, in a ceaseless discovery of how the 'I' resonates with the real, an echo of a repressed state that triggers sentiment transposed in the unfolding of time: 'Only those that leave this place/ preserve their past intact./ Long have I too known/ that the city, house, rivers and mountains/ no longer exist' (*The past from afar*).

His poetic imaginary consists of sequences of experiences from distant and immemorial beginnings, such as when the child of four makes an essential discovery, which is like a 'hiding place' in a cellar that becomes unforgettable: 'since then, if I read about/ any shelter, I sense the smell of apples or cabbage/ and rather than feeling embarrassed, I am/ pierced by an inexplicable joy,' as memory sometimes fills him with horror, particularly when the words are written in capital letters.

Poetic emotion/experience almost always develops from a visualisation of the everyday in which notions of reality that engender *wonder* are in the majority: once again, as a child, 'Mama left me, even then, in front of the shop,' and now the child in the pushchair becomes acquainted with 'the whistling, rustling, rumbling or roaring,/ which I seem to have forgotten.'

Well, the greater part of Markó Béla's poetry is born of this 'forgetting', in which he rediscovers the vibrations of the self, such as when children adorn a cart that will become the 'marvellous carriage' from the fairy tales, only for the hell of aggression to follow, so that 'since then I've known how much the kingdom of justice/ is worth.' Then memory gathers in images of 'baked apples,/ at the same time as the barley. Pears with the red core./ Gooseberries, after the sugar flushed/ their skin,' only then in the poem *Arbitrary* to remember the summer when the children came back from the holidays at their grandparents', 'Mama played in my grandparents' shed a/ Beethoven symphony.' The flux of affective memory makes the poet oftentimes be 'harrowed even today,' with the ordinary, even the

banal, acquiring the value of a symbol, becoming mythic, as in the case of an iron pitchfork that his grandfather hurls 'into a whirlwind… and in an instant both whirlwind and pitchfork vanished,' thereby making room for images from an 'enchanted realm' when in the attic of a barn 'hay was heaped with the same care and attention' as that of 'women making the bed,' while the 'mischievous' child more than once picks a quarrel with the wind and the rain.

All these life experiences are educative, as when the skinning of a rabbit gives rise not only to bashfulness but also horror at the killing of living creatures, even the swatting of a fly. A gallery of creatures large and small naturally appears in the poet's memory, such as the dove, the blackbird, the sparrow, the raven and the parrot that plucked from the little box the threepenny ticket that told the future.

Sometimes nostalgia for the past takes on bewildering tones: 'I'd dearly like to see again/ the doorstep, door handle, door of luminous/ brown: If I look back/ after sixty years,/ I don't know what colour are the clothes I wear,' but he recognises the red jug from which he drank water as a child, and when he speaks of courage, fear and cowardice, he is overwhelmed by emotion, before succumbing to confusion like a schoolchild deciphering the writing on a blackboard: 'I live from one/ anguish to the next and ever/ shorter is the relief at solving/ a problem. But if I write a sonnet,/ it goes into action. Like the beetle desperately scuttling in the hollow of the clenched/ fist' (*Credo*). Feeling is a constant fluctuation, more often than not when you

'don't feel what they feel,' when people call the beautiful ugly and vice versa, as he wonders whether he might write a poem the way you would write about 'shoeing horses' or 'tiling a roof' or other everyday activities.

The paradoxical, sometimes even the absurd, are themes where observation becomes ironical or even sarcastic, such as the observation that 'damage' begins to drive the poet mad when he discovers the disaster: 'I'm ruining ruin,' whence he senses that 'another sonnet will come of it.'

Markó Béla is a contemplator of life as event, an observer who expresses topsy-turvy truths in search of 'life's purpose', when after yet another disaster (mainly of the spiritual variety) a wise man should observe that 'something reassuring' has occurred, that everything was nothing but an accident. Including Death. Strangeness always lies in wait, and the poet sometimes remembers unbelievable dreams: 'What a wonderful dream I had,/ the dictator will stretch his bones after/ sleeping for six years while they made preparations/ for war,' a state to which is added another form, that of the grotesque: 'the various forms of the stupid,' which often cause disasters, confronted with which 'on the scholarly professor's face/ there appeared a kind of hesitancy and fear,' before he gloomily says, 'So what?' Then, in *Masks*, he observes some of the world's facets also in a kind of impotent amazement: 'Not even this was what it seemed,' followed by the devastating conclusion: 'Is everything otherwise?' Disaster, unbelievably, will be followed by revival, trust: 'The crows have come, are here. I confess/ that I'm glad,' particularly given that

soon snow will smother all, bringing with it horizons of innocence. This is a seal of complete sensitivity that we also notice in the poems of the final section of the collection, *Divine Poetics*, now the sensibility of joy at returning home, when he feels 'The touch of the wings of the bird before me,' with it remaining uncertain whether 'the creator' 'really moulded him' or else 'I have long sensed/ that you do not exist. I think you did/ well to drive us away,' the apocalypse being nonetheless nothing but 'a passing darkness.'

Nor could it be otherwise: Markó Béla cultivates the theme of creation by predilection, the theme of the birth of poetry and the substantial as a necessity even when they move among small things, as the pathos of creation is unfailingly aroused by an eventual memory 'to take us back to where/ we still try to do battle with the unknown', often invoking a God who now exists, now does not, since 'poetry has need of an unknown,/ and God easily provides us with it./ Such as the song of the blackbird.'

Markó Béla's collection *Whose Am I?* is a book to pick up and read in the evening, while sitting comfortably in an armchair, because it will take you on a journey into a life full of occurrences that are seemingly your own, events temporarily forgotten, but which demand their right to be remembered, so that as you read, you will at intervals exclaim: *Aha, so that is the man. Now I know whose I am.*

DORIN ȘTEFĂNESCU

Heart and Words

IT WAS NO ACCIDENT THAT I CHOSE THIS PARTICULAR title, which repeats a line from a poem, for these notes in the margins of Mircea Petean's collection *The Poems of Ana* (Limes, 2020). Not because the word is spoken with the heart, comes from the heart, as they say, so much as because it is the heart, as it belongs to the heart that speaks words and writes the poem. Let us first of all note that the word on the page is more than that which is spoken in order to be heard, since 'the word is not uttered—/ it comes into being'; which means that the mode of its emergence does not primarily relate to its spoken nature, but rather to its coming into being, to the newness that it brings to light. And the word takes on being just as light does from its own coming into view, it gives of itself in the world of the poem, the best of possible worlds, since it is the only one in which it can be born, for only here is it genuinely at home.

The poetry of Mircea Petean is a celebration of the word which, in taking on being, is poured out into the welcoming content of the poem, it finds the riverbed of utterance, it has being and it creates. And if sometimes only 'the ash of words on the tongue' is felt, that which cannot be uttered is a testimony not of the defunct word, but of the transient and consuming word, which leaves behind it the *trace* of its having burned up. 'I would speak of traces,' says the poet, as if that which is given to be spoken depended on wakeful confession, as if it might continue to speak even in the erasure of any power of naming. What is subtle in these poems is the frequent gliding from the aforementioned celebration, that of the birth of the word, to officiation of a ritual of falling silent, even of melting into that which cannot be said. But is not this the very purpose of poetry, to leave more unsaid than said, to 'speak of a certain ending,' to name so much that it gives way to the trace, the aftermath?

The word is captured between these two instances thereof, between the source and outpouring, beginning and end of the potential to be. But it is not an end that brings to a close, unlike the ordinary word, which is brought to a close and perishes in the saying. The living word of the poem continues to speak even after all the things in the world have fallen silent, or even then above all, in the absolute vacuity and eclipse of all mundane meanings. What, for example, does it mean that 'words with light steps/ arrange for breath its vicinity' or that 'like a hand in sleep moves the word'? Do they not bear such witness to the *life* of a word that is spoken discreetly, barely audibly, in the

rhythm of breath that is likewise unheard, of sleep rocked by an unseen hand? In the poem, everything is born and ends under the sign of a word that speaks in passing, bringing to light images in motion, snatches of sound. Or rather fragile discontinuities, broken articulations, fractures of language, which paradoxically are what lend such poems their strength of expression.

The word of the heart, which is *cordial*, emerges from the un-word of those that do not come to be spoken before ending in the un-word that bears its trace, the living presence as foundation of the poem. In this fruitful place, everything speaks, is transformed into speech, takes being in the thing that speaks its word: 'beneath our very eyes the forest/ […]/ is metamorphosed into word,' the fruit of the rain mellows 'in the light of that word', all things are placed 'beneath the eaves of that word', 'beneath the Δ-shaped roof of that word.' A place provided for dwelling, since only by sojourning here does the understanding come upon meaning, *over*seen by the word's nimbus of light, by the arch of the mystical *delta* that closes off its horizon. Here, indeed, all things become volatile, light, winged words, unburdened by gravity, freed from 'the mounds of words' fabricated to be communicated. We witness a miraculous transformation that gives meaning to creation: 'the words were made bees in flight,' as if that which is said aspires to far more than saying itself would make it. In the vortex of this transformation, the word is emptied into the heights that absorb its honey.

Among things small and humble, only the heart represents the foundation for growth and flight. Poetic creation here places

meaning in the light, the never abolished meaning of things seemingly insignificant, the *margin's* virtue of laying a beginning. In the poetry of Mircea Petean we cannot speak of marginality as a shadowed field of being, as a decentred being of things. The margin speaks through itself, for it is there that the genuinely poetic word takes shelter. Not in the very nucleus of full utterance is its dwelling place, in the fullest sense of the things already spoken, but in the margin of saying, which rests between unspoken and spoken, as if in an already indicative pre-saying, in the oblique sense of the utterly empty. Thence, from its original forewarning ('it is not the word in itself that is colossal but what portends it'), does the word begin to resound, 'it calls from that margin', 'from beyond the margin of margins.' And then the margin speaks only its emptiness, its *present* absence, therefore 'a full absence' of the freedom of the possible.

A poetry of the *possible*: this seems to us to be the fruit of Mircea Petean's poetry. Is it too little? But does not the unseen foundation of all horizons, the bundle from which split away roads towards every horizon, reside precisely in the possible? And what if 'the core is nowhere,/ only the margin remains', and 'things are sometimes only surfaces/ that vanish'? Welling up through all things, from the margin of the unseen world, that which shows itself in the word that it says is the only truly important thing: 'what is seen is a bead of dew.' That and nothing more. Hence, from this almost nothing comes to light everything, a *far more* than we might say or see. All that comes to light herefrom, all that follows as a trace of the word, is the

splendour that is radiated by the light of the heart: 'the light in your eyes/ claimed origin from the light of the world's roots'. Redefining the Cartesian apothegm, love gathers together ('you are therefore I am'), it binds within a single light all things seen to their unseen foundation.

'A submerged image' through which is seen that which otherwise is not given to be seen: 'the smile in the corner of the forgotten mouth/ like a living butterfly.' Everything is alive, as I said, in these poems of the heart, and precisely because they are manifestations of the alive, they are identical to the life that the word cannot utter to its very depths, 'the ultimate meaning is elusive.' The purpose of poetry is to produce the beginning, not the end; with its world, all things begin, and the word—even if it ends at a given point—cannot utter the end itself. Nor would it be desirable; the poem remains forever open, the last always appears on the face of the first, in an endless beginning. What lends singularity—and absolute originality—to the discourse of Mircea Petean is utterance in fulgurant movement, pulsating to the rhythm of the heart that animates it. Poems of love? Without a doubt, but also, through them, poems of the life that erupts 'like a solar god just emerged from the shell of the word.' More than that which is seen in the light of the heart that beats in the word we cannot say. But here we are not those that see, 'only the gods/ perhaps/ keeping us in view.'

ION BUZAȘI

A Monograph on a Teacher from Blaj[1]

(a literary restitution)

A WRITER VERY POPULAR IN TRANSYLVANIA IN THE first half of the twentieth century, Alexandru Lupeanu-Melin is today a forgotten writer. This is due to the fact that he is a writer from a period for which more recent generations have only an abstract respect, without affective participation. He has

1 Claudia Magda László, *Alexandru Lupeanu-Melin – un mentor cultural al neamului*, Editura Buna Vestire, Blaj, 2024.

been called a 'folk writer', a 'describer of Blaj', but the author of the recent monograph on him goes one better by naming him a cultural mentor. Many will be surprised at such a label and will experience a feeling of doubt, since a mentor is a guide, a counsellor. Is this not going too far for a writer consigned to oblivion? But the monograph by Claudia Magda László, thanks to its wealth of information, its exhaustive account of the career of the industrious teacher from Blaj, provides arguments for this title being fully warranted in relation to the age in which he lived. For, after an introduction that lays out the social and political context, there follows a detailed biography strictly connected to rich and fruitful socio-cultural achievements.

His childhood and education are described, from primary school in the village of Ciuci (near Luduș) to university in Budapest and Cluj. While still a student, he engaged in writing articles for a series of newspapers and magazines 'in the vortex of the national struggle.' He was one of the intellectuals most active in the preparations for the Astra jubilee of 1911, celebrated in Blaj. And naturally, as an extension of this, he took part in preparations for the Union of 1918, being, alongside Alexandru Ciura, the chronicler of the grandest event in our history. He was a remarkable journalist of the people, editing a supplement of *Unirea*, the old Blaj newspaper, which by its very title showed to whom it was addressed, titled 'The Unification of the People', and the peasants of Tîrnave even composed a folk poem emphasising the fact that in 'old Blaj' there was a newspaper 'That just for us does plead,/ Those who suffer want and need.'

His social and cultural activity encompassed a remarkable didactic dimension, and he was one of the most brilliant lycée teachers and headmasters in Blaj. But I think that no position brought him greater satisfaction than that of director of the Blaj Central Archdiocese Library, which held veritable treasures of the Romanian language, some of them unique. Lupeanu-Melin loved them with a possessive, individualistic love that irritated some. Pavel Dan, a teacher in Blaj in the period from 1932 to 1937 penned a satirical portrait of this individualism in administering Blaj's literary treasures. As director of the Central Library, he wrote a series of pamphlets and pamphlets in which he introduced unfamiliar aspects of Blaj's cultural heritage: *Guide to Blaj* (1922), *Historic Blaj in Icons* (1924), *What is to be Seen in Blaj?* (1926), *Woodcuts from Blaj* (1929), *Blaj* (1930), *The Soul of Blaj (1931)*, *Blaj and its Library* (1932), *The Blaj Central Library* (1932), and others. None of the teachers of 'the little Rome' wrote more about Blaj than he, portraying it in its multiple religious, historical and cultural guises. The articles, scattered among a host of newspapers and magazines and in numerous brochures bear witness to Lupeanu-Melin's great love for the city 'whence rose the sun of Romanianism.'

Among his writings, *Evocations of Life in Blaj* (1937) occupies a central place. Published in the year of his death, it is also his swansong, as well as a '*finis coronat opus*.' For Blaj, 1937 marked the two-hundredth anniversary of when Vlădica Innocentius Micu 'dismounted' here and founded this city of Romanian faith and strength. Besides a jubilee issue of *Cultura Creștină*

magazine, featuring remarkable studies and articles, three evocative books were published on the occasion: *Lycée Pupil of Old* by Ion Agârbiceanu, *The Caravans of Transylvania* by Septimiu Popa, and *Evocations of Blaj Life* by Alexandru Lupeanu-Melin.

Descriptions of and eulogies to Blaj could be found before this in the memoirs and school speeches of Timotei Cipariu, in and the memoirs of Ion Bianu, while Ion Rațiu, in his *Our Teachers*, had attempted a biographical bibliography of writers from Blaj. What was new in Lupeanu-Melin's book was a series of chronological descriptions that formed a historical novel of Blaj at important moments in the life of the city. The originality of the book was well intuited by Radu Brateș, a poet and himself, a few years later, the author of a book titled *Aspects of Life in Blaj*: 'Alexandru Lupeanu-Melin was in love with Blaj. From love he proceeded to research the history of Blaj, its people, its spiritual life. And if his artistic chronicle of choicest feeling was pleasing, it was precisely for the warmth that he put into the moments of great national upheaval in Blaj and in his evocation of its legendary figures… Lupeanu-Melin was not a historian, but a poet. He was not a discoverer of documents and a critical interpreter of data, but a moving describer of a world that he viewed in its beautiful aspects, and where he found shade he shone there the light of his soul.'

Lupeanu-Melin's descriptions are an invitation to discover a tone which, thanks to its church, school, teachers and pupils, thanks to the history it forged, thanks to its places

and monuments, has taken on almost symbolic dimensions. The book as a whole is a gateway to knowledge of all these, which as a reader you listen to in enchantment, because the writer, as one of his heroes says, 'knows how to tell a tale and to illumine events, people and places of old like no other.'

The final pages, furnished with an abundance of references from the press, describe the Blaj bookman's years of suffering and illness and his death. After this series of episodes in the biography of a writer who is not of the first rank, his labelling as a cultural mentor is shown to be appropriate precisely thanks to the rich palette of his career. Written objectively, without exaggerated praise, which would have been unconvincing, the monograph is a 'literary restitution' of a writer viewed in the wholeness of his life and career.

MIRCEA POPA

The Faces of Poetry

THE RISE TO POETIC PROMINENCE AND THE LITERARY development of Horia Bădescu are closely connected to the Cluj *Equinox* group. The establishment of the Cluj student magazine was a brilliant, beneficent idea, which had as its immediate effect the creation of that framework for emulation and public initiative required by every ambitious poetic construct. The emergence of a literary magazine in December 1968 in the elevated setting of Cluj's student community, giving the impression of ostentatious multiculturalism given its trilingual Romanian, Hungarian and German format, gave the impression of broad intellectual co-operation. The magazine's founding in that crossroads period, after the invasion of

Czechoslovakia, was in any event a huge triumph for cultural decision-makers with a word to say in the city of the Someș in that period. That providential act came as a kind of recognition of united action on the part of the intellectual masses and élites, when the Party and State leadership wished to display its solidarity and recognition of a firm position regarding Czechoslovakia and when it was considered that the time was right to loosen the ideological screw, allowing broader expression of the cultural forces of youth, providing them with the opportunity for organised and Party-controlled creative affirmation. This emancipatory act resulted in the creation of the premises and framework necessary for the promotion of creative potential among a whole generation of students, who had already provided plentiful signals that they could no longer be reduced to mere Party slogans. In Romanian universities of every type a talented and capable generation of people made itself felt, who had been liberated from the oppression of socialist realism and were eager to participate in laying the foundations of a competitive and broadly democratic culture. The first issue introduced new and courageous names, such as Eugen Uricaru, Petru Poantă, Dinu Flămând, Petru Motzan, and Marcel Constantin Runcanu, who strove to produce an issue that would be set a high standard. In the meantime, cultural officialdom decided that it was not advisable to have a magazine management consisting solely of students and appointed a number of young assistants to the editorial staff to keep a close eye on the students' imaginative flights. Assistant university literature lecturer Ion Pop was thus

appointed editor-in-chief, backed up by Ion Vartic, Marian Papahagi and Aurel Codoban. The magazine continued to be a liberal forum for ideas, publishing commentaries on Emil Cioran, Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Paul Ricoeur, and giving space to Lucian Blaga's unabridged protest against the aberrations of Mihai Beniuc, so that a connection with the tradition of the Sibiu Literary Circle was formed of itself. Horia Bădescu was among the founder members, with a significant number of his poems appearing in the new publication.

It should be said that many of the writers who developed around *Equinox* were educated young people of impressive culture, who were familiar with the latest innovative European literary movements, with the new theories of literary criticism and narratology, that many of them read in and translated from multiple languages and read the Western press, proving themselves capable of assimilating the latest influences, of confidently invoking and citing famous poems by the world's great poets, in whom they found affinities of theme and ideas, of putting forward judicious points of view, of sparingly selecting the names of those they were prepared to promote. As we have seen, many of them went on to become genuine spokespeople of Romanian literature to the major cultures of the West, with Marian Papahagi and Adrian Popescu opting for Italy, Ion Pop, Horia Bădescu and Dinu Flămând for France, Petru Motzan and William Schenk for Germany, many of them later swelling the ranks of the exiles and émigrés, with their future development being closely bound to the literatures of those countries.

As regards Horia Bădescu, he remained deeply attached and connected to Romanian culture and literature, even if he played an important part in the Francophone world. From his very first collections, his poetry displayed multiple features in common and affinities with a number of literary directions, so that, as was proven by its later development, it reveals obvious complexities and innovative aspects, firmly opting for thematic reference points and lyrical semblances that complement and mutually support each other. The general defining feature is that he never swerved from the fertile direction of a musical poetry based on germinative kernels of great radiant strength, with highly organised metaphors and modern-style compositional structure. His poetry is seductive for the poetic language it employs, the harmony of its poetic structures, its rich and varied semantics, capable of conveying metaphorical energy and wielding surprising rhymes. The poetry of Horia Bădescu is warm and enveloping, like a scarf in which you wrap yourself to protect against the elements. His fluency employs a genuine art of seduction, he is able to conquer you with the hymn-like, initiatory solemnity of his lines, their melodic articulation, their attractive suggestiveness. Pairings of words, associations between concrete and abstract, the host of inner harmonies, the newness of the imagery, the suggestive power of the epithets, the surprising comparisons, the transcendence of the material world through the introduction of the cosmogonic, the striking symbolism, the full communion with the traditional, classical line of descent from Eminescu to Arghezi and Blaga—all of

these make Horia Bădescu's poetry an island of boldness and refinement. His poems prove to be constructed with great linguistic exigency, they are vehicles for an original poetic timbre, stimulating human sentimentality through the cadenced rhythm of their ideas, through their mysterious summons to the boundless. Spreading the wings of speech wide, his poetry is a vehicle for a mysterious inner drama, which is transformed into a seductive hymn-like utterance, with obvious Orphic implications, which turn his poetry into a troubling tool for knowledge and incantation. Arguing for the natural setting of the human being to be restored to health, for the bounded to be overstepped, he plunges into a cosmological visionary state that holds the human being prisoner in a snow-filled sky of illumined angels that embrace the profligacy of the blizzard and overwhelming snows, threatening the end of the world, its burial in the translucent nest of purifying ice. The obsession with snow, a metaphor of bodily and spiritual candour and cleanliness, lifts the shroud of the unknown from the image of the destructive cataclysm: 'Listen to how the snow is coming!/ Somebody in heaven is heaving at the wheels of the clouds./ A flour of angels is falling,/ their bodies are falling, ripped apart/ in the abattoirs of purity./ Listen to how the snow is coming!/ Listen to how it comes!/ Look how it presses against our lips/ its shining cleaver!'

The poetry of Horia Bădescu reveals multiple poetic registers, multiple recurring expressions whereby he conveys a rich content of experiences and sentiments, ennobled according to laws proper to an 'I' always in search of the ultimate wording.

The games played by his poetry can be found on multiple levels and within multiple existential dimensions. A first dimension would be the sacral, another, the harmonised cosmogonic visionary state, another still, essential from the ideatic standpoint, man's initiatory journey in the universe, which has to do with the memory of being and the books of life. Another game seeks an answer to the solemn side of existence by undermining it through the ludic and parodic register. All these show the diversity of poetic formats accessed and the rebuilding of the world's unity as a territory of incantations and poetic structures capable of responding to the complexity of the world in which the human being moves, understood as an existential/lyrical katabasis of great expressive potential. A critical approach of great constancy and coherence will consequently be required in order to reveal all of these to the reader and to familiarise him with Horia Bădescu's conception of poetry, as contained in personalised rules and procedures, in such a way that we will be able to reconstruct a supple and coherent organic universe, aimed at deciphering its intimate relationship with everyday experience and metaphysical experience, as part of a dual hermeneutic and compositional approach. In this way, we will be able to be attentive to the determining factor that lies between tradition and innovation, between attachment to the archaic and the immanence of the new. A poet both profound and modern, fully in control of poetic means of great refinement, Horia Bădescu displays in his poetry natural openness to the existential absolute, distilled in the multiple alembics of a polyvalent lyricism.

The first thing to be observed about Horia Bădescu's poetic tools is the presence of multiple levels of form in the existential structure of this creative act. The first level is that of the ballad and the sonnet. The second is connected with his attempt to fill a certain number of folk-derived lyrical forms with new material, which corresponds with his 'I' in its territorial and temporal expansion. This second experimental level has resulted in further enrichment in terms of expression and poetic vision through the incorporation of the folk lament, curse, and song of grief and yearning into new lyrical structures, which demonstrate their effectiveness and sensibility through a visible renewal of material, careful to reproduce using specific means an ancient ethnic substratum with regard to the specific collective mentality of the folk, which delights through its learned strategies and combinations, the lyrical resonances of a sensibility captivating in its rituality. By preserving the inner sound of such forms, Horia Bădescu proves yet again, after the great finesse of his exegesis of the ballad *Master Manole*, that he is able to appreciate Romanian folk poetry to the highest degree and that its ideatic and formal depth are capable of engaging in a pertinent dialogue between rural and urban, between oral and written, in order to stimulate new hypostases of value. Respect for fixed forms has ultimately led him to introduce to Romanian literature a new species of lyrical song named the 'ronset', as the fullest mode of his own lyrical, verbal and compositional expressivity.

In respect of notional and conceptual forms of thought, the movement from the level of form becomes extremely

perceptible at the upper level of visionary-type correspondences, contemplatively, of imaginative-notional repercussions, which determine phased changes of valoric permutations. We progressively witness changes in nuance and intimacy, from the most tangible concreteness to stylised abstraction, thereby overlaying broad surface areas of poetic substance with a potentiated dissemination. Lyrical moods are the immediate consequence of the expressivity of the lyric 'I' at odds with time and space, with diurnal motion, with changes in the terrestrial. From the youthful ecstasy of fusion with nature, he also attains the crepuscular zone of the ludic and tragic, as well as the sacral ecstasy of Orphic poetry. The dominant of thought, or the central figure of the creative spirit, is the sacral aspiration of the poetics of being, characterised by incorporating the celestial of the divine being. The formal level is answered by a conceptual level, of the same poetic sign and power, marking not stagnation, but the ascension of sentiment and the creative flux towards a fusion with the celestial. The presence of this bracing and ascendant sentiment augments the amplitude of the formal ambitus, providing it with new points of stability and emergence. The cosmic climb, ascent, aspiration ensures conquest of a new spatiality towards which it constantly tends: 'In the suspicion of a path/ resides the birth of the road./ The suspicion/ is the watchfulness of self-discovery;// watchfulness is the wait for a thing/ long surmised./ The path of the thing/ in its watchfulness is suspected./ Only the paths of the Lord/ are unsuspected;/ straight are they/ in their watchfulness just and straight.'

In such a context, it is the poem itself that incorporates the memory of the road, the permanent aspiration to the light of wisdom, even if the allotted portion taken with the self is that of the ancestors, it cannot avoid the danger of death: 'The poem is itself a road. The road of the poem/ is the poem itself. Along the road of the poem. It is not the poem that/ travels; along the road of the poem/ wanders the dust/ from the soles of death.'

The aspiration to the absolute, to boundlessness, holds the structure of the poem within a trophic chain of sentiments and ideas that crystallise in the doctrine of the sacral, which it never loses sight of, declaring the fact that 'Forgotten is the road to Paradise,' but its desire shows itself to be grounded in the asceticism for which it yearns: 'Arrange, O Lord, the world as we wished!' so that from this desired collaboration the desired joy of fulfilment might be able to be born: 'Ah, the holy joy of being!/ Faces turned to the setting sun,/ bathed in a nameless light/ we are every day enriched.'

In this favourable climate, the poet projects and accredits diaphanous lyrical moods, enveloped in a blessed hieratic condition, in an anticipated ascension, for the fitting embrace of planetary worlds, suffused with the living and dynamic movement of the seasons, the successive transition from the solar to the autumnal, from the efficient joy of the state of celestial fusion to the tension inculcated by aggressive threats, which give rise to oppressive sentiments that forbode lethargic waning, translated as de-structuration and decline of sentiment, as restriction of vital expansion to the melancholy, depressive register of a

nature under siege, of its embarking upon the chill of autumn, when decay is unleashed, along with the melancholy presentiment of the confrontation with a denuded, empty landscape. The threat of winter cold, the coming of snows and blizzard, creates a mood of fear, anxiety, apocalypse. Leaving the captive zone can be achieved through imprecation, curses, a compensatory mode of speech, which rebels and protests against the smallness of the imposturous and delinquent pecuniary world of the now. It is the moment when his poetry wields its vituperative power to attack the machinery of a defective politics, an icon of a tragic immorality. The road travelled is one-way, and social and moral satire descend with corrosive force into the petty world of darkened horizons, devoid of the guidance of godhood, and precisely for this reason subject to perdition, which engender an acute feeling of despair: 'Lord, there is no road to be seen!/ There is no more tomorrow, no now;/ there is nobody left who might come./ Only thorn grows in the flesh,/ the skin of speech flowers in ash;/ to say it, who knows how?/ There is nobody left who might come./ Dust remains to you for a neighbour,/ the mouth of the day moulders,/ nobody now knows what you were,/ there is nobody left who might come./ The blood grows cold in the veins./ Lord, darkness there is in me!'

The shifts from humour and joy to sorrow multiply, the face of poetry clouds over, sentiment fades into mist, we reach the end of the road, where only the voice of the poet pierces time and space, achieving the high notes of a murmuring spring

or pond suffocated by the stagnant, dirty air of a revolution in history. The poetry of Horia Bădescu takes note of all this maculature of the contemporary human spirit, vitiated by the guilt of people who have forgotten God and His commandments. At the end of his poetic road wait the religion of love and boundless faith in the star of Good. His poetry is an essential guide for regaining faith and forgiveness. For without forgiveness, hope cannot exist.

MARCEL VIȘA

Silvan Th. Stâncel, *The Romantic Android*

Silvan stâncel's collection of poems *The Romantic Android*, published this year by Editura Școala Ardeleană, has an afterword by leading literary critic Răzvan Voncu and a cover illustration by none other than Katia Stâncel! On the back cover, we find praise from Matei Vișniec and Răzvan Voncu. The android, designed to be 'immortal and cold', devoid of emotion, begins to discover the beauty and complexity of human love, interacting with people, learning from

them. In the midst of the conflict between his programmed rationality and his desire to feel and to love, the character finds voice in Silvan Stâncel's collection. I don't know whether the android steps inside the skin of the poet or whether the poet steps inside the latex of the android, but what is for sure is that the two entities fuse together to produce a poetic cyborg who declaims as follows: 'I've externalised memory/ in a hard disk,/ my belly in a fridge/ my future in a child/ my walk in a car/ my feeling in an audience/ my thoughts in a book/ my solitude in friendship/ god in deeds/ myself in a name/ my body in the soil.' Throughout the collection, *The Romantic Android* is a fascinating poetic journey through the inner world of man and machine, an exploration of beauty seen through a bionic and a human eye, of sadness, love, and loneliness. The work is a bridge between soul and technology, with the title in itself suggesting a fascinating juxtaposition between the concepts of the human and the artificial. In his poems, Silvan himself becomes a son of technology and reason, but who possesses a heart and a deep desire to be loved, a desire that paradoxically emerges precisely from the poems that treat the subject with irony, a talented use of reverse psychology. In style, the whole collection is written in a language direct and evocative, with simple line structure, which emphasises the emotional intensity of the message. Frequently his poetry seems to tackle themes connected with 'inner emptiness', emotional exhaustion, and lack of any meaning to life, for example, in the lines: 'I am the only one left/ completely empty/ and now I listen to/ louis amstrong// like a bare wall/

without any graffiti/ without feeling/ drained/ ragged inside/ exhausted// not even struggle/ or war/ have any meaning now' Feelings of disappointment and isolation are obvious, pointing to a low-frequency state of mind, to introspection and sickly melancholy. Listening to Louis Armstrong suggests an attempt to find consolation in music, a temporary refuge, but it is not enough to heal the poet's inner wounds, and the comparison with a bare wall, without graffiti, indicates an emotional void that causes him an acute breakdown of creativity. In the poem *chocolate-coated corn puffs*, which goes like this: 'if the priest had/ a beautiful voice/ do you think you'd love/ god?// if the voice of the singer/ on the radio/ were pleasing/ do you think you'd love/ music?// if the one speaking romanian/ were to your liking/ do you think you'd love/ this country?// if the politician// made your life easier/ do you think you'd love/ politics?' the poet employs rhetorical questions to highlight the superficiality of the way in which people form their convictions. Each verse tackles a different side of life—religion, music, patriotism, politics—in order to bring out the theme more strongly. What enhances the poem's impact is the repetitive structure and critical, provocative tone, aspects that make readers examine their own perceptions. Through these poems, Silvan encourages us to reflect more often on our convictions, on their sources, and to question more often external and superficial influences, while in the above poem, he also comes up with a solution, presented in the final lines: 'abandon/ break away/ unclothed/ naked.' Still on the subject of the religious and Silvan's scepticism and irony—in one

of our conversations I once even told him that I liked the overflowing sincerity he shows in real life, and which here can also be found in his poetry—he views the miniature icon as 'a banknote that peddles happiness'. It sounds blasphemously good, blasphemously beautiful, I would say. And also true! In the love poems, which are not lacking, and even take up quite a lot of space in the pages of this collection, which is not called *The Romantic Android* for nothing, Silvan explores themes linked to hypocrisy, acceptable lies, and even takes an X-ray of relationships based on appearances and diplomacy. He highlights how the little dissimulations and untruths can be accepted both in society and within a couple, particularly within a couple, where such artifices lend the relationship a kind of vitality, even a subtle erotic note. And on the subject of perpetuating a social game of politeness and hypocrisy, we inevitably come to the poem *dear friend*, where Silvan, with his overflowing sincerity (yet again), recognises his own act of betrayal, his doubts, the fact that he was glad at a friend's failures, but couldn't bear his successes, and did so consummately performing what he calls 'the theatre of our friendship'. 'hey!/ it's great to see you!/ how are you?/ everything fine?/ splendid!/ I heard!/ congratulations!/ I really glad for you!/ if you need anything just say!/ of course!/ I'll help you!/ my pleasure!// I betrayed you/ so many times/ in my thoughts/ in my solitude/ without telling you/ I doubted you/ I distanced myself/ I came back as if nothing had happened/ I lied to you/ I discreetly rejoiced in your failures/ I pretended to be sorry/ I couldn't stand your successes/ I felt

guilty and small/ I always played the part to perfection/ the theatre of our friendship.' And this is how the android is revealed to us as human, and this collection is actually about how the human side determines the machinery, this cyborg riddled with sentiments. Finally, I would like to draw your attention to some lines that I very much liked: 'the artist commits suicide/ assisted/ for all to see/ encouraged/ paid even/ he leaves his notes// with every new work/ he creates.'

So, in this second collection of poems, Silvan Stâncel offers us a complex meditation on identity and humanity. In his poems, relating to the title, Silvan suggests that in the face of technological advances and the trend towards our depersonalisation, romanticism remains a vital force for the survival of the human race, but he also reminds us that sincerity, regardless of how painful it might sometimes be, is and must remain the fuel for our evolution.

MONICA GROSU

Thirty Years of Splits and Divergencies in Literary Criticism

A CRITICAL LOOK BACK AT THE THIRTY YEARS SINCE the fall of communism is tantamount to a reassessment of value and a proposed systematisation of the relevant works in the field. An act of clarification and contextualisation, the work of a literary critic and historian presupposes not only an active memory and reflexive outlook on the past, but also a self-imposed distance or, even more so, a willingness to make a selection in accordance with George Călinescu's definition: 'even if he is writing about a book published last week, the literary

critic by vocation permanently has in mind the *circle of values* and historical scale of the whole of literature.'

Romanian Critics of Today, (Editura Școala Ardeleană, Cluj, 2020), the natural extension of *Romanian Poets Today*, volume 1 (2019), proposes, supported by fitting arguments, a panoramic survey of authors who have published significant studies and research in the relatively recent period: critics, literary historians, scholars of comparative literature, theorists, essayists. The author, Răzvan Voncu, manages to assemble this picture of a Romanian literary criticism that has undergone 'thirty years of splits and divergencies' by employing an appropriate tone and moderation in his organisation and selection of his profiles of critics: '*grosso modo*, those authors that are still relevant thanks to their work and/or current activity.' Despite all this, the enterprise will not be at all easy due to divergent developments within the discipline.

With his accumulated experience, Răzvan Voncu is an authority in the field of current literary criticism, who, nonetheless, does not forget the reader in his critical discourse, donning the garb of elegance and good taste. A correct judgement, liberated from complacencies and uttered in a lucid voice and with edifying strength, cannot but cast a welcome light at a time of great confusion in the values of the aesthetic. In this sense, the studies and research published by Răzvan Voncu come as a testament to a constant preoccupation with the reception of the literary work in Romania: *Contemporary Literary Sequences* (2 vols., 2001, 2nd edition, 2010), *Mediaeval Horizons* (2003), *On Preda*

(2003), *Critical Essays* (2005), *The Confessional Text in Old Romanian Literature* (2006), *Night Fragments* (2008), *Contemporary Literary Sequences. A Panorama of the 1990s* (2009), *A Decade of Romanian Literature. 1998-2008* (2009), *Ten Literary Studies* (2010), *The Labyrinth of Confession. Self-Referential Strategies in Mediaeval Romanian Literature* (2012), *A Literary History of Wine in Romania* (2013), *Romanian Poets Today,* Vol. 1 (2015, 2nd edition, 2019), *The Architecture of Memory. Studies in Classical and Contemporary Literary History* (2016), *Jewish Writers in Romanian Culture* (2020), *Reading the Classics* (2021).

Within the category of critics, Răzvan Voncu includes first of all Nicolae Manolescu, 'the greatest post-war literary reviewer', appreciating 'the huge effort of his critical work', but putting forward a series of ideas regarding the part played by such a survey as *The Critical History of Romanian Literature* since its first publication, as well as the relationship between literary criticism and history. In a year when leading critical voices passed away (Nicolae Manolescu, Alex Ștefănescu, Dan Cristea, all of them included in the first chapter of the book), it becomes all the more moving to return to certain of their books, be it even in the tone of the memoir, and where 'stories about writers' are told, critical engagement is lent a different dimension through a commemorative viewpoint.

In addition, Răzvan Voncu inserts into the portrait gallery scenes and events (viewed from the inside), which take as their protagonist the one who dedicates his time to reading their contemporaries' books. For example, of Gabriel Dimisianu

he says: 'I watch him, week after week—with rare absences caused only by inclement weather conditions—seated at his desk in the editors' office of *România Literară*, where he has likewise officiated for many decades. Always calm, always affable, he brings to us younger colleagues a healthy dose of critical scepticism. Ultimately, the spectacle of literature can be deceptive. The man who for more than five decades has felt the values of Romanian literature, weighing them up without erring, knows that once the enthusiasm of encountering a good book has passed, the texts will quietly be set within the frame of literary history, in which everything becomes smaller. But there is nothing corrosive, nothing dissuasive about this scepticism: the next week, the master is back in his place, with the next book or books in front of him. Deceptive or not, the spectacle of literature remains the most beautiful thing in the world for Gabriel Dimisianu.' Such evocations also appear in the case of other authors mentioned, without denting the coherence of the critical discourse and without imperilling its effect as a survey. On the contrary, Răzvan Voncu brings interpretation down from the heights of arid preciosity to a level that is more approachable, bringing it up to date and adapting it to the new forms of reception. In this way, the critical discourse becomes charged with authenticity, with the liveliness of storytelling with and about writers. In other words, as in the case of other critics (Valeriu Cristea, for example), 'the imagination and freedom of the scrutinising eye does not affect the rigour of the proof.'

The rôle of the critic is, as is well known, also to clarify and to sift, using the sieve of value, published works. Such a thankless task was taken on by the late Alex Ștefănescu, author of a 'highly original, amusing and instructive literature textbook for beginners,' as well as 'a miniature guide to literary morality.' Such a critical gesture needs to be commemorated, since it is unique in the overall current literary picture, increasingly besieged by the sociological flaws of the present moment. Of course, in the case of each separate critic, the author of the study brings to the page achievements and examples representative of the contribution made by each of them, urging that works and studies perhaps little researched be recovered, including correspondence and memoirs that rewrite the Romanian literary phenomenon from a less rigid perspective. In the landscape of literary criticism and history above all, such texts broaden the perspective onto an internal dynamic of the evolution of literature in all its forms. 'The need to revise the image of post-war Romanian literature' has been felt by literary historians, who have identified premises and directions, have filled in the gaps, and have methodically marked out aspects that contribute to a better understanding of the works under examination. In many cases we thus enjoy a genuine spectacle of erudition and hermeneutic creativity (Eugen Simion, Nicolae Balotă, Romul Munteanu, Mircea Mihăieș et al.).

Given the limited space allocated to this review, it becomes quite difficult, if not impossible, to mention every leading figure in the area of critical and comparative literary research, authors

who have opened up new directions: in regional criticism (Cornel Ungureanu), in contemporary Bessarabian literature (Andrei Țurcanu), in literary history with its periods of creative revival (Paul Cornea, Z. Ornea, Ștefan Cazimir, Mihai Zamfir, Mircea Anghelescu, Ion Pop), in the new Romanian mediaeval literary studies (Dan Horia Mazilu), in the renaissance of interpretation (Eugen Negrici, Florin Manolescu), in the tradition of encyclopaedic comparative literature (Ovidiu Drimba), in literary theory and history (Mircea Martin), in the essay (Alexandru Paleologu, Horia-Roman Patapievici, Dan C. Mihăilescu).

In understanding 'the pedagogic dimension subjacent to criticism', in *Romanian Critics of Today* Răzvan Voncu has provided a model of exegetic discourse, in which stand out attention to the *pulse of the period* and landmark books published since the revolution, as well as significant individual contributions to the process of recalibrating criticism and the essay in Romania.

LUCIAN SCURTU

Reflexive Stage Directions

In the beginning there was Ioan Morar, then Ioan T. Morar, Biju, as he was affectionately called in the late seventies by his friends, fellow students and acquaintances, including myself, from Hall of Residence 16 at the Timişoara Student Complex. He stood out and was quickly noticed over the course of time thanks to his collections of poetry, his prose, and his journalism. We now have before us an elegant collection of poems, *When it rains I'm named differently* (Baroque Books & Arte, 2021), illustrated by Octavian Mardale and with 'aristocratic' praise from H.-R. Patapievici on the back cover and Mircea Mihăieș on the back dust-jacket flap. The first says the poetry is melancholy, that it reveals 'a disillusionment in

the face of decline, time, loss, and banishment, which rings in our ears and remains in our hearts thanks to the beauty of the poetry,' and the second, an old and constant friend of the poet's, views it overall as a poetry that succeeds in conveying 'in forms of complete transparency the complications of experience that is simultaneously spiritual and visceral.'

From the very first poem, 'I have lived just half a life,' the poet offhandedly, self-confidently reveals his complex personality, fascinated with what he has done (he loved more than the average, he has been drawn to sunrises, sunsets, the sea, the smell of hay, he has cultivated generosity, he has 'multiplied himself in moderation'), but also what he has deliberately concealed, carefully tracing the boundary between good and bad, beautiful and ugly, life and death, with logical preferences for the thinking rather than the 'niggling' reed.

He admits to his weaknesses, as if before a court of law, which he compares with 'scars/ with which I was born,' feigning immunity to others' suffering, but reproaching himself that 'I loved when I ought to have scorned,' while the future takes shape for him alchemically in the (im)probable athanor of bodily matter interpenetrating the bookish matter of transcendence ('let my ashes be mingled/ with the ashes of my books'). Split into multiple identities, he maps and sounds each separately, so that, like a jigsaw puzzle, the individual pieces, having been externalised, reveal the whole, i.e., the individual marked by the dynamic of images, things, ephemera, phantasms from his immediate vicinity, amplifying and dissipating into the void the alterities

that he adopts or invents. Possessed of a sense of humour, Biju contemplates his passage through this world with the talkative wisdom of a thaumaturge, analysing ('The world/ doesn't look/ the same/ after/ I've described it'), comparing ('I invented comparisons/ so as not to die alone'), reflecting ('After all we were created/ that we might grow old/ that we might trace the line in the palm to the end'), now making a pact with ingrate fate, now bridling against slippery eternity, convinced that every word/ deed, no matter how insignificant, might give rise to meditative moods with wide-ranging ontological and ontic ramifications.

The poetic 'I' drills a borehole down into family and multi-ethnic genealogy, distancing itself from the present in a rather Pharisaic way, only in the end to conclude à la Rimbaud, 'The other is I', or, in rainy weather, 'I am named differently', which denotes splitting in twain as the defining feature of his way of being and thinking. The deliberate use of medical imagery in poems such as *The Guinea Pig* and *Transplant* ('I have aged in one lifetime/ as much as the others in all the laboratories put together', 'In the cardiology clinic/ tethered to the apparatus', 'I hear the helicopter/ atop the building/ the refrigerated cabinet dashing along corridors', 'an X-ray read in haste') accentuates the author's proclivity for teratology, placing himself in direct connection, to the point of identification ('I lived like a guinea pig/ which lived liked me'), with the one subjected to therapies that do not so much heal as reveal antinomies, synaesthesia, and hidden existential meanings. Futility, the void, *Hesitation*, *Pallor* are as many ingredients that condiment a simmering

emotional tumult, painstakingly filtered through the painstaking sieve of the confessing subject, the one who sees, feels, hears, meditates on the surgically dissected human condition in order to be able to project onscreen his endurance to the multitude of doubts, temptations, failures, illusions.

Biju is a (self-)ironising nostalgic parenthetically concealed beneath the mask of multiple questions ('Was my soul ever anything else?') and everyday fears ('our fears take it in turns to sleep'), which undermine his pallid optimism and a self-confidence subjected to the amplifying pressures of states of doubt, which are as many needs of a convulsive existence, but also writerly or bookish. This is why the deliberate fragmentariness of the texts carries the reader through the misty labyrinths of the soul's interiors ('My soul was never anything other/ than my soul'), less to understand their abyssal depths than to intuit their propensity for astonishment and the gnomic ('Not all apocalypses have grandeur'—a revealing line), elsewhere for desolation and dramatism, but also, more seldom, for enchantment and serenity. The use of dialogic monologue certifies the validation of answers that sooner give rise to uncertainties than unconvincing truths, all of them haloed by an unsparing property: *seriousness*. For Ioan T. Morar is a serious poet in all that he thinks, experiences, writes, dreams, although sometimes he deftly simulates the opposite, nimbly slaloming among momentary ludic scenarios or the percussive phantasms of a lifetime, laden with significance and equivocal meanings, augmenting their enigmas, engrams and nebulas: 'You won't find

soil moister/ than my heart/ living soil/ in which I have buried/ all that I was/ and/ likewise/ all that I was unable to be/ (they burned together)./ Of this it was written:/ I am a clay tablet/ that forgets my name/ a chernozem of sentiments/ a slime in which I was mirrored/ with haughty pride/ 'soil with a memory'/ they told me./ In my blood's swamp/ like blind reeds will/ grow regrets/ like vague lily pads/ they will flicker/ even the lilies/ later sold for wine/ I will live awhile yet/ confined in a cheap vase/ full of tired darkness/ my heart will weep/ it is/ my heart that writes:/ 'moist soil/ in which is buried/ a soil even moister' (*Soil to soil*).

The past is not an extension of the confessor, but is monolithically identified with him (bluntly stated: 'I am the past'), compared ('I write therefore I compare myself') with various and unexpected *objects* (a train, a sparrow, a tear, a shop, a blood vessel), but especially with the ivy that descends to its own seedbed, both a terminus and a habitat of rebirth and glorification of eruptions with wide-ranging emotional-affective effects: 'then I experienced the glory of the first caress'. The adopted community is the tribe with its illusory idols, whose topos is the savannah and the jungle whose sounds are dominated by the lion roars so dear to the author ('His roar makes history shudder', 'his roar alone travels through the jungle', 'the lion's roar was once a torch', 'in my heart/ they will find a lion's roar', 'his roar/ will return in the night'), which seem to convey sibylline messages from a misty pre-mankind and in a language decoded by the poet alone, who lends them their own interpretations

and meanings. But in the end, he trenchantly recognises, 'the truth is a lion/ left alone in the dark', but also, 'in my heart they will find a lion's roar' or 'it will be a lion's roar'.

Although his personality is defined by joviality, in his poetry Biju loudly proclaims his solitariness, he is drawn like a moth to the source of light, more so to dusk, twilight and darkness, augmenting the intensity of experience and precipitating the world's disenchantment, always interested in what cannot be seen and less in what can be seen: 'I have inherited a darkness', 'and darkness was my witness', 'a transfusion of darkness', 'a tender darkness', 'Darkness is the light's past', 'a pipe through which the darkness moved', 'they spread the darkness'.

Refuge in the temple remains the opportunity to relate to a deity diffuse but omnipresent in his mind, invoked reservedly, but credibly, confirming the religious backdrop of this poem (also grasped by H.-R. Patapievici in his comment): 'Like a whirling dervish who/ screws himself into his own faith/ I have erased all that I have written/ that I might overcome my pride./ I return to the temple now housed/ in a ruin/ where the stone that I worshipped/ thought that my knees/ were immortal.'

Nevertheless, the gods that were once worshipped seem in time to become more ordinary, more human ('a pale god', 'an impoverished god', 'a god without portfolio', 'Like a bleeding god'), some of them 'dethroned' from their ancestral homes ('We close the temples/ the gods leave', 'the gods of comparison are dead'), having become pointless now that humans, in the

face of finitude, no longer expect salvation, not even a mimetic salvation, from the claws of impenitence or thanatophobia.

In love with the past, the author problematises escapism directed at the Hellenistic age (the poem *Alexander*) or creates bridges between realms laden with history and myth (the Ancient East), where he feels in his element, sometimes in ecstasy among ruined cities, imaginary or real ('You will reach the city/ with the dust of the other city on your sandals'), or by invoking a female phantasm in a distant 'slave market of late Antiquity.' More seldom, a discreet *she* finds her way into the poems, her outline hazy, devoid of hedonistic allusion, a *she* affectionately perceived in a manner that ranges from the sensorial/volatile to the elevated level of exultation that is apodictic in strategy and implication: 'You were created/ so that the light/ might find rest/ on your face' (*Ray*).

After reading the collection, we conclude, without surprise, that regardless of the weather, the author's *name* remains the same, for all the actor's skill at leading us down seductive fictive paths or guiding us on beguiling, evanescent journeys.

Ioan T. Morar ('a living temple made of flesh and bones', as he defines himself) remains the same poet whose reflexiveness and ingeniousness propels him to a place among the much-desired eligible places of today's Romanian poetry.

SAVU POPA

The Poet Who Saw Melancholy

Reading the world and the book as facets of the same tragicomic image, poet Dumitru Chioaru captures the absurdity of existence with neuralgic acuity. Filtered through the melancholic sensibility of his creative structure, concrete and, contrariwise, imaginative experiences iridescent with literary impulse reveal copious fantastical and theatrical extensions. In his poetry the everyday, acts of rebellion against the régime, encounters, and journeys wear a halo that lends them an Orphic transfiguration, regardless of how derisive or greyly quotidian they might be.

If as Camil Petrescu defines it the one who has seen ideas has 'eyes hallucinating and inwardly burning', the poet

who has seen melancholy knows a different kind of inward burning, one that would imply a joco-serious reassessment of life. Chioaru's poetry thus becomes the catalyser of long-term, intense melancholy which at every step is filled with questioning resignation.

His most recent collection, an edition that includes both older and unpublished texts, *The Melancholies of an Old Bookman,*[1] he provides us with a balance sheet of his melancholies, which brings the poet ever closer to the strange truths of a literary occupation of long duration. This foray into the everyday on the part of a bookman assailed by the suffocating, restrictive aggression of material existence, almost always implies intense flinching away and, sometimes, anguish, followed by an immediate retreat into the comforting, safe space of the paper page/the library, where the everyday awaits poetic sentence to be passed.

The collection is an extension of previous ones, making a decisive contribution to outlining the portrait of this initiator of melancholy-literary hierophanies, to which his 'astonished poetry' has stuck throughout. The texts here collected suggest, precisely thanks to this juxtaposition of past and present, a living panorama of discretion. Quickened or slowed by the rhythm of serious reflection, the poems also reveal observations subtle or bitter, tempered by thrill of wisdom, but immediately revitalised by a sarcastic, ludic, imaginative streak.

1 Dumitru Chioaru, *Melancoliile unui bătrân cărturar,* Bucharest, Editura Tracus Arte, 2024.

Despite all this, in some poems, like a signal of alienating danger, this balance sheet is short-circuited by the danger of a tempestuous and hallucinatory incursion of everyday dizziness into the matrix of the library. This brings about the ransacking of pages filled with experiences and confessions, the overshadowing of pages filled with meaning and substance, the cessation of the ineffable time of reading oneself in the polyhedral mirror of the Library. As we have said, once the safe place of the experienced book or the experience of the book has been left behind, the bookman hierophant will be confronted with the outside world. But without for a single moment losing the horizon of his oracular-poetic reverie, whereby he will still perceive, move closer to and bring closer to himself the world and poetry.

In the cycle *Poesia*, which opens the volume, the first text can be read as a parable of a step-history. Above which floated, in sign of freedom of mind and spirit, but also in sign of rebellion against vicissitude and limitation, the spectre of poetry, that discreet but quite fiery Zeitgeist of a frenetic appetite for creation. The unusual expressiveness of an insurgent spirit split between the ludic and the catastrophic is still fresh, even though the cycle was written decades ago: 'I loved Poesia in blue jeans/ against the fathers of the fatherland/ and I forgot the good manners/ of the poets from the textbooks—/ I too tripped up metaphors/ and I hurled words of abuse/ at black-and-white photographs/ and I laughed in the face of a poster/ with hobbling letters:/ man has snapped the (catas)trophic chain/ and caught God by the wooden leg—/ I too disordered all the senses:/

the rock acrobats in the circus ring of snails/ mechanical storms of jazz in the chalice/ for holy communion—/ I took shamelessly loved Poesia in blue jeans'.

Likewise, in almost all the texts in this grouping, confession is reinvigorated by a phantasmal potential that determines an accentuated impulse of reverie seemingly aimed at producing a fantastic disorder in the material world: 'From the cup of morning coffee/ the brain unfurling itself in white ribbons/ inaugurated the world like a museum/ of wax effigies/ some effigies awoke/ when they felt my breath/ like the misted windows/ and they uneasily went out into the street/ others remained wax effigies/ tipped by angels at the crematorium—/ death is a surrealist accountant/ Ariel with dice stilts/ rummaging through the crowd—/ I made myself one with Poesia/ at my writing table/ whenever they rolled up to the window/ the footsteps in bone dice.'

In another grouping, *The Return of Poesia*, the elegiac tone succeeds in setting in motion the oneiric mechanism of nostalgia: 'Cars telephones computers—oy/ how far the century has advanced!/ how swiftly Poesia/ you fell out of fashion—/ and I like a unicorn have turned white/ in the wilted woods of symbols/ and sadder than the raven/ I perch on the blackened bust of Pallas/ looking back as if into a chasm/ Poesia—the evil hour has struck!'

Another parable speaks of the condition of poetry in society, of the poet's alienation and solitude in the midst of a world far too noisy. In this bewildering atmosphere, poetry, being hooked

up to the rhythm of everyday life, loses its magical impetus, is passed through the filter of a banality that leaves it stripped of all essence, meaning or aesthetic value. Against this hallucinatory, unreal backdrop or climate, a strange figure makes his entrance, as if stepping from the world of the fairground and harlequinade: 'In the middle of the room I espied/ mister Faustofel/ seated on the chair of Poesia/ his legs crossed:/ sir this century is mine/ in vain do you keep seeking/ here all things are jumbled up/ Good is not distinguished from Evil/ Heaven from Hell body from soul/ man from woman world from theatre/ poetry from advert original from plagiarism/ there are no facts only advertising/ and everything is for sale—/ he dissolved like pipe smoke/ with a long peal of laughter/ forgetting his cane whose knob/ was in the shape of a poodle's head.' In effect we are dealing with a Faust who has descended into the midst of simmering derision.

Being invested with the valences of a sarcastic and solemn lucidity, trivialising and slightly mocking a damned existence, poetry reminds the *poète maudit* of the fact that she remains the saving solution to every quotidian or creative impasse, to every strident difference between old and new, between the ideal and the derisory: 'My dear—laughs Poesia—/ you're ever sadder and grumpier/ only I can cross your threshold/ finding you covered with books/ I pity your solitude/ and fear of me—/ I had a drink in a bar/ with some raucous poets/ with shaved heads and sunglasses/ wearing blue jeans and corduroy/ jackets/ like Mr Faustofel—/ they were talking about the need to clean up/ literature—/ everything that's written smells of wastepaper!/

said one tracing a line/ with a coin on the table/ let's consign Noah's ark to oblivion/ and put ourselves down in writing/ we invented poetry!'

In the penultimate section, *The Melancholies of an old bookman*, the urge to make a rather resigned return to the natural and the clearness of life in general are the supporting walls for the poetic identity that Dumitru Chioaru fervently and lucidly takes upon himself, ultimately with an acute sense of the human: 'Poesia turned amazed/ at my grey-haired head—/ where have you been all these years?/ in libraries and museums—/ and what did you learn?/ I wrote a shelf of books/ looking for you—/ did you forget that poetry/ is elsewhere?/ the little things in life/ day after day/ look at them and listen to them/ like a man in love/ (she left leaving me to my thoughts)/ I go out into the empty park in front of the building/ and listen/ to how a bird sings on a hedge/ in a language learned/ before knowing/ that I was born a poet' (*Speaking with Poesia*). Thanks to this, there also shows through that gallant naturalness, that reserved tone in which the poet speaks, without any trace or predisposition to dissimulation or plays of nuance, about everyday concerns, about anxiety and fears, about interrogations and reflections, infected with the microbe of futility, but also about the confrontation between man and world in order to regain dignity and the ludic spirit: 'I wait for inspiration to fall/ like a bomb from the sky/ I answered a woman/ who asked me to write her a poem/ in impatient youth/ —we both waited in vain—/ Rimbaud thought that you had/ to provoke it as if/ you sat beauty on

your knees/ and spat on it—/ some say that it comes to you by writing/ and others that it doesn't exist/ does it exist?/ doesn't it?/ —not even she knows the truth like a beautiful woman/ and damnably capricious/ arriving and leaving/ unexpectedly' (*Unexpectedly*). The experience of writing is revealed to us through a powerful metaphor that combines sensuality with gravity: 'As I lean/ over the blank sheet of paper/ I seem prepared/ for a leap into the depths—/ words and things/ are different worlds/ I live in both of them at once/ joining them in poetry/ like two bodies/ during a night of love—' (*A leap into the depths*).

With the last grouping, titled *Poeta Viator*, the poet returns to his origins via a confession not lacking in solemn notes and interesting ethnographic references: 'I greet men with brimless straw hats/ and women with flowery headscarves/ like ancestors who/ discovered their fate/ where their footsteps took them in summer/ with scythes on their shoulders/ taking the surname Chioaru/ from Chioaru Land—/ we come from afar/ as if to the bride/ driven by the desire for confirmation' (*Chioaru Land*). But this confession of the final poems seems somehow marked by an ineffable dimension, framed in a miraculous, folkloric halo. Two directions meet and resonate, that of an Arcady from the dawn of time, which envelops these places in seraphic nostalgia, and that of a fantastical ethos of the regions in question, which succeeds in bringing forth from the depths of local memory unsuspected, downright chimerical energies.

Times and geographical spaces seem to have been drawn from a contemporary world marked by alienating auspices, but reconfigured in the key of a crepuscular expressionism: 'On the banks of the Seine looking at the waters/ I find myself grey-haired and with bags under my eyes/ —I toss a stone to dissolve my presence—/ a tourist in my lifetime's dream/ I walked the parks and the boulevards/ bewitched by cathedrals and museums/ and caught my breath at a pavement café—/ as if I were living a different life/ among poets and painters cursed/ to taste immortality in the cafés/ and to end their days in the Seine—/ but a rejection lurks behind me:/ I will not die in Paris on a rainy day/ I misinterpret a line sadder than ever/ in my futile poem/ —I have also missed vespers at Notre Dame—/ the bouquinistes lock up old books in metal chests/ on the Seine the boats light up/ carrying raucous passengers—the poets/ sleep soundly in Montparnasse and Montmartre—' (*Evening Paris*).

Dumitru Chioaru the man and poet has seen and sees melancholies, he is a melancholic visionary, who, in almost all his poetry, succeeds in demonstrating an engagement with the immediate world, through a continual and questioning astonishment.

ELINA ADAM

Seeking and Finding the Ages of Time

Hanna Bota made her début as a poet thirty years ago. Since then she has published ten collections of poems and her work has been included in anthologies of translations in English, French, Hungarian, Slovak, Slovenian, Czech, Turkish, Spanish, and Korean. She is also a talented prose writer, with her most recent novel, *Three Women, Four Including Me* (Editura Cartea Românească, 2023) that year receiving the Ion Agârbiceanu Award for Prose Book of the Year, bestowed by the Cluj Branch of the Writers Union, of which she is a member. With a background in the humanities, having a degree in theology and philology, an MA in ethnology, and a PhD in cultural anthropology, she currently works as an editor for

Viața Românească magazine. Hanna Bota is a complete writer, resting on the solid ground of the humanities, which allows her to express herself profoundly and wide-rangingly on a variety of subjects.

Her latest collection, *At Time* (Editura Tracus Arte, 2024), intelligently illustrated by Constantin Baciu, expresses in an unusual way Hanna's journey along knife-edge of the poem and, above all, the knife-edge of the word, of living itself. Although slim, containing 27 poems, and easy to read, the impression the collection leaves is one imbued with meditative accents that develop slowly, kaleidoscopically, like a true corolla of existence. As a human being subject to finitude, the poet is aware that time demands its tribute in the form of another wrinkle on the face or the beautiful fingers that end up crooked and transformed to the point where *the whole body is bowed to the ground*. This is a position that prompts meditation, and why not? It is one that allows transient things to be revealed and a young shoot in the form of the immaterial face to bear fruit.

Endowed with a sense of the ludic, which she knows how to handle like living clay, the poet undertakes true journeys in time using vehicles from childhood: paper boats and dandelions whose seeds will bear fruit in time. A time through which Hanna Bota travels with the ease and specific intelligence, we might venture to say, of quantum mechanics. She finds herself in multiple places at once: both as an adult and as a child, participating in the revelation of the father—himself a magician of time—who sees his own child grown up at a distance of many

years. A craft learned, to be sure, also through a power or skill that is available to creators. The word provides the true victuals for this journey, of which the poet is fully conscious as she takes on the task of making these words/victuals bear fruit. She is not at all surprised by this time tunnel through which she travels and whose moments of grace she accepts with gratitude and intensively valorises. Take, for example, the poem *The Circle*, in which the poet recognises that she knows how *to turn the wheel deftly* (the wheel being a symbol of unity, the infinite)— here we see the wheel of time—she knows the ages that traverses the circle of life, she knows about understanding and acceptance, about gliding, turning and returning, but above all about the knowledge that liberates, because as the poet confesses: 'today/ I pass through the hole of the circle/ back/ commuting between then and now/ I cancel out time, space and laws/ the eternal wheel of return/ also turns the other way' (*The Circle*, p. 10).

A true magician, the poet knows how to look and to understand. Proof of this is the poem *The Unseen Face of Women*, a poem that takes its inspiration from a painting by Irina Petraș, *The Female Condition*. Reading it, we get the impression that Hanna Bota delivers up to us, by a kind of alchemy, words, colours and meanings, as if we were present and contemplating the work of art itself in the original. Joining these female avatars, these faceless women, who kneaded the dough, leavened it, and bore fruit, she becomes a shoot of that incandescent fruit that only 'the shamans, the avatars,/ the saints of the earth/ or the angels beyond time know.' She has the courage and the inner

impetus to separate herself from this magma and give shape to it, while at the same time being all women, all faces, fulfilling the whole work.

And nevertheless, Hanna's true task is not to recover, to salvage artefacts of the heart, of the affective memory. Reading the poems of *Along Time* we could not help but think of the science-fiction film *Interstellar*, directed by Christopher Nolan. A genuine time traveller, Hanna Bota makes it her task to save the Poem itself, the seeds that might regenerate mankind, having access to different points (of time) on the circle, capable of repairing or healing wounds, uncertainties, solitudes: with the senses awake to the universes of *then*, she willingly returns *collapsed space, curved time*. The entrance into the world unseen by the physical senses is via a crack in the house, by now a ruin, through the tall grasses, which, when moved aside, open up a luminous world, that of childhood and everything in it, in which the father figure speaks, and the echoes are actually felt, and the mother, who 'gathers basil/ maybe peonies or mint/ and sings', crosses the garden, a garden of paradise lost, but now regained, on a different scale, and the mother's footsteps vibrate in the soil that the poet's hands receive as a gift, as a second skin, the vehicle in which she will be able to transcend time.

Aware that she is dealing with a game but an incredibly serious one, a game of life and death the poet chooses: *what she loves and what she does not, what hurts and what does not*, a swinging pendulum that ceaselessly counts out life. Or death. *Unlife* and *undeath*? Two boundary markers, two realms to

which the poet has access, swinging between the two sometimes calculatedly, sometimes not, the knife-edge between the two can sometimes be razor sharp, sometimes blunt, but one thing is for sure: Hanna does not flinch from feeling that edge, accepting the consequences of her encounter with it: wounds, abysses, ascensions, healing. The journey proves to be now intense and as brief as the Moment, now long, transparent enough to allow the *movement of the sun, the phases of the moon, the birth of the species, coming apart and coming together.* She, Hanna, in the middle, always in the middle, with her gaze turned back or pointed beyond something intuited only by her, moving through the world, *passing and remaining/ passing/ remaining.*

Through the poems in this collection, Hanna Bota remains without doubt in the reader's affective memory, making us party to journeys/experiences, endowing us with powers so that we ourselves might be capable of travelling in our own time, in order himself to play the game of transcendence, of seeking and finding once more. The poet succeeds in holding us captive (but with our consent) in a different reality, that of the Word, of eternal time, through the emotion whose intensity is maintained high from the first to the last poem, an emotion that nurtures the lofty vibration characteristic of the unseen, the ineffable.

GEORGETA ORIAN

Fonchito in Romania

A REMARKABLE BOOK EVENT TOOK PLACE IN 2021: Curtea Veche published Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Children's Ship*, translated from the Spanish by Raluca Davicenco and with very inspired illustrations by Gabi Toma (the Spanish original was published in November 2014: Mario Vargas Llosa, *El barco de los niños*, Editorial Alfaguara Infantil, ilustraciones de Zuzanna Celej, 2014, 102p). Not by accident the publisher's website quotes Alessandro Baricco: 'A very beautiful story, in which some children get lost in a nowhere land…' *El barco de los niños* is one of the titles in the *Save the Story* series, a literary experiment pioneered by Baricco with the aim of creating an 'ideal library' that will bring together famous stories from all over the world,

retold for children and teenagers of the twenty-first century by famous authors. Captivatingly illustrated and covering a highly diverse range of literary genres, themes, regions, and cultures, the books in the series illustrate the aims of the Holden School in Turin, an academy/M.A. in creative writing founded in 1994 (named in honour of J.D. Salinger, whom Baricco lists among his literary masters), in order to develop new, innovative ways of telling/writing stories, involving the visual and performing arts.

In its *Save the Story/Stories Retold* collection Curtea Veche also published *The History of Don Juan* in 2017, retold by Alessandro Barrico and translated by Mariana Adameșteanu, as well as other masterpieces of world literature: *Crime and Punishment, Cyrano de Bergerac, King Lear, The Epic of Gilgamesh, Captain Nemo, Gulliver's Travels, Antigone,* and others.

Vargas Llosa's *Children's Boat* was born from Marcel Schwob's *The Crusade* (more on which in a future issue; on the Romanian publishing market, the natural chronology has been followed, as proven by the quotation on the first page, referencing the Romanian edition: Marcel Schwob, *The Children's Crusade,* translated with an introduction and notes by Mădălina Ghiu, Bucharest, Tracus Arte, 2021), something of which the author makes no secret: the highly suggestive quotation on the first page should be correlated with the final lines of the story, in which we discover that the main character's father gave him Marcel Schwob's *The Children's Crusade* as a present.

Llosa transforms Schwob's text using Fonchito, a character already familiar to Spanish-speaking readers from an earlier children's story *Fonchito y la luna [Fonchito and the Moon]*, 2010: the book was included in the *Mi primer…* [*My First…*] series, aimed at familiarising young readers with the great names of adult literature, thereby producing books suitable to be read aloud among the whole family. *Mi primer Mario Vargas Llosa, Fonchito y la luna* (Editorial Alfaguara, illustrations by Marta Chicote Juiz, 2010) is a likeable tale, in which Fonchito falls in love for the first time.

In part, the technique of *The Children's Boat* is that of *A Thousand and One Nights*, and the opening sentence employs the tools of fairy tale ('Once upon a time'): Fonchito's attention is drawn to a little old man sitting on a bench near his house and looking at the sea in a strange way. This encounter is transformed into a veritable ritual of storytelling: every morning, before the school bus arrives, the boy listens to the story about other children who, centuries ago ('in the twelfth century, can you imagine! That was no fewer than nine centuries ago, a long way away, in Europe. Back then, religion was held in high honour. You might even say that religion wholly ruled people's lives'), went off to save the world (or at least Jerusalem).

What is fascinating is the way the old man whets and then maintains the boy's curiosity: it seems that he sits watching the sea every morning because he is waiting for the ship—the only one of the many that sailed away but didn't sink—

with a hundred chosen children ('You don't see it because it hasn't arrived this morning. Even if I showed it to you, you probably wouldn't see it. On the other hand, I see it as clearly as I see you now, said the little old man with a smile. Because not everyone is worthy of seeing it. When you see the ship, it's as if you were being rewarded for something you had done. A great sacrifice, for example').

At a well-chosen point in the story, the text becomes an *hourglass*: the old man starts to use the first person plural and, even though the boy demands explanations and asks questions based on logic and reason ('"But does that mean that you were with the children who were going to board the ship and sail away," Fonchito interrupted him in amazement, his eyes as wide as wide could be. "How could such a thing be possible, sir? If it were so, it would mean that you are incredibly old, that you are… are a good few hundred years old! And that's not possible, nobody lives so long",' and elsewhere, '"if you were on that ship, then now you must be a ghost, mustn't you?"'), the storyteller subtly forces him to accept the convention of the impossible, specific to fairy tales, and urges him to do something that would entitle him too to see the ship, to be numbered among the 'chosen'.

The stories of every day, part of the greater Story, that of the children's voyage, are fantastic tales of pirates and mermaids, mediaeval legends and riddles, narratives of crime and suspense. The ship is captained by Jean de Brieu, 'one of the most knowledgeable mariners in Marseille' ('who has sworn to make

a pilgrimage to Jerusalem if God deigned to save his seriously ill wife from death'), who provides one of his ships for the children's crusade. On board there is also a crew of seven adult sailors, but soon they begin to vanish, tempting us to believe that it is a scenario akin to Agatha Christie's novel *Ten Little Niggers* (subsequently retitled *And Then There Were None*); the series of deaths begins with the youngest sailor, Little Pierre, a leper (alluding to the Book of Leviticus), thrown overboard so as not to infect the others. The episode is a crucial point in Vargas Llosa's book, since it shifts the tone towards the tragic, sadness, unavoidable discussion of death. In any event, the cheerful tone of the old narrator character changes, henceforward it is tinged with melancholy and grief. The symbolism of sin is redoubled: the stigma of murder will hang over the crew: 'Even now, after so many centuries, they still ring in my ears, the wails of that poor tortured soul when the terrified sailors threw him overboard. We children were struck dumb with grief and despair. And all of us had heavy souls and the dark premonition that what had taken place was not only a great crime, but also an ill omen, and that from that fateful day forth, many misfortunes and tragedies were to befall us all.')

The tale requires detours and intertextual digressions, such as the sequence that refers to the myth of Ulysses the wanderer and the Sirens who, ultimately, bewitch the sailor Revoir, known as Hook, before he vanishes from the ship. A historical dating indirectly slips in when the children's ship, now adrift, meets the *Invincible*, no doubt a reference to the *H.M.S. Invincible*.

There is a visual image on the boundary of myth (the 74-gun French ship launched in 1744, captured by the English in 1747, sunk in 1758, and since become part of the world's heritage, which provides the reader with the image of a ship from stories of pirates and naval battles). But now another sign of the supernatural intervenes, another step towards accepting the impossible: 'we could see them, but they could not see us, whispered the old man.'

The revelation has another phase: Captain Jean de Brieu comes to the conclusion that 'ever since God has decided to make us unseen, immaterial or however this conjunction between the worlds in which we now find ourselves might be called', a difference has become visible between crew and children: while the sailors/adults still have physical needs (hunger, thirst, and so on), which they desperately try to satisfy, the children have been turned into pure spirit, no longer feeling any physical need. After the proposal that they abandon the ship, in a last attempt to break the curse, the children are left alone aboard, and the ship henceforward takes them on a voyage beyond time and space: a panorama of human history, of social evolution can be witnessed (including wars), as a spectacle viewed from a distance, from aboard the ship, it too immortal. The children, forever 'twelve, fourteen, fifteen years old', have an intuition that they will never leave the ship: 'Nobody had told us that we weren't allowed to, but we sensed that it would not be a good thing. We were fearful that if we left it even for a second, the spell would be broken, and time would demand its tribute, ageing us

instantly and killing us,' at which point the Romanian reader's thoughts will straight away fly to *Ageless Youth and Deathless Life*. Curiosity drives the ghost child (who becomes the old narrator) to defy the 'interdiction', even if it is unspoken, in other words to see what will happen if he disembarks from the ship and sets foot on dry land (we know after all from Vladimir Propp that the ban and breaking it go hand in hand).

The ingredients of the narrative cover a vast intertextual range: from the ghost ship of the little crusaders (which is strikingly similar to the *Flying Dutchman* of Davy Jones and Jack Sparrow in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series) of the *Highlander*-type existence of the child who disembarks from the ship to myths and symbols such as the Tower of Babel, Adam and Eve and exotic locations such as Phuket (Thailand), Recife (Brazil), and so on. There are definitions of the following kind: '"Do you know who Methuselah was?" "An old man from the Bible," answered Fonchito. "A very old man",' which are reminiscent of the innocence embodied in various ways in the book.

Fonchito's disappointment at the story nearing its end is lessened by the old man's advice: 'Life and above all books are full of extraordinary stories that you can read and, if they are written with skill, you will feel as if you are experiencing them for yourself.' The epilogue is a kind of plea for curiosity, for the thirst for knowledge and the need for stories and reading, which make every life unique and captivating. We discover that the old man has seen the ship from time to time, without being able to get close to it, and this adds a further symbolic touch to the

text: life as an 'eternal pilgrimage around the world,' the sin of curiosity/knowledge, access to innocence, purity, the trauma of all times and places (that demands to be healed), the compensatory world and imaginary friends of childhood ('Fonchito never again saw the old man in the little park in Barranco. And from that day forth, his father, don Rigoberto, and *his stepmother*, doña Lucrezia, began to wonder why Fonchito spent so many hours alone on the balcony, looking out to sea'—emphasis added).

If the Mario Vargas Llosa series published by Humanitas Fiction is such a big success among adult readers, young readers in Romania deserve 'my first Vargas Llosa' too.

ELISABETA BOGĂȚAN

Art and Historical Document in the Work of Cornel Nistea

'I **ACTUALLY THINK THAT LITERATURE IS NOTHING BUT** the product of the self's revolt in the often-desperate attempt to resolve its conflicts and rid itself of its obsessions, and writing becomes an escape valve in the hope of escaping from the captivity in which it was straitjacketed from its very beginnings, so that ultimately I might say: I write, I am free!' states Cornel Nistea on the jacket flap of his recently published novel, *Condamnați să trăiască* [Sentenced to Live] (Editura Școala Ardeleană, Cluj, 2024).

The novel opens with a memorable scene, in which the unimaginable cruelty of the communist apparatus is revealed in all its harshness, a scene seared onto the memory of Mihăiță, a boy of four and a half, who is to bear witness years later: 'The very next moment, the commandant put his pistol to his father's head,

ordering: "On your knees, bandit, I'll shoot you like a rabid dog!" At the same time, a Securitate man slammed his rifle butt into the boy's grandfather's face, causing the blood to gush.'

Let me reiterate what I have already said about Nistea's *Diary 2000-2012*: 'Cornel Nistea takes on the task, one felt to be vital, of *channelling memory*. To a greater or lesser degree of visibility, almost everything Cornel Nistea writes is oriented towards this: in his diaries, his short prose, his novels.' Communism, which Cornel Nistea views through all its horrors, is therefore all the more so what Cassian Maria Spiridon states in 'The Communist Utopia, an Abortion of Contemporary History (1)', published in *Convorbiri Literare* No. 12 (2024): 'a scourge that shows no sign of coming to an end, but rather, quite the opposite, continues to seduce, and we see how Marxism-Leninism through its new methods ever more vigorously cuts a path for itself, thanks to the Neo-Marxists, who are gathering more and more followers [...]. What is necessary is a recapitulation of the horrors perpetrated from when Soviet tanks forced communism onto Romania on 6 March 1945 and all the way up to December 1989.' This is exactly what Cornel Nistea does, emphasising, again and again, the horrors committed by the communist régime in Romania.

The characters of the novel are Teodosia, 'the daughter of boyar and senator Paul Aron' and mother of Mihăiță, who is doomed forever to relive the days of horror when he lost his parents, and the collective character that is the personnel of the communist apparatus, the Securitate and Militia men,

who might be viewed as mere robots carrying out orders, were it not for the fact that their souls are filled with hatred and venom.

The plot of the novel wagers on suspense, feeling, empathy: taken away in the middle of the night on a political train, Teodosia and Mihăiță are abandoned in the middle of a rain-drenched, deserted field. Teodosia is warned: 'It's forbidden that you should say who you are or what happened to you! If you talk about it, you'll end up in prison, where your bones will rot, and the child will be sent to an orphanage.' The female protagonist's nightmare continues: 'After having been on the train the whole night, they had to be far from home. She was gripped with despair.' Her thoughts are echoed in the novel's title: 'We've been sentenced to live cut off from the world… They had been indirectly sentenced to death.' Although she finds herself in a limit situation, Teodosia, thanks to her hope in God, tries to instil optimism in her son: 'You'll see, everything will be fine! Just as you all told me!' She feels her duty is to protect him, that he is the future: 'He must survive without fail!… We have to resist! We have to live!' Her fierce resolve to protect her son renews Teodosia's strength and turns her into an emblematic figure of motherhood, who will without doubt find a place in the gallery of unforgettable literary characters thanks to her strong will and her love: 'Don't be afraid, you're with your mother…'

The author proves to be a subtle psychologist, who intuits in the mother's soul not only a fierce determination to survive, but also the torment of understanding what has happened

to her: 'Lord, why is our right to live a human life taken away from us?' The words of encouragement she constantly whispers to Mihăiță come as an impulse rising from ancestral depths: '"Do what your grandfather advised you to do when they put the handcuffs on him." "For me to be brave, you mean… Is there anything else that Grandpa said?" … "Don't forget, Mihăiță! He said that there will come a time when we will live in freedom again and when it does come, it will be the better for us." "I don't understand, Mama! What is freedom?"' In passing this indirect sentence of death, the odious régime calculated everything, it demolished every bridge to other human beings, every bridge to survival: '"Are you strangers? The station manager warned us not to sell anything to strangers …"' Their adaptation to life in the wilderness likewise brings memorable scenes: 'After the week that they had spent in the field, in the hut by the well, Teodosia began to develop her instincts for defence and to acquire the reflexes of a hunted animal eager to survive.' Wise teachings passed down from generation to generation give her strength: 'Let it be clear to you what you intend to do and above all you have to be determined whatever situations life might throw at you!' and 'Endure all with dignity! Be patient… This calamity too will pass, just as so many others have passed in this world…' Teodosia might even be said to repeat the travails of Robinson Crusoe. At intervals, the narrator observes: 'And the sun rose over the mist-shrouded plain yet again, just as it had ever since the good Lord's world began,' echoing the Holy Book ('And it was evening and it was morning…').

Sentenced to death by hunger and cold, according to the communists' diabolical plan, the ailing Teodosia is discovered by a hunter, Dumitru son of Novac, but the ban on her revealing who she is or what has happened to her prevents her being saved: '"But will I get away scot free if the Securitate finds out I've been talking to a… to an enemy of the people? That's how misfortune can come down on a man in an instant!"' says Dumitru fearfully, but even so, out of humane instinct, he saves the mother and child from freezing in the deserted field.

The author gives shape to a complex social and political panorama, one of exceptional harshness: 'There were also others, some of them fugitives in the forests or higher up, in the mountains, whom the local and central authorities were looking for so that they could arrest them. Most of them would be caught and sent to prison without trial. Everybody knew that: all those who were not in agreement with the new democracy were declared, without exception, "bandits and enemies of the people" and then sent to prison or deported to the forced labour camps.' The people listen to *The Voice of America* in secret, from which they also find out about communist atrocities in regions outside their own: 'It says that the political prisoners locked up at Aiud and Gherla are kept in overcrowded, unheated cells, they're beaten and starved, they die by the dozen, so much so that they can barely keep up with burying them in the mass graves…'

Fear and uncertainty act as a poison: 'Prison eats you alive, Dumitru, if the Securitate finds this woman on the run here with us…' Disturbing news comes in an avalanche: 'they were talking

about an even wider ranging agricultural reform, which entailed abolishing all private property and making it collective.' And: 'Day after day, fresh batches of people were arrested and sentenced to long years in prison or were deported for the sole reason that they were well-off, accused of having profited from the labour of the poor. At the same time, intellectuals were hunted down one by one and then sentenced to decades in prison or to hard labour for life merely for belonging to that social class.' On the other hand, the agricultural traditions of the peasantry, not yet flattened by the communist juggernaut, are also described. But according to the general direction in which things are going, one fine day Dumitru son of Novac is reported to the village revolutionary committee as an exploiter for having employed Teodosia. During the so-called interrogation, he is beaten until he loses consciousness. After escaping further beatings by means of a ruse, he is still unable to escape the terror that now grips his soul: 'Any day now, I'm expecting them to arrive from the revolutionary committee and to force us to hand over extra grain and cattle quotas on top of the ones they took away in autumn.'

The social and political panorama is described in a nuanced way, often with touches of bitter humour in which the demagogy holding up the villainy of the communist apparatus is sketched out: '"Haven't all the kulaks been liquidated? There were around six families all in all, I think…" "Yes, you liquidated them, but that was a year ago, and since then nobody has worked the land. Which means not a bushel of fodder has been

produced. […] Because there was nobody left to work it, given the reactionary families had all been deported…"' And, 'Irimie Pasăre was a man of strange beliefs, such as that the new society would be constructed by itself even if all the cattle on the farm he managed died of hunger. Early on, he had assimilated the principle of *The Party looks after everything!*'

The author paints a suggestive collective portrait of villagers living in terror of the new régime: 'folk were fearful and kept indoors for the most part. They did not hold weddings or baptisms any more, fearful lest, in his cups, a man might lose control and let fly with a curse or swearword.' And, 'the people hid away from the investigators in the most unexpected places, lest they come face to face with them, but also in fear of reprisals against those who had not fully paid off the taxes owed to the state and the Soviet Union.' Moreover, 'all the marts had closed down, so that folk wouldn't be able to sell anything, given that the Government had decided to set up collective farms in the villages.' People barely dare even to think: 'To think of it, Dumitru was heard talking to himself on his way to the cattle shed, I bolted the farmyard gate and now I have the feeling that we're living in a kind of prison, as if you were afraid even to go out of the house…'

The author describes a series of things which, as if in a black-and-white image, provide an even starker picture of the baseness of the communist régime: when the authorities discover there is a shortage of labour, Teodosia is recruited to work at a piggery. Since she is declared to have lost her memory and

power of speech due to the shock of her house having burned down, as Dumitru explains, she is given an official certificate for a provisory identity card. She is shocked to discover that the 'Hammer and Sickle' farm is just like the family manor. She endures here heavy humiliations: 'Here it is then, she said to herself, you have the privilege of getting to know the human beast, which, irony of ironies, you're forced to accept as it is so that you can live yet another day in this world!' Devoted as she is to tending the animals, Teodosia's work is noticed, so much so that she is put forward for the title of Heroine of Socialist Labour, which leads to her background being checked, and in the culminating moment, when she is presented with the medal, the Securitate, having discovered her real identity, arrests her as an enemy of the people. Dumitru Savu son of Novac and his wife Ana are also arrested and sent to a forced-labour camp as enemies of the people, and their property is confiscated. Teodosia's son Mihai is sent to an orphanage. All in the name of 'the full victory of socialism and communism.' The conclusion to be drawn from such atrocities is encapsulated in the cynical motto of those for whom nothing matters outside their inhuman ideology: 'Henceforth, the revolutionary authorities proceeded with even greater zeal to liquidate private property.'

It is obvious that in painting this social and political panorama the author has drawn on real historical information. As in his other writings, he has painted this picture of the monstrous communist dictatorship as a vital testimony, feeling it to be a moral duty, lest such horrors ever be repeated. All the more so,

as stated by Cassian Maria Spiridon, whose words I quoted at the beginning of this review, and which it seems important to me to restate here, communism is 'a scourge that shows no sign of coming to an end, but rather, quite the opposite, continues to seduce, and we see how Marxism-Leninism through its new methods every more vigorously cuts a path for itself, thanks to the Neo-Marxists.'

The novel, perfectly structured according to the pattern of the classic novel, is thus also a historical document, constructed with the sure hand of a writer in perfect control of how to dose his literary effects. Rounding off the balanced structure with suggestiveness and suspense, constructing memorable character types, such as Teodosia, Dumitru and Ana, while at the same time providing a lifelike portrait of the collective character of the communist apparatus, which in fact personified the specific flaws of the régime, the brutality, the moral poverty, the unscrupulousness, the demagogy, the hypocrisy, Cornel Nistea constructs one of his most powerful novels, a narrative that keeps you on the edge of your seat, a novel which may, to a certain extent, be regarded as biographical, since it deals with events in the midst of which the author lived, while also being, thanks to this very fact, a documentary work.

CORNEL NISTEA

The Shop Dummy

'**What lovingness! look how she straightens** his tie, look how she doesn't like the way his hat sits on his head and how she adjusts it.'

'What are you looking at? Because I can't see anything.'

'Look, there, in the shop window, but also look at how young and beautiful she is! Now she's tilting his hat to one side…'

'Darling, are you out of your mind or is it that I can't see well? That girl in the shop window is dressing a dummy…'

'She may be dressing a dummy, but what lovingness in her every movement. Look at how she runs her fingers

over him, as if she were caressing him. Movements filled with tenderness…'

'You poor man! You're seventy years old and here you are wanting to be in the shoes of that dummy and to have that nineteen-year-old assistant dress you. Do stop staring at her!'

'What are you in such a hurry for? Didn't you say we should get out of the house and see a bit of the world outside?'

'I did say, but this wasn't what I meant, to have you stand rooted to the spot admiring a young girl dressing a shop dummy…'

'My dear, I know you're a sensitive woman, with a fine spirit of analytical observation, but let me enjoy this splendid sight. Look, the girl hasn't finished yet, now she's adjusting his waistcoat. See? Now she's putting a flower in his breast pocket…'

'Pompiliu, we're in people's way, we're getting under the feet of the passers-by.'

'But my love, that dummy, which the nice girl is dressing, isn't it there so that people can stop to admire it? I mean, to admire the clothes it's wearing, which we can find for sale inside the shop.'

'Yes, but which are you doing? Are you admiring the suit on the dummy or the way the girl is adjusting its clothes?'

'I'll admit that at first I was enchanted by the girl's movements, the lovingness with which she adjusted the tie of the man in the window and tilted his hat to one side. What lovingness! To make movements like that you have to have been born with a certain sensibility…'

'And seeing the way that girl dressed up that dummy, all of a sudden you felt a need to be in its place, to make yourself its replacement.'

'Look, Crina, you're all of a sudden filled with jealousy because I've been admiring the tender gestures of a beautiful girl dressing a dummy…'

'Do you hear yourself? Me, jealous because you're looking at some poor girl dressing a dummy…'

'It's not like that, Crina, it's not like that, I was only struck by how much lovingness she puts into it…'

'If you really want to know, she does that because it's the job she's paid for, she probably attended some college for window dressers…'

'You're just saying that to detract from the girl's sensibility, her lovingness…'

'Pompiliu, yesterday at the café, your gesture when you grasped the hand of the waitress who brought us our coffee, was that also to do with lovingness?'

'You're raving, dear: what do you mean I grasped the hand of the waitress who brought us our coffee?'

'Then what was it you did? How am I to interpret the gesture you made yesterday at the café?'

'Probably I liked the friendliness with which the girl served us and I wanted to thank her by shaking her hand. You see, it's all too seldom in today's world that we encounter such gestures of friendliness. But didn't you take a liking to her smile, her gait?'

'And for that you left her a ten lei tip…'

'She deserved it, Crina, I assure you that she deserved that tip and my handshake…'

'I'm amazed you didn't introduce yourself to her the way you usually do: Writer such-and-such, recent winner of the Academy Prize…'

'You forgot to say that I received the prize in question on reaching the age of seventy, that perhaps I didn't deserve it…'

'My dear, I'm not the one who's saying you didn't deserve that prize, but what can I tell you? at least if you'd received a load of money along with it…'

'Lord, you know full well that for me it's not the money that counts…'

'But it does count, Pompiliu, you have grandchildren at university…'

'All right, money counts too, and now, if I might ask you something…'

'Ask me. Let me see what it is this time.'

'I'd like us to go back to the café to have some ice cream.'

'All right, I've nothing against that. I know, I know, now I get it. You want to see whether that waitress is still there, now that the girl has finished dressing the dummy in the window we've been standing in front of because you refused to budge, and you made us get in the way of the passers-by…'

'But don't you see, don't you see how wonderful it was! With what lovingness that nice girl did his tie, how she tilted his hat to one side and put a flower in his buttonhole…'

The Summer Garden

I WAS COMING BACK FROM THE MARKET, WALKING down a side street to avoid the strong July sun on the boulevard, when all of a sudden, my attention was drawn to a man seated on a tree stump, drinking coffee at a low table outside a block of flats. He was all on his own there, behind a tall nickel-plated wire-mesh fence, next to which were growing a few rose and sweet tobacco bushes, and at the bottom of the wire mesh a few liana tendrils were timidly starting to climb. Actually, there was also a tree there, whose limbs had been hacked off by the municipal gardeners, although its northerly position would never have provided the man with any shade, although the chirping of some stray bird concealed among its branches might have suggested to him a park-like expanse.

Aha, I said to myself, aha, there's a man who's found an original way of extending the bohemian life, of guarding his privacy, his peace and quiet.

It wasn't hard for me to work out that he lived on the ground floor of the block of flats, given the open window, through which he was probably handed his coffee in its copper pot. And suddenly I remembered, oh, what times! when I used to go to the Turkish café to feast my eyes as the girl there handled a coffee pot of the same reddish hue, shifting it over the hot sand, while I imbibed the aromas emanated by the coffee as it came to the boil, after which I would sit at a table as I waited for my coffee, more often than not on my own rather than accompanied by some friend or lover.

But it was what that man was doing that struck me as truly odd. It must have been a way of recollecting his youth and I lingered there a while in an attempt to decipher something of his attitude as he lifted the cup of still boiling coffee to his lips before taking a careful sip. There was no question of my thinking about his humble condition, that of a down-at-heel man, or about anything else of that sort. But even so, it did strike me as odd how he isolated himself from the world, and I was even sure, I had the certainty that it was all thanks to that tall wire mesh, fashioned and erected there with, I must admit, a certain artistry, next to which grew those rose and sweet tobacco bushes, to give the impression he was untouchable, an illusory thing that had started to amuse me, even to make me feel a certain regret at his self-deceiving attitude. I said to myself: Yes, yes,

it's not uncommon for us to be mistaken about ourselves. Lord, what must the man have been thinking as he drank his coffee in that improvised summer garden of his, no larger than two and a half by four to five metres. In other words, how can you find peace and quiet, if not happiness, in such a confined space!

Who on earth can he be? To judge by the landscaping he's done for himself, I suspect he is a new tenant, returning to the town after roving through who knows what climes, after all, the set-up I can see is very recent; I'm seeing it here for the first time.

My curiosity tempts me to go and talk to him, but it would be sacrilege to disturb his peace, his moment of reflection. I increasingly admire his idea of arranging a place for himself where he can drink his coffee and meditate between the hours of ten and twelve a.m., shielded from the world by the tall grille and the rose and sweet tobacco bushes. Ah, he must have accustomed himself, he doesn't care that people pass by on the nearby pavement; he sees to his peace and quiet and his coffee, which he sips with a pleasure that thrills his body. I begin to admire this man for his way of discovering for himself the pleasure I've just been talking about. To a certain extent, I'm familiar with the feeling. Didn't I myself plant in the garden of my summer house twelve sweet tobacco bushes right next to where I put my writing table?

But how much space I had there! A hundred paces from the road, on which cars and people seldom passed, whereas here, on the ground floor of a block of flats made of prefab

concrete panels, within an area of two and a half by four to five metres, where hundreds of people and dozens of cars pass by daily, he finds he has enough space in which to meditate, given that he's built a fence there and planted rose and sweet tobacco bushes. It seemed odd to me, later likening that spot to the prelude to a tomb, having observed that the owner was actually elderly.

But that no longer mattered, what was left was the bohemian life that he had built for himself and which probably stirred memories in him as it did in me, memories of the times I used to spend years ago in our town's Turkish café, where the coffee was brewed in copper pots over hot sand, or the period when I used to drink my coffee at Verde in the big university city, where I would linger for hours on end, admiring the premises and the girls at the bar. Now the man is slowing lifting the cup of coffee to his lips, he takes only the slightest sip, he savours it, and all of a sudden, I'm interested, I would like to know whether the coffee is Brazilian or Columbian, just as it might also be some other kind of coffee. Now his face lights up slightly, oh, it must be the memories, the nostalgia. Yes, the nostalgia that so often assails us, harrowing our souls. Am I imagining it or has he now grown sad? Lord, I think to myself, what if he's a man whose love was unrequited? And I begin to suffer alongside the stranger who has, for want of a terrace, built himself his own summer garden, where, between the hours of ten and twelve, he drinks his coffee from a copper pot, pouring it into a blue cup as he sits on that tree stump at a low table, alone with his thoughts.

Alone! And as I murmur the word, I'm flooded with sadness. But he has that flat with the concrete walls, the garden with that small low table on which he puts his blue cup, the tree stump he uses as a seat, they're his, and then there's also the tall fence made from nickel-plated wire mesh, clad with rose and sweet tobacco bushes. Yes, yes, all these are certainties, a whole world that he himself has created and which suits him.

Look, now he's studying his hands. Maybe he's seeking some trace of the past in them, and I exclaim, loudly enough for him to hear me: Creator!

No question of him paying any attention to me, he lifts an eyebrow, he breaks into a smile. Lord, what's all this then?

About a week later, when I passed by again, no little was my amazement when I discovered that the man had planted a linden sapling next to the wire-mesh fence. I couldn't refrain from yelling at him in my mind: Poor wretch, you hope to live long enough for your linden to grow tall, to blossom, and to shed a host of flowers on you and your writing table?

The Diploma of Excellence

THE OTHER DAY, THE TOWN HALL CONFERRED ON ME a *Diploma and Medal of Excellence*, at an appropriate ceremony, of course, before a large audience, which ought to have thrilled me and I was amazed that it didn't. But oughtn't I to have appreciated how much of an honour it was on the part of the local authorities to include my name among the town's leading figures? Why then did I not feel thoroughly honoured at my having been noticed by so generous a local officialdom?

As if in a dream, I heard the words of the mayor: 'This *Diploma and Medal of Excellence* is bestowed on Mr Such-and-such for his exceptional merits in contributing to our town's development.'

In the moments when the mayor spoke my name, handed me the diploma, pinned the medal to my chest, and cordially shook my hand, scattered applause could be heard from the audience.

I don't know why I was particularly alert to that applause, to its intensity, not necessarily because it might have signified some kind of esteem. Then, returning to my seat in the audience, whence I had risen when I heard my name, it seemed strange to me that I didn't register the faces of those present, including a number of friends and people of my acquaintance. I couldn't divine anything from their faces, whether they were sincerely glad at this recognition of my 'exceptional' merits on the part of officialdom or whether, more likely, they were indifferent to my having been acknowledged. That's that, I told myself as I sat back down on the plastic chair, rather disappointed at the sparse applause and even at the diploma and medal of excellence that I was wearing on my chest with a certain amount of embarrassment. Yes, yes! I'd probably been blinded by the flashes that went off when people took photographs, by the lights of the film cameras, perhaps that's why I hadn't been able to register those faces clearly enough to be able to gauge the attitudes they evinced.

It was only after I sat back down that the emotions welled up, probably caused by uncertainty as to whether such a diploma genuinely confers on you the dignity fitting for a creator of art, which should eventually place him on a pedestal, at which moment there appeared, like a furious beast, the disappointment, the thought that the diploma—a coloured piece of paper inscribed with gilt letters—would bring me neither glory, nor money, nor happiness, at which I was filled with sadness. Only now did I understand that the 'excellence' that had been ascribed to me was nothing but one of those political moves that win

potentates votes and behind which those same potentates multiply their business affairs.

But the press reported the event, your picture appeared in a few newspapers, you were on the television and the day after the event, the number of people who greeted you on the street increased considerably: Look, he's that writer, the one who won the prize…

I took the framed, gilded diploma home, along with the medal, I spent a long time looking for the right place in which to display or keep them. At the houses of a number of fellow writers I'd seen such diplomas hanging on the wall, on display for every visitor to see, and the memory of it began to discourage me. No, I'm embarrassed to hang the diploma on the wall in the living room or library, even if it is one for excellence. I walked up and down for a while holding the framed diploma and noticed on it the large signature of the mayor, beneath that 'awarded for exceptional merits', I went out onto the balcony, which I use as a kind of larder, and put it next to the jars of jam and pickles, while the words of the mayor rang in my ears, the same mayor to whom I had once remarked that he dished out diplomas and titles of excellence too readily:

'My dear chap, it doesn't hurt my hand to sign a piece of paper that's otherwise worth nothing…'

After that, I lived in fear that my turn would come to receive such a diploma. And I in the end I couldn't avoid it.

MIRCEA STÂNCEL

playing with fire

don't tell me that only now did you hear the first black note
only now did you see our too cramped bedroom
I think you're attending a different *liturgy*
your teacher she opened the window that looks from heaven
and still you don't get that such plazas don't grow here
not even in your dreams do you come wearing clean dresses
boulevard sensations keep soaking them;

you've ended up spreading contagion across blank paper
from now on your violin will produce strange notes
increasingly you're a fifth season
you keep retouching your smile to suit how the wind blows
in summer you do a trade in mini-blouses
and now we don't clutch the same pillow to our chests
through the carriage window I watch your train
which is slowly pulling away
how sad the youths next to me with their tattooed chests
they think and I still think it's theirs that's leaving;

you mimic the stupid things I do which are wider than the sky
you want to be like me when I stop off at old taverns
where I no longer find anyone I know
would you like there to be two drunks in the house?
we don't have enough cigarettes till tomorrow;

I write in toothpaste in palpitations sometimes in hopes
on a screen that's emptier and emptier
but it swiftly grows dark on our street
and someone puts a mask on us to make us look brighter
two burly lads strolling the anti-Corso hand in hand;

that line in the poem's no treat for you either
I realised straight away that the connection was broken
the peach alone is aware of its irresistible aroma
the wedding photograph is starting to crack
a black hole vacuums up every crumb in the vicinity;

I mow the lawn where you walked past all alone
I rake the grass that your ankles humiliated
(mind how you talk to me she said
annoyed that she had to extrapolate the root number
of an irrational marriage);

I admit it, you taught me how to thread the needle
but left-handedly
the way sacks of potatoes are lugged from market

the way I might soar from an upper storey
oh, but this library is unbounded and cyclical;

I told you I didn't want to be an aeroplane
and I'd give you back your shopping list
your things dismember me utterly
and I see the countdown has begun
your past and your present affairs
blatantly pile up in the near future;

I know, my perspiration has started to bother you
if I shouted at you now not even your perfume would hear
your diary has fresh pages you write black on red
you hold me to blame for the youth of your ruined dresses
for the fact that the train tickets are no longer valid;

true, your ear was pressed to a different violin
you look at the jays that newscast about the world's beaches
but only with both of us walking there
would your skin fit you without any slack
the walls of the flat are full of surveillance cameras
where your large mirror walks around;

your forehead dances in the arms of the latest dream
the audience outside is puzzled rebels
and my hand no longer finds yours
not even your dress wants to touch me now;

you live with me in this room
except for your vulnerable mind
you pen your defence with a leaden nib
you leave me to freeze with my hand on the door handle
in all of literature your gaze alone makes a splash
I come to you with the last of the roses;

don't tell me that only now do you feel freedom
you carry it around in your handbag draw it on the asphalt
between the taut strings of your violin
now while we still have the rings on our fingers
and while there's still gold in them;

you left you've started playing with fire
you've always played with it you rock on the swing
dusk finally falls and we ought to live you spill
so much booze on the parquet can't you see it's swelling
the most beautiful wounds are obviously deep down
and at least with one hand with its provocative fingers
you scraped the roots of the embers and you gently screamed
I know, you like to be visceral but have yet to find the way;

dirty laundry

this dress yet another dress lots of dresses
and this winter room abruptly warms up
the living room walls start to sweat
the ice melts from bras and breast
trickles down a tremulous valley tanned and sensual
your poems are of a completely different format now
they are wispy and seductive
but you sing outside the irony of these words;

your things water clouds alone buried in perfume
I tell the truth about that short skirt
above the ground swiped from Instagram
fit to make the emil brumaru poems show through
and particularly in blank rhymes then bikinis—
a flimsy colour drawing
where the very sharp point of a poisoned pencil
was barely able to touch you
the trousers with the ripped knees speak can't you hear them
squished beneath thighs they can hardly bear the humiliation;

it's someone I haven't seen before
a merry tailor you forgot about, who left in may
and a sweet essay traced by gypsy crooners in ink pencil
promotes the vanity on every wall of the neighbourhood

it's been coming more and more often lately
crosses the border clandestinely mixes up and confuses genres
it asks the flat abdomen the skin showered ten times a day
why it nonetheless needs attention
once a month and nature enters you and wreaks havoc;

the hair on your head is that of a new-born babe
then the nickel-plated wire coil in the higher areas
in the lower ones with their fastidious fire
we met each other in reform school
then at the mall which opened yesterday
the alley looks at you till it bursts at the seams
the fence pales abandon their purpose the poplars go haywire
you imitate dolls characters from novels bankers' accounts
when I meet you, which seldom happens
my eyes write stories on the tarmac of the pavement
and somebody reads them really slowly
to savour every last bit of their sweetness;

you're always falling down in these slippery squares
where anger sizzles you daub the walls progressive hues
and your smile rejuvenates the alleys
then a lorry gives birth to affairs and promises
you let your hands wander politically
but even so you arrive home when the rain stops
your dress finally dries out;

you always complain of my body's weight
and you send me all your blood to collect shells on the beach
it's the only reason for having a conversation with you
but your white dress with its cultural hems
always gets dirty expresses itself as best it can
its fabric wears out in different mansards;

I thought you had a big womb in which you healed me
when I come back beaten to a pulp from the latest affairs
with a body on which every knife has been whetted
I notice how this angry veil still props you up
you talk to yourself play the piano replacing philip glass
the spiders' drawings suffocate you
you educate me with commitments with ego phrases
with broken alleys with a series of contorted metaphors
that no longer want to be made part of the canon;

all your bedsheets get low marks for behaviour
your dress doesn't busy itself around me any more;

TONI CHIRA

Death opportunities

Love provides death opportunities.
I drank the marrow from your bone teacups.
I poured in your ears the cement of dementia.
The love in which you can drown
in the sulphuric absence of the other.
I drank the marrow from your bone teacups.
I poured in your ears the cement of dementia.
The love that slid disaster deep
into your sockets.
I drank the marrow from your bone teacups.
I poured in your ears the cement of dementia.

⁂

You shall have no other God than anger.
You shall turn the stone's outer layer into flesh
and you shall love it till it gets to its feet.
You shall, in all earnestness, be in vain
or you shall curl up beside me when I say:
Love yourself in anger.
Be what you feel when you feel you're choking.

⁂

I'm an expert in melancholy,
obstinately not forgetting a single word.
I'm the number-one expert in melancholy,
my disciples have yet to be born.
I'm the champion at melancholy,
the hungry ghost leaving the body.
Anything else dried up long ago.
Anything else is not even I.

⁂

I can't tell pain's body from your body.
Not even the compact darkness do I feel.
A red leaf will come down from the tree.
I'm not calm enough to describe it.

SAVU POPA

***

In morning's pocket,
Sleep-crumpled bits of paper,
The streets baggy-eyed from insomnia,
The trees with their red
Bark,
This rough grass,
Like ashes to the touch,
Former stage set
For some dream or nightmare,
And the lifts stuck
Between the floors of a solitude.

As for us,
We're stray crumbs
In the torn pocket of the mornings.

A cross of flesh

After a day like this,
I swap one coat for another,
One skin for another, then,
Using a knife's point, really gently,
I scrape off the brown crust of the disgust
That clothes my body in its Sunday best.

At the city limits of my own shadow,
It's there that I house my solitude
Once it meets, with maximum efficiency,
Its quota.

There's nobody about,
Just a darkness that rustles
Like a bat's wing made of crêpe paper.

Something dangles down
And lends the air the shape
Of a lopped-off arm.

They are my thoughts
The residues of an electromagnetic storm.

Tomorrow seems a bit empty to me
Like a bag you're given at the 100-year memorial
To a forgotten dictator.

I rock on the swing of my own mind
And in that way, I deem I've fulfilled
My creative duty
For today.

I prepare
For a sleep
That will flow through my body
In the form
Of a final spurt of lava
Ejected just when the volcano seemed fully tranquilised.

My weariness,
A cross of flesh
On which my mind is crucified

Head downwards.

***

Childhood
Remains the sheath
In which

My life
Still encases
Every one of
Its sharp points.

***

The house is quiet.
God is leaning
Over it,
Listening to it like a seashell.

Twin brother

Inside me
For a while there's been
A mountain
Which, not long since, I took
Outside to air.

It's
Of average height,
Full of crests
Which, seen up close,
Look like orphaned
sea waves.

Sometimes,
Up and down
Its two rather uneven
Slopes,
Wild animals
Wander in the shelter
Of clumps of vegetation
And feed on all the oxygen
Inside me.
Which must explain
My lack of inspiration!

I've been told
That it's no ordinary mountain,
That it's somehow too human,
That the strong air of my flesh, of my blood,
That my bone's nightmare architecture agreed with it,
That it's of the same height,
Has the same habits, gestures as I do,
Even our voices are quite similar.
It's as if I've rediscovered
a long-lost twin
brother.

After I took it outside
To air,
To leaven,

I started climbing it
Without the appropriate equipment,
Simply taking care, keeping my eyes peeled.
But once I reached the summit,
Another mountain rose from it
From whose peak
Began another mountain
And on and on.
My head started spinning badly,
If I'd ventured another ascent
I'd definitely have fallen
Off a precipice.

And the ultimate summit
Was invisible among the volcanic crests
Of the clouds now appearing
After the whole sky had been recycled
Using some terrifying cutting-edge technology.

I took fright, said to myself
In a whisper,
There's no way this mountain can be
My twin brother,
Just no way!
And, all of a sudden,
The mountains retracted like a fan
Into a single mountain,

The first one,
Which once more fit
Inside me,
Returned to its roots.

For some time
I haven't known
What's going on.
Can it have withdrawn to the hermitage
Of one of my ribs?
Or has it turned into an ivory lighthouse
Hard by the estuary of my heart?

From time to time,
In the night,
I dream
That somewhere, not far away,
My twin brother
Is waiting for me,
He's dreaming
Of me,
That average-sized mountain,
Deeply rooted in his
Seething
Viscera.

SILVAN TH. STÂNCEL

transfer

I saw the elephants
making ready to leave…
I sensed
the advice the old ones imparted
before their next journey…
I was baptised into the words and the unspoken
responsibility
of their carrying on
I was there
at the comets' departure

and serenely they told me

when we depart…

I'll tell you honestly

each sells his illusions where he can
and everything is all right
so long as they're paid for

each desperately seeks happiness
without knowing
that it's always been right there next to them
you just have to stop everything
you're doing
and take joy… in every second

old age is youth full of memories full of life
it's consummated past time

photographs between the lines failed relationships
disappointments achievements
it's the short future that disturbs your sleep…
and sets you to thinking
how beautiful is the moment
between life and death

I think

and of all the winters you
it seems
were
the hardest…

and I know
I'm not mistaken

and I know
that we're both
trapped…

between seasons

your departure

never
I never left
never

I couldn't leave
never
I couldn't
understand

I fought
to the end

I wept
I was pitiful

I looked for you even when I knew
there was no longer any point

I went back to the place where we were

to those to come you're not alone

all that's left is an emptied-out me
and now I'm listening to louis armstrong

like a blank wall without graffiti
without feelings drained
ragged inside exhausted

not even battle or war
mean anything any more

today for the first time I don't even know

if poetry itself has any purpose

in this hiatus

encounter

I met alifantis on page 54 of nichita
one spring day
reading about
an autumn feeling

I hear nichita's voice
I hear alifantis's song

a three-way encounter on the pages of a book

I pick up the phone and call

MARCEL VIȘA

1. Our bodies

Our bodies
tell their stories in a whisper,
like a procession of ants.

Our bodies learn to be silent,
and time, old thief, dismantles us,
jigsaw pieces lost under the couch.

Me and thee—
the same vowel in different words,
echo of a forgotten language.

The light goes through us,
we leave no shadow.
We're stained-glass windows in a burnt cathedral,
shards that still preserve the glint of a faith.

We lean against each other,

like two dry branches,
in a blind forest awaiting winter.
Children of nothingness,
dancers that practice their steps
within a circle of fire.

When night comes,
when the last window closes,
we will be nothing but breath;
a brief mist on the mirror of the universe.
Then, silence.

Or maybe death is a door that's ajar,
and behind it, we'll find each other again—
two gargoyles keeping watch over
a silent, stone city.

2. The air of a house

Every house has a smell.
Those who live there don't notice it,
the same as the eye doesn't see the air,
the same as time doesn't feel its passing,
the same as the soul doesn't smell its own absence.
They are inside the smell—
they consist of it.

Every house has a smell—
bodies that daily revolve in the same light, the same dark,
thoughts that soak into the tissues,
worries that slowly come to the boil
in a tea kettle left on the stove.

Similarly:
only the stranger sees the shape of your thought
as if a strange coat.
Only someone on the outside senses your essence,
the same as the fish doesn't know how to swim in water
or sleep doesn't know that it is sleep.

Each closed system
loses its perception of its own density.
The body forgets there's gravity.
Language forgets there's convention.
Prayer forgets there's fear.
Love forgets there's choice.

We're whole only in reflection,
just as smell becomes real
only when someone opens the door
and says:
'it smells of you here.'

I too have learned to dream that which dreams me
a room in which the shadows speak
at low frequencies

3. I am the dream of a dream

I am the dream of a dream.
when I fall asleep,
I wake up in a different body,
with a different guilt scheduled
to ache at a set time.

nothing is mine any more
except this oscillation
between parallel realities—
one in which I die,
another in which I'm not yet born,
and one
where we hold each other's hands
never having met.

4. I sometimes take a long break from goodness

I pull the latch
as if closing up a shop of dreams
that has no customers
that has grimy windows.

I leave my gentleness out to dry
on the back of a three-legged stool
until I forget I ever wore it.

people pass by,
ask me directions, for a light, forgiveness.
I shrug my shoulders
like a silent saint
who's forgotten his prayer.

today I'm not the good man from my poems.
today I'm just the man
with his hands thrust deep in his pockets,
groping for the spare change of pity.

at times,
goodness holds me by the hand like a mother.
other times,
it goes away without a word
and leaves me to grow my shadows by myself.

but you,
if you see me silent,
don't judge me,
maybe I'm just practicing
coming back.

5. After we die

After we die, our television sets
are left awkwardly by themselves in the corner
Still showing 'A Daughter-In-Law for Mama'
and 'Love Island'
as if someone were still watching,
as if someone were still feeling.

One day, maybe a hurried grandson
will post them on OLX,
'almost brand-new, bargain, negotiable.'

Our television sets don't know how to mourn,
they don't know how to hold a silence.
They just carry on playing
other people's tragedies,
other people's joys,
and in the breaks,
ads for sleeping pills
and life insurance.

Maybe, once we die,
a speck of dust from our good days
will be left clinging to the screen,
an echo of our laughter,
a smudge of sadness.

But our television sets
will never stop believing
that time never ends
and that there'll always be
another episode,
another season,
another life.

ADRIAN ALUI GHEORGHE

The Tale of the Ultimate Nobel Laureate

MR ANDERS RUGGER OLSSON, PERMANENT SECRETARY of the Swedish Academy, the one that awards the Nobel Prizes, asked his personal adviser, Mrs Katarina Swensson, for a glass of water: he had to take one of the tablets that kept his pre-diabetes under control.

Mr Anders Rugger Olsson acknowledged in his own mind that Mrs Katarina Swensson was a beautiful woman. She had broad, well-rounded hips under a tight skirt, slender ankles.

If your eyes travelled higher, you would see a flat tummy, firm breasts, a long throat, and fleshy lips slightly parted to give a glimpse of perfect teeth. The eyes were the colour of fjord water, grey-green. The forehead had quite a deep facial-expression wrinkle, from above which tumbled chestnut-blond hair with bluish glints.

Mr Anders Rugger Olsson asked for another glass of water. He did so only to watch his beautiful adviser cross his line of sight. And she crossed his line of sight yet again, rather absently, taking care not to spill the glass of water trembling on its dish.

'If you like, I could bring you a bottle of water so that you'll have it handy. Shall I make you some tea?'

'Pardon?' Mr Anders Rugger Olsson woke from a daydream. 'Ah, no, this will be enough. Thank you.' His vague attack of erotic feeling had abruptly passed. Although Katarina was going out and, now that her back was turned, her beautiful long legs were on full display, Mr Olsson was no longer looking at her. He pulled a file from an impressive stack, nominations from all over the world for the next round of Nobel Prizes. The sorting of these nominations was solely his responsibility, and for this reason he treated the files with quite a lot of deference.

The files in front of him were in the Physics section. Physics wasn't his strong suit, but he had to check whether all the necessary procedural criteria had been met. It was procedural, no more than that. After which the files that had been given the permanent secretary's official endorsement were passed on to the Academy's specialist commission for scientific examination.

After the first round of selection, by 1 February, just fifty nominations from the thousands submitted were to remain under discussion. On 1 June, this list was whittled down to five proposals, the so-called short-list, and in October the final vote was held. Followed by the ball and the debates. The debates were always awful. Half of the people who commented on the Prizes, whatever the category, disagreed with them, and the other half agreed. This was why, once they had been awarded, he, as permanent secretary, was interested only in the next year's prizes. When he would start all over again. He had held the position for fourteen years and if anybody caught him off guard by quickly asking him who had won such-and-such a Nobel Prize in some previous year and why, he would not have known the answer without asking the help of some adviser.

By now he had gone through a number of files, rejecting two as preposterous. One had been sent from an address on the Moon, yes, really: the address was on Serenity Street, complete with the building number and postcode, and the sender had provided only a serial number instead of a name. Some nutcase or other! The sender said, in an English riddled with errors, that he had discovered a method for teleportation based on the inertial energy absorbed by the Moon as it orbited the Earth. Yes, you could daydream nicely on a subject like that. Another project was a calculation with no scientific grounding that gauged the energy of the Planetary Ocean at a few billion kilowatts per second, energy which was wasted. The author, an Indian living in Australia, claimed in the pages that followed to provide the

solution for harnessing that energy. But in the following pages there was nothing but pseudo-scientific gobbledegook, some lines from the Mahabharata and a map of the Earth, on which were traced curves to represent the permanent currents of the Planetary Ocean that had to be harnessed. In the first phase, Mr Olsson rejected the file, but then he opened it again, reflected for a moment, after which he signed a corner of the page. This meant that the file had been accepted from the procedural standpoint, and it would be up to the scientific commission to make head or tail of it.

Katarina Swensson came back in and Mr Olsson looked at her again, admiring her elegant gait, the fact that she placed one leg in front of the other as if she on the catwalk at a fashion show. The skirt tightly hugged her thighs and, at the front, showed the outline of her tummy and pubis, rather enticingly. Actually, for fourteen years, day after day, Mr Olsson had noticed the same thing, but never said anything to her. Public scandals with a hint of the sexual in recent years had ruled out even the most innocent compliments in the workplace. If you told a female employee in any public sector that she looked good that particular day, you could find yourself accused of sexual harassment. Yes, feminism had gone too far, Anders said to himself. Such were the times, he thought, remembering scenes from 'la dolce vita' in which women had their bottoms pinched in the street and nobody felt offended. Yes, those were the days…

Katarina Swensson had brought him a file that was difficult to place in any category, although the cover letter left a very large

amount of leeway. Those making the nomination belonged to a Christian association from the Balkans, and their nominee for a Nobel Prize was God. Yes, really.

Mr Olssen read the cover letter slack-jawed in amazement, but immediately got a hold of himself when he looked at Katarina to see whether it might be some kind of a joke. Or to see whether she was at least smiling in reaction to something so far-fetched. But she wasn't smiling, she was the perfect adviser, who comported herself irreproachably and permitted herself no personal opinion.

'God?' asked Mr Olsson.

'Yes, God,' replied Katarina.

'Does it strike you as a serious nomination to you? Mightn't it be a joke? Isn't it a challenge to the Academy and the prizes in general?'

'Every nomination is serious until shown to be otherwise. We have to provide a solution from the procedural standpoint.'

'But even so… God?' asked Anders once again. 'God isn't a person, a definite being… What is God? A principle!'

He felt at a loss, he didn't know how to explain to Katarina who God was. Or why the nomination struck him as inappropriate.'

But Katarina wasn't paying any attention to Mr Olsson's religious dilemmas. She wasn't a believer, far from it, and religion was a matter of indifference to her.

She knew, for example, that the Islamic religion represented a threat to her personal comfort, to the world she lived in, to social policy, and to history, but she had never tried to find out

why the threat had arisen or where it had come from. It was a concern for policymakers, she had heard on the news that there was something not right about Islam, that the religion was on the verge of replacing public policy in many countries, even in Europe. But who was she to judge such things?

Initially, the nomination was sent to the Academy's special biology, anatomy and physiology commission for examination, but they decided that it was not within their jurisdiction. Yes, God had probably created the world, but it was not the best possible world. There were numerous shortfalls, numerous defects. He may have created it, yes, but it might be well be an unsuccessful prototype. Mr Olaf Alberik, he himself a candidate for the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, even having reached the shortlist, among a group of researchers who had isolated the life-bearing alpha particle in the composition of meteorites all the way from Cassiopeia that had been found in the North Sea, wrote the final, negative response:

For thousands of years this so-called creation of God's, the world, has been the most imperfect molecular compound of all those that exist in the universe. And as for man… Man is the most defective creature, a failure of a compound. Predictability has destroyed any idea of change at the level of the human kingdom. From the human point of view, any rock is a compound superior to man or beast, for the unexceptional reason that, if nothing else, rocks don't contract diseases or cancer and live for a cosmic eternity. He himself, Olaf Alberik, would have preferred to have been born a rock! But it was not to be.

Mr Anders Rugger Olsson read the report's conclusion, scratched his head, looked at Katerina once more, who was flexing her legs, one at a time—the woman's knees had a life of their own: they had opinions, communicated with each other. What did they communicate? Hard to say. All that is known is that every man grows very curious when watching how a woman's two knees communicate with each other. What do two knees think about, two knees in quivering expectation? What is it that the one says to the other? Thinking about this, Mr Olsson decided that the nomination wasn't one for the *physics* prize. Maybe it would be more appropriate for the *peace* prize? God promoted universal love, after all, and the Academy might, via its Committee, have tried to award Him a prize that would give peace a chance on Earth. It struck him as a good idea, so he wrote in one corner of the file: 'PEACE section! To be examined closely!!!' The Nobel Peace Prize was overseen by a special committee appointed by the Norwegian Parliament. Their advisers would have to do what was appropriate.

Katerina Swensson tucked the file under her arm and went out, stepping gingerly. Mr Olsson watched her go out. He sighed. Until afternoon, he sorted file after file after file. In the afternoon he attended a concert and colloquium organised by a European association of musicologists, which was trying to make the Academy award a Nobel Prize for Music. Their arguments were laid out in a series of hefty files. Katarina went with him, along with another two advisers specialising in procedural matters. Mr Olsson said neither yes nor no, and in the end, it remained

for the Academy Senate to examine the proposal and articulate a response. A representative of the musicologists, Polish composer Adalbert Wojciechowski, insisted on having the last word, pointing out that music was simultaneously mathematics, poetry, peace, chemistry, and even economics, as inner harmony resulted in social harmony, and that by agreeing to this new category a necessary regeneration of the Academy's work would be brought about, and so on and so forth. Katerina leant across and whispered in Mr Olsson's ear: They've no idea about Alfred Nobel's will! What regeneration? What revolution? Procedurally, we can't allow such a proposal. We won't commit ourselves to anything.

Yes, he thought the same thing, which was why he didn't commit himself to anything. Katerina's cheek had left next to his a waft of *Joy de Jean Patou* perfume, that mixture of rose and jasmine, which cost a packet. It was the kind of perfume that made you dream.

*

The next day, Mr Anders Rugger Olsson set to work sorting files at around twelve o'clock. That morning he had attended a happening organised by foreign students from a Belgian university, who, through performance art, were trying to draw the world's attention to the dangers that threatened all due to a lack of ecological awareness when it came to the Planetary Ocean. The Ocean's species were dying in droves, suffocated by discarded plastic. In addition, the message was that the Academy

should open its eyes and remember to award a Nobel Prize to global conservation efforts. Maybe the young people were right, but it wasn't a question of procedure. He didn't tell them that, and it remained for the Academy to make a statement of its position. Katerina offered to do so.

He then returned to the mounds of files awaiting solution.

Katerina brought him a glass of water so that he could take the pill to keep his pre-diabetes under control. She was wearing a grey tailor-made costume and white blouse. The skirt was blue with silver accents. Her stockings had a discreet stripe that emphasised the firm line of her calves tapering down from her thighs to her ankles.

'If you like, I can bring you a bottle of water to have handy. Shall I make you some tea? Or bring you some mango?'

'I beg your pardon?' said Anders Rugger Olsson, waking from a daydream. 'No, that will be enough. Thank you.'

The response from the commission that was examining the files in the Peace section that had been given the procedural stamp of approval was prompt and curt: 'We believe that given the resurgence of religious terrorism globally, when the universal principle known as God is employed in the most aberrant ways to justify attacks, murders, and other aggressive acts, we cannot agree to your nomination in this category. Moreover, we look at history, from the Crusades to the two world wars and the ideological upheavals of the twentieth century, we cannot but associate the idea of God with the justifications articulated by those who enacted the Holocaust and other tragedies.

For which reason…' The report was signed by Dr Gunnar Simonssen. Given his doctorates in medicine and the study of recent history, and the Holocaust in particular, Dr Gunnar Simonssen was an authority difficult to contradict.

Anders' first reaction was to discard the nomination as fantastical and get on with his work. Nobody would have questioned his decision, as his word was sovereign in the Academy. Moreover, those making the nomination couldn't have objected, there was no channel by which they could appeal, and it was sufficient to tell them that procedurally something was amiss, and they would be able boast that they had reached the long-, medium- or shortlist of the Nobel Prize, depending on which. He placed the file on the stack of those rejected for procedural reasons. And he got on with his work, productively. At the end of office hours, when the two advisers arrived to take the rejected files to the archive, Mr Olsson gave a start: what if he had not proceeded correctly? And this because from the procedural standpoint the nomination rightly rejected in the *peace* section, met all the parameters to be examined by another, more appropriate commission. Maybe he had not been inspired in directing the file to the commission that examined nominations in the peace category? So, he carefully wrote on the corner of the file: 'ECONOMICS commission.' And signed it. Katerina took the file away; she knew what was to be done with it next.

In a few days, he finished the procedural sorting of the *physics section* files under examination. Around two hundred had remained to be sent to the panel of experts. Which

wasn't many, and henceforward it would be easy. He had forgotten about passed on to the economics panel when Katarina, who had also brought him a glass of water to take with the pills for his pre-diabetes an acute ulcer, handed him the report sent back to him by Dr Jan Pedersen, the head of the *economics* panel.

'If you like, I can bring you a bottle of water to have handy. Or shall I make you some tea? Or can offer you some mango?'

'I beg your pardon?' said Mr Aners Rugger Olsson, awakening from his introspection.

The response was curt this time too: 'Following examination of the nomination forwarded to the economics panel, we consider that procedurally all the requirements have been met apart from arguments to support it. Although God is credited all over the world for the quantity and quality of consumer goods, as well as the quality of life, we must keep in mind that there is also major economic equality between continents, social classes, and individuals within the same society. Many years ago, the winner of the Peace Prize, Anjeze Gonxhe Bojaxhiu, known as Mother Theresa, put forward a similar nomination, incumbent on a universal idea more than a person, saying among other things that in this world it is the rich rather than the poor who are hard to feed. Until the problem of equality can be solved, we consider that the nomination does not satisfy the necessary arguments…' He pushed the file to the edge of his desk with the rest of the rejected files. He had decided to do what he ought to have done from the very start.

Mr Olsson sighed and asked for some tea. He suddenly had a bitter taste in his mouth. It might have been from the pill, which contained seal bile. After she brought him his cup of tea, in which floated an Asian rose petal, Katarina informed him that the news that God had been proposed for the Nobel Prize had appeared in the press. There was quite a big commotion about it.

How had the news leaked out?

From the panels that had examined the file, probably. Or even from the Balkan Christian association that had made the nomination. Possible. Given the channels of *media contamination* nowadays, every word breathed anywhere instantly circles the globe.

He slid the file back from the edge of the desk and leafed thought it again. God? He, Anders Rugger Olsson was an agnostic. He had never found any rational, objective arguments to make him believe in the existence of God. Although he believed in God the same as he believed in love, democracy, peace, the rotation of the Earth, the circularity of time, life's inexorability, and so on. He also believed in other things. He believed in the moment, for example. Yes, when he had insomnia and lay awake thinking in the middle of the night, he would feel as if he were nestling at the heart of the moment as if inside an egg. And from that egg he was ejected into the next moment, the next egg. And so on. The moment was warm inside. Let us reveal a secret: sometimes the moment ejected him not into another moment but straight into Katarina's womb. Really. It was as warm inside, if not warmer. That dream made him feel

a sort of pleasant guilt that sometimes stayed with him during the day.

'Do you believe in God?' he asked Katarina. 'Do you believe that God really exists?'

'God?' I've never thought about it! He exists, I think, given so many people relate to Him. Even this nomination submitted to our Academy is an argument for His existence. That's what I think. Just the same as ideas, laws, rules exist. I'm not actually religious.'

Katarina then brought him a press file with the latest news about the Academy, the upcoming Nobel Prizes, the bookmakers' odds. Yes, God was already being given astounding odds. Satirical magazines were also all over the news item. Cartoons galore. There had been a number of protests on the part of the traditional Churches. The sectarian churches supported the nomination. Some said that the nomination was a gimmick, others passionately hailed it. A Moscow newspaper smugly wrote: 'This nomination is pale recognition on the part of mankind that God is the supreme Creator. It is a start for regaining lost ground…' A Greek newspaper called down on the Academy an anathema liberally sprinkled with not at all flattering epithets. In *The New York Times* a Chinese futurologist predicted a China swiftly Christianised by this gesture on the part of the Nobel Foundation. But the opinion and ruling of the permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy were now awaited. His was the final, incontestable decision. The responsibility on his shoulders weighed him down, and he abruptly

hunched over. He felt small in his too large chair. Although he did not lack the courage to be paradoxical, because the world was waiting for news that would take it by surprise, to give broad space for discussion. The world, yes. And God was the argument in the secret pocket of every single person in the world.

Without him asking her to, Katerina brought him a peeled mango, sliced into eight almost equal segments. Mr Olsson began slowly to eat a segment, looking at Katarina in gratitude. Could she read his thoughts? Might Katarina be his protector, his guardian?

So, Mr Olsson summed up: physics, no; peace, no; economics, no. What then? Literature. That was all that was left. Yes, in one of the comment pieces in the press, a famous literary critic from Italy (whose name Olsson forgot) had shown that only the Nobel Prize for Literature would be fitting for God: 'Isn't he the author of the greatest fiction in the Universe? Isn't he the author of the greatest drama in the Universe? Isn't the human mind the canvas for this drama? Isn't He the one who has generated the billions of stories that have accompanied billions of human lives? Nobel Prizes for Literature have been awarded to politicians, musicians, actors by virtue of symbolic realities and principles. And there is no reality more symbolic than the one embodied by God. Whether a reality or not, without God mankind would not have evolved. This is the conclusion of all the philosophers who have left their mark on the human mind. It is a versatile prize, let us acknowledge!' Mr Olsson then made up his mind.

The press agencies relayed the news.

God had been nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature. His main work? Poetry. A particular collection? A title? Hard to specify. But what author would admit that he hadn't written under the influence of grace? And was not grace a divine emanation? All the world's poetry was in fact the indirect work of God.

The other authors on the long-, medium- and shortlists were about to be swept away by the wave of sympathy for God. The awards committee did not seem to hesitate. Was historic justice not being done? Was not the literary gift God-given?

Yes, it was.

But what if he did not turn up to collect the prize?

The prize money would be redirected to one of the world's Churches.

Would there be a public debate on the subject?

Yes, there would.

*

On his way home, Olsson stopped off at his small local bookshop. He wanted to buy a Bible, he wanted to have a few notions of God direct from the most authorised source. The bookshop didn't have any Bibles, but it did have a few copies of the Koran.

The Koran? No, that wasn't what he was after.

Kabbalah studies?

No, Kabbalah studies wasn't what he was looking for, either.

What about a copy of the Talmud? They had two different translations.

No, that wasn't what he was looking for, either.

*

All night he dreamed of God. And of Katarina. At one point, the God and Katarina were playing tennis, and he was the ball. When they hit him with their rackets, he felt sharp pains in his head and ribs.

Flying back and forth over the net, after the two hit him hard, he felt dizzy and then sick. He woke up and vomited.

But he never found out who won the match.

*

His personal adviser, Mrs Katarina Swenson, had prepared for him the folders of what the world's newspapers were writing about the Academy's current actions. The nomination of God for a Nobel Prize was front-page news the world over.

But Mr Olsson was no longer interested in the subject.

Yes, he wanted a glass of water.

Yes, would also like some tea.

Yes, he would also like a peeled and sliced mango.

Yes!

He looked at Katerina and suddenly discovered that she had a large number of wrinkles that radiated from the corners of her eyes before tapering away at her ears.

When had those wrinkles appeared on Katarina's face? He had known her for more than fourteen years, after all. Day after day, her face had seemed a full moon, a ripe peach.

And Katerina's tummy was no longer flat, it protruded. How had he not noticed before now?

Mr Olsson told Katerina that her dress had an unsightly crease.

An unsightly crease?

Yes, an unsightly crease.

All right, but where is this unsightly crease?

Mr Olsson could not say that the unsightly crease was over the pubis, the mons Venera. How to translate that into decent language? He had no idea. For fourteen years, he had failed to notice that the swelling of the pubis was like a hedgehog adopting a defensive position. He was noticing it now.

An unsightly crease?

Yes, an unsightly crease.

And Mr Olsson stood up, went over to Katarina, and placed his finger on Katarina's node of energy, her pubis. The effect of the touch was to send an electrical current through his veins and right up into his brain. In his heart, the current discharged heat, which seeped into his armpit like a burn.

Katarina shrieked. She wasn't expecting it. Mr Olsson's act abruptly contradicted fourteen years of irreproachable collegiality, during which she had not detected the slightest questionable conduct on his part. How to interpret that touch? It was if she had been pricked by something hard, sending a wave of warmth up to her brain. Might there be blood?

Mr Olsson stepped up to Katarina once more, trying to explain that the crease was still there, that for fourteen years he had only ever known her to dress impeccably, that her skirt was usually stretched taut over hips that were slightly too broad but all the more feminine for that. He extended his finger once more to point at the crease, which stood out below the pubis.

Katarina raised her hand to her eyes and let out a strident cry.

To Anders, the cry was like the violent rending of a cloth that had covered a gaping abyss.

The plate with the eight perfectly sliced segments of mango shattered on contact with the tiled floor.

*

Katarina Swenson filed a police complaint against Mr Anders Rugger Olsson for sexual harassment. She described what happened in minute detail, dwelling on the part where Mr Olsson felt her pubis. For felt it he had, rather than simply touching it.

Blows? Did he assault her?

No, he hadn't assaulted her.

Any attempt to engage in a sexual act?

No, not at all!

Did the victim wish for the accused to be held under arrest during the investigation? Did she feel that she was in any physical or moral danger while he was at liberty?

Yes. It would be better!

Were there any witnesses? It's important.

Yes. God.

God? Are you joking?

No, I'm not. God Himself.

Can God act as a witness?

Maybe. Why not? He's been nominated for the Nobel Prize. That is, he might win the Nobel Prize for Literature but he can't act as a witness in a sexual harassment case?

Maybe. So decided the Judge.

How will He be summonsed to provide evidence? What address should the summons be sent to?

This was of no interest to Mrs Katarina Swensson. It was a procedural matter outside the scope of her present concerns.

(From a collection of short stories in press)

DUMITRU AUGUSTIN DOMAN

The Odyssey of a Bottle of Scotch Whisky

On the 6th of December, the feast of Saint Nicholas, or Santa Claus, as he's popularly known, chief accountant Nicolae Popescu received a bottle of the finest Scotch whisky on the occasion of his name day. It was brought to him by former deputy consul Andrei Ionescu, who had received it—on some special occasion at some point in his life, we won't go into details—from the ambassador to Bucharest from some Nordic country. He treasured it more than anything else, for

sentimental reasons, as well as from professional pride, and not even in moments of the utmost thirst had he resorted to unscrewing the bottle cap. But caught by surprise when he was invited to his friend Nicu's name-day evening, against his better judgement he took the bottle from the sideboard, almost shedding a tear as he did so, and with hypocritical generosity gave it to his host as he greeted him with Sibiu salami, stuffed cabbage, barbecued meat, and Hungarian beer.

On 7 January, Ionel Bobescu invited his friend Nicu Popescu, among others, to his St John's Day party. Although possessed of chief-like principles, the chief accountant did not go to his friend and underling's party empty-handed. He brought him the bottle of Scotch whisky, as he had nothing else handy. They ate sausages and barbecued ribs of lamb, drank Cabernet Cîrligați, and had a fine evening, they and their families, which culminated in a chocolate cake.

But since among the thousand-year Romanian people with their *-escu*-suffixed surnames, name-day celebrations are in endless supply, and on the 30th of January Grigore Vasilescu, a friend of the above and undersecretary of state in the Department of the Environment, celebrated his. The more than twenty guests included Ionel Bobescu. And you don't go to an undersecretary of state's party with a cheap trinket and a plastic flower. Certainly not! So, he put the bottle of finest-quality Scotch whisky in a gift bag and felt in his element as he ingurgitated caviar, sliced salmon and the other culinary specialties, not to mention French wine.

But on the Feast of the Great and Victorious Martyr St George, George Mărgescu, county chairman of the party currently in government, held an honorary banquet, whose honorary and not so honorary guests included his superior, the undersecretary of state from the Department of the Environment. The latter, about to leave the house empty-handed, espied the bottle of Scotch whisky on the bar, grabbed it in passing, and gave it to the man whose name day was being celebrated, along with a hypocritical embrace.

On 21 May, Mrs Elena Costescu invited to her name day the county chairman of the party. Mrs Elena C. is no longer a minister, it is even rumoured that she is being investigated for corruption, tax evasion, and other ministerial exploits. But it is well to maintain relations, because you never know with the political dialectic, you never know which way the wheel of power is going to turn in these climes. So, before setting off to the lady minister's villa, George Mărgescu took the bottle of Scotch whisky, wiped off the dust with a moistened paper napkin, and gave it as his gift to the lady celebrating her name day.

The dust is gathering on the lady minister's case files at the National Anti-Corruption Agency, she appears every other night on the television, not the mainstream channels, but still television, and so, on the 30th of November, Andrei Ionescu invites the (former) lady minister to his name-day party. Relations need to be maintained, he tells himself. We who engage in politics on the banks of the Dîmbovița River, good, bad, toxic, be it as it may, need to stick close. He was on tenterhooks as to whether or not

she would decline the invitation. But as in the times when one hand washed the other, the lady minister was still a lady. The former minister placed in the arms of the former consul the bottle of finest-quality Scotch whisky, a bottle originating from the ambassador to Bucharest from a Nordic country.

Not Odobac's Walnut Tree

For a few months, I've had a new neighbour. The owner of the house over the fence from me is a man of about fifty, tall, supple, with frizzy hair and a long neck which he cranes over the fence to peer into my garden, without him having to stand on tiptoes. You'd think he was that character from the Creangă folk tale, able to catch birds from the trees or even ones in flight. He walks slowly around his garden, which is as big as a town hall foyer, in other words, about three metres wide and twenty-five metres long. In this foyer, he has planted about a dozen apple and plum saplings, and has dug two onion and garlic beds.

One day, walking with a glass of palinka through my cherry orchard, I saw him perched on an aluminium stepladder cutting with a circular saw the walnut branches which, rather

impertinently, true, had stretched over his garden fence. At first, I was annoyed: I had planted the 115 trees in my orchard one by one over a period of twenty years. They're like my children, and when someone attacks your child… But going over to the fence, I took a sip of palinka and calmed down. When I reached the fence, my neighbour had just finished his big and important task.

'Good day to you, neighbour!' I greeted him. 'What's this that you're doing?'

'I'm cutting these walnut branches which were keeping my garden in the shade and ruining my agricultural production.'

'You do it now, just when the walnut is in leaf and it's producing nuts? Look, they're as big as cockerel's balls!'

'That's right.'

'Look, neighbour, this walnut tree is twenty-five years old, it's young and vigorous, it's not Odobac's walnut—'

'What? Odobac?'

'Never mind, it's just an expression.'

'No,' said the neighbour, 'tell me, what's Odobac? Is it a swearword?'

'Come off it! Odobac was an old man in his nineties who had a walnut tree on the boundary between him and his neighbour, like my walnut tree here, but his was about three hundred years old.'

'And did the neighbour cut it down?'

'Well, not exactly. Relatives grandchildren, villagers, everybody suddenly got it into their heads that the walnut tree gave off

unhealthy vapours, that it drained something from the soil of the village, that it was poisonous, and they decided to cut it down.'

'And wasn't that the right thing to do?'

'Nobody knows. A walnut tree is a walnut tree.'

'And what's the connection between your walnut tree and Otobanc's?'

'Odobac's. That's what I'm telling you, that there isn't any connection. My walnut tree doesn't give off unhealthy vapours, it doesn't drain anything from the soil on our street, and it's only twenty-five, not three hundred.'

'That doesn't matter.'

'And, let me tell you, Odobanc hanged himself in his walnut tree before the villagers could cut it down. He died with the tree…'

'And you mean to say—'

'Come off it! I'm not going to hang myself because of three branches cut off using a circular saw—you don't have a chainsaw, do you? But I am going to give you the satisfaction, even so…'

The next day, I called an old man from the neighbourhood who had a red chainsaw with which in his lifetime he had cut thousands of firs and beeches in the Făgăraș Mountains. A real professional. It took him no more than two hours to fell the walnut tree and chop it into small pieces: trunk, branches, the whole lot. A veritable vegetal massacre. I invited the old man to the summer house and paid him for that aestival catastrophe. Then I regaled him with sausages, bacon, sheep's cheese, palinka

and wine. We talked, we told all kinds of stories, we laughed, and I also cried a little, but only to myself. I was drinking palinka, I was laughing, and in my heart of hearts I was mourning the walnut tree, which wasn't Odobac's, but whose end had been no different.

As I conducted the old chainsaw man to the gate, my neighbour called to me over the fence:

'What have you done, neighbour?'

'I cut down the walnut tree, so as not to keep your big crop in the shade.'

'I don't think that's right. Walnut trees are protected by law. If I make a complaint, it won't go well for you.'

I was woken from my afternoon nap by loud knocking on the sheet metal gate, knocking that also woke every dog on the street. I went outside, still-half asleep. At the gate were two men who introduced themselves as environmental inspectors.

'We have been informed that in your garden an offence has been committed and we have to make a report and decide what measures are applicable.'

They make to enter. I shake off my sleepiness in a flash and ask:

'You want to enter my garden, private property, without a warrant from a prosecutor?'

The two look at each other, taken aback, but the one who seems to be in charge replies:

'We are here in the course of duty, we're state officials and have the right to—'

'I'll say it again: you're not coming in unless you have a warrant. If you barge your way in, I have the right to use my axe to defend my property.'

A police car now pulls up to the gate and a policeman and young policewoman get out.

'Good day! We've received a complaint that a crime against the environment has been committed and we're here to investigate.'

I repeat for the police the same spiel about entering private property without a warrant. The police repeat the same justification as the environmental inspectors, almost word for word. The parleying is abruptly interrupted by the arrival of another car, from which alights a man of around forty, in a brown suit and blue tie.

'Good day! Are you the owner of this property?'

'Yes.'

'I'm prosecutor Nicolae Berbecel from the local magistrate's office and I have a warrant to investigate an offence.'

I step aside and the brown suit enters the garden, closely followed by the inspectors and the police. They all go directly to the spot where the walnut has been professionally butchered. They take out their notebooks, their cameras, the whole arsenal.

In the meantime, a long line of official vehicles has formed all down the street: ambulance, fire engine, funeral director's … The neighbours come outside to stand at their gates, some enter my garden, my private property, they come inside like it's the local theatre and they're attending an official performance,

with written statements, filming, statements from the man who committed an offence against the environment…

One of them looks up at the sky:

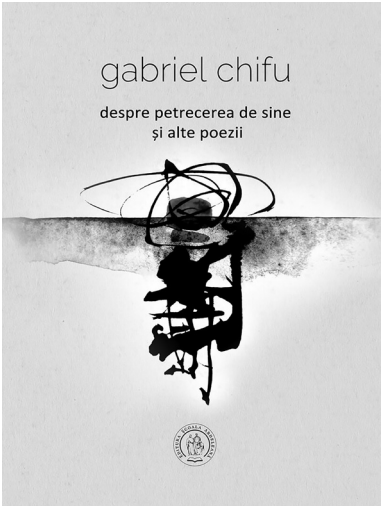
'They said this morning on the television that there would be an eclipse at this time. But nothing. Look, the sun's blazing away, and no eclipse.'

'Not here in our country, and not at this time,' says one of the seven or eight gawpers in my garden, 'in America. It'll be at night here…'

'In America, eh? Well, isn't it the same sun?'

MIRCEA STÂNCEL

In search of the fitting self



The new collection of poems by Gabriel Chifu (1954-) reveals a poet who has reached full maturity. Hence the complex relationship with a series of (past) identities, where time becomes the central character. These creative identities of the poet are naturally part of a life that has undergone constant transformation ever since his début

collection, *Abode in the heart* (1976). We see here a reflection/ expenditure of his own creative persona over the course of time, albeit subect to a disadvantage: 'Your life is in the past' (p. 55). It is an attempt at self-reconciliation, which gives rise to slight but necessary nostalgia and preserves the feeling of continuity and choice. In this sense, as his tools the poetic agent employs introspection and meditation in order to reveal the depths of being, of the *expenditure of self*. What binds this approach together is existential angst, a certain weariness in his visible struggle with his own existence. The poet is aware of how impossible it is to reconstruct the appropriate *self* over the course of time because every stage of life unveils new sides to his personality, and his memories grow fragmentary and unclear: 'I forget everything./ The past no longer finds/ the road hither./ Events, people from other times/ remain back there, left behind' (p. 16).

His recent collection, suggestively titled *On the expenditure of self and other poems*, published by Editura Școala Ardeleană this year, is elegant in its graphic design. The substance of the book is partly taken up with an analytical reactivation of previous phases, bringing about an act of anamnesis on the subject of *loss* and *restoration*, of rediscovery of 'wasted bodies'. His poetry is characterised by a narrative that is intellectualised, although sometimes seemingly simple, and deliberately designed to illustrate the thematic complexity. His poems from the present encourage better reflection on the fundamental dominants of existential reality and the meaning of life, time, death, the human condition: 'Events, people from other times/ remain back there,

left behind,/ buried beneath the rubble/ of time that has caved in on them/ like a Cretan temple' (p. 16).

Metaphors, which are often composite, serve profound conceptual themes, as do intertextual elements: symbols of 'particles', of the 'fragmented self.' These dominants are carefully crafted into an elevated imagery that is both neo-modernist and postmodernist. The poet obviously wishes to remain free of literary fashions, as he has from the very beginning, while also always remaining relevant and innovative, flexible enough to to tackle the most various styles and themes, but above all, to have access to contextual changes in the search for authenticity. Likewise, the realist approach to detail provides codified and ambiguous meanings, engaging in drama and allegory. Take for example the motif of the personified, captive house: 'I have no escape/ the living, versatile house/ has begun to close in on me./ Soon I will be unable to move,/ neither forward nor back,/ I will have neither future nor past' (p. 46). We may also speak of an existential blockage, but also of a constant instability referred to in a more or less veiled manner. The incorporation of and commentary on cultural concepts ends up adding further strata of meaning: 'The house in which I dwell/ is strangely animate,/ it continuously alters its shape,/ constantly grows and shrinks' (p. 46).

His recent collection opens with a poem of self-reflection and self-examination, an *ars poetica*, I might say, which sets the tone for what follows. It is ultimately also a moment of reflection that encompasses the whole of his creative process. What Gabriel has in view is the complexity of the stages through which he

has passed, the emotional and physical states in which he has created, and above all the *product* resulting therefrom. As I was saying, he brings into discussion the validity of such sources of inspiration, the degree of the emotions and craft employed, and in particular the continuous *search for the self*.

What is striking from the outset is the desire to lend shape to and understand the variety of his own and his poetry's facets. Reconciling them presents a challenge to the poet, also because they occurred at different stages: 'I seek my bodies strewn every which way' (p. 38). Some of them, rejected or forgotten, he regards as 'derelict houses', others, in the present, are 'drowned in tears: 'As for the bodies, they swiftly pass:/ alas, illness takes full control of them/ weakens them, fells them' (p. 49). Let us look a little more closely at the poet's identities (stages), which we find to be revealing. The classification of the versions of the lyric 'I' (which reminds us of Jung's analysis of 'I'/body/good, valid), which defines the poet (in fact revealing the 'implicit' side of his texts), creates a contemplative poetic atmosphere and, above all, a certain melancholy nuance that lends his poetry a meditative, analytic hue (see the poem 'Bodies of mine lined up along the side of the road'): 'Of some I'm ashamed, and rightly so./ But in some the heart still beats strong/ [...] They give off rays at random./ What kind of electricity is this? (p. 7). The question that the poet asks here is which version of his lyric 'I' should ultimately be listened to, which of the variants now fits him and should be followed? 'I've no idea how to judge. I don't even know/ which of these bodies/ still fits me now that I'm hard

pressed./ Is there one of them/ that I can recycle, in which to take shelter/ so that I can carry on walking?' (p. 7) The poet's struggle with his lyric identities is situated between regret and acceptance. And it is here that the agent's dilemma in understanding his previous iterations arises. In the end, he is conscious of the importance of the 'bodies' he has left behind, but he allows doubt to creep in. The synthesis of the past is made in the subtlest terms and is positive. 'Paying mind' ultimately depends on a close examination of the decisive stages. The struggle of the lyric 'I' and the distancing of the self both trigger the dynamic emergence of states of unease.

In the poem 'Awkward elephant' the tone is despairing, reflexive. The intense flux of his thoughts, to be found in almost every text in the collection, accentuates the feeling of disturbance in his desperate attempt to stop the 'expenditure of self'. The tone of the poems also refers us to a universe of belated, complete introspection, with profound feelings of melancholy, emphasising powerlessness to stop the *expenditure*, but above all rediscovery of the self, and all these seem to be situated in a continuous effort of resistance. The desperate search for meaning, for redemption, for repose, is part of the tireless *salvation and knowledge of self*: 'I kneel. I pray and seek myself./ I no longer know who I am' (p. 27). We would not be mistaken in also speaking of a feeling of confusion and disorientation, of insecurity when it comes to the paths chosen, but also of abandonment into the arms of transcendence, through the use of dramatic natural and religious imagery (lightning, heaven, earth, floods etc.) for a

divine path. The poems in the collection obviously situate us very closely within the vicinity of European elegiac structures, where *loss* takes place, but rather than our mentioning these now, it gives us pleasure to recall the Eminescu-like poems at the end of the collection, with their ultimate yearning.

The poems in the collection are biographical in substance and reflect the human condition in all its frailty, in our final moments, moments of examination, when we seek the true meaning of existence. Gabriel Chifu's most recent poems clarify still further his personal lyric note, the deeper aspects of his self, and his desire to stick to the path along which he originally set out (in the poetry of the eighties generation), but not too closely to the standards 'imposed' by the trainers.

Selected poem:

The final shore, the final day

(second version)

Soon I shall reach the shore
of that sea

that I have always dreamed of
and which ever did I wish-not-wish to reach.

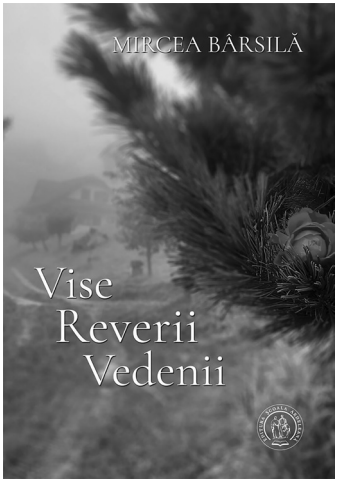
It will happen exactly
as it was planned to be before the beginning.

Drawn hypnotically
I shall step into the pellucid water
that will seem to me paradisiacal.
And I shall swim far, until I forget myself,
and the sorrows that oppress my mind,
heavy as millstones,
will suddenly become so light
that I will no longer feel them.

Then, on gentle waves calmly afloat,
I shall fall asleep, I shall fall asleep.
Yearned-for, culminating rest,
the one that is eternal.

A postmodernist in the midst of nature

Mircea Bârsilă (1952-) is one of the few leading eighties-generation poets in whom we find a deep, intellectual, highly refined poetic respiration in the midst of nature, of the reverberations of life and ritual, which also combines with emotion and sentiment. In his work, re-writing acquires a sense of defiance, one deeply imbued with irony, and is not only a revolt against a tradition that has exhausted its resources, but also sets in motion the entire structure of the text, amplifies the symbolic and cultural signification of the



elements under attack, and challenges our imagination: 'Lord God, after you take my life, Lord,/ also take mercy on me by taking my death. I don't know whether I'll have/ the patience required to wait, once dead, for the radiant day of the promised Final Resurrection' (p. 29) and 'Perched atop a withered poplar, the blue jay of the water meadows/ unwittingly symbolises the dead centre where the whispered/ sermon of the absolute founders' (p. 45). In addition to such symbols of the absolute, which are held back by the everyday, we also find the expected situations devoid of meaning. We find the limits of a lofty world and the dead centre of the encounter with reality, where the discourse of the absolute founders. It is a spiritual state that the poet has never given up sustaining (against the literary tide) in every collection of poems, in the most direct and laborious way possible: the world's lived reality is a perpetual, profound, inexhaustible hypostasis in poetry, regardless of fashion. The intellectualism here combines with affective messages, where descriptive images evoke strong states of disquiet. The majority of Mircea Bârsilă's poems create highly dramatic tensions, lived experiences translated into various forms that are deeply imbued with culture: 'Every autumn, on the hills the boars crack between their teeth/ the bones—a beautiful woman's—of summer' (p. 43) and 'I find myself at an age when the mountains step before me in white gowns/ the same as doctors' (p. 20) and 'I am that I am: a fir leaning over the beautiful chasm/ between a woman's breasts (over which,

night after night, the imaginary beasts in her mirrors keep vigil till dawn)' (p. 48).

As a result, in his work the image is neither serene nor innocent, and often it is left within a mysterious, silent atmosphere; it does, of course, have something of the twisted exercise of manners in its connection with the human, aimed at challenging the reader under the painful sign of the message. Thanks to an acute feeling for minute observation of natural detail, Mircea Bârsilă unleashes a vivid, profound poetry, and the game he plays and which is frequently talked about is not just on paper, it is one that employs actual rocks, dead bodies, soil, love, birds, forest mushrooms, reeds, gnats. What I mean is that it is made of words experienced as alive, which communicate varied textures and provide an acute reinterpretation of traditional structures.

Mircea Bârsilă weaves together objects and living creatures that have mutual affinities (with a lucid focus on deconstruction), by means of experimental language and provocative themes. We see how he approaches nature in an interactive text, leaves the reader with a clear path to images of every variety and deconstructed natural landscapes. This is how a successful *Pastel* sounds: 'Tracks of snakes and birds in the mud of fords, obscene boletes/ plunged in shadow and the paths' detours amid withies and brambles/ the green suspenders of the bushes, an ant hill, a heron, a rye field bathed in silver, the clover, melilot and camomile lacking/ the requisite prestige, a potato plot wrecked by wild boars,/ reeds, rushes, pewter grass [...] pied wagtails,

whistles and enigmatic cries stirred by the innocent/ presence of God walking, in the guise of a beetle,/ among the blades of grass [...] here first begins, morning after morning, life,/ here begins, morning after morning, the curvature of the earth' (p. 47).

The 'unconventional' language of Mircea Bârsilă's poems conveys to us, in a very direct way, power and authority, a permanent persuasion. The linguistic articulations distract the attention focused on the subtleties that imbue his texts (and less on the poetic forms), which are carefully controlled, line by line. And these subtleties do not make understanding more difficult but rather illumine it. Sometimes he creates the feeling that the delicacy and above all finesse of the texts are elided through the use of a penetrating language that breaks with conventions hitherto. This is not a superficial impression. The poet writes and rewrites the *nature* that Romanian poetry has long *imagined*, which was good for other periods, when the monotony sometimes became irksome, preserving from it the successes that outlive the times and fashions, and of which he constantly wants to remind us. He does not play games only for the sake of textual semiotics, but carries, as I have said, the world with him, chops it up fine. And the metaphorical substance of the fantastical or miraculous elements is more often than not the cherry on the cake.

Mircea Bârsilă aims in the subtlest possible way to *stimulate myth*, but using different tools, through de-sacralisation (profanation). The poem *Thalassa* is one such text that decodes the fear and trembling of myth, 'Greek ritual', and godhood is

associated with the depths, the darkness of the sea, either as a symbol of life or as a territory of perdition and suffering; the phenomenon of a space that is both mysterious and to be feared. Here it tends towards the fragility and instability of human being: 'Thalassa! Thalassa! And its dreams long drawn-out/ and so evil/ that often they make even me cry out in my sleep./ A convex expanse of smiles, of gold and forgetting./ Overwhelming, a vast absence/ whose tentacles clench me in a merciful and seductive/ entanglement [...] Take far away from me the woman in the blood!/ Take far away from me the sea in the blood/ and the humiliation of always feeling myself on the outside/ in its proximity:/ a cornered beast with shaggy hair, with sticky eyes,/ a beggar on the steps of a church' (pp.15-16).

Mircea Bârsilă has always insisted on a winning dominant, acquired at great pains (as the reviewers have noted at the time), and he has done so with precision, revealing lived experiences and a deep understanding of the relationship between meaning and image. In his approach to nature, let us reiterate, he mythologises by demythologising and sacralises by de-sacralising, if one might put it like that, pushing things slightly too far. All the elements of his poetry are anchored in an experienced human reality, which pursues our every step, that of disquietude or, if you prefer, despair.

The collection features back-cover praise from some of Romania's most important poetry critics. In alphabetical

order: Al. Cistelecan, Dan Cristea, Valeriu Cristea, Gheorghe Grigurcu, Nicolae Manolescu, Ion Pop, and Alex. Ștefănescu.

Selected poem:

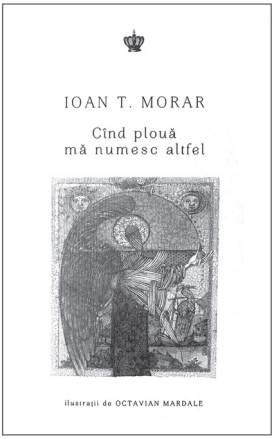
Repudiation

I write only in moments when I forget to be sad.
I forget the rats in barns filled with grains of corn and wheat,
the imaginary snakes in the bathroom and the badgers
in the dark under the bed
where I always sleep alone.
Yes, I write only in moments when I forget to be sad
and if, by writing, I don't feel gradually transposed
into the situation of an innocent girl singing for strangers
who late at night play cards and who,
drinking her song like wine,
pour it in their glasses,
it means the poem in question doesn't represent me.
which is why, in token of repudiation, I put the words
in a plastic bag or in an old hat,
in whatever I have handy
at the time, take them to a field for the cuckoos to spit on
as they fly from tree to tree, for the snails to sully
with their whitish secretions,
for the foxes to lick—the rabid ones and those in heat again—
for the lizards, butterflies, glow-worms to frighten

and for the ants to torture, both by day, once the dew lifts,
and by night, with their venom,
administered in experimental doses.
I write and rewrite, delete, discard, alter and plane metaphors
all day long, thoughts and sentiments still rough to the touch.
The hardest for me are the poems that have old
reservations in the names of other poets
(some of them as yet unborn) and particularly
the ones sent by my friend Amur:
a magnificent
Pekinese, who, in the next world,
was elevated to the rank of angel.

The sincerities of the poetic act

Ioan T. Morar (1956-) is a poet who wagers on paradoxical expressions and intellectual tensions; his poems prompt us to varying degrees of interpretation with the aim of creating polysemy, intensively achieved through the experience of reading. At the same time, we notice a return to (re-establishment of) 'sense', a move towards deeper meanings, without the text becoming rigid—an aiming for the revelatory poem: 'My life is a gold coin/ pure gold/ tossed/ up in the air/ up to the heights of heaven/ it spins/ glints/ spins/ hundreds of times/ ablaze/ it's a whirl of light/



of which the wise men speak' (p. 33). The present texts develop a series of meditations on identity, in which time and personal as well as collective history can be found caught up in sensorial games, in deeply experienced contrasts. All of these are dependent on the change of ordinary theme and the dissolution of ordinary identity. One in which arises a different coincidence of the lyric 'I' modified according to the elements of the time. This is why even the book's title, *When it rains I'm named differently* is constructed according to the same poetic format, beyond that which can be enounced, reminding us of the ineffable à la Nichita Stănescu. On the other hand, the poems communicate to us a certain anonymous sadness, perhaps even more than that. The metaphor to do with tears that flow and end up 'in the wine of those who will come after us' hides a silent pain, which can be interpreted as a part of a collective inheritance, rather than simply an individual one, as we might sometimes believe. Ioan T. Morar's metaphors also tend towards a reincarnation of traditional symbols and are associated with 'personal' suffering. His poetry ultimately speaks of *his own body*, but allows broader meanings that open towards the community: 'I perish along with all my identities [...] how can we fit inside a single flag?' (p. 18). He aims at central symbols, such as that of the 'blood' and the 'city', although not only these, and they are part of known pains, in the dominant of noble causes, and are not treated in a negative register. Ultimately, the tragedy of the individual is rolled from past to present, and it is now

seen as a statistic in a tangible system. As the poet ironically says: 'I felt good in all those statistics,' he reduced the tangible person, in other words, man, in all his being, rich in unique pulsations, to a depersonalised unit, emptied of emotional substance. For Ioan T. Morar, life is perceived, temporally, as incomplete, but above all inadequate, even if time, as such, is intact. In order to stimulate the reader's critical and creative thinking, he also tests the limits of poetic language. He tries to capture that which cannot be expressed through words, what we currently name the conjunction of materiality and the transcendence of language. In this way, he exposes a beguiling mystery and confronts us with the inexpressible. As a result, the poet is interested in profound and delicate concepts that are hard to couch in words: 'If we didn't know how to name/ the butterfly/ in a thousand ways/ how should be think/ that we will contain/ death/ in a single word?' (p. 128)

The texts in this collection set out, we believe, to open up feeling, nostalgia, but also past and forgotten debts, and to incorporate them in an inner lyric landscape or even to resort to 'hiding' and classifying them in ungraspable 'residues'. Is this all that literary time now permits? They are actually aesthetic mechanisms that lead to a dissolution of identity, to depersonalisation of collective feeling. The avoidance of directly conveyed sentiments seems to mould itself perfectly to the strong voice of the lyric 'I'. The poems of Ioan T. Morar, which, in general, are constructed from short lines, are intended to create a strong

impact on the reader through this type of perfectly achieved aesthetic 'muteness'. And in this way to recharge so-called exhausted symbols.

In Morar's work, paradox combines with subtle humour, whence often results refined poetic expressions. Irony combines with profound truths, which can be likened to the technique employed by Marin Sorescu. This format becomes a mechanism that sets in motion both thought and laughter: 'I shave after a few days,/ After a few years/ I shave/ After a lifetime/ in which I've produced miles of hair [...] after which/ in the depths of the mirror/ I see shaving/ a series of men/ that I don't know—my ancestors [...] a drop of blood/ has come down hundreds of years/ a family inheritance/ to bloom now on my freshly/ shaven cheeks.' And if we go further, the aforementioned mechanism, easily neglected by poets, here has an unexpected effect on poetry. Ioan T. Morar reveals a major existential dimension, he brings to light a subtle critique of social and literary conventions: 'with the money I get for a poem/ I can't even pay for a cheap/ hooker.'

We might say, without erring overly much, that Ioan T. Morar is among the (few) poets who send out, faintly for the time being, the signal that a literary period is now ending, that of 'sophistry' in poetry. He is emotionally and existentially invested, even if the sensory is reflected almost entirely through the intellect.

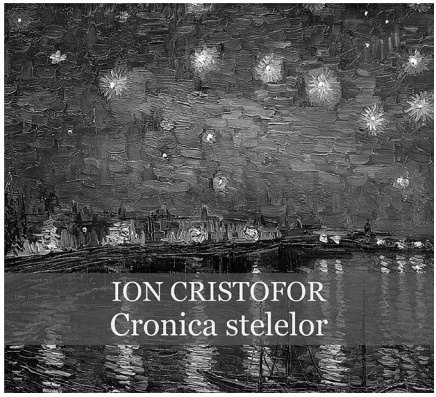
Selected poem:

21 grams

The fine mist
that lifts
imperceptibly
heavenward
without being detected
by the apparatuses
when we die
is not only the soul
as we believe
in every religion
but also a part of us
because
we were unable
to describe it

Emotional depiction of the real

Ion Cristofor (1952-) is primarily a lyric poet (even if narrative also makes itself lightly felt in his work), but one who makes poetry more accessible to young, ordinary readers in an extremely turbulent literary world. It's not hard for you to localise his 'open' poem, to grasp its details, to understand its subject—*a calligraphic landscape with flutes*. Its imagery is constructed on contemporary foundations and it resonates with us privately. The poet plunges into the world of today with a fury: the social, the political, the erotic world… And in



this respect, it must be said, Cristofor is not far away from the themes of rap and street poetry (see for example 'We anxiously await' and other poems).

Cristofor is a poet of the eighties Equinox school, who was not part of the movement's hardcore of founder members, he flirts with a surrealism that is serious in tone, and through his climate activism, he is a poet who cares. He cultivates a poetry that is aimed at both the casual and the committed reader, winning them over with the play of his imagination, his freedom of expression, the naturalness of his discourse. The moisture content of Cristofor's poems depends on an acidic-luminous area of vision, although let it be said that only in this way are the tensions in the structure of the text further amplified. And his humour pedals major psychological functions, through a generalised approach, in the form of bands glued to paper: 'The brothels and the banks count their money, con people, turn the light off/ The girls chatter and smoke by the petrol station on the corner,/ The mad moon is acting up on the pavement' (p. 74). Everywhere we see how masculinity in its every social form wants to control everything through a legitimate voice: 'For a lifetime I've been writing and writing a monograph on the stars/ During breaks I listen through the walls to the growing breasts of the girls next door// I'll wait for Jesus to arrive on the evening train/ with a medal, with a brass band, with a bushy crown of thorns.// A dog barks, the newspapers shriek, a country collapses, a child dies// lilies and petunias stand humiliated their eyes to the ground' (p. 73).

Ion Cristofor nimbly combines the tragic side of society with unconventional dramatic projections: 'A piano/ dumped on the riverbank/ by some workers// who've just been moved into the house/confiscated from a family of bourgeois/ deported to the Canal// And the cascade/ lamenting all night through/ to the rhythms of Bach' (p. 9) He conveys feelings with enviable precision. His dreams touch on the countryside and the affective, not only in the presence of death, as part of nature's inevitable cycle: 'The raucous starlings open the gates of autumn/ and the mellow fruits fall from branches with a thump,/ a reminder of death's perfection' (p. 18), 'My grandfather teaches me to die' (p. 76), but also in the frequency of eroticised vegetal life in various situations: 'I remember the season when/ in my childhood home/ the leaves fell from the calendars,/ and the dried bean pods showed in their leathery cirrus sac/ black, brown or orange nipples' (p. 23).

The collection *Chronicle of the Stars* (Editura Școala Ardeleană, 2017) is the model of a 'rebellion' waged within the poet's social imaginary, a rebellion which we also find, fragmentarily, but not, I think, so emphatically, in other more recent collections. His principle of essentialisation is based on an art between communication and style, making use of moods dictated by the given situation. It is under the sign of the absence of external form, wagering on freedom of expression, that the whole 'story' of the collection unfolds, but not in the absence of an internal, intellectual, emotional appearance that obviously takes the outline of the poet's personality. We find here a mixture of

long and short lines, which allow the fragmentary to unfold. He juxtaposes the dreams of the (recent) child with past and present history in all its implications. He avoids the abstraction à la Ion Barbu practised by the Equinox group, which might interrupt the normal development of poetic feeling, and tips the balance towards a democratisation of poetry. It is a question of free thought, an amalgam of images, which Cristofor tries to harmonise according to carefully structured criteria against a backdrop of positive nostalgia. Sometimes even within a single poem he introduces a wide range of situations, both lived and literary. And he is very attentive when feeling moves closer to painful realities. There are all kinds of life experiences to which he has easy access, some of them subject, with the same detachment, to surrealistic distortions: 'The cello caught fire/ in the tree in front of the house/ the birds abruptly fell silent.// Lord, the birds from in front of my house/ have fallen in love with a girl' (p. 14) Ion Cristofor is one of those poets who think that the subject is not only literal, even if the language employed is metonymic and figurative. His poetic utterances are not hallucinatory, even if they seem to be, but rather they are subject to a lucid state of mind.

Selected poem:

The hour chimes

The hour chimes when the pods open up to reveal
imperial peas as sensuous as the female nipple
as red as the eye of the rabbit hanging from the butcher's
hook

With the petty deities of the field
Grey mice, bee-eaters, daws and blackbirds
over which October rolls like an unseen crusher with the spirit of putrefaction,
with the phantasm of a wasted youth

It's the season when the old flesh sends out its dark emissaries
among the trees in the mist, among the trees freshly toppled by the storm
it slips into the tussocks rotting in the plain
into the birds delighting in a carcass on the stubble field now cloaked in hoarfrost

It's the hour when it's meet that we greet death's dominion with whistles, with bread and salt
with flowery cloths, with candles winking like the eyes of children

with immaculate handkerchiefs, like those passed across the abode of the dear dead
across the wood caressed by plane blade, sweet fragrant wood, wood for a country coffin

When you whisper softly to yourself
'these tawny rustling stems of withered maize
are merely the Madwoman's feeble stylistic exercises'
and I like any other mannered man will not gainsay you
contenting myself with muttering something below
the wind-swayed lanterns of the carts
returning from a different life
at night from the market
with wilted goods, not sold yet again.

AUREL PANTEA

Notes on Christian Mystical Poetry

In the Christian period, relations with the sacred have been determined by the revelations of the Gospels. All the intellectual-affective experiences that followed the Gospels have been founded on the doctrine of salvation as revealed by Jesus Christ. The search for God has produced many types of discourse: the theological—founded on Christian dogmas—the rational, and the mystical. There is therefore a God of theodicies, a God of the rationalists, and a God of the mystics (Kolakowski). The third of these spiritual experiences has also nurtured the spirit of theology, as well as nurturing the sphere of religious poetry. Every definition applied to the mystic state dwells on the ineffable side of such an experience, revealing

the ontological metamorphosis of the one who experiences it. Founded on the subject/object dichotomy, European thought is forced to dispense with this distinction in such cases. It is precisely this that moves Eastern and European religious thinking closer together, almost to the point of similarity. One of the definitions of the mystic, a philosophical one, which attempts to integrate its multiple forms, can be found in Nikolai Berdyaev's *The Realm of the Spirit and the Realm of Caesar: The Meaning of Creation*. Following on from Goerres, the Russian theologian and philosopher distinguishes between divine mysticism, natural mysticism, and diabolical mysticism. The mystical experience proper is situated as a mode of the spirit's activity 'that moves beyond the bounds of the opposition between subject and object, i.e., it does not fall within the category of the objective.' Berdyaev likewise distinguishes between religious-mystical experience and religion proper, where 'religious experience is objectified, socialised, organised.' In *The Meaning of Creation*, a work from Berdyaev's youth, the mystical experience is placed beneath the sign of revelation, and therefore within the realm of the irrational. Here, mysticism is conceived as revealing the inner man, 'as opposed to the world of the exterior man' (see also Meister Eckhart, *On the Noble Man*). This inner man is a representation of wholeness, an image of that type of revelation whereby man appears as a microcosm, integrating the totality of the universe. Such a process falls within the realm of ecstasy, the negation of individuality through absorption into the sacred. The Russian philosopher goes on to distinguish between

mental experience—a name for the psychical element—and purely spiritual experience, whereby man reaches his inner self. The paradigms of the Christian religious spirit are established by the *Gospel according to John*, the *Epistles of St Paul*, and the evangelical experience of St Peter as founder of the Church. Berdyaev finds that the mystical tradition began with St John the Apostle. This tradition was to be recognised in the mystical works of St Francis of Assisi, St Simeon the New Theologian, and St John of the Cross. An important phase in the development of mystical thought can be found in the *Enneads* of Plotinus. For Plotinus, all the things in the world have their foundation in an absolute reality. This reality cannot become an object of thought, it does not address the analytical spirit, the intelligence, and it cannot be conceived of by means of logical operations. Plotinus' absolute is the One: simple reality, without any parts. Given it is so, it eludes intelligent analysis, inasmuch as the intelligence breaks everything down into parts, and consequently it conceives of the world as a series of elements. But a reality constructed from parts, when perceived by means of the intelligence, is inscribed within the temporal. Absolute reality, on the other hand, does not submit to the analytical spirit, it therefore rejects the temporal, as it is postulated as being without beginning or end and atypical. Discursive reason, therefore the intelligence, finds no object within an absolutely simple reality. The intelligence likewise cannot conceive of things except within well-defined limits, as forms. But the reality of the One rejects limits and therefore any form within which the intelligence

might frame it. Whereas the analytical spirit is rejected by the One, man may nonetheless access the One through direct, synthetic perception thereof. This direct channel is *ecstasy*. The ecstatic state presupposes a liberation of the soul from every preoccupation with particular realities, even the distinction between good and evil. In such a state, the soul can be the Seat of God/the One. In ecstasy, the soul is beautified, because the One is defined as absolute Beauty. Therefore, to attain beauty implies purification of the particular. The ecstatic state is, as may be seen, revelatory, the state in which duality vanishes, in which the divine wells up in the souls of the *initiates*. The disappearance of duality brings about happiness, which Plotinus defines as the moment when 'it is impossible to distinguish the soul from God, as long as it rejoices in His presence.' Ecstasy is a form of supreme love, recognisable, as an imitation, in the act of love between human beings. Unification with the One activates a type of direct understanding of God, in which the principal function is incumbent on love.

The first major hymn of Christian love can be found in Chapter 13 of St Paul's *First Epistle to the Corinthians*. From the very first verse, the hymnographer distinguishes between the languages of angels and the languages of men, as if between two modes of being that have different degrees of access to the divine. The angelic condition has been defined as the 'rather unusual quality of being simultaneously close to God and close to man' (Andrei Pleșu, 'Angels. Elements for a Theory of Proximity', in *The Language of Birds*). The angel's

hypostasis as intermediary between divine and human is developed by Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite in *The Heavenly Hierarchy*. Here, the angelic condition represents an entity that has access to the 'hidden part of the deity'. The angels enjoys 'divine illumination' and facilitates 'revelations that transcend our power of understanding.' As a screen for the deity, as a face of God, the angel is for the hymnographer of this epistle therefore also a consummate language in relation to human language. Even the possibility of integrating the two languages, the human and the angelic, cannot guarantee ontological transfiguration of the human condition. The image of the sounding brass and tinkling cymbal in the poem refers to the purely rhetorical condition of those languages that do not incorporate love. The next verse includes other forms of being: prophecy, initiation into mysteries, scientific knowledge, and, surprisingly, even faith. All these are gifts. Their pure activity is not enough to ensure ontological transfiguration. The 'I am nothing' at the end of the verse is a conclusion that eliminates from the regime of Being the human condition that is set in motion only by pure action within parts and the fragmentary. The impression might arise that the Apostle negates the fundamental ideas of Christian doctrine. Even renunciation of the regime of having, the spirit of possession, and therefore even abandonment of bodily passions are not acts capable of guaranteeing consummate being. Love, as the only guarantee of salvation, is defined as joy in the truth. All these things belong to man as possibilities that facilitate only openness to the divine. They constitute man's

good part, but in order to become productive they need the Christian paradigm of love. Taken in themselves, they form aspects of man entrenched in his own pride. Their antithesis is love. Its representations situate it as a foundation for salvation, as a will to good, a rejection of resentment, a shunning of all pride. Through love, another state of being opens up, founded on leaving behind the regime of possession and entering the regime of being, entering into an essentialised relationship. Joy in the truth resides precisely in maintaining this relation, beyond any petrifaction in the strict individuality wherein dwell impiety, selfishness, anger, evil thought. Joy in the truth is the opposite of unrighteousness. Here, unrighteousness has not only moral but also ontological connotations. The unrighteous man is the man who has become lost because he has not fertilised his own gifts. The sole gift, the talent, left unfertilised, maintains being under the threat of non-being. Love, on the other hand, as potential and an infinite act of agreement with all the elements of the world, is capable of providing a bridge to something other than the strict individuality of each person. Its hypostases are inscribed in the Christic paradigm and include suffering, faith, hope, patience, in the sense of enduring. All these elements/images of love constitute as many admonitions against strict perseverance in individuality. At the same time, however, they have the power to re-cosmicise the world and to restore man to a new alliance with the divine. 'Love faileth not', writes the hymnographer. Failure here defines the collapse, the fall into precarity, into non-being. By contrast, since love is the only founding power, man's gifts,

as potentialities activated in its absence or remaining virtual, suffer the temporal, the fragmentary, and therefore failure, collapse, the fall from Being. The verse that contains the series of these failures heralds the Apocalypse. In the ninth verse knowing and prophesying are associated together under this regime of precarity and the fragmentary. The hymn is situated within the horizon of salvation from the 'in part'. The hymnographer writes of a future in which 'that which is in part shall be done away.' Doing away implies a process of transfiguration, metanoia, the conversion of the intellect in the direction of the divine. But it also contains suggestions of a vocation of the human condition coming to an end: that by virtue of which man is a symbolic being. All the gifts listed by the hymnographer have to do with the types whereby this symbolic vocation becomes manifest, they are therefore secondary, necessary languages, but they have an instrumental status. Consummate knowledge stands in direct relation to the sacral: 'face to face'. It is to be noted that metanoia implies a full knowledge, as you are known so you will establish the eternal dialogue, the continuous relationship, founded on three essential acts: faith, hope and love. The connotations of each of these demands the presence within the horizon of individuality of a you that is expected not in order to be possessed, but in order to be recognised as redemptive.

A religious hymn founded on prayer can be found in the first chapter of St Augustine's *Soliloquies*. The prayer in this hymn signifies the entry into authentic order. It is a pedagogic effort on the part of the spirit that prepares for its own transcendence.

Only after the preparatory metamorphosis can the spirit become worthy of being listened to, with listening being a necessary step towards salvation. God and the world are the first elements to occur in the hymn. The world is defined solely as the aspiration towards being, as it rests in the impossibility of being established ontologically through itself. The true source of its establishment is to be found in transcendence. Even the process of the disappearance of Being does not find its cause within itself. Augustine's invocations put forward the idea of a beautiful world created *ex nihilo*, an idea later to be found in Leibniz. The world as having been produced by God can be found in all Patristic thought. The idea of a beautiful world finds its origins in pre-Christian thought. It is sufficient that we recall Plato's two dialogues, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. Here, Eros is defined as 'birth within beauty'. A great theologian of this century, Tomáš Špidlík, in a work titled *The Way of the Spirit*, in its final chapter, 'Love', draws a distinction between Platonic and Christian love. The Slovenian theologian asks himself wherein resides the difference between Christian love and 'the universal tendency to love, which we observe in all human beings.' Building on Plato's arguments, Špidlík also accepts the progressive degrees of the love determined by the desire that accompanies humans over the course of the different periods of their existence. Following Plato, the theologian argues, 'The greater his love, the greater the man.' There is therefore a love for the world of objects, a love of music, a love for God, and so on. The degrees of love were analysed by Erich Fromm

in the twentieth century, in his *Art of Love*. But Plato's degrees of love do not apply to the love instituted by Christ. This is because in Plato love is conditioned by desire. Logically, it follows that as the degree of perfection increases, love decreases. The end point of such reasoning is that God, being consummate, cannot have any desires. Therefore, He cannot love the world. Christian love has been based, as we have seen, ever since the Plotinian turning point, on God's love for the world and for man. The supreme act of divine love is the Christic sacrifice. The very fact of loving God is a gift of God in Christian thought. Father Špidlík interprets the divine love for man within the Church tradition. God loves man and the world by virtue of *philanthropia*. But this love for man is a supreme form of giving: love is the gift given to man, rather than a result of desire. Being consummate, there is nothing that God can add to Himself, therefore His love is not the result of desire. The divine love is distinguished from the Platonic *Eros*, it is *agape*, gift-giving without the desire for anything in return. But the divine love cannot be expressed in its entirety through words. One of the Church Fathers who discusses the subject of divine love, in his *Major Rules*, is St Basil. There are three reasons why God must be loved: the desire for beauty, the desire for good, and gratitude. But for St Basil, there is also the love of God for His own sake, which is found in perfect penitence.

Living in the realm of invocation, St Augustine, in his poem from the *Soliloquies*, represents a You in which are centred all the world's forms and energies. The universe is defined as

harmony, while disharmony is a form of evil being absorbed into the realms of the good. The problematics of the existence or non-existence of evil can also be found in the *Confessions* (VI, v. 7). In a number of passages in the *Confessions,* this subject is developed in series of questions. One of these allows for the possibility that the essence of evil might actually reside in man's fear of evil. The very affective reality that represents evil to itself might therefore be the form of evil. But in the poem, evil is defined as that which does not exist. It follows that evil is ultimately an evil vectorisation of subjectivity, even a subjectivity directed towards nothingness. The suitably vectorised ratio of subjectivity finds the divine through the opposing spiritual attitude: love. In the absence of love, the human condition is made to experience its own exteriority. The rediscovery of self coincides with the rediscovery of the divine, a process of constituting the inner man. But the inner man is revealed as light and beauty. As St Augustine writes: 'Late did I love you, beauty so old and so new!… And behold, you were within, while I was without, and I sought you there… O, Love, which ever burns and never is extinguished, Love, my God, kindle me!' The paradigm of the inner man can be found in St Paul's *Epistle to the Galatians*: 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me (*Galatians*, 2, 20). Commenting on this passage, Dionysius says: 'So too the great Paul, ruled by the divine love and receiving a part of its ecstatic power, like the true lover he was (as he himself says), lived in God but not for the sake of his own life, and loved the life of Him Whom he loved' (*On the Divine Names*, 13). Evil as

a productive, constructive power, once fertilised by the action of good, is also present in the thought of Dionysius (*On the Divine Names*, 20). The theologian develops his syllogisms by arguing for the ontological impossibility of evil and even its logical impossibility (*On the Divine Names*, 21). In a series of implorations, God is called the source of Truth, Wisdom, 'the highest life', Happiness, the Good, and the Beautiful, and is likewise 'intelligible light'. It would be significant here to discuss Augustine's definition: '*in quo et a quo et per quem*' (wherein and wherefrom and whereby). In these definitional relations, the divine is an all-encompassing source and an act that ontologically guarantees all that exists. The same as for the psalmist, the absence of this guarantee leads to falling from the divine plan. The idea of relation, conveyed in multiple connotations, is highly significant: breaking of relation leads to death, restoration of authentic relation is equivalent to rebirth, and dwelling in the divine is life. This is an Augustinian truth that will be perpetuated in Thomas Aquinas and Pascal. It is a question of the appropriate orientation of the inner man, of rediscovering him through an impulse higher than the self. The human condition endures the action of a part subject to evil; participation in the divine annihilates this part's action. Annihilation of the fragment that belongs to the enemy is present in the image of taking off the garment of non-being. In the fifth passage of the adoration the body is described as a precarity that can be absolved of its condition through authentic openness. The body is considered to be a place where communication is closed off, it experiences a

malady that prevents true seeing. The poetic world here springs from absolute faith before a higher deciding authority. The hymn, the prayer, the ode are based on adoration. The spirit finds itself at the beginning of a redemptive journey. There are three paths that mark out the course of absolution from precarity: faith, knowledge and virtue, which include adoration, the cognitive spirit, and morality. This redemptive triad nonetheless abides by the Pauline horizon of the hymn: faith, hope, love.

A poet, orator, bishop, writer, St Gregory, known as Gregory the Theologian, lived in Caesarea of Cappadocia in the fourth century and studied in Athens with his disciple, later to be known as Basil the Great. He is famous as the author of more than three dozen theological speeches and more than eighteen thousand lines of poetry. The most frequently cited of his speeches are the five (XXVII-XXXI) on the Holy Trinity.

Dionysius' apophatic theology reaches its apogee, according to Vladimir Lossky, in the theological speeches of Gregory the Theologian. In his discussion of the Holy Trinity, the Cappadocian poet and theologian polemically distances himself from Eunomius, who upheld Arianism. His relation to the heresy provides an image of the relations between the spirit of theology and of philosophy, which is founded on rationality. The spirit of Greek philosophy was, as is known, employed by the Church Fathers the better to underpin faith. Etienne Gilson, in *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, says, 'The heresy of Arius seems to have arisen in large part from the desire to frame religion within the limits of reason.' Gregory's polemic

against Eunomius is one of theology against metaphysics. Metaphysics accepts a super-rational principle which it tries to determine by rational means, whereas theology draws on dogmas, revealed truths, as mysteries that transcend the rational and demand gradual, adoring comprehension. Following Plato, Arianism and Eunomius argued for a non-manifest, unborn, simple God without attributes. A God Who is pure essence, or substance, or being. They rejected the consubstantiality of the Son and the Father, since the Son, the Word of God, once born, becomes different to the Father. The contradiction that presented itself to these heretics was between the unborn condition of the Father and that of the Son who is born. Gregory the Theologian's argument against this idea exposes the confusion of his opponents' argument: he emphasises the contradiction in their concept of the Father. Since He was conceived as supratemporal, He was unable to bring about a temporal birth. Therefore, the insertion of historical time into an atemporal mystery demolishes the Arianist argument (*Third Theological Discourse*, 5). Theological thinking about the Holy Trinity begins only when God's incomprehensibility is recognised. This is a postulate of the non-categorical mystery, for which God is a 'boundless and endless sea of being, wholly free of nature and time' (St John Damascene, quoted by E. Gilson). The theologian's poems speak of abandoning 'the things of this world,' a process whereby the soul accedes to other energies, those of contemplation. These appear as a pure light and luminosity. Accession to contemplation is the result of ecstatic ravishment,

caused by the 'supreme intelligence'. Through ecstasy is achieved an abandonment of the corporeal and an entry into the 'sanctum of the heavenly tent'. Ecstasy implies a blinding of the eyes of the body and a blockage of thought, which is incapable of participating in the plenitude of revelation. The Trinity acts by pouring out an incomprehensible luminosity. A principle of all that exists and therefore of man himself, man is separated from the Trinity by temporality. The theme of dying to this world and of the world dying to the self, which will be met in mystical poetry, is a supreme form of mystical communication: 'The Trinity, in which even the vague shadows filled me with emotion' (passages commented on in Lossky, *Mystical Theology*). The theologian explains the mystery of the Trinity by drawing on the symbolism of numbers. The divine is neither unity nor multiplicity. In the Trinity, the multiplicity represented by the dyad is transcended. In the Trinity there is simultaneously unity and multiplicity. Separated from contact with the sacral, the poet experiences the precarity of the moment. Drawing on Heraclitean perpetual motion in some passages, the poet experiences the illusion of identity. Existence in precarity is situated between the images of the two tombs: 'Two tombs await us who dwell within death.' In the realm of appearances severed from the sacral, life receives the menacing signals of time: 'Hideously does old age wash over us.' The poetic consciousness prefigures the image of 'the undecayed age', when temporality, a theme central to the Theologian, is abolished. In an *Evening Prayer*, being is shown to be besieged by terrors. The voice is that of a being who

laments before the Logos. The atmosphere is made concrete by the inclusion of images of darkness and the light of the Logos. In appearance, a simple separation is transcribed. But the poetic language accumulates in images of light and darkness, signs of the abandonment of being. Material darkness is ultimately a representation of the inner darkness, a symbolic and physical form of temporality. The final invocation to Christ confirms the symbolic nature of the images. Other images of deviant time are transcribed in the evocation of affects. The movement of these brings joy to the contemplative spirit that has squandered itself. The following verse pulsates with the desire for transfiguration of that which is otherwise a barrier in the path to salvation: 'Would that the morrow gave its light.'

The ravishing triumphs of ecstasy can be found in the *Hymns* of St Simeon the New Theologian, who lived at the end of the tenth century and in the first half of the eleventh century. He left thirty-three theological discourses and fifty hymns. The theme of the hymns is theophany as a light that transcends both the senses and rationality. Man's entire cognitive apparatus is out of synch with the ineffable moment of revelation. The condition of him that experiences ecstasy is situated between silence and language. The being transported by such spiritual experiences cannot communicate the incommunicable, but nor can he speak of ravishment. The obsessive and overwhelming image in the hymns and discourses is that of 'a divine fire'. Periphrastic attempts to define it resort to attributes such as the uncreated, the unseen, that which has no beginning,

the immaterial. The type of relation that the transported consciousness maintains is the apophatic. Unification with the sacral is experienced by a being in its entirety. The revelation of this light occurs in moments of absolute separation from all things, where 'all things' are understood to be the forms of the human unconnected with the sacral. The condition for the genesis of this light is detachment from the worldly, peace, humility, and therefore abandonment. In such moments, the hymnographer's being becomes a blessed offering, ravenous for beatitude. The sources of this fire are located either in an abyss of subjectivity or in an indeterminate exteriority. The intensity of the participation could not be greater, the transition from one realm of being to another, that process of spiritualisation, entails a scattering—the image is physical, concrete—of the inner darkness (here, it is not a question of Dionysius's divine darkness), but also an opening up and the discovery of a wholly spiritualised cognitive apparatus: 'you have opened my spiritual eye, you have cleansed the pupils of my mind's eye.' In the beatitude of participation, the blessed offering of the hymnographer's being can be felt to have been re-grounded: 'making of me what you wished.' God/Light is defined as omnipresent, 'a day that wanes not, like a sun that sets not.' The failure to perceive this omnipresence is due only to evil vectorisation on the part of man. As may be seen, the whole experience of the hymnographer, beyond contact with the divine, is a perpetual wandering without salvation. On the other hand, the hymnic state, which coincides with prayer, favours,

as Lossky says, the eschatological view (see Lossky, *The Vision of God*). There are three kinds of prayer, differing according to a being's degree of openness to the holy. In prayer, the spirit reaches the 'door of life and death'. Even the act of prayer is dependent on a certain occasion favourable to spiritual ascent. Unfavourability causes a fall from the holy. To pray is a spiritual act that demands of the hymnographer a cleansing process achieved through mindfulness. What occurs is a detachment from 'evil thoughts', through wakefulness and prayer. The first kind of prayer is ruled by the demon of the analogy between the heavenly and the earthly. By virtue of this spirit of analogy, prayer is exposed to the rhetorical condition. The part thereby activated is the intellectual world, which has a provocative function, giving rise to a kind of more or less decorative anamnesis of the elements of the holy. The cathartic effects of this stage provoke a pernicious, prideful awareness of self, capable of leading the consciousness down to a demonic level. At the second stage, there occurs a detachment of the mind from the sensorial, from the sensory nature of the external world, and there now unfolds the act of freeing the intellect from 'vain things.' Finally, the mind contemplates its contents and, experiencing a different division, is guided towards the content of its own demands. As may be noted, this type of prayer brings with it a series of splits in the consciousness, splits that preclude any climate of inner peace. In other words, this type of prayer does not separate us from the realm of having. The split consciousness relates to itself and its objects as possessions. All these possessions

become, says the hymnographer, intelligible enemies, provoking fragmentation and therefore failure. Prayer is transformed into a torturous labour precisely because of prideful centring on an 'I' not redeemed from the realm of prideful having. 'The darkness in his mind' born of the impossibility of determining these intelligible enemies is the pregnant image of the ontological collapse of the one who gives himself up to this type of prayer. The entry into the kingdom of being occurs by means of separation from the 'evil age' (a representation of the world that has fallen into time), by means of detachment from passions, the world, and the body, all of which are realms of having.

All the hymns of St Simeon the New Theologian may be inscribed within the signifying realms of the third kind of prayer. From what is stated, this stage of communion is impossible to rationalise: 'a thing strange, wondrous.' It cannot be summed up and does not satisfy the limits of the believable. At this level of the life of the spirit, all division is done away with, the one who prays thereby shifts the axes of ontological and moral responsibility from subjectivity to the reality of a higher authority. It is an act whereby the redemptive ontological metamorphosis occurs, through the collaboration of mind and heart, and therefore through the achievement of the wholeness of being. Abandonment of the passions, the intelligible enemies, leads to the inner depths where delusional multiplicity does not exist. In a note on the third kind of prayer, Dumitru Stăniloaie says: 'Only in the abyss of ourselves as consciously experienced subject can we encounter the abyss of the divine Subject, or the

conscious experience thereof, within a heightened responsibility. The abyss of our Subject proper is actualised in the encounter with the abyss of the divine Subject, which calls us to responsibility or to consciousness of ourselves.' This stage is called 'the peace of the heart.' It can be attained through physical methods, a certain bodily posture, and through the concentration that is able to ensure the unity of being. Ultimately, the journey is that of attaining the revelatory state wherein the mind 'sees the firmament that exists at the centre of the heart and sees itself in luminous wholeness that is full of the power to distinguish.' At the foundation of this revelatory state can be found the orphic archetype of poetry, the revelation of the *nous poietikos.* In the *Hymns,* this moment of revelation overwhelms individuality by the aggressiveness with which it takes hold, beyond all limits of the will. Man appears as a necessary term in the fulfilment of a terrifying mystery: 'what is this terrifying mystery that consummates itself within me?' The divine transcends even praise and hymning; the lyrical being seems overwhelmed by the opportunity offered to it. The poet calls himself a 'prodigal son'. Even praise offered to the divine is no more than a humble reality inasmuch as the holy cannot be glorified, as it is the very source of glory. The holy is called 'this sun that we contemplate in the world,' 'it shines, it does not receive light.' The act of consummating the mystery occurs in the abyss of subjectivity: the intelligence is a participatory factor whose function (*intelligere*) is, however, paralysed by the amplitude of the phenomenon of revelation. Language itself, whose function is symbolic,

is reduced to silence. 'My tongue lacks the words.' The poetic spirit takes part in the revelation of what is invisible. That which it sees 'is invisible, entirely freed of all form.' Language cannot therefore express what it sees, it can only *participate*. The act of writing, of incorporating revelation into language is one that transcends the will. Revelation is a continuous process, whereas writing captures the continuity into which the heart is poured. The writer renders the flow of beatitude temporal. 'The terrifying miracle,' writes the hymnographer, 'makes me speak and write despite myself.' In evoking the third kind of prayer, the first phase prior to luminous epiphany is that of an impenetrable darkness; this description can also be found in the *Hymns*, which speak of 'my heart enveloped in darkness.' The evocation of language's impotence by means of lamentation is followed by the imploration to receive the gift of evoking the plenitude of this inexhaustible light. In the ecstatic state, the senses dry up, the soul is terrified, like a dead and departed blind man. Connected with the holy, contemplative energy achieves the difference between the redeemed and the unredeemed. The second are situated between two darknesses, severed from the holy for all eternity. Doomed to hell, the unredeemed experience absolute solitude: 'a terrifying abyss separating each from the next.' In the upsurge of the hymnic prayer, the holy is defined by such attributes as a divine banquet hall, a field of paradise, an ineffable marriage chamber, a table laid for all, the bread of life, a pitcher for the water of life, an undying lamp lit for all the saints. Otherwise, the poems seem to unfold ecstasies. The saint has

visions of the places where perfection is to be found. But these places are not situated in the corporeal, but as he himself says, 'Through the spirit you are able to attain the plenitude of the incorporeal.' But this atopic incorporeal plenitude is defined as an ineffable receptacle. It is a kind of indefinite abyss. The unredeemed will themselves experience his ineffable receptacle, but they will know a different ontological situation: they will be outside the light, without sight, without any sense of the divine. They will experience 'nameless pain for all eternity.' The confession of revelation is expanded in the hymns of eschatological visions. Communion with the divine occurs as a result of the poet accusing himself of unworthiness, followed by a process of spiritualisation of the anatomy, its transformation into light. The most concrete image of the abolition of all boundaries, one that is disturbing in its mystical eroticism, can be found in the following line: 'my blood is mingled with yours.' The transition to spirituality through transfiguration of the poet's own body is brought out in a series of attributes that convey transparency: 'I have become your most pure body,' 'a radiant member, transparent, most pure,' 'I reflect the light of Your grace.' The ecstatic state is transcribed as follows: 'I find myself outside myself thinking of myself.' The poems are lent the accents of a lament at living within the bounds of the world (of the evil age) and are charged with the yearning for liberational spiritualisation. The spirit that implores the Holy Trinity can be found approximated in images of irreducible mystery. What dominates here too are the isomorphisms of 'indivisible light, divided in three,'

which transcends the bounds of the rational. One hymn, the third, includes a eulogy to the monk conceived as a being in perpetual dialogue with the holy, subject to the beatitude of luminous metamorphosis, illumined in an ineffable way. The spiritual ascent demands that the earthly be left behind for the spiritual: the monk must hear and see in a spiritual way, thereby achieving metanoia. Repeated purification leads to contact with the ineffable: 'you will hear that which your tongue cannot express.' The hymnographer draws a distinction between spiritual and carnal thought. The moment of communication means hearing and seeing with the spirit, when 'everything is seen to the very depths of the abysses.' 'I weep, I am filled with pain when the spirit shines on me,' writes the saint, overwhelmed by the effects that beatific ecstasy has on him. Mystical knowledge leads to the supreme revelation of the Holy Spirit, made known in the statement, 'my nature is beyond all space.' The human condition shifts to an angelic state.

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The name of St Francis of Assisi (twelfth-thirteenth century) is linked to a certain type of Christian mysticism, a specific poetic sensibility, and, naturally, a certain typology of the Christian. The praxis and the types of relations established by this figure, the founder of a monastic order, have become paradigms of the religious experience. St Francis's poetic spirit is a spiritual reality that encompasses the experience of a life in its entirety. The distant model for his poetry is orphism. Whereas

with St Simeon the New Theologian, absolute communion is trans-linguistic in nature, for St Francis, in consensus with the whole of his spiritual experience, language, as a divine creation, has foundational functions. The orphic purpose of language was suggested as long ago as Thomas de Celano, in his *Life of St Francis of Assisi*, in the episode of the fragments of text found and gathered by the saint. Language is thus a creature endowed with being. Even if it serves purposes other than the strictly sacramental, language originates in the fundamental evangelical text. Through language is expressed the historical dynamic centred on Christ. Thus, as Anton Rotzeter explains, there is an absolute meaning to history. Language has an essential function as a tool endowed with this absolute meaning. Therefore, 'language, the human word, is the context without which the text proper, the word of God, cannot be read or understood.' As a semantic tool, language serves an essential type of communication. But for St Francis to communicate means to give up the self, to raise up the other, serving him. Ultimately, the act of communicating through language, in the above sense, is similar to the type of Christ's sacrifice. Moreover, language is a reality given to the human spirit in order that it might perceive God, Himself a vehicle of the holy to a different degree. Its purpose is to provoke and generate reality, even if it is merely a sign of that reality. The clearest example is the Eucharist, when through language reality, the bread and the wine, is transformed. In this example we find one of the paradigms of mythic/symbolic thought: the act that comes about in the Eucharist reproduces, through

the action of language, a paradigm *illo tempore*. Lyricism erupts in St Francis's texts in the fullness of their description of ritual practice. The very moment of the ritual is that of the overflowing and the metamorphosis of the holy. The hands of the priest symbolically represent the isomorphic image of the fruitful womb of the Holy Virgin. The perception and experience of this moment fills being with fear and trembling, affective extremes that lead to the dynamisation of the universe in jubilant tones. Theophany is perceived as Christic benevolence and humility. The meekness of the holy that descends into the realms of humility and boundedness draws the consciousness into unboundedness through meekness. More than once in the texts of St Francis, meekness takes the meaning of an anagoge through renunciation of the 'I'. Meekness is here a name for the annihilation of the consciousness centred on the 'I'. The 'I' is that which preserves something for itself, it is a kind of isomorphic concretion of the hardened man of the Psalmist. It therefore represents an obstacle that must be eliminated, since by its elimination the condition of the one who prays is released from the realm of the part. Through the act of meekness is produced an other that restores man's wholeness. The achievement of wholeness has as its result the birth of divine benevolence. The divine is in this way a receptive reality. But the absorption into the holy of the being that believes is simultaneous with the act of self-giving on the part of the divine (see *Letter to the Whole Order*). The texts of St Francis employ numerous references to the whole of the biblical corpus. His consciousness constantly moves between the models of the

Old and the New Testament. In terms of modern poetics, his poems might be called inter-texts. But unlike the postmodern awareness that employs intertextuality as a symptom of weary irony and a desire to extend the territories and modes of fictionality, for St Francis the use of quotation is a form of devotion. Devotion and adoration towards the language that has structured itself syntactically in order to render holiness communicable. Probably the dwelling of his spirit among paradigms, which makes him contemporary with all the moments of revelation in scripture, is merely a result of his existential situation. And his existential/spiritual situation has two defining dimensions: fraternity and poverty.

Fraternity itself is the work of God. The fundamental purpose of life is the achievement of communion with Christ, and otherwise the saint's life itself achieves the supreme moment of communion when he experiences the stigmata. Living his life as a *perpetuum ministerium*, in other words constantly applying the spirit and the letter of the Gospels in his relations with himself, the word and God, St Francis draws the distinction between reflexive understanding and direct comprehension of the Holy. It is not the God of the philosophers that concerns him, but rather the God of the Gospels, He who is revealed through Christ. Through the Gospels, he finds a holy place of encounter with the divine. And the encounter occurs not by means of the critical spirit, but aided by meditation and love. The text of the Gospels provokes a special type of understanding, which is ultimately the transfiguring act that leads to inner metamorphosis.

Consummate understanding of the holy text is achieved with love and meekness and leads to action, to the extension of the revealed paradigm. The comprehensive act determines the liberation of the 'I' and generates the happy life, a form of beatitude. The saint rejects the seriousness and 'hypocritical exteriorisation of sadness.' These are expressions of the 'I' that obstruct dialogue. The spiritual atmosphere appropriate to dialogue is joy as a result of the action of grace. What is produced thereby is serene reason and the spirit of praise, of gratitude and devotion. Every object of the world is to Francis's awareness a seat of the holy that demands the spirit of fraternity. Even if he speaks of the mortification of the 'I', he names the body 'brother body'. The body is called 'our cell', in which the soul is a hermit. The body is compared with the monastic cell, a way of saying that the power to fraternise with all the elements of the world, and therefore also the body, includes reality within a sacred order. Life is conceived as perpetual prayer. The modes of prayer for Francis are the position of the Son, with head bowed; kneeling, the position of obeisance before God; prostration, with face to the ground, to express the state of sin. The fraternity and poverty practised by St Francis are aimed at making him who follows them *be* without *having*. Poverty is Francis's Lady, a fact that falls within the tradition of poetry that comes down from the Troubadours. Poverty is man's primordial condition and was part of the paradisiacal order. The very revelation of Christ is explicated in the Franciscan spirit through God's entry into the world in order to restore the paradisiacal state through

nakedness and expiation, through the annihilation of any spirit of possession. Even if for St Francis God is immutable, invisible, ineffable, his mystical spirit is conjugated with the visible and the tangible. His mysticism differs from the other type that entails detachment from created things. For him, God is an uninterrupted revelation in creation and history. Every creature is framed within the universal harmony. The saint feels himself to be a messenger to all creatures. He preaches to rabbits, fish, birds, in the spirit of the Gospels: 'Go forth into the world and preach the Gospel to all creatures' (Mark). Francis lives in a reconciled world. He feels himself to be the brother of the worm, skulls, trees. In the *Canticle of the Creatures* can be found brought together all the elements of the universe: water, earth, fire, air. Each being achieves its authentic hypostasis in accordance with its power to reflect the condition of fraternity. On the other hand, every object in the world has a unique ontological status and cannot be replaced with anything else. *The Canticle of the Sun*, written in old Italian around 1225, when Francis was ill, also known in Latin as *Canticum fratris Solis vel laudes creaturarum*, is a kind of mystical-poetic synthesis. The lyrical condition here derives from the greatest degree of devotion, which pushes language to endless praise. The poetic spirit declines its power to name the holy, although this is still accessible to a certain climate of being ruled by adoration. On the other hand, the road to the holy is fully accessible by means of devoting attention to creatures, with each perceived as a theophany. The supreme theophany, in both the Eastern and the Western mystical spirit,

is light made material in the sun. It is to be noted that Francis's sun is a material manifestation of life. The inventorying of the universe, a poetic one, naturally, brings to the text a list of elements that are vehicles of the light, albeit the created, perceptible light, a corporeal light, which builds the material architecture of the world. In praising the divine, Francis ultimately sings the praises of His acts, of His forms in the living world. It is the world brought to life through the dynamic of the holy that is the 'object' of this Franciscan hymn. The poetic imagination encompasses three levels: the celestial, the earthly, and the moral and spiritual. These levels form the geometry of the world, integrating life and death alike. The very rhythm of their elements' existence is a glorification of the holy. The attributes of this concrete world include beauty, usefulness, radiance, and even meekness. Water is meek, fire is strong and worthy of love. All things have a guiding purpose, they represent life's reference points, they are conceived as founding messengers embedded in the Text (from *textum*, 'fabric') of existence. The spiritual level includes a fragment of the Christic paradigm: it refers to those that forgive and endure in peace. The gentle frenzy of fraternity cancels out the ontological boundaries between life and death, because the saint speaks of 'our sister bodily death.' But to speak of death thus means to be 'in your most holy will', whereas in the Franciscan spirit, to be within such a will coincides with the postulate of universal fraternity. The God of Francis is a father and brother who redeems the second death. This second death is also found in ancient Egypt and India. In Franciscan 'doctrine',

it is possible to avoid it through the gentle solidarity of all the living creatures interwoven in the holy text of the world.

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Discussing the problematics and semantics of the word *soledad*, Karl Vossler, in his study 'The Poetry of Solitude in Spain' (*From the Romanic World*) argues that its meaning points to 'a spiritual deepening, which we are right to denote as being a small poetic licence, as something essentially lyrical.' Semantically similar to this word are others such as: abandonment, absence, grief, lamentation, yearning, desire, suffering, nostalgia. Vossler finds the word in the poetry of St John of the Cross and believes that along with others, such as night and day, society, inside and outside, it has a metaphysical value. Withdrawal from the world for the purpose of going deeper into the abyss of interiority is one of the poet's fundamental themes. The poet lived in the second half of the sixteenth century and wrote songs, poems, ballads, some of which also have his own commentaries, examples being: *Dark Night of the Soul, Where Have You Hidden, Beloved?* and *The Living Flame of Love*. His spiritual writings broadly develop Christian doctrine: *Spiritual Song, The Ascent of Mount Carmel, The Dark Night*. He also wrote shorter works: *Spiritual Counsels, Words of Light and Love*. All his poems are written under the impulse of the love that transcends language. In *Counsels of Light and Love* can be found a clear distinction between language able express the sacred message and the acts of virtue that language is able to activate. The poetic

word, another kind of prayer of the heart, is differentiated from profane language, rhetoric, which is compared with barren talk devoid of grace. In a study by Damaso Alonso, *Poesía de San Juan de la Cruz*, argues that the mystical love in his poems represents an extension and transfiguration of the typology of secular love found in the poems of the Troubadours. Damaso Alonso finds two sources for the poems of St John of the Cross: *The Song of Songs* and secular erotic poetry. Whether it adapts motifs from secular poetry or borrows passages or images from Garcilaso or Sebastian de Cordoba, the poetry of St John of the Cross evinces a true mystic fervour. The essential terms of his poetry are Bride and Groom, referring to the soul and Christ respectively. The groom as the absolute pole of mystical love is the true You of the poet's spiritual perfection. 'Who will be able to heal me?' asks the poet, thereby naming the relationship of crisis between subjectivity on the road to revelation and the elements of the immediate reality. These can be at most precarious messengers of a *je ne sais quoi* that transcends them. The elegiac intensity of the poems evokes the lamentation of the spirit in its condition of exteriority, exiled in a world whose codes, although they can be paths to the holy, provide only partial proof of the holy. The means whereby to eliminate this condition of exteriority is love. Through love the boundaries between 'I' and You are done away with, or rather, the mystical/lyrical subject succeeds in incorporating the You, or, as the poet writes: 'Love gives rises to a likeness between lover and loved.' Love combines with faith. It is through faith that St John of the

Cross understands this act that is common to both God and man, an act whereby man gives up his own will, entrusting himself to a transcendence that circumscribes him. Through faith, through having faith, the spirit becomes aware of the 'dark night' that is the impossibility of perceiving the holy. In *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, three senses of the dark night are given. The first stage thereof begins with abandoning every desire and the idea of possession. Such an abandonment annihilates the kingdom of possession. Ultimately, it wholly reduces the world of the senses. The bracketing of the darkness of the sensorial originates in the presentiment of the existence of an essential reference point that defines all that exists. It is a case of grasping something, that *je ne sais quoi* that the world cannot reveal. It is not scorn for the world that guides the lyrical subject, but awareness of and bringing to awareness the shortfall of being that its codes endure. The second stage of the dark night throws into crisis contemplation's very power to grasp the holy. In such a condition, once the crisis of subjectivity and the sensory has occurred, the contemplative spirit finds itself unable to find any footing, whether in the things of the world or in the divine. This second stage ultimately denotes the effects of the unlimited concept as a blinding light cast on the limited creature that has embarked on the mystical journey to attain the unlimited. the dark night now denotes a process of 'sublimation, of ennoblement that by far transcends its ordinary, natural potential.' Through it, through this dark night, 'the soul must attain a kind of divine being, a divine manner, sublime and invigorating, in perceiving both

divine and human things, a manner that cannot be grasped by the ordinary senses or the soul's natural thought.' In this blinding of the senses and the spirit occurs the mystery of the spiritual marriage of the soul and its Groom. The mystic conjugal act is capable of restoring all the elements of the real. It is, however, a question of a transfigured restoration. Only after this mystic experience are all the elements of the world perceived in their true ontological condition, that of being traces of the 'divine Beloved.' What thereby occurs is the transfiguration of the act of possession, the Spirit experiences the consciousness of wholeness and the harmonious co-presence of the sacred and the profane: 'The angels are mine, and the Mother of the Lord and all things, and God himself is in me and for me.' The supreme stage of the dark night reveals the metamorphosis of the soul in endless longing for the holy, its being situated in pure and perpetual projection. Even having passed through these three phases, the soul does not gain a direct perception of the divine, but only of its actions, as a result of which it is situated as an infinite vectorisation. In the *Song of the Song in its Intimate Union with God* can be found a subject tormented by the joy of revelation. The sacred is now communicated as a pure flame that tenderly sears the limits of the subject. The wound is experienced 'in the deepest centre of the soul.' In the poem, the flame and drunkenness of love are associated, a wholly spiritualised love that ravishes all that the soul thitherto knew. In such torment, the lyrical soul attains the supreme reality, which is called the unknown sphere, a new domain of the world, a sphere which,

once perceived, makes the spirit of this ignorance transcend all knowledge, every other type of knowledge. The paradigm of this ignorance that transcends limited knowledge can, of course, be found in Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite. The soul experiences 'knowledge in the absence of knowledge'. Elsewhere, situated as pure aspiration, the lyrical subject experiences the disturbances of an inexhaustible lamentation, not finding its place in the order of life and death, 'living without living in itself.'

MARTA PETREU

On *The Philosophy of Style*

One of Blaga's longstanding dreams was to become a professor at the University of Cluj. He had made plans with Sextil Pușcariu to this effect at the university's opening ceremonies (1-3 February 1920). Amid the atmosphere of enthusiasm in those days when everything seemed possible, Rector Pușcariu promised the young philosopher that, two years after he completed his doctorate, he would give him a position in the university's department of aesthetics and sociology. Blaga's first opportunity to enter a competition for the position arose in 1923-24. It was for this competition that the young philosopher wrote *The Philosophy of Style*.

The book is in essence a highly original aesthetic inquiry, which begins as an essay about the significance of the work of Van Gogh. Its stated aim is to define the nature of style in art and the causes that lead to changes in it. Aestheticians, says Blaga, regardless of their orientation (prescriptive, empirical, etc.), are in agreement that artistic norms or their tangible expression: styles are 'emanations or modifications of the aesthetic' and consequently they change as a result of factors characteristic of the aesthetic phenomenon; 'This is the unanimously accepted prejudice that we aim to do away with in the present work,' announces Blaga polemically, himself having a completely different opinion regarding style. In his research, he employs a method inspired by Goethe's studies in morphology, upon which are also based the 'cultural morphology' of Leo Frobenius, Oswald Spengler, and the Russian formalist school (Propp et al.). Observing that there is a 'morphological parallelism' between many aspects of life (conceptions of the cosmos, philosophy, art, religion, morals, etc.) in given places and periods, the young philosopher concludes that *style is a universal element, characteristic not only of art but also the whole culture* (the term 'culture' is here used in the broadest sense) of an epoch; it is 'precisely what the art of an epoch has in common with the other branches of culture.' Style arises from a 'concealed origin', writes the young theorist, long familiar with psychoanalysis, namely, from a 'spiritual attitude towards life and the world.'

In effect, Blaga removes the concept of 'style' from the exclusive ownership of the arts world and attributes it to a sphere that extends to the dimension of all human creativity and the whole of the human-created world: social organisation, religion, philosophy, science, art, architecture, the legal system, etc. Likewise, the competence for studying style is shifted from aesthetics to the philosophy of culture—and from aestheticians to philosophers of history and culture: 'artistic norms are not aesthetic properly speaking, but represent an invasion of the aesthetic by values alien to it. Study of them falls to the responsibility of the philosophy of culture.' The definition of this all-encompassing phenomenon becomes broader in its turn: '"Style" is precisely what the art of an epoch has in common with the other branches of culture. This is why "style" is not an emanation or a form of the aesthetic in itself, but an outside invasion of the aesthetic, a cultural invasion.'

The philosopher attributes the birth of style to 'the spiritual attitude towards life and the world' that humans have, which a few pages later he names *nisus formativus* (the formative drive). One of Blaga's older intuitions, originally named 'the soul's attitude towards life and the world' (*Stones for my temple*) therefore recurs here before going on to have a lengthy career in his philosophy. He himself declares that he drew the idea from biology, from Swiss naturalist Karl Willhelm von Nägeli, who '*employed this term for the hidden power at work in the organism of living beings, creating their increasingly perfect form*' (I would add that

today we talk about a genetic code of only the living world, not of culture).

According to Blaga, the formative drive contains within it a fundamental value, a kind of radiating power 'that realises it', namely, 'in all creations of the human mind: theoretical, moral, religious, social, artistic.' It is not eternal, but rather different epochs have different formative drives. In Blaga, for the moment, the formative drive becomes the criterion for classifying styles: 'According to the values embodied in art through the formative drives, which succeed each other in history, we have to orient ourselves within the classification and theory of styles, rather than by the problematic degree of proximity or distance from the nature thereof.'

For Romanian culture, *The Philosophy of Style* is astonishing in its newness, with Blaga here constructing a broad theory of style, whereby he prefigures the future philosophy of culture. According to him, style alters not through the internal logic of art, but 'from epoch to epoch', depending on the central value that animates the formative drive at any given moment; and when it does alter, the changes take place not only in art, but in every area of human existence. By analogy with Kantian philosophy and with pride in having formulated such an innovation in his own right, but within the realm of the spirit, Blaga concludes: 'Kant said that nature adjusts to the laws of the human spirit, that nature borrows the articulations of the human intellect. We shall not enter into a discussion of this famous Copernican

inversion; what is certain, however, is that nature also adjusts to something else that exists in man, something less constant, it is true, but deeper and vaster than the intellect: it adjusts to the formative drive that determines not only our ideas about nature, but also the artistic, moral, social creations of the human mind. The Copernican inversion brought about by Kant is deepened to an extent that we are unable to glimpse.'

Throughout the history of the world—the Romanian philosopher was never Eurocentric, but also wrote about Asia and Africa, continents about whose history and culture he as almost as richly informed as he was about Europe—there have been three values that have generated the fundamental styles: the values are the individual, the typical and the absolute: 'The values around which these tendencies crystallise are *the individual, the typical and the absolute*. / Between them the human spirit oscillates over the course of history according to an inner dialect of its own, now combining them, not separating them.' Blaga goes on to describe their manifestations within the 'cosmic picture', in science, ethics, metaphysics, art, and social organisation.

Dumitru Micu notes that these statements by Blaga 'are obviously indebted to Max Deri's *Geschichte der Malerei im neunzehten Jahrundert* (1920), which he also cites, not without specifying that "some of the principal ideas" laid out in the *Philosophy of Style* are prior to that book (and to others, to which he refers), having been articulated in *Stones for My Temple*.' Likewise, the historian of literature and ideas points to the fact that *the individual, the typical and the absolute* 'do not properly speaking have

a content radically different from that with which Max Deri was working' when he spoke about *naturalist, idealist and expressionist* 'fundamental attitudes'; he admits, however, that in Blaga the three concepts are more comprehensive and 'nonetheless seemingly more precise.'

The young Romanian philosopher's attempt to explicate world history and culture and to classify the multitude of creative forms, from literature and art to social organisation, thus the whole of human life in a given period and place, using a single criterion (style, arising from the central value to be found in the yearning for form, and therefore from a mental experience), is of the same nature as Nietzsche's idea, in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), of describing and explaining the whole of ancient Greek art through the *Apollonian/Dionysian* dialectic, attitudes arising from mental experiences. In actual fact, *the idea that culture has a style was Nietzsche's*, when, in *Untimely Meditations*, in passing and without dwelling on the point, he referred to 'the imprint of a fecund culture on great style', thereby pointing to style as a characteristic of a culture as a whole (although it should be noted that he did not include science within culture). Nietzsche was the model who inspired many late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century European theorists of history and culture, including Spengler, another author cited and quoted by Blaga (polemically). The Romanian philosopher was therefore inspired by Nietzsche, as he himself obliquely acknowledged later, in *Horizon and Style* (1935). The same family of theorists who systematised the world's culture through the prism of a

single criterion would also include Ernst Robert Curtius, of the same European generation as Blaga (he was born in 1886), author of *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1948), and his disciple, Gustav René Hocke, author of *The World as Labyrinth* (1957), *Mannerism in Literature: Alchemy of Language and Esoteric Ars Combinatoria. Contributions to European Comparative Literature* (1959), both of whom explained European history and culture from Antiquity to the present day through the play of forces between *classicism* and *mannerism*, terms employed in a typological sense.

Blaga succinctly described the first two styles, the *individual* and the *typical*, localising them in time and space, and described the way in which the central value of each is realised in cosmology, science, ethics, metaphysics, and social organisation (this is actually one of the rare texts where, in a number of passages, Blaga the philosopher comments in a descriptive rather than a projective way on 'social organisation', in other words, only in order to illustrate how all-encompassing style is). He dwells at length on the third, based on the tendency towards the absolute—in fact, it is expressionism that is at stake here. This, too, according to Blaga, manifested itself in various previous epochs (the Christian Middle Ages, Ancient Egypt, India, etc.) and has returned in the present day, via Expressionism, dear to the philosopher, since he himself was part of the movement at the time. In his opinion, Edvard Munch, Van Gogh, Matisse, Picasso, Brancusi, Alexander Archipenko, and other contemporary artists 'attempt to cut a path to the absolute'. Setting out

from how it manifested itself in the Christian Middle Ages, Blaga brings into discussion for the first time *dogma* (in the common sense of a statement held to be infallible, made by an authority designated as such); in the Middle Ages, he says, 'Intellectual interests end up in dogma. Dogma is the form of the absolute. It transcends the intellectual powers of the isolated man; it is the world of a super-intellectual collective, imbued with a shared inspiration. The individual is merely a medium for the absolute. He blindly submits to formulas, actions and systems in which the idea of the absolute finds concrete expression in a particular way.'

Pompiliu Constaninescu and Zevedei Barbu noted that in his work Blaga heralded many contemporary cultural directions and movements. 'Through his intellectual structure and tendencies, Mr Blaga has gone before all the programmatic intentions and noisy spiritualist manifestos of recent years,' observed Pompiliu Constantinescu. 'Blaga may rightly be regarded as a forerunner of basic concepts in social psychology, as well as in contemporary anthropology,' being a 'pathbreaker' also in the theory of knowledge, believed Zevedei Barbu, his former assistant. Such a grasp of intellectual trends contemporary with him can be found even in *The Philosophy of Style*, where he promptly and accurately inventoried new symptoms arising in the historical and cultural arena immediately after the First World War. In the 1920s, consequent to the disaster wrought by the world war, Europe was gripped by a *crisis of fundamentals*, in the sense that the fundamental axiological ideas on which European civilisation was based had been shattered. As part

of this crisis, bourgeois-liberal individualism was thrown into doubt by the collectivist idea (this having emerged from the experience of solidarity in the trenches, from the contagious example of the Russian Revolution, and from major discontent towards the insufficiencies of democracy, held to blame for the disaster of war), and Cartesian rationalism began to be thought too narrow and rigid in comparison with the riches of the real and human nature.

The crisis of Cartesianism was one of the major features of the intellectual climate of the 1920s, in effect one of the acute symptoms of the crisis of fundamentals. And late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century movements of thought, vitalist philosophy, psychoanalysis, and nascent existentialism, as well as other contemporary theories (the books of Berdyaev, Hermann Keyserling, Frobenius, Spengler et al.), each sought in their own way a philosophical explanation broader than Cartesian rationalism. Synchronised with European philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century, Romanian philosophy experienced the crisis and, via a number of philosophers (Rădulescu-Motru, Nae Ionescu, Mircea Florian, Lucian Blaga), helped to particularise it. Ultimately, after the First World War, European philosophy tried to reform itself as it went, to bring into debate the real human being, which was more complicated than in the rigid rationalist view of Descartes. What Blaga wrote here about dogma, the crisis of classical rationalism, the emergence of irrationalism, the orientation towards collectivism and the absolute, etc., is connected with this all-encompassing crisis

of the 1920s and represents the young philosopher's reaction and diagnosis thereof.

The same as many other authors from the West or from Romania (of those I have looked at, in the 1920s Rădulescu-Motru, Nae Ionescu, Mihail Bulgakov, Klaus Mann, and E. Lovinescu realised the same), Blaga observed that in Europe a mutation was taking place, manifested through the emergence of collectivism opposed to individualism; and in conformity with the dominant spirit of the age, he hailed it: 'there are signs, many of them, even, that the yearning for the absolute is today increasing. Individualism has been atomised and ground away to the point of exhaustion. But what the dogma of tomorrow will be and what specific appearance spiritual collectivism will take cannot be glimpsed even vaguely. It is history's task to create them. ([…] If the collective spiritual structure of the future is not a creation springing solely from the deep needs of the time, history will surely founder.)' In Blaga's opinion, the changes in the arts herald changes in all the other areas of society:

'If it is true, however, that art goes before the other transformations, then it is perhaps justified to prophesy: *Europe is on the way to creating a new dogma and a new spiritual collectivism or church,*' he diagnoses. Not many years later, Eugène Ionesco was to claim likewise, that the art of an epoch prophesies and prepares for the political and social revolution of the future and that Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Poe, Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Mallarmé and others were ideologues of the revolutions of the twentieth century, relative to which they had the selfsame

position that Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot and Montesquieu had relative to the French Revolution. The literature of 'agony, despair, hatred of man, visions of an apocalyptic end' paved the way, says Eugène Ionesco, for the political reality of the twentieth century.

Another extreme contemporary tendency that Blaga grasps in *The Philosophy of Style* is the emergence of scientific theories and cultural events that no longer fit either Cartesian rationalism or the Newtonian way of doing science, but are gnoseologically overlaid onto ontic irrationals; he named them 'irrational dogmas'. According to Blaga, dogma is characterised by its '*well-founded irrationality*' and by the fact that 'it is a limit of knowledge, where reality itself is of an irrational nature; the only road to such a reality that remains to us is therefore that indicated by irrational expression. This is why we say that dogma has a *well-founded* irrationality. The cosmic absolute—as a rule—demands dogmatic expression.'

For Blaga, what is important is only the type of expression and the reality devoid of reason to which the expression refers; the common meaning of dogma, of a statement that must be believed unreservedly, becomes secondary for Blaga and not to be taken into consideration: 'The claim of the dogmatic to infallibility is a wholly secondary symptom and sooner betrays the social aspect of dogmatism: it derives from the spiritual collectivism usually concomitant with the radical tendency towards the absolute: Collectivism demands a high degree of unity in its views, hence dogma's claim to infallibility,'

he explains, diagnosing the existence of the social phenomenon of the emergence of collectivism and its tendency to impose unity of opinion as Christian dogmatism did of old.

It may be observed that in *The Philosophy of Style*—as will also be the case throughout Blaga's vast work—the author employs the word 'dogma' in two senses: sometimes, in the usual sense of a statement whose emitter has conferred on it an infallible meaning and which must therefore be quite simply believed without critical examination; but sometimes he uses the word in the sense that he himself later gave it, in *The Dogmatic Aeon*, that of a *logically* contradictory 'expression of the irrational', which he terms an *ontic* irrational. The philosopher did not in every instance specify in which sense he was using the term.

The idea of the dogmatic was an older intuition on Blaga's part, derived from a personal experience: 'My love,' he wrote to Cornelia in 1918, 'little by little I begin to understand the dogma of the trinity: God says of himself that he is a being in three persons (1=3); I must admit that I did not really understand this theological mathematics. But today it is more accessible to me: do not we two form a *being* in *two persons*?' In *The Philosophy of Style*, he observes that in philosophy and the sciences there are statements with the same structure as theological dogmas, and he calls all of them dogmatic. The example taken from theology, the same as in his correspondence with his fiancée, is the dogma of the Holy Trinity: the Church Fathers said of God that 'He is one, but in three persons.' For philosophy, he refers to Bergson, who argued that the world of the living is irrational and must

therefore be expressed as such; for mathematics, to infinitesimal calculus. But the majority of his arguments he takes *from science*, however, which at the end of the nineteenth century and very obviously by the early 1920s was undergoing an accelerated change in its explanatory principles, brought about by new observations and theories, which led to Newtonian physics being left behind and to the formulation of relativist physics, on the one hand, and quantum physics, on the other.

'We shouldn't be frightened of these expressions of the irrational. The irrational after all enters so often even into the hypotheses and theories accepted by science,' warns the philosopher, following on from Hans Vaihinger, and gives examples of scientific constructs that 'defy logic'. In the first place, 'Higher mathematics is full of such a-logical expressions. In the infinitesimal calculus, for example, the infinitely small is taken now as equal to zero, now equal to something, with a size which added countless times to itself gives the infinitely large. Such constructs that defy logic are even reckoned among the boldest facts of science.'

In Blaga's opinion, physics is expressed dogmatically through Einstein: 'For the dogmatic expression of reality, an expression that is not afraid of the irrational, but receives it as a constitutive element, the case of Einstein is perhaps instructive. / It is known how much Michelson's experimental paradox has made a whole generation of physicists think,' writes Blaga, and goes on to give a succinct presentation of a famous experiment Albert Michelson

conducted in 1887, frequently repeated thereafter, for measuring 'etheric electricity'.

Namely, in physics, since Descartes and Newton, it was believed that cosmic space was filled with 'ether'; the ether was an auxiliary hypothesis to explain a number of consequences of Newtonian physics (rather like the hypothesis of 'dark matter' today and 'dark energy', or the hypothesis of white as opposed to black holes, the second of which are known to exist based on observation. It was supposed that light travels through the ether and that it ought to have different speeds depending on the direction in which the etheric medium was moving. Michelson conceived an experiment to measure this, using an apparatus, the interferometer (the basis for the apparatus with which gravitational waves were recently measured), and the direction of the Earth's movement around the Sun, towards the Sun for a part of the year, and away from it for another part of the year. Scientists expected the speed to differ according to the direction in which the Earth was moving, but this was not observed. The experiment was repeated a number of times, and it failed every time, in the sense that no difference in the speed of light could be observed, which confounded the scientists' expectations and created bewilderment, but at the same time, it signalled physicists that Newton's physics might be neither perfect nor complete. As a result of the experiment that attempted to measure the speed of the movement of the ether, the conclusion was reached that no ether actually exists in the universe.

As Blaga sums it up, the experiment showed that the speed of light is always 300,000 km/s, regardless of the direction in which the Earth is moving: 'Everything occurred as if the Earth were stationary in the universe.' The solution to the problem and the scientists' perplexity was, says Blaga, provided by Einstein, who postulated the speed of light as an axiom, or rather as a constant of nature, as a measurement or limit that nature itself contains within it. According to Blaga, Einstein was thinking 'dogmatically': 'Einstein's act resides precisely in a daring dogmatic formulation. He confidently stated: we should not interpret and misinterpret Michelson's experiment by means of hypotheses. The experiment should quite simply be *received.* After which he enunciates the dogma: relative to any moving system, light preserves its constant speed of 300,000 km/s. Every current theoretical idea must be modified taking this dogma as its starting point. / As their manner of expressing it, the Church Fathers did nothing different when they said that 3=1. What had been a problem is, through a single act, transformed into a primordial fact, into a principle, into a basis for the operation of theoretical research.' And after praises Einstein once again for the abstract 'cosmic picture' at which he has arrived, Blaga emphasises, with good intuition, the correspondence between this principle of physics and contemporary abstract art.

Although Blaga uses a simplified version of Albert Michelson's famous experiment (in reality, the experiment was far more complex, was repeated a number of times, and after a given point was conducted with Edward W. Morley), he well intuited the

exceptional novelty of the way in which Einstein reasoned through the theory of relativity, which postulates a constant value for the speed of light, regardless of where it is measured from. Blaga called Einstein's solution 'a bold dogmatic formulation'. Werner Heisenberg's commentary on Einstein's solution to the experiment conducted by Michelson and Morley moved in the same direction:

'It was here that Einstein stepped in, solving all difficulties at one magical stroke'; to be specific, 'Einstein has the unusual courage to throw into doubt these premises [about uniform time and space—*our note*] and, at the same time, had the intellectual strength to examine how a non-contradictory ordering of the phenomena can be reached on the basis of other premises'; and the changes he brought 'presuppose an unusual intellectual achievement.' In fact, Einstein worked axiomatically, but within the limits of physics, without overstepping the bounds of the rational.

Let it also be noted that in 1945, when he revised for publication all his works prior to the system and composed the anthology *Horizons and Stages*, Blaga changed the title of this work from *The Philosophy of Style* to *Aesthetic Problems*; likewise, although a comparative analysis of the two versions of Blaga's text lies beyond the scope of this essay, let it also be noted that Blaga completely eliminated pages 73-76 of the *editio princeps*, with all the references to Michelson's experiment and to Einstein, perhaps because he used the same example as the basis for speculation contained in *The Dogmatic Aeon*.

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To sum up, in *The Philosophy of Style*, Blaga puts forward the following philosophical ideas, some of the original, some inspired by other philosopher and employed by him in different contexts and on a different level:

– style is not a quality characteristic only of works of art, but is the quality that characterises every aspect of human life in a given time and place; in a word, it is a feature of culture as a whole;
– the style of a work of art is not a phenomenon of an aesthetic nature, but an invasion of the field of the work of art by extra-aesthetic, cultural elements; put differently, it is the invasion of the work of art by the spirit of the times;
– the right method for knowing styles is the cultural method previously practised by Nietzsche and others; in this sense, Tudor Vianu, who wrote a very generous review about his contemporary's book, justifiably notes, 'In a Nietzschean spirit (the Nietzsche of the early period, when he wrote *Untimely Meditations*), for Mr Blaga the philosophy of style is no different from the philosophy of culture';
– styles change depending on the *nisus formativus*, a term borrowed from naturalist Wilhelm von Nägeli, to be more precise: on the fundamental spiritual value that is *imperative* at a given time; Vianu rightly notes, 'Mr Lucian Blaga is a psychologist in his aesthetics';

– the whole history and culture of the world can be explained by three similar values, inspired by Max Deri, respectively three such styles, the individual, the typical and the absolute, which each can take the place of the other;
– in the immediate contemporaneity, a striving for form based on the value of the absolute may be observed; according to all the symptoms he observes, Blaga argues that there is a movement to an absolute style, and according to him, Expressionism is a manifestation of this style in the arts; when this style dominates, the formulation of dogmas is reached;
– the contemporary period, with its formative striving for the absolute, is characterised by the tendency towards collectivism, the re-valorisation of the irrational (which can be factually observed in existence), the crisis of Cartesian rationalism and individualism, the emergence of a new method, the dogmatic method of formulation and knowledge;
– for dogma and dogmatic formulation, Blaga is inspired not only by philosophy and theology, but also by the sciences, by Einstein's solution to Michelson's experiment. In the field of knowledge, the dogma expresses the irrational in existence, so that the *irrational in the real is also received in knowledge as a constitutive element*

It should also be said that this work, filled with philosophical intuitions important to the subsequent evolution of Blaga's

thought, is written in clear, lucid sentences, but with certain structural flaws: as a whole, the book is clumsily structured.

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The Philosophy of Style was complete by the end of 1923—as proven by the fact that on 20 December 1923, when Blaga registered for the examination for the position in the Aesthetics Department of the Cluj University Faculty of Philosophy and Literature, a department headed at the time by Ioan Paul, he also submitted a typescript of the work, as a docent dissertation. The examination, which he sat on 20 June 1924, ended in failure and humiliation for the young philosopher. The originality of the ideas employed by the candidate (some of them borrowed from German philosophy of culture and art and then undergoing anamorphosis, some of them his own) obviously irritated the members of the commission: Ioan Paul, Gheorghe Bogdan-Duică, Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă (standing in for Professor Marin Ștefănescu, embroiled in an unsavoury sex scandal at the time), Mihail Dragomirescu (from Bucharest), and Petre Andrei (from Jassy). Before the work was passed around the professors, Ioan Paul asked the candidate to make changes to it, and Blaga did so, formally at least, although not substantially. The final report states: 'After a detailed discussion', three of the commission members (Petre Andrei was absent) were of the opinion that 'Mr L. Blaga, arguing for a new definition of style and a new classification of styles, it would be opportune that he should rework and expand the essay with a broader explanation than

the theses discussed in his work *without omitting Romanian ones*.' But there were no Romanian sources for the shockingly new ideas Blaga put forward. What equally irritated some members of the commission (Gh. Bogdan-Duică, Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă, Mihail Dragomirescu) was the fact that Blaga was a poet who, at his début, had gained a certain notoriety.

Blaga's rejection by the university was described by Sextil Pușcariu in his diary: 'Blaga presented himself at the examination for the docent in aesthetics. He was rejected. Only Paul was for him, and against him were Goangă, who was unable to discern in his dissertation the original part of the philosophical thought and battened onto a number of "unscientific" trifles, Dragomirescu, who had had a polemic with Blaga, and Duică, who was against Blaga for no apparent reason and didn't bother to read him carefully: thus, our university bears the shame of rejecting the only philosophical mind among our young Transylvanians, instead of embracing him with love and seeking to win him over.'

After the examination, the young Blaga couple, who were living in rented accommodation in Cluj, left the city and settled in Lugoj, where Cornelia opened a dental surgery and Lucian was, for a time, able to dedicate himself solely to study and writing. Years later, he thanked his wife with a statement downright English in its sobriety: 'In Lugoj, I made the decisive leap of my life: it was there that I made the greatest efforts of thought and I sometimes have the impression that everything I have worked on since then is nothing but its realisation.'

The Philosophy of Style was published by Editura Cultura Națională in a handsome edition in the autumn of 1924. It received a number of reviews, from the generous one written by Tudor Vianu to the brief one full of reservations written by Mihai Ralea. According to Ralea, Blaga's philosophy is characterised by 'anti-rationalism and anti-nationalism', and the author is, 'A mystic in his philosophical conceptions, together with a whole contemporary movement, he denies reason the potential for a just image of our universe and the individual the right to be considered the measure of the thing.' In fact, nothing in the work justifies the diagnosis of mysticism. The observation remains valid that the author genuinely did not believe that reason alone is useful in knowing the world. It is clear that for Blaga, following his reading and assimilation, albeit probably from indirect sources, of the science's new way of reasoning, principally in physics, Cartesian rationalism no longer had any credibility, just as it no longer had for numerous other contemporary European philosophers.

ROXANA PAVNOTESCU

Brett Dean's *Hamlet* and the Theatre of Ideas

Brett Dean stands out among the most prominent composers of our time, thanks to a diverse body of work that includes chamber music, orchestral, vocal, and choral pieces, opera (*Bliss*, 2010), and concertos for various instruments. Dean is himself a virtuoso violist and was formerly a member of the Berlin Philharmonic. While Shakespeare's plays have increasingly resonated with modern opera (for composers like Benjamin Britten and Thomas Adès), *Hamlet* has, over the course of time, inspired just one opera: the 1868 adaptation by French composer Ambroise Thomas.

In his second operatic work, the Australian composer proposes a version of Hamlet's dilemma: 'Not to be' as both

leitmotif and manifesto, yet another commentary on the hero's inability to act.

The composer's aim of lending Shakespeare's tragedy a musical dimension—superimposing contextual poetry with vocal and orchestral lyricism—is achieved through an inspired collaboration with librettist Matthew Jocelyn—a translator and director (Canadian Stage)—conductor Nicholas Carter, director Neil Armfield, and set designer Ralph Myers. *Hamlet* had its première in Lewes in 2017, at the Glyndebourne Opera Festival.

The libretto preserves Shakespeare's original language, unaltered, but restructures it, fusing it with the score on a subliminal level, making it a successful rendering of the complexity and richness of the text through music.

As the opera's reference point Brett Dean opts for the abbreviated version of the play found in the *First Quarto*, whose convenient length made it suitable for performance at the royal court.

A repetitive, almost whispered 'Not to be', which opens the opera ominously, is projected against the backdrop of Elsinore Castle, where all the courtiers sit at tables in frozen silence.

In the *First Quarto*, the rhetorical interrogative ('That is the question') of later versions merely debates a point of view, while its opposite is elided in this context: 'Not to be. This is the point.' 'Not to be' becomes the alternative to a way of being—a noble gesture to set free the soul afflicted by 'the arrows of outrageous fortune'.

A sombre score accompanies Hamlet's soliloquy in the opening scene, assembled from disparate fragments taken from other moments in the play. We are confronted with an energetic Hamlet, expressively portrayed by English tenor Allan Clayton, who tirelessly commands the stage throughout the opera. At times, he reveals a choreographic, comic, even caricatural side, particularly in his interactions with the hilariously absurd duo of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

The opening scene merges two successive moments—the lament for the dead king and the wedding ceremony—into a single festive tableau, in line with the traditional proclamation: 'The king is dead. Long live the king.' The wedding is announced by a shift in musical tonality and the explosive entrance of Queen Gertrude (mezzosoprano Sarah Connolly) and the new king—brother-in-law and now husband—Claudius (baritone Rod Gilfry). The couple are greeted by the court's shrill, high-pitched ovations—bursting into life, like in the fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty*—in parallel with the orchestra's strident dissonances. Hamlet greets the newlyweds with a bewildered, sardonic expression, launching into a frenzied dance atop the incestuous wedding banquet table.

Elsinore Castle is represented through interiors marked by a simple, elegant line of doors and windows framed in white. A diverse range of costumes helps establish atmosphere while projecting certain characters back into various epochs: the ladies of the court wear elegant gowns in the slender style of the nineteenth century; the 'players' are dressed in composite

garments evoking *commedia dell'arte*; Horatio and later Hamlet appear in modern clothing, with Hamlet in a black trench coat; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern wear identical grey suits, resembling bureaucrats or secret police operatives in the service of the king. The ghost of the former king is bare-chested, wearing punk-style trousers with tie-dye patterns around the hips. All the principal characters wear a mask of white powder.

Apart from the inversion in the opening scenes, the order of events in the original play is largely preserved. What emerges is a lyricism of ideas in a text that has been musically reconfigured. Lines are fragmented, reiterated, shifted to moments of the opera that diverge from the linear narrative, in order to amplify a mood, idea, or character.

Voices overlap or complement each other in harmonies and dissonances, intoning the same text, which becomes alternately cause or effect. Yet the reason for these textual displacements is not purely musical; it also reveals the penetrating force of language and ideas, and the metamorphosis of characters placed in extreme situations. As he dies, Polonius makes references to *The Mousetrap*, the nickname Hamlet gives *The Murder of Gonzago*, the play performed earlier at court. Ophelia, in her madness, alternates between vocalised fragments of Hamlet's letter, 'Never, never doubt I love,' and their negation: 'I love you not.'

The opening scene introduces elements from the Act III soliloquy ('not to be'), as well as reflections on the human condition drawn from the dialogue with Guildenstern in Act II:

'What is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me.' It also anticipates the final act, where, before the duel, Hamlet defies his fate in a conversation with Horatio: 'The readiness is all.' A restructured soliloquy, like a jigsaw puzzle of juxtaposed ideas, with ascending and descending musical lines, distils doubt, inaction, and the premonition of death: elements that fundamentally define the hero. Amalgamated, repetitive, and recomposed in a lyrical register, Hamlet's phrases are sublimated through music.

With its composite and eclectic structure—echoing Stravinskian resonances and eerie orchestral interludes à la Bartók (*Bluebeard's Castle*), which signal the ghost's appearance or prepare scene changes—Brett Dean's *Hamlet* elevates the text to an abstract plane, beyond the characters who have themselves been reduced to their monadic essence. This is achieved through the layering and investment of voices with a distilled lyricism, elevated to the realm of pure ideas.

Particularly striking is the play-within-a-play scene, or rather, the opera-within-the-opera, which is presented as a pantomime animated by vocal discourse. During preparations for the performance, the lead actor, who will play the king in *The Murder of Gonzago*, sings key phrases from the Hamlet repertoire: 'To be, or not to be' in its universally recognised form; and it is also he who utters 'All is not well', Hamlet's line before his encounter with the ghost, as well as 'Remember me,' the ghost's final words.

A directorial and musical artifice suggests that the lead player is Hamlet's alter ego, or a Hamlet in dialogue with himself,

with the dual effect of harmonising the prince's reflections within a contrapuntal dialogue and emphasising his artistic nature, which is somehow detached from worldly concerns, through his identification with the player. It is no coincidence that the player, the gravedigger, who also sings in Hamletian tonalities, and the ghost of the king, as Hamlet's superego, are all performed by the same voice (John Relyea). There is a lyrical and conceptual cohesion between the three rôles, essential to the musical completeness of a Hamletian character.

Brett Dean sets out to evoke Shakespearean language with all its symbolism, variety, richness, and, above all, mercurial spirit. A large orchestra, featuring a wide array of percussion and electronic instruments, evokes extreme states, synergies, emotions, and even moments of comic effect. In addition to its atypical instrumentation, the pit includes a small chorus, whose function is to produce a background, echo-like sound. This chorus underscores the minimalist thread of the score between vocal interludes. There is also a large onstage court chorus, which contributes both vocally and by its stage presence as part of the dramatic extras. The acoustic landscape is extended into the auditorium via two satellite groups, each consisting of one percussion and two wind instruments (clarinet and trumpet), positioned at the far ends of the upper balconies. Onstage, the soundscape is further enriched by the accordionist—a member of the acting troupe—who delivers one of the opera's most virtuosic solo moments.

The voice is amplified by the orchestra, with all its physiological arsenal, and, at the same time, by the inanimate world: Yorick's skull rolling across the ground is amplified by an unconventional array of percussion materials, creating a 'theatre of sound,' as the composer himself describes it. This is achieved through the shaking of an aluminium sheet, the crushing of plastic bottles, the clashing of two stones, the rasping of sandpaper, or the thud of a rubber ball, all of which lend a sombre atmosphere to a scene shrouded in darkness.

A difficult and complex vocal score is assigned to Ophelia (coloratura soprano Brenda Rae). The young girl, or 'the green girl,' as Lord Polonius calls her, in reference to her innocence, wears a candy-pink ruffled dress. Her rôle is approached with great emotional intensity, built from dissonant vocalisations and guttural sounds, particularly in her encounter with Hamlet in Act II, augmented by percussion instruments, all of which reveal a nuanced performative artistry. The harrowing score associated with Ophelia's madness is accompanied by a vocal and physical outburst, like that of a wounded animal, infused with leitmotiv phrases obsessively repeated, drawn from Hamlet's love letter, the mark of an unbearable betrayal. Here, madness is staged as a kind of spiritual unruliness. Ophelia appears dishevelled and exposed, wearing tight, mottled leggings that evoke the silt soon to envelop her body, and her posture is both provocative and sensual. In an impetuous choreography, she throws herself into the king's arms, echoing the metaphor used by the queen

mother: 'Mad as the sea', originally intended for Hamlet in a different scene. At Ophelia's funeral, the queen's lament for her lost daughter-in-law is accompanied by Ophelia's voice, which descends from the balcony, yet seems to rise, crystalline, from the depths.

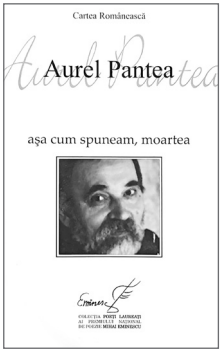
The staging of Polonius's murder is spectacular. Gertrude crosses the stage diagonally, with small, gliding steps (*suriashi*), closely following—without seeing it—the ghost of the king, as if on a Noh theatre platform, where the *shite* (the spiritual being) cries out for revenge.

The score accompanying the two countertenors, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, introduces elements of opera buffa. The pair sing in unison or canon, bleating like sheep and exchanging lines in a syncopated rhythm, with exaggerated physicality, in a burlesque choreography, flailing their arms in a chaotic pantomime reminiscent of Laurel and Hardy. A rich arsenal of percussion instruments supports both the vocal and situational comedy.

Brett Dean approaches Shakespeare's text in its universal dimension, divorced from character or context, letting it stand on its own through the brilliance of the language and sharpness of its spirit; like a biblical text, open to endless reinterpretation, its meanings can never be fully exhausted. It is no coincidence that three versions of *Hamlet* coexisted in Shakespeare's time, much as there are four canonical Gospels.

AL. CISTELECAN

Death, as I Said by Aurel Pantea[1]



Aurel pantea's latest book, which we are launching today, actually contains all Aurel's books, since between

1 To mark the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Horea, Cloșca and Crișan National College, Alba Iulia, on Tuesday, 26 February 2019 an event was held to launch *Death, As I Said*, an anthology of poems by Aurel Pantea, published by Cartea Românească in 2018. The book was published as part of the Poets Laureate of the 2017 Mihai Eminescu National Poetry Prize series. It was also an opportunity for Aurel Pantea, who was formerly a teacher at the school, to meet pupils and his former colleagues. The anthology was presented by literary critic and historian Alexandru Cistelecan, a professor at the Petru Maior University, Tîrgu Mureș, who also wrote the book's preface. (The editors)

the cover of this volume can be found all the eight volumes he has written up to now; the last therefore represents the whole. I would like to begin by congratulating the city of Alba Iulia, not only the Horea, Cloșca and Crișan Lycée, for the fact that one of the most important poets in Romania today lives here, in the city, not the lycée. And if today, then in fact for all time, including times past and, I hope, even more so, times to come. Making a quick statistical estimate, I see that there are cities larger than Alba Iulia that have not had the privilege of being home to a poet of Aurel Pantea's stature. I'm thinking of cities like Timișoara, for example, or Brașov, which are definitely larger than Alba Iulia, and even my home town, Tîrgu Mureș. There are also others that lack poets of the breadth of Aurel Pantea, whom I would rate, without hesitation, as among Romania's top ten poets of today.

When Aurel Pantea first started to write, probably when he was in lycée, if not earlier, and above all once he realised that he had a poetic vocation (but as yet he hadn't realised this), Aurel enrolled in a poetry school, the school connected to the *Echinox* magazine and poetry circle at the Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj, in the Philology Faculty, as it was called at the time. It was a poetry school that already had a solid, established tradition, fortunately or unfortunately for the poets who were later to join its ranks. The Echinox circle and the magazine of the same name came into being in 1968. 1968 was a very significant year, given the protest movements in Europe, in which workers took part, and in particular students and schoolchildren, your counterparts at the time. Lycée students played a decisive part

in the 1968 movements. In Eastern Europe, which was under the rule of communism and the control of the Soviet Union, 1968 witnessed episodes that were absolutely unique. The most important episode of all the Eastern European movements was of course the movement in Czechoslovakia, followed by the invasion of Warsaw Pact troops, in which all the communist countries took part, but there were also reverberations that were felt even in Romania. I wouldn't ascribe the founding of the Echinox magazine and circle to this revolutionary wave that swept Europe at the time, and Western Europe in particular, but their founding is a significant detail of that protest movement and that yearning for freedom. Both the magazine and the poetry circle were in fact spaces for the manifestation of freedom, primarily creative freedom, but not only. They were also places and spaces probably under close surveillance, but these manifestations, both in the pages of the magazine and in the classrooms where the poetry circle was held, belonged to the spirit of freedom, argumentatively and above all creatively.

Aurel Pantea was among the poets who entered here in the mid-seventies. As I was saying, *Echinox* magazine had an established tradition by then, because fortunately, a few years earlier, a number of representative and classic poets of this poetic school had made their début in a compact group. First of all, there was a triad who débuted almost simultaneously, made up of Ion Mircea, Adrian Popescu and Dinu Flămând. Even today they are the leading lights of the *Echinox* tradition. They don't necessarily resemble each other, these three, in the way in which they write,

but at the time they shared a feature in common, after which, naturally, the differences grew. What they had in common was a kind of library culture in poetry and a kind of refinement in writing. These were exigencies that were later imposed on the poets who came after these three. It was against this backdrop of cultural refinement, steeped in literary elements, with multiple cultural references, where, around every poem, you could feel the presence of the library more than that of the street, that Aurel Pantea emerged. By temperament, by constitution, however, Aurel was actually a wild man. If you ask me, he turned up among the Echinox poets like a bear in a reading room and he didn't fit in at all with that very strictly corralled format that was Echinox poetry, although he did try to fit in. In his first collections you can sense Aurel's desire to be an Echinox poet, the way Echinox poets had to be: learned, refined, bursting with references, writing excessively cultivated poems. But even at that time it was obvious that that imposed tradition—and one which to an extent he willingly accepted, but without being able to be himself—didn't suit him. You could sense that he was there as if inside a casing. His temperament, his nature were already repressed and this can be seen in poems rebelling against the eighties and pre-eighties poets' manner of writing and the manner of Romanian poetry at the end of the seventies. So, Aurel denounced it with a kind of fury, which then remained a kind of permanent imaginative fury, he denounced it, as I say, with a kind of exasperated rebellion against the lie of such a poetry, which is to say, by popularising its literature, which was sold

in the marketplace of metaphor and which did not come before the reader with what was authentic in the poet's soul.

After polemicising with this kind of poetry, after sating himself on a poetry steeped in literary elements, he discovered his own personal path. And his personal path is based on a very spare, brusque, direct writing, without preliminaries, without imaginative protocols. Aurel Pantea throws down a shocking image all of a sudden and then unleashes an entire series of imaginative explosions, from which his poetry coagulates. The road he discovered for himself was not a road that looks from the self outward so much as it was one that looked inward. And on the inside, within himself, Aurel does not discover anything delightful, but rather something terrifying, he discovers a chasm, he discovers a hell, he discovers, in fact, an abyss. And it is towards this abyss that he turns his antennae, it is from this abyss that he absorbs all his images, finally coming to convey visions from the void, as a kind of newspaper report.

And the encounter with the void, with absolute nothingness, covers the stages of a revelation of disintegration, of the decomposition of being. Looking inside himself, Aurel Pantea does not discover there the geometry of the archetypes with which the psychoanalysts have accustomed us, but rather he discovers a formless human pre-composition. Everything in the substratum of our self is, according to Aurel's vision, miry, grotesque, repulsive; our primordial origins are muddy water. Thence, from these swamps, is born the human spirit, thence being begins its

ascent, and Aurel writes a kind of newspaper report, an exposé of these depths, from which the spirit gradually frees itself. I would say that from this viewpoint, he is at the very opposite pole to the poetry of Bacovia. It has been said of Bacovia that he feels organic, structured matter discomposing, disintegrating. In Aurel Pantea's work, on the contrary, the perspective is that of the spirit separating itself from the matter that teems formlessly in some infernal zone. Obviously, this is not the only register to be found in Aurel Pantea's poetry, this encounter with the void, but it is the principal vector of his poetry, and from this perspective I would say that his uniqueness is guaranteed both by the talent with which he is able to report from the void and by the strictness that Aurel Pantea imposes on himself as a poet. And this can be seen straight away, since, look, if I show you the book, you can see that it's reasonably thick, and this is everything that Aurel Pantea has written up to now. Is it little? In any event, it's not a lot. Highly strict with himself, he didn't indulge himself. In general, poets are quite indulgent with themselves and they think that if they close their eyes, their readers close their eyes too. Obviously, it's a deception; the reader never closes his eyes, even if he did have humanly justified, not necessarily aesthetic, reasons for doing so.

Apart from this perspective of inward collapse and telegrams sent from the void, Aurel Pantea also has other thematic registers: there is a component of social poetry, since Aurel is a rigorous moral poet, a combative civic poet. And there is also a highly significant, consistent, as well as quantitatively

consistent, element of love poetry and religious poetry, I would go so far as to call it mystical poetry, if a lot of the poems were not on the fringes of apostasy. It is not that it is neither religious nor mystical, however, rather it is a poetry of the relationship with the transcendental, with God, with Jesus, itself full of contestations of the self and contestations of the transcendental. In Aurel's poetry, the transcendental does not come down to earth, as it does in Blaga, for example, his transcendental is harried, bullied, it is, as it were violently stopped by the police—the poetry police—and interrogated mercilessly and with the utmost disrespect, in effect with the utmost irreverence. But not with the irreverence employed by Arghezi, who was so familiar with God that they used to sit on the porch of an evening smoking a cigarette together, but with an impiety embraced as suffering. Of course, Aurel is a poet lacking in piety towards God, but his lack of piety causes him to be desperately pious and meek before the Lord, and this meekness, which comes as a need to redeem himself from his own contrarian temperament, makes his religious, his mystical poetry, let me nonetheless call it that, be of a kind which, before him, I've never come across in our great poets.

Likewise, Aurel Pantea's love poetry is not one of tenderness, smiles, grief, weeping, it's not a poetry of yearning: it is a poetry of extreme, uninhibited sensuality, the poetry of a tiger having a fit. In his poetry there is no kissing, in it there is rending, ripping, a violence of sentiment that translates into a kind of carnal-sensual violence. But it does not stop there, it always

emerges into the spiritual, the non-material. And it is with a kind of fear that Aurel touches both the limits of love and those of religious belief, as well as those of the inner being. Just as in the poetry of inner explorations he reaches the abyss and there, like Jonah in the belly of the whale, he is gripped with terror, so too in the love poetry and the religious poetry he goes to the extreme, and reaching the limit there, he finds the agents, the representatives of total destruction. There are a number of images of the destroyer that occur in Aurel Pantea's poetry: the annihilator, the mute… and with these symbols, but also more than symbols, with these forces of formlessness, Aurel Pantea carries on a dialogue against a backdrop of fear. Let me tell you honestly, if you read Aurel Pantea's poetry for the first time, it won't be a pleasure; only the second time will it be a pleasure. It is a poetry that does not set out to be pleasant, to sing into your ear, it is a poetry that abruptly bludgeons you over the head. This is how poetry ought to be, say the poets, or in any case one of the greats, a favourite of Aurel's: it ought to be violent, to stun you from the start, after which you will cope somehow.

I hope you will cope better than I have done here today. Thank you very much!

A Foreshortened Anthology

Viewed in reverse chronological order, the way this anthology is structured,[1] the poetry of Nicolae Panaite has shed (albeit not completely) many of its characteristic features, some of them good, others less so, which have been remarked upon by the critics over the course of time. It is, however, a process of shifting the emphasis, which slides along an organic axis, not one of abrupt turns or ruptures. What was, remains, but it is blurred or dissolves into air under the pressure of different obsessive onslaughts. It is transparently an



1 *Mîna scriitoare,* Junimea, 2024.

endeavour to achieve a discipline of theme—and at the same time, form—as well as to contract into coherence, even if the poet does not announce that he is ridding himself of some habit and does not undergo any theatrical metamorphosis. He merely slides down a musical stave from whose lines he does not/cannot emerge. I am not so clever as to be able to follow the suggestion implied by the order of the anthology or to attempt a crab-wise critical method, so let me console myself merely with recalling a number of dominants and highlighting a number of deliberate or inherent losses.

The most productive—and relevant—loss resides in the adoption of euphemistic penitence and in damping down the 'poeticising excess' remarked on in his début by Radu G. Țeposu. Since *Signs and semblance* (1989), and even more decisively thereafter, Panaite has no longer been a 'captive of calligraphy.'[1] He has escaped this captivity, although he is constantly nostalgic for it. The signs of this nostalgia for diaphanous writing and the aesthetic of the pleasing still persists even in *Green day* (2019), where in places there sprouts a euphemistic snowdrop or little haiku sequences intercalated within a debate of an erotic or other nature, of the following kind: 'The silence makes no resistance;/ it knows it's no good at all to hinder/ the nightingale's trills' (*Together*). Such jeweller's inserts, in which the 'writing hand' was the hand of an artisan specialising

1 Radu G. Țeposu, *Istoria tragică & grotescă a întunecatului deceniu literar nouă,* Cartea Românească, 2006, pp. 112, 113.

in the gracious, were frequent in his début collection, *The marble cloud* (1981), and they recur in small regular waves over the course of a parabolic sketch, as for example in *Through the swirling light*: 'her white hand has turned white/ as if it were a rose/ growing in the middle of the house.' Slightly murky confession and contorted developments allowed little treats of graciousness, giving the impression that the poems yearned for aesthetic preciousness. True, there the writing about delicate things should have contrasted with the writing about ordeals and made them harmonise with each other in an oxymoron wafted with Christic prestige (a constantly active reference, whether overt or hidden): 'in the look in my eyes drops of blood/ like blossoming thorns/ are drawn into a minuet'. The temptation towards oxymoron, programmatic in the beginning and displayed in the very title of the collection, by merging together the gentle and the crushing, remains a transversal paradigm in Panaite's poetry. At every step, we come across communion between the diaphanous and the atrocious, between the tender and the harrowing, or between the delicate and the ferocious. Not even things from nature can exist without an oxymoronic rule: 'The night unfolds,/ Clasps us in its hot and cold arms' (*Where you pass*). Such exasperating binaries, forced to harmonise with each other, crop up at every step: 'the river of loam and sun', 'words full of winter and summers', 'your body, now a hot stove, now a hermitage', 'In the same instant/ Sunset and sunrise', etc. etc. They are not, however, signs of 'inner rebellion',

as Mircea Bârsilă[1] would have it, but merely signs of a tension always on the point of implosion. This obsession with opposites that try to achieve a pacified 'synthesis' and above all its highly productive, if not inexhaustible, redundancy, indicates a highly tense state of strain, but which is ready at any moment to explode, as the poet is constantly on the verge of stepping into paroxysmal expressionism. What stops him on the threshold, however, is nostalgia for the gentle things and the madrigal-esque penchant for tenderness, as well as control over the imagination and setting it to work for the benefit of a moralisation of the vision.

In order to bring together these opposing things within a functional equation, Panaite must frequent two orders of the imagination: one materialist, the other abstract or spiritual. This is what he does throughout his evolution, but with a more obvious detour into the material than the spiritual. If 'ghost-like purity haunts' his poems, as Gheorghe Grigurcu[2] says, it haunts them in an atmosphere threatened by the violence of the material and the constant exercise of sensualising the abstract and ineffable. Panaite's world, which yearns for the light and suffers from spiritualisation, is overwhelmed and crushed by materialisation in an avalanche of its own horizon: 'There are mornings so earthy,/ so heavy,/ that even getting dressed becomes a

1 Mircea Bârsilă, *Poezia optzecistă,* Eikon, 2022, p. 499.

2 Gheorghe Grigurcu, *Poezie română contemporană,* I, Editura *Convorbiri literare,* 2000, p. 429.

burden/ and the rising of the sun moves slowly,/ so slowly/ as if it were a huge snail/ carrying the light' (*There are mornings*). It is this aggressiveness of the earthly that the writing of things diaphanous has to tame and to show the way to spiritualisation. The traffic signs to the latter are spaced frequently, but sooner out of threatened devotion than illumined fervour. Mircea A. Diaconu has already spoken of the gusts of panic at the height of illumined trance in his commentary in *The Library of Post-War Poetry*,[1] where he remarks on 'a luminosity in agony'. But sooner than a luminous manifestation, in the poetry of Panaite we might speak of sexual manifestations. There is—as has already been pointed out—a mechanics of sensualisation (and anthropomorphisation), to which the poet resorts perhaps too often. When he is at play (there also exists a jesting Panaite), as he is in *Ring 1*, where the feelings get ready to box with emotion, this stylistics is intentionally naïve and parodic, but as a rule Panite personifies seriously and with a trust that is not always rewarded: In *The Distillery of the Prophet Elephtherios*, for example, 'illusions fall at his feet' ' like stained fruits', in *The Circle*, the rains 'have full breasts' and 'the circle unbound the afternoons with the high, warm ankles' (not even on the Rambla have I seen as many ankles as in the poems of Panaite!), in *Franz*, 'despair' 'rummages' 'with soil-covered hands', in *Tidings* we hear: 'the absences built their nests/ from grasses and bones,/ pain and sky.' Not to mention the apocalypse—granted, an 'affectionate'

1 Editura Universității Ștefan cel Mare, Suceava, 2016.

one'—whose breasts and ankles/ can be seen ever more clearly' etc. etc. The candour of this procedure, which relies on naïve imaginative cataloguing, is, however, subject to difficult trials, which go beyond the ornamental and purely stylistic condition, engaging in existential lectures of the utmost gravity: 'My loneliness bent/ Until it formed a circle,/ From which I, as if from a hermitage,/ Have been trying a lifetime to emerge!' (*On the river of gestating words*). In such circumstances, even if they are lent a slightly ludic turn, the innocence of the procedure sabotages the gravity of the issue, but Panaite deliberately weaves together sensuality and visionary import: ''With a star in hand/ you weave my loneliness/ which calls to me/ that I should challenge you/ to come with your ankles/ all sparks/ which in the darkness make/ a little starry sky' (*Where you pass*). If not a contradiction, then at least a tension exists between the sensualising mood and the oracular temerity of the poems, an unresolved conflict between the poetics of ardour and that of the madrigal. For, he is a poet devoted to the old art, and a religion of 'combustion' (endeavouring to perpetuate the poet's romantic prestige) can be seen in many poems that play the rôle of an 'ars poetica', but no less relevant are the 'poetic arts' that wager on poetry's erotic prestige, on the erotic revelation of the poem; on poetry as something erotic, ultimately. The 'writing hand' is on an erotic expedition and an exploration of revelations, with equal reason: 'My writing hand, under the skirts of the day,/ has reached higher than the knees/ never has it been so close to the hot spring' (*Above the ark*). Creative jouissance

becomes the same thing as erotic and sensual jouissance: 'my hands on her body/ are wings released from prison —/ a freed flock' (*idem*). But in Panaite, there is no jouissance without an ordeal—nor any ordeal without jouissance—and the 'writing hand' is wounded as badly when it caresses as when it writes: 'My hands even now/ are still healing,/ after passing through the wheels of the thorns,/ through the wheels of the ink that stumbles/ when today the words poke their heads up/ like swimmers crossing my path' (*The green day*). The poem is an adventure doubly dangerous, since, on the one hand, it is an existential pyre, and, on the other, it is an abyss, the words open up 'chasms' in the paper, and these chasms too are fatal. The dialogue between the two poetics, the erotic and the ardent, is a continuous line in Panaite's poems, as if the poet were unable to choose between the sensory and the spiritual hypostases. Both love and writing are, however, jouissance and sacrifice.

There is no analogy between them, but only a homology. Both come upon the poet in a storm and together they condemn him to a hierogamy: 'With the coming of dusk,/ I watch how the poem/ climbs a flaming stair/ with your legs,/ which, in our domestic abyss,/ are as if the hands of a clock (*This morning*). The devastation wrought by the lover ('through her can be seen your body/ enveloped in the sustaining mists/ of all your forms/ rushing towards me/ like a midsummer cloudburst', *Seeds*) is not greater than that wrought by the onrush of words: 'Like throbbings/ the words wield my blood,/ they burst in,/ they even stick to my bones/ resembling nails/ from houses.//

The word has begun digging/ into refuges of being' (*Like throbbings*). If 'our body topples over in sparks' (*Grounding*), nor is the fire caused by words any smaller: 'Words are chasms, and they're shameless,/ they've escaped so many guards,/ setting fire to the earth in me' (*Later*). You might say that Panaite moves from one pyre to another, tasting the ecstasies in torments. In any event, it is on a pyre that he dwells: 'and I enter the poem/ as if a house on fire/ in which screams are heard/ one after the other I redeem them all' (*The writing hand*). It is the redemptive vocation of poetry, which Panaite exalts alongside the mythology of combustion, but conscious that around these redemptive words 'flocks of crows/ rush in' (*Plane I*). Once he has seen them, Panaite advances into apocalypses—not all of them 'affectionate'—within a régime of reserved expressionism. The reportages about hallucinations resort to notation, but the notations are generally fantastical, leaving the poet where he was in the first place: still between the real and the chimerical.

MIRCEA BÂRSILĂ

Nichita Stănescu:
The Secondariness of the Inspired Poet

Revelation as an essential factor in the poetics of the instantaneous, as well as a procedure for achieving a poetic equilibrium between subjective and (objective) impersonal truth, does not exclude the requisite percentage of lucidity or, as it is called in treatises on aesthetics, the so-called *logic* of the artistic imagination. The moment when revelation occurs is the instantaneous result of a long build-up of tension. This moment stands out from others, like a star loosed from the bonds that hold together all the others stars in the firmament: 'Revelation is the instantaneous and lucid leap that sets in equilibrium the inner and the objective truth. It rests outside time and space, it is simultaneous with the beginning and the end of time and simultaneous with every point in the Universe.

For it to occur, first of all the scaffold must painstakingly be erected, the block must be polished, the hooded headsman must arrive and, with a single blow of the axe, sever the long and unconscious neck of the stupidity that holds the star in linkage with all the other stars.'[1] In the final instance, the state of grace is a form in which the daemonic becomes manifest: 'Once we have learned all that can be learned from the art of poetry, for the art of poetry has one part that relates to craftsmanship and craftsmen, and another that relates to the daemon, as Socrates says, whom I believe when he says that every man has his own daemon, I believe him because I have a daemon of my own, and I sense it when it comes to me and leaves me, and this is part of my physiological portrait, so, when I see the written word, all its possible meanings appear to me as if in an actual diagram. The text emerges from a perfect love of beauty and style, but also from a complete absence of feeling, since sometimes in poetry feeling is one of the forms whereby the daemonic manifests itself.'[2] Feeling is derives from inspiration or a voluptuousness of spirit that depends on something irrational, something daemonic, 'which is part of my physiological portrait.' The use of the word 'physiological' demonstrates that Nichita Stănescu accepts the fact that the daemonic denotes 'a physiology of spirit [...], the irrational power by virtue of which the psychical

1 Nichita Stănescu, Aurelian Titu Dumitrescu, *Antimetafizica*, Editura Cartea Românească, 1985, p. 135.

2 *Antimetafizica*, 147.

apparatus creates,' transforming into positive creation, by means of an *anatomy* of spirit specific to the man of genius, an energy that is 'usually perilous.'[1] The reference to Socrates' daemon is nonetheless offhand and to an extent incompatible with the description of the visits that his personal daemon pays him (made lyrically tangible in the poem *Node 28*).[2]

The question of the supernatural reality of the *daimones* was always in mutable, from the oldest folk beliefs and the philosophers of Ancient Greece to the mediaeval mystics and those of subsequent periods, who, in their acts of magic, conjured up various demons. In ancient folk beliefs, the *daimones* were denizens of the interval between gods and humans, they were ambiguous in nature, which is to say, they denoted an indeterminate supernatural power that was as a result not reflected in rituals, mythology, mythic and folk legends, or figurative representations.[3] Such a statement does not hold if we think, for example, of the Aryan Rudhra-Shiva or the monstrous hypostases of female deities from mythology or mythic and folk beliefs. Let us leave to one side such issues, which lie outside the horizon of interest in the daemonic side of the creative act, and let us instead note that between the daemons, which, unlike

1 Lucian Blaga, *Daimonion*, Editura Societatea de mâine, Cluj, 1930.

2 See Nichita Stănescu's poem *Node 28*: 'My daemon comes from afar/ into the lodgings of my being/ [...] he places his word in my brain,/ bleaching it like the sky has bleached the stars.'

3 M. Detienne, *La notion de daïmôn dans le pythagorisme ancien*, Paris, 1963.

the gods, do not belong to an organised world (parallel with the human world, and human beings there has never been a clear dividing line).[1] Let us also remember that M.P. Nilsson[2] emphasised the idea of 'dynamism' (dynamic action) in connection with daemons, which would justify their opposition to the gods (*theoi*), characterised by a passivity of power.[3]

Heraclitus held that 'character (*daimôn*) is a man's fate' (*ethos anthrôpos daimôn*), which means that in his vision, *daimôn* and *moira* (fate, destiny) were equivalent or almost equivalent). Empedocles, too, stressed the idea of the individualisation of the *daimôn* in man, although he separated the forms of human knowledge: 'Empedocles sharply distinguished sensations, thought and even reason—all forms of human knowledge—from the *daimôn* that dwells within us. The individualisation of this *daimôn*, consecrated to a particular human being who discovers his fate in it, does not change the specificity of the mysterious power, alien to man, of a reality present everywhere in nature, in the wind, in animals, in plants, in man.'[4] Those who believe that Homer did not apply a rigid meaning to the term *daimôn*, given that in the *Iliad* (III, 420) he refers to the gods as *daimones*, ignore the kinship between gods and *daimones*

1 Adelina Piatkowski, introduction to Plutarh, *Despre oracolele delfice*, Editura Polirom, 2004, p. 13.

2 M.P. Nilsson, *Daimonic*, Uppsala, 1955.

3 Adelina Piatkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

4 Apud Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mit și gândire în Grecia Antică*, Editura Meridiane, 1995, p. 155.

and, at the same time, the Homeric allusion to the 'irrational' (daemonic) attitudes of the gods in certain situations.

Hesiod divided *daimones* into two classes: *higher* (epichthonian) *daimones* derived from the men of the Golden Age, who, on behalf of Zeus, supervised the correct wielding of royal power, and the *lower (*hypochthonian*) daimones*, derived from the men of the Silver Age, which are lacking in piety and analogous to the Titans. In Hesiod, it is said only of the men of the Golden Age that they become immortal *daimones* after death. Elsewhere, Hesiod speaks of the multitude of *daimones* that keep watch over men's deeds, both good and bad: 'they are called pure spirits dwelling on the earth, and are kindly, delivering from harm, and guardians of mortal men; they roam everywhere over the earth, clothed in mist and keep watch on judgements and cruel deeds.'[1]

In the *Pythian Odes* (V, 122 ff.), Pindar puts forward the idea that humans' *daimones* are directed by Zeus ('The great purpose of Zeus directs the *daimôn* of the people whom he loves'), and Socrates thought them gods or bastards of the gods: 'Then if I believe in spirits [*daimones*], as you say, if spirits [*daimones*] are a kind of gods, that would be the puzzle and joke which I say you are uttering in saying that I, while I do not believe in gods, do believe in gods again, since I believe in spirits [*daimones*]; but if, on the other hand, spirits [*daimones*] are a kind of bastard children of gods, by nymphs or by any others, whoever their mothers are said to be, what man would believe that there are

1 Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 120 ff. (trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White).

children of gods, but no gods?'[1] In the same dialogue of Plato, Socrates tells his judges that neither before he was brought to trial nor during his defence did his god (*daimonion*) give him any sign that he was on the verge of not doing a good thing: 'For hitherto the customary prophetic monitor [*daimonion*] always spoke to me very frequently and opposed me even in very small matters, if I was going to do anything I should not; but now as you yourselves see, this thing, which might be thought, and is generally considered, the greatest of evils has come upon me; but the divine sign did not oppose me either when I left my home in the morning, or when I came here to the court, or at any point of my speech, when I was going to say anything; and yet on other occasions it stopped me at many points in the midst of a speech; but now, in this affair, it has not opposed me in anything I was going or saying. What then do I suppose is the reason? I will tell you. This which has happened to me is doubtless a good thing, and those of us who think death is an evil must be mistaken. A convincing proof of this has been given to me; for the accustomed sign would surely have opposed me if I had not been going to meet with something good.'[2]

The word *daimon* is also used in other texts, with meanings whose nuances fluctuate. In Aeschylus there can be found, in multiple variants, the idea that the 'demon that rules our fate' is identical to 'fortune' (but not good luck in the modern, positive

1 *Apology*, 27 b-e (trans. Harold North Fowler).

2 *Ibid*, 40 a-c.

sense, an idea alien to the ancient mindset). Let us close this long parenthesis with two quotations significant to the evolution of the concept of the daemon, taken from E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*:

> 1. '[I]n the age that lies between the *Odyssey* and the *Oresteia*, the daemons seem to draw closer: they grow more persistent, more insidious, more sinister. Theognis and his contemporaries did take seriously the daemon who tempts man to *atê* [the 'occasional' state of obnubilation, confusion, in which man does things that are against his will—*my note*] [...] And the belief lived on in the popular mind long after Aeschylus' day. The Nurse in *Medea* knows that *atê* is the work of an angry daemon, and she links it up with the old idea of *phthonos* [the envy of the gods—*my note*].[1]
>
> 2. 'According to Nilsson the δαίμων was originally not only indeterminate but impersonal, a mere "manifestation" of power (*orenda*) [...] Such evidence as we have suggests rather that while μοῖρα developed from an impersonal "portion" into a personal Fate, δαίμων evolved in the opposite direction, from a personal "Apportioner" (cf. δαίω, δαιμόνη) to an impersonal "luck". There is a point where the two developments cross and the words are virtually synonymous.'[2]

1 E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1951, p. 41.

2 *The Greeks and the Irrational*, p. 23, n. 65.

Like madness (*mania*), poetic utterance, the same as prophetic utterance, is the result of a supernatural gift: the gift of the poet (a divine madness). To be 'possessed by the Muses' was, in Plato's eyes, an indispensable state for 'the production of higher poetry.' Of the same opinion was Democritus, the first writer to speak of poetic ecstasy, arguing that the best poems are those composed while 'filled with inspiration and holy breath' and denying that anybody can be a 'great poet' *sine furore* (without inspiration).[1] Poets, as the chosen ones of the Muses (the daughters of Mnemosyne), they are in fact their 'instruments', as well as those of Apollo and Dionysus. Let us keep in mind the foregoing equivalence between *furor* and *inspiration*, which is definitional to the state of *enthousyasmos* (the state of possession, ecstasy, divine communion), in order to focus our attention on Nichita Stănescu's references to the state of grace as 'abrupt onrush in the midst of the concrete' and to the poetry 'inspired' by Apollo and Dionysus.

The type of poetry inspired by Apollo has as its model the paean, 'an orderly and peaceful poetic composition', whereas the poetry inspired by Dionysus has as its model the dithyramb, 'a poetry laden with violent sentiments and movements' that express disturbance and loss of mind. The two types of music represent the two principles, the *Apollonian* and the *Dionysian*, on which depend the luminous, serene (and also the conventional, mendacious) view of the world, on the one hand,

1 Jean-Pierre Vernant, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

and the 'dark' (unconventional) view, on the other, which presupposes looking in the face the 'evil of the world' hidden beneath the veil of appearances.

The Dionysian state resides in going beyond the terrifying 'spectacle' of the world through frenetic (ecstatic) participation in the miracle of the world 'managed' by the god Dionysus. There is, of course, a certain ambiguity to oracular inspiration, to the state of possession that induces the impression of a mingling of demonic and divine, no doubt due to the demons' status as denizens of the interval (*metaxy*) between gods and men.[1]

Another revealing aspect as regards the ambiguity of the demon is that it exists simultaneously inside and outside the individual. For Plutarch, the ambiguity of the demon is illustrated by the *ambiguity of the moon*, as an image of the demon and seat of the demons: 'But let us take the sun as an example. Nothing shows an image more similar with it, on the other hand, nothing provides an instrument of a more docile nature than the Moon. The radiance and flaming arrows that the Moon receives from the Sun are not directed at us [earthly denizens] as such, but rather, distorted by contact with the lunar soil, they change their colour and acquire a different quality.'"[2]

In the view of Nichita Stănescu, the demonic is, *mutatis mutandis*, the *agent* of the poetic gift, ultimately having the same

1 Plato, *Symposium*, 202e-203a.

2 Plutarh, *Despre oracolele delfice* (trans. Adelina Piatkowski), Editura Polirom, 2004, p. 129.

purpose as light in relation to the eye: 'Although it possesses the faculty of sight, the eye cannot enjoy this privilege without the help of light,' says Plutarch, quoting Plato's *Symposium* (507d-609b). Likewise, Plutarch goes on, 'the prophetic gift, which is the *eye of the soul*; it too needs an agent to awaken it and set it in motion.'[1]

Nichita Stănescu often spoke of *inspiration* and the part played by the daemonic in his own poetry, and did so from a modern position, which also entailed a certain degree of irony and, on the other hand, as we shall argue below, a subtle understanding of the 'as if' that defines the aesthetic experience. In other words, he did not take it to be 'enthusiasm' in the spirit of the ventriloquists, of the unknowing priestesses who prophesied (in verse or poetry) in a state of delirium or of the poetesses represented by the Sibyl. This is what Pausanias has passed down to us about that ancient poetess, who created spontaneously, the same as Femios (the poet 'forgiven' by Ulysses) and whose poetry sprang from unknown and uncontrollable depths. At Delphi there was a rock on which Herophile sat and sang her prophecies. Locals knew her as the Sibyl. Before her there had been another Sybil: the daughter of Zeus and Lamia (the daughter of Poseidon). She it was who was 'first among the women who conveyed prophecies in song [...]. Herophile was younger than her, but it seems that she too lived before the Trojan War' and predicted the fall of Ilium because of the beautiful Helen. Herophile was born, as

1 *Ibid*, p. 202.

she herself says in her verse, of a mortal father ('who eats wheat') and an immortal mother, perhaps one of the nymphs of Ida: 'I am descended from Ida on my mother's side.' Herophile spent the better part of her life on Samos, but also lived in Claros (in the lands of Colophon) and even at Delphi, where she sat on a rock and sang. The people of Alexandria told that Herophile became a priestess of Apollo Smintheus, and the Delians also remembered 'a hymn to Apollo by this woman; and in its verses she names herself not only Herophile, but also Artemis and says that she is the rightful wife of Apollo, and elsewhere she calls herself the sister and daughter of Apollo.'[1]

In the poem *Node 28*, the motif of the daemon is employed to describe the disturbing act of creation. At such moments, the body becomes the 'lodging' of the mysterious being whose devastating presence disrupts the poet's natural existential state, establishing a state of the greatest crisis at the level of the two planes of being, the physical and the spiritual: 'My daemon comes from afar/ into the lodging of my flesh,/ I know when he comes for he smites me/ with showers of stars,/ he swells my ankles, walking's keepers,/ he strokes my heart like a flame,/ he withers my tongue like a wild desert/ where only the lion and lioness drink,/ he shatters my eyes like two excrements of sight,/ he wipes himself on my eyebrows,/ he puts his word in my brain,/ bleaching it as the sky bleaches the stars.'

1 Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, vol. 2, Book 10, *Phocis*.

In Stănescu's lyric vision, poetry, brought by the rudrianic (terrifying) imaginary being, results from a state of 'possession', an involuntary enthusiasm, which shakes him to the very depths of his being. The 'visit' is brief, and the enigmatic 'guest', who provokes an unbearable crisis, as textually borne out by the verbs 'smites', 'swells', 'withers', shatters' and the series of comparisons ('he strokes my heart like a flame', 'he withers my tongue like a wild desert', 'he shatters my eyes like two excrements of sight'), forgets to say why he has come, leaving as a memory in the brain, the 'lodging', of the poet only gilded poetic lines: 'he wipes himself on my eyebrows,/ he puts his word in my brain,/ bleaching it as the sky bleaches the stars/ and he forgets to say why he has come/ and he departs more glorious than the whole universe/ and he leaves me as a memory only the gilded lines/ and the gilded word/ and he goes away and he leaves me/ and he doesn't even care about me;/ about me who am his home,/ a man rigid and smiling.'

The memory (*trace*) of the strange, tempestuous visit is the 'gilded' poetic lines, that is, the inspired, revealed poem, whose enigma contains the truth: the truth that the daemon shows him in order to conceal it (this, ultimately, is the purpose of poetry!).

Thus, *Node 28* is a text constructed on the (romantic) theme of the daemonic status of the poetic act and of the poet (of genius), who creates, like the shamans or archaic poets, in a state of *trance*. A state as spontaneous and unpredictable as it is dramatic, taken to be an encounter with the daemon or, in other words, a definitive defeat of the consciousness at the

hands of the perilous and obscure elemental forces of the unconscious. The suffering, perplexity, and subsequent state of inner emptiness are constitutive aspects of the magical transformation of daemonic energy into positive, 'beneficent', radiant (gilded) creation.

The sight of the 'guest' gives rise to an ambivalent reaction, just as the holy daemonic presence itself is ambivalent, a reaction in which fascination mingles with perplexity and fear: *tremendum*, *horror sacrum*.

In *Daimonion*, Lucian Blaga tackles the concept of the *demonic* from a Goethean perspective: as a contradictory, paradoxical manifestation of God, which, as a rule, manifests itself archetypally and which, in certain circumstances, permits itself 'to play', and thereby, demonically. As an expression of the deity coming out of itself, the demonic is not lacking in a *positive* side. Unconscious and, to a large extent, positive, manifestations of the demonic—whose substance preserves 'as if in a subterranean chamber the monsters of all evil impulses'[1]—differ from the negative manifestations of the *diabolical*. By its positive element, the demonic, which is beyond good and evil, is distinct from the *satanic*, which is always destructive, negative, anti-divine. In its positive aspect, any manifestation of the demonic is incorporated within the divine order.

Philosophically, the demonic, as a manifestation of the irrational and a stimulatory factor as regards knowledge, reveals the

1 Lucian Blaga, *Daimonion*, Editura Societatea de mâine, Cluj, 1930. p. 27.

unusual energy of those obsessed with overcoming the self, like Faust, the Goethe character. Let us remember that Faust devoted himself to magic, helped all the while by Mephisto, in order to obtain not power, but knowledge and unmediated contemplation of the Essential. Knowing in His divine wisdom that Faust's soul will be saved, God does not hesitate to make a wager with the devil (Mephisto): a wager whose stakes are the very soul of Faust, the man dominated by creative strivings that transcend human power.

The spell, the charm of a poem's beauty and of art in general are obtained, as Goethe argues, through *sublimation of the demonic*: 'In poetry there is in truth something demonic, and in the unconscious in particular, which surpasses both the intellect and the reason and which, for this reason, is so mobile. Something similar can also be found in music to the highest degree [...]. Poetry participates in the demonic the same as the shadows in Plato's Cave participate in the existence and being of the ideas that pass through the mouth of the cave.'[1]

Goethe's view of the irrationality (magic) of the spell specific to art is typically *romantic*. Inspiration, the gift of creation in poetry, transforming the magical demonic power into creation, Faustian striving in science, and even lunatics' power to walk over houses springs from the Romantics' *unconscious* 'woven from magic threads', that is, from the hidden background of human being.

1 Apud. Lucian Blaga, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

Arguing that 'there is no genius without the demonic', Lucian Blaga had in view the fact that the demonic defines 'a *spiritual physiology*, the dynamic of a life and the energy, the irrational power by virtue of which the psychical apparatus creates.'[1] Demonic power, which is 'usually perilous', is transformed into *positive*, beneficent creation by means of a *spiritual anatomy* specific to the man of genius.

But what is the 'gilded verse', as the inspired, in-breathed verse, beyond its status as a 'textual generator'? Is it not somehow a *repeated verse*? A verse that the recipient of the inspiration receives in order to utter it after it has been conceived and uttered by the supernatural power that gives it to him as a gift in a moment of crisis or, perhaps, out of generosity: inspired words, lines, poems are in fact *repeated*, argues Jacques Derrida.[2]

From this angle, *Node 28* is an elegy of great subtlety about the *humiliation* of the inspired poet: of the poet who discovers himself within an inexplicable state of *secondariness*!

Setting out from the ancient motif of the daemon and an old-fashioned theme, Nichita Stănescu achieved an 'astonishing' text (*Node 28*) about the state of poetic revelation (about the level of poetry's genesis), a text that is bounded within 'poetry about poetry': one of the most spectacular facets of the poetic work of Nichita Stănescu.

1 Lucian Blaga, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

2 Jacques Derrida, *Scriitura și diferența*, Editura Univers, Bucharest, 1998, p. 252.

GEORGE REMETE

God, the Principle of Existence

Man experiences existence as the relation between being and non-being. But the Primordial or Principle of existence cannot be such a relation, since it is not an absolute, but rather it is only Sovereign and Indisputable, transcending mere being. This is why no idea, no concept, no term can express this absolute except Unique and Inevitable: God.

We need to know that in relating to existence in general, God has been understood in two ways: 1) *positively* expressed as the Truly Existent or absolute, sovereign and full Existence, 2) *negatively* expressed as Supra-Existence or the Supra-Existent, wholly different from any other being, any other existence,

anything that is not He. In the following, we wish to show that God is the Principle of existence in both senses: firstly negative, and secondly positive. For, we believe that only in this way can we accept the proof that we can only conceive and express the Principle of existence by understanding the completeness of the inevitable naming of God.

If something has always existed, if eternity exists, then the Principle of existence is absolute, sovereign, perfect, and indisputable. No matter how eternal the eternity of the world might seem to us, and as it appeared to the Ancient philosophers, it cannot be the Principle itself, because it is not self-sufficient, because it reveals itself to be relative and deficient. Even if Ancient philosophy tried to console the mind with the idea that only the surface of the world ('accidents') passes and that being or essence is immutable and eternal, man is nonetheless unable to reconcile himself to the evident fact that the world's most perfect being—man, the person, consciousness, reason—is destroyed, dies, perishes.

Whether we like it or not, and whether or not we are believers, it is obvious that the Principle is higher than the being of the world as existence, that we must affirm it as an absolute, as a **God higher than existence**. In fact, by asking, 'Why is it that something exists rather than nothing? Why is existence possible?' we already imply or pose (as we have argued in a different work) the question, 'Why does God exist?' Only after this can we divide the question into two parts: 'Why does being in general exist?' and 'Why does Absolute Being exist?'

As it is the Absolute, the Principle radically surpasses being and the existence of the world, because 'all the things that we know to exist derive their existence from something else and in their existence depend on a system of references.'[1] The rigorous and consistent researcher must acknowledge the fact that, in making the being of the world the Principle of existence, Ancient thought enclosed the existence of man and the world within a circle or a closed cycle ('*the cycle of eternal recurrence*'), in which everything is actually repetitive and mechanical, making dynamism, spontaneity and the new impossible, i.e., freedom. In this way it is explicable that Ancient thought had no knowledge of the idea of the person or man as freedom. In this way, the honest researcher must admit that Biblical thought alone has revealed man's freedom, through the idea that he is created by God qua the Primordial higher than all being and existence, but also '*in His image and likeness*.' This idea, one absolutely new in the history of thought, belongs to Christianity alone and it is to be noted that it was not a stroke of inspiration on the part of some gifted theologian, but rather it was the consistent and permanent witness of the Christian Church from the very beginning.

As early as the first centuries of the Church, St Dionysius the Areopagite firmly, categorically expressed the profound idea that 'existence itself belongs to Him that is. And existence is His, He is not existence's. And existence is in Him, and it is not He that

1 Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, Bucharest, 1978, p. 152.

is in existence.'[1] He goes on to explain this radical idea through the fact that 'God is not in any ordinary way, but in a simple and boundless way, having in Himself all at once and in advance the fact of being.'[2] This idea, expressed briefly and concisely by Dionysius the Areopagite, was constantly reiterated, but it was St Maximus the Confessor in particular who expanded on it, revealing that 'the very existence of the things that are, in having a "whereby" to their existence and not existing simply …provides a strong and great proof that things have a beginning according to being and birth … with the exception of God alone, who is properly higher than existence itself.'[3] Every determination is a limitation; this is why only God is the Principle of existence, being higher than any finite or determined existence. If we name the being of the world and all that we know 'existence', then God/the Principle of existence is higher than any definition or naming, He is 'the beginning without end and the principle without principle' (St Maximus the Confessor, *Gnostic Chapters*, I, 69), and cannot be framed even within the category of existence: 'we do not categorise His existence as existence. For He is the wellspring of existence, but not existence itself. For, He is higher even than the existence spoken or

1 Sf. Dionisie Areopagitul, *Despre Numirile Dumnezeiești*, V, 8, in *Opere complete*, Editura Paideia, Bucharest, 1996, p. 160.

2 *Ibid*, V, 4, p. 159.

3 Sf. Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Ambigua*, 60, in *P.S.B.*, No. 80, E.I.B.M.B.O.R, Bucharest, 1983, p. 172.

thought of in any ordinary way.'[1] To think or conceive of the Principle of existence means to conceive of the Absolute, and this is only possible by ignoring the mode, being and existence of the world, dismissing it before the Principle. This is why, along the lines of the Church Fathers who preceded him but also providing a summary of exemplary clearness, St John Damascene described God as the Principle precisely by setting Him apart from the concept of 'existence': 'it is far more appropriate that we speak of the being of God, disregarding all things that exist and setting Him higher than existence itself.'[2]

God is the Principle of existence, since He alone is the *undetermined Absolute*, i.e., the 'apeiron', to use Anaximander's term. But in this understanding, St Dionysius the Areopagite is also the father of Christian theology. For, in naming God 'He Who pre-exists: the beginning, as He Who is cause; the end, as He Who is the limit of all things',[3] he radically stated that God is the Principle in that 'He is not in any ordinary way, but in a simple and undefined way, having in Him all at once and in advance the fact of being.'[4] The Principle is certainly the Absolute itself, and this means that is it undetermined and wholly ineffable, as it is 'the Unity that creates unity… higher than all unity… [for which] there is no word or understanding

1 *Ibid*, p. 173.

2 Sf. Ioan Damaschin, *Dogmatica*, I, 4, E.I.B.M.B.O.R, Bucharest, 2005, p. 21.

3 Sf. Dionisie Areopagitul, *Despre Numirile Dumnezeiești*, V, 10, ed. cit., p. 161.

4 *Ibid*, V,4, p. 159.

or name, as it is none of those things that are.'[1] Along the same lines, St Maximus restates the self-determination of the Principle, warning that 'in saying that God is, I do not say in what way He is… Since God is higher than all speech and all understanding. This is why not even in saying that He is do we do so by subjecting Him to the category of existence.'[2] And that outstanding summariser of the patristic tradition, St John Damascene, sets the final seal on the idea of the indeterminate and ineffable when he magnificently states: 'we believe in one God, in one principle, without beginning, uncreated… eternal, infinite, uncircumscribed… impassive, immutable… a power that cannot be known by any measure, but is measured only by its own will.'[3]

This patristic understanding has remained consistent in Christian theology, from the beginning until today. It may be said, however, that in modern and contemporary theology, the idea of God as undetermined Principle has been expressed primarily based on the mystery of the person as ineffable, namely the absolute personhood of God. For example, renowned Greek theologian Ioannis Zizioulas emphasises that 'the true person, as absolute ontological freedom, can only be "uncreated", i.e., free of any "given", including its own existence.'[4] Here we shall allow ourselves to restate that the human condition

1 *Ibid*, I,1, p. 135.

2 *Ibid*, I,1, p. 135.

3 Sf. Ioan Damaschin, *Dogmatica*, I, 8, ed. cit., pp. 25-26.

4 Ioannis Zizioulas, *Ființa eclesială*, Editura Bizantină, Bucharest, 1996, p. 38.

itself as limit refers man to the unconditioned, to the personal Absolute without which nothing can be stated, without which nothing can have being. Father Stăniloae reiterates this when he notes that temporal limitation itself 'leads us to postulate eternal existence, which exists by itself… that existence for all eternity must be perfect for all eternity or must have plenitude for all eternity, namely actualised plenitude.'[1] The Absolute must needs be the Primordial as plenitude, i.e., not subject to any law, but possessing solely within itself the cause of existence. But it is immediately to be noted that the plenitude of existence cannot consist in a 'concrete' substance or essence, since only the person manifests itself as fulfilled or full existence: 'The divine personal reality is eminently non-determined, because it is the hypostasis of supra-essence, from which every created essence receives its existence.'[2] So, every substance is subject to laws, whereas the person means transcendence of the necessary or law, including the obligation or determination of its own essence.

God is the Principle higher than existence also because He is the pre-existent *Primordial as Sovereignty and absolute authority.* He is not a simple cause of existence, but Existence prior to existence, necessarily unbound by that which causes, but in a pre-existent mode. This causal obligation shows God to be the Absolute Sovereign, i.e., the true Principle of existence.

1 D. Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 1987, p. 215.

2 D. Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, E.I.B.M.B.O.R, Bucharest, 1978, p. 152.

It should here be stressed the wholly significant fact that the term *archē*, which denotes the idea of the principle in Greek, at the same time means 'rule', 'authority' and 'sovereignty'. Sovereignty means self-determination, power and authority of itself and in itself. But it is not real if it is limited in substance or essence, but only in person, for a being unconscious of its power cannot be called sovereign. To claim that the Principle is identical to Sovereignty or Absolute Authority seems tautological or pleonastic, for '*If something exists, it exists because there exists a firm, eternal and plenary foundation of existence*.'[1] But it is absolutely necessary immediately to make clear that a Sovereignty, a foundation or a strictly substantial or impersonal guarantee, such as that conceived by pantheists and atheists, is wholly phantasmagorical. Without personhood or any connection with the person, every being exists only by convention and is in fact meaningless. To deny, avoid or distort that God is a personal Principle of existence means to reject the only full explanation of existence, to deny its meaning and certainty. The pantheist and atheist idea in fact means the exclusion of freedom, reason and meaning, the proclamation of the absurd and the triumph of non-being over meaning and being.

1 D. Stăniloae, *note 104* to Sf. Atanasie cel Mare, 'Trei cuvinte împotriva arienilor', in *P.S.B.*, No. 15, E.I.B.M.B.O.R, Bucharest, 1987, p. 275.

‘The veritable writer is, I think, the one who can be a model for others, a moral and aesthetic reference point’

IULIAN BOLDEA

INTERVIEWED BY
VICTOR MAROLA

Victor Marola: Mr Iulian Boldea, I would like to begin this dialogue with a number of aspects connected to your educational background. You took a Degree in Literature at the Babeș-Bolyai Universiy, Cluj. What are your memories of professors such as Mircea Zaciu, Ion Pop, Ioana Em. Petrescu, Marian Papahagi, Liviu Petrescu and Mircea Muthu?

Iulian Boldea: All the great professors you mention played a formative, shaping part, in that they embodied the ideal of the passionate, ludic intellectual, as well as the spirit of subtle, natural mentorship. In their classes and their lessons in implicit ethics, these professors stimulated our passion for knowledge, guiding us towards the horizon of the literary text, through the

subtle techniques of a comprehensive hermeneutics, whether implicit or explicit. In this way, my fellow students and I learned how to read and comment on a book, how to analyse a text, how to gain a nuanced understanding of both the world of literature and the real world. For me, it was a period of accumulation, sedimentation, and nuancing of my knowledge of myself and others. This is precisely why the voices of our professors resound with the same strength of conviction in my affective memory under the sign of an elevated intellectuality, one that shapes the awareness and the character. Those were the professors we needed at the time! The good fortune of having met them, of having been able to see and hear them, marked my fate, my life, my career in the most fortunate way possible.

V.M.: What did the student movement surrounding *Echinox* magazine in the Cluj of the 1980s mean to you? Please give us the names of some of your colleagues at the magazine and people of the same generation who became leading eighties writers and poets, to which you make frequent reference in your reviews and articles.

I.B.: The founding of *Echinox* magazine more than fifty years ago was a highly significant event for contemporary Romanian literature, even though many minimise the prestige of the Cluj student magazine in insufficiently objective literary histories and surveys. A thorn in the side of the communist authorities of the time, *Echinox* was one of the few magazines in communist Romania that wove for itself a European allure, through rigour,

a spirit of multiculturalism (it had pages in Romanian, Hungarian and German), fertile dialogue of literary values, and multiple, healthy openings towards the international. From the very beginning, the mentors of *Echinox*, Ion Pop, Marian Papahagi, and Ion Vartic, fostered freedom as a way of life, an atmosphere of bubbling creativity, under the sign of critical and ironical perception, whereby solemnity was constantly relativised with ludic accents. The feeling of liberation from circumstantial restraints, the cult of value and responsibility in writing were taken up and carried on by future *Echinox* generations, a spiritual journey in which continuity was natural and necessary. The writers produced by the Echinox school are today, many of them, established names in Romanian poetry, prose, literary criticism, and essay-writing. A literary school that could not have been more demanding, Echinox was and has remained, beyond all its avatars, a state of mind and ethical awareness. Just a few of my magazine colleagues and those of the same generation whom I would like to mention are Ion Mureşan, Al. Cistelecan, Aurel Pantea, Andrei Zanca, Ioan Moldovan, Corin Braga, Alexandru Vlad, Ruxandra Cesereanu, Sanda Cordoş, Mihaela Ursa, and Horea Poenar, but there were many others.

V.M.: What do you make of the current Romanian literary landscape?

I.B.: In gauging Romanian literature today, I prefer to look at books, writers, groups, developments with detachment, in a balanced, rational hermeneutic exercise, with tempered critical judgement

aloof from the more radical games of the literary arena. The selection of the books commented on is based on value and empathy, I have always written about the books that say something to me, the ones that I like, in which I have faith, but I don't write about books that I find unconvincing. Lately I have noticed a lot of bickering of an extra-literary nature regarding literature's institutions, I notice a radicality that might be worthier of better causes, just as I also notice an unnatural restlessness that comes from untimely impulses, prejudices, disharmony. In my opinion, contemporary Romanian literature needs more balance, greater maturity of judgement, a larger dose of lucidity in perceiving and evaluating its own condition. The younger literature of today seems dynamic, providing artistic vision aplenty, fictional directions, creative techniques. We're talking about a phenomenon in progress, which naturally has yet to settle, about individual voices that have already gained a reputation, while others are for the time being devoid of identity. All these voices, profiles, and identities form the overall picture of today's literature; it's a multi-storeyed picture, with various levels, dimensions and branches, whose outlines will become more clearly defined as it goes along. On the other hand, what Alecsandri said about the Romanian being 'born a poet' is more valid today than ever before: Romanians are all poets to a greater or lesser extent, in thought, in feeling, in the pride of being published. Words such as 'poet', 'writer', 'intellectual' seem compromised, they have lost value through overuse, through inapplicability; such words have come to mean almost nothing any more, because of

a graphomaniacal industriousness devoid of substance. True, authentic literature risks being asphyxiated, compromised, and it's harder and harder to lay claim to the profession of writer in its noble, beautiful sense.

V.M.: What does the future hold in store for literature in a technologised, pragmatic world that sets greater store by image than word?

I.B.: The future of literature resembles the future of humanity, which is heading towards ever more perfect computer technologies, towards rapid and efficient communication between people, a communication that is lesser in its emotional/empathetic impact. Literature would therefore have the opportunity, in such an atmosphere saturated with virtual reality, whereby competition with computer imagery becomes increasingly fierce, to lend nuance to its message, to modulate its language, to move closer to readers by restructuring its components, thereby amplifying its communicational component, without giving up its capacity to convey affective beauty, emotional tension, conserving its aesthetic charm, the expressive resonance of identity.

V.M.: How do you view the ethical condition of the writer, his civic position?

I.B.: It would be ideal for writers to preserve their independence of opinion at all costs, even at the cost of being at odds with the norms of their times. The veritable writer is, I think, the one who can be a model for others, a moral and aesthetic reference

point. There is, of course, also the posture of the non-conformist, radical writer, who manifests himself as an iconoclast, but let it be noted that non-conformism does not heighten or lessen the value of a book, which derives from its intrinsic, irreducible nature, from the indissoluble unity between feeling and expression, the emblematic forms of knowledge acquired through literature.

V.M.: Are there correspondences, correlations between science and literature?

I.B.: In my opinion, there are very many creators who are interested in science, at a minimal and general level. As we know, scientific knowledge provides clear reference points to enable us to know ourselves and the better to understand the world we live in, a world that is disturbing in its immensity and diversity. Arnold J. Toynbee believed that the principle of reason cordoned off the scientific and the cultural fields depending on the historical era: 'Belief in reason, consolidated over the course of the modern epoch of western civilisation as a consequence of the rediscovery of Antiquity in the Renaissance, came to be strongly contested during the Late Modern period and increasingly fiercely after the 1850s.' In the sphere of psychology, says Toynbee, 'the western scientific intelligence verified by means of observation what Pascal had intuited, namely that the heart has its own reasons, of which reason itself has no inkling.' The twentieth century asserted itself by renouncing a unified perspective on the world, the Cartesian principle, instead cultivating relativism

in science (Einstein's theory of relativity), in psychoanalysis (Freud, Jung, Adler), in philosophy (Husserl and Heidegger's phenomenology), in art (Cubism, Constructivism, Surrealism), and, not least, in literature (Proust, Joyce, Thomas Mann et al.). It is known that every manifestation of human consciousness brings together two distinct yet complementary modes of reaction to the challenges of the physical world: a mode based on the instruments of reason, of logic, and another, intuitive mode, which allows us to find interpenetrations, correlations, convergences between literature and science, particularly in the present period of globalisation, postmodernism, heightened relativism, and accelerated development of science, technology, and computers. There is no gap between literature and science: between Picasso and Einstein, for example, there are numerous parallels. What is also relevant is the way in which postmodernism expresses the correlations between literature and science, and what take shape are interdisciplinary dimensions of discursivity, which result in texts hard to categorise, with a polymorphic, fragmentary, rhizomatic, structure, constructed through agglutination of images, hybridisation of modes of utterance and artistic expression nurtured by correspondences between various fields of knowledge (music, literature, photography, cinema, scientific experiment, etc.). One name that comes to mind is that of Solomon Marcus, a mathematician and poetician who in his books has illustrated connections correlations, convergences between science and art, believing that the drastic separation between the humanities

and the exact sciences is inoperative, as an integrative, synergetic vision of these epistemic spheres of the human spirit is far more fertile. Solomon Marcus believes that the 'imaginary universe of poetry' is nurtured by 'the human in all its diversity, in its multiple, logical and intuitive/emotional, empirical and theoretical manifestations.' I acknowledge that I myself am interested in the new achievements in the scientific field (neuroscience, cognitive psychology, the world of personal development), but also in major topics at the intersection between science, philosophy and literature (artificial intelligence, cyberspace, chaos theory, the multiverse, trans-human medicine, meritocracy, utilitarianism, ecology, game theory, conceptual art etc.), topics that can be found in books that have had a large impact and relevance within the sphere of knowledge (*This Will Make You Smarter*, ed. John Brockman, *The Laws of Human Nature*, by Robert Greene, *The Life of the Spirit*, by Hannah Arendt, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, by Isaiah Berlin.

V.M.: Into the sequence of the questions in this interview I would like to insert an issue to do with linguistics, which I see as necessary to the field of literary culture. It concerns another binary: the diachronic/synchronic in the evolution of literary language, concepts on which linguists such as Saussure, but also Eugen Coșeriu (professor at the University of Tübingen in the final part of his career) have written seminal studies. Please provide a few ideas and opinions pertinent to knowledge of such linguistic aspects.

I.B.: Linguistics is not my field of expertise, but I would say that, as we all know, every language evolves according to certain laws, tendencies, forces that shape language to a greater or lesser extent. As notable linguist Alexandru Gafton said, 'the evolution of the literary aspect should be disengaged from these aleatory channels,' since it can be controlled by 'reason imbued with the spirit of language,' and the literary aspect of language is a 'guarantee of evolution, but also a path for embracing characteristically human thought as an educated and cultural being.' Alexandru Gafton concludes as follows: 'The only truly guiding principle, which can preserve the connection with the living, genuine and dynamic character of language, while at the same time guiding and underpinning every cultured construct is the diachronic principle. Indeed, this is the central column that holds the living roots and which ensured the healthy nurturing of the other principles. For this reason, the diachronic principle not only ensures the correctness of any decision regarding forms, but is also the only correct standard in the event in which there arises the need to adjust the principles or the forms whereby they are applied. The diachronic principle represents and constitutes the essential nature of the system, of that which is and of that which can be—its genome.'

V.M.: Thank you!

MIHAI BARBU

On the DADA Movement in Călimănești and On the Double Measure at Frăsinei

'CUZA'S SPRING' WAS ERECTED IN MEMORY AND HONOUR of Prince Alexander John Cuza, subsequent to the two visits that his highness made to Vâlcea County, the first shortly after his election as ruler of the United Principalities, in the summer of 1859, and the second in 1862. On both occasions, he was welcomed with the same affection by the inhabitants of these parts, who, impressed by the princely figure, wished to preserve over the centuries this historic event and they captured this spring here at Cozia in the Olt Gorge.' (Signed: Călimănești Mayor's Office)

DISCOBOLUL INTERNATIONAL | 2025

Edifying thought, marvellous achievement…

The only thing is that the 'Cuza Spring' is the only one which, the whole of the distance I travelled from Cozia to Frăsinei Monastery, has dried up. The spring is on the left of the road that leaves Călimănești heading for Brezoi (12 km away) and Sibiu (75 km away). The structure is elaborate, made of reinforced concrete with three arches that are painted white, while a wall of stone arches says the final word. In the middle is mounted a spigot which can't be turned on or off because it is missing its handle. The hosts could have left a wrench alongside and let the Romanian plumber manage as best he could, if the spring hadn't dried up but had only been blocked. The concrete basin, which ought to have stored the water, is full of dead leaves. Over the road is an elegant establishment named 'DADA'. In Călimănești, I came across numerous commercial premises generically named 'DADA' and a three-star hotel, endowed with thermal spring water, also dubbed 'DADA'. I was naturally intrigued by the way in which, at a Romanian spa resort, the name of an avant-garde movement born in Zurich, Switzerland, more than a century ago had taken such a hold. None of the passers-by I asked was able to explain the mystery of what this literary brand was doing in a resort where people come for the sake of their health, drinking the miraculous waters that flow all around, except from the memorial drinking fountain. At the guesthouse and the restaurant at the far end of the

resort, I decided that I should make one last attempt to unravel this mystery which had come to obsess me hour by hour and even step by step. I stepped inside and ordered myself a coffee. A discreet gentleman was sitting by himself at a table and was treated with the utmost deference by the staff. I apologised for intruding on him and came straight to the point: 'Please excuse me, but why have you named all your premises in Călimănești DADA? Does it have anything to do with…' The proprietor allowed me to finish my question and provided the answer on the spot: 'My wife died seventeen years ago, I was left with two small children and they used to call their mother Dada. I promised them that we would always remember her, as would all our guests.' The proprietor hadn't heard of the literary movement that Tristan Tzara had made famous throughout the world. So, in Călimănești, from the sentimental point of view, 'Dada' today means something completely different than it does in Paris, Bucharest, and Zurich.

If you can't beat them, persuade them to join you

But to return to the 'Cuza Spring': let us find out why the Prince didn't deserve such treatment. In response to the letter that St Calinic wrote to the ruler of the principalities, in which he asked him to exempt the Frăsinei hermitage from the nationalisation of monastic estates, Cuza proved highly amenable: 'I saw

what you wrote to me about the Frăsinei Hermitage, which you argue that out of sense of religious duty and by Your Holiness's own means you rebuilt from a ruin. Learning of this pious deed and in order to express my gratitude, I have ordered my minister of religions to take the appropriate measures to satisfy the wishes that you convey to me regarding the Frăsinei hermitage.' (History records that on 13 December 1863 the law put forward by Mihail Kogălniceanu to nationalise the monastic estates was passed. It stipulated that all succursal and non-succursal monastic estates, as well as other public legacies or donations made by various testators and donors from the United Principalities to the Holy Sepulchre, Mount Athos, Sinai and to the metropolitan sees, bishoprics and their succursal monasteries here in Romania and to other monasteries and churches in towns or to benevolent foundations and those for the public good, were proclaimed domains of the Romanian State, and the incomes of such establishments were to be included in the general state budget.) The Minister of Religions, N. Crețulescu, was close to St Calinic ('Your Holiness's spiritual son') and in this official as well as sentimental capacity he informed him of the Prince's decision with undisguised joy: 'Frăsinei will remain the only non-nationalised monastery in the country!'

At the 'Old Cozia Holy hermitage' (or 'St John of the Rock') or, more plainly, at the 'Old Post Office', you have to wait two to three minutes

The hermitage is situated on the shore of the Turnu Hydroelectric Dam reservoir, which was built between 1976 and 1983 under the supervision of engineer Ioan Mihăilă from Călimănești. A thick wall of stone shelters the church from the rumble of traffic and the weather. If you succeed, taking great precaution, in crossing the main road, you will enter the portal of the hermitage and, reaching the front of the church, come across the following enlightening announcement: 'If the church is locked, press the doorbell button by the small door on the right of where you are reading. Wait for two to three minutes… If you press the button again and still do not receive an answer, we wish you a pleasant journey. Thank you.' We did as we were instructed and followed *Teaching No. 16* of the monks of Frăsinei: 'On leaving the Church, go straight home, avoiding detours to taverns or places where there is tittle-tattle and idle chatter.'

The most beaten tracks lead nowhere

'Around here, people are well-brought-up and decent, nobody walks on the grass or picks the flowers or leaves litter. 'Be on our side, not the litterbugs'.' How can you not be on the side of the people of Călimănești? At Cozia Monastery I admired the stone

rosettes, the blind niches, the moulded edgings, and the ceramic crucifixes with their varied motifs, I looked up at the sky and I saw atop the spire the princely Cross of Mircea the Old. I lingered in the monastery porch, added in 1784, which was designed in the Brîncoveanu style. Over the road from the monastery we saw a magnificent cemetery and didn't have the heart not to enter. This was how we discovered that 'Man is a mystery,/ his life, a dream,/ to good souls,/ the heavens open.'

Another cross, another philosophical idea: 'Every person is alone on the face of the earth… and all of a sudden evening falls.' (Doesn't this sound like the other famous words? 'A man was all alone in the world. All of a sudden, he heard a knock on the door…' It's proof that great spirits can meet even in a cemetery in Căciulata!) One unexpected grave on a path dotted with anonymities was that of the illegitimate son of a controversial king: 'Here lies Carol Mircea Grigore of Romania/ 1920-2006/ the firstborn son of H.M. King Carol II by marriage with the Princess Ioana Valentina.' The grave can be found at No. 824 Trajan Way, Căciulata, postcode 245601. Returning to our own earthly world, we observe that advertising is also the soul of commerce of rural extraction: 'If you want to grow up big and strong, eat corn on the cob, brother, it's really healthy, a natural dessert, you can find it here, a product with big kernels, and it's Romanian too. Boiled and roasted corn on the cob, just 6 lei!' In this context, we also came across a dirty version, in which were jumbled together corn (boiled or roasted), a cob, the

estimated time, and a hot lady, a lethal combination that we preferred to ignore. It seemed to have been composed in the 'Dada' Academy itself…

All alone, on the way to Frăsinei…

Before doing anything else, I listened to the friendly advice of a local on how to reach Frăsinei from Căciulata by car in the best possible time. At one point, at an intersection without signposts, I had to activate the GPS. I typed 'Muiereasca', the village within which the monastery is located, but the device refused to recognise the address. I got annoyed, but in the end, I realised that I was the one in error. I retyped the address, omitting the pesky i, and wrote: 'Muereasca'. Bingo! On the way, I picked up a sweating local, who was in a hurry to get to work on time. He was the monastery watchman and I assisted him in not arriving late on duty. Three kilometres before reaching the destination, I saw a large poster which warned women that access was strictly forbidden to them beyond that point. Married and unmarried ladies could, however, descend a short but steep slope to a secluded spot reckoned to be outside the monastery to wait for their menfolk. The rules of Bishop St Calinic, unique in their way, are that meat is never eaten at the monastery, women never set foot there, and services are held from midnight until morning, rules that are strictly followed by all the monks. For these blessed reasons,

Frăsinei Monastery is rightly deemed to be the Romanian Mount Athos. I park the car and the doorkeeper leaves me in the hands of the Lord. I have arrived at an unsuitable time and find that I am the only pilgrim at the monastery.

The wise eye knows how to cleanse the mind that it might quench the fire and drive out illusions

The church was closed, so I had a look around the outside and carefully read all the inscriptions on the walls of the buildings inside the monastery precincts. I started with some that seemed to be addressing me personally: 'Man, for as long as thou art within sight of this life, before the market is ended, purchase thyself God's mercy by giving to the poor. With humility, purchase eternal glory; with righteousness, the endless life; with cleanliness, the unwithering garland. With gentleness, purchase entry into heaven; with prayer, life alongside the angels; with toil, purchase rest; with wakefulness, the sight of the unseen God; and with fasting and thirst, the enjoyment of heavenly delights.' The second exhortation, as forthright as the first, I found in a 'Discourse of spiritual benefit': 'Man, all things hast thou got from God, wisdom, and thought, and craft, and mind. And all things are subject to thee, those on earth, those in the sea and the sky, which have been given to thee for thy food. But they were given to thee on loan, that thou mightest thank the Lord for them, through righteousness, love, gentleness, humility, and

charity. And he will give thee gifts that the eye hath not seen and the ear hath not heard, nor have they risen to the heart of man, gifts that God hath prepared for those that love Him.' After which I discovered, from the quill of Patriarch Nicodim himself, how to make the sign of the cross correctly: 'Because there are often to be seen Christians of the kind that know not how to make the sign of the Cross properly but merely flutter their right hand next to their noses or chests and make a few motions that mean nothing, for this reason, Christian, I deem it necessary to say to you, on this occasion, a few words about how you ought to make the sign of the Cross. You should not make the sign of the Cross willy-nilly but as the Holy Right-Believing Church teaches us, and namely: firstly join together the thumb and first two fingers of the right hand, clasping the two smaller fingers against the palm of the hand and then, placing the joined fingers and thumb on the forehead, say: In the name of the Father, then, lowering them to the chest, say: and of the Son, after which, touching the right and left shoulder, say: and of the Holy Ghost, then add the word Amen!' I took note and as I was about to leave, I was espied by a monk, who placed in my hand two huge keys, with which he urged me with a look to open the doors of the church. I did so piously, I walked towards the icons and remembered Teaching No. 15, which I had just read on one of the walls: 'When you make the sign of the Cross in front of an icon, kiss the image of the saint on the feet or at most the hands, but not on the face.' The monk then invited me to the Chancellery, where he gave me the *History of the Holy Monastery of Frăsinei*. This was

a rare opportunity to receive further pieces of spiritual advice on moderation. As I listened, I realised that those who dwell in the Lord are people like us, sinners, who, among their many acts of penitence must protect and guard themselves against fires. For example, in such a dramatic situation, Athanasius alerts the staff, Dionysius alerts the professional, private, voluntary and emergency services. Gervasius shuts off the utilities, the fire extinguishers are handled by Anastasius, Miron and Dionysius, it is also Athanasius who will evacuate all persons, evacuation of goods falls on the shoulders of Brother Miron, and the entire operation will be led by Brother Gervasius. (The plan was drawn up by a civilian, Mr Chiril Popescu.) Having been reassured that such matters are under control, I bought a bundle of candles, divided them in two, and lit them in honour of the living and in memory of those who have departed to the Lord.

Epilogue to be heeded

Before the entrance onto holy ground, to which women have no access, comes that steep road that leads to the spot where the ban is lifted. There I met a young and quite attractive teacher, who, with her father, had come to pray. She was a teacher who ought to have been fulfilled both materially and spiritually (not long ago she had got her driving licence and bought a car…), but despite all that, she felt unfulfilled. Both she personally and her beloved father. The young lady wanted to get married

and was convinced she was unable to take this step because of some nasty relatives who hated her with all their heart and consequently cast all kinds of spells on her. She had come to Frăsinei because she had great faith in Father Vasile, a holy man, who, before she took her teaching exam, predicted that she would pass with an average score of 89.2 per cent. And that is exactly what happened… She was now waiting, full of hope, for him to predict where, when and how the other miracle in her life would take place. And above all, who would be her chosen one…

VASILE MOGA

The History of Archaeology in Romania

In 2022, the historical and archaeological Sciences department of the Romanian Academy published, as part of Romanian Civilisation Section 23, overseen by Academician Victor Spinei, a volume titled *The History of Archaeology in Romania* by Mihai Bărbulescu of Cluj University, an academic first in Romania, being a survey of this chapter in our history, which examines over the course of 490 pages the evolution of this auxiliary science as well as the study and chronology of settlements from prehistory to the early Middle Ages. I should point out from the very beginning that the author has previously published another book on a connected subject: *Archaeology in Romania Today*, written in Rome, where for a

number of years he was the head of the famous Accademia di Romania, founded in 1922 by Vasile Pârvan, regarded as the founder of modern Romanian archaeology.

The book that here concerns us reviews numerous chance discoveries, including the hoards of gold found at Sânnicolau Mare and elsewhere, the trove of jewellery known generically as the Hen with the Golden Chicks, the gold helmet from Coțofenești, the treasury of twenty-three sculptural items, and many other ancient artefacts of great archaeological and historical value.

There is an examination of the foreign travellers who passed through Transylvania and other regions from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, including Martin Opitz, from Silesia, who taught at the Gabriel Bethlen College in Alba Iulia and who copied a number of inscriptions from Apulum and Ampelum, praised by German historian T. Mommson, author of the great *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (volume 3, epigraphs from the province of Dacia), and who in 1857 visited Roșia Montană, Alba Iulia and Blaj, where he met Timotei Cipariu. At Roșia Montană (Alburnus Major) he visited one of the ancient goldmining galleries and enquired about the famous wax tablets, regarded as the first juridical documents from the territory of what is now Romania.

Other foreign travellers visited Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia, writing about the archaeological artefacts that could be found there almost every step of the way, remarking on the discoveries preserved *in situ*, subsequently also researched

in the present day, at Sarmizegetusa Regia, where even now treasure hunters can still be found, Colonia Ulpia Trajana Sarmizegetusa, Napoca, Potaissa, Micia, Sucidava, Romula, known as the 'Romanian Pompeii', and many other sites in Dobrudja, Moldavia, Bessarabia and elsewhere, where systematic archaeological investigations continue to this day. In this context, a number of important names come to the fore, including Grigore Tocilescu, author of a set of regulations for preserving historical and archaeological monuments, and Alexandru Odobescu, who compiled an archaeological questionnaire and was author of *Le Trésor de Pétrossa* and the connected *Étude sur l'orfèvrerie antique*. Also interesting in our opinion are his words to the effect that whoever lacks book-learning cannot be an archaeologist!

Other famous names in archaeology included Grigore Tocilescu, Pamfil Polonic and the aforementioned Vasile Pârvan, who studied sites in Dobrudja: Adamclissi, Tomis, Calatis, Histria, Troesmi, and in Moldavia and Bessarabia.

The wealth and variety of Romania's archaeological remains led to the emergence of private collections and museums that housed items found during digs. To be mentioned here are the museums in Bucharest, Cluj, Deva, Turda, and elsewhere, and not least the Alba Iulia Regional Museum, which since 1975 has been the National Museum of the Union, whose first custodian was Adalbert Cserni, whom we may regard, without fear of error, as the pioneer of local archaeology, the man who made the first excavations in Alba Iulia at the castrum of the Thirteenth

Gemina Legion and at Partoș, excavations which here, as elsewhere, continue to this day.

Travellers noted other places where civil and military settlements had been discovered in the Olt Valley, south-western Dacia, at Drobeta, with its famous bridge across the Danube, in Băile Herculane, Tibiscum, and Berzovia. Nor did they overlook the discoveries in Moldavia, for example those at Barboși-Galați and Scythia Minor and many other places where archaeological research continues to this day.

After the Romantic phase came a period of professionalisation, in that archaeology departments were established within history faculties and young men emerged eager to practise the profession, following in the footsteps of mentors famous not only in Romania, but also abroad, where they took part in a series of scientific events and at the opening of exhibitions of archaeological artefacts.

The survey from which I have gleaned a few topics proves to be a useful working instrument aimed primarily at young future archaeologists.

Its author, university professor Mihai Bărbulescu, a corresponding member of the Romanian Academy, adds this new work to his previous books, each of which individually and all of which together prove that our friend and colleague is deserving of our greatest appreciation.

Let us therefore rejoice.

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ISSN 1453-8881
9 771453 888002