Poetics of the Sacred in Lucian Blaga's poetry

Carmen POTLOG

En cet article, nous avons étudié l'art de créer subtilement une atmosphère mythique sigficant dans tout le poème lyrique de Blaga. Nous avons considéré la relation Je-multiple, et la liaison Dieu-homme. Nous avons également étudié la capacité du poèt de plastifier ses idées, de donner ses abstractions dans les formes concrètes, qui montre une puissance remarquable de matérialiser.

Lucian Blaga's poetry plays an unmistakable role in the history of Romanian poetry, primarily through the subtle art of creating a mythical atmosphere. It's not paraphrases or duplications of certain myths in poetry, nor the mythical excuse (as in the first two volumes of *Poems of the Light* and *The Prophet's Steps*), but the author's ability to suggest an order and coherence impregnated by mystery: of the world, of the cosmic universe, of man's position in the world. This is why the tragic consciousness of the temporal limitation ("the great passage," death's due time) is associated in Lucian Blaga not only with the dramatic and pathetic cry of man who talks with the disorder of the "great passage", from the irreversible flow towards an end, but also with the intense perception of the entwinement of beauty and mystery that presides over "the great, great story," the branching tale.

The desolation of the "passage" and the avid sipping of the mysterious beauty are the two inseparable sides, that define existence and the world, giving the man in it a special condition, of belonging to it, but also of exception in the noble and tragic conscience of the inexorable death.

Despite contiguities (in poems such as *Letter, Promises, Fallen Smoke, Upon Waters, John Self-Lacerating in Wilderness*) with Cioran's desolations, Lucian Blaga believes in the tragic nobility of the human condition and the chances to save mankind through sacrifice and work and creation in culture. In poetry, "the yearn-yearning" is the ultimate synthesis in which the dialogue, the mystery in the universe and within us, with "the great passage" are underlined in "song," in a beauty produced in man as a result of contemplating the miracle of the world from the point of view of a mortal being. Blaga created a Romanian Expressionism along the line of a poetry and drama of mythical atmosphere, and "the yearn-yearning" (distinct from longing for something or someone) is the Romanian and the poetical equivalent created by the poet for "the trans-horizontic aspiration",

BDD-A143 © 2011 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:54:26 UTC)

humanity's yearning for another condition, freed of time and death, impossible to attain, but to which the human soul, unresigned, aspires.

E. Lovinescu asserted that in the volume *Poems of the Light* there are too many poems that are not really poetry, that they look like a disguised micro-essay[1]. But he also emphasizes the "power of the image," he perceives a spiritual similarity between Blaga's imagery and a spirit that dominates the eastern thinking. Of particular interest in this volume is the relation I-multiple (the relation God-man) (*Light, Silence, The Stalactite, To the Stars*).

G. Călinescu argues that "Blaga's first lines in *Poems of the Light* struck especially through image, because although they were relatively insignificant, reduced to a few broken sentences into an appearance of metrics, they are condensed to a single point: into a metaphor"[2]. Referring to the same issue, George Gană contends: "brief in substance and artistic development, this poetry holds more of a documentary interest ..."[3].

But the full crystallization of Blaga's poetic mode was accomplished with the composition of the poems in the volume *In the Great Passage*, poems dominated by the theme of time. This volume has a motto: "Stop the passage. I know that where there is no death there is no love either, and yet please: stop, oh, God, the watch with which you measure our dissolution."

The title of the volume reproduces the title of a poem, *In the Great Passage*, poem illustrative for Lucian Blaga's entire vision on existence and time. It is this consciousness of the great passage that opens man up to the idea of beauty and mystery. The beauty and the mystery of the world are meant to be seen only by the human being because he is the only one aware of his death.

The poet experiences the fear of passing away:

"numai sîngele meu strigă prin păduri

după îndepărtata-i copilărie"[4]. Time is thus a downward movement, fall towards death.

Many of the poems from the volume *In the Great Passage* are placed between the painful obsession with time and the miracle of the daily resurrection (*The Daily Resurrection*), giving the dialogue nuances between the two poles. The poet experiences a feeling of regret regarding birth:

"De ce m-ai trimis în lumină, Mamă,

de ce m-ai trimis ?" (*Scrisoare)*[5].

The regret of birth is the regret of entering the world subjected to time and death.

---

[1] Eugen Lovinescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane* (*History of Contemporary Romanian Literature) (I-VI, 1926-1929)*, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1981.

[2] George Călinescu, *Istoria literaturii române de la origini şi până în prezent* (*History of Romanian Literature from Its Origins until the Present*), Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1987.

[3] George Gană, *Opera literară a lui Lucian Blaga (The Literary Work of Lucian Blaga)*, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1976.

[4] "only my blood cries through the forest / for its long gone childhood." (my translation).

[5] "Why did you send me into the light, Mother, / why did you send me?" (*Letter*) (my translation).

BDD-A143 © 2011 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:54:26 UTC)

If for Blaga the city is alienated from the movement of the cosmic life (a space of death), a cemetery with ashes instead of grass, alienated from nature:

"aici şi ţărîna învenineză
Aici casele au încercat cîndva
Să ucidă pe copiii omului" (*Semne*)[6], the village is for Blaga the place of childhood and ancestors, the place of continuity and of conquering time. Here the border between life and death is blurred: "I think that eternity was born in the village." (*The Soul of the Village*)

The volume *Praise to Sleep* (1929) is a retort given to the obsession of the great passage. It's not about sleep as biological recovery, but the sleep state of the world, a state that represents a climate in which the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, between life and death, between the known and the unknown disappear. For Blaga, "sleep" is a way to participate in the profound life of the universe and to enhance the individual existence.

The state of sleep is a climate in which the ego fades away:

"Dăinuie un suflet de adieri,
fără azi, fără ieri" (*Somn*)[7].

This sleep seems / is a complete dissolution of individuality; it takes man out of the time of the history, out of this mechanical time. This soul of the world from the poem *Sleep* gives rhythm to something that cannot be marked by the mechanical time:

"În somn sîngele meu ca un val
se retrage din mine
înapoi în părinţi"[8]. Blood is a kind of relay of continuity. It draws back to the mythical (primary) time, not in the parents. Ion Pop argues (*Lucian Blaga, The Lyrical Universe*) that in Blaga's poetry it rarely appears such a wide definition of the lyrical motif of "sleep" and such a clear articulation of this motif with the fundamental directions of his vision[9]. The nocturnal space is here the environment of the Being par excellence, of the eternal and inexhaustible source of individual existences.

In *Praise to Sleep* the spiritualization process is higher, and the poet falls into a kind of nostalgia.

The subsequent volumes *At the Watershed* (1933), *At the Court of Yearning*, *Unsuspected Steps* (1943) are representative for the motif of yearn-yearning. With this motif, his poetry returned to the simple joys, the lyrics, non-musical once, are now songlike. The yearn-yearning is a metaphysical nostalgia.

---

[6] "here even the dust poisons / Here, the houses tried once / To kill the children of men" (*Signs*) (my translation).

[7] "A soul of breezes lives on, / without today, without yesterday." (*Sleep*) (my translation).

[8] "In sleep, my blood, like a wave / leaves me / flowing back in the parents." (*Sleep*) (my translation).

[9] Ion Pop, *Lucian Blaga, universul liric (Lucian Blaga, The Lyrical Universe)*, Cartea Românească Publishing House, Bucharest, 1981.

BDD-A143 © 2011 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:54:26 UTC)

In the poem *Disease* (from the volume *At the Watershed*) yearn-yearning is an invocation with signs of the cure. The disease is the metaphysical sadness metaphysics, ontological to the reason that tells you that you are mortal:

"Piezişe cad lacrimi din veac
Invoc cu semne uitare şi leac"[10].

In *Magic Mountain* (poem consisting of two quatrains) we find symbols of a sacred space ("purple lakes", "more sacred beasts"). Here, time seems enlarged: "What high time!" The magic mountain represents the link between verticality and magic. The mountain is for Blaga a source of anxieties.

The poem *Disintegrating Paradise* included in the volume *Praise to Sleep* (1928) builds on a biblical motif. The language used in this poem is somewhat similar to that of the eighteenth century scholarly pastoral, where words that refer to concrete concepts gain a spiritualized meaning.

Here too, in Blaga's poetry, symbols like "the sword" without flames (according to the legend, the entrance to paradise is guarded by an angel armed with the flaming sword of truth), the field, the wells, ploughing with the wooden plough, dust itself – they are all realities denying themselves in their materiality, symbolizing something else, namely, moments and dramas played against the setting of biblical mythology.

Disintegrating Paradise is nothing but the typical sign of the declining age, not representing the being anymore, but its negation, which amounts to the decay of knowledge of any kind. The sword of truth has no flames anymore. The winged gatekeeper" (here, the poet himself) feels defeated without a fight:

"Portarul înaripat mai ține întins
un cotor de spadă fără de flăcări.
Nu se luptă cu nimeni,
dar se simte învins"[11].

In Blaga's view, paradise is like in the old days, when creatures stood for the word, self-representing, being themselves signs. The degradation of the unequivocally established signs represents at the same time a dissolution of the being, its fall in descending steps that can be observed in the downward gradation of the poem's symbols: winged gatekeeper, seraphims, archangels, dove, naked angels, spiders, dust, flesh, the latter failing to regain the organic denotation they had in the previous volumes.

The transition occurs from heat to cold ("angels shiver"), from full to empty ("the wells refuse the buckets"), from struggle to surrender, from purity to decay ("angels too will rot underground").

"The disintegrating paradise" is actually the textualized world; it is easy to see how reading affects the way reality is represented.

[10] "Slanted, tears fall forever / I invoke with signs oblivion and cure." (*Disease*) (my translation).

[11] "The winged gatekeeper still holds up / a sword stub without flames. / He fights no one, / but feels defeated." (my translation).

BDD-A143 © 2011 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:54:26 UTC)

"The disintegration" of the landscape which becomes aware of its textualized existence, this gigantic metamorphosis overthrowing the known meanings of the world, has certainly a explanation in the very expressionist poetics that invented its own "disease", understood as a flare up of the ontological crisis.

The symbol of the well holds a special place in the text, identifiable not only in verses eight to nine, but also in the last sequence. In general, in Blaga, the wells are suspected of holding certain truths that are denied. Later, especially in the posthumous poems, the well will also acquire the attributes of the mirror, as reflection of the sky.

The rhetorical emphasis of the invocation ("woe to me, woe to you") brings the crisis to date, bringing it into the present. At the same time, the two sets of elements of the paradisiacal and the disintegration communicate and neutralize each other.

Ion Pop supports the idea that the definition of the ego hypostases in Lucian Blaga's poetry can not be conceived outside the consideration of large and essential area of the erotic poetry[12].

The feeling of love and the contemplation of the corolla of wonders of the world are the essential sources of Blaga's more serene poetry, the main outlets of his elation:

"Lumina ce-o simt
Năvălindu-mi în piept cînd te văd,
Oare nu e un strop din lumina
Creată în ziua dintîi?" (*Lumina*)[13].

Love is sharing the original substance of the world, a sense of inclusion in the absolute matter of the universe.

Blaga's love poetry is essentially a praise of the beloved woman, seen as the embodiment of the absolute substance of the world. Love is the contamination with cosmic fire (*Fire Song*), it is salvation from the great passage (*The Princesses*), it is "pure" (*Summer Near the River*), is divine in the pagan meaning, so it is portrayed as a nymph (*Pan to the Nymph*), goddess (*The Red Grove*), "brilliant, proud and pagan" (*Night*). The woman is one of the wonders of "the corolla of wonders of the world" (the most beautiful of them all). Blaga always calls her "wonder", "wonderful", "my wild wonder", "devastating wonder".

If in Eminescu or Arghezi appears the idea of the male superiority, in Blaga the relation is reversed: the woman has the higher ontological condition. She is an embodiment of the "light," coming into the poet's life as a miracle (*Meetings*).

"In its highest points, Blaga's love elegy comes close to Eminescu's, not only in matter, but also in value"[14].

---

[12] Ion Pop, *Lucian Blaga, universul liric (Lucian Blaga, The Lyrical Universe)*, Cartea Românească Publishing House, Bucharest, 1981.

[13] "The light I feel / flooding my heart when I see you, / Is it not a spark of the light / Created on the first day?" (*Light*) (my translation).

BDD-A143 © 2011 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:54:26 UTC)

Lucian Blaga's artistic doctrine always had a secondary philosophical side, a philosophical manner. The poet has the ability to plasticize his ideas, to convey his abstractions into concrete forms, which shows a remarkable power to materialize. E. Lovinescu considers him "one of the most original image creators of our literature"[15].

References

Blaga, Lucian, *Opere. Vol I. Poezii antume*, ediție critică şi studiu introductiv de George Gană (*Works. Vol. I., Anthumous Poems*, Critical Edition and Introductory Study by George Gană). Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1982

Blaga, Lucian, *Opere. Vol II. Poezii postume*, Ediție critică de George Gană (*Works. Vol. II., Posthumous Poems*, Critical Edition by George Gană). Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1984

Călinescu, George, *Istoria literaturii române de la origini şi până în prezent* (*History of Romanian Literature from Its Origins until the Present*), Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1987

Gană, George, *Opera literară a lui Lucian Blaga (The Literary Work of Lucian Blaga)*, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1976

Lovinescu, Eugen, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane* (*History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*) *(I-VI, 1926-1929)*, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1981.

Pop, Ion, *Lucian Blaga, universul liric (Lucian Blaga, The Lyrical Universe)*, Cartea Românească Publishing House, Bucharest, 1981

Simion, Eugen (coord.), Dicționarul general al literaturii române (The General Dictionary of Romanian Literature), vol. I, Univers Enciclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004

[14] George Gană, *Opera literară a lui Lucian Blaga (The Literary Work of Lucian Blaga)*, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1976.

[15] Eugen Lovinescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane*, *(History of Contemporary Romanian Literature) (I-VI, 1926-1929)*, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1981.

BDD-A143 © 2011 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:54:26 UTC)