# EROS AND THANATOS IN ILEANA MĂLĂNCIOIU'S POETRY

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*Abstract*

The eros represents a privileged theme of the lyrical universe of Ileana Mălăncioiu. The poet wishes to designate, in her verses, that area of indefiniteness and delicateness in which the feeling of love is born, an area in which self-dedication conjugates with the desire of completion of being, introspection is completed by propensity towards others, withdrawal into oneself calls for the supple, sympathetic agreement with the lowed one. The feeling of love is rather a promise of communion, an utopian brace, a temptation of completeness by Eros, than self-fruition of the moment of love. Love and death are themes which contaminate each other, in a romantic tradition; Eros gains reflexes of Thanatos, while living encloses uncertain spaces, with a fluctuant geography of dream and affective solitude. Life and death, for that matter, appear to be not so irreconcilable realities, on the contrary, the spaces they occupy overlap. In a world of alienation, of dismantled meanings and progressive reification, even the feeling of death seems to be more tolerable, entering almost within the limits of natural.

**Keywords: Eros, Thanatos, poetry, neomodernism, imagination**

Ileana Mălăncioiu managed to configure throughout time, a poetic universe with a striking singularity, both from the point of view of recurrent topics and motives, as well as in respect of the lyrical vision or otherwise said, in respect of the refraction angle of the referential elements present in the poetic space. The poetry books published by Ileana Mălăncioiu, starting with *Pasărea tăiată* (1967), continuing with *Către Ieronim* (1970), *Inima reginei* (1971), *Crini pentru domnişoara mireasă* (1973), *Ardere de tot* (1976), *Peste zona interzisă* (1979), *Sora mea de dincolo* (1980), *Urcarea muntelui* (1986) reflect the obsession of a conscience split between the desire for inner clarity and the disharmonies of an out of the ordinary reality, marked by anomy and lack of distinction. That is why the favourite lyrical attitude of the poet is that of withdrawal within herself, of reclusion into the imaginary of her own existence, of fortification within the limits of her own being. Thus, loneliness leaves its mark on this translucent and agonizing verse, illuminated by the whiteness of Thanatos and tempted, to the same extent, by the adolescent-specific purity and candor. However, solitude is not merely absolute renunciation of the connection to the world, but rather an attempt to clarify an interior relief dominated by affectivity. Laurenţiu Ulici is correct in this respect, when he states that "a demon of solitude, greedy of unlikeness and self-sufficient, endowed with an immense hypnotic power, took the poet's eye from the contingent, being carried into the dark azure of a soliloquy which seemed as definitive as an imprint. The semantic nucleus of devotion in a loneliness was the thanatic promise of the Eros (romantic theme, revised and extended by psychoanalysis), illustrated in three successive books (...) which form a monograph of the erotic mutation from the plane of affective reality into the plane of imagination". The eros represents a privileged theme of the lyrical universe of Ileana Mălăncioiu. The poet wishes to designate, in her verses, that

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area of indefiniteness and delicateness in which the feeling of love is born, an area in which self-dedication conjugates with the desire of completion of being, introspection is completed by propensity towards others, withdrawal into oneself calls for the supple, sympathetic agreement with the lowed one. The feeling of love is rather a promise of communion, an utopian brace, a temptation of completeness by Eros, than self-fruition of the moment of love. Therefore, the poetic expression takes on the aspect of an invocation and the imprint of an idealizing impetus, which condoms the traits of the loved one to an eternal imperfection, to a perpetual provisional state, to an adjournment of real data, in favor of laying out a non-contingent relief of the clamored being: Dar oricât mă tem şi oricât te chem/ Tu te-ai făcut abur şi m-aştepţi să vin/ Să descânt tot eu pe numele tău/ Şi să mai încerc să te scap de chin" sau „Înger luminat, duhul i l-ai luat/ Viaţă după moarte, dă-mi-l îndărăt/ Şi-am să vin tot eu să ţi-l aduc/ Când o fi cu părul alb ca de omăt// Îl cheamă Ion şi-i fecior de om/ Cum n-am cunoscut, cum n-am mai văzut,/ Dacă nu-i mai ai trupul să mi-l dai/ Fă-l de la început suflând peste lut".

It is true that Ileana Mălăncioiu often disguises her feelings, experiences and visions in an allegoric note, granting them an oneiric identity, with a rather obvious symbolic investiture. Thus, Ieronim, Irodesa, the Queen, Natanael are characters with an unquestionably mythical aura which roam the poet's verses, as just as many diffuse alter egos through which it is attempted to go beyond the monadic contour of the solitary being and to express a desire to communicate with the universe. Thus, the verses of Ileana Mălăncioiu produce an effect of palimpsest, to the extent that in the under layer of one's own feelings, the under layer of the figuration of one's imagination, every day mundane structures, objects and figures are predicted. On the other hand, the body's dematerialization, the spiritualization of purely biological elements exhibit the same will for purity and impetus towards the ideal, as repeatedly presented in these verses („Iertaţi-mă, vă rog, că vă spun, dar mi-e frică,/ Trupul dumneavoastră nu mai este decât/ Un contur de lumină aproape difuz/ Şi prin el vi se văd toate oasele frânte"). An essential metaphor for the poetics of Ileana Mălăncioiu is the "dead queen". This is a metaphor for singularity, for an "I" which detaches itself from the contingent, finding its inner universe and implicitly arrogating to itself a transcendent posture and position towards the apparent, disharmonic elements of one's character. In the same time, such a metaphor has incontestable thanatic connotations. The symbolism of death, the breath of nothingness are obvious. In fact, one might say and the critics have also observed it, that the "dead queen" is an inverted image, in a thanatic mirror, of the poet herself. „Ci iar regina ta colindă peste lume/ Şi ochiul meu născut de trupul ei se-arată/ Şi trupul meu e umbra eternului ei trup/ Intrat în umbra cea adevărată// Şi cum şi-ntinde mâna se-ntinde mâna mea/ Spre umărul tău rece şi aplecat şi mare/ Şi cum îşi lasă fruntea se lasă geana mea/ Şi gura mea se lasă spre trista-ţi răsuflare".

Thus, love and death are themes which contaminate each other, in a romantic tradition; Eros gains reflexes of Thanatos, while living encloses uncertain spaces, with a fluctuant geography of dream and affective solitude. Life and death, for that matter,



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appear to be not so irreconcilable realities, on the contrary, the spaces they occupy overlap. In a world of alienation, of dismantled meanings and progressive reification, even the feeling of death seems to be more tolerable, entering almost within the limits of natural. „Să stai o zi în locuinţa morţilor,/ Să mănânci pâinea lor/ Şi să bei din vinul lor curat/ Şi să te-ntorci aici nepăsător.// Să fii sigur cu cine-ai mâncat, /Să fii sigur cu cine-ai vorbit,/ Să-ţi aminteşti ce stare aveai/ În clipa când te-ai trezit// Tot în lumea asta în care / Niciodată nu ştiai cu-adevărat/ Cu cine stai la masă şi cu cine/ faci drumul cu care-ai plecat// Să nu te temi că ai ajuns la capăt/ Să-ţi fie totuna încotro apuci/ Să nu-ţi mai fie frică de moarte/ Mai mult decât de viaţa pe care-o duci". The lines in *Urcarea muntelui* impose due to their agonizing and in the same time protesting bearing, to the vehemence of the prophetic tonality, to the images of rejection of a disintegrating reality, in which individuality was condemned to nothingness and collective guilt pulled down. The feeling of loneliness, of separation is irremediable here: „Ne-am separat, nimeni nu mai este cu nimeni/ Cineva a avut grijă să nu mai fim cu adevărat/ Nici măcar doi la un loc şi a reuşit/ Şi totul e mai greu de-ndurat// Mai stăm alături doar din întâmplare/ Şi-n liniştea atât de aşteptată/ la care am ajuns fără să vrem/ Eu aud încă voci de altădată.// Sună unite-n capul meu şi totuşi/ Ceva nedesluşit mă face să mă mir/ Cum pot suna unite vocile unor oameni/ Închişi pe rând în ei ca într-un cimitir.// Ştiu bine că eu însămi n-aş mai putea acum/ Să mai iau totul de la început/ Şi-nnebunită de durere strig:/ O, vino înapoi, măreţ trecut.// Dar nu-i de-ajuns să strig ca el să vină,/ Parcă ne-am prăbuşit de undeva de sus,/ Ar trebui ceva să-nvie morţii/ Din liniştea care li s-a impus". The inner dynamics of Ileana Mălăncioiu's poems is not at all centrifugal, oriented towards the world, but rather centripetal. Most of the verses are constructed for the purpose of configuring an "I" mythology, with its universe pressed by unknown secrets and guilt, by unsettling phantasms and figures of incapability or death. Sensitive to reality's abuse, the poetic voice many times modulates in arpeggios of dense melancholy or of a sublimated pathos.

*Pasărea tăiată* is maybe the representative poem for the vision, style and means of lyric construction used by Ileana Mălăncioiu. Beyond the implicit presented poetics, what impresses here is the tragic thrill drawn in clear verses, with an edifying conspicuousness of the delimitation of certain liminal feelings. The poetry can be considered an initiation in the secrets of existence. Here, knowledge means oblation and expiation. It is the metaphor for entering a forbidden property, in which great secrets about existence, full of meaning and miracle, await. *Pasărea tăiată* is a parable of initiation into the grave secret of death. The child at the age of candour becomes aware of the insertion of Thanatos within the living, it becomes aware of this fundamental dichotomy of human knowledge: that of life and death. The trauma of this perception of the end is also marked by the use of the verb "a uita" ["to forget"] in two cases, which for that matter, are in a relation of semantic and symbolic contamination with the verb "a se uita" ["to look"]. On the other hand, the dominant condition of the images is the visual one, an extremely striking visuality, which amplifies the dramatic character of the lyrical drawing: "M-au ascuns bătrânii după obicei/



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Să nu uit de frica păsării tăiate/ şi ascult prin uşa încuiată/ Cum se tăvăleşte şi se zbate.// Strâmb zăvorul şubrezit de vreme/ Ca să uit ce-am auzit, să scap/ De această zbatere în care/ Trupul mai aleargă după cap.// Şi tresar când ochii, împietrind de groază/ I se-ntorc pe dos ca să albească/ Şi părând că-s boabe de porumb/ Alte păsări vin să-l ciugulească". Purity and innocence make way, following this revelation of death, evil, nothingness, to a guilty cognition, a cleave in harmony and world balance. The child, fascinated by the spectacle of life passing into death, lives and relives the bird's fright, it is traumatized by this seemingly endless struggle „în care /Trupul mai aleargă după cap" ["in which/The body still runs after the head". Being on the other side of the forbidden space, the child lived in a universe of beatitude and purity, in a mythical geography, in which space and time did not exhibit the imprint of historicity and the dimension of existence were placed under the sign of continuity and integrity. Once inside the space of knowledge over good and bad, life and death, conscience is placed under the sign of scission, it has the dramatic revelation of a temporality which brings along the degradation and transformation of existence into nothing.

In this moment of cognition, existence seems entirely amputated, disintegrated, disharmonic. The child's gesture is not incidentally that of rebuilding the connection between the elements, of making up for the voids in existence, of restoring the functionality of life to a being which has passed into nonbeing. The guilt caused by knowing the contradictions and convulsions of existence claims expiation; the disintegration of the living calls after itself a reintegration at a symbolic level, also recalling an illusory rebirth: „Iau c-o mână capul, cu cealaltă restul/ Şi le schimb când mi se pare greu,/ Până nu sunt moarte, să mai stea legate/ Cel puţin aşa, prin trupul meu.// Însă capul moare mai devreme/ Ca şi cum n-a fost tulburat or tăiată bine/ Şi să nu se zbată trupul singur/ Stau să treacă moartea-n el prin mine". There is no doubt that the verses of the poem *Pasărea tăiată* bring to life a sensitivity with an acute propensity towards the aporia of reality. The resonance of cutting the bird in the conscience of the lyrical self, is stirring and tragic, causing guilt and disquiet. Knowledge, as a description of a human being perceptive towards the world, exhibits the dimensions of oblation and guilt, to the extent that by its means, the experienced human being emerges from the protective perimeter of one's self, from its favorable reclusion and becomes aware of the drama, non-fulfillment, fissures, abnormalities and the imperfections of human nature. In Ileana Mălăncioiu's vision, knowledge implies overcoming the limits accepted by the illusory, utopian perception of human nature, the surmounting of barriers, boundaries and implicitly finding an access path towards the "forbidden area". *Pasărea tăiată* is an emblematic poetry for the lyricism of Ileana Mălăncioiu, a lyricism which is marked by the volutes of allegory and by the clear drawing of a verse with a precise cut, in a style which combines the precision of expression with the enciphering of meanings.

One of the most frequent themes of Ileana Mălăncioiu's poetry is death, fear transcribed into an austere-expressionist tone, in a febrile and violent writing, in a wry, extremely tense phrasing. In this sense, Eugen Simion notes that "the parables of Ileana



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Mălăncioiu always place the human being into a situation with no exit. Only poetry can still gather the body's fragments and make sense of an existence from which nothingness takes a strong bite. There is also an element of sarcasm in the poetry, there is a subtle sensitivity towards the grotesque, the obscure and the morbidity of life. Ileana Mălăncioiu's insight easily discovers the *void* in things, the inconsistency of light, the evanescent forms of matter. There is a direction of the imaginary and it always indicates a *collapse* of rough matter, a *descent* of the spirit to the lower limit of the bearable. Ileana Mălăncioiu puts a certain fervor in suggesting this endless fall of structures, exhaustion of the human being which wants to understand the secret causalities of an irreversible process."

A poetry with an intense fervor of visuality, in the pithiness of images and the drawing with an atrocious precision of details, the *Bouljupuit* approaches the thanatic theme from the perspective of the relationship between the vital flux and the body's materiality, between ideality and reality. The inferno of the body deprived of the signs of life is represented in a drawing exhibiting a thrilling concreteness of lines and colors, in a lyric staging with maximum imagistic conspicuousness: „Boul jupuit atârnă cu picioarele în sus,/ Pielea nu mai înveleşte carnea lui cea muritoare/ O lumină dinăuntru şi-o lumină dinafară/ Lasă coastele să facă cercuri albe de răcoare.// Locul inimii aşteaptă însemnat cu cheag de sânge/ Capul cel cu stea în frunte se mai vede numai unde/ Ochii umezi daţi pe spate vine cineva să-i scoată/ Şi desparte carnea rece de luminile rotunde.// Eu rămân tăcută-n preajma trupului ce se lungeşte/ Şi se leagănă în aer parcă-anume ca să ştiu/ Că din el se vede doar o umbră şi-o lumină/ Dată de acea putere de-a fi fost odată viu". The last verse of the poem transmits the mortifying sensation of the immanence of flesh, of the all-dominant nothingness, of inert matter which is self-sufficient: „Dar lumina este rece şi încep să mă cutremur/ Că în jur nu văd nimica şi încep să-i dau ocol/ Până când se rup în noapte funiile de pe oase/ Şi dispare fără urmă trupul atârnat în gol". The poem *Boul jupuit*, which is representative for the lyricism of Ileana Mălăncioiu, outlines a feeling of death carved from images of suggestive materiality. The ephemeral character of appearances, of the flesh dispossessed by the transcendence of the vital spirit is the last suggestion of these verses engraved with an extreme sensorial acuity into the contorted and contracted relief of the poem. The poem has a rather dramatic structure and the lyric tension comes from the congestion of details from the visceral sphere, from the field of immanent existence of the body. A feeling of reification penetrates the poem's space, the mechanics of living is gradually replaced by an inertness of the fleshes, which no longer transmits an illusion of life. The vital dynamism is absent, only the revelations of the visceral trace that so fragile limit between life and death, between spirit and matter. Ileana Mălăncioiu's lyricism is not one dealing with the adhesion to the values of exteriority, but rather with entrenching oneself within one's space, in an imaginary territory with a peculiar and refined architecture.



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