NOUL EXPRESIONISM TRANSILVAN: ION MUREŞAN
The New Transylvanian Expressionism: Ion Mureşan

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Abstract

The lyricism of Ion Mureşan is one of substance, a lyricism in which interrogation and sarcasm collect their significant energies into a convincing poetic picture. How can enlightment and skepticism coexist in the body of the same poem? how can desperation, anxiety of a most acute intensity and visionarism stand side by side? we might wonder when reading the verses by Ion Mureşan. The poet perceives the contours of things with a dramatic acuity, penetrates them with a tireless passion for demythologization, claiming himself from a merely hinted nostalgia of paradise that fuels his visions with the vague energies of a prophetic of fall. The collapse, decline, agony, twilight – typical states for a damned universe, lacking the coherence of senses, unexpected and disaggregate, having lost any trace of sacrality.

Keywords: poetry, expresionism, visionarism, crisis, anxiety

The poetry volumes of Ion Mureşan (*The Winter Book, The Poem That Can Not Be Understood- the Alcohol Book*) put before us an abrupt verse, maximally tense, out of which emerge a tragic vision and a vocation of essentiality together with an expressionist exhaltation of vitality. The essential state of being confessed by Ion Mureşan in his poems is the state of crises: coming to one's senses, the pathetic contemplation of the world, are replaced with a state of urgency that, refusing its own ecstatic enlightenment, settles for a prophetic, apocalyptic fervour. The poet perceives the contours of things with a dramatic acuity, penetrates them with a tireless passion for demythologization, claiming himself from a merely hinted nostalgia of paradise that fuels his visions with the vague energies of a prophetic of fall. The collapse, decline, agony, twighlight – typical states for a damned universe, lacking the coherence of senses, unexpected and disaggregate, having lost any trace of sacrality: „Seven bleeding heads get out of waves /above the sea, in turn, spitting sand and blood /off of their mouths. / Tam-taram, are the seven rusty stoves cast away / at the edge of the cornfield, / the board in which the whole night you stroke your fists and / you mumbled, Tam-taram. / It's the seven breasts darkness." (*Poem de vară -Summer Poem-*). The poetics of existential disgrace assumed by Ion Mureşan has the aroma of perceptive magic: the poetic enlightenment is produced through spasm and fracture amidst an extraordinary existential and scriptural tension, and the most relevant image for the emergence of the poetic vision is the cutaway, the laceration, and the defleshing. The poet also cultivates frantic vision, but incongruous imagination, the surrealism of perception turns into a tragic performance, like in the poem *Orfeu -Orpheus-*: „I turned my head and that I should have done/ from the beginning. / I alone have carved the creamy air /and have seen so far: / shield after shield. / And above each of them dozens of heads

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bound / between hands /with black gloves. / Oh, dozens of her small heads / round ends as copper pennies."

The tragic perception, apocalyptical vision, and terrifying projection on the world are charged with literality through a significant expression, freed from utopic decay, imagining a definite semantical paroxysm. The poet feels with a painful acuity the pressure of any convention, the resistance of patterns to the explosion of the vital flow and the falsehood of any pre-established norms. From this horror felt against falsehood, idyllisation or idealization stems the dynamism of Ion Mureşan's verbs, the directness of acute notations, and the nude, detached perception through which the poet registers the convulsions of reality. Distorted like reality itself the poetic text quite lucidly arrogates to itself the role of lyrical transcript of a fragmented world, mined by the spectrum of distortion and dissolution. Ion Mureşan is ruthless when it comes to the precarities of reality and one might say he is handling this ruthlessness through the medium of an ethical dimension monitored by moral imperatives (hidden at the very depths of the text). The ethical requirements that the poet arrogates to himself are relevant especially in those poems that are about poetry, about the condition of the poet situated between extasy and agony, between enlightment and disenchantment, between Life and Text. Between the "drapes of existence" the poet is a magician of images and a prophet of apocalypse, hypnotized by the Idea, but at the same time stolen by the spasmsofreality, like in the poem *Poetul. Mărturia unui copil -Poet. A child's testimony*-: „It was getting dark when I leaned stairs under his window. / He sat in the middle of the room speaking quietly. / Two sticks, two floating rotten sticks were burning / above his head. / Piles of stones on the floor. / And dill in a silver box (...) But his words became swollen like balloons. / His grumbling, backbiting words in all /colours / surrounded and shut the monkey down. / When I left, only his head could be seen among the words / head of an old man, shouting something completely / confused, / in the middle of a herd of buffalo".

The virtuosity of language and the remarkable verbal dexterity folds in these poems against a deep and troubling vision. The lyricism of Ion Mureşan is one of substance, a lyricism in which interrogation and sarcasm collect their significant energies into a convincing poetic picture. How can enlightment and scepticism coexist in the body of the same poem? how can desperation, anxiety of a most acute intensity and visionarism stand side by side? we might wonder when reading the verses by Ion Mureşan.

They are unbelievably expressive verses, a tense expressiveness, maximally tense, made up of frustrations and unforgiveness, visionarism and deception. Agony, painful voluptuousness, cruelty, refusal of emotion, tremor – are some of the terms with a conceptual allure through which literary criticism has sought to define the identity of Ion Mureşan's lyricism. It is beyond any doubt that in the poems of Ion Mureşan lay hidden an always awake consciousness that lucidly watches the ridiculous spectacle of existence, a sceptical, at times aboulic, other times sarcastic consciousness that always manifests doubt, repulsion or a polemical impulse towards the precarious composition of a reality the meanings of which have been demonetized.

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One may also note that Ion Mureşan abandons any attempt to understand poetry as a "happy language", as an enchanting extasy or a compensatory space. On the contrary, poetry is in the poet's view, a receptacle of one's own anxiety, a prompt alchemy of the ontic evil, a fractured enlightment of disharmonies and spasms in things. The poet anticipates with a certain fervour the existence of a hiatus between living and expression; condemned to a fragmentary diction, to a deficient exhibition of a sense always hidden under the appearances of phenomenality, the author of the *Carte de iarnă - The Alcohol Book* -has recourse to an allegorical language, to the symbolical allure of the word, to the allusive-coded dimensions of the poetic verb. Eugen Simion emphasizes this lyrical stance: "Ion Mureşan has undoubtedly learnt from the expressionist poets this allusive, parabolic language, open to the great undetermined symbols (...). One can easily observe the tension, the discrepancy that exists between the violence of the language at the surface of the poem and the undetermined nature of the symbol from its depth. It is a sarcastic poem, a sharp refusal of external things and of evident causalities, a harsh contestation of memory, and finally a hint of fear of the proliferating word. Some images are taken from literature. The poet is blind like Demodocus at the court of King Alcinous or like Tamiris the Thracian punished by the jealous Muses… In order to see with his mind's eye he must lose his external sight, and in order to be able to communicate the essential, the incommunicable, the poet must not use the language of transparency". In the poem *Înălţarea la cer -Rising to Heaven-* we find the same features of the lyricism of Ion Mureşan that made him famous: oracular vision with a vaguely hieratic symbolism, allusive language that is nonetheless mined with a fundamental "impurity" with concepts from the most remote lexical spheres, the projection of the everyday frame of reference into the horizon of metaphysics, etc.

The first part of the poem summarizes the image of the lyrical self situated within its own immanence, its secret rhythms beating in harmony with the rhythms of the senselessness of existence. Turning to biography, to the everyday gestures, has a programmatic meaning here as the poet focuses on events and things from the present, but also on echoes of past times, within an anamnetic exercise that tries to remake the ideal form of the being always subjected to the demonism of seconds. One can distinguish two main features of the writing here: first, a more intense focus on the details of reality, through which the apparently irrelevant elementary things of a minuscule significance is hoisted to the scale of the monstruous, having an ample vision and, on the other hand, an almost surreal coupling of the elements of reality, assuming a poetics of hazard, an almost accidental syntax of the imaginary, through which the words deny their dual nature: referential (mimetic) and symbolical-transfiguring.

Paying attention to the details of reality the poet wants to capture the subtle mystery hidden behind gestures and apparently incoherent, apparently trivial and insignificant surfaces. Symbolizing everyday life, remaking the metaphysical dimensions hidden within the layers of the profane, are actions that take place at the same time as the contrary reaction, that is, the demythologization of consecrated poetic themes and

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"objects". The second sequence of the poem establishes the fundamental date for an ars poetica, based on the direct, placental, unmediated connection between the poet and the elemental nature of the world. The identity of the lyrical self is therefore dependent on the degree to which reality is assimilated into the structure of the poem. A scenography of the hilarious and grotesque, of macabre miracles and a most acutely concrete infra-reality is revealed in these verses that do not lack a visionary appetite, not metaphysical vision.

The following poetic sequence is marked by the dynamising presence of poetic images representing the ascension, by suggestions on how to escape from the quasi-imprisoning terrestrial space and to ascend into the astronomical sign of an almost transcendental imaging. Through writing, through confinement inside the fragile architecture of the script, the matter-of-factness of existence is rendered new determinations and shapes, a certain metaphysical prestige, a symbolic and visionary expansion. The end of the poem confirms such a denouement for the poetic vision, in which liberation from the constraints and limitations of actuality is done starting from the apparently insignificant detail raised to the power of fiction within a subliminal soteriologic scenario. A poem in which anxiety, the terror of everyday life and the sub-textual belief of the triumph through poetry are put together, Înălţarea la cer -Rising to Heaven- also has the allure of an ars poetica, a programmatic lyrical document, written in a rudimentary and sublimate manner and at the same time in a language in which the anecdotic nature of present everyday life is filtered through the retorts of Orphism, of a sarcastic visionarism.

Hermetic brevity, oneiric neo-expressionism, the substantial drawing of the internal universe with ample emotional brushes: all these features of Ion Mureşan's onto-poetics can also be found in the most recent volume entitled *cartea Alcool -the Alcohol Book- (2010).* After *Cartea de iarnă -Winter Book- (1981)* and *Poemul care nu poate fi înţeles (1993), cartea Alcool - The Poem That Can Not Be Understood- the Alcohol Book* -is only the third volume published by one of the most important contemporary Romanian poets. Ion Mureşan's book has been received differently by its first critics. Figurative, tense, having an authentic expressive force, having compact meanings and hiding the great symbols under the appearance of everyday humbleness, The *Poemul alcoolicilor -the Poem of the Alcoholics*, a poem of undeclared sacrifices and the redundancy of living, of aboulic revelations and self-occultism: „Alas, the poor, alas, poor alcoholics / how no one tells them a good word! / Especially, mostly in the morning when they go wobbling /along the walls / and sometimes fall on their knees and look like letters / written by a clumsy schoolboy. / / Only God, in His great mercy, / pops a pub near them / because it's easy for Him as is for a child / who pushes a match box. / ... / And until noon the town turns purple, / until noon it's three times autumn / three times spring / three times the birds come and go to mild countries. / and they talk and talk about life, about life, / Generally, even young alcoholics express themselves/ with a warm responsibility. / And although at times they may stutter or stumble, / It's not because they expose terribly deep ideas, / but, because inspired by their youth / they succeed in saying really moving things …".

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Another memorable text from *cartea Alcool- the Alcohol Book-* is *Întoarcerea fiului risipitor -The Return of the Prodigal Son*, a remarkable litany of being written in a liturgical manner and wedged between quasi-apocalyptical notes, in which the dominant feeling of ephemerity is amplified through repetitions and accumulations.

The universe created by Ion Mureşan is one of existential damnation, where humanity is fragile and precarious, a universe represented in sombre colours with things that are intermittently given a clear shape. The poems of Ion Mureşan excel, as it has been noted before, especially through the overwhelming force of vision, through the tension of certain images that have real ontic and poetic poignancy. Ion Mureşan was reproached with discursivity; forinstance, Paul Cernat talked about dispersion and dilution; however, I do not think this applies in connection with a poet who is so parsimonious in his lyrical manifestations, so careful with articulating his ideas and speech. The imagery of alcoholics, degraded humanity, the pub as aplace where meditations about the divine are articulated, the alcohol as "a vehicle of God" (Horia Gârbea) – all these things are beyond a doubt the primary data in the poems from Ion Mureşan's volume *cartea Alcool- the Alcohol Book-*. Beyond these primary data we may identify secondary data such as the submergence into the abyssality of instinctiveness, transgressing the limits of humanity, digging into infra-reality, the resurrection of the antinomies of being, but also the deceptive perception, spasm and convulsions as manifestations of an ulcerated ego marked by the effigies of damnation.

Lucidly assuming the flares and brushes of transitiveness, Ion Mureşan outlines in his poems a carnavalesque-dostojevskijan atmosphere where the human figures are reconstituted through a great diversity of discursive styles and the pub becomes the scene where reality and dreams lend one another faces, masks, means of expression, the is but a prechamber for the miraculous and the sacred. Physiology is given a metaphysical shape, the being under the influence of alcoholism gains supranatural characteristics, the pub itself is a space that allows escaping humble reality for another dimension, that of the sublime and the weightlessness of the being extracted from the tyrannical determinism of space and time. Assuming his narrative methods even more acutely than in the previous volumes *cartea Alcool -the Alcohol Book-* poignantly records obsolete emotional states (aboulia, remorse, absence, memory, oblivion, etc.) transposed into an interiorized, wry writing that intermittently celebrates its own ontic and gnoseologic limitations. Visionarism in the poetry of Ion Mureşan is invested with a negative sign, it is a reverse sign. The poet does not perceive the world under the influence of beatitude and transfiguration but, on the contrary, through the filter of weary fervour, lacking any spiritual enthusiasm.

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