EMIL BOTTA. THEATRICALITY AND LYRICAL FAIRY SCENE

The abulic gaze cast upon a world adrift, skepticism and disillusionment caused by a world bearing in its steam flesh the signs of extinction, all this is associated, in the case of Emil Botta with some "Alexandrianism", remarked by Eugene Ionesco, an Alexandrianism materialized in the worship of the beautiful expression, in the refinement of lyrical diction and in the imagistic pomp. Eugen Ionescu was the one who also referred to the inborn theatricality of Emil Botta's poems, poems in which the self is in a perpetual dialogue with itself, assuming a role, a lyrical mask, of a still inexpressible authenticity. Botta's Hamlet-like stance, which was so much argued about, is not necessarily a pose. In this stance there is naturalness and truth of being and of utterance, a dose of doubt and skepticism; it is also bookish, but at the same time, it is also studied expressiveness, all these in a mixture in which the components are quite difficult to dissociate. An incurable sadness with metaphysical echoes, floats above these lines, despite their theatrical character, or their farcical appearance, fact also noticed by critic Ion Pop, who emphasizes the modernity of such poetry: "Acutely modern consciousness, Emil Botta writes "conventional" poetry against the conventional, implying, ever since his 1937 debut with *Întunecatul April*, the need for maximum freedom of movement of the act of creation. Transformed into spectacle, the world is for him an immense storehouse of available props - props, poses, costumes, gestures; a way of uttering a certain distrust in the real, an expression of a particular skepticism. Most of his old poems hide in their depths, as an invisible spine, the verse of Eminescu's *Glossa*: 'Alte măşti – aceeaşi piesă'. Lucidly consuming his drama that is placed under the sign of the sadness of not being able to take part wholeheartedly in the dynamics of existence, the poet bestows upon it a marked dramatic note, overstressing scenic effects, willingly dilating gestures, giving discursive tone a pathos that is only partially canceled by its excess: caricature of a life carried on tragic coordinates - but from such an expression results just the double game practiced by the poet between *real* and *expressed* tragedy – distance of doubt, trajectory of fundamental melancholy."

The poet imagines himself, as Eugen Simion writes, as an El Desdichado living in a universe marked by hieratic signs of extinction and

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shadow: “Singur umblam prin desime,/ prin a Rusalelor codru vestit./ Negru de tristeţe, tristeţii sortit,/ singur umblam prin desime./ Când auzit-am auzit/ glas ca de zimbri, metalic, ascuţit:/ Briareu!/ Aici în desime nu-i nime,/ doar păgânească treime,/ tăcutele doar elocinţi vegetale şi ziulica şi eu./ Ah, e codrul, titanul cu braţe o mie,/ strămoşul codru e Briareu./ Şi mi-a dat domnul neliniştea setei nebune,/ rubedenia vulcanelor crăpate de sete,/ simpatia stâncii, a focarelor bete,/ purtam pe buze munţi de cărbune!/ Ai băut a vieţii şi a morţii frumuseţe toată,/ codrule mare, Briareu!/ Dar gura mea e gură de cântec, fântână secată,/ gură de iad căreia îi e sete mereu”.

The lyrical landscapes that Emil Botta transcribes in many poems are marked, subsidiarily, by the shadow of ever-present time that threatens the being but at the same time, opens a horizon towards eternity. The nostalgic look of the lyrical self puts the items of nature in an idealized framework, grants them a utopian halo of melancholy magic and of mirage of recollected memory. Forest becomes, as in Eminescu’s verse, a tutelary quasi-mythical figure with symbolical inflections, a figure participating in the ritual of existence: “Mă duce dorul către umbre iară,/ străbune codru, vechiul meu Alcide,/ cu gure dulci m-au sărutat silfide,/ m-a prins, în plasa ei, plăcuta seară./ Nu-s astre-n cer câte visez iubi,/ nu-i noapte-atâta câtă ard să port,/ departe-s, vai, de-al veşniciei cort;/ în umbra lui regească vrere-aş fi!/ Veste s-a dus că nu mai suntem tineri,/ s-a istovit al tinereţii pas.../ Din focul clipei stinse ce-a rămas?/ Lacrime doar, ce-s partea crudei Vineri./ Război am vrut, mă rog acum de pace,/ străbune codru, vechiul meu Alcide,/ în poartă bat şi te implor: deschide./ Sunt, tot, o noapte. Frig mi se mai face”. The "cold", the "shadow", the "heat of the moment", the "Chimera" are figures metaphorical emblematic for the lyricism of Emil Botta, a lyricism steeped in secret thrill of dream and in bookish echoes, but also of an undisputed spectacular-fantastic aspect. The theme is love lies, with this poet, under the sign of a heavy, diffuse melancholy, under the pressure of an “unquenched longing” but also under the sign of the imperfection of feeling, of the indeterminacy that dominates gestures and unspoken words: “Tu erai apa care doarme,/ eram ţărmure înmărmurit,/ şi ce braţe de piatră avea/ stânca sciţilor, acel ţărmure scit!/ Şi mă făcui vultur pleşuv,/ pasăre de foc ce vultureşte căta,/ braţ de văpăi vultureşte îmbrăţişa/ apa, apa care dormea./ În rătăcire m-am rătăcit,/ în ceruri gigante printre nori./ Şi în rătăcire eram fericit,/ dând uitării acel ţărmure scit”.

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Imponderable and visionary, the poems of Emil Botta are placed under the sign of an attraction to the unfathomable depths of being, to the faceless and bodiless chimeras, to which the poetic self feels inexorably drawn: („Vine un chip fără chip,/ vine o voce fără voce,/ un sunet fără sunet,/ vine o faţă fără faţă,/ vine canalia cea luminoasă,/ cu aripi mii./ Şi ce ţesătură,/ ce scriere cuneiformă,/ ce misterioasă,/ ce ţepi de arici/ în fluturare hidoasă!/ nu mă lupt cu tine/ ca Iacob cu îngerul,/ nu mă cosi, nu mă secera,/ nu mă cheamă Iacob,/ sunt altcineva./ Făpturile visului meu/ sunt preacurate,/ mâinile mele sunt ostenite,/ la piept aşezate./ A sunat stingerea/ şi se lasă linişte, linişte./ Şi numai cristali/ şi doar minerale/ în spelunca din vale)". Placed under the sign of twilight visionary attitude and oneiric fantasy, Emil Botta's poetry has the Orphic stature of a work of genuine ontic thrill, where the being of the poet faces his own delusions and the world's abysses.

Emil Botta's poetry has a very special character, an undeniable individuality in the context of interwar lyricism. *Întunecatul April*, his first volume of 1937, was received by literary critics of the time just in the sense of the "signs of new lyricism" that it brought with it. Vladimir Streinu notes in an article greeting the work and even entitled *Semne noi de lirism* (signs of new lyricism), the specific brands of this volume, and also establishes certain lineages: "his volume of poems *Întunecatul April* renews our lyricism with a serious tone that rises in the vicinity of black humor with an emotional intensity often paired with the lucidity of self-derision; he freshens our literary taste by means of a sincerity that becomes again, after so many sterile attempts, the target of our poetry – and we are sincerely glad to see that happen – a poetry that boasts a simple though strong and original display of personae. Thus, even from the beginning of the poetic career of Mr. E. Botta, we could talk about an interesting lyrical identity (...). As we do not intend now to establish clear lineages, what appears as indisputable regarding Emil Botta is that his poetry represents to us a final filtering of the toxins of Edgar Poe, previously passed through the string of French poets after Apollinaire." The posture of damned poet, who refuses any kind of classification, and knowingly manufactures himself a mask, a role is the one that gave Emil Botta singularity and originality. Assuming his poetic and existential condition under the spectrum of tragic theatricality, the poet has the awareness of the obvious discrepancy between "face" and "mask", between spirit and flesh, of the ineluctable

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fracture between his deep self, with all its unsuspected depths and tribulations of his surface self, with its mechanical gestures with convulsive feelings, apparently lacking a well-defined logic. However, the "posture", the "roles" assumed by the poet are not merely fireworks or simulacra devoid of any consistency, but rather external signs of extreme experiences, of a wholly unambiguous authenticity of ontic substance, even if it is encoded in an allegorical code or in fantastic embodiments of vision. Simulation, the will for hoax, are features highlighted by Cornel Robu too: "All of them - clearly undermined by a willful air of theatricality, of duplicity, of impenitent simulation and mystification. 'Lyrical performance', thus directed, yet retains an impress of irrepressible sincerity and naturalness, having the gift to crystallize the paradoxical effect of neutralizing, through self-sarcasm and, simultaneously, of frantically exasperating the pathos of the state of crisis, produced with feverish fervor with a voluptuousness of self-flagellation pushed to the limits of paroxysm: romantic excitement and romantic irony save each other - diversion and counter-diversion - maintaining speech and gesture, unflinchingly, in grave and elevated register, always avoiding the risk of facile amusement as well as that of emphatic declamations; not always, perhaps, that of mannerist over-emphasis.

The poem *Un dor fără saţiu* was first published in the volume *Pe-o gură de rai*, in 1943 and stands out due to a subtle interlacing of reality and fantasy, of mannerist origin, of aesthetic convention and pure experience. Affects are no longer hidden, here, beneath some masks, they are not cast in roles, but rather allow themselves to be transcribed in the register of a subjectivity through which the author seeks to decipher, by lyrical means, his own tribulations, experiences and inner resources. The lyrical self feels, in its depths, a state of ontic vagueness, of disturbing unrest in front of the impenetrability of existence, a perpetually unfulfilled aspiration towards an absolute that is barely glimpsed, never touched. The Chimera, the ghost of a never quenched thirst, belongs to a being that assumes the limits of its own human condition, marked by fragility and perishableness, but lives and longs for a saving transcendence. We deal, after all, with the ambivalence and ambiguity specific to any human consciousness, and fixed tyrannically in the models and patterns of a biological body, but at the same time, tempted by the revelations and illusions that transcend it, that circumscribe its condition. The self confesses, in verse of disturbing simplicity, austerity

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and transparency at the same time, its double belonging; firstly, to earthly time and its constraints and its avatars and, on the other hand, to an indefinite time, of cosmic origin, time of transmundane mysteries and liberating illusion. In this way, between the inner world of consciousness that feels acutely its own inner fractures, and the outer space, colored by a diaphanous chimerical tint, an undisputed correspondence is built. The consubstantiality between the two terms of poetic equation, the self and the universe (a universe of mystery and illusion, of incompletion and infinity) gives the characteristic expression of this verse: "De un dor fără saţiu-s învins/ şi nu ştiu ce sete mă arde./ Parcă mereu, din adânc,/ un ochi răpitor de Himeră/ ar vrea să mă prade./ Şi pururi n-am pace,/ nici al stelei vrăjit du-te vino în spaţii,/ nici timpii de aur, nici anii-lumină,/ izvoare sub lună, ori dornică ciută,/ nimic nu mă stinge, nimic nu m-alină/ şi parc-aş visa o planetă pierdută".

The hallucinating look of the poet has a tragic weight. Damnation results here from the inability to assume an Apollonian condition when faced with a convulsive existence and of an ineluctable diversity. The temptation of irreality, of that thrill of shadow and mystery that lies beyond the clear, visible aspect of things, gives verse an oneiric expressiveness. Facing archetypal truths, mysteries of Genesis, ultimate truths, the poet's voice has inflections of awe and unstylized gravity; it is sublimated to a whisper reminiscent of ritual incantations. The end of the poem is revealing in this sense, of the transcription of fundamental anxieties of the being that can not find its purpose and place, being torn between the extremes of its emotions and utterances: ("E atâta nepace în sufletul meu,/ bătut de alean şi de umbre cuprins…/ Un dor fără saţiu m-a-nvins,/ şi nu ştiu ce sete mă arde mereu"). There are many grammatical and stylistic illustrations of negation, which illustrates precisely the poet's refusal to stick to a given condition, the condition of discomfort caused by determination, the tyrannical power of individuation. The Chimera, the illusion pursued by the poet, may as well be poetry, imponderable embodiment of thought, harmonic and inconstant relief of the world, carved in verse. *Un dor fără saţiu* is the ars poetica of an author of incontestable authenticity of feeling and utterance. Ion Pop, in a study entitled suggestively *Elegia "realului imaginar"*, notes that "although 'rhetorical' and sometimes 'anecdotal', he is so in a very particular way: his poetry acts as a discursive *style,* as *show* of the stylistic reconstruction of its own composition. It is always obvious that poet stages

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his fantasies, but without developing an "action" proper; *utterance* lies in the forefront. As before, this visionary lyricism remains disciplined by an impeccable rhythm, developed with a peculiar sense of the musicality of the word, with obvious care for the purity of diction. In the great theater of the world, the poet composes true tirades, learned constructions, of a studied preciousness, cultivating a mimicry of high stylistic effect – synthesis in which the archaic- scholarly tone meets the deliberately neologistic language meant to mark the critical, ironical distance of the writer to his own text. "

The volume *Întunecatul April*, to which the poem *Fantasmagoria* belonged, was published in 1937 and was considered the most representative work for the poetics of Emil Botta, for his worldview, but also for his specific poetic means. Pompiliu Constantinescu, in his commentary dedicated to the volume, notes that "there is in the poetry of Mr. Botta an excess of image, perhaps a facility and dexterity (surreal reminiscence?) which we must not blame him for; this manner of flying among cosmic elements, of clownish play among stars, hides a real struggle, of a tragic clown crying softly. Because the originality of Mr. Botta lies in joking with his dramas, in directing them in solemn scenery, and then crumbling them through humor; the poet stands behind the curtain, watches the show of his grandiose desires and when he feels they are going awry, he calms them down, forcing them drastically from the heights to the ground. Lyricism and self-irony mingle in a precious image dosage, often characterized by inner constraint." The poem *Fantasmagoria* falls within the same regime of the oneiric and of the fantastic hallucination. The poet imagines a scene of the regression of elements toward their original condition, toward their embryonic stage. A vision is pictured here of the regression towards the increate. In fact, the primary means of lyrical expression is invocation, an invocation that has magical ritual reflexes with a barely suggested, allusive philosophical tint. Things are not imagined in their mature, completed stage, but in that of incompleteness, of their deployment in time: “Stele ascunse în telescop,/ întoarceţi-vă-n cer./ Douăzeci de ani astronomul miop/ ca să vă caute ca pe mioare un oier.// Priviri, la matcă vă-nturnaţi/ ca ploaia, ca izvoarele./ Orbul care v-a pierdut cere să-i redaţi/ luna şi soarele”. The last stanza of the poem refers to humanity too. People, with their dynamism and reflectiveness, are represented in the state of virtual stones, back to their

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state of original inertia: („Melci, reintraţi în cocioabe,/ cenuşă revino în focuri şi-n vetre,/ copaci, întoarceţi-vă în muguri, în boabe,/ şi voi, oameni, în pietre"). In fact, Emil Botta transcribes in his poetry an apocalypse turned upside down, representing a universe that disappears in the point of origin, in the vortex of the initial increate.

The poetry of Emil Botta has, as noted, a pronounced singularity in the Romanian lyricism of the twentieth century. His poems are situated mostly at the threshold between disenchanted meditation and oneiric ceremony, the author of scrutinizing the realms beyond the empirical existence, the horizon of mystery of transcendence, as well as the suaveness of the moment that passes instantaneously into nothingness. On the other hand, we must note that in the verse of Emil Botta land there is an organic duality, a multiplication of roles. The lyrical self is at the same time, director, actor and witness of its own experiences and anxieties, studying his gestures, illusions and chimeras with lucidity and abulia. Emil Botta's poetry is also characterized, on the other hand, by an oracular pathos and imagistic frenzy pf romantic source, by a theatrical irony that spiritualizes things and creatures, giving them a chimerical shape and an opening to the fantastic of the humble aspects of existence.

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