ION MUREŞAN. THE TENSION OF LIMITS

The poetry volumes of Ion Mureşan (*Cartea de iarnă*, *Poemul care nu poate fi înţeles*, *cartea Alcool*) 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 extatic enlightenment, settles for a prophetic, apocalyptic fervor. 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 dissagregate, having lost any trace of sacrality: "Şapte capete însângerate ies din valuri/ deasupra mării, pe rând, scuipă nisipul şi sângele/ din gură./ Tam-taram, sunt cele şapte sobe ruginite aruncate/ la marginea lanului de porumb,/ tăblărie în care toată noaptea ai bătut cu pumnii şi/ ai mormăit, tam taram./ Sunt cei şapte sâni ai beznei" (*Poem de vară*). 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*: "Eu am întors capul şi asta ar fi trebuit să fac/ de la bun început./ Prin aerul ca smântâna eu singur am scobit şi/ am văzut:/ până departe paravan după paravan./ iar deasupra fiecăruia zeci de capete ale ei ţinute/ între mâini/ cu mănuşi negre./ Oh, zecile ei de capete mici şi/ rotunde, capete cât bănuţii de aramă".

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,

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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*: "Se însera când am rezemat scările sub fereastra lui./ Stătea în mijlocul camerei şi vorbea liniştit./ Două vreascuri, două putregaiuri pluteau arzând/ deasupra capului său./ Grămezi de pietre pe podele./ Şi mărar într-o cutiuţă de argint (…) Dar cuvintele lui s-au umflat ca nişte baloane./ Cuvintele lui cârtitoare şi clevetitoare şi în toate/ culorile/ au înconjurat maimuţa şi i-au închis gura./ Când am plecat numai capul i se vedea dintre cuvinte,/ cap de om bătrân, strigând ceva, cu totul/ nelămurit,/ în mijlocul unei cirezi cu bivoli". 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,

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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.

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* 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 gelous 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* 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 refrence 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

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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: „Vorbesc din propria-mi piele, singura care îmi stimulează/ ambiţia de a huzuri/ oferind cuvintelor un fel de demnitate cu pori şi delicate/ firicele de păr/ (aceeaşi pe care la zece ani o conferisem puiului de şarpe/ după ce zvîcnise scurt în piept/ şi i-am simţit capul răcoros între buze./ Şi sora mea aplaudînd veselă crezînd că aşa deodată am/ reuşit să vorbesc/ un cuvînt negru cu ochi:/ – Uite, mamă, ce cuvinte lunguieţe au limbile străine!/ Apoi acelaşi şarpe în vasul de tablă foşnind ca o carte/ tipărită pe hîrtie proastă)/ Cutare şi cutare fenomen sufletesc se pierde, iar/ cutare şi cutare organ nu se pierde şi totuşi/ gol şi înfricoşat în faţa oglinzii îmi strîng trupul în braţe./ Dar ce puteam face cu două voci în gură?/ Fără îndoială acum umblu prin oraş cu demnitatea pe băţ/ îmi bălăcesc degetul în conştiinţă la fel de uşor ca într-un/ borcan cu iaurt/ şi amestec pînă se face moale, moale, moale./ În plină amiază un om stă gînditor se scarpină în cap şi/ scuipă în propria-i memorie ca într-o/ fîntînă părăsită:/ – Memorie? De parcă eu mi-am dorit din lăcomie nişte/ pleoape cu dinţi şi măsele/ ca să îmi rumeg toată ziua ochii!/ Îl vom mai vedea pe acest om mai spre sfîrşitul poemului/ sub forma unui roi de musculiţe de oţet (Drosophila/ melanogaster)/ cum intră şchiopătînd pe porţile culturii”.

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 “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

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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: “Oricum, eu stau în faţa crezului poetic ca în faţa unei femei/ fără piele/ ce îşi pudrează venele, iar dacă o sărut uneori cu ce sînt eu/ mai presus decît măcelarul ce după închiderea prăvăliei plîngînd îşi/ îngroapă faţa în hălcile de carne/ care i-au rămas nevîndute./ Adică eu îmi pun grumazul între lucru şi cauza sa/ adică grumazul meu stă între poem şi cauza sa/ cum stă uterul femeii între spermatozoid şi ovul./ Iar dacă prietenii mei se laudă că le-a crescut vreo ureche/ pe burtă/ cu burta să li se vorbească. Îi ştiu prea bine: ei stau cu un/ sîmbure de adevăr în gură/ şi îl tot sug ca pe o bomboană./ Am numărat destul, am mai multe încheieturi decît degete. În ultima vreme scrisori tot mai insistente îmi cer să hotărăsc/ vîrsta la care voi înnebuni”.

The following poetic sequence is marked by the dynamizing 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: “He, he mîine dimineaţă voi prinde un cîine roşcat de un/ picior şi rotindu-l deasupra capului ca/ pe o elice/ cu adevărat o să mă înalţ la cer./ Iată ce am ştiut dintotdeauna: cei care îşi mărturisesc puterea/ o fac prin mirosul de animal sterp./ Iată ce am învăţat: încă fiind copil se prevăzuse că trebuie/ să trăiesc o întîmplare./ Apoi în şcoala primară literele înfloreau pe hîrtie la fel cu/ micile pete de rujeolă/ animale mici, jucăuşe schimbîndu-şi culoarea pe faţa colegului/ de bancă./ «Vara aceasta am fost la oraş unde am avut posibilitatea de/ a mă plimba foarte mult/ cu scopul de a respecta regulile de circulaţie. O, cu cîtă/ emoţie/ traversam străzile în conformitate cu indicaţiile/ semaforului...»/ Ay, trup al meu astfel stai tu în lume ca o fiertură colorată/ clocotind într-o căldare de preţ!/ Şi tocmai acum raţiunea mea sîngerează peste singura mea/ reprezentare despre liniştea sufletească:/

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un soldat cu părul alb pieptănîndu-se în ferestrele mici şi/ blînde ale băii comunale./ He, he mîine dimineaţă voi prinde un cîine roşcat de un/ picior şi rotindu-l deasupra capului ca/pe o elice/ cu adevărat o să mă înalţ la cer". 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* 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* **(**2010). After *Cartea de iarnă* (1981) and *Poemul care nu poate fi înţeles* (1993), *cartea Alcool* 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*, a poem of undeclared sacrifices and the redundancy of living, of aboulic revelations and self-occultism („Vai, săracii, vai, săracii alcoolici/cum nu le spune lor nimeni o vorbă bună!/Dar mai ales, mai ales dimineaţa când merg clătinându-se/pe lângă ziduri/şi uneori cad în genunchi şi-s ca nişte litere/scrise de un şcolar stângaci.//Numai Dumnezeu, în marea Lui bunătate,/apropie de ei o cârciumă/căci pentru El e uşor, ca pentru un copil/ce împinge cu degetul o cutie de chibrituri.../.../Şi până la amiază oraşu-i ca purpura,/Până la amiază se face de trei ori toamnă,/de trei ori se face primăvară,/de trei ori pleacă şi vin păsările din ţările calde./Iar ei vorbesc şi vorbesc, despre viaţă. Despre viaţă,/aşa, în general, chiar şi alcoolicii tineri se exprimă/cu o caldă responsabilitate./Şi chiar dacă se mai bâlbâie şi se mai poticnesc,/nu-i din cauză că ar expune idei teribil de profunde,/ci pentru că inspiraţi de tinereţe/ei reuşesc să spună lucruri cu adevărat emoţionante..."). Another memorable text from *cartea Alcool* is *Întoarcerea fiului risipitor*, 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. ("Totul a fost băut./Nici o băutură nouă nu a apărut sub Soare în timpul vieţii

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mele./Nisipul pustiurilor s-a fiert în nisip şi s-a băut./Praf de argint s-a fiert în oală de argint şi s-a băut./Praf de aur din căniţă de aur s-a băut./S-au băut pietrele din pahare de piatră şi încă/din timp în timp apărea din cărţi cineva/care vedea ceva de băut/o piatră seacă:/vedea şi bea./Apoi şi cărţile s-au băut./Viermii negri şi păsările albe s-au băut./Peştii albaştri şi caii roşii s-au băut./ S-au băut aerul de sub unghii şi măduva din oase şi sângele./Pielea şi părul s-au băut./S-au băut geografia şi pictura şi sculptura şi poezia./S-au amanetat, s-au amestecat, s-au dizolvat ca bumbuţii sub limbă/şi s-au băut...").

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 („Şi, deodată, lucrurile mi-au devenit limpezi,/ca atunci când scrii o poezie după ce ai plâns/vreme îndelungată,/şi nu mai vrei să înţelegi nimic"), in the reoccurring scenography of the pub, where next to the drunks that have a degraded humanity one may find, in a natural way, the fallen figure of the angel („Aceasta e Ziua celei de a doua veniri./Şi deodată, pleosc!/întunericul scuipă un înger,/un înger mic, mic,/un înger sfrijit/un înger diabetic,/un înger albinos,/ultimul îngeraş recuperator./Care mă înhaţă de o ureche/şi mă duce în lumină şi eu plâng/şi plâng prin aer/cu urechea între degetele îngeraşului,/plâng,/că întunericul rămâne singur"). 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 („Acum sunt liniştit, mintea mea e limpede,/limpede şi sterilă/Pe măsură ce cânt, imaginile se adună în cheaguri de sânge/deasupra ceştilor albe./Aromele se subţiază ca foiţa de ţigară/şi se lipesc pe cuburile de gheaţă/ca timbrele"). 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*. 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-

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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 („Numai Dumnezeu, în marea Lui bunătate,/ apropie de ei o cârciumă,/ căci pentru El e uşor, ca pentru un copil/ care împinge cu degetul o cutie cu chibrituri. Şi/ numai ce ajung la capătul străzii şi de după colţ,/ de unde înainte nu nimic nu era, zup, ca un iepure/ le sare cârciuma în faţă şi se opreşte pe loc"). 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. Remorse, the feeling of redemption that marks the alcoholic are represented under the species of the "little angel of a glass" („Îngeraşii de pahar nu muşcă şi nu fac rău nimănui./ Îmi vine să vomit de milă, îmi vine să vomit de tristeţe./ Îmi vine să vomit gândind că aş putea să înghit un îngeraş de pahar./ Îmi vine să plâng la gândul că el ar fi, brusc, foarte singur./ Să plâng la gândul că el ar plânge toată noapte cu sughiţuri în mine./ Să plâng la gândul că el ar putea să cânte în mine cântece de la grădiniţă./ El ar putea cânta, cu o voce subţirică, «Vine, vine primăvara!»./ Cu unghiile înfipte în spinarea dihaniei cobor spre fundul paharului"). Assuming his narrative methods even more acutely than in the previous volumes *cartea Alcool* 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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