POETRY AS A FLOWER OF EVIL

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Abstract: *The two poets, Charles Baudelaire and Tudor Arghezi, demonstrate that ugliness can generate beauty through literary creation.*

This article focuses on the following aspects: the depiction of the actions of the three guests of a poem, the aesthetic points of view concerning the relation between beauty and ugliness/ good and evil, the analysis of two poems, "To the Readers", by Charles Baudelaire and "Flowers of Mold", by Tudor Arghezi.

In conclusion, evil is a productive aesthetic category mainly expressed by the lexico-semantic level of the language.

Keywords*: ugliness, beauty, art.*

According to statements of George Popa, literary work is visited by three textual *guests* (Popa, 2002: 1): reader, translator and literary critic. A text is interpreted from all three perspectives, but, when it comes to poetry, the hypostases who has contacts with the text are faced with a dilemma of perception. Beyond the linguistic, specific form in every language, it contains an ineffable side who is not related to any cognitive process, but the uniqueness of the ineffable values submitted by it.

Poetic imagination is an uplifting compensation to the trivial reality. It can be reproduced by none of the three guests of the poem who operated a singular action upon it, who founded reality of the poetry according to the condition of the produced state, to their own subjectivity, to their personal experience of the ineffable.

The mere reader is distinguished by sincerity of feelings, with no doctrinal rules; he lives again every time the poem meanings depending on his spiritual predisposition. The literary critic or *the model reader* has the role of "*the set of conditions laid down in the way successful textual content which must be satisfied as a text to be fully updated in the potential content*" (Eco, 1991: 94). He compares creation to some pre-existing patterns to determine the essence of its value.

The translator is characterized by a re-creation of the work effort by determining the meanings, writing a new creation with its own individuality. Wilhelm von Humboldt defines the translation like *"a parallel universe, an another space and time, in which the text proposes other possible and extraordinary meanings... Translation have to be an irresistible, direct experience, <sans paroles>, who recreates and redefines the universe on the page and beyond it."* (Wilhelm von Humboldt, *apud* George Popa, 2002: 5)

Since ancient times, the patterns of art to express the beauty were established; they are based on the perfect harmony of the ineffable force of creation. In the romantic era, for the first time, art was based on a suggestion of the possibility of using other means of expression, changing the rules of literarity which is capable to produce landmarks of the vast state of mind. In that direction, Victor Hugo innovates in the sense of using the word *Les Misérables*, who is related to the semantic sphere of Evil. Hugo also had the merit of using all layers of language, including the words considered

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un-poetic until then. Philosophy approves this initiative of expression; Schopenhauer says that an aesthetics state frees the ill-fated self from the contingent constraints. The impure state of the self can be also expressed by through profane art.

Beauty and ugliness represent two aesthetic categories which define themselves through opposition. Beauty aesthetics has a subjective structure and it induces positive emotions for the lecturer. Antithetically, semantics of negative leads the lecturer from the artistic ascension to the discomfort states of ugliness.

The poetry of ugliness constitutes a permanent temptation for the poet who wants to offer a variety of feelings through the embodiment of the complete art realities. Charles Baudelaire, Rimbaud and other 19th century poets and Tudor Arghezi, Romanian interwar modernist poet, use the poetic art of ugliness improved with a different aesthetic value based on the most vulgar layers of the language. This new artistic approach produces a surprise of literary perception from the *guests*, changing the traditional aesthetic point of view.

On the connection with the Baudelairian manner of introducing ugliness in literature, Arghezi produces the area of conciliation between the two conflicting aesthetic categories which is based on the temptation of paradox. About this temptation in Arghezian art expressed in the second volume, *Flowers of the Mold*, Nicolae Balotă says: *"It is not here* [...] *the poetry of a damned poet. But it is the poetry of conviction through poetry."* (Balotă, 2008: 203)

Paradoxically, ugliness can generate beauty through art; the limit between the two aesthetic categories is uncertain till they were used together in literature. Using the artistic manner of creation from his French predecessor, the Romanian poet offers aesthetic meanings to the trivial transforming it in art.

The similarity between the two poets' art also derives from the biographical analogy. Deprivation of paternal love and the rebellious attitude of maturity generate deep psychological connections. Arghezian admiration for Baudelaire also derives from them.

The approach between them concentrates upon the volume *Les fleures du mal*, whose title is paraphrased by Arghezi for naming his second volume, *Flowers of the Mold.* Both paratexts are focused on the oxymoronic significance. The first coincident lexeme, *flowers*, belongs to the semantics of beauty, expressing fecundity, delicacy, sacredness. For the second lexeme, Baudelaire establishes the oxymoronic sense through a term from the negative category: *evil*, a symbol for the force which rules humane destiny. Arghezi prefers a concrete term, *the mold*, in accordance with the symbol of the flower, for highlighting the malignant manifestation of nature.

The Flowers of the Evil, published in 1857, represents a starting point for symbolism and for modernism, as a boundary between romanticism and the future poetry. Its structure is rigorous and gathers more cycles of lyrics whose isotopy is based on the alternation between beauty and ugliness. After 74 years, in 1931, the Arghezian book is published, a book presenting similarities with baudelairian volume. It reveals the world as a prison based on the autobiographical highlights.

In the introduction to the volume *Les fleures du mal* (Baudelaire, 1968: 5), edition published in 1968, Vladimir Streinu reveals similarities at the lexical level between the volumes of the two poets who use the lexeme of the ugliness: *poison, bourbeux, peur, helmithes, chancre, crachat, cadavre, tette, ver, brute, venin (Les floures du mal), venom, molds, wounds, mildews, mud, disgusted, rot* (*Flowers of the Mold*) etc. The Romanian writer took the patterns from the French writer's volume.

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For both poets, art represents the profession of faith, a way to confront reality by creating an imaginary universe coming from the combination between the adverse experiences with the spiritual ascension.

Two poems are representative for the way of perceiving the existence at aesthetic level; their symbols are based on the book isotopy and the existential intervention of evil. The two poems are: *To the Readers*[49], by Charles Baudelaire, a poem with a metatextual title, and *Flowers of the Mold*[50], by Tudor Arghezi.

In the Baudelairian poem the dominant isotopy is the demonic profane generated by the equivalent lexemes: *Satan, The Devil, Hell, Demons, Death, Ennui, monster*. Un-poetic textual terms complete the image of the world as a place of spiritual death, in connection to the general isotopy of evil: *folly, error, sin, avarice, vermin, faint, evil, repugnant things, gloom, stinks, prostitute, maggots, wails, rape, poison, daggers, arson, vices, ugly, wicked, filthy, cries, scaffolds, smokes, hypocritish (reader)*.

Although *Flowers of the Mold* also represents a preface of a profane volume, it does not contain a variety of linguistic manifestations of evil, but it emphasizes the isotopy of the book/ literary arts. It reveals a vocabulary of intentional ugliness and decay anticipated by the lyrics of *Testament* (*"Out of wounds, mildews and slinging mud/ I've raised new and priceless beauties."*[51]): *thieves, fetters, death, rats, lice, bitch, bugs* etc.

To the Readers is an *ars poetica* with an existential theme, revealing metatextual sense at the end. It is conceived as a direct addressing to the lecturer seen as a human-being subjected to evil, sin, mistake.

Baudelaire's poetics opens with an enumeration of human sins through which both the soul and the body are milled and contained sorrow. People dominated by them are compared with beggars who are enriching the loft of lice. The loss of the soul is governed by the symbol of evil, Satan or The Devil, a name metaphorically extended through the collocation *"this wise alchemist"*. Satan rules over the souls and the world seen as a profane territory, as a Hell.

Demonism has mastered the human destiny and culminates with the presence of death, getting the spirits off *ad inferos*; the world becomes *"the filthy menagerie of our vices"*. Personified ugliness, expressed by the epithets *"more ugly, more wicked, more filthy"*, symbolizes the destructive force of life generated by the evil spirits from the inside of every human being. The actions of evil have catastrophic effects upon life and they are initiated by the satanic symbol who *"dreams of scaffolds as he smokes his hookah pipe."*

The last two lyrics defines the Evil through an oxymoron as a *"refined monster"* in a situation of aliasing of the self who addresses the lecturer as an accomplice in the confrontation with absolute evil. In the last verse, the reader is named through an epithet *"hypocritish"*, which suggests a certain pact with the horrible *monster* who rules the world and produces suffering to the writer. Beyond this categorisation, the reader is also familiarly named *brother*. Reader's fate is similar to that of the writer in confrontation with existential ugliness, but he may manifest a destructive action related to the creation, proving his duplicity.

Lyrical confession of Arghezian *Flowers* starts with a a line focused on the personal pronoun *it*, referring to another manner of writing in the hostile environment of

[49] Translated by William Aggeler, http://www.paskvil.com, 1954
[50] Translated by Veronica Guranda, http://thebonfireofhumanities.wordpress.com, 2013
[51] Translated on RomaniaMagicLand blog, 2012

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the prison as a symbol of the whole world. The lyrics represents an eject of imagination which characterizes a lyrical self wishful to create: *"I wrote it with my fingernail in mortar,/ In an empty blockout wall,/ In the dark, alone,/ Unaided by/ Neither bull, nor lion, nor eagle/ That aided/ Luke, Mark and John."*

The unique manner of writing with the *fingernail in mortar* involves a sacrifice assumed by the one who is sentenced to aloneness and devoured with desire to let the testimony of its art symbols. Art becomes exclusively the fruit of surveying the inner space, based only on *letters forged ahead*, because *letters of fire*, divine inspiration, is refused.

The poem offers a poetic definition for this unique manner of writing expressed by symbolic metaphors: *"There are verses without year./ Verses of the pit,/ Verses for thirst,/ And for hunger/ And ashes./ Verses of the now."*

The metaphor of *angelic nail*, the artistic tool inspired by Divinity, who *got blunt*, suggests both the descent of the self *ad inferos* and the hope of regeneration through creation. The writer as a God of his universe follows the desire of the soul, sacrificing his life for creation *with nails* of his *left hand*.

Particularly this *ars poetica* and generally the whole volume delineate a new realm of poetic imagination, the world as a prison. The constraints come from personal experience of detention, but it extrapolates the meanings and refers to the society or to the entire universe. So the human being becomes the prisoner of his own existing, aspired to spiritual liberation.

The similarity between the two volumes is evident. There are also the defining landmarks for each of them. For example, Baudelaire gives a more general sense to the ugliness and Arghezi particularly associates it with the world of prison.

Referring to Baudelaire's poetry, Hugo Friedrich affirms that: *"the deformity produces a surprise, and it breaks out the <<unexpected attack>>. [...] Abnormity announces as a principle of generating modern poetry."* (Friedrich, 1969: 56)

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