The "Non-Oedipal Thought" of Gherasim Luca

Ovidiu MORAR*

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One of the most outstanding figures of the Romanian avant-garde, Gherasim Luca represents, undoubtedly, a very special case. Author of many shocking experiments culminating in his real suicide by throwing himself into the Seine, he is the poet whose tragic existence thoroughly identified with surrealism, proving that its ideals were perfectly achievable. Born in 1913 in Bucharest, Gherasin Luca (on his real name Zollmann Locker) started his dazzling avant-garde experience very early, in 1930, as a contributor to the surrealist magazine *Alge* ("Algae"), where he published provocative poems characterized by incongruous associations, shocking images, rebellious spirit meant to vex the bourgeois, and also the so-called "pure psychic automatism", which was searched in the speech of the retarded children, considered to be "visionary". Out of the same rebellious spirit, he published, together with the other editors of *Alge*, in 1931 and 1932, two ephemeral magazines with scandalous titles, namely *Pula* ("Dick") and *Muci* ("Snots"), which were sent to some important personalities of the time, such as Nicolae Iorga, who was the most notorious apostle of nationalism. In response, Iorga called the police to arrest "the gang of the spoilers of writing", and indeed they were arrested and imprisoned for several days on the accusation of pornography.

The name of Gherasim Luca could also be met, during the same decade, not only in the most notorious avant-garde magazines, like *unu* ("one"), *Viaţa imediată* ("Immediate Life"), and *Meridian*, but also in the left-wing publications *Cuvântul liber* ("The Free Word"), *Tânăra generaţie* ("The Young Generation"), *Umanitatea* ("Humanity"), *Reporter*, *Era nouă* ("The New Era"), *Fapta* ("Action"), *Meridian*, etc., where he vehemently denounced the exploitation of the proletariat, the officially encouraged anti-Semitism, the fascist danger, and the increasingly threatening specter of the war, meanwhile sustaining the idea of an "engaged" (or "revolutionary") literature. Gherasim Luca was the main theorist of the "proletarian poetry", in a series of articles published in 1935 in the left-wing magazine *Cuvântul liber* ("The Free Word"). In his opinion, tributary to the Marxist ideology, the proletarian poetry (which was opposed to the "pure" poetry, considered to be in the service of the dominant class) had to reflect the deep contradictions of the bourgeois society, in other words, its motor had to be the class struggle. The poems published

* "Ştefan cel Mare" University of Suceava, Romania.

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by Gherasim Luca between 1933 and 1937 were a perfect illustration of this program, by their deliberate anti-aestheticism expressed in the most ostentatious prosaic manner, shocking gestures and violence of speech. The poet appears here in the hypostasis of the proletarian who hates the bourgeois society; the main theme of these poems is, therefore, the class struggle, as they are built on an antithesis between the exploited and the exploiters:

> beware, comrades, of the god-like smile of the gentle people/…/ they are gentle because they are satiated/ and satiated they have all the time to feel pity for those who have nothing to eat/ but they are still satiated/ and you still have nothing to eat// comrades,/ the thieves who break into houses to rob at night/ are identically dangerous, either if they are masked or unmasked/ their mask, their smile, their words of priest or god/ must be for good and all unmasked" ("feriţi-vă, camarazi, de zâmbetul de dumnezeu al oamenilor blânzi/.../ei sunt blânzi fiindcă sunt sătui/ ci sătuii au tot timpul să le fie milă şi de cei care n-au ce mânca/ dar ei continuă să fie sătui/ şi voi continuaţi să n-aveţi ce mânca// camarazi,/ tâlharii care pătrund noaptea prin casele oamenilor ca să le jefuiască/ sunt tot atât de periculoşi, fie că vin mascaţi, fie că vin cu faţa deschisă/ masca lor, zâmbetul lor, cuvintele lor de popă şi de dumnezeu/ trebuiesc o dată pentru totdeauna demascate") (Luca 1933, my translation).

Gherasim Luca also published in 1937, in the same manner, a "proletarian" novel entitled *Fata morgana* ("Mirage"), whose protagonist is a Moldavian communist who performs conspiratorial actions under the guidance of the Romanian communist party (officially forbidden in 1924). The stake of the book was obviously not aesthetic but political, since it is almost unreadable, the plot is badly constructed, the action is incoherent, and the style can be considered *anti-literary* par excellence. Otherwise, the police opened the author a file tracking in which the novel was described as a guide to the clandestine activity of the communists, and therefore its sale was immediately prohibited (Tănase 2008: 178–179).

In 1938, Gherasim Luca left for Paris, where he met André Breton and other members of the French surrealist group, but the outbreak of the war forced him to return to Bucharest, where he settled, together with Gellu Naum, a Romanian surrealist group (the other members of the group were the poets Paul Păun and Virgil Teodorescu, and the painter Dolfi Trost). Otherwise, the adverse political context (the setting up of Antonescu's fascist dictatorship and his alliance with Hitler) forced the group to suspend its activity by the end of the war (besides their communist sympathies, Luca, Păun and Trost were Jews). From that very moment, in all his artistic activity, Gherasim Luca will be preoccupied to find out a solution to Freud's "Oedipus complex", that is, to develop a "non-oedipal thought" which means total liberation of the spirit from the tyranny of all social constraints.

But unlike Freud, who considered the "Oedipus complex" to be an inexorable datum, Luca believed in the possibility of surpassing it through a "permanent negation and negation of negation", that is, through a "dialectical position, materialist and revolutionary" meant to deny "the Oedipal condition of the existence" by the restoration of desire which would put an end to the promiscuity of an existence dominated by anguish. This idea was asserted in the manifesto *Dialectique de la dialectique. Message adressé au mouvement surréaliste*

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international ("Dialectics of Dialectics. Message addressed to the International Surrealist Movement") written together with the painter Dolfi Trost, in 1945.

All common places of surrealism are reiterated in this manifesto: the search for the "objective hazard", meant to provide "the opportunities to discover the *contradictions* within the society divided in classes", and the search for the "dialectical and materialized" love, liberated from all constraints, which is defined as "our principal method of knowledge and action", and "our most legitimate insurrectional support". Nevertheless, this dialectical thought pushed to its limits implies a series of radical conclusions, most of them fanciful. First of all, the authors postulate the negation of the whole past of humanity, together with its support, the memory; second, they proclaim love (i. e., the "erotic magnetism") to be "the general revolutionary method proper to surrealism", and, consequently, they propose "the unlimited eroticization of the proletariat", solution able to accomplish the double surrealist goal of total transformation of man (by liberating the *libido*) and of society (by the proletarian revolution), that is the conciliation between Marx and Freud[1]. Perhaps the most fanciful of all these "solutions" is the proclamation of surrealism in a revolutionary opposition both against the external limits imposed by nature and against the internal limits generated by the Oedipus complex[2] "in order to liberate love". Finally, the authors announce the experimental "discoveries" of the Romanian surrealists, among which Gherasim Luca's "cubomania" and the "objectively offered object". These experiments – the authors claim – are meant to push the automatism "to its most concrete and absurd limits", in order to "break the ice of universal causality" (Luca Trost 1945, my translation).

In the book *Le vampire passif* ("The Passive Vampire") published in the same year, Gherasim Luca defined the *objectively offered object* as "an object made while thinking of the person to whom it was intended. This way the object can be used as a vehicle for sentimental or intellectual exchanges, and can become a qualitative description which can only be interpreted like a rebus" (my translation). Such an object, called *The Letter L*, was meant to be offered to Breton himself, whom Luca much admired. Other 5 objects, called "non-oedipal", were reproduced at the end of the essay *Parcurg imposibilul* ("I cover the impossible"), also published in 1945, with the explanation that they were "aphrodisiac" objects produced by a "lover-medium" as a result of the author's desire cast upon her (Luca 1945a, my translation). But even more interesting was Luca's *cubomania*, an original version of the collage in the form of rectangular cut ups of preexistent images and their fortuitous rearrangement under the impulse of the "objective hazard", a procedure that remembers the children's play with cubes. Nevertheless, the experiment was invested by its author with the most serious (and even tragic) significance, as we

[1] Although aberrant at first sight, this thesis was consonant with the Marxist-Freudian theory of Herbert Marcuse, who, ten years later, in one of his major works, *Eros and Civilization* (1955), stipulated the social emancipation of man by total liberation of *the principle of pleasure* from the tyranny of *the principle of reality*.

[2] In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud maintains that in the Oedipus complex reside the "simultaneous beginnings of religion, morals, society and art", as each member of the society bears in his blood the "original sin" of the murder of the primordial Father by his sons *in illo tempore*. The liberation from this complex becomes, therefore, for the authors of the manifesto, the condition *sine qua non* of social emancipation.

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find out in the essay *Inventatorul iubirii* ("The Inventor of Love"), published in the same volume with *Parcurg imposibilul* and *Moartea moartă* ("The Dead Death"): from the cut ups of images of unknown or partially known women made unconsciously, by the mechanism of *displacement* and *condensation*[3], the author can mentally build the complete image of his ideal lover, an invented woman without past, without hopes, and with no fixed identity[4]. One year later, he published 33 "non-oedipal" cubomanies in the volume *Les orgies des Quanta* ("The Orgies of Quanta").

About the curse inherited by "the axiomatic man of Oedipus", the obsessive theme of his whole creation, Gherasim Luca had spoken in greater detail in the three poetical essays mentioned above. The solutions preferred instead of the passive acceptation of the oedipal destiny were the re-invention of love in a completely new world, without past and reference points, the refusal of birth, of procreation, and even the suicide, which was seen as a "dialectical jump", that is, a "negation of the negation of life". These solutions, conceived as tragic attempts to outrun through negation the anguish of the natal trauma, the Oedipus complex and the complex of castration, were to be put into practice through exercises of systematic delirium meant to recreate an object of desire by autosuggestion, synthesized in the dialectical formula "the desired desire" (which were described in *The Inventor of Love*), and through exercises of mental simulation of suicide (which were described in *The Dead Death*: here the author – who would really commit suicide at the age of 81, by jumping into the Seine – described five attempts of suicide which he pretended to have already experimented).

Gherasim Luca's poetic writing developed under the sign of his "non-oedipal" thought was defined by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze as a "prodigious stutter", and for this revolution of the poetic language he became famous in the late seventies. Poems like *Passionnément* ("Passionately") or *Niciodată destul* ("Never enough"), written as early as 1947, exploited all the linguistic opportunities of the title-word, by the repetition and transmutation *ad libitum* of its syllables and phonemes, by their recombination with similar ones, and by phonetic plays which often generate absurd puns. Such subversive means of unwonted deconstruction and re-articulation of the poetic discourse were meant to create a new poetic language which was supposed to be pure, *sui generis*, completely liberated from any

[3] According to Freud, *displacement* and *condensation* are the main methods by which the repressed returns in hidden ways: "Displacement is the principle means used in the *dream-distortion* to which the dream-thoughts must submit under the influence of the censorship" ("New Introductory Lectures"). For example, in dreams the affects associated with threatening impulses are often transferred (displaced) elsewhere. As for the condensation, in dreams multiple dream-thoughts are often combined and amalgamated into a single element of the manifest dream (e.g. symbols) (www.cla.purdue.edu).

[4] The author spoke about cubomania in the following terms: "this vibrating mixture of fragmented women, unknown or partially known, and that are attracted to me with an irresistible force, in circumstances without equivalence in the ready-made world of the current or exceptional phenomena, but that remind sometimes of the processes of displacement and condensation suffered by the phenomena of the dream life (…)" (Luca 2003: 240, my translation). "These bodies of women dynamited in me, fragmented and mutilated by my monstrous thirst for a monstrous love, have at last the liberty to search and find outside the marvelous from the bottom of their being, and nothing will make me believe anything but the fact that love is this mortal entrance in the marvelous (…)" (*Ibidem*: 239, my translation).

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pragmatic/ utilitarian function (associated, of course, with the "bourgeois" thought). Thus the "prodigious stutter" invented by Gherasim Luca casts a new light on every word and phoneme by their fortuitous redistribution within the discourse, so that they permanently generate new significations. Poetry becomes therefore an *ars combinatoria*, an incessant play, more or less innocent, with language. For example, the untranslatable poem *Niciodată destul* is developed from the word *proporţional* ("proportional"), which is decomposed and rearticulated in phrases with possibly subversive meanings, that is, with possible references to nationalism, anti-Semitism, and to the traumatizing experience of the war, e. g., *prea mulţi morţi* ("too many dead"), *prea multe torţe* ("too many torches"), *mori în zori* ("die at dawn"), *un porc de popor* ("a piggy people"), *rog popor să mori* ("I beg you people to die"), *spion* ("spy") etc. (Luca 1947b, my translation). (As a Romanian Jew, Gherasim Luca had been confronted since childhood with anti-Semitism and had to endure the consequences of the racial laws promulgated during Ion Antonescu's dictatorship).

In the phonetic poems created after the method of the "prodigious stutter", the "non-oedipal" vision basically means a revolt against the parental "castrating" authority and against the censorship imposed by the Superego through its tutorial institutions – the Family, the Church and the State – which ends with the liberation of desire (Toma 2012: 197–198). For instance, the well-known *Passionnément* reflects, by the same schizoid mechanism of fortuitous decomposition and recombination, following the unconscious flow of desire, through the process of *displacement* and *condensation*, an attempt of liberation from the *Complex of castration* ("le pas", "le faux pas", "le mauvais pas"/ *the step, the false step, the bad step*) by the revolt against the authority of the father ("le mauvais papa", "pissez sur papa"/ *the bad papa, pee over papa*) transferred on a social authority – the Church represented by its leader, the Pope ("pissez sur le pape", "pissez sur la pipe du papa du pape pissez en masse"/ *pee over the Pope, pee over the pipe of papa of the pope pee in mass*) – then on the idea of the *nation* ("minez vos nations", "crachez sur vos nations"/ *undermine your nations, spit on your nations*), followed by the crystallization of an erotic discourse centered upon the idea of the liberation of desire ("ne dominez pas vos passions"/ *do not dominate your passions*) and finalized with the declaration "Je t'aime passionnément"/ *I love you passionately* (Luca 1947a, my translation).

Otherwise, let us notice that the "non-oedipal" thought of Gherasim Luca coincides up to a point with the "anti-oedipal" position formulated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in the first volume of the essay *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) entitled *Anti-Oedipus*. In Deleuze and Guattari's opinion, the unconscious is socially structured in two poles: a "paranoid-fascist" pole which "invests the formation of central sovereignity", and a "schizoid-revolutionary" pole which follows the centrifugal movement of desire. The "Oedipus Complex" is born from a "social investment of a paranoid type", which means that the liberation from its domination supposes total liberation of desire through a centrifugal movement of a "schizoid" type equivalent to the refusal of fixation in a social framework, that is, a family, a religion, a state, a nation, a language, etc. (in other words, the "anti-oedipal" position means complete liberation from the familial and social prison by the refusal of a fixed identity, the model for this attitude being the schizoid man) (Deleuze, Guattari 2008: 383–385).

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Gherasim Luca's poetic thought corresponds, of course, to this pattern, and probably not incidentally Gilles Deleuze considered him one of the greatest poets he had ever known (a poet who invented a specific "prodigious stutter", i. e., a *style*, as the style means, in Deleuze's opinion, to speak your own language like a foreigner). Gherasim Luca could be defined as the *revolted* par excellence, as his whole life and creation stood under the sign of revolt (which was at the same time social, political, aesthetical and linguistic); otherwise, in one of his essays, he identified the "non-oedipal" thought with the "revolutionary thought", that is, with the rejection of any certainty and of any fixed framework[5]). Eventually, perhaps in order to remain faithful to his non-oedipal credo, the poet will commit suicide, and, again probably not incidentally, his great admirer Gilles Deleuze will soon do the same.

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Abstract

The poet Gherasim Luca could be defined as the *revolted* par excellence, as his whole life and creation stood under the sign of revolt, eventually directed against the "oedipal" condition of man (otherwise, in one of his essays, he identified the "non-oedipal" thought with the "revolutionary thought", that is, with the rejection of any certainty and of any fixed framework). His existential credo, formulated in the essay *Inventatorul iubirii* ("The Inventor of Love"), published in 1945, was: "Dare to break the oppressing limits that are opposed to man's total liberation". And after the ultimate experiences he had always provoked, among which the attempts of suicide described (literaturized) in *Moartea moartă* ("The Dead Death"), 1945, the poet will commit suicide indeed, by throwing himself into the Seine, perhaps in order to remain faithful to his non-oedipal credo.

[5] A "revolutionary thought", he said, "must reject with indignation any attempt to be closed in a certainty, no matter how fascinating" (Luca 2003: 249, my translation). Otherwise, Luca's existential credo was: "Dare to break the oppressing limits that are opposed to man's total liberation" (Luca 2003: 236, my translation).

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