## "To Be" of the Word

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**Abstract:** In Nichita's poetry, words "are very much like beings... they are even beings" set out in the adventure of knowledge. Knowledge means appropriation, bringing to oneself what is foreign, including another in oneself, reducing the exterior to the interior. Just like the subject of the traditional philosophy, the word tends to get anchored in itself and in self-knowledge. Life endlessly consists in a "difficulty" of being.

**Key Words:** to be, the word, the life, the ontology, the intellect, the respiration, the verb, the poetical language, Prophetic Verb.

Nichita Stănescu proposes an ontological poetical discourse, under the dominion of the verb "to be", in order to bring to light a horizon of meaning that belongs to the being of the WORD.

What the verb "to be" means is ineluctably present in all that is uttered, in all that is thought, in all that is felt. The languages of the whole world, woven around the verb "to be" not only reflect this undethronable royalty but they also make up its very purple apparel.

"cel mai miraculos fapt al *existenței* este faptul că este..."

"Iată acum *principiul*: cea mai mare dimensiune *este viața*, nici o viață nu este mai mare decât alta, nici o moarte nu rămâne neîmpodobită de o nastere."<sup>2</sup>

The core of the whole philosophy history is the *ontology* (gr. *on*, *ontos* "being, existence" + logos "study" = the theory of existence). The fundamental character of the **being** for the understanding of any thing is stated convincingly. The fact of **being** becomes with Nichita Stănescu "the condition" (starea) of poetry.

Life's way of *being* is that of the *word*.

"Ceea ce există, este."<sup>3</sup>

"Văzută din afară lumea și locuitorii de pe punctul albastru pot fi caracterizați prin aceea că **sunt** si pot stârni ciudatul sentiment

că au tendința de **a fi...**",4

<sup>1</sup> "The most miraculous thing about *existence / is the fact that it is*" (our underlining), *Învățăturile cuiva către fiul său /* Someone's Teachings to His Son.

<sup>3</sup> "What exists, is." (our underlining), Învățăturile cuiva către fiul său / Someone's Teachings to His Son.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> "Now here is *the principle*: / the largest dimension / *is life*, /No life is larger than the other,/ No death remains unadorned / by a birth." (our underlining), *Contemplarea lumii din afara ei* /The Contemplation of the World from outside It.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> "Seen from the outside, / the world and the inhabitants of the blue point / can be characterized by the fact that they *are* / and can arouse the strange feeling / that they have the tendency *to be*..." (our underlining), *Contemplarea lumii din afara ei* /The Contemplation of the World from outside It.

**The being** rests under the bright paradigm of the **Light** and of the **I** of "**I am who I am**" (*The Exodus*, chap. III, 14):

"Pricina ființării noastre, și pricina ființării mele tot una sunt."<sup>5</sup>

"I deal with the very **being of God**" is Nichita's explanation for the "condition" of **light** that bathes his word, giving birth to poetry.

"*El* întrerupe cu *sinea sa* orice altă mișcare.

El face să nu mai fie

ceea ce este

și să apară în ființă

ceea ce încă nu s-a născut.

El leagănă moartea

până când răsar din ea cuvinte

El este numit uneori sufletul..."6

In Nichita's poetry, words "are very much like beings... they are even beings" set out in the adventure of **knowledge**.

Knowledge means appropriation, bringing to oneself what is foreign, including another in oneself, reducing the exterior to the interior.

Just like the subject of the traditional philosophy, *the word* tends to get anchored in *itself* and in *self-knowledge*. *Life* endlessly consists in a "difficulty" of *being*:

"m-apasă blând durerea de *a fi*..."

Thus, "a sui generis language mythology" is born, where the fundamental relation is that "between the poet – as 'character' in a mythical scenario – and the words on the lookout for meaning."  $^8$ 

It is an attempt of *linguistic disinhibition* to which Nichita's poetry itself urges by its content – as in his creation *the word* has to identify itself with the thing / being, namely it must name them exactly, directly, instead of just functioning as their *vehicle*. An example of a *word* that is a *thing* and a *vehicle* at the same time is the *tear*:

"Numai lacrima, numai ea transportă sinele către sine ridică sinele în sine, ia sinele din sine, prin simplă luare."9

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> "The reason why we are / and the reason why I am / are one." (our underlining), Colinda colindelor / The Carol of Carols.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> "He interrupts with his self / any other movement. / He turns what is into what is no more / and makes what has not been born yet / come into being. [...] He swings death / until words spring out of it [...] He is sometimes called the soul... (our underlining), Contemplarea lumii din afara ei /The Contemplation of the World from outside It.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> "The pain of *being* is gently pressing me" (our underlining), *Noaptea metalelor* / The Night of Metals.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Ion Pop, *Nichita Stănescu. Spațiul și măștile poeziei /* Nichita Stănescu. The Space and the Masks of Poetry, Editura Albatros, București, 1980, p.166

The poet believes that "the essence of poetry does not depend on words... For the language of poetry is nothing else but a vehicle..."; "... the written word has a much stronger character of aesthetic vehicle than the spoken word...".11

Meditating on the *limits of language*, trying to penetrate this *undecipherable mystery*, the poet uses words like: *stone*, *grass*, *tree*, *light*... turning them into concepts. Actually Nichita warns about the special character of his language, which does not come from a strange preference for shocking the expectations of a respectable reader, being on the contrary imposed by the intention that animates his research: "As a poetic vehicle... the written word tends to lose its syntactic properties, becoming integrated in a pure morphology where a simple sentence, or even a whole complex sentence has the functional value of a single word, or even of a single phoneme." 12

The consequence of the use of this language is the breakup with the patterns of the traditional conceptual discourse, similar to what Eminescu, Arghezi, Blaga, Ion Barbu had done before, and the imagination of *another poetical discourse*, however no less rigorous:

"Trecea foarte repede râul, deşi numai el era de față, tot timpul. Fiind de față el trecea cu față cu tot, astfel ne sărutam cu gâturile retezate.

Cuvintele tale și cuvintele mele erau lipite, pentru că locul din care se nășteau era unul și același pentru amândoi. Zeu cu două trupuri și fără cap, astfel alergam tropăind din patru picioare, cu patru mâini rezemându-ne de ziduri.

Trecea foarte repede râul, deși numai el exista.

Existând, el trecea cu existență cu tot. Astfel rămâneam singuri, înfrigurați, dormitând în aceeași rotulă.

La mijloc fără culoare, la margine fără sunet."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> "Only the *tear*, only it / transports the self towards itself / lifts the self to itself / takes the self out of itself / by simple taking." (our underlining), Prin simplă luare / By Simple Taking.

Nichita Stănescu, Amintiri din present / Memories from the Present, Editura Sport-Turism, București, 1985, p. 21

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Idem, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 195.

<sup>&</sup>quot;He was crossing the river in a big hurry, although/ he was the only one showing his face there, all the time / Showing his face there he was passing / with his face and all and so / we were kissing our beheaded necks. / Your words and my words / were stuck together because/ the place where they were born / was the same for both of us. / Deity with two bodies and without a head /we were running like this trumping on four legs / with four hands leaning against the walls. / He was crossing the river in a big hurry, although/ he was the only one in existence. /Existing, he was passing with existence and all. / So, we were staying alone quivering / Sleeping in the same kneecap. / In the middle without color, / towards the verge without sound.", Inscriptie nedescifrată / Undeciphered Inscription.

Letting yourself charmed "by the logos... is a secret way of getting separated by drawing near, of getting separated laughingly of what is not, and of giving those noble «lacrimae rerum » to the existence, to what is concrete, to the logos..."

Nichita Stănescu's writing is characterized by a constant attempt to *catch in the word* the ubiquitous presence of the verb *to be*. This is reflected in the poetical language that Nichita Stănescu puts on show; the abrupt character of his writing comes exactly from the constant attempt of *catching the ontological language*:

"...nefericita speranță a celor care **sunt** de **a** și **fi**. E vorba despre fericire, pe care noi am vrea să o **suntem**, dar ea nu ne **este**." <sup>15</sup>

For Nichita, words, who "are really beings... Have a way of living of their own, when they fly freely in the air like the birds, when they live in symbiosis with the brain, with the vocal cords...". 16

In order to come to life, to be made flesh, words solicit both "... the intellect and the respiration". Both the proffered words, uttered towards the outside, and the interior word, thought in the inside, "are born" in respiration.<sup>17</sup>

"Just like animals, words multiply, have their family, get organized in groups, go hunting, chase and are being chased. They are just like plants, they flourish, from time to time, grow only in certain geographical areas, bear fruit, lose their leaves and saw their seed in the most fertile land of the world, the human brain. Words are abstract animals and plants... they live on the brain globe, namely in the atmosphere of the brain globe, that abstract atmosphere, where even the stars of the sky penetrate not by themselves, but by their names. By the beautiful names that rays and light usually bear." 18

This explains the very frequent use of the constructions based on the verb to be for defining the word who "is as big as everything that is, but is at the same time inside everything that is. The word has no dimension. He is. He is the only thing without a thing that is. He is everywhere. His being is as big as everything that is. He is never outside himself, because "what is" has no outside. Always only inside himself, because "what is" has only inside."

*Time* and *language* belong to *ontology*, because *language*, gathering the scattering of duration in *nouns* and in *sentences*, allows for an understanding of the *being* and of *to be*:

"vorba *sunt*, vorba *eşti*".<sup>20</sup>

**The being is the verb itself**. Temporalization is the verb of the being – is the verbality of the verb. In order to render the strange temporal struggle, the poet makes use of metaphors borrowed from the register of what is temporal (process or act of **being**, *uncovering*, *accomplishment* or *flowing* of the **being**) and not of time:

"...am botezat ceea ce însumi eu făcusem, rănindu-mă, mereu împuținându-mă, mereu murind cu vorbe de buzele mele spuse.

Eu mor cu fiecare lucru pe care îl ating

1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 184

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> *Ibidem* (our underlining), p.33, *O aripă locuită*. In English, an approximate translation would run as follows: "... the unhappy hope of those who **are** to **be** as well. It is about happiness - we would like **to be** it, but she **is** not us."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Nichita Stănescu, *op. cit.*, p. 190-191.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> André Scrima, *Antropologia apofatică*, ediție îngrijită de Vlad Alexandrescu,, Editura Humanitas, București, 2005, p.105.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Nichita Stănescu, *op. cit.*, p. 190-191.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p 90-91. The original Romanian version is: "este cât tot ceea ce este, dar şi înlăuntrul a tot ceea ce este. Cuvântul nu are dimensiune. El este. El este singurul lucru fără de lucru care este. Pretutindenea este. Cât tot ceea ce este, este. Niciodată în afara lui, pentru că ceea ce este nu are în-afară. Totdeauna numai înlăuntrul lui, pentru că ceea ce este are numai înlăuntru."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> "The word **I am**, the word **you are**", Sincopă / Syncope, in the vol. Oul și sfera

*fiecare umbră* pe care o arunc peste nisip, sufletul mai puțin mi-l rămâne, gândul mai lung mi-l întinde; fiecare lucru îl privesc cum aș privi moartea, rareori uit aceasta..."21

The poetical language resulted from the verb's verbality has not only the capacity of making something understood, but also that of making the being's essence vibrate. So, language is not just a system of signs that doubles the beings and the relations, a concept that could prevail if the word were noun. Language is rather an excrescence of the verb and, as verb, it already bears a sensitive life – temporalization and essence of the being (the essence expresses the being - fiinta - , which is different of to be - fiintare). The words hold in themselves the energy of the things that are uttered.

*The lived sensation – being* and *time* – already resonate in the verb.

"Supuşi cuvântului, de verb mă rog, du-mă odată din groaza vieții, du-mă, du-mă, și nu mă mai pedepsi si mie nu mă mai redă-mă !"²

"Născut dintr-un cuvânt îmi duc înțelesul într-o pustietate divină. "23

"Acum, chiar acum, când citești, tu, cititorule, cuvintele acestea viața mea curge în fața ta și viața ta curge în fața cuvintelor mele."24

Nichita Stănescu imagines the *identity of structure* between *language* and *matter*, identifies "similarities between words and elements", between the "properties of names" and the "properties of cores": "... a poetical complex sentence, is in space, just like a crystal in the infinite inner space of the conscience. We can compare the structure of any simple sentence uttered or written with the atomic structure. We can compare forms and their symbols, the letters, to the structure of the simplest particles. We are amazed by the similitude between nouns and cores. Between verbs and electrons. Between adjectives, adverbs, pronouns and quanta. We are amazed by the fact that just like the different atoms, which have a certain number of valences, each noun taken separately has a certain number of syntactic possibilities to combine with verbs. We could say, without approximating too much, that language, words are the enlarged shadow of matter in our conscience".2

22 "As we are submitted to the word, I pray the verb / Please, take me at once from the terror of life / take me away, take me away and stop punishing me / and do not give my self back to me anymore!", Dialog cu Oda în metru antic / A Dialogue with the Ode in an Antique Meter, our underlining, in the vol. *Oase plângând* / Bones Crying.

<sup>23</sup> "Born from a word I carry my meaning / through a divine desert." Confundare / Mixup, our underlining, in the vol.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> "... I baptized what I had done myself, / hurting myself, / continually weakening myself, continually dying / with words said by my own lips. [...] / I die with every thing I touch [...] / with each shadow that I throw on the sand, / my soul remains diminished, my thought / becomes longer; at each thing / I look as if I were looking at death, I rarely / forget this..." Enghidu / Enkido, in the vol. Dreptul la timp / The Right to Time.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> "Now, right now, as you are reading / these words, reader, / my life is flowing before you / and your life is flowing in *front of my words*.", *Comunicare* / Communication, our underlining. <sup>25</sup> Nichita Stănescu, *op. cit.*, p. 197, our underlining.

So, the structure of the word-being is identical to the structure of the universe. Nichita seems to be under the power of a revelation that gives his language its "poetical" function – in the etymological sense of poiein, i.e. "to create" – conferring it a dimension of Prophetic Verb.

"Mă voi supune la dezobișnuire de felul meu de-a fi, dar nu la părăsire, ce-o ține-n dânsul verbul lui a fi. M-oi dezobișnui și eu de trup, născând un Făt-frumos al verbelor..."

It is said: "everything we imagine exists somewhere. We can reflect seriously about the relation word – matter, and, turning reality upside down, meditate on "in the beginning was the Word". <sup>27</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> "I will submit to getting unfamiliar / to my way of *being*, / but not to separation, / *which is held in itself by the verb to be* / I will get unfamiliar to my body / *giving birth to a Prince Charming of the verbs*...", *Tonul* / The Tone.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Idem, op. cit. p. 197, our underlining. The original Romanian quotation is: "tot ceea ce imaginăm există undeva. Putem să reflectăm cu seriozitate asupra raportului cuvânt – materie și, inversând realul, să ne reculegem asupra acelui "la început a fost cuvântul"