THE OIL LANDSCAPE IN GEO BOGZA'S VISION[1]

***Abstract**: Geo Bogza's vision shows an exultation of matter's violence and monstrosity from Busteni area,the oil gushed from deep earth represents the centre of the space in which we find ordinary people, owners of oil wells and workers. The central theme of Bogza's poetry is given by the obsession of reality ,the unusual and elation of this dark world.*

***Keywords**: oil, wells,Geo Bogza.*

The Romanian literary avant-garde has developed in several directions, their common point being the promotion of a radical conception of poetry, a poetic discourse aimed at denying the traditional poetry.

The avant-garde movement highlights the key opposite breaches subsumed within negative categories such as: subjectivity / objectivity; inner world / outer world; individual / society. The avant-garde promotes the act of negation, a latent condition of any "modern" attitude developed in destructive, iconoclast spirits (Marino, 1973:184). Fire was considered to be the symbol of this movement: the purifier fire, the fire of sacrifice, of conflict and of hell.

An important representative of the Romanian avant-garde was Geo Bogza, "a tumultuous nature and a pathetic spirit with a contradictory adolescence which enfolds a sailor's nostalgia and oily nights at the wells on the hillsides of Buştenari" (Protopopescu, 1972:108).

The young man from Buştenari started with violent lyrics and articles in 1927, aligning himself with the ideology of the time. The poet's writings became known both by insurgency manifests (*Creative Exasperation*, *Rehabilitation of the Dream*, *Profession of Faith for Algae group*), and through poetry and prose. His entire publishing activity promoted the creative freedom by "revolt", "dream", "exasperation", "reality".

In *Creative Exasperation*, tragic ideas can be found: "The outer world is a fire. Our inner world is another fire. And we run between them on a peak which is our lucidity" (Bogza, 1933)

The stages of his creation rank him as an extravagant, ostentatious and moralizing poet. The poet is marked by vulgarity and triviality, with raw and uncensored language, at times pornographic such as in *Sex Diary* and *Poem Invective*. Solemnity replaces the vulgar tone in *Ioana Maria* and *Song of revolt love and death*. The moralizing stage belongs to the book *Orion*, and Bogza was considered by Pompiliu Constantinescu "a poet of geological views, a rough singer of man fighting the aridity of soil and the difficulties of life".

In one of his notes written in *Jurnal de chaise longue*, Bogza talks about the world he lived in, a world of spectacle, where everything was stained with oil: "I shall have to talk another time –confessed Geo Bogza- and with another pen about the influence that this world had upon my mind, this world of fire, of permanent spectacle

[1] Aurelia Mihaela Năstase (Micu), University of Piteşti, nastaseaura@yahoo.com.

*This work was partially supported by the strategic grant POSDRU/88/1.5/S/52826, Project ID52826 (2009), co-financed by the European Social Fund – Investing in People, within the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013.

BDD-A5914 © 2011 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-11-02 09:22:54 UTC)

and of tipsy breathing. A landscape where everything is smeared in oil especially the souls."

Like Bogza, FT Marineti discovered the land of Moreni in 1930, when taking a trip there along with the group of writers from Contimporanul. This region had become somewhat famous for the ardent fire that lasted very long. "Marinetti exploited the impressions that marked him projecting the images recorded on the spot in a poem by the futuristic aesthetic rules: *L'incendio della probe*.

Paul Sterian is the one who raised the ideal image of the poet reporter, entirely assumed by Geo Bogza "with a thousand eyes, a thousand ears, a thousand feet, a thousand telegrams, a thousand pens, a thousand phrases" (Sterian, 1931)

The specifics of this life consists of a continuous turmoil and a devastating fire that is insightful and often hides in oil tanks, in oil and fuel reservoirs which arouse the poet's interest for the world of oilmen. Between people and oil, there is a complementarity well-defined by the unifying fire: "There is a spirit of life hidden in oil tanks, in the heart of so many people, a spirit that sometimes bursts in a glance, in a fire. Between people and oil wells, there is an identity of destiny. They sometimes burn together and then life is something epic" (Bogza, 1970).

The land of Bustenari with people, with wells, with oil was exploited lyrically in a realistic manner and in a modern language by poet Geo Bogza. *The Oil Poem* is a matter of worship of the violence of Bustenari. The world of oil is evidenced mainly in the poems: *Mysterious murder in Bustenari village*, *Sick landscape oil* and in the volume *Nicolae Ilie* (*Epitaph, Mourning, The Mistresses and Terror*).

The Oil Poem is written in terms of reportage and represents a description of the environment full of wells and explosions that occurred in the village of Bustenari. In this vast poem dedicated to oil, the poet moves from vituperation to praise, from rebellion to worship. Written at about the same time with *Song of Rebellion, Love and Death*, *The Oil Poem* was first published in 1934, in *The Time*, and it appeared accompanied by a portrait of the poet. The poem was revised and saw the light of publishing for the second time in 1977, in the pages of *Romanian literature* being accompanied by another portrait, but with a new time stamp.

In all the poems dedicated to oil everything is hot: the hills, the wells and the people. The land "gasps", "cracks", "sweats", "tosses", "groans" and dumps out its black suppuration. "The oil as the stone, the fire, the earth or the water, is one of the primary substances that excites the writer's fantasy" (Balotă, 1976: 112). The poet makes a confession about Bustenari village which at first was "a village of thieves, a redoubtable nest of thieves", about "the world and the other people with their agonies and ideals", about its crimes, about the oilmen burned in flames, "but also about oil", a seething dirty mass. "The whole poem is a poetic confession of the solitary ego. The poetic self is reinforced by the use of the personal pronoun in the first person" I": "I, this one, I'm going to talk about oil and its crimes / I, who am malevolent and violent //" (*The Oil Poem*).

The wells are likened to mistresses who bore the earth:" the wells, my mistresses so hungry/they bore in the heart of earth and they grimly suck its entrails/ earth groans / rattles and howls/and oil is gushing from it as suppuration from a wound// (*The Oil Poem*).

The tumultuous flow causes hysterical laughter and joy within the people eager to get rich. In contrast with people full of oil money, Geo Bogza presents people hungry and full of despair that are ready to sell themselves: "From top to feet they are for sale /

BDD-A5914 © 2011 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-11-02 09:22:54 UTC)

despair of soul and hunger of bones make me sell cheaper / I'm ready for any villainy / buy me and I'll be yours//" (*The Oil Poem)*.

The poems dedicated to oil, *Nicolae Ilie*, *Mysterious Murder in Bustenari Village*"and others focus on the author's own self who lives with the locals the joys and disasters arising from the burning wells:"When I barely turned twenty and had no other job or vocation than to walk under the moon, especially on Bustenari hills, dotted with wells, I found myself in the situation to hold the body of a young driller burned alive for an hour." (Bogza, 1978)

The entire volume *Nicolae Ilie* arises from the dramatic experience the poet had on the oil lands: "The night of horror that I spent trying to save the young man tossing in the grass with two rings of fire around the ankles, made me write some poems, also in the tone of the avant-garde, but different from those before."(Ibidem:7). The main character of the whole volume *Nicolae Ilie* is young Nicolae Ilie, a driller from Livada village, who died by burning on September 28, 1928: "Nicolae Ilie a driller from Livada village / a nice lisping guy / fallen prey to oil fuel and fire / on Friday, the 28th of September 1928 / died the next day at six, without a candle" (*Nicolae Ilie - Epitaph*). The keywords with a special significance, "driller", "black", "Nicolae Ilie," "oil", "fire", highlight by repeatability strong lyrical effects: "Nicolae Ilie, a driller from Livada" (*Nicolae Ilie - Epitaph*)"Who could suspect, Nicolae Ilie"(*Nicolae. Ilie - Mourning*)," Nicolae Ilie, your mistresses / can you see what you did, Nicolae Ilie//" (*Nicolae Ilie - The Mistresses*).

The noun "fire" and its derivatives "flames, ashes" : "Fallen prey to fire and oil fuel" in the poem "Epitaph" and, "his blue ash eyes" in the poem "Mourning" highlight the tragedy of human existence. Realism pushes the concrete to the limit of hallucinations. The events presented, taken from real facts establish the true rites of tragedy. The disasters and infernal landscapes stay together with purifying biblical symbols, such as: "drops of holy water", "the image of Christ". The inner fire emphasizes the sisters' pain who are devastated for the loss of their mother and brother, "your sister dressed in black / tears out her hair / crying for them and for you//" (*Nicolae Ilie-Mourning*). To the external fire, a hellish fire, it corresponds the ardent inner fire, resembling to the sacrificial fire which represents knowledge, enlightenment (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1994: 65). At the same time the fire is given negative connotations: "it darkens and it suffocates because of its smoke, it burns, consumes, destroys [...] the fire that burns everything is opposite to the bright flame and it symbolizes the exalted image ... the subconscious … the subterranean abyss …the infernal fire ... shortly, all forms of mental regression."(*Ibidem*: 66)

Therefore, besides the positive aspects, the flames have also negative aspects that darken, choke, burn, consume, destroy and all is reduced to "ashes", "Oh how black he was of burns/ cracked as ground after earthquake / with small craters of volcano / and with its navel ashes// "(*Nicolae. Ilie -Terror*).

In contrast to the vital red of the fire, black is often materialized by the adjective "black", a symbol of the fundamental fear: "Oh how black he was of burns" (*Nicolae. Ilie - Terror*) (Durand, 1977: 112). The negative connotations of black are: sin, anxiety, rebellion and judgment. The nocturnal landscapes are specific to depression." Black, the symbol of death and sadness is at the same time the colour of the oil extracted from earth "Wells squeeze it out, they terribly suck its entrails / its black feet / they flow and do not stop//" (*Sick oil landscape*). The parallelism between man and landscape and between man and oil stands out in all the poems dedicated to oil. The hill is a sick man, and oil is similar to prostitutes: "Hill is a sick old man without

BDD-A5914 © 2011 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-11-02 09:22:54 UTC)

curative / on hill he falls to his knees of fatigue / But oil and prostitutes have the same look / here is the scaffolding probe and further the suburb of brothels//." The verb "crackle" emphasizes the infernal sound of death: "their massive bones crackle, hills crackle, prostitutes crackle / and everything is close to death// " (*Sick landscape oil*).

Every drop of oil is sprayed with sweat and blood, "the drillers full of sweat work and full of sweat they make love" (*Sick landscape oil*). Earth "groans", "cracks", "sweats" and "tosses".In the center of these images there are the drillers, simple people, found in exemplary situations. "The man at Bogza- as observed Al. Protopopescu – passes from the condition of daily martyrdom to that of absolute martyr." (Protopopescu, *op. cit.*:139*)*

He describes each burned driller's wounded body, and the corpse is given a dark and oppressive legend. The poet insists on the lives of humble, very often tragic and anonym. The tragic feeling reaches infernality when it refers to death. One of the dead drillers was Anton Bosilca, a mechanic, aged 21, found dead in an oil well. "Ion Anton Bosilca, only 21 years old / with a feeble intention of becoming a mechanic / was found only after three days in a well / of oil / they couldn't see his head / only his feet emerged to / the top// " (*Mysterious murder in Bustenari village*). The family situation of the dead is disastrous. Veta, one of his sisters, the most beautiful, is placed in the position to entice passers-by to get money for the funeral. She doesn't take account of morality and thinks only of money for the coffin and the priest: "Veta, who is the most beautiful one/ enticing passers-by / go on she said / tomorrow we bury him / and we do not have anything / only the coffin is one thousand / and the priest sent us word that he does not come but for five hundred.//" (*Mysterious murder in Bustenari village*).

In Geo Bogza's poetry nature is a genuine passive framework. "The writer considers it "natura naturans", protean and active. He looks for the multiple embodiments of space and time" (Ibidem: 155)

Bogza's perspective on the oil world fits a new and modern vision of topos in literature called "hell on earth".

The negative tragedies and all the symbolism centered on the negative meanings of fire support with a great lyrical force this vision that gives a substantial drama to Bogza's civic attitude.

Bibliography

Bogza , G., "Nicolae Ilie", România literară 25, 1978.
Balota, N.,*Universul prozei*, Univers, Bucuresti, 1976
Chevalier,J; Gheerbrant,A., *Dictionar de simboluri*, Artemis, Bucureşti, 1994,
Durant, G., *Structurile antropologice ale imaginarului*, Univers, Bucureşti, 1977
Proptopopescu, Al.,*Volumul şi esenţa*, Eminescu, Bucureşti, 1972
Sterian, P., *Poezia agresivă sau despre poemul reportaj*, *Unu* 35, IV(1931)

BDD-A5914 © 2011 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-11-02 09:22:54 UTC)