ASPECTS OF TEMPORALITY IN LUCIAN BLAGA'S LYRIC[1]

***Abstract**: The study reviews some aspects of the metaphor of temporality in Lucian Blaga's poetry, which relies on the tragic conscience of the temporal limitation ("the great passage", death as time limit). The passage, one of the facets that define the Blagian existence, is the poetic translation of the contemplation on the miracle of the world from the point of view of a mortal being. We also explored "the trans-horizontic aspiration", that yearning of humanity for a condition free of time and death.*

***Keywords**: metaphor, temporality, ephemerality.*

Ancient Greek philosophy was founded on two different theories on time: the Heraclitean (dynamic) time and the Eleatic (static) time. In poetry they mark the antinomies: the classic time is static, while during the Baroque it is configured as an eternal passage. The Classic time reflects optimism, and the Baroque time is a result of the tragic aspect of human existence. (Munteanu, 1981: 339)

The ego seems to be separated from the inner self. The passage of time is objective, indifferent to the will of men.

The old Aristotelian cosmology was gradually replaced by a revolution of thought and full research. A characteristic of this period is the long-term tenacity of observation and courage. Concepts such as *infinity* and *eternity* are less frequent in the philosophical language, increasing its circulation in the area of poetry. (*Ibidem*: 234) The reluctance is pragmatically motivated. "We never mix ourselves in disputes on infinity; it would be ridiculous, for us, who are limited (beings), to try to determine certain things and thus, in trying to understand them, to assume that they are limited; this is why we don't bother to answer those who wonder whether half of an infinite line is infinite or if the infinite number is odd or even..." (Descartes, 1953 : 58)

From a temporal point of view, man has a finite existence or duration.

Space and time are assumed by man with emotional states without "the power to adhere to the time in which he lives, nor does he know much about the past, alienating himself from his own time through the reverie that project him towards the future. Hurt by the present from which he removes himself, regretting it if is pleasant, escaping into an uncertain future, Pascal conceives the human being in a state of alienation from everything around it, nature making it weak in any place and time" (Munteanu, *op. cit.*: 237)

Pascal's reflection on the time divided into moments, as well as his reflection on eternity and death is identical in most cases with that of most significant poets. (*Ibidem*: 238)

For Spinoza the same concept has ways and qualities required by the divinity: "By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting a infinite number of attributes, all of them taken separately expressing an eternal and infinite essence" (Spinoza, *L'Ethique* : 19).

When it comes to Blaga's poetry, we find ourselves in another cultural context. In Romanian literature, Lucian Blaga is a great poet of time, whose flow he feels with painful intensity, as the worst sign of human frailty. Life is a "great passage" through the light, but also an inevitable fall into nothingness. This vision was the origin for one

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of the fundamental themes of Blaga's poetry: the theme of life threatened by death (a theme also found in the poems *Beautiful hands, Silence, The Shiver*). The poet builds a "stylistic matrix" that defines a whole cultural space. (Doinaş, 1972: 225) His great poetry is found in the volumes *In the Great Passage* (1924), *Praise to Sleep* (1929), *At the Watershed* (1933). That does not mean that in *Poems of the Light* there are not valuable poems, but in those three volumes there are treated the dominant lines of his lyricism.

The volume *In the Great Passage* is written on the great theme of time. In the first two volumes time did not exist, while *In the Great Passage* the dominant theme is the passage of time.

Simultaneously with the discovery of the issue of the great passage, the implications and the atmosphere dominated by the existence towards death, there also appears a refinement of that great theme: the mystery (and beauty). In Blaga's view, if you reduce the mystery, beauty also diminishes. The world is beautiful because it has mystery.

The title of the volume reproduces the title of a poem, a poem representative for the entire vision of the poet related to existence and time. Emphasis is placed on the flow as in Heraclitus (Everything flows: panta rhei. You cannot step into the same river twice). At the opposite end is Zeno of Elea (the Eleat model is static, the essences are static).

Cosmic noon, noon time, an equilibrium moment, when the bodies don't have shadows anymore, is the balance whose scales hold the time that ran out (recorded) and the virtual time (the equilibrium, the stagnation express a state of calm): "*The sun in the zenith holds the day's scales*".

Through the line *Heaven gives itself to the waters beneath* it is validated the method to indirectly metamorphosize the sky (the water above), to establish an analogy between the telluric and the celestial. The sky seems to give itself to the waters beneath because they have a calm surface, they seem to be Eleatic, not Heraclitean. Just as the sky is not disturbed by the idea of death, these earthly waters, at noon, seem to attain this Eleatic, static image. Heavenly peace flows on earth.

The dynamic flow ("*gives itself*") is an anthropomorphized reflexive, as if it would suggest a kind of will of the entities, a signal along the line of a mythical balance.

Blaga creates a heavenly picture involving the "*foliage that arch here over an entire story*" in which the great story is identified with the space of the heavenly world and the creature that has conscience, the instinct to care, but also "*docile-eyed, passing beasts*" where it increases the awareness of the passage, of death, a tragic ability characteristic only to humans, the animals situating themselves under the shadow of the "*docile*" eyes. From the generalization "*Nothing wants to be other than it is*" the exception is made by "*only my blood cries out in the woods*". A relationship is established between blood and the distant childhood through the comparison "*like an old stag after its deer*", a relationship between the old stag and the deer lost in death. (The analogy forces us to transfer childhood features of the deer.)

The passage of time involves the mineral, the vegetal, the animal, the man. Among them, man is the only one who can contemplate this passage, because he is a "thinking reed." The sequences "*I wish I'd stop the waters*", "*I wish I'd shut with my fist all the springs*" capture the specific human rage, the lack of reconciliation with the thought of the passage, of the flow.

It is this (human) consciousness of the great passage that opens to man the idea of beauty and mystery. Beauty, together with the world's mystery, is given to be seen

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only by the man because he is the only one aware of his death. The animal is deprived of that capacity, becoming unable to see the mystery.

The world is beautiful, thus seen through a tear. In these points resides Blaga's essential lyricism. They make Blaga a great European poet.

In the poem *The Daily Resurrection* the emphasis is not on fear of death, but on the miracle of a daily resurrection. To resurrect every day also means to die every day. Although here we can identify that droplet of death, the emphasis is on the light "*The day comes as justice made to earth*". To the opacity of the earth corresponds the light that conceives the flower. This clay is spiritualized. The telluric gains a grain of spirituality. Light is the complement of transparency in relation to the opacity of the earth. "*Flowers over threads of clouds*" are seen as "*halos lost on the field by the saints of the past*" (revealing metaphors through which the finite opens to infinity). The opposite of the miracle of this awakening seen as resurrection is sleep "the publican of life" (Mihai Eminescu). Slipping into sleep is a kind of daily death. Thus, resurrection is a king of meeting with the light. Impressive, here, is the re-entry into the world's sea of light. The awakening and the enlightenment of the world are seen by Blaga as defamiliarized. Blaga wants this re-entry of the light into the world to produce a distinction between those who are here on earth and those under it ("*Passer-by, whoever you are ... / raise your right hand over me*"; "*the right hand*" is the hand used for blessing), a resurrection of the ancestors which outlines the communication between life and death. There is in Blaga's poetry a verticality connecting life of death, children to parents (the living are the gardens, while the dead are the roots). Thus, the roots of life are in death (the dead are not quite dead as long as the saps circulate between the two spaces). The poem *Parents* from the volume *Ships with Ashes* is built on the theme of passage, but it is musicalized, sounding like an hourglass. Here, time is not as frightening as *In the Great Passage*, the yearn-yearning fostering even this link between life and death.

Many of the poems that make up the volume *In the Great Passage* are variations on this theme of the consciousness of temporality. In this volume there is captured a meaning regarding this confinement of the man in time. Blaga's view is that man transforms this awareness of mortality from a source of sadness into something else, into a kind of stimulus for his work and a stimulus for his responsiveness to the beauty of the world.

Man becomes more sensitive to the beauty of the world by knowing that he is mortal (and failing to reconcile with this thought), man reacts to death by striving to give meaning and value to life. The poems in this volume are situated between the two poles (the painful obsession with time and the miracle of the daily resurrection), representing nuances of the dialogue between these two poles. (To be wise is to remember that you are mortal).

The volume *Praise to sleep* is a response to "the great passage". This volume proposes a lyrical inner mythology of the poet, dominated by the orientation towards this sleep state which blurs the time dimension. It is a metaphoric-symbolic creation seen as an imaginary space, refuge from this obsession of the passage.

The sleep state is a climate in which the self fades. The soul of the world gives rhythm to something that can not be marked by the mechanical time, "*A soul lasts in breaths, free of today/free of yesterday*". Thus, all individual times diminish precisely because they fade. Breathing, a representation of the soul, becomes impersonal, while breath, image of the breeze, becomes a cosmic, implanetary breath. The phrase "*free of*

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today/free of yesterday" outlines a world without the limits of the mechanically measured time, which could take man out of the historical time.

The courage to dream of a time healing climate, without falling into nothingness, is found in the verses: "*With dull rumors through burnings/hot centuries arise"* (*Sleep)*.

'The metaphysical sadness" experiences an anxious phase in the volume *In the Great Passage* and then an agonizing one in the volume *Praise to Sleep* towards a wise resignation. Its echoes are brought by the lyrics of the subsequent collection, *At the Watershed*, which, as the title suggests, sets the threshold where life events are to be relived in a symmetry of the decline. (Simion *et alii*, 2004: 549)

The fear of time implies daytime.

The poem "The Holm" published in volume *Poems of the Light* is a philosophical elegy on the coexistence of life and death. The dominant feeling is the serenity with which the poet contemplates the presentiment of the slow fall into nothingness (the starting point seems to be *The Ewe Lamb* with which it was often compared, emphasizing man's poise when confronted with death, a serene detachment, acquired, in the poet's case, through meditation.

In Blaga this motif of the great passage is associated with the erotic love (*Archaeology, Path Through the Cemetery, Judgment in the Field of the Beautiful*).

Time, in an anthropomorphic aspect, it opens its moments just like a man opens his arms to go to sleep. Archetypal metaphor, expressionist type, has its essence in principle. In the poem *Time* is recorded the tumultuous history of the Romanians, bringing a change of vision (which is located in the absolute).

The poem *On waters* is based on the topos of the biblical flood, where water is Thanatic, charged with the connotations "of the great passage". The river–time adds up to the symbols of Blaga's lyricism placed under the obsession with time. "Deposit of mysteries, origins of eternity, soteriological source, Blaga's village is completely removed from the historic and the social" (Doinaş, *op. cit*.: 29). The village is "a biblical gipsy camp" (*Fallen Smoke*). Both the myth and the cosmic mythology translate the feeling of eternity through the rhythms built using the metaphor "*I believe that eternity was born in the village*". Returns to his native village have the meaning of regaining a heavenly space (*Lost Horizon*).

Such representations of the village multiply. They are caught "under a mythical aura, supporting the idea of its eternity, through the sacred fauna that hosts it, the unyoked bull, the healing bear, fireflies with little lamps" (Simion *et alii,* 2004: 549).

The feeling of alienation from the heavenly space of childhood is often mistaken with an element specific to uprooting, thus it becomes obvious the return towards the village as a last thought of the poet (*Words to Four Friends*). The same experience is found in the poetry of poets such as Mihai Eminescu (*I Have One More Wish)* and Tudor Arghezi (*Hide-and-Seek).*

What is beyond *At the Watershed* in under the power of that lyrical myth that was connected with the motif of the yearn-yearning. Blaga's poetry opened with love of mystery and ended with the note of the yearn yearning. (*At the Court of Yearning*, *Unsuspected Steps*). His poetry returned to the simple pleasures, even to the theme of mystery which was apollinized, softened. Their essence integrates into new syntheses built around the motif of the yearn-yearning. It is the yearning for something that can not be named. Yearning is a man's longing for another world. It is the dream of evading the law of the great passage and death. It is the dream of forever remaining in contact with the mystery and the beauty of the world.

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The poem *Disease i*n the volume *At the Watershed* is an invocation with signs of the cure. Man must cure himself of the obsession with the great passage. We find here the suffering of being, that knows itself to be transient, and implicitly the suffering of being mortal: "*A disease entered the world / without a face, without a name ...*" It is necessary that these beauties remain somewhere in the world. Disease includes the metaphysical sadness ("*Oh, no miracle comes true"*), the ontological sadness, the sadness of the intellect that tells you that you are mortal.

"The Seeker" Lucian Blaga considers his own poetry an expression of the search. Thus, in the poem "Light of Yesterday" all components are projected into an indefinite past, whose only distinct temporal mark is its opposition to the present. The whole poem is thus structured on the opposition present – past. The past is real, while the present is altered (Alexandrescu, 1967: 122). This opposition is not a substantial constructive element from the poet's point of view, the decisive poetic factor in understanding the significance of poetry is actually the meaning of the metaphors. However, the past described in the poem may even be the lost Paradise also sang by Milton, but at the same time is an illustration of the theory of knowledge.

The portrait of Lucian Blaga created by Nicolae Balota confirms the writer's biography. "He was a living man, and not only a thought incorporated in a work, to whom we owe the only 'philosophical stone' to which a man can have access to, namely a philosophical consciousness, and this we owe to Lucian Blaga" (Balotă, 1972: 307). Pompiliu Constantinescu says: "The tragedy of the knowledge experienced by the poetry of Mr. Blaga, left him with a longing for death that accompanies him even in his apparent reconciliation with the world. His metaphysics builds a legendary universe in the absolute of a primordial candor from the ashes of the great doubts that were left on the bottom of the soul" (Simion *et alii*, 2004: 551)

Lucian Blaga believes in the tragic nobility of the human condition and the chances to save mankind through sacrifice and work, and through creation in culture. Time is a product of contemplating the miracle of the world from the point of view of a mortal being. The equivalent created by the poet is actually a yearning of humanity for another condition, free of time and death, unattainable, but to which the human soul, failing to reconcile, dreams.

The salvation through culture is a response to the idea of death. Creation provides compensation to the vexations brought by the contact with a universe closed to total knowledge, a fervent wish to achieve a creative act.

The durability of a creation is measured by the extent of the ideal towards which we aspire and the ability to overcome the limits of contiguity by finding a balance point in itself. The reason of the great passage is related to the poet's own biological destiny, to the consciousness of the individual twilight.

"Condemned to word, and condemned to condemn through word, the Poet is the man par excellence, who saves himself as creator, and – due to his verbal rite – saves the words returning them into 'the no-name country' of Silence, their homeland" (Doinaş, 1972 : 18).

Blaga's particularity as a poet results from his rapid and synthetic thinking, as he operates with surprising metaphors and revealing analogies between the concrete and the abstract. Blaga's poetry does not appear at all as a sum of concepts versified using a certain technique, but as a living, self sufficient organism, pulsating with the blood of creation.

G. Călinescu argues that Blaga's lyrics "concentrate on one point: a metaphor". (Călinescu, 1987). Referring to the same aspect George Gană, in *The Literary Work of*

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Lucian Blaga, argues: "indefinite in substance and artistic development, this poem holds more of a documentary interest ..." (Gană, 1976: 37).

Blaga's poetics is immanent, modern. So, Ştefan Augustin Doinaş feels entitled to say: "For him, poetry is not so much a gift, as a trade: it is the special art of revirginizing the language, forcing the word – through the prestige the verse exercises over it – to contaminate the silence that precedes and surrounds it on all sides" (Doinaş, 1972 : 19).

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