LANDMARKS OF TUDOR ARGHEZI'S POETIC ART

Margareta ONOFREI*

Abstract*: Tudor Arghezi's poetic arts reveal the sacredness of artistic creation through specific language based on coincidentia oppositorum aspects, a a junction between ugliness and beauty. This article focuses on the following aspects: the metatextual discourses, the Arghezian capacity of poeta faber, his aesthetic principles, the study of the two main poetic art, "Testament" and "Flowers of the Mold", based on the semiotic isotopy of the book, the study of the foremost the representative metasememes (metaphors, symbolic metaphors, oxymorons, epithets) and a metalogism (symbols) at the lexico-semantic level.The conclusion of the study is that Arghezi bases poetic arts on the contrary lexemes (poetic and un-poetic) in an original manner of writing.*

Keywords*: sign, isotopies, metalinguistics.*

"Poetry is life itself." (Arghezi, 1933: 503)

According to Arghezian affirmation, *"Poetry is life itself."*, human existence corresponds to poetry in a relationship of mutual interdependence. So the communion between writer-lecturer-literature is very close and it is based on textual cooperation towards the aim of art.

The most obvious form of cooperation between the textual instances is the metatextual discourse. The metatext generates a *hypothesis* (Toma, 1986: 559-560) upon the text and it becomes *"the measure of the capacity of understanding the depths of the text"* (*Ibidem*).

In Romanian literature, Tudor Arghezi, interwar representative poet, has many original characteristics among which is that his poetics, emerged at the confluence of several literary schools and being unable to situate it in any of them, focus the coordinates of the discourse on the combination of work and divine inspiration. His artistic profession of faith in based on the idea that art means both rationality and passion or both hard work and sacred revelation. In the presence of divine grace, Arghezi masterly creates, but in the absence, he invokes it, searching through his art which becomes a cry of absence healer.

Tudor Arghezi appears as a *poeta faber* defined through a continuous search and a search of denial. Literary critique notices this main characteristic of both personality and work; about this permanent contradiction, Eugen Lovinescu says that Arghezi is *"a Faustian soul, in which not only two souls rest, but conflicting principles of modern man collide"* (Lovinescu, 1981: 234)

Arghezian *ars poetica* is founded on the book isotopy as a source-symbol of the creation. In the paradigmatic plan of the language, *book* is a cultural sign which is in correlation with Arghezian metatextual discourse.

This lexeme based on the abstract-concrete semic variation and connected to the representative symbols (*soul*, *words*, *verses*) is most often associated with perennial abstractions as beauty, originality/ uniqueness, assumed modesty. Writing the book involves both the hard work of the creator and the divine inspiration. The beauty of the book is associated both nature and love, in an endless variety of the meaning.

*University of Pitești, paper financed through PERFORM POSDRU/159/1.5/S/138963, onofrei_ada@yahoo.com

BDD-A14498 © 2014 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:55:11 UTC)

Tudor Arghezi is a remarkable original poet. His poetic art, as the whole creation, are almost impossible to be integrated into patterns. However, although patterns vary, Arghezian poetic arts reveal some directions of interpretation that may be considered general categories: the poetic art of direct expression of the self/ binary self, the poetic arts of analogy, childish poetic art.

The first category of poetic arts is represented by the most texts as: *Portrait, Epitaph, Epigraph, Tough Craving/ Dor dur, The Evening Pray, Lost Leaves, To the Unknown Poet* etc. They reveal the artist's appreciation for the creation seen as a product of the divine grace and the hard work. The poetic arts of analogy present the different aspects of the self: sculptor (*Affront*), stonemason (*Hallelujah!*), weaver (*A Song*), healer (*The Healer*), God's apprentice (*Graces*). Childish poetic art reveals the innocence of the creator and his own diminished universe (*Preface, Abc*).

The semantic field of book-creation is expressed by its content, through nominal terms, as *verses, word, soul, story, verb, language*, or through art tools: *quill, pin, whistle, inkpot, hand, sheet* etc.

Two of the most representative texts for Arghezian poetic arts are *Testament* and *Flowers of the mold*. Each of them reveals an original manner of writing being in an antithetical relation one to the other.

The lyrical discourse which paratextually induces the idea of an end, not of a beginning of a volume is a profession of faith based on the isotopic symbol of the book/creation, of the art emanated from the experience of previous generations. The *Flowers of the mold, flowers of the evil*, changes palinodic and paradoxical the Arghezian manner of writing.

The lexeme *testament* has a metaphoric connotation related to the text and its denotation has cultural implications as allusions to biblical Testaments. The poetic collocation of *flowers of the mold* changes the rhetorical pattern, from a lyric language of confession to a materialized epic one and it represents a symbolic oxymoronic metaphor. The collocation comprises the book, as an implicit term, the two texts being *"the metalinguistic definition of the poetic act understood as a coincidentia oppositorum: <<letters of fire>> (natural vocabulary) and <<letters forged ahead>> (artificial speech)"* (Artagea, 2009: 27).

In incipit, both poems contain semic, metalinguistic recurrence of the writing named *book*, a metonymical symbol, expressed by the vast semantic fields. In *Testament*, the corresponding terms/ collocations are: *a bridge ladder, the first charter, fitting words, pen, inkpot, language with cattle callings, verses, icons, a violin, letters of fire, letters forged ahead*. In *Flowers of the mold,* the isotopy is based on the formulations: *flowers of mold, it* (the verses), *verses*.

Arghezi finds out a way of cooperation between the two antithetic aesthetic categories, beauty and ugliness. The last category involves the first one as there is a piece of latent beauty in every negative thing. Referring to the Arghezian art of ugliness, Nicolae Balotă affirms that *"there is not here [...] the poetry of a damned poet. But it is the poetry of conviction through poetry"* (Balotă, 1993: 203)

The conviction through poetry is obvious from the first text of the *Fitting Words* to the whole creation. *Testament* is conceived as an addressed monologue to the son, metonymic term for the lecturer. It brings together aesthetic productions of the *angelic nail*, expressing beauty in which ugliness is just suggested, at lexical level through un-poetic words. The subjective discourse is also based on the poetic aspects of the self: *I/ me/ my/ we/ us/ our*, the father/ *the son, the princess/ the Lord*. The hypostatize of the self in *Flowers of the mold* reveals a single instance of a creator of his

BDD-A14498 © 2014 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:55:11 UTC)

own universe, convicted to solitude, compelled to use only *the nails* of his *left hand*. The symbol of the *left hand* reveals the opposition in relation to sacrum, the descent in the profane generating thanatic lyrics.

Both poems are remarkable especially at the lexico-semantic level (metasemems). As a dominant sememe, *creation* is expressed by different semes. Metaphors and symbolic metaphors/symbols are recurrent. In *Testament* are collected: objects of peasant existence through which the text takes a solemn tone (*first charter/ hrisov, sheep's fur coats/ sarici, bones/ oseminte*), work tools or elements of rural existence (*the spud, the furrow, oxen, cattle*), symbolic of the spiritual life utensils (*a pen, an inkpot*), semes related to poetry metaphors/ symbols (*fitting words, the cradle, verses and icons, rosebuds, wreaths of flowers, honey, the ashes of the dead people, a God of stone, High boundary, a violin, wounds, mildews, slinging mud, priceless beauties, the fruit of pain and sorrow, letters of fire, letters forged ahead*). To these terms of space are added: metaphors of the wildly chaotic space (*creeks, deep ravines*) which express hard work, the gradual accumulation of effort and place the creation-book, a spiritual value, on a evolutionary ladder, metaphors of open spaces (*stone, High boundary, with two worlds at the edges, the summit, the forest, the branch*), and also metaphors of closed spaces (*the sofa bed*).

Metasememes interfere with metalogism when the metaphors turning into symbols; the symbol *"appears as a seme that sends to the object through another seme."* (Coteanu, 1993: 203), so it contains both terms (semes). Book isotopy is based on the symbols and symbolic metaphors culminating with a metaphoric definition of poetry: "*Letters of fire and letters forged ahead/ Are paired together into my book/ Like an assembly of soldering iron and pliers."*

In *Flowers of the mold* the new type of semic association or the resemantisation of the discourse occurs through innovation at the level of the image. The recurring lexeme of the book is expressed by the range extended semantics with metaphors and symbols: *hand, nail, claw, bull, lion, eagle, Luke, Mark, John*. The determinants of the lexeme *verse* are also symbols: *verses without year* (timeless lines), *verses of the pit* (death symbol), *verses for thirst* (verses without divine inspiration), *and for hunger/ And ashes.* (translations of human degradation).

One of the Arghezian baroque stilemes, the oxymoron has key positions in both poems. Turning evil into a value of right represents a cathartic valences of art: "*The spilled venom I've turned to honey/ Letting its strength flow into my thoughts."* The *Flowers of mold* oxymoron associates the unifying symbol of the universal elements – *flower* – to an element from the evil semantic sphere; poetry becomes a malignant eject of a creator sentenced to aloneness.

The epithet is also often found in Arghezian lyrics as a form of tinted significance: *empty blockout, unaided, rebellious evening, deep ravines, fitting words, spilled venom, a stumbling goat, slinging mud, priceless beauties, slowly and punitive, obscure darkness.*

The Arghezian preference for the metaphors and symbols reduces the frequency of the other figures of speech. For example, the comparison is rare and it just completes the meanings of the symbols.

Both poetic arts, *Testament* and *Flowers of Mold*, are based on the spiritual meanings of a creator-self who has devoted all his life to create: "*The poet identifies himself with the carver who celebrates that initial act of creation to devise living beings. Kneading words as the potter [...] his dream is the dream of the great creators: to give life to the Glorious Body."* (Balotă, op. cit.: 607)

BDD-A14498 © 2014 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:55:11 UTC)

Bibliography

Arghezi, Tudor, *Ars poetica*, Editura Dacia, Cluj –Napoca, 1974
Artagea, Andreea M., *Tudor Arghezi. Victoria retoricii*, Editura Aius Printed, Craiova, 2009
Balotă, Nicolae, *Tudor Arghezi*, în *Arte poetice ale secolului XX*, Editura Minerva, București, 1976
Balotă, Nicolae, *Opera lui Tudor Arghezi*, Editura EuroPress, București, 2008
Beșteliu, Marin, *Tudor Arghezi-poet religios*, Editura Cartea Românească, București, 1999
Boldea, I., *Memory, Identity and Intercultural Communication*, Edizioni Nuova Cultura, Roma, 2012
Coteanu, Ion, *Gramatica de bază a limbii române*, Editura Gramond, București, 1993
Eco, Umberto, *Lector in fabula*, Editura Univers, București, 1991
Friedrich, Hugo, *Structura liricii moderne*, Editura pentru Literatură Universală, București, 1969
George, Alexandru, *Marele Alpha*, Editura Cartea Românescă, București, 2005
Grupul µ, *Retorica poeziei*, Editura Univers, București, 1997
Lovinescu, Eugen, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane*, volumul II, Editura Minerva, București,1981
Arghezi, Tudor, „Poezia", 1933, *Progresul social*, nr. 7
Arghezi, Tudor, „Ce este poezia?", *Argeș*, 1966, nr 6
Toma, Elena, „Probleme ale structurii textului: metatextul", Limba Română, 1986, XXIX, nr. 5

Electronic Resources

http://anenduringromantic.wordpress.com/2013/01/17/baudelaire-and-the-ugliness-of-beauty-an-addendum-auden-on-poetry, accesat 1 mai 2014
http://www.alternativaonline.ca/Tezesiantiteze1406.htm, accesat în 1 mai 2014
http ://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/us, accesat în 2 mai 2014
http://thebonfireofhumanities.wordpress.com, acesat în 10 mai 2014

BDD-A14498 © 2014 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:55:11 UTC)