A "DECADENT" POET ON THE AESTHETIC "PLANTATIONS" OF THE NEW POETRY

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Abstract:
The Lost Generation marks a major moment in the development of contemporary Romanian poetry. The process they start and develop in a rebellious manner in the fifth decade is not limited to theoretical or ideological positions. Advocating the change in poetry, they propose something in return: their own poetry. Another kind of poetry, in the spirit of a new vision and of a new aesthetic, based, paradoxically, on the refusal of aesthetics. The young authors' literary offer is remarkable and shows the way to a new kind of poetry, to a new aesthetic canon. Constant Tonegaru is one of the most important poetic voices of this movement, who crystallizes a particular poetic aesthetics. Escapism, fantasy, irony and self-irony, bohemian attitudes, intelligence, in an aesthetic context that brings together post-avant-garde, surrealist, neo-modernist and textualist elements, is what defines his aesthetic identity.

Keywords:
Aesthetic canon, escapism, irony, post-avant-garde, surrealism, neo-modernism, textualism

"Look, this is Tonegaru, a decadent poet; / he writes about ghosts, constellations and other stupid things / without it being known that he failed the Romanian language exam." This is how the poet, through the presumed voice of the others ("of course it will have been once said"), defines himself in a poem (*The Public Garden*). It is self-irony, showing how he is perceived by the public. The framework designed by the poem suggests the type of the world in which the young poet is acting and the level of its aesthetic reception. A well-settled society, governed by rules, customs and rituals, in public and private life, with solid aesthetic tastes, following an undeniable tradition of reception, with firm boundaries between "value" and "non-value" or "questionable value". In terms of reception, this public shares the official aesthetic canon, promoted by textbooks and by the traditional criticism, in the line of an artistic common sense that

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synchronizes with the ethical and axiological norms of the whole existence. It is a world that very likely enjoys consecrated poetry, created by means of its traditional objects, enshrined in a glorious poetic tradition, with ”sacred” themes and motifs from the heritage of “classic” poetry. Remaining in the area of presupposition, this public might have likedbetter such poets as Vlahuţă, Dimitrie Anghel, Șt. O. Iosif, Goga, Topârceanu, Pillat, Voiculescu, Crainic, Minulescu, Blaga and less or not at all some others, such as Bacovia, Arghezi, Barbu, not to mention the avant-garde or surrealist poets. It is to be expected that, according to the logic of this kind of reception, the authors of the new generation such as Stelaru, Geo Dumitrescu, Caraion, Corlaciu, Tonegaru are unlikely to satisfy the literary public or live up to their expectations in any respect. They write entirely different poetry, which the readers trained in the old poets’ school could hardly call *poetry*. They don’t even name it as such actually, as Tonegaru informs us in the above verses. In their view, his themes are unusual, bizarre, non-poetical things, which have nothing to do with real poetry. So much the more can we imagine (see the caricature-like episode of the indignant reception in G. Calinescu's *The Wedding Book*) the reaction that the public would have had when meeting with Arghezi’s *Flowers of Mould*, in the poems which substitute great, sublime, metaphysical themes with objects from vermicular environments. Or, what does Tonegaru write about? By no means about flowers, angels, romantic loves, moonlight meditations, the status of the genius in the world, the search for the ideal etc., major topics of traditional poetry. Tonegaru, as it happens with the other members of this generation and of this literary movement, writes about “minor” things, related to everyday existence, to the immediate reality, to the world around them with all its facets, un-poeticby definition. He also writes about dissatisfactions, frustrations and revolts, about aspirations and desires to change the world, and, being unable to change it as he would like, to make it the image of his thinking, facing the future, he looks for other worlds, real or imagined, in distant geographies, in long forgotten histories or beyond the terrestrial boundaries, in the universe, amongst the stars. Not only are the topics tackled by the poet of a minor nature, but his manner of writing is also different, very different actually. After all, under the auspices of genius and inspiration, poetry can be made out of almost anything, or at least this is the lesson of the great poets. But with Tonegaru – and with his other fellow poets, too – there are not such things as elevation of ideas and style,

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complexity of meditation, aesthetic perfection, profoundness of the poetic reception. Essentially, there is no thrill, no shaking, no emotion. Instead, his poetry talks about snowy tram tracks, about school-girls walking "like partridges in dappled aprons" and talking about the death of Rudolf Valentino, about a poet killed by a horse, about a love affair with a mulatto woman in a hotel in Braila, about the sleeping sickness in Congo and erotic fantasies with black virgins, about taverns, alcohol and drunkenness, about hashish, loose women and sex, about naked bodies, breasts and thighs, about his continuous running away from reality, to distant lands, to the moon, into the cosmos and other phantasmagoria. In a word, a *decadent poet*, in relation with the glorious tradition of great poetry.

In his only volume of poetry published during his lifetime, *Plantations* (1945), Constant Tonegaru, an emblematic poet of the war generation, crystallizes his own aesthetics, whose defining elements are irony and self-irony, parody, escapism, a bohemian attitude, poetic deconstruction. Tonegaru's irony is milder than the often malignant one of Geo Dumitrescu. His escapism, a way of detachment from the immediate world and of projection of the self into parallel worlds, temporal, geographical and spiritual, takes him to exotic places, in a terrestrial real or invented geography, or to revolute times, in a regression of history, as an alternative to the present. Instead, the alcoholic bohemian attitude of Dimitrie Stelaru or Ben. Corlaciu, other "escapists" of the lost generation, is associated with running out of the world and people either to sordid and marginal spaces, such as the tavern, or to utopian spaces, terrestrial or cosmic.

Reading Tonegaru's poems, the impression is that any existential situation, any sequence of life opens a gate to other worlds and a way of escape to other spaces. Almost each of his poems is a window looking onto parallel worlds, through which the spirit escapes. The flight from reality is an escape from the world, from the greyness of daily life, a way of affirming the freedom of the spirit, a freedom experienced in dramatic and spectacular situations, in strange histories or in distant lands. Fleeing the world is, at the same time, a flight from the self in the position of being in a world anchored in a flat existence, under the rule of hazard and absurdity, in which the individual, constrained by limits, lives under the threat of ontological mediocrity and alienation. The alternative is offered by freedom through poetic escape. His poems create scenarios of transcending the immediate reality and of sliding, through imagination and dreaming, into other

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universes, second order realities born out of the desire of the free affirmation of the self. The poet lives in parallel worlds, transiting dimensions or proving a kind of ubiquity between space and time frames. His transgression of the trivial reality of the everyday existence is made, by the instruments of poetic fantasy, into exotic geographical spaces, terrestrial or cosmic, but also in history, in other times, more or less remote from the present. The poet proves a "prolific fantasy" and "a real sense of migration." (Simion 1978: 103) The poetry of escape, cultivated by several poets of the lost generation, covers, in its area of deployment, time, space, the universe. Stelaru, Corlaciu, Geo Dumitrescu, the *Albatros* poets in general, often escape from reality in such poetic creations, into utopian, historical or geographical imaginings, projecting themselves into original scenarios, into lyrical interpretations specific to each of them, which include irony, parody, rebellion, sarcasm, social and moral criticism, spiritual, messianic aspirations or historically contextualized prophetic accents. With Tonegaru, escapism is "a form of protest too, but it is also the poet's pleasure to create an imaginary geography", which "participates in a broader poetic mythology." (Simion 1978: 103)

Reading a newspaper article on the tram, on a rainy evening, about the battles in the Ukraine (it is the World War II), transposes the poet into another time and another identity: he sees himself as Hetman Mazeppa, hunted by wolves in the Nogai Steppe, a rebel and an anarchist, who had planned to overthrow the tsar. Such common things as the tram journey, the rain, the newspaper, create the dream state of escape from a mediocre reality and the ordinary rhythm of existence. The rain reverie ends broken by the sounding horns reporting a tram accident, together with the return to the grey present. It is worth notinghow the tram enters poetry, along with other trivial, poetically inglorious, objects, actually with all the objects of everyday reality, of immediate existence. Through Tonegaru and its congeners, poetry is approaching reality, descends into existence, into the terrestrial dimension of life, from the transcendental heavens in which it had been isolated. It is true, the reform had begun, sometime before, with Urmuz and the avant-garde poets and continued with the surrealists. The generation of poets of the 40s sets out programmatically to bring poetry close toreal life in all its aspects, hypostases and metamorphoses, from the sordid to the sublime, from the vermicular to the metaphysical. The poetry of this decade does not easily agree with such poetic objects, the effect of an anti-aesthetic

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aesthetics, as opposed to the serious, canonical perspective of poetry. We are talking, however, of poetry of aesthetic versatility, covering various stylistic formulas, sensitive to the new and permeable to innovation. Indeed, traditionalist poetry, indebted to an outmoded aesthetic or to the official one, subordinated to the ideological dogmas (it is a time of crisis, when even literature falls victim to ideology), can be put into contrast with the new poetry. With all its diversity and creativity, the great poetry of the time still remains isolated in a transcendent space of aestheticism, albeit not ostentatious, and not always bookish, in which primacy is given to style. The tram is not therefore an appropriate object in the poetry of Arghezi, Blaga, Barbu, and much less in that of Voiculescu, Pillat or Nichifor Crainic. With Bacovia is not inconceivable, and with the avant-garde or surrealist poets it can be a natural presence alongside with other "unnatural" things from the surrealist register of automatic dictation. So here is how by the banal fact of the tram ride, Tonegaru expresses much more than a simple journey, namely an on-going revolution in poetry, developed by the young authors of a generation, among whomwe find Geo Dumitrescu, Ion Caraion, Ben Corlaciu, Sergiu Filerot, Victor Torynopol, Alexandru Lungu and others. *The Rain* thus suggests more than the anecdote itself, while the escape from reality into history, with the schizoid projection into an anarchic hypostasis, is a sign of the change that had begun, much earlier, in poetry, a change under way also due to the contribution of Tonegaru's poetry, an important poet of the generation. Here is an excerpt from the pluvial-historical revelation: "The things I'm talking about were really happening in sixteenhundredandsomething; / I used to be a nihilist at the time and I was plotting to overthrow the tsar / but the cold penetrating me deeper than the blade of an Arab sword / I would abandon the subversive thoughts to conspire in the samovar. // In my eyes time had ceased to pass / and from far away wolves were still howling in the Nogai Steppe - / then here are horns, O, God, how many horns; / of course a banal tram accident had happened." (*The Rain*) [1]

[1] "Lucrurile despre care vorbesc se petreceau aievea pe la omieșasesuteșiceva; / pe atunci eram nihilist și complotam să răstorn pe țar / dar gerul pătrunzându-mă mai adânc decât lama unei săbii arabe / abandonam gândurile subversive să conspire în samovar. // În privirea mea timpul încetase să mai treacă / iar de departe lupii se mai auzeau încă urlând pe stepa Nogai – / pe urmă iată claxoane, Doamne câte claxoane; / firește se întâmplase un accident banal de tramvai." (*Ploaia*).

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The poet roams the earth, covering exotic geographies in spectacular lyrical scenarios: in a poem, we find him as an adventurer on the Colorado and in Brazil, on the quay of Bahia, exploring in his mind the tropical forest or among mestizos, in the middle of a riot (*Oswald's Ghost*). In another poem, a meditation on death, around the Biblical Salome, herself a chimera who brings about death, the poet is "Tonegaru, an alchemist of the platinum lights": "Salome was dancing smoothly on large prairies. / Death is an endless sleep, a long dream; / – Despotic from the Moon the deputation comes silently, / beyond thighs, up to her chest the sad herbs reach her." (*Salome*) [2] Elsewhere, he is dreaming of himself in the North, in the world of aurora borealis, where time is "cold and rough like a slate plate", with peoplewho, as if in a surrealist painting, because of the cold, "persist in the habit of falling suddenly everywhere", while the poet writes poems and makes "the calligraphy of fjords". The poem contains spectacular images of intense poetic concentration, subsumed to a surrealist imagism, with frozen thoughts metamorphosed into mandarins, with exotic birds and overlapping souls ascending to heaven: "I was amazed especially at the heroic fall of the sad people / as if they were proclaiming the Independence of Cold with their arms raised / to the parapet of the aurora borealis where tangerines were blossoming / out of their thoughts in very bizarre frozen forms. // On its heights ibis birds were exhibiting red and sacred plumages / above this descriptive poem with Pharaohs in exile; / on a needle whose pin is Polaris itself / their souls even now are docilely overlapping to constellations." (*The Harbour Stuck in the North*). [3] Attracted by distances, the poet's thoughts fly towards the equator, where, this time, pestilence and the dead sprinkled with lime prevail, with birds pecking their eyes. The fugitive spirit passes through meridians and transgresses vast spaces to bays with jellyfish, to agave bushes and particolored parrots, with a geographical accolade to Manila, finally returning to a world dominated by winter and death, with

[2] "Salomeea dănțuia lin pe întinse prerii. / Moartea e un somn nesfârșit, un vis lung; / – Despotică dinspre Lună solia îi vine tăcut, / dincolo de pulpe, până la piept ierburile triste o ajung." (*Salomeea*).

[3] "Mă mira în deosebi căderea eroică a oamenilor triști / ca și cum proclamau Independența de Frig cu brațele ridicate / spre parapetul aurorii boreale unde înfloreau mandarini / din gândurile lor în forme cât se poate de bizar congelate. // Pe înălțimele lui păsări ibis etalau penaje roșii și sacre / deasupra poemului acesta descriptiv cu faraoni în exil; / pe un ac a cărui gămălie este însăși Steaua Polară / sufletele lor și acum se suprapun spre constelații docil." (*Portul înfipt la Nord*).

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"the clouds hung as curtains after the show", in which the coffins seem "some crates with smuggled alcohol". An image of surrealist essence, with Urmuz-like reflexes, at the same time, concludes this macabre exotic journey: "Here, / a lame man was spinning like a screw / and continuously walking on the streets / he was scattering his whole body." (*Open Letter*) [4]. Visual images are frequent in Tonegaru's poetry, a visual poetry *par excellence*, defined by an imagism of surrealist essence. In obscure revelations, the poet is dreaming of himself as an explorer of the seas, haunted by spirits and demons, in delusional scenarios with pirates, invaded by "mud creatures". The poem can be read as an allegory of seeking the meaning of being, in a world under the threat of darkness. (*Sea Fight*)

In the wintry dull world, in a banal domestic setting, in which love itself is threatened by routine and platitude, the poet dreams he is Christopher Columbus, who, following the snowy tram lines, reconstructs the way of the fleet overseas to the new world. The frosted glass turns into a map which invites him to escape to Terra Nova, to exotic, luxurious lands, to tropical coasts and distant oceans, to realms inhabited by red skins performing ritual dances. The return from the reverie brings him to the medium of the romance, reduced to the automatic execution of the actors' roles, in an existential antithesis opposing the placid, decorative woman and the poet who takes refuge from the real world, without substance and challenges, into the space of the dream, on the way of escaping from reality: "– You are in our literary circle. Timeless. An infallible spectrum; / there is nothing pulsating in you and the liquor from arteries / to the ending of a savant cruise through unsolved mysteries / by the blue of the ocean evaporated to other spheres. // My love with a neutral smile and carmine long legs; / she turned pale as the old piano keys; / I offered her the last drop of the liquor carefully preserved / to melancholically revolve around her brown sex another year." (*The Mistress with a Neutral Smile*). [5]

[4] "Aici, / un șchiop se învârtea ca un șurup / și tot mergând așa pe străzi / își risipea întregul trup." (*Scrisoare deschisă*).

[5] "– Ești din cenaclul nostru. Fără vârstă. Un spectru infailibil; / în tine nimic nu mai pulsează și licoarea din artere / la un final de croazieră savantă prin enigme nerezolvate / cu albastrul oceanului s-a evaporat spre alte sfere. // Dragostea mea cu zâmbet neutral și pulpe carmine prelungi; / se ofili cum prind paloare clapele învechite de pian; / eu din licoare i-am oferit ultima picătură păstrată atent / să gravitez melancolic în jurul sexului ei brun încă un an." (*Iubita cu surâs neutral*).

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The poet translates himself into bookish scenarios, migrating from identity to identity, each in another frame and other circumstances, as in a kind of poetic metempsychosis, without limits in time or space. Tonegaru is "a poet of metamorphosis", defined by "instability", by "the flight from a certain identity", by "the pleasure of wearing several masks". (Simion 1978: 102) Generally, the mechanism is the same. A picture, a story, an idea, a representation, a state, put into the context of an overflowing poetic fantasy, constitutes the trigger of the migration of the ego. It is a movement of return, a regression transcending time and space, the effect of a doubling tendency, of a projection into another identity, of a temptation of otherness which the poet experiences at high intensities. The contemplation of an old illustration, for example, takes him into the past, in the days of Marco Polo, on the Baltic coast, to the romance lived with the Princess Clara. A poetic dream, of course, a utopian love designed in a time of myth and legend, triggered by the imagination in front of an image, as a gateway to other dimensions. Tonegaru's romance takes shape within the frame of a medieval painting: "Naked, / both of us on bear furs / were listening to the mercenaries who in a buzzing hive / on the crenels were testing bending over the bows / the new strings of wolf guts. / The princess was melting the ice on the stained glasses with her breasts / for us to examine in the light of the aurora borealis / with the reindeer leather-bound folder with plants / the herbs brought by Marco Polo." (*The Last from 1200*). [6] Anecdotally speaking, Marco Polo had not yet been born in 1200, and his legendary journey to China was to come about 70 years later (see Piru). The dream of the journey through time, a fabulous poetic return, expresses the desire for another world, shrouded in the aura of myth. The poet is fascinated by the past and cannot find his place in a world in which he seems to live by hazard and out of which he wants to escape at every opportunity, which he himself creates. Viewed in the light of this penchant for regression, he is a misfit, an adventurer, an explorer of time and space, in search of better worlds. The return is dramatic and generates delusions, the return to an alien world, to a space and time of existential waste, with the intense nostalgia of the lost love: "I haven't suspected that lateness came along, / that I am the

[6] "Goi, / amândoi pe blănuri de urs / ascultam mercenarii ce-n zumzet de stup / pe creneluri încercau aplecați peste arcuri / coardele noi de mațe de lup. / Prințesa topea cu sânii gheața de pe vitralii / să cercetăm la lumina aurorii boreale / cu dosarul cu plante legat în piele de ren / ierburile aduse de Marco Polo." (*Ultimul de la 1200*).

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only one from 1200 among robots and horsepower; / ah! There is a herbarium inside of me, / a black, bitter alga silently grew up in my orbits. / On unknown roads / I'm wandering dressed in the rags of the reindeer skin – / Only the lines of my destiny intersecting in my palm / are crossing the silence with the roar of a train collision." (Idem) [7]

In the state of grace of the dreamy contemplation and flight, the poet has the revelation that the stars have died of flu and remained shaped in two corners like the Italian policemen's cap, and, in this area of universal extinction, the moon floats like a "huge bald head", among "withered stars", the destination of romantic reveries ("on which the dreamers cling the calligraphy of romanticism on the sky"). It is also an opportunity for political reflection, an irony in Swift's sarcastic style, who projects onto the lunar space the utopian (dystopian) dream of an "ideal" world: "Maybe in the Moon there are sincere republics because there the dead are living" (*General Allegory*). A parodic dreaminess, revealing a caricatured view of the universe, in the style of Geo Dumitrescu, who, among other things, would see a terrible "adventure in the sky", with the moon as a "lunar brothel". Elsewhere, under the escapist stimulus of alcohol, amazed by the rise of the stars in the sky, the poet feels tempted to shoot in the moon with a "Manlincher rifle" (sic) (*Less alcohol*). Burning with fever and with the sleeping sickness, he is dreaming himself in the Congo, where he is drinking rum and has bizarre visions, mixing erotic sequences and cosmic visions. This time, the poet adjusts his shooting at the stars, hunting the angels who are placidly contemplating the theatre of human existence: "The stars were according to the atlas a multiple Greek alphabet / in which I randomly shot the last Dum-Dum bullets / because through the large-sized stars the angels were watching indifferently / the drama theatrically unfolding at a metallic end of the road." (*The Tse-Tse Fly*). [8]

Back to the terrestrial dimension, the poet flees the present again, wandering through history and ironically dreaming himself as a poet (he

[7] "N-am bănuit că târziul a venit, / că sânt singurul de la 1200 printre roboți și caii-putere; / ah! în mine se află un ierbar, / o algă neagră, amară, mi-a crescut în orbite în tăcere. / Pe drumuri necunoscute / rătăcesc îmbrăcat în sdrențele pielei de ren – / Numai liniile destinului ce mi se-ntretaie în palmă / străbat liniștea cu vuietul unei ciocniri de tren." (idem)

[8] "Aștrii erau după atlas un multiplu alfabet grecesc / în care am tras la întâmplare ultimele gloanțe Dum-Dum / fiindcă prin stelele de întâia mărime îngerii priveau indiferent / cum drama se desfășura teatral la un capăt metalic de drum." (*Musca Tse-Tse*).

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doubts, however: "I do not know if I am a sufficiently great poet"), in the Grévin Museum, next to the wax figures of Marat and Camille Desmoulins. Escaping from the trap of the shadows and of uncertain glory, a being throbbing with life, torn by conflicting passions, he continues his journey through space and time and projects his geographical chimeras on women's body: "Nevertheless I have a simple heart desperately beating / to enter the women with hot and raw bosom / on which I draw with ink a blue sea / imagining that the nipples are the atolls in the South." (*Song on Paper*). [9] Further on, he dreams that he is a condottiere who "writes calligraphically" his epitaph to the courtesans in a romantic-parodic attitude: "<I am the condottiere Tonegaru without a sword; / I have blunted it sharpening my last pencil / to write how I threw a grenade at poetry>." (idem) [10] The last verse projects a new light on Tonegaru's poetry, providing a hermeneutical key, an interpretation perspective as a sequence of poetic art. The verse opens a window to the vision and aesthetics of this poetry. By his lyrical act, the poet blows poetry up into the air, in other words, aims at deconstructing the traditional canonical poetry, anchored within the limits of the aestheticized perspective. The Tonegarian poetic act is thus a deconstructive one, in the sense of the deconstruction of aesthetic poetry, by the relativizing and demythologising of the consecrated, sterile, themes, devoid of meaning, and their "degradation" from the bookish status to one devoid of the metaphysical glory of poetry. Throwing at poetry with a grenade means obliterating the poetic vision and the text. The challenge taken by the poet and his generation fellows is restructuring poetry on the basis of a new vision and a new aesthetics. An anti-aesthetic aesthetics based on the refusal of aesthetics. Throwing the grenade can be simply translated as bringing poetry to normality. From this point of view, this is the key verse of Tonegaru's poetics.

In the metempsychosis chain which pervades his whole poetry, the poet dreams of himself, in a flash of his escapist reveries, as a hero of the French Revolution, a contemporary of Danton, he identifies himself with Peter Schlemihl (Chamisso's hero, who sold his shadow to the Devil), is a

[9] "Totuși am o inimă simplă ce bate cu desperare / să intre în femeile cu sânul fierbinte și crud / pe care desenez cu cerneală o mare albastră / închipuindu-mi că sfârcurile sânt atolii din Sud." (*Cântec pe hârtie*).

[10] "<Sânt condotierul Tonegaru fără spadă; / mi-am tocit-o ascuțindu-mi ultimul creion / să scriu cum am dat în poezie cu o grenadă>." (idem).

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martyr pierced by bullets, rising to the stars in a balloon, in a cosmic procession of the martyrs of the Revolution to a large celestial congregation. It's a surrealist image, with souls floating through the cosmos to the Moon (see above: "there the dead are living"), as if to a Doomsday of heroes, a macabre, grand, fairof universal dimensions, yet circulated, in the subtext, by a subversive, deconstructive and parodic air: "To the dead star with deserted huts / under the pallor of the hemlock flowers / the veterans of the revolution were coming flimsy / to the Grand Transparent Congress on a raft / slowly driven by the wind from the south. / From their way the comets were picking them in their laps / after some long disputes / with my hands as wide as spades / calling them in a prayer gesture / united as two unskilful tools." (*Document*). [11] In successive hypostases of the same poetic scenario, the poet is an activist against dehumanization, for the humanity of man and for freedom, with a transparent polemic allusion directed to the present, "then – not now", to a world that will know the terror of a totalitarian regime, an idealist and a justice-maker under the sign of utopia, "Knight of the <Don Quixote's Lance> Order". Here are the lyrics: "However I launched this manifesto: / Citizens, / barricade the one way road / and remove the robot man / and sign myself, / I, / Knight of the <Don Quixote's Lance> Order. / Then – not now, / I was greeting with the cap our blood on flares / illuminating the flags of victory." (idem) [12] The poet thus launches "a pathetic (and ironic) manifesto against levelling civilization". (Simion 1978: 103) The same poetic fragment is interpreted, in a complementary sense, as a "vague allusion to the danger of the establishment of absolutism and forced labour". (Piru 1968: 169) In another poem, the adventurous poet, who passes through an inexhaustible series of metamorphoses, sees himself in the position of an agent of Western civilization, an armed combatant in the cynical and dehumanizing offensive of war and colonialism, who kills, in China, an opponent, and then, overwhelmed by remorse, is haunted by

[11]"Spre astrul mort cu magazii pustii / sub paloarea florilor de cucută / veteranii revoluției veneau străvezii / la Marele Congres Transparent pe câte-o plută / purtată lent de vântul dinspre miază-zi. / Din drumul lor cometele îi culegeau în poale / la urma unor lungi dispute / cu mâinile mele late cât nişte casmale / ce-i chemau cu gest de rugăciune / lipite ca două unelte nepricepute." (*Document*).

[12]"Totuşi am lansat acest manifest: / Cetăţeni, / baricadaţi drumul cu sens unic / şi demontaţi omul robot / şi însumi semnez, / Eu, / cavaler al ordinului <lancea lui Don Quijote>. / Atunci – nu acum, / salutam cu boneta sângele nostru de pe facle / luminând stindardele victoriei."

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the image of the "yellow man". The poem can be read as a criticism of the struggle for domination and supremacy, of the absurd that threatens human existence, of the dehumanization of man: "Somewhere in Southern China I have pierced a yellow man with the bayonet; / on the pagoda steps the blood was flowing from him smelling rotten of iodine / drowning in a spot beyond the stone walls Asia / where we were bringing civilization armoured in Ford trucks. // I tell you: <Here I met death with transparent wings of fog / casting lots with a pirate's skull passing white as an enamel; / I give my word the poet Constant Tonegaru saw Death / hovering over the leafless tea plantations >." (*ASolemn Moment*) [13]

At another time, he dreams of the Sapphire Sea, on which the Ghost Ship is floating, watched by an "exiled star", "from sumptuous constellations, glamour and fame", and is haunted by the Demon of Blood, a metaphor with possible erotic implications, in an obscure dreamlike fair in which chimeric images, the silver moon, violet constellations, algae meadows, aurora visions mingle, in the infinity of the universe. (*The Demon of Blood*) The desire of escape and adventure finds a support and incentive in hashish, which conjures in the free universe of fantasy erotic phantasms or transfigures the reality of the romance in an exotic experience, of an augmented sensuality. The lover, who comes from the Arctic lands, is an embodiment of pure instinctiveness and genuine eroticism, of the poet who frantically lives his fantasies and hallucinations under the power of his inner, self-induced freedom. Looking at things simply, the poem can be the transfiguration, in the terms of Tonegaru's poetry, of a common erotic episode, among those usually cultivated by the poet. Under the irrepressible impulse of fantasy, stimulated by the drug, he projects a new light on it and clothes in an exotic and bookish aura, giving it poetic meanings in the key of the eroticism and exoticism falling within the aesthetic definition of his poetry. Generally speaking, the poet has a taste for exotic erotic experiences, which take him out of the threatening routine of life, for mulattos, medieval princesses, African virgins, creoles, hirsute women, senoritas etc. Here is a

[13] "Undeva în China Meridională am străpuns un om galben cu baioneta; / pe trepte de pagodă sângele curgea din el mirosind putred a iod / înnecând într-o pată dincolo de zidurile de piatră Asia / în care aduceam civilizația blindați în camioane Ford. // Vă spun: <Aici am întâlnit Moartea cu aripi străvezii de ceață / cum arunca sorții cu țeasta unui pirat trecând albă ca un emai; / pe cuvânt de cinste poetul Constant Tonegaru a văzut Moartea / plutind deasupra plantațiilor desfrunzite de ceai>." (*Moment solemn*).

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significant sequence: "As usual a hairy woman from the arctic land arrives / mysteriously looking like a rune, / she ardently strangles me soon / with a brown ivy hug. // My kiss from far, far away / on her pointy breasts will ghostly pass; / to legs like a snail slipping / on her thighs will let its wet, cold dream." (*The Hirsute Woman*) [14] Hashish brings him other phantasms too: the Yellow Sea, with tiled fish swimming through the space, behind the Moon (idem).

Eros is a dimension of Tonegaru's poetry, Eros in a carnal representation, in a particular key of materiality and sensuality. From this thematic perspective, he can be seen as an erotic poet, one who brings a specific vision of Eros, a rough, material, carnal one, but not naturalistic, between sexuality and textuality, associating in inspired and provocative combinations the image and the suggestion. In this formula, the effects of poetry, through the power of images and suggestions, offered to the open reading and interpretation, are often stronger than the nude text, which shifts into the territory of erotic naturalism. Tonegaru's eroticism must be associated with the poet's escapist experiences, being, in itself, a way of escape from the dull reality of an existence without challenges, which the poet lives under the threat of ontological dissatisfaction.

Viewed in the context of the lost generation, Tonegaru is a nonconformistic poet, intelligent and ironic, with a "cordial irony" (Simion 1978: 103), who writes from the standpoint of a stoic philosopher, often cynical, blasé, knowing the limits of the world and the mediocrity of existence. We cannot talk in his case about the kinds of idiosyncrasy, frustration and rebellion experimented with by Stelaru or Corlaciu, for instance, who are rebellious, turbulent, clamorous spirits, for whom bohemian attitudes and escapism are ways of protest, resistance and survival in a world that rejects them. Tonegaru faces the world through irony, humour, sometimes sarcasm, well dosed and well concealed in intelligent and spectacular poetic scenarios. There is, however, beyond all these, a tragic dimension of Tonegaru's existence and poetry. Behind the irony and the propensity for escapism, there is a clear, lucid conscience that sees existence and human condition in their very essence. From this position, he

[14] "Obișnuit sosește o păroasă din arctic / misterioasă la aspect ca o rună, / înfiebântată mă sugrumă îndată / cu îmbrățișare de iederă brună. // Sărutul meu de departe, de foarte departe / pe sânii ei țuguiați fantomatic va trece; / spre pulpe lunecând ca un melc / pe coapse își va lăsa visul umed și rece." (*Hirsuta*).

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is "a metronome of <the common event>, of the most trivial daily gestures, of hungry and rough love, of indolent death, of aggressive hunger, of the war invading life, of the joy of living, in an unsophisticated manner, existence in its nudity and of giving it a shake." (Mincu 2007: 495)

Escapism is a constant theme and attitude, a coordinate of Tonegaru's poetry. The poet seeks, invents alternatives and ways of access to the worlds he discovers as possibilities of refuge. The poetic evasion is the way by which he has access to his chimeric revelations, located in remote histories or in exotic places. The author's poetic imaginary is structured according to such elements as: "the adventurous, the exotic strangeness, the bizarre, the fantastic", the poet being defined by "the great vivacity of the spirit". (Micu 2000: 336) Speaking of the new poetry, for whom the poets of the fifth decade militate, the novelty of his poems does not necessarily consist in the escape to planetary geographies and exotic realms. The journeys across the world are a theme of poetry at all times from Homer onwards. What is new is the way in which Tonegaru sees these escapes in space and time, the nature and meaning of evasion, out of which he makes the central theme of his poetry. The poet creates parallel worlds, in contrast with the real one. The geography of Tonegaru's poetry includes the North Pole, Brazil, Africa, Asia, Manila etc., an entire geographic atlas (Piru 1968: 168), but it also goes beyond the boundaries of the planet and extends into space, among the stars, forming a map of poetic inspiration, a fabulous geography. What is essentially important is that everything is doubled by irony and parody in the subtextdimension of the poetical discourse. Thepoet is likely to amuse himself with the lyrical scenarios he creates. He thus suggests that these escapes in search for existential alternatives are, at the same time, free experiences, adventures generated by an existence without horizons, imaginative and exotic challenges to the reader, traditional or not. In the context of the poet's escapist vocation, the attitude of theatrical exteriorization, the strategy of playing diverse and spectacular roles participate in the psychological and aesthetic formula of Tonegaru's poetry. "The taste for imaginary journeys, in particular, and for a delicious braggadocio, almost in Minulescu's manner, gives the specific note of the poetry published by Tonegaru immediately after the last war." (Micu 2000: 336)

Everything in Tonegaru's poetry is traversed by a subversive current, by an ironic and self-ironic air, that turns upon his poetry and upon poetry in general, but also upon his own self. It is a way of self-bantering, of seeing

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poetry as a play or as an experiment, or even to make poetry into play. At the same time, a surrealist air permeates his poetry, more benign, indeed, than surrealism itself, the territory of radical, extreme literary experiments. Tonegaru assimilated the experiences of the poetic avant-garde and surrealism, and melts them in his poetry, distilled, purified, emancipated from radicalism and from the experimental character. One should not overlook the textualist tendency of his poems, which seem to be growing by virtue of a self-generating process, to develop semantically from the matter of the text itself, which creates meanings beyond the areas of referentiality, in a sphere of ambiguity and often obscurity. Thus the elements of post-avant-garde, surrealism and neo-modernism, together with the opening towards textualism, the tendency to poetic deconstruction, at conceptual, aesthetic and stylistic levels, the irony, the parody, the playful air, the critical spirit, the humour, they all fall within the particular aesthetic formula of Tonegaru's poetry.

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