# "*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***..." [1]

"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 naştere."[2]

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***."[3]

"*Văzută din afară*
*lumea şi locuitorii de pe punctul albastru*
*pot fi caracterizați prin aceea că* ***sunt***
*şi pot stârni ciudatul sentiment*
*că au tendința de* ***a fi***..."[4]

[1] „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.

[2] „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.

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

[4] "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.

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***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 fiinţării noastre, -***
***şi pricina fiinţării mele***
***tot una sunt***."[5]

"*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 mişcare.

***El*** face să nu mai fie
***ceea ce este***
şi să apară în ***fiinţă***
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***..." [7]

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]

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[5] "***The reason why we are*** / and ***the reason why I am*** / ***are one***." (our underlining), *Colinda colindelor* / The Carol of Carols.

[6] „***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.

[7] "The pain of ***being*** is gently pressing me" (our underlining), *Noaptea metalelor* / The Night of Metals.

[8] Ion Pop, *Nichita Stănescu. Spaţiul şi măştile poeziei* / Nichita Stănescu. The Space and the Masks of Poetry, Editura Albatros, Bucureşti, 1980, p.166

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The poet believes that "the essence of poetry does not depend on words… For the language of poetry is nothing else but a vehicle…"[10]; "... 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 şi cuvintele mele*
*erau lipite, pentru că*
*locul din care se năşteau*
*era unul şi acelaşi pentru amândoi.*
*Zeu cu două trupuri şi fără cap,*
*astfel alergam tropăind*
*din patru picioare,*
*cu patru mâini rezemându-ne de ziduri.*

*Trecea foarte repede râul, deşi*
*numai el exista.*

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

*La mijloc fără culoare,*
*la margine fără sunet.*"[13]

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[9] "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.

[10] Nichita Stănescu, *Amintiri din present* / Memories from the Present, Editura Sport-Turism, Bucureşti, 1985, p. 21

[11] Idem, *op. cit*., p. 193.

[12] *Ibidem*, p. 195.

[13] *"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.*", *Inscripție nedescifrată* / Undeciphered Inscription.

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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...*"[14]

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** şi **fi**. E vorba despre fericire, pe care noi am vrea să o **suntem**, dar ea nu ne **este**.*"[15]

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***.[17]

"*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.*"[19]

***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***"[20]

***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***

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[14] *Ibidem*, p. 184

[15] *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.*"

[16] Nichita Stănescu, *op. cit*., p. 190-191.

[17] André Scrima, *Antropologia apofatică*, ediție îngrijită de Vlad Alexandrescu,, Editura Humanitas, Bucureşti, 2005, p.105.

[18] Nichita Stănescu, *op. cit*., p. 190-191.

[19] *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.*"

[20] "The word **I am**, the word **you are**", *Sincopă* / Syncope, in the vol. *Oul şi sfera*

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*.....*
***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 aş 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 - *ființa* - , which is different of to be - *ființare*). 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, şi nu mă mai pedepsi*
*şi mie nu mă mai redă-mă* !"[22]

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

"*Acum, chiar acum, când citeşti, tu, cititorule*,
*cuvintele acestea*
***viața mea curge în fața ta***
***şi 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****".*[25]

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[21] "… ***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.

[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.

[23] "***Born from a word*** I carry my ***meaning*** / through a divine desert." *Confundare* / Mixup, our underlining, in the vol. *Oul şi sfera*.

[24] "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.

[25] Nichita Stănescu, *op. cit*., p. 197, our underlining.

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*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 dezobişnuire de*
*felul meu de-****a fi****,*
*dar nu la părăsire,*
ce-o ține-n dânsul ***verbul lui a fi***.
*M-oi dezobişnui* şi eu *de trup,*
***născând un Făt-frumos al verbelor***..."[26]

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***".[27]

[26] "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.

[27] *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*** *şi, inversând realul, să ne reculegem asupra acelui* "***la început a fost cuvântul***"

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