TUDOR ARGHEZI. THE DRAMA OF THE POETICAL KNOWLEDGE

Iulian Boldea
Prof., PhD, "Petru Maior" University of Tîrgu Mureș

Abstract: For Arghezi a space of the metaphysical hypothesis, as stated before, does not exist or of onirical and evocative nostalgias. The poets' dreams are actually real nightmares, hallucinations, conflicting states between the lucidity of the consciousness and the fears of the unknown. Arghezi's drama is that of a courageous, restless and lucid consciousness, although always contradicted by a mundane reality. At the origin of the argumentative, nonconformist attitude of the poet, resides an overuse of the perceptions, on a general basis of understanding. The horrible sight and the exaggerated sensitivity equally fuel up the poet's art, but also the pamphleteer's. The satirical writer's laughter always triggers the moment when he captures the ridicule or the grotesque, borderline states of the human condition.

Keywords: poetry, Arghezi, knowledge, drama, human condition

Arghezi's literary activity takes place for more than seven decades, in a variety of unprecedented media forms. Therefore, Arghezi has alternated poetry with journalism, he founded magazines and newspapers, and he wrote pamphlets, novels and short stories. It can be said that Arghezi was a unique and uncomfortable personality, even if he collaborated with numerous publications, he didn't actually adhered to them emotionally and intellectually. Just like Al. Macedonski before, Arghezi naturally goes through more schools and literary ages; so that we can say that he was connected with the literary movements of his epoch, without any of them being able to clearly claim him. Arghezi's debut was under the sign of the Parnassian influence, without neglecting several themes, places belonging to the Semănătorişti, but cultivated in a period when the orientation was dissolving (*Archaeology, Welfare, Writing on a country house*). The poems with which Arghezi draws for the first time attention are those from the cycle *Black agate*, a unitary poetical cycle, which does not excel through originality, from which the author will publish several poems in the volume. The inspiration and the tone belong to Baudelaire, existing also echoes from Eminescu, echoes that will remain until late in the poet's elegiac-sentimental creation. In these beginning verses are felt the social mutiny tonalities (*Evening prayer*). Arghezi consolidates in this first stage a wider reputation of a pamphleteer of a high verbal violence and of a total lack of respect towards the personalities of the epoch. It can be said that, in Macedonski's case, the man caused a lot of damage to the work of art. After the appearance of his own newspaper, *Parrot's notes*, the writer plenary states his double vocation: that of a poet and of a lyrical pamphleteer. The drama of the poet, resides at Arghezi, precisely in the very losing of the consciousness, of the self, of the individual, but also from the absence of an authentic way of communicating with the others. Although the general tone of Arghezi's lyricism is rather dark, the poet tries the experience of a lucid vision, ignoring the self illusion or the delusion. There is, on the other hand, radicalism in the problematic of understanding in Arghezi's poetry, which turns out to be his intellectual sub layer. The failure of this continuous effort of inner clarifying represents the drama that gives a unique tension to the poems and to the humanising of the lyrical self. The poet doesn't try at all to break free from the earthly inferno, to escape into the transcendental. For Arghezi a space of the metaphysical hypothesis, as stated before, does not exist or of onirical and evocative nostalgias. The poets' dreams are actually real nightmares, hallucinations, conflicting states between the lucidity of the consciousness and the fears of the unknown.

BDD-A23124 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:53:07 UTC)

Arghezi's drama is that of a courageous, restless and lucid consciousness, although always contradicted by a mundane reality. At the origin of the argumentative, nonconformist attitude of the poet, resides an overuse of the perceptions, on a general basis of understanding. The horrible sight and the exaggerated sensitivity equally fuel up the poet's art, but also the pamphleteer's. The satirical writer's laughter always triggers the moment when he captures the ridicule or the grotesque, borderline states of the human condition.

The general attitude of the writer is an opposing one, of passionate relentlessness that sometimes exceeds its object. The poet is, therefore, at the antipode of the classical artist, he does not try to stop the impulses that come from his inner inferno. There are also oasis of calm beauty within Arghezi's universe, so that his heavenly space is the ideal one, that of simple nature, of the children, of the bugs and of the animals. The thinking, that the poet calls, in a verse, "poison" intervenes in this heavenly universe with its doubts and fears, so that this inherited paradise is only an ideal. In the context of his literary work, the poet is situated in a significant contrast with the regressive, nostalgic style of the spirits who are looking for "the poeticism" in intellectual or rational formulas. In 1961, Tudor Vianu shows that "Arghezi's historical role was to get over Eminescu's poems, still present in the work of many contemporary poets of his generation. The renewal of the Romanian lyricism, its taking away from the paths set by the influence of the *Star's* poet, is the most important consequence made by its affirmation from the second decade of our century". The volume *The right words* allows the approximation of the temporary levels, starting with the Parnassian and symbolist accents (*The mystical cup, Caligula)* to Eminescu's thoughts in the erotic elegies from *Black agate*. The cycle of the *Psalms* constitutes the dramatic nucleon of Arghezi's poetical vision. Man and God appear to be disputing without the possibility of finding a solution, filled with the fervour of the search and of identification. A profoundly religious poet, Arghezi assumes a paradox condition: of not accepting the belief, realising the impossibility of the living and of the authentic religious feeling outside the general belief.

The cosmic and the miniature become familiar dimensions of this lyricism that hesitate between the sweetness of childhood and the infernal toughness of the social visions. From the purity of the erotic mystery, to the metaphysical turmoil when facing death – the poet's consciousness has a winding way. Arghezi's poetical discourse manifests itself through the direct confession or through the most unexpected metaphorical structures, so that Arghezi's poetry is nothing like any tradition neither by syntax nor by style. *Mildew flowers* (1931) express the experience of detention, the poems can also be read in a symbolical register, as the waiting room for death, description of a conflicting universe, where the primal human instincts abandon the masks of the conventions and reveal the nakedness of desperation.

The enclosed space (the monastery hut, the prison cell) transmits the fear of the aggression and the tendency to escape. The humanity of the *Mildew flowers* is attacked, and the common state of the lyrical self is that of a nightmare made up of monstrous figurations. In these poems the fantastic of the vision sets free grotesques figures, the human being replaced with the beastlike. The gallery of representatives is sublime: hallucinating persons, androgens, instable, people tortured by the idea of a sin imagine a world tormented by dreams, murders and wild instincts. Arghezi's eros is no longer melancholy similar to Eminescu's poems, but physiological fever, biblical temptation and nightmare of the senses (*Streche, Rada, Tinca*). The woman is, here, the embodiment of demon like, as seen in the loners' visions. In the big picture scenes from these volumes (*Dinner, Morning, The Dead, Prisons, The Convoy*) the idea of domination is raised to the dimensions of the human condition itself. The fantastic tendency is also present here, where life behind bars offers situations of a savouring reality, narrated, with a movement of the epic that hesitates between the pure picturesque and the suggestion of the chimera (*Chickens, Let the drum kill him*). Coming down from a modern hell, *Mildew flowers* also symbolises to set free an imaginary

BDD-A23124 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:53:07 UTC)

demon. With his contrasting imagination, the renegade from *Mildew flowers* returns to the familiar universe from *Little book for the evening* (1935) volume that can be considered a "book of the hours" written in a retraced, calm tone. The poetical accents purify here in a bucolical atmosphere similar to Vergiliu's, the poet finding again the pure emotion of a paradise like space, identified in the familiar universe of the domestic world, of living amongst plants and animals.

The ceremony of love is transcribed in tones of ode, these "evening verses" being the expression of a naive, decorative and sort of minor drawing. The verses from *Horas* amplify this aphoristic point of view, of a graceful and fragile game. The game like perspective enhances, in *Horas* with a grotesque-pamphleteer perspective, a sign of the presence of the lucid moralist and of the observant of the social evil. "The horas" are also games imagined by the poet for his children, but under the game like-childish aspect of the verses, we can notice even the sarcastic accents, which cover the pamphlet or the Aesopian fable. The same ambiguity (suavity/grotesque) is a characteristic of his prose, from the novels *The eyes of Jesus' Mother, The cemetery Good-spread, Lina.* An important feature of Arghezi's poetry is the richness of the thematic register, as well as the diversity of formulas and lyrical methods. Arghezi is a protean poet, whose expressions always take on new faces, sometimes conflicting.

A fundamental theme of Arghezi's lyricism is that of the big, existential questions about man, represented by the *philosophical and moral* poem. This theme appears in all Arghezi's volumes, from *The right words* (1927) to the volume *The night* (1967). The best known poems that work with this theme are the *Psalms*. The notion of *psalms* goes through major changes, because Arghezi's psalms don't have an exclusive religious character and they do not resume to the attitude of praising the divine being. *The Psalms* are a philosophical poem where the poet asks himself a number of questions related to the meaning and the condition of man in the universe. The poet seems to be talking to a Heaven where God does not reside; he addresses an absence of the divinity. Faith combines with contestation. *The psalms* show an attitude of doubt and search, but also a dramatic situation, one of crisis of communication between man and divine. The poet's suffering comes from the fact that, not having a religious certainty, in his soul the unbearable consciousness of the loneliness that the human being has in the universe comes to life: "I am so lonely, God and across / Lonely tree forgotten in the field..." This absence of the Creator calls, with the help of long-lasting harmonies, for the presence of the creator. By not considering Heaven sacred any more, Arghezi sacralises simultaneously life, the human beings, the plants and the animals. Arghezi's paradise must be looked for on Earth, among the most humble beings, and not in bare Heaven, where nobody lives. In the poet's imagination, Heaven is "caught in nails" and "padlocks". God is the Lord, the Father, the Dad but also Somebody, Someone, Nobody, Who knows who. For Arghezi, outside of life, that represents the ultimate good of man, there is no precipice, no death. Arghezi's philosophical lyricism is the place for dramatic questions, with no answer, of inner struggles of the poet with himself, of sentimental tortures, but also of the joy of living. Another important theme of Arghezi's poetry is love. In the beginning poems (*Melancholy, Autumn, Breaking up, Lost bones*), Arghezi cultivates a sort of erotic elegy inspired from Eminescu, where meetings and separations of the lovers asre provoqued in an autumn monotonous atmosphere.

The volume which contains the most erotic poems is *Little book for the evening* from 1935. In this volume's poems, the poet imagines the terrestrial space like a heavenly space where the lovers live in complete harmony with the world, with the creatures. Arghezi's paradise is a religious and pagan one, the result of a cosmic vision. Love is regarded by the poet simultaneously in its spirituality and its material form. In this universe, the woman appears like a graceful deity who communicates directly with the creatures of the world. In

BDD-A23124 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:53:07 UTC)

the poem *The Bride* the calling in nature is done by the man who says words of a fascinating ritual. Arghezi cherishes the feminine beauty (that of the "velvet eyes", "eyelids' hem" etc.). Arghezi's love knows all the variety of attitudes, from the chaste, honest love to the firing sensuality. In many poems, love is presented like an illness, like an unreachable desire (the motive of the flying lover). The first volume representative for the social theme is *Mildew flowers*. In these poems, Arghezi becomes the echo of the "aesthetics of the ugly", widening the sphere of artistic expressivity to the areas considered so far anaesthetic.

Mildew flowers represent, as previously mentioned, the biggest work to "recover" the ugly from the Romanian literature. Jargon, abject, delicate, suave words intermingle in an extremely expressive poetic language. The mentioned environment is that of the slumber, of prison, presented in different visions: grotesque and bitter or ironic. The aesthetic recovery of this degraded existential environment has to be understood also as a moral recovery, so that, just like there is an aesthetic beauty in the "ugly" sides of the existence, in the same way there is a morality in the degradation and in the filthiness. Man is retrievable, no matter how low he got – here is one of the sub textual ideas of *Mildew flowers.* Arghezi's social lyricism is much more comprehensive.

In the poem *Testament*, for instance, "the book" is regarded as the inheritance of a long tradition, the tradition of the many, from whose language "with advice for cattle" the poet manages to find "the right words". In *1907 – Landscapes,* Arghezi gathers more paintings that make out a narration in verses of different moments and characters of the 1907 mutiny. The atmosphere of the mutiny is made by a summation of various procedures (the satire, the political pamphlet, the elegy and the description etc.). The social poem the most important in length and intentions is *Singing to the man*, a sociologic poem where the author traces the origin and the evolution of man on Earth, "through ages, decades and millenniums". The birth and the evolution of the social man allow the poet to use verses where he praises innate talents of man and his aspiration to reason. *The theme of the game* (of the seed and of the crumb) is one of the most meaningful in the entire creation of Arghezi. The game is a central motive in Arghezi's work. In the verses and the prose from *Weeds, Tokens, The book with toys, What do you have against me, wind?* , Arghezi imagines a miniature, childish universe, filled with delicate creatures. The world from these verses seems to be copying the real one, at a smaller scale. By shrinking things even the parody of serious elements, Arghezi simulates the dimensions of the concrete reality, revealing new meanings. Besides the visionary, fantasist poet there is also a craftsman poet, who stands out through an inexhaustible linguistic mastery, by unpredictable associations, by an unexpected, own syntax.

Unlike the other modern poets, where the word is a *sign* related to the intellect, Arghezi is a sensual person with a primitive voluptuousness; ready to use the touch, the sight and the other senses, to enjoy of the mater's concreteness: "The word is like the rock or it is soft like the snail. They attack like the wasps or they comfort you like the cold, they squash you like the sponge or they caress you like the rosy dew". Arghezi's originality of the poem does not result from the statistical frequency of archaisms and regionalisms, but from their rhythm. The chanting from the *Welfare,* the metaphorical monologue from the *Spiritual*, the symbolic-allegoric form from *Linger***,** all these take their sap almost entirely from the popular lexical basis. Balancing wondering between earth and transcendently, Arghezi is not per say a poet of nature, although this dimension is present. Therefore, *the mountain*, *the eagles*, *the sea*, *the tree* have a symbolic significance, just like *forever*, *the light*, *the mystery*. The picturesque images, the chromatic nuances are oriented towards refinement and tenderness. Similarly to Blaga and Sadoveanu, the biblical savour tends to create an atmosphere of a genuine myth. Just like Eminescu, Arghezi invents some verbal forms, when he adds to the feeling a necessary nuance ("the ink pot", "barren Golgota", "boyish girl", "the afternoons"

BDD-A23124 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:53:07 UTC)

etc.). Arghezi does not have an equal concerning the metaphoric language. Demigod, creator of possible worlds, with the help of the *created word*, the poet tends to measure with *the firry word* of nature. Poet of fundamental questions concerning the existence, moralist and creator involved in the social problems of his time, Arghezi enrols in the highest trajectory of the Romanian verse. His creation represents a decisive contribution to the development and renewal of the Romanian lyricism, both by problematic and the artistic means used.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Nicolae Balotă, *Opera lui Tudor Arghezi*, Editura Eminescu, Bucureşti, 1979;
Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu, *Tudor Arghezi*, ESPLA, Bucureşti, 1960;
Alexandru George, *Marele Alpha*, Editura Cartea Românească, Bucureşti, 1970;
Gheorghe Grigurcu, *De la Mihai Eminescu la Nicolae Labiş*, Editura Minerva, Bucureşti, 1989;
Nicolae Manolescu, *Metamorfozele poeziei*, Editura Timpul, Reşiţa, 1996;
Nicolae Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române*, Editura Paralela 45, Piteşti, 2008;
Dumitru Micu, *Arghezi*, Editura Institutului Cultural Roman, Bucureşti, 2004;
I. Negoiţescu, *Istoria literaturii române*, Editura. Minerva, Bucureşti, 1991;
Ion Pop, *Recapitulări*, Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică, Bucureşti, 1995.

Acknowledgement: This paper was supported by the National Research Council-CNCS, Project PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0841, Contract Nr. 220/31.10.2011, title Crossing Borders: Insights into the Cultural and Intellectual History of Transylvania (1848-1948)/Dincolo de frontiere: aspecte ale istoriei culturale si intelectuale a Transilvaniei (1848-1948)/ Cercetarea pentru aceasta lucrare a fost finantata de catre Consiliul Naţional al Cercetării Ştiinţifice (CNCS), Proiect PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0841, Contract Nr. 220/31.10.2011, cu titlul Crossing Borders: Insights into the Cultural and Intellectual History of Transylvania (1848-1948)/Dincolo de frontiere: aspecte ale istoriei culturale si intelectuale a Transilvaniei (1848-1948).

BDD-A23124 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:53:07 UTC)