Life and End in the Poem *The life of the world*

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Le chroniqueur du XII-ème siècle, Miron Costin propose par le poème philosofique ***La vie du monde*** *la première vision eschatologique de la litérrature roumaine. Le destin tragic de la condition humaine déclanche la méditation sur l'éphémérité et l'irréversibilité du temps, mais la perspective du final du poème dèveloppe les sentiments de l'instabilité et de la pauvreté. Bref, le poème proclame les valeurs de la vie dans l'épreuve de l'homme de dépasser sa propre condition par ses accomplissements.*

Mots-clés: poème, condition humaine, l'irréversibilité du temps.

Through the philosophical poem *The life of the world*, written between the years 1671-1673, Miron Costin is part of a series of Romanian literature creators. His work has a didactic character which arranges the lyrical theme of the slippery fate (*fortuna labilis*) summarized in the motto in Eclesiast part 1: *the depletion of depletions and everything is a depetion*.

Even from the preface the author confesses his intention to demonstrate the poetic possibilities of the Romanian language. He tries to raise it at the rank of language of culture. *Poftind ... să vază că poate fi şi în limba noastră acest feliu de scrisoare ce să chiamă stihuri* Costin realizes in a humanist manner a process of emancipation and sanctification of "the vulgar language"[1].

In the Preface created like a short discourse about versification the historian exposes the conditions that verses must usually fulfill: the measure - *Stihul iaste nu ca alta scrisoare deslegată, ci iaste legată de silave cu număr... Deci de aceste silave, stihurile ceaste ce sriu într-această cărţulie au 13 silave, iară se pot şi în 9 şi în 7 a face, şi sînt într-alte chipuri stihuri la alte limbi, cum iaste elineasca şi letineasca*; the rhyme *...deci are şi altă datorie stihul: cuvintele ceale <de la> sfîrşitul stihului a douauă stihuri să se întocmească într-un chip, pe o slovă să se sfîrşească, cum iaste: aţa-viaţa; frunte-munte; spume-lume";* pointing out the hiatus *"unde se vor prileji trei slove, cărora le zicem unoglasnice - adică «de un glas» (vocală) - cum iaste a, e, i, o, acestea de se vor prileji trei alăturea, să lipsească una, cum iaste: nice o avuţie. Aice caută că o iaste între e şi între a, deci*

[1] G. Ivaşcu, *Istoria literaturii române*, vol. I, Editura Ştiinţifică, Bucureşti, 1969, p. 184. Autorul îl include, de aceea, într-o „Pleiadă românească", pornind de la afirmaţiile din *Predoslovie*, interpretate ca „Defense et illustration".

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o piere şi vei citi: nice-avuţie i proci. Alta: pentru acestă slovă î, când va avea înaintea sa iar o slovă unoglasnică, se întunecă, cum veţi găsi între stihuri un stih într-acesta chip: mari împăraţi şi vestiţi, care nu-l citi: mari împăraţi...ci: mar' împăraţi.

For Miron Costin poetry is a flamboyant discourse which arranges historical or religious themes (*lucrurile şi laudile împăraţilor, a crailor, a domnilor şi începăturile ţărilor şi a împărăţiei lor*), (*cântările sfinţii biserici, stihirile, canonile, antifoane, cu carile, ca cu nişte pietri scumpe şi flori neveştejite, au împodobit biserica*). That is why poetry called verses is never seen as believable fiction but as flamboyant truth.

Costin does not use the notion of poet. For him Homer is a historian[2] and Ovidiu[3] is a mentor, which means that according to a literary conception he places himself under the medieval or byzantine sign of the domination of rethorics to the disadvantage of poetics, illustrating a vision which characterizes the Romanian culture before Budai-Deleanu[4].

The mentioning of the names Homer and Vergiliu, the eulogizing of Antiquity which is "full of spirit", portrays, as Al Dutu was stating - a reconsideration of an esthetically dominant culture - the ancient one, from which the medieval culture had gone far away as it had imposed the things to which the words referred (*res non verba*) to the disadvantage of "the mysterious glowing of verbal splendor"[5].

Alexandru Piru (1970 I, 134 and the following) and Dumitru Velciu have underlined the fact that all the motives from which the philosophy of the poem *The life of the world* is inspired come from the medieval religious literature and from old Latin poets. "The spirit of the poem is a Christian one , the poem being a typical tearfulness on the subject of universal death, without any individualistic accent"[6].

The whole theme of Miron Costtin's work is concentrated in this first original work, the poem *The life of the world*[7], a meditation which updates in a sentimental shape the biblical lamento on the theme *vanitas-vanitatum* and the related motives (*ubi sunt*, *the wheel of fortune*), frequent in Middle Age literature[8].

The theme of this poem has a meditative nature and it contains the conclusion to which the human being always arrives. Reaching maturity the human being starts

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[2] M. Costin, *Opere*, ediţie critică cu un studiu introductiv, note, comentarii şi variante, indice, glosar de P.P. Panaitescu, E.S.P.L.A, Bucureşti, 1958, p. 318.

[3] *Ibidem*, p. 248, 265.

[4] I. Em. Petrescu, *Configuraţii*, Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, p. 49.

[5] Al. Duţu, *Coordonate ale culturii româneşti în secolul XVIII* (1700 -1821), *Studii şi texte*, E.P.L., Bucureşti, 1968, p. 40.

[6] N. Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române*, Editura Fundaţiei Culturale Române, Bucureşti, 1997, p. 30.

[7] Compus înainte de 1673, conform cronologiei operei stabilită de P. P. Panaitescu, a cărui ediţie o utilizăm în continuare: M. Costin, *Opere*, ed. critică, studiu introductiv, note, comentarii, variante, indice şi glosar de..., E.S.P.L.A., Bucureşti, 1958; *Viiaţa lumii*, p. 318-323.

[8] I. Em. Petrescu, *op. cit*., p. 49.

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to slide towards "the great pass", which is getting closer: "The emptiness of emptiness... everything is empty". From medieval Latin the literary motive passed on to the romantic literatures, gaining a delicate interpretation in the lyrical work of François Villon at the beginning of the XVth century in *Ballade des dames de jadis*. The same motive appears in the reflections of a Moldavian diac who was ending a lordish act for the church Hangul, from January 14th 1628: "Am văzut şi am cunoscut că nici o mărire nu este stătătoare pe pământ care să nu împărtăşească morţii, ce ca o floare se veştejeşte şi ca umbra trece şi se strică tot omul"[9].

In Italian literature this theme was transmitted until late in the religious lyrical area of the XVIth century, reaching, through the Polish students, the literature which was well known to the Moldavian historian.

The structure of the poem implies the arrangement of two ancient themes. The first one is *fugit irreparabile tempus* and then comes *fortuna labilis*. In the first part of the writing the theme of time passing irreversibly, disappearing forever, with no chance to come back, is developed in a manner which stresses true expressive valencies. Miron Costin perceives the art of writing the same way that ancient people did and very similarly to the people of the Middle Age, as a craft.

In Miron Costin's work the literary theme *fortuna labilis*, just like in the case of Neagoe Basarab has *The Bible* as a source, more precisely Ioan Hrisostom, *The Ecleziast* and *David's Psalms*. Between the biblical sources and Costin's work there intervene Latin and Medieval poets, *The History of Alexander The Great* by Quintus Curtius *and Istoriile Râmului,* the collection of stories and jokes from the XIIth and the XIVth century, *Gesta Romanorum cum aplicationibus moralisatis ac mysticis*[10]. The poem is marked by ancient classicism with some ideas from Ovidiu - *Triste* and *Pontice;* Horaţiu - *Ad Postumum, Ode;* Vergiliu- *Eneida.*

As a whole the work of this historian imposes a classical ideal through his solid admiration for Antiquity, about which he says it is "full of spirit and wise in its writings". Miron Costin became familiar with the classical writers at the Polish School of Humanism. The poem *The life of the world* contains all the motives present in the similar creations from Western literature.

The life of the world begins with a generally-human meditation which underlines the fragility of human life. *A lumii cîntu cu jale cumplită viiaţă,/ Cu griji şi primejdii, cum ieste şi aţa*. The comparison of life with the fragile thread is borrowed from ancient literature and at a certain moment in time it will also pass on to the folklore creations.

A simple comparison between the verses of the Latin poet Ovidiu and Miron Costin's creation, emphasizes the similarity of structures, motives and the reference to the same fundamental experiences. *Omnia sunt hominum tenui pendentia filo - A lumii cântu cu jale cumplita viaţă/ Cu griji şi cu primejdii cum este şi aţa/ Pre*

[9] Apud V. A. Urechia, *Schiţe de istoria literaturii române*, Bucureşti, 1885, p. 127.

[10] Al. Piru, *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până la 1830*, Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică, Bucureşti, 1977, p. 107.

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subţire şi-n scurtă vreme trăitoare/ O, lume hicleană, lume înşălătoare. The verses which underline the traps of human existence complete the introduction and anticipate an enumeration of comparisons on the theme of *fugit irreparabile tempus*.

The fate of the unhappy poet offers one more example of instability, underlining the motives of Costin's sadness. The exile of the latin poet had produced a strong impression even from Renaissance. The comparison of life appears in the first verses combined with the enumeration of the famous men who died under "the wheel of fortune". Here we can also find a motive from Ioan Hrisostom. The motive of the wheel of fortune and the one of instability are the main elements which make up Miron Costin's poem.

From a stylistic point of view the writers of the time frequently use the comparison. The beginning part of the poem is a harmonious combination of comparisons. The intensity of these expressions is gradual. The drama of the poem is amplified as well as the emotions. The series starts with the comparison which makes the abstract notion of time accessible, through elements connected to the daily life. Time passes in an irreparable way, nothing can turn it back. The units of measurement for time are present through concrete elements. *Fug vremile ca umbra*, like a summer shadow which gradually disappears, *nici o poarta /A le opri nu poate*. The poetic idea catches the passing of the time, but the diverse and expressive images try to propose an imagistic variety. The idea is suggested through the always new repetitions; the writer wants to increase the effects: *Trec toate prăvălite/ Lucrurile lumii şi mai mult cumplite*. There is a resemblance between the passing of time and the flowing water which is realized in a plastic manner: *ca apa în cursul său cum nu să opréşte,/ Aşa cursul al lumii nu să contenéşte*. Later on in the poem the stylistic registry changes once again. The elements of the passing of time become implicitly expressed and imply a series of rethorical interrogations: *Fum şi umbră sîntu toate, visuri şi părére./ Ce nu petréce lumea şi-n ce nu-i cădére?/ Spuma mării şi nor suptu cer trecătoriu./ Ce e în lume să nu aibă nume muritoriu?*

In the poem Costin meditates about the irreversible passing of time and about the shortness of life: *Trec zilele ca umbra; ca umbra de vară,/ Céle ce trec nu mai vin, nici se-ntorcŭ iară/ Tréce veacul desfrânatul, trec ani cu roată/ Fug vremile ca umbra şi nici o poartă/ A le opri nu poate*.

The succession of comparisons belonging to the author is completed through the introduction of some new elements in order to modulate the poetic discourse. The author's comparisons are replaced with some new ones, on the same theme: *Zice David, prorocul: Viiaţa ieste floare,/ Nu trăieşte, ce îndată ieste trecătoare./ Viierme sîntu eu, şi nu om, tot acela strigă*. These new elements strengthen the authority of the meditation and amplify it.

The poem continues with a new expressive valence. At the beginning we find a series of acknowledgements on the fragility of the human condition. Then the verses go on with an enumeration of exclamations and rethorical interrogations.

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Their presence is necessary to accentuate and anticipate the categorical conclusion: nothing is eternal, everything conforms to the passing of time. *O, hicleană, în toate vremi cum să nu să plîngă/ Toate cîte-s pre tine! Ce hălăduieşte/ Neprăvălit, strămutat? Ce nu stăruieşte/ Spre căderе de tine? Tu cu vréme toate/ Primeneşti şi nimica să stea în véci nu poate*.

The tone of the lyrical discourse becomes solemn, the presented elements gain high valences. Here we do not find any concrete elements and in the centre of the appocaliptical image we have the universe itself, God's supreme creation. Even these dimentions of the microuniverse submit to the end. *Ceriul faptu de Dumnezeu cu putére mare,/ Minunată zidire, şi el fîrşit are./ Şi voi, lumini de aur, soarile si luna,/ Întuneca-veţi lumini, veţi da gios cununa*. The end cannot be avoided and God's creations submit to the passing of time. In the end everything will die and disappear. *Voi, stéle iscusite, ceriului podoba,/ Vă aşteaptă groaznică trîmbiţă şi doba*.

The universal structure "the sky as lights of gold ……the sun and the moon as good stars", is not portrayed by Costin as an image of the divine harmony, on the contrary it is imagined as a masque of death, and the poet's voice forsees the apocalyptical agony of the elements. In Costin's poem the world is born only to live its cyclic agony, fulfilling the cruel game of death, being betrayed by the deceiving wheel of fortune. From the point of view of its theme and its poetic figures of speech, *The life of the world* the first literate poem in Romanian literature, remains in the spheres of lyrical creations specific to the European literature of the Middle Age.

In Costin's vision the process of swoop of the worlds betrays the spherical structure of the universe on the basis of a cosmologic model that broke from the image of the harmonious and cyclic cosmos of Platon's conception, getting close to the cosmologic vision where the worlds are born and die, and the cosmic substance is no longer incorruptible, it also submits to the erosion power of time[11].

The temporality of the poem is a tragic one. It has a meaning of fall and also an ironical sense - *Sub vreme stăm*, *badjocura*, *amăgire*, *hiclenie*, *înşelătorie*.

A first group of literary motives takes shape: temporality – fall – divine irony, which mainly has as a basis the biblical motives, frequently arranged in the literature of the Middle Age. The poem has another secondary group of motives. It will prevail in *Letopiseţul Tării Moldovei* and it is present in the verses *Fârşitul cine caută vine la mărire,/ Fapta nesocotită aduce perire*.

In Costin's poem time becomes the measure of the agony of the worlds, empires and human generations and so the poem is conceived like a continuous, cyclic, universal movement. Time becomes the *wife* of the world, or the *wife* of luck and it is not seen as a time of birth or blossom. Time is the measure of the *fall* or *swoop*. The poet's worlds have only one movement, the flow, the collapse towards death: *Fug vremile ca umbra şi nici o poartă/ A le opri nu poate. Trec toate prăvălite/.../*

[11] I. Em. Petrescu, *Eminescu. Modele cosmologice şi viziune poetică*, Editura Minerva, Bucureşti, 1978, p. 52.

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Ce nu petrece lumea şi-n ce nu-i cădere?/ .../ Ce hălăduieşte/ Neprăvălit, strămutat? Ce nu stăruieşte/ Spre cădere de tine? .../ ... Vremea toate le surpe .../... Aşa jocureşte/ Împărăţiile lumii, aşa prăvăleşte/ ... / Aşa ne poartă lumea, aşa amăgeşte/ Aşa înşală, surpă şi batjocoreşte.

In the spirit of the medieval and particularly Latin poets, Costin meditates upon the stormy image of the world. He is touched by a state of deep pessimism, announcing the break of the entire world: *Nu-i nimica să stea în veaci, toate treace lumea,/ Toate-s nestătătoare, toate-s nişte spume*.

Above everything only God does not submit to the cyclic image of death: *Tu, părinte al tuturor, Doamne şi împărate,/ Singur numai covîrşeşti vremi nemăsurate./ Célelalte cu vrémea toate să să treacă./ Sîngur ai dat vremilor toate să petreacă./ Suptu vréme stăm, cu vréme ne mutăm viiaţa,/ Umblăm după a lumii înşelătoare faţă*.

With these remarks, ends the first part of the poem, which arranges the theme of the passing of time *fugit irreparabile tempus*, which continues in the next verses, but introducing the motive *ubi sunt.* Up to here the poem is exclusively dedicated to the theme of the irreparable passing of time.

With the same thematic and expressive value, in stressing the pessimism, the poet develops the concern in *fortuna labilis*. The ephemeral condition of the human being is underlined in these two aspects: - time which passes irreversibly and fate which in an instant can turn upside down everything that time erodes through its passing.

The image of luck (taken from *Ecleziast*, but well inserted at the level of the text, in meditation), is the one which completes the picture of humanity: luck has only hands and wings which make its flounder be in vain, but it does not have legs, because it never stays in one place, it cannot fix itself, it cannot evade, just for one moment from its changing condition. Just like Ovidiu's work, the work of the Romanian historian transmits a state of deep sadness: *Vrémea lumii soţie şi norocul alta/ El a sui, el a surpa, iarăşi gata./ Norocului zicem noi ce-s lucruri pre voie/ Sau primejdii, cîndu ne vin, sau cîte o nevoie./ Norocului i-au pus nume cei bătrîni din lume,/ Elu-i cela ce pre multi cu amar să afume./ El suie, el coboară, el viiaţa rumpe,/ Cu soţiia sa, vrémea, toatele surpe./ Norocul la un loc nu stă, într-un ceas schimbă pasul./ Anii nu potu aduce ce aduce ceasul./ Numai mîini şi cu aripi, şi picioare n-are,/ Să nu poată sta într-un loc niciodinioare*.

In the translation of the fragment which is part of the book of Quintus Curtis - *De rebus Alexandri regis Machedonum*, Miron Costin introduces the same ideas about the evanescence of the human condition: *...Aşa zic bătrânii noştri, tătarii, că norocul n-are picioare, numai mîini şi aripi. Cîndu-ţi pare că-ţi dă mînule, atuncea şi zboară...*

The human model upon which Costin's entire work is built is that of the wise man who detaches himself from the deceiving game of the world and from the

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tentations of the "ignorant human nature", opposing to the changeable fate a lucid frugality and a total stability with himself[12].

Just like in *Epigonii*, the purpose of Costin's poem is a didactic, moralist one, through the evocation of the glorious past, through the phylosofical meditation upon the irreversible passing of time and the imminence of death, through the detachment of the superior human being from the mediocre life in which he lives. By projecting the human vainness in a cosmic plan, the poet tries to stress the burst of the feudal society towards the ephemeral glories and victories. Here we can find the Latin saying in *Gesta Romanorum - Quidquid agis prudenter agas et respice finem*, which is adapted to the historian's ritmicity - in the verses which summarize the poet's conception about the deeds for which man is directly responsible: *Orice faci, fă şi caută fîrşitul cum vine,/ Cine nu-l socoteşte nu petreace bine*; *Tot ceea ce mâna ta găseşte cu cale să facă, prin puterile tale, aceea fă! Căci nu e nici o faptă, nici o punere la cale nici cunoştinţă, nici înţelepciune, în şeolul în care te duci*.

The literary theme of the slippery fate implies the frequent use of the enumeration, the refreshment of the great glories lost in time. It also implies the presence of the interrogation *Ubi sunt qui ante nos?*: *Ubi Plato, ubi Porphirius,/ Ubi Tullius aut Virgilius?/ Ubi Thales, ubi Empedocles,/ Aut egregius Aristoteles?/ Alexander ubi rex maximus?/ Ubi Hector Trojae fortissimus.../ Ubi Helena Parisque roseus?/ Ceciderunt in profondum ut lapides;/ Quis scit an detur eis requies?*

Just like in Horatiu's Odes, at Costin we find the names of the famous people reaped by death: *Unde-s ai lumii împăraţi, unde este Xerxes,/ Alixandru Machidon, unde-i Artaxers,/ Avgust, Pompeiŭ şi Chesar? Ei au luat lume,/ Pre toţi i-au stinsŭ cu vrémea, ca pre nişte spume./ Fost-au Tiros împărat, vestit cu războae,/ Cu avare preste toţi. Şi multă nevoe/ Au tras hândii şi tătarii şi Asiia toată./ Caută la ce l-au adus înşelătoarea roată:/ Prinsu-l-au o fămeae, i-au pus capul în sânge./ «Satură-te de moarte, Ţiros, şi te sting/ De vărsarea sîngelui, o, oame înfocate,/ Că de vrăjmăşiia ta nici Ganghes poate/ Cursul său să-l păzească»*.

Death appears in the same manner in the work of the Latin poet: Palida *mors aequo pulsat pede pauperum tabernes regumaque turres*, *Moartea, vrăjmaşa, într-un chip calcă toate casă/ Domneşti şi-mpărăteşti, pre nime nu lasă*. The apocalyptic vision in the philosophical poem matches perfectly with Seneca's words: "calamitosus est animus futuri anxius".

The description of the universal extinction, through the image of the darkening of the sources of light of the universe, offers to the Romanian literature a first eschatological vision, in the thematic perspective of the poem *The life of the world* The entire lyrical substance of the poem is based on the antithetic structure life – death, captured in a metaphorical way: *the sea, the clouds, the flower, the sun, the moon, the stars - the worm, the cutter, the sac, the clay, the ashes.* The idea of

12 Despre succesiunea istorică a modelelor umane, Al. Duţu, *Eseu în istoria modelelor umane. Imaginea omului în literatură şi pictură*, Editura Ştiinţifică, Bucureşti, 1972.

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degradation and damage is suggested by the lexical forms in the plural referring to life *(the days the years , the times, the things of the world, etc*), in comparison with the singular of the images of death (*worm , sac , cutter, clay*).

The life of the world is a literate poem of biblical inspiration[13] which keeps the didactic sense through the final precept: man can redeem his mistakes through the good deeds that he makes - the good becomes his utmost goal towards which he has to aspire. "The end of the poem *The life of the world*, proves that the tragic vision does not affect his beliefs so much as to not be able to affirm the possibility of a chance"[14]. Completing and extending Neagoe Basarab's concept and anticipating Vasile Pârvan, Miron Costin is convinced that peoples live only through the deeds of their precursors.

In conclusion, the tragic vision of the poem proclaims, in essence, the values of life . The historian goes strongly against "today's dreadful times", supporting the preoccupation of those who "among other things found time to read". Miron Costin acutely lived/experienced the feeling of having gone beyond his own destiny, through the work that he created in a heroic and affirmative manner. *Ia aminte, dară, o oame, cine eşti pe lume,/ Ca o spumă plutitoare rămîi fără nume,/ Una fapta ce-ţi rămâne, buna, te lăţeşte,/ În ceriu cu fericie în veci te măreşte*[15].

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[13] Al. Piru, *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până la 1830*, Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică, Bucureşti, 1977, p. 109.

[14] D. Curticăpeanu, *Orizonturile vieţii în literatura veche românească* (1520-1743), Editura Minerva, Bucureşti, 1975, p. 52.

[15] M. Costin, *op. cit*., p. 119.

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