THE DIMENSION OF THE ARTISTIC IMAGES IN ODOBESCU'S POEMS

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Abstract: *This study is focused on the research of the artistic images that can be identified in Alexandru Odobescu's poems. The poems are not so well-known by the public, but they reveal a specific vocabulary, the author's interest in using different figures of speech, but also the interest in describing his country and his feelings about women.*

Keywords*: figures of speech, love poems, patriotic poems.*

Alexandru Odobescu is best known in Romanian literature for *Pseudo-cinegeticos*, his masterpiece. However, the author also wrote poetry, even if he did that for a short period of time when he was a student in Paris. Through this he tried to discover his literary path.

Odobescu' activity as a poet proved to be just an experiment. The critics showed little interest in his poems. In fact, very few critics ever mentioned the titles of Odobescu's poems in their literary analyses. One of them was D. Păcurariu who wrote the book *A. I. Odobescu*, which was published by Youngsters Publishing House (Editura Tineretului) in 1966; D. Păcurariu mentioned two patriotic poems: *Odă României* (1852) and *Întoarcerea în țară pe Dunăre* (1855) and six love poems written between 1850 and 1853: <*Eu crez că dulceață*>, dedicated to Cxxxxxa, <*Ca tot codrul să răsune*>, dedicated to Axxxa, <*Multe femei*>, *Moartea unei amante* and two others without a title. It is a curious fact that only three love poems were selected to be included in the first volume dedicated to Odobescu's writings (Publishing House of the Romanian Academy, 1965). The other three poems that D. Păcurariu only mentioned can be found at Romanian Academy Library (Ms. 4935, f. 1-23). For the moment we are going to analyse only those that were published by the Publishing House of the Romanian Academy.

Written in October 1850 in Paris, the poem <*Eu crez că dulceață*> seems to be an exercise of composing some lines. From the beginning one can notice Odobescu's inversion technique, which proves his effort in getting a rhyme and creating the feeling of a romantic atmosphere. The poem is structured in eight stanzas and its topic is focused on describing a beloved woman. Odobescu had used the techniques of literary portrait and description since the early years as a writer; these techniques helped him develop his literary skills. At a closer look at the text, we can observe that the first five stanzas contain a presentation of his lover's mouth, face, eyes, hair and chest and in the last three stanzas the girl is described as a goddess and a beauty of nature.

The first stanza: *Eu crez că dulceață* / *Decât p-ale tale* / *De garoafe buze* / *Nu e de găsit.* has a particular aspect due to the inversion of lines, but also due to the presence of the verb "to be" at the end of the sentence. The verb being at the end is specific to Latin writings, as Odobescu was preoccupied with the translation from this language. The idea of comparing a part of the human body with a flower (in this case the mouth is like a carnation) is continued in the second stanza with the image of the

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girl's face compared with a hyacinth: *Fața ta îmi pare / Zambila ce micsă / Cu-a zăpezii-albeață / Palidu-i veșmânt*.

Each stanza seems to be a photo that describes the features of the beloved one in the deepest details. Therefore the fourth stanza: *Crez că vântulețul / Pe mai dulce undă / Decât neagra-ți buclă / Nu poate-adia* is the "photo" which surprises the movement of the woman's hair against the wind.

Odobescu oscillates between black and white, the colours which he considers necessary in describing the perfect woman's portrait. Over the years, when the author wrote *Pseudo-cinegeticos* and inserted in this book the story *Basmul cu Fata de piatră și cu Feciorul de împărat cel cu noroc la vânat*, it was noticed that some elements from his poetic debut were kept in the lines that presented the portrait of the female protagonist: *...ieși acum din stâncă / albă, dalbă fată, / vie și frumoasă, / blândă, răcoroasă, / cu chip luminos, / cu trup mlădios.* The literary motives such as white colour, light, graceful body, which are present in these lines, prove that Odobescu uses the same technique of describing feminine beauty. In the sixth stanza of the poem <*Eu crez că dulceață*> the girl's body is described: *Crez chiar că zeița / Ceea-a fromusețe <i> / Mai puțin mlădioasă / Decât tine-a fi.* Although the resemblance to a deity seems to be the ultimate compliment, the poet continues to eulogize his girlfriend in the last two stanzas, stating that: *Tu îmi pari obiectul / În care Natura / Ș-a pus chiar mândria / A se-mpodobi* and *Tot ce este galeș / Tot ce te atrage / În însați ființă / S-a împreunat.*

Comparing the words that Odobescu used to the primordial elements, it was noticed that the writer used three of them: soil, air and fire. The words that are related to the lexical field of soil are: *garoafe, zambila, zăpezii*; the words *vântulețul, adia, columba* belong to the lexical field of air and *scânteie și foc* are related to fire.

There are plenty of nouns in the poem and they are sometimes linked to adjectives in order to create a stylistic effect that is specific to epithets: *palidu veșmânt, negrilor ochi, dulce undă, neagra buclă*. In most of the stanzas there are few verbs. The most frequent verb is the popular form of "to believe" used in the first person, singular: *crez*, which appears at the beginning of five from the eight stanzas. The purpose is to express the writer's deep belief in his girlfriend's beauty. The majority of the verbs are in the indicative mood and the negative form introduced by the word *decât*: *nu e, nu iese, nu poate, nu varsă*. There are also a few verbs in the present, the affirmative form: *micsă, îmi pari, atrage*; verbs in the past: *a pus, a împreunat* or verbs that appear in the infinitive mood: *a fi, a-mpodobi*.

The dominant figure of speech is inversion, not only of the parts of speech, but also of the lines. It can be noticed the presence of monorhyme as in folk poetry and the measurement of lines is of six syllables.

<*Ca tot codrul să răsune*>, dedicated to Axxxa, was written in 1851 and had eight stanzas, each with two lines.

The theme chosen by Odobescu is a classic one and it is related to nature and love. The forest, which is a witness character, represents the terrestrial space where a he and a she can love each other. The beginning and the end are identical due to the repetition of the same lines: *Ca tot codrul să răsune d-ale tale dulci cântări,/ Și ca eho, plin de taină, să-ți trimiță salutări!*.

The vocabulary is better developed that the previous odobescian poem. There are many words related to the lexical field of the forest: *codru, tufei, fronză, filomele, arborii*. The close terrestrial space of the woods is doubled by the open space of the heights through the words: *vulturul, piscuri, zefiri.* All these are important for the poet because he associates the feelings of love, gratitude, awe, as it comes out of the lines:

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Orice sunet al naturei m-a făcut a resimți, / Când fiori, când mulțumire, ce nu poci a le descri. The voices of the birds (the nightingales and the eagles) are considered to be pleasant to the human hearing: *Toată firea să desmiardă, ascultând cântarea lor*. Still, there is nothing more beautiful in the poet's imagination than his sweetheart's voice. He compares this voice with the one of a mermaid: *Dar când glasu-ți de sirenă, înălțându-se treptat, / Printre arborii pădurei cu putere-a răsunat, / Îmi zisei că firea-i numai un susur nesimțitor, / Căci c-o notă dedeși viață unei lume de amor*. The author mingles three elements and three worlds: aquatic, terrestrial and aerial.

In this poem Odobescu succeeds to create some acoustic images through the following expressions: *codrul să răsune, șoptea a tufei fronză, vărs gemete d-amor, ascultând cântarea lor, strigătu-i măreț, sunet al naturei, cu putere-a răsunat.*

The epithets are obtained by writing an adjective after a noun: *filomelele duioase, gemete d-amor, vulturul semeț, susur nesimțitor*, but also by writing an adjective before the noun: *dulci cântări, misterioase fericiri*. The forest is personified and it is capable of saying hello through its echo. One comparison is only used in the text of this poem in order to show the deepness of the eagle's voice: *Și ca trâmbiță d-arhanghel este strigătu-i măreț*.

Since Odobescu's debut as a writer, he revealed his predilection for using folk forms of some words, such as nouns in genitive that end in *–ei* instead of *–ii: pădurei, naturei* or folk forms of the verbs: *trimiță, să desmiardă, poci*.

By analyzing the tenses in the stanzas, one can observe the author's tendency of using present simple when he describes the nature, which suggests the durability and the eternity of the open space. Still, when the writer talks about his own feelings and the interaction with the person he loves, present perfect tense is used: *simțit-a*; *a făcut a răsunat*.

Many main sentences can be identified at a phrase level and they are followed or preceded by temporal clauses introduced by the word „when": *Când șoptea a tufei fronză; când vărs gemete d-amor; Dar când glasu-ți de sirenă … cu putere-a răsunat.*

The poem <*Ca tot codrul să răsune*> represents a prove of Odobescu's attempts to write under the influence of an easy romanticism. However, „the versification difficulties that the young poet tries to fix by looking for the right rhyme do not indicate poetry as the literary way that Odobescu should follow. (T. Vianu,V. Cândea, 1965, p. 378)

Composed in July 1853 in Paris, the unfinished poem <*Multe femei*> is a specific work to Odobescu's early years, but the poet becomes capable now of more mature judgements over some realities. This aspect is proved by writing the work *Călătorie din Paris la Londra* one year before. „The declarations of circumstance addressed to any muse from exile or from the country do not denote anything good in order to make him different from the other lovers of the same age. He had already loved many women (*multe femei)* at 19 years old, the last one always being his first love (*întâiu-mi amor)* and he had already had the chance to know how bitter life was". (T. Vianu,V. Cândea, 1965, p. 411-412)

Alexandru Odobescu passed through some artistic phases in his short period as a writer of love poems: at the beginning he described the woman he loved, then he remembered the best moments they spent together in a natural environment and in the end he wrote about the moment of betrayal and break up. In the poem <*Multe femei*> it can be identified the motif of langour (*dor*): *am plâns cu dor; un dor nesfârșit*. The author uses some words frequently: the adjective *dulce* is necessary for creating epithets (*mai dulce nume; dulci cântări; suspine mai dulci*), the noun *dulceață* appears in the

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expressions: *râul dulcei* (metaphor) or *Eu crez că dulceață /Decât p-ale tale / De garoafe buze*; these exemples prove the writer's difficulties in finding the most suitable words and expressing himself in an original way. If fact everybody knows that Odobescu worked hard to choose his words, as he was not a natural talent.

Although without a great literary value, these three love poems presented above are important for identifying and understanting the origins of the authentic odobescian style. His passion for art and literature represents the basis of his development as a writer. That is the reason why Odobescu had the ability to transform nature, human body and gestures into an artificial painting. „He turns a natural spot into a pastel or a landscape; a town into an architectonic environment; a woman into a portrait.[...] Odobescu's paradox is to create art only through the illusion of life and life through the illusion of art: he is sensual when perceiving art and he is an aesthete when perceiving reality". (N. Manolescu, 1976, p.47-49)

Odobescu's patriotic poems are better known by the public: *Odă României* and *Întoarcerea în țară pe Dunăre* (published in 1855 in *România Literară* Magazine). They proved that the author was a patriot who dreamed about the emancipation of the Romanian people.

The first two stanzas from *Odă României* are deeply subjective; the poet carries out an imaginary monologue with his mother country which he cherishes, but at the same time he deplores its destiny. The usage of vocative: *țara mea iubită, mândră România, mumă iubitoare* represents a pathetic proof of Odobescu's affection for his country. He creates lines that have a contradictory symbolic value in order to illustrate the increase and decline of a nation; thereby, the Romanian land is crossed by golden rivers: *râuri d-aur sub boltă azurie* (chromatic epithet), but over them the happiness had passed: *Trecut-au fericirea ș-a' tale sărbători, / Cum trec l-al toamnei crivăt plăpânde dalbe flori* (comparison).

The second stanza continues with a rhetorical question: *Când fiii tăi s-adapă cu laptele-ți cel dulce/ Și când cosesc ei spicul ce sânul tău aduce/ Se mai gândesc ei oare la sântul legământ / Ce ți-au jurat odată, în timpuri mai ferice:/ „Să apere cu brațul strămbunul lor pământ,/ Până și cel din urmă va zace în mormânt"?*. These lines represent a symbolic presentation of a nation in decline; at the same time, the above lines condemn the peaceful present without patriotism and they praise the „happy" past dominated by battles. The noun "grave" is a descendant symbol, its purpose being to show the ultimate sacrifice made by Romanian ancestors. The same idea of sacrifice is perpetuated in the following stanza through the lines : *... românul acel ce-n bătălie/ Uita că copilașii, sărmanii! zac în pat/ Lipsiți de hrana zilei... când țara-i de scăpat!*

The poet seems to be an orator, because he creates an enthusiastic speech about the life of the people in the past and in the present: *Când se sculau românii, pe loc pierea dușmanul [...] Românii d-acum, însă, trăiesc cu umilința!* „The young poet develops a time motif by comparing the ancestral courage with nowadays humiliation: *De vechi făgăduințe nu va nimeni să știe, Dar țara-i tot aceea, frumoasă, roditoare*" (T. Vianu,V. Cândea, 1965, p. 228). The author identifies the cause of this situation: *Străina uneltire revarsă neștiința,/ Și-a țării neatârnare e numai ca un pai / Luptându-se în viscol cu crivețe de plai*. Odobescu criticizes the foreign poisonous influence not only through some articles, but also through these patriotic poems. Poetry is for him another way of expressing his own artistic and patriotic beliefs. "The originality of this composition written in adolescence comes from the idea of national renaissance through arts" (T. Vianu,V. Cândea, 1965, p. 228).

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Odă României is an original writing. By analysing this poem, one can notice the author's effort in bringing together different figures of speech, such as: epithets: *râuri d-aur; boltă azurie; lanțuri d-aramă; pulbere d-aur; văl cumplit;* metaphors: *duhul libertății; a păcii dulce floare; al artelor izvor; focul vieței; steaua nemuririi;* comparisons: *să furi, ca Prometeu, scânteia ce nu piere; ca flacări văpăiezi*; inversions: *adânca durere; aspră voinicie; veșteji lauri; luminoase sfere; limpedea cătare;* reoccurences: *tot aceea, tot limpede, tot încântătoare; s-a stins la noi, s-a stins virtutea.*

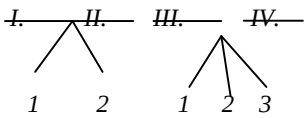
Among the stanzas which assure the oscillation between the glorious past, the injurious present and the possible future reborn by art, there are some visual images created in order to demonstrate an absolute aspect – the beauty of the country: *Dar țara-i tot aceea, frumoasă, roditoare;/ Tot limpede e cerul, câmpia zâmbitoare,/ Și munții cu pâraie, cu piscuri, cu zăpezi;/ Și nopțile de vară tot sunt încântătoare./ Cu fața-ți argintie, tu, lună! scânteiezi.*

Odobescu will get to his artistic maturity with a diverse vocabulary as a result of his life and education. In *Odă României*, composed at the beginning of his literary career, it can be observed his interest in a certain vocabulary, with specific forms and constructions which defined his style later. The author liked folk words that he used a lot in order to create "a local colour" for his poem: *ferice* (=fericit), *păs* (=necaz), *osmanul* (înv.= turc), *măcelărit* (= măcelărire), *neatârnare* (înv.= independență politică), *cătare, vecinic* (= veșnic); *văpăiezi* (înv. intranzitiv), *cătau* (= căutau), *s-aținte* (= s-aștintească), *nu va să știe* (= nu va ști), *va să-nflorească* (= va înflori). There are some regional phonetic versions: *mumă, sântul, atuncea, marturi, colo, vieței, cării* (=cărei), *vârtutea, sărbând, iarăș, țălul, orizonul*.

"Composed of 12 stanzas, the poem *Odă României* has a clear and logical development." (T. Vianu,V. Cândea, 1965, p. 228) Since his adolescence the writer used to have a specific pattern of writing a phrase with balanced subordinate clauses.

Here is an exemple:

I. *Dar țara-i tot aceea, 1. frumoasă*
2. roditoare;
II. Tot limpede e cerul,
V.
III. câmpia zâmbitoare
IV. Și munții 1.cu pâraie,
2. cu piscuri,
3. cu zăpezi;
V. Și nopțile de vară tot sunt încântătoare.



The theme of the poem *Întoarcerea în țară pe Dunăre* was presented by many other writers of the time; it referred to young intellectuals who returned home with new patriotic ideals after spending some time abroad. Still, the idea of coming home suggested different feelings to each poet: some of them felt the happiness of finding love, peace or serenity; others felt the sadness generated by solitude and expected death. For Odobescu, coming back home meant rediscovering the environment where he could move and create: *Sunt ferice că-mi văd țara,/ Văd curgând Dunărea lin;/ Sub cer neted văd cum seara,/ Malul e de taine plin*.

The poem begins with two stanzas in which the author expresses his regrets for not having a better voice: *un glas tare, sunător* și *versuri pline de dulceți* in order to praise the country. In the following four stanzas he expresses his affection for the beauty of his birthplace: *m-aș cerca a le descri; aș culege flori și stele/ Și aș împleti cu ele/ Cununi pentr'a' tale nunți; Viața mea cu bucurie / Mi-aș zdrobi-o-n fala ta; Te-aș*

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urma, mândră și tare/ Pe un tron scânteietor;/ Te aș face eu mai mare. These lines contain some verbs in the conditional that indicate at a stylistic level the young intellectual's patriotic ideals. He also condemns those who oppress the people. *Daca toți cât nasc în tine/ Așa dragoste-ar simți, / Poate-ai fi și tu mai bine,/ Poate-atât n-ai suferi./ Însă vai! mulți te apasă/ Mulți din sângele-ți trăiesc/ Și de doru-ți nu le pasă,/ Căci chiar ei te asupresc*.

The other stanzas describe the same emotion produced by the idea of coming home. There are some lines that contain the metaphor of the star, which can have a dual meaning from a symbolic point of view. On one hand, the star indicates Odobescu's destiny as a human being, and on the other hand the star is the source of inspiration and creation for Odobescu, the writer: *Însă inima-mi tresare/ Când gândesc a revedea/ Pe pământ, câmpia mare,/ Și pe ceruri, a mea stea,/ Steaua ceea favorită,/ Ce gându-mi copilăresc/ O închipuia unită/ De pământul românesc.*

Compared to *Odă României*, *Întoarcerea în țară pe Dunăre* does not have to many figures of speech. Some inversions can be noticed: *falnic viitor; întins pământ; tainică-armonie; nestins amor* and epithets: *dulce mulțumire; tron scânteietor; cer neted; gândiri noroase; eterul luminos; ginga*ș*e licuriri*. The dominant lexical field is related to nature: *deal, câmpie, moșie, pământ, stea, cerul, Dunărea, malurile*; these words helped the author to create his visual images.

Taking a closer look to Odobescu's vocabulary, it can be observed his interest in using folk words: *preget*, *fericea* (fericirea), *voi s-apuci* (vrei s-apuci), *voi s-arunc* (vreau s-arunc), *voi să-nec* (vreau să-nec), *aș cerca* (aș încerca); regional phonetisms: *daca* (Walachian phonetism instead of *dacă*) and *sânt* (Moldavian phonetism instead of *sfânt*), reoccurences: *al tău falnic viitor; ale tale frumusești; al tău cer; ai tăi munți; a' tale nunți; a' Dunării talazuri; a mea stea; a mea copilărie; ale slavei măguliri; a mea inimă.*

All the ideas presented above demonstrate that Odobescu's work got some specific features in time. Although he wrote a few poems which were not appreciated by the critics, they represented the clear proof of the author's literary interest; the poetry was like an exercice that helped him create a career in literature and promote Romanian literary language.

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