# *THE SYMBOL OF THE LILY IN AL. PHILIPPIDE'S POETRY*

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**Abstract***: The study seeks to reveal the meaning underlying the usage of the lily in Alexandru Philippide's poetry. Its frequency betrays the poet's appetence for this ambiguous flower. The lily stands between the concepts of life and death, of purity and darkness. The royal flower is very often reflected in Philippide's poems, functioning as an avatar of the poet.*

**Key-words***: Alexandru Philippide, lyrism, lily, symbol*

Poetry vibrates through the symbol, this being a mask of the world comprised in a word. Without such an artistic substitute, the natural world would hardly be imported into the poetic universe.

The symbol models ideas, objects, beliefs, transposing them into vocables which carry deep meanings. It functions as a hermetic cover of the core, of the content of art. The reader will see himself unwillingly turned into a decoder, because the symbol, this tempting mask of the word, will invite him to a superior thinking, a transcendental one meant to develop until its last phase, that being the true cognizance, the revelation.

The symbol is a cover usurping the core of the word. Disguised in another vocable, another object or another idea, the symbol appears on a quite frequent scale in Alexandru Philippide's poetry. Caught between tradition and the modern path, the poet from Iași gives words unexpected valences, managing to create this palletisation with the aid of the symbol.

Being fond of the past, of myth and archaic ideals, the poet Philippide configurates traditional symbols, in which he fosters modern seeds.

The first part of his poetic creation lies under the sign of romantism, of pozitive onirism which heads to the stars. The lyrical ego kneels in front of the Sun, begging it to cast away the darkness that left its veil upon his world. The solar light is the embodiement of his dream, a new dream, different from the one he had been living in for so long. Longing after the solar rays actually reveals the nostalgia of the good times, of the new beginnings, of breaking all the old bonds.

The palpable touch of the long plotted dream becomes feasible through the usage of pozitive tools resembling their target, the ideal, through their structure.

Pozitive tools are actually symbols of kindness, of purity, symbols which may connect in a final point to the target, this being the accomplisment of the ideal. The ascension that the lyrical ego engages himself into is a ceremonial journey, where the prayers blend with sacrifices and beginnings blend with endings.

The lyrical ego summons the stars in his own process of transformation, in which his soul, which he already calls "old", because he no longer recognizes it as being his, will get another embodiment. By willingly separating himself from his own soul, the poet hopes

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to get a new soul, simultaneously forcing the old dream to turn into a new one: "Și dă-ne, Soare, suflet nou, alt vis!/ Ne-am săturat de vechiul nostru vis!" (I, 4)

Philippide's first volume opens up with precisely these aspirations included in "cântecul câtorva". Being the voice of his world, the poet fills the verses with a few spiritual petitions. He asks for plenitude for he sees the world empty, he longs for light in an almost always nocturnal background and dreams about a world of lilies, a world of hope and purity.

The world populated with lilies is an edenic world that the poet sees as possible at least in the first part of his poetic creation: "The abundence of the white, the depth of the lilies signify the paradisiac space so confined and soon lost of Philippide's poetry. An esthetic and luxurious space, but also fragile, a sort of a pendant of the luxe, calme et volupté baudelairianism" (Balotă, 1974: 46) (Our translation G.C.). It is precisely this type of aestheticization of the lyrics that brings him close to Dimitrie Anghel. As well as Philippide, Anghel imports in his poetry elements as the lily, the reverie and the preference for the colour white.

The presence of the lily in iconography, art and literature dates back to the early times, its simbology being a solid one, enclosing in itself a series of mytical dimensions.

In Christian iconography, the Virgin Mary is holding a lily in her hand, this being the floral correspondent of her purity and virginity. Philippide invokes this flower in the hope of purification, of spiritual cleaning of a world lost in darkness. The longing for primordial purity actually hides the hope of a new beginning, unshattered by the complicated ways of the soul.

The ancestral Egyptians worshipped him until identifying themseves with it. The hieroglyph representing the lily was the symbol of Egypt. The lily was also the witness of death, but paradoxically, it wasn't associated with the end of life, but with its continuation into a higher framework, generating eternal happiness.

The lily is an equal of pure and chaste love but also with the love for divinity: <<The lily also symbolizes forgetting the self in favour of God's will, leaving yourself in the hands of Providence, who takes care of the needs of his chosen: "Take a look at the way the lilies grow; they do not tire themselves and they do not spin. (The Gospel of Matthew)>> (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1969: 46) (Our translation G.C.). The poet from Iași addresses himself to the Providence, in his solar embodiment, that is the sun, asking it to draw him from the claws of darkness: "O soare, cu aripa ta alungă/ Cît mai departe noaptea noastră lungă;"

The lily flower blossoms in the youth poetry of Philippide, managing to comprise more significances at once. It appears like a hypostasis of the dream, a mediator between the aspiration and the reached ideal, as an avatar of the Sun, as a dimension of eternity, and not lastly, as a poetic womb.

1. ***Hypostasis of the dream***. The lily, whose ethers are astounding, luring you to detach yourself from the real topos, can be an image of the dream itself. Its strong perfume creates narcotic, hallucinogenic effects in the one sniffing it, determining him to let himself carried to the illusory: "The lily, Philippide's novalisian flower, through its narcotic effects, disposes yourself towards romantic reveries, satisfied in the field of art, not without a shade of baudelairian thrill" (Gibescu, 1985: 44) (Our translation G.C.).



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The scents of the lily appear as facilitators between the heavy reality and the comforting oneiric. They are described through the personifying epithet, "moi" (soft), meaning that the harshness of life softens once you let yourself imbued by the elixir of the paradisiac flower. At the same time, the word "moi" intercepts a kinesthetic image, meaning that the ethers of the lily do not install themselves only in the olfactory space, but it invades the entire system. The lyrical ego feels the scents in his inner self, as well as in a tangible manner, dripping down his body: "Miresme moi ca mîinile, mărunte/ Ca zîmbetele, lunecați pe frunte;" (I, 17). Single verse contains three artistic images: visual ("mărunte"), olfactory ("miresme), kinesthetic ("moi").

Philippide's flower impresses both on a visual and an olfactory level, eventually transferring you to a space where the flower itself gets impenetrable meanings. The simile, "Miresme moi ca mîinile", translates the state in which the ethers of this flower can take you to.

The hallucinogenic sensation which is similar to the state given by narcotics is deeply felt by the lyrical ego: "În jurul meu plutiți ca niște ape; / Lăsați pe ochi molatice pleoape". The perfume of the lily instantaneously installs the state of dreaming. Detaching yourself from reality is performed gradually. The beatitude initially planted in the lyrical ego's psyche continues with a floating sensation, of silent senses. The epithet "molatice" attributed to the eyelids confirms the great passing, the ascension towards the oneiric. The senses get blurred, the eyelids fall helplessly, obstructing the sight, the way of access towards reality.

The lily becomes a hypostasis of the dream through the effects it emits towards its admirers. Initially showing itself like a converter of perceptions, altering the communication with the reality, the lily eventually takes the embodiment of dream, becoming a sort of avatar of the flower He leaves. "pe gene/ Odihna unui vis" (I, 18).

Personified, the lily becomes a present character generating physical and psychical changes that it operates at body and conscience level in what regards the lyrical ego.

The scent of the lily urges its receptors to let themselves led into an oneiric journey, which is only possible by air, flying a "zbor răcoritor" (I, 18), in which the adversities are rooted in the soul. "The uranic flight is done with the aid of the lily, Philippide's auspicious flower." (Gibescu, *op.cit.*: 45) (Our translation G.C.). The astral background is the space where the weight of the soul disappears, where anxiety fades away, where the paradisiac quietness rises.

The lyrical ego worships the lily which he sees as matrix of good dreams: "Îndeamnă gîndul meu spre visuri bune." (I, 18). The opposition lucidity-hope is to be found in the opposition bad dream-good dream: <<If the "good dream" manifests itself as reverie during which memory and imagination intensify themselves mutually in order to sublimate some memories and images […] "the bad dream", oriented towards the fantastic and the macabre, activates the anamorphic and negative aptitudes of the poetic imagination (Bârsilă, 2009 : 126-127)>> (Our translation G.C.).

In Philippide's poetry, the good dream coincides with the astral aspirations, with the lily flower, a protective dream that will menace the coming or the returning of destruction, of anxiety and chaos.



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The lily has a curative role, being able to extirpate the bad dream: ”De visul rău mă vindecă deplin,/ În suflet dezmierdări de gheață-mi pune.” (I, 18). The lyrical ego prays to the lily to give him protection against the danger of dissipation, the glacial coldness being the way of rejection.

In Philippide’s poetry, the unconsciousness in which the lily induces you is not actually similar to sobriety, but it is the gradual conferral in which the lyrical ego launches himself, a conferral of the self as an offering for divinity: “The lily doesn’t lead to the perdition of the drunkenness, but to a reconciled self loss” (Balotă, op.cit. : 48).

Although resembled to Macedonski through the position of lilies in his lyrics, Philippide shapes the floral symbol in totally different way. In Macedonski’s *Rondelul Crinilor*, the effects of the lily sum up ”beția cea rară”, the lyrical ego being caught by their fervour (”În ei mă sorbiră, extatici”). In Philippide’s poetry, on the other hand,”it is not the extravagant drunkenness looked for in the candid flower, but precisely the lilial thrill, the diaphanous and lunatic white, the abstraction from the existence of any sort of brutality.” (*Ibidem*) (Our translation G.C.).

2. ***Avatar of the Sun***. Through the arrangement of its petals, the lily can be a sun on a lower scale. Their potencies converge to a common centre, the divinity: ”The heraldic lily with six petals can also identify itself with the six spokes of the wheel, whose circumference is not traced, therefore with the six rays of the sun: (GUEC, GUES) flower of glory and fecundity source.” (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, op.cit.: 388) (Our translation G.C.).

In Alexandru Philippide’s lyrics, the lily seems to somehow derive from the sun: “Polenul tău să ne preschimbe-n crini” (I, 4). The sun is lowered into the vegetal, material space. Attributing the pollen to the lily, Philippide brings the sun close to the flowers, the sun becoming, through analogy, one of them. The effect of the rays is registered as being similar to the effect of pollination. The light, as well as the pollen leads its way from the womb to the new life. The sun is personified and at the same time potentate getting divine powers from the Creator. The lyrical ego addresses the sun in a reverential manner, saying prayers after religious patterns. The solar figure, dazzling in its appearance is a pendant of the Creator.

The verb “a preschimba”, through which the sun gets personified valences, translates the idea of metamorphosis. The lyrical ego longs to become, along with the world he represents, a lily among lilies. The metempshycotic process he prays to traverse is the recovery of the innocence that the Creator endowed him with at the beginning of his existence. Being also a symbol of dying, the lily could constitute the end of a funerary metempsychotic process. Purity, innocence and perfection are reestablished in the heavenly space, in the life after.

Both the sun and the lily symbolize perfection and perfection is, from a religious perspective, an attribute conferred only to the divinity. Both of them are representations of God, one on a celestial level and the other on a terrestrial level.

3. ***Dimension of eternity.*** The symbolism of the lily also includes temporality. In Philippide’s lyrics, this is often a mask of eternity. The metamorphosis into white lilies is the passing to eternity, a passing that can only be performed through the death in the telluric space. The lyrical ego goes through a partial death, a separation from the soul that he wants to bury in order to receive another one in return.



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Inside the lily lies the hope of the future, the ideal of eternity, an ideal risen in ephemerity: <<With the soul liberated from illusions, the poet is the slave of the future moment but the present, seen in the goethean spirit revigorates him because on a consciousness level it equalizes ”clipa cea de-acum” (now) with eternity. Philippide means to say that eternity is a lily blossoming in the ephemeris.>> (Gibescu, op.cit.: 71) (Our translation G.C.).

Embittered by the moment sick of memory (“bolnavă de-amintire”), the lyrical ego is tempted to draw himself from the unknown (“din cunoscut”) (I, 155), to draw himself from the self: “Un singur gând ca o mireasmă tare:/ Să te desprinzi din tine și să zbori/ Asemeni continentelor de nori.” (I, 155). The strong scent is the perfume of the lily with its oneiric fruit. The wish of abstracting from the known translates the desire of abolishing the spatio-temporal dimensions. The abandonment of the telluric and the projection towards the clouds indicates the abandonment of anything earthly. The embezzlement from temporality marks the entrance into eternity, this way being operated the permutation between the known and the unknown.

On the land where no memory vibrates (“nici o amintire nu vibrează”), time stays still. The strong perfume of the lily bears Philippide towards the divine purity, where eternity lies: “S-ajungi în calea ta văzduhul pur:/ Miraculoasă, veșnică amiază…” (I, 155).

The temporal dimension of eternity similar to Philippide’s floral poetry is the moment of the never-ending beatitude, a dimension reached in the spirit of Faust.: <<“Clipa cea de-acum” (Now) towards he runs to harvest *fructified* as a lily „răsărit în pulbere de drum” (risen in the dust of the road) is not Schopenhauer’s eternal prezent, as one would think, but the moment celebrated by Faust after the exhaustion of all experiences: “Verweille doch, du bist so schön” >> (*Ibidem*) (Our translation G.C.).

4. ***Poetic womb***. In Alexandru Philippide’s poetry, the lily is not only a symbol but also a poetic source. If behind other symbols lie an object or an idea, behind the significance of the lily, lies the entire youth poetry of the poet from Iași.

The lily is, for Philippide, an art, music and poetry generator. Its beauty gives birth to sonorous rhythms: “Și-n muzica privirilor eterne, / E-o liră albă fiecare crin.” (I, 65). The lyre is a musical instrument used in early times as accompaniment in reciting poems. The metaphor “liră albă” betrays a sort of ars poetica generated by the floral symbol: “the lily is a fecund matrix of the ream therefore good generator of poetry.” (Balotă, op.cit.: 49) (Our translation G.C.).

In his first volume of poems, “white songs with lily wings” (“muzici albe cu aripi de crin”) can be heard. The songs are coloured once again; they are white as the lilies. The wings of the lily are gates towards dreaming and at the same time towards inspiration. The lily becomes a muse of the poet in the construction of his poetry.

In Philippide’s lyrical works, the lily takes the position of the instrument (“liră”), that of the musical product, which in fact, is a poetic product (“muzici”), but also the position of the interpreter (“menestrel”). The minstrel is a poet and a musician at the same time. He recites verses on musical rhythms or he just recites being accompanied by an instrument.

Not accidental at all, the minstrel is attributed the colour white: “Alb menestrel a lunei, sprinten Crin” (I, 18). This time, the word “lily” (“crin”) is initially written with a



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capital letter, being converted from common noun into proper noun. In the verse above, there is a trade of epithets. The minstrel lis white, although the lily should be attributed this epithet, and the Lily is agile, an epithet that shows the minstrel's dynamism. The writing with capital letters at the beginning of the word, just like a proper noun proves the significance of the lily both for the poetic substance and its creator. Once again, this floral symbol is established as character.

The lily, as well as the entire nature, gives birth to verses on paper: "Philippide takes out of a nature experience a song, a state of poetry." (Gibescu, op.cit.: 84) (Our translation G.C.).

The vocable "lily" ("crin") encapsulates varios meanings, these being easy to spot in the context of several stylistic figures. The lily is attributed epithets, it is personified, it is inserted in metaphorical structures and used as a term of similes.

a) ***The sphere of the lily epithets***.

The lily appears in verses adorned by different epithets. There appear epithets with a personifying role attributed to it as if it were a character, present entity in the poetry.: "gentle", "agile" ("blând", "sprinten") (I, 17). When these characteristics are poetically transferred to it, the term "lily" ("crin") is written with a capital letter at the beginning, this way outlining the transfer of human characteristics.

The epithet "gentle" ("blând") sends back to the meaning behind the symbol of the lily which is purity, innocence. Kindness also derives from these qualities. Seeing in the lily a vegetal form of perfection, therefore, of divinity, Philippide finds it "gentle" ("blând"), accessible in his way of restoring his own soul.

The poet also attributes the lily the epithet "agile" ("sprinten"), this one betraying the dynamism and vivacity of the oneiric flight. The perfume of the lily flower immediately launches the rupture from the telluric.

The lily is also implanted other attributes in the poetic space, but not directly, but by its ethers. Its scent is "strong" and "soft" ("puternică" și "moale"). The epithet "strong" ("puternică") is an ornant epithet defing a sort of scent: faded or strong. Its softness betrays the existence of a mixture of sensations. The smell of the lily can be felt kinesthetically. The sniffing of the smell provokes a softening of the feelings, a sort of anaesthesia.

b) ***The insertion of the lily in metaphorical structures***.

In Philippide's lyrical work, the lily is, either represented through various metaphorical structures, or it shows itself as a component of a metaphor.

The metaphoric structures that symbolise the lily abound, especially in the poem *Crinul*, dedicated to it as an ode. The lily is named white cupbearer ("paharnic alb") (I, 17). The cupbearer representes, in the Middle Ages, the landowner that poured drinks to the reigning. The lily, through its inebriating smell, servs the oneiric, as well as the cupbearer does. At the same time, the colour attributed to the cupbearer concerns makes straight connections with the lily that the poet from Iași prefers, the white lily.

The metaphor "white mistrel of the moon" ("alb menestrel al lunei") gives birth to another interpretation of the lily. The minstrel was a sort of a troubadour, a probationer of the sung poetry or of the poetry that is simply accompanied by an instrument. The analogy of the minstrel with the lily inside the metaphorical structure above, suggests the idea that this flower is a generator of poetry. The lily becomes a muse with inspiring ethers. The



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insistence over the white colour emphasizes the role of the lily in the poetry and, at the same time, it deconspires it. The lily seems to belong to the moon, being related to it. The moon, white as well, is a dreaming core: "The moon keeps the magic of the nature, but also the artistic experience." (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, *op.cit*.: 88) (Our translation G.C.).

The lily is also a white lyre ("liră albă") (I, 65). As in the other metaphors, the white chromatics is permanent. The lyre is the instrument accompanying the minstrel, both accompanying, in turn, the poetic creation.

The word "lily" ("crin") is also a component part of some metaphors: "muzici albe cu aripi de crin" (I, 32), "alb fior de crin" (I, 30). The lily's wings ("aripi de crin") are fragile and feeble wings, as it is the material making them. Moreover, the metaphor "aripi de crin" can be semantically substituted by the structure "white wings" ("aripi albe"), as the lily will always be white in Philippide's poetic creations.

The moon ray is seen as "white thrill of lily" ("alb fior de crin"). What Philippide looks for in the youth poetry is precisely the thrill of the lily, the paradisiac quietness. White is the colour that defines both the cosmic element, the moon, and the telluric element, the lily: "The lily is associated with the moon ray, with the ethered music and with the secrets of the colour white. All these attributes send to a particular existence, an ethered one, eminently poetic and dreaming." (Balotă, op. cit. :48) (Our translation G.C.).

c) ***Similes of the lily***.

Lilies become a component of the simile „Urcau spre cer ca niște crini" (I, 32), where the poet places in analogy the castle towers and the lilies. The height of the lilies is registered as similar to the height of he towers. Lilies metaphorically rise to the sky through its narcotic effects that they produce, through the oneiric flight over the telluric.

The ethers of the lily are compared to an anatomic human part: "Miresme moi, ca mîinile" (I, 17), meaning that the sniffing of the lily perfume provokes claustrophobia as the kidnapping hands. Once ensnared by the enchanted flower, you cannot retreat or long for freedom.

d) ***Personifying structures of the lily.***

The lily is personified on the poetic land of Philippide, being even possessed by a soul: "Răpesc secretul alb pe care crinii/În sufletul lor fraged îl ascund" (I, 33). Animated, the lily becomes a sort of etheric magician wrapping its admirers in mystery. The soul of the lilies is frail, this attribute reinforcing the significance of the philippidian flower, that of purity, frailty, new beginning. Having a soul, the lily becomes a poetic companion of Philippide during the beginning of his creation.

With a "burnt" heart ("arsă"), the lyrical ego asks the lily to unleash its scents: "domol îmi varsă parfumul tău" (I, 17). This personification embodies a lily with human attributes which serves the poet perfume in the cup of a new life. The scent of the lily gets a liquid shape ("îmi varsă"), functioning as a potion altering senses, placing you above everything else.

The lily becomes a guide and, at the same time, a healer: "Îndeamnă gîndul meu spre visuri bune, / De visul rău mă vindecă deplin. / În suflet dezmierdări de gheață-mi pune."(I, 18). Turned into a protector of good dreams, the poet begs the lily to <<protect the soul with "ice caresses" ("dezmierdări de gheață") >> (Gibescu, op. cit. : 45) (Our translation G.C.).



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In Philippide's poetic space, the symbol of the lily encapsulates a multitude of meanings, being built on antithetic pillars. It expresses both the beginning and the end, both life and death, both purity and darkness through its hidden potencies. Mirror of dreaming, the lily blossoms as an avatar of the poetic youth of Alexandru Philippide.

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