# ION BARBU. THE ECSTASY OF GEOMETRY

Ion Barbu is the pen name of Dan Barbilian. Born on March 19, 1895 at Câmpulung Muscel, he passed away on August 11, in Bucharest. Elementary and secondary studies at Câmpulung Muscel, Roman, Piteşti. Highschool in Bucureşti and from 1914, student at the Faculty of Mathematics. He gets his PhD in mathematical sciences in 1929. After 1930, scientific activity becomes his main activity. Ion Barbu debuts as a poet in the journal *Literatorul* (1918) but the beginning of an intense creative work is marked by his contact with the *Sburatorul* magazine and literary club. He publishes the volumes of poetry *După melci (After snails*) (1921) and *Joc secund* (*Second Game*) (1930). The poetical work of Ion Barbu represents, in a way, a diagram of the passage of Romanian lyricism from Romanticism to Modernism. Thus, the Parnassian period corresponds to a moment o plenitude of post-Romantic Decadentism whereas the ballad and hermetical periods correspond to a programmatic modernism. The three stages of creation of Ion Barbu are linked by one element, by one means of communication that gives them a certain coherence, vision and theme; that element is the poetry of love. Love, in Ion Barbu's view, is not just a feeling originating in a sensation, it is the outcome of reason, involving a tension on the way to an ideal; therefore it can identified with the vitalist élan of the first poems. The meaning of such love is universal and absolute, representing – in debut poems – a cosmic, plainly confessed aspiration, towards the original sources of life.

The poet celebrates thus not exactly the love for something near, something belonging to the range of contingency, but the love for what is placed in distant and future space, for that which is high and surrounded by purity. In the *Lava* poem, the poet's communion with "serene spheres" is a foreshadowing of a potential achievement of the aspiration towards the absolute, towards the realm of transcendence. În a mythological sense, the motif of the "wedding" is present in *Pentru Marile Eleusinii* or aspires towards universality through communion with "pure consent" in the poem *Ţi-am împletit.* In his creations of Parnassian type, the poet combines two thematic directions, and also two tones: a Dionysian and an Apollonian one. Apollonian poetry corresponds to the aspiration towards the absolute of the hermetic poet, while Dionysian poetry proclaims a total immersion in life, in experience. What unites the two lyrical orientations is the idea of



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totality, which is both the aspiration towards the Heights and simultaneous penetration into the shimmering world of Dionysian orgy. The Dionysian poetry of Ion Barbu is placed, as noted by the critics, under the wheel of Venus, while his Apollonian poetry lies under the tutelage of Mercury. Aspiration towards the absolute is achieved with Ion Barbu through a synthesis operation, bypassing the choice of one of the two options for the two principles (male and female), preferring their integration into a coherent and substantial unity. On the other hand, Ion Barbu commentators have noted that in his poetry two levels of knowledge become apparent: a sensuous knowledge and an intellectual one. The image of the sun, emblematic to Barbian lyricism, overcomes this opposition with a totalizing, pure, absolute image. Ion Barbu's hermetism is, in fact, but the cultivation of a gnoseological poetry, fascinated by the tense knowledge of essences, by the invisible order of the world, a poetry that tends to instruct on the essential things. In the poem *Joc second,* the poet puts forward a profession of faith, revealing his aspiration towards the things themselves. It is not a denial of reality as a whole, as a coherent whole, but a refusal of the contingent, of randomness, of the accidental.

In the view of Ion Barbu, abstracted from the ephemeral, poetry is a "second game," a purer, sublimated reality. Although based on the experience of life, poetry is not to be confused with it, poetry represents a second universe, and possibly a "saved azure." In the *Joc secund* (*Second Game*) volume, two poetic types are visible: a hermetic phase proper, leading to the musicality of poetry through coding and abstraction and a plastic, evocative and picturesque expression. In the poem *După melci* (*After Snails*), under the guise of incantatory and naive verse, lies a drama of knowledge, a poem that contains a rite of initiation into the mysteries of life and death. Lyricism is born here in the sense of familiar communion with nature, out of the candor of childhood naivety, out of the spell with magic implications. The lamentation at the end has a disturbing charm; it is composed of a mixture of innocence and sadness, melancholy and fragility of candor in an unusual language, with onomatopoeic sounds. The Balkanism configured in several poems creates a mythical universe a striking originality, an oriental world, with its almost strident mixture of colors, shapes and languages. The Isarlâk poem begins as a pure fairytale, the lyrical "story" revealing the life of the imaginary citadel in a tone that absorbs in it humor, joviality, and the barely felt parody. In *Nastratin*



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*Hogea la Isarlâk* (*Nastratin Hogea at Isarlâk*) Nastratin is a hilarious character, projected against the hallucinating atmosphere of a swarming universe bound for decay. But the poem also has an encoded significance, a hidden meaning; according to Ion Barbu, it is "a caricature symbol of grim individualism: the apotheosis and satire of an exasperating solitude." The essence of Ion Barbu's poetry can best be isolated from the "hermetic" cycle. Poetry is, in this view, a mere reflection of the world in the ineffable mirror of verse, a denial of materiality. The world is a product purified by "geometry". Ion Barbu himself defines, in fact, his own creed, his manner, his artistic conception: "the verse we worship proves to be a difficult freedom: a world purified to the point where it only reflects the figure of our spirit. A pure act of narcissism." The expression of essentialized Beauty claims, however, another kind of song, a more "inclusive" one, purified of any sentimentality, freed from discursivity, purged of confessional elements. Ideal essences can be accessed through disturbing symbols, not through simple allegories, but by "images simultaneously expressing the order in microcosm and the one in macrocosm." *Ritmuri pentru nunţile necesare* (*Rhythms for Necessary Weddings*) is an encoded lyrical show that stages the great adventure of knowledge, whose last phase, the "Sun wheel," belongs to Poetry. Poetry as essence of authentic and deep knowledge of the world - is the ultimate meaning that Ion Barbu transmits to us.

The poem *Riga Crypto şi lapona Enigel* (*King Crypto and Enigel the Lapp*) belongs to the ballad and oriental stage, characterized by attraction to the polychromous, heterogeneous space of the Orient and by the ballad-like appearance of lyrical exposé. The poem first appeared in “Revista română", no. 1/1924, and then in the volume *Joc secund* of 1930. In a review, Dinu Pillat considers that "from among the fable poems with elements of nature as characters, the masterpiece remains *Riga Crypto şi lapona Enigel*, a ballad imagined by Ion Barbu as told by a minstrel ‘at the end of the wedding, in the pantry.’ This time we witness a lyrical drama, whose development takes place in the vegetable world of the boreal climate, involving Eros in the form of extraordinarily plasticizing circumstances.” The manner of structuring the lyrical substance is that of "the frame story" and the initial "frame" is placed in some hypothetical Middle Ages, fashioned from the fluctuating figures of dream and of the ritual fabulous.



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The "Minstrel" puts on a "story" with allegorical and fantastic flavor, a story of an impossible "wedding." Invocations to the minstrel introduce us into a world of ancient time and ancestral ceremonial and his “inclusive” song recreates the "story" in an aesthetic code, "at the end of the wedding" in a space of reclusion, the leisure and ease ("in the pantry"). Two attitudes are defined here, one of the fertile opening to the infinite and another one of closure, of meditation in the intimate space of the "pantry": “Menestrel trist, mai aburit/ Ca vinul vechi ciocnit la nuntă,/ de cuscrul mare dăruit/ Cu pungi, panglici, beteli cu funtă,// Mult îndărătnic menestrel,/ Un cântec larg tot mai încearcă,/ Zi-mi de lapona Enigel,/ Şi Crypto, regele-ciupearcă!// - Nuntaş fruntaş!/ Ospăţul tău limba mi-a fript-o,/ Dar, cântecul tot zice-l-aş,/ Cu Enigel şi riga Crypto.// - Zi-l menestrel!/ Cu foc l-ai zis acum o vară;/ Azi zi-mi-l stins, încetinel,/ La spartul nunţii, în cămară”. In the ballad of Ion Barbu two worlds face each other, two mentalities and two kingdoms: a world of the masculine and one the feminine, a mentality of existential abulia, of vegetation and one of solar aspiration towards spirituality, as well as a vegetal kingdom and a and human one. The masculine is placed by the poet under the sign of the demonic and stagnation. King Crypto is a being who delights in seclusion and abulia, who refuses to leave the narrow circle of tautological becoming and who, by contrast, bears the toxins of darkness and moisture (“Des cercetat de pădureţi/ În pat de râu şi-n humă unsă,/ Împărăţea peste bureţi/ Crai Crypto, inimă ascunsă.// La vecinic tron, de rouă parcă!/ - Dar printre ei bârfeau bureţii/ De-o vrăjitoare mănătarcă,/ De la fântâna tinereţii.// Şi răi ghioci şi toporaşi/ Din gropi ieşeau să-l ocărască,/ Sterp îl făceau şi nărăvaş,/ Că nu voia să înflorească”).

The feminine element is placed, as opposed to Eminescu’s *Luceafărul*, under the sign of the sun and of the aspiration towards spirituality. Starting from the pole, from the lands of eternal ice, Sámi Enigel goes through the steps of initiating becoming, of a sacrificial way to knowledge. In this path of self-fulfillment, the Sámi passes through the land of shadows and coolness of King Crypto, who lures her into his world of stagnation and denial of fulfillment, of fruitfulness. Enigel’s invocations have folklore ties and incantatory valences; they invite the Sámi to sleep and coolness, to a state of vegetation and standstill in the patterns of being. Sleep represents, just like in Eminescu’s poem, the threshold between the two kingdoms, the communication path between two antinomian universes, the realm of



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interference between shadow and light. King Crypto has, on the other hand, the acute, painful consciousness of his precarious condition, of his inability to detach himself from the tyranny of his own existential model: " – Enigel, Enigel/ Ţi-am adus dulceaţă, iacă./ Uite fragi, ţie dragi/ Ia-i şi toarnă-i în puiacă.// (…) –Enigel, Enigel/ Scade noaptea, ies lumine,/ Dacă treci să culegi,/ Începi, rogu-te, cu mine.// (…) – Să mă coc, Enigel,/ Mult aş vrea, dar vezi, de soare,/ Visuri sute, de măcel,/ Mă despart. E roşu, mare,/ Pete are, fel de fel;/ Lasă-l, uită-l, Enigel,/ În somn fraged şi răcoare". The invitation of the "Mushroom King" scares the Sámi girl, she perceives shade and coolness as a demonic world, a world of pure instinctual and aggressive physicality. To escape the temptations of the king, she reveals her different, even antinomian origin. The condition of Enigel the Sámi is one decisively marked by her pursuit of knowledge, by the signs of the sun and of incremental idealism. Thinking, knowing, as opposed to shade and sleep are represented by the symbol of the sun, as ideas are the ones that structure chaos, restoring an archetypal world of extreme purity and organicity: "Mă-nchin la soarele-nţelept,/ Că sufletu-i fântână-n piept./ Şi roata albă mi-e stăpână/ Ce zace-n sufletul fântână.// La soare, roata se măreşte;/ La umbră, numai carnea creşte/ Şi somn e carnea, se desumflă,/ - Dar vânt şi umbră iar o umflă…". The poem has the tragic end of those seeking to transcend their condition, without sufficient means to do so. A kind of Bovarism is apparent in the King's gesture of moving from the realm of the shadow into the solar one. That is a hubris that is going to be expiated as, for creatures of clay and darkness, "Pahar e gândul, cu otravă". The capacity of reflecting the world in ideas, of recreating the universe in the mirror of thought, is only given to humans: "Că-i greu mult soare să îndure/ Ciupearcă crudă de pădure,/ Că sufletul nu e fântână/ Decât la om, fiară bătrână,/ Iar la făptură mai firavă/ Pahar e gândul, cu otravă". Poem of the confrontation of two principles: demonic and solar, *Riga Crypto şi lapona Enigel* has a harmonious, cohesive structure and is written in a language that combines folk sounds with the aesthetic valences of the word of undeniable modernity.

The poem *Dioptrie* (*Diopter*) appeared in the magazine "Tiparniţa literară" in 1928, and is part of the hermetic stage, an essential phase in the poetic development of Ion Barbu. The author conceives the poetic act from the perspective of real data transfiguration to the point freeing reality from contingent details, from the accessory, from mimetic irrelevance. Poetry is



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thus pure, ideal representation of the world, an encoding of the meanings of the universe and of the senses of being, a retrieval of the spiritual originality of things. Defining Barbian hermetic poetry, G. Calinescu shows that the features of Ion Barbu's aesthetics at this stage are: "poetic Pythagorism, sublimation of the object to the full extent allowed by art, restoring an order at the second level of an occult correspondence among symbols, instruction into basic things, initiation in this inner order through core images and musical practices." In the poem *Dioptrie* too we deal with an intellectualization of forms, a revelation of the essence of things with the simultaneous bracketing of contingent meaning and the lifting of objects to a higher, intellectualized order. The key symbol of the poem is that of the book. In Barbian poetry the book is the one that bears the pursuit of spirituality, the one that stages the pure show of ideas on the scene of the word and gives the human being a propensity for transcendence, as chance of escaping the burden of the contingent. In *Dioptrie*, however, the book is not regarded as symbolic representation, by virtue of its semantic, transfiguring content, but as a rather material reality with a rather concrete relevance: ("Înalt în orga prismei cântăresc/ Un saturat de semn, poros infoliu./ Ca fruntea vinului cotoarele roşesc,/ Dar soarele pe muchii curs, - de doliu"). Thus a contrast is established between the "porosul infoliu" and light, as tension towards the ideal, as ecstasy of the intellect and sign of human aspiration towards the absolute. The poet perceives the book as a carrier of minor meanings, of a knowledge that is, if not barren, than a least irrelevant to the order of ideal truth, and he opposes it to ecstatic knowledge, to the pure rationality that does not need to submit to the narrow patterns of the sign: "Aproape. Ochii împietresc cruciş/ Din fila vibrătoare ca o tobă,/ Coroana literei, mărăciniş,/ Jos în lumină tunsă, grea, de sobă".

The failure of bookish knowledge is suggested by the poet through the sacrificial burning of the book. The truths of the book turn to ash, the purifying fire (belonging to the same semantic sphere as the light) is left to avenge and save true knowledge, that knowledge that is not turned into words and remains therefore pristine, a knowledge that borders on the virtual, on the potentiality rich in existential meaning ("Odaie, îndoire-n slabul vis!/ - Deretecată trece, de-o mătuşe -/ Gunoiul tras în conuri, lagăr scris,/ Adeverire zilei – prin cenuşe"). Praise of pure thought, of an experience that is unrevealed and unobstructed by the sign, a praise of the



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unperverted spirit and not of the barren letter, Ion Barbu's poem is one of the outstanding works of the hermetic cycle. *Din ceas, dedus…* is the most famous ars poetica of Ion Barbu, a programmatic poem in which the author explains the springs of his own work. The hermetism of Ion Barbu is, in fact, a lifting of the common word to the horizon of essences as well as a revelation, through lyrical encoding, of the fundamental truths of the world and of being. The critic E. Lovinescu defines Barbian hermetism as "a tendency to repress lyricism, either by abstraction of content or by simple means of reserved, discrete expression or, directly and voluntarily, through tortured, elliptical expression, with associations of strictly personal ideas, which turns poetry into a crossword puzzle." A poet of flawless artistic conscience, Ion Barbu paid, in some of his articles, a particular attention to the aesthetic manner of verse, retaining especially the abstraction of the lyrical from the sphere of the contingent and its placement in the area of a geometry purified from the slag of everyday life. In a 1929 article, the poet explains the relationship between poetry and mathematics: "No matter how contradictory these two terms may appear at first glance, there is somewhere, in the higher realm of geometry, a luminous place where it meets poetry (…). As in the case of geometry, I understand by poetry a certain symbolism for the representation of possible forms of existence. To me, poetry is an extension of geometry, and therefore, by remaining a poet, I have never left the divine realm of geometry." For Ion Barbu, poetry is a "game", so it involves a gratuitousness of the gesture of reflecting the world, a revelation of the meaning of the world in the field of pure, unforged or unperverted aesthetics. Through lyrical expression, the poet tends toward the sphere of the absolute that lies immersed in a world of timeless essences; he tends towards spatial and temporal boundlessness, that is to a world very close to that of geometry. The poet seeks pure beauty in the more or less prosaic details of reality ("adâncul acestei calme creste") a beauty which is reflected in his inner universe, so that reflection turns into refraction, into transfiguration, *mimesis* becomes *aesthesis*. The beautiful, sifted through the distillation devices of poetic consciousness, becomes "un joc secund, mai pur", ("a purer second game") exceeding the time limits of the "clock" and passing into "mântuit azur" ("saved azure.") Poetry is, therefore, a "nadir latent" (slow nadir), that is a reflection in the depth of the pure art of the zenith, a "însumare de harfe" (addition of harps), whose music is configured "în zbor invers" (in reverse flight).



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Language game, perfect mirror of the world, poetry has also a Platonic sense, in the sense of revelation of archetypal Ideas, those timeless forms that are imperfectly translated by poetic grace. Poetry is a mirroring of the world, which in its turn is a reflection of the space of eternal and immutable archetypes. We believe that the poet seeks, through the Orphic exercise of poetry, an escape from the contingent, from the empirical world, in a space of the ideal and the sublime, but also a negation of demonic and destructive time: "Din ceas, dedus, adâncul acestei calme creste,/ Intrată prin oglindă în mântuit azur,/ Tăind pe înecarea cirezilor agreste,/ În grupurile apei, un joc secund, mai pur".

The two antinomic terms essential to the understanding of poetry are: *zenith* – which designates the space of reality, and *nadir* – representing the world of art, a world of transfiguration and essential purity. Moreover, Tudor Vianu notes that "if the realm of experience rises up in a pyramid to the 'zenith,' its reflection forms its 'nadir.'" Poetry, art in general, has the role of bringing together the disparate aspects of reality, of synthesizing and focus concentrating in the perfect form of verse the whirling chaos of existence. Poetic creation is, in the opinion of Ion Barbu, a revelation of truth and a loss of being to the sacrificial tension striving for essentiality, it means flight, but a *reversed* flight, therefore a descent of poetic spirit into the abyssal, originary areas of existence, in the depths and grounds of the universe: "Nadir latent! Poetul ridică însumarea/ De harfe resfirate ce-n zbor *invers* le pierzi/ Şi cântec istoveşte: ascuns, cum numai marea,/ Meduzele când plimbă sub clopotele verzi". Negation of the concrete and, simultaneously, revelation of pure beauty, poetry has for Ion Barbu, an Orphic purpose and structure. It is the foundation of the world in and through the word, an establishment of a higher order, of a geometric type, a "nadir" preserved in potentiality, revealing the essential truths of the universe and of the human being, but also its own structure. Art is therefore autotelic, self-sufficient. It saves reality, through the transfiguration of its empirical data, giving it a fresh dimension and perspective, giving it entirely new, authentic meanings.

The poem *Oul dogmatic* belongs to the Uvedenrode cycle and is configured around a central topos, that of the *egg* – a metaphorical-symbolic representation of creation. The poet celebrates, however, that which is virtuality, latency in the egg, i.e. the increate, the mystery of the unseen, of the still indistinct from the original plasma. It is clear that in his



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verse, Ion Barbu restores the cosmogonic myth represented by the primary cosmic egg that hides in itself two essential principles of the world: the vital and the thanatic. In one study, Eugen Simion points out the meanings of the poem, stressing that "*Oul dogmatic* is a delightful praise of the beginning, of the innocence, of auroral purity, finally it is an hymn about the great architecture of universal creation. To praise all that, the poet chooses a symbol that appears in all creation mythologies, the *egg*, presented here in a lyrical paraphrase of great graciousness, which does not, however, lack strokes of humor and puns." The poem begins as a ballad, at a narrativized pace whereby the poet suggests the two ways in which the egg is perceived: as a profane object ("oul sterp"), ("sterile egg") without ritual meanings and as object of worship ("viul ou") ("living egg"), as revelation of an unconsumed wedding, mystery, as reality with hidden, spiritualized meanings: "E dat acestui trist norod/ Şi oul sterp ca de mâncare,/ Dar viul ou, la vârf cu plod,/ Făcut e să-l privim la soare!". There is, therefore, a symbolic symmetrical series: sterile/ living, yolk/ sun, series that can be traced to the antinomies of the essence of human condition, divided between life and death, between the aspiration towards the absolute and the relapse into contingent. Located in the midst of these antinomies, somehow making the transition between life and death, the egg is the bearer of a synthetic vocation, it carries within itself the germ of life, but does not actuate it, it is pure latency, eternal beginning, relevance of the genesis and, at the same time, "tomb," symbolic death, non-wedding. In it coexist the possibilities of epiphany and those of extinction, its structure is an autotelic, perfect, self-sufficient one, as its destiny is a closed one and its structure circular. Another symbolic correlation is that of the feminine (albumin) and male (yolk), the latter being the giver of life, the germinating force, the one that removes the egg from its vegetative latency: "Cum lumea veche, în cleştar,/ Înoată, în subţire var,/ Nevinovatul, noul ou,// Palat de nuntă şi cavou.// Din trei atlazuri e culcuşul/ În care doarme nins albuşul/ Atât de galeş, de închis/ Cu trupul drag, surpat în vis.// Dar plodul?/ De foarte sus/ Din polul *plus*/ De unde glodul/ Pământurilor n-a ajuns/ Acordă lin/ ŞI masculin/ Albuşului de hialin/ Sărutul plin". The "holy" egg is, in the opinion of Ion Barbu, the beginning of all things, a symbol that recovers the primordial myth of birth, the sign of virtuality, of the existence *in potentia*, as opposed to the existence *in actu*.



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The egg should not be "sipped" by the common being, but must remain in its potential state, in the dimension of latency that preserves in itself infinite possibilities and existential resources. Between "conceived" and "unborn" a strong opposition is established. The "conceived" lies under the sign of the tragic, of death, of extinction, of inevitable evolution, of the implacable becoming of life, while the "beginning" keeps in itself virtualities and signs of sacredness, it recovers the mythical grounds of the whole world: "A morţii frunte – acolo-i toată./ În gălbenuş,/ Să roadă spornicul albuş,/ Durata-nscrie-n noi, o roată./ Întocma – dogma.// Încă o dată:/ E Oul celui sterp la fel,/ Dar nu-l sorbi. Curmi nuntă-n el./ Şi nici la cloşcă să nu-l pui!/ Îl lasă-n pacea-ntâie-a lui,/ Că vinovat e tot făcutul,/ Şi sfânt, doar nunta, începutul". A representative poem of the hermetic stage of Ion Barbu, *Oul dogmatic* reveals the poet to us as a contemplative spirit, who circumscribes the ultimate mysteries of existence in his verse, due to a yearning for ideality, because of a profound thirst for archetypes, for essentiality. The poem first appeared in the magazine "Sburatorul" in 1926, in a first draft, and was rewritten in the final version, in the 1930 *Joc secund* volume. *Timbru* (*Stamp*) is an ars poetica, a work with programmatic character, where the author seeks to clarify his own creative options, his own conception of poetry and of its reasons. Ion Barbu understands poetry as "pure act of narcissism," as revealing presence in which the spirit reflects itself in order to wipe out the contingent, accessory data and reveal its deepest essence. On the other hand, in Ion Barbu vision, poetic language is not extracted from common, everyday language, but is a language of essential purity and depth, able to communicate fundamental things, to transfigure empirical reality, to give objects and beings an idealized outline, a halo of magic and mystery. In this respect, Ion Pop notes that "Poems such as *Timbru* or *Grup* - always cited among characteristic ars poeticae – guide us towards the same conclusion: in the game of the fragmentary world that expresses itself in a fragmentary way (…) a 'comprehensive song' is imagined that transfigures great cosmic elements and recalls the hymnic, paradisal promise of human fulfillment; into the chaos and opacity of phenomena is called the 'closed gesture' of the restructuring spirit, a gesture of supreme clarity, revealing the secret order of the universe." The poet puts in opposition two kinds of poetry: a poetry of representation and emotions, of the "song" marked by severe sentimentality and by its connection with the "clay," and a poetry that



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instructs on essential things, intricate and coded, where the "mark of the mind" is domineering and revealing. The former type of poetry, with a degree of mimetic representation of reality that is too high and dominated by emotions is suggested in the first stanza by the metaphors of the "bagpipe" and of the "whistle". That is an elementary poetry, unable to suggest essential and profound aspects of human existence, unable to overcome the limits of clay: “Cimpoiul veşted luncii sau fluierul în drum/ Durerea divizată o sună-ncet, mai tare…/ Dar piatra-n rugăciune, a humei despuiare/ Şi unda logodită sub cer, vor spune – cum?” Poetry, in Barbian sense, is not intended to be a witness to the confessions of the diurnal self, a reflection of everyday gestures and external feelings. It must acquire a spirit of synthesis, of embedding in itself the fundamental meanings of the universe, meanings that can only be poetically "spoken" in a mediated way, through an allusive, symbolic, coded verse.

Ion Barbu suggests that poetry must be a clarification of the details of the world, an ordering of the infinite meanings of the universe, a reflection in the mirror of pure spirit, of the meanings and nuances of things. In this way, the world, with its multitude of manifestations and aspects, reveals itself in the unity implied by the poetic game in revealing coherence. The poetic act, "pure act of narcissism" insofar as it reflects the figure of creative spirit, is therefore an act that incorporates in itself a sacrificial vocation (giving up the empirical world, the world of everyday gestures) and an ascending one, in the sense of lifting the details of reality to a synthetic and unifying sense that renders reality relevant: “Ar trebui un cântec încăpător, precum/ Foşnirea mătăsoasă a mărilor cu sare;/ Ori lauda grădinii de îngeri, când răsare/ Din coasta bărbătească al Evei trunchi de fum”. *Timbru* is a confession of poetic faith, where the author develops a lyrical conception of spiritualist and hermetic and, eventually, of Orphic origin, because in the opinion of Ion Barbu poetic language is a foundation, a building of possible worlds put under the sign of a higher order and perfect harmony.

The poem *După melci* (*After Snails*) belongs to the ballad and oriental stage of Ion Barbu’s work and was published in 1921. Despite its resembling a "story", despite its narrativity that circumscribes the first level of poetic text, we can see, in the poem, certain profound philosophical meanings, a deeper meaning of lyrical allegory. The poem *După melci* reveals its author’s temptation to celebrate vital frenzy, the concrete



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elementary, in a sensory perception of the world and from the perspective of local mythology as it emerges in many folk- or high culture ballads in Romanian literature. The perception of nature, of great lyrical freshness, is accompanied here by a deeper sense, that of the revelation of unfathomable mysteries and initiation into the mysteries of life and death. The snail, an obscure being with vegetative existence, allows itself to be lured by the child's innocent spell into an early spring. Treacherous spring ends, however, and the snail, out of its protective shell, freezes to death. Barbian lyricism oscillates between two attitudes, between two dimensions of different affective vibrations: it is, first, the drama of the snail, a gentle creature caught unawares by unpredictable nature and then the feeling of regret of the child, whose game takes on tragic meanings. The Universe as reflected in the *După melci* poem appears to be configured out of fixed, immutable prototypes, that cannot change their condition, cannot leave their circle, any attempted escape being severely punished. Death is transfigured here, it is sublimated into a sense of communion with the rhythms of nature, as in *Mioriţa*. Moreover, formulas of folk spell, of folk incantation, enhance the atmosphere of magic, of obscure mystery: "- Melc, melc, ce-ai făcut,/ Din somn cum te-ai desfăcut?/ Ai crezut în vorba mea/ Prefăcută… Ea glumea!/ Ai crezut că plouă soare,/C-a dat iarba pe răzoare,/ Că alunul e un cântec…/ Astea-s vorbe şi descântec!/ Trebuia să dormi ca ieri/ Surd la cânt şi îmbieri,/ Să tragi alt oblon de var/ Între trup şi ce-i afar'…/ Vezi?/ Ieşişi la un descântec;/ Iarna ţi-a muşcat din pântec…/ Ai pornit spre lunci şi crâng,/ Dar pornişi cu cornul stâng,/ Melc nătâng,/ Melc nătâng!". Poem structured in ballad form, *După melci* stages a drama of knowledge, of initiation into the mysteries of nature. It deals with the knowledge of the mysteries of life and death by an innocent being that listens to the voice of the world, trying to capture its deeper meanings. Ion Barbu's poetry is the expression of a spirit devoured by knowledge, by experience under the sign of pure poetic ideas, a spirit that has risen to the "intellectual manner of the Lyre".



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