“THE WAR GENERATION”. TWO LYRICAL APPROACHES: GEO DUMITRESCU AND ION CARAION

Geo Dumitrescu. The defiance of “antiliterature”

Geo Dumitrescu's poetic destiny was rightly assumed by literary criticism in terms of rebelliousness and protest - implicitly and explicitly - against weaknesses of the real but also against the ways of representing these realities lyrically. Joining a tradition of Romanian "anti-literature," the poetry of Geo Dumitrescu was placed by Gheorge Grigurcu, for example, under the sign of "popular avant-garde" (syntagm created on the model of "folk Surrealism," applied to Jacques Prévert): “we are dealing with a ‘popularization’ of an experience that is consumed in a Mandarin-like 'modernism', a *sui-generis* purism, which turns the black flag of the anarchists into the black of gala suits, through a bizarre attempt at classicization of the most unleashed nonconformism.”

One of the many questions that Geo Dumitrescu's poetry can raise is to what extent the nonconformist and negativist flow of lyrically transcribed interrogations retains ethical and aesthetic reasons and semantic energy nowadays, i.e. more than half a century after their enunciation. Fact is, firstly, that the poetry of Geo Dumitrescu has no "obsolete," no anachronistic air. Beyond "trends and time," his lyricism kept intact its debunking energies and the scale of meanings, the ironic and sarcastic subtext and lexical flavor. The "antibourgeois" revolt, the rebellious disposition, are conjugated with a verse of complete directness and transparency, which assumes anticallophily as a "pre-established" standard of lyrical discourse. For these reasons, the rhetorism of Geo Dumitrescu’s verse depends not so much on tonality and attitude, as on the structure of his work, because, even when the lyrical vision seems abstracted, detached or self-reflexive, turned upon itself, it always contains, in fact, a "message" addressed to an addressee (which may be that Baudelairian "hypocrite reader" with whom the poetic self is in constant dialogue). Geo Dumitrescu's books thus reconstruct the journey of an author that influenced to an extremely important extent Romanian lyricism after the Second World War in its deepest structures and manifestations, as noted, among others, by G. Dimisianu: "among the poets of his generation, Geo Dumitrescu is the one who has the most literary followers, sons, grandchildren and even great-grandchildren, all in a straight line (...). I will

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not hesitate to mention in this respect Marin Sorescu, himself a cultivator of the common, desolemnized language of unembellished poetic expression, of the humor springing out of the handling of word games, puns etc. but even more appropriate would be to mention Mircea Dinescu (...). Besides these two, we can find Geo Dumitrescu spread, so to speak, throughout the poetry of the generation of the eighties and nineties (grandchildren and great-grandchildren!), a poetry that is, in its turn, devourer of the "everyday", sarcastic, playful, destructuring and destabilizing ".

In this way, we can see that Geo Dumitrescu's poetic approach has its starting point in an attitude of revolt, of inadhesion to a counterfeit, unnatural reality; poet with an undeniable "penchant" for the real, Geo Dumitrescu assumes the prerogatives of sarcasm and irony out of an acute sense of inadequacy of literary expression to the data of the concrete. Acutely feeling the poetic word as an alienated and alienating way of communicating, improper to an authentic aesthetic dialogue, the author uses a "democratization" of poetic language, restricting the scale of consecrated vocables and relativizing the amplitude of themes with a consolidated, but otherwise constraining prestige. Out this need for truth, of this imperious necessity of "credibility" is born the interrogative mood of the poet, the doubtful fascination that gradually creeps into the heart of the poem, the lyric space being permanently configured as a dialogue, an alternation of questions and answers, as in the well-known poem *Dar eu spun mereu*: "(…) Şi discutam mereu, şi ziceam… şi vorbeam, -/ «dar fiţi atenţi! – spunea domnu-nvăţător -/ trebuie să stăm la o distanţă egală/ de lucruri, de *nu* şi de *da*!»/ şi eu ziceam *oare*, şi tu spuneai *însă*,/ şi el zicea *una-alta*, şi vorbele/ se-mbrânceau unele peste altele,/ şi ardeau enorme iluzii şi gânduri mănoase/ iluminând până departe, astfel că/ discuţia părea lâncedă şi fără picioare,/ şi tocmai de aceea apăru, ca un strigăt puternic,/ nevoia mişcării, risipindu-ne/ într-un umblet înfrigurat, în zig-zag/ cu ochii deschişi, cu ochii-n pământ, căutând…/ şi eu spuneam *totuşi*, şi tu spuneai *parcă*,/ şi mai căzu un cuvânt tremurat, ori/ un cuvânt de taină, *îndoială* sau aşa ceva". It is significant, on the other hand, how the methodical, assumed rhetorism of the author (which belongs to both formula and intent) harmonizes with the rebellious attitude that is constitutive of these verses. Reflexive and self-reflexive lyrical consciousness, Geo Dumitrescu relativizes – in well calculated doses of irony, sarcasm and

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demythologization - emotional and expressive commonplaces of poetry, giving them a new scale and tonality. Denouncing "the bookish slime, the damned stillness of dull words, dulled in meanings", the poet aspires to a "lost Eden" of the original word completely liberated of all successive conventions continually burdening it. With a Heraclitean and agonal poetic structure and agony, for which lyrical discourse means perpetual polemical reaction as well as opposition to any form of "stillness," Geo Dumitrescu articulates his poetic visions in a regime naturalness where phrasing, though apparently entirely freed from rhythmic canons, obeys however a lithe inner rhythm that dictates the flow of utterances. For this reason, the poems of Geo Dumitrescu preserve their open and rigorous construction and the impeccable architecture of verse does not deny at all the "direct," engaged form of images.

It should be noted however that the attitude of rebellion against aesthetic canons and commonplaces of any kind is not cultivated for its own sake, but presupposes, as a fair corollary, an underlying moral value, exposed through a subtle art of poetic suggestion and persuasion. Antisentimental at a time when sentimentality was manifested in various forms in literature, Geo Dumitrescu disguises his attitudes and inner states under the half-serious, half-buffoon masks of intended commonplace, deliberately declared as such. If, with the lyricism of Geo Dumitrescu "in the hourglass of poetry the sand of prose begins to trickle " (Ioan Buduca), it is not less true that this poetry confesses, next to its fertile appetite for the real, a metaphysical dimension, one that is not explicit, but subsidiary and allusive, manifested in the temptation of the poet to capture in his poems the senses of the world, to lyrically circumscribe the tragic connotations and truths of human condition. The threat of time and of an alienating history, the perception of the fragility of being faced with the gregarious spirit, the overwhelming sense of panic engendered by the monstrous proliferation of matter, are essential moods that reign supreme over the lyricism of Geo Dumitrescu, one of the most important contemporary poets, unforgiving and lucid witness of these times that are reflected - with an ironic and debunking halo – in the rigor and interrogative fascination of his poems. Poetry born of a rebellious reaction and of an inborn discomfort with commonplaces of any kind, the poetry of Geo Dumitrescu has an unmistakable ostentation of cultivation of the trivial, a skepticism of poetic thought and also a certain bacovianism of attitude and style. To

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idealization, the poet opposes persiflage and to the standstill in patterns, the iconoclastic verve, the ironic and sarcastic instinct, through which he trivializes the forms of too high solemnity of existence, of culture, of the human. Eugen Simion insists on ironic verve of the poet: "The young poetry around 1940, begins again to communicate under pressure, maybe, from historical events, but also as a result of natural evolution. It continues to harass the indolent reader and to ridicule the inertia of literature, but it does so in an intelligible way, with a wide variety of techniques. Geo Dumitrescu intelligently uses irony. He is an ironist, which here means a sentimentalist, a pathetic person in disguise. His first concern is to deride the sacred objects of traditional poetry. He starts with the very being of the poet, commented in these sacrilegious terms: heart - a "pinhead," brains - "a sacred and concrete machine" thoughts - "a shapeless heap of dirty laundry" etc.. Literature with all its prestigious clichés is next in line: love, death, transcendental life etc., do not enjoy any esteem in the poet's eyes."

The poem *Iubire* has the aspect and character of a brief lyrical "reportage" in which the author does nothing but record, with minuteness and accuracy of detail, several relevant facts of human condition. The poem begins with a concise comment on death, in brief and poignant notations, where the verve of ideation mingles with symbolical braces („Cineva hotărâse de mult/ că oamenii au voie să moară.../ Moarte frumoasă, nemuritoare, moarte bună,/ moarte obscură, moarte grea, plină/ de înţelesuri şi întoarceri..."). The following sequence of the poem makes room for the notations of the lyrical "reportage," where the poet unnoticeably adds some highly expressive turns of phrase of metaphorical character: "El muri tânăr. Încă tânăr. Era îndrăgostit./ Trupul i-a fost găsit împăcat, fierbinte,/ adormit pe un mare zâmbet./ Asupra lui s-au găsit/ mai multe bilete de tramvai/ de pe traseul 8 orizontal,/ o scrisoare nescrisă, din care/ s-a putut afla totul,/ un certificat de stare sufletească/ pe numele Clement Ion/ şi o batistă curată, umedă...". The last sequence of the poem has a higher dose of lyricism. One perceives here a wave of compassion, of regret before an untimely broken fate. The feeling of love is delicately transcribed as transfiguration of ordinary existence, as redeeming emotional elevation: "Inima i se oprise, mare,/ după ce izbise zadarnic în gratiile/ pieptului, încercând să scape./ În ochii larg deschişi, lumină,/ în locul vieţii, imaginea Ei,/ albastră,/ căreia o rază de soare/ îi adăuga şuviţe blonde". Demystification and resemantization of a feeling, the poem *Iubire*

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shows the range of a major contemporary poet, Geo Dumitrescu. The feeling of love, debunked, subjected to a desecrating reaction, is also transcribed in *Madrigal răsturnat*, in the volume *Nevoia de cercuri*. Madrigal is, as well-known, a species of gallant poetry which proposes a compliment addressed to women, implying, generally, expressive ingenuity and sophistication. In Geo Dumitrescu's poetry gallantry is replaced by a sense of skepticism, tenderness is supplanted by a more detached attitude and expressive refinement is substituted with prosaic, direct, genuine diction.

The lyricism of his poetry comes precisely from this sense of abandonment and skepticism, from the apparently uninvolved attitude of self, for whom the "fata de fum" represents a capital of love and beauty that it has appropriated. The girl herself remained after the ravishment sad, ugly, poor: "Ai să te faci urâtă, fată tristă, fată de piatră./ Tot ce mi-ai dăruit sporeşte, urcă-/ piere încet ce ţi-am dat, aşa cum seacă/ bălţile neadânci bătute de vânt./ Mi-ai dat puţin – ţi-am luat tot,/ ochii mei te păstrează întreagă/ şi-n cana de lut a inimii mele/ murmură sângele tău./ Ai să te faci urâtă, fată tristă, fată de fum./ Tot ce era frumos, tot ce era de preţ/ pe piept am luat, pe frunte, comori uriaşe -/ ce-a mai rămas e aproape nimic/ şi mai puţin încă, ce-a mai rămas,/ încet-încet tot mie-mi rămâne,/ căci strâng după tine harnic, avar, bob cu bob,/ ca vrabia în urma sacului rupt". The resonance of erotic feeling, blurred, barely heard in the lines of the poem, is devoid of any mystery, deprived of the sound of the ineffable, recorded in a playful-debunking key. Referring to the specificity Geo Dumitrescu's poetry, Petru Poantă notices that "in his case this antipurist resurrection has the most literary aspect. Almost cynically, he compromises all commonplaces of a lyricism generally considered 'beautiful', he methodically destroys the very ineffable of poetry, its grace, its imponderables, and its privacy. The imaginary is removed and compromised by a permanent confrontation with reality. A cold irony undermines metaphors about to form, language is no longer selective, therefore not 'poetic;' it incorporates words from extremely diverse areas, with unusual associations, manhandling the bourgeois sense of a 'beautiful' work. The poems are full of cheap comparisons, located in a peripheral, violently trivial, often grotesque world. An absolute denial of mystery is encountered in such a universe that seems to have lost the idea of 'literature.'"

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The poet, recognizing himself in the image of a "thief" of feminine beauty and grace, is the one that stripped the female being of its very secrets, of its unalterable beauty, of the "shining powder" of the beloved creature. The treasures of the girl have remained embedded in the soul of the lover, and his increasing his emotional dowry: "Ai rămas puţină, fată tristă, creangă desfrunzită./ Ca un tâlhar sălbatic te-am prădat;/ te-am jefuit de taine, de idoli,/ de flori şi de lacrimi,/ iar fluturele tău viu, luminos şi năstruşnic,/ ţi l-am furat, dezgropându-l din inima ta/ şi lăsându-te stinsă, deşartă,/ ca o veştedă crisalidă pustie.// Ai să te faci urâtă, fată tristă, fată amară,/ ca o grădină bătută de grindină./ Lacom, înfrigurat, te-am spălat în apele mele,/ te-am ales strecurându-te ca pe un nisip aurifer -/ nimic n-a mai scăpat printre degete:/ toată pulberea ta strălucitoare/ e-n mine.// Chiar umbra ta, să n-o cauţi zadarnic,/ ţi-am oprit-o pe zid, la plecare,/ atunci când inima mea explodând,/ te-a spulberat./ Şi iată mâinile mele, priveşte-le:/ în palma lor a rămas încrustată/ urma genunchilor tăi, aşa cum rămâne/ pe cojile nucii urma miezului dulce". The end of the poem takes a melancholy turn, the atmosphere is of overwhelming sadness, the verse opens to an emotionality also enhanced by the invoking tone of the poet: („Şi-ţi strig în fiecare noapte, răutăcios,/ deschizând fereastra spre luna ce scapătă,/ îţi strig mereu cu mâhnire adâncă şi teamă;/ ai să te faci urâtă, ai să te faci puţină,/ fată tristă, fată de gheaţă.// Ai să te faci urâtă, fată amară!..."). The poem is, in fact, a madrigal with reversed meanings, but which echoes, with awe and recollection, an insinuating and abulic love. Geo Dumitrescu's poetry stands out, in the context of postwar poetry, by its prosaic-reserved tone, through its direct notations of an all the more pronounced plasticity as they are placed under the sign of brevity and of the lack of rhetorism.

Ion Caraion and the poetics of negativity

Poet belonging to the so-called "war generation" Ion Caraion established himself primarily through the originality of his lyrical universe, through his striking imaginary horizon transcribed in unconcessive, steep verse, of a negativist force rarely seen in our poetry. The insurgent spirit, the rebellious attitude are prevalent in Caraion's poems, a poet for whom denial is a form of resonance with his aesthetic and ethical choices. In Caraion's poems the dominant feeling is that of anguish, of heavy despair, of apocalyptic reflexes, nourished by disillusionment and disappointments

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of daily life and drawn in contracted lines, with broken syntax and images that bring together the concrete and the imaginary under the sign of an underlying ethics, an ethics of nothingness, of negativity. Sometimes existential drama turns into a drama of knowledge, the poetic word can no longer "spy" on the secrets of the world, feeling acutely its gnoseologic precariousness, so that the poet performs an incomplete reading of the "text" of the world, with cracks and blanks of representation. The sense of disillusionment and agonal skepticism is also given by the existence of the lyrical self in an urban space, a cloistering space of hallucinating annihilation, fact emphasized by critic Michael Petroveanu, who notes that "Ion Caraion does not oppose, in traditionalist spirit, urban corruption to the regenerating purity of the 'hearth'. Hostility to the landscape of stone and cement is compatible with the appeal of urban condition seen as irreversible destiny. Historical destiny of man is played, for the poet, between the walls of blocks and the pavement of passersby. Scene of degradation and graveyard of hopes, the city is at the same time the place of the possible resurrection, awaited in a spasm of nerves, blood, flesh."

Acuity of perceptions is accompanied by a very clear need of reflexivity, always contradicted by filthy and precarious reality, while the strictly limited space of the poem, the lyrical vision and idea are equally entitled to aesthetic life, under the sign of an exacerbated awareness of the ridiculous and the ephemeral of being. The feeling of death is also present in these texts that make up a quasi-mythical existential scenario of a lyrical self marked by the anxiety of the passage of time and by a disappointed skepticism in front of the world's precarious makings. The present moment turns to ashes and the flickerings of memory can no longer restore an ever more elusive past. Things themselves, in their solitary stillness remain to measure the frailty of beings that pass away, while their illusions are shattered one by one. The agonal sadness of these poems with an expressionist tinge comes from the impossibility of perceiving the ultimate, essential meaning of the world and also from the feeling of lack of ideality in a universe dominated by materiality, by reification. Caraion understands poetry as fracture, as twisted image of a disaggregating universe, as immersion into the meaningless, grotesque show of a human existence macerated by war, death and anxiety. The bridges towards the transcendent have retreated, the ascending thrill turns into ashes, the being itself loses its identity, its consciousness of self and others and soon becomes an

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imperative, an assumed requirement, rather than a reality. Critic Cornel Regman most clearly defines Ion Caraion's lyrical identity: "poet of the state of crisis (who) finds a proud vocation in assuming unreservedly and without illusions this poetical, but also human condition: loneliness, desolation, anxiety, fear, disgust and revolt of an outraged moral fiber, vexed to exasperation, ulcerated and macerated in its secret vulnerability, but which - in a fantastic response – is trying, through poetry, a chimerical revenge on its own, against the entire universe, disfiguring the face of reality with the vitriols and suppurations of an injured self." Ion Caraion is, simply speaking, a poet of negativity before a very precarious reality that has its moral and existential meanings overturned or diverted. His lyrical expression is one of rebellion, fighting back and spasm. .

Omul profilat pe cer, poem originally published in the homonymous 1945 volume, is very representative of the negative visionary character of Ion Caraion, of this lyricism transcribed into despair and disillusionment in front of existential absurdity. The poem is, ultimately, a parable of the human condition and has a disturbing concreteness. The allegorical substratum is, here, always emphasized by violent images that are violently projected on the retina of the reader, images that disturb, amaze, assault, in a register of urgency and insurgency: "Omul profilat pe cer avea umerii aspri, răniţi,/ mersul înfricoşător şi-un păr negru, ierbos,/ crescuse enorm ca o zăpadă polară, ca o inundaţie marină,/ laolaltă cu minereurile pământului, cu sângele lui subteran,/ în care au putrezit rădăcini/ în care s-au înecat femei/ în care au venit să moară carbonizate păsările din fundul lumii;/ gonite din cuiburi şi de pe vapoare,/ au venit să moară păsările Sudului.// Printre materii anorganice, printre viziuni sălbatice şi plante/ mergea uriaş ca o mie de blocuri puse să meargă,/ ca o mie de soldaţi trimişi să se omoare,/ ca o mie de prizonieri întorşi din război,/ ca o mie de muncitori chemaţi la fabrică". Poetic syntax is an elliptical one, syncopated, trenchant and disarticulated, with rollover images and convulsions of vision. Ion Pop notes in this regard that "the poetic text will know, therefore, willful disturbances, discontinuities, gaps, fragmentation called to concentrate a powerful tension node in the punctual notation, with surreal associative shocks, but also with poignant reflective accents, leaving, on the other hand, plenty of room for the reverberation of image (...) ". Disaggregating realities of war are lyrically captured through a series of images, of sequences in almost cinematic progress. Hallucinatory, of a heavy

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materiality, the broken lines of contours, things, beings, gestures have a tragic pallor, with reflexes of the absurd and the irregular: “Ne ameninţă frigul, fabrica mea şi-nserează -/ o înserare cu vertebrele obosite şi combustibil consumat./ Omul profilat pe cer venea din măruntaiele pământului cu căldură,/ cu asasinate inedite, cu insule de cadavre plutind/ pe rezervoare de păcură de la un sat la altul.// El avea umerii puternici şi vechi,/ inima grea ca o iarnă/ şi nişte ochi fantastici, nişte priviri/ încărcate de miragii.// În dimineaţa brutală ca un pumn/ ploile au curs paralel cu sângele/ cu dragostea, cu bucuria, cu iarba./ O bucată de pâine uitată în coş/ o cale ferată pe unde nu mai vin trenuri/ o pensiune din care au plecat ferestrele/ un copil care se plimbă prin curte/ o mamă care nu mai poate să nască/ un stejar cu ghinda cafenie în palmă/ un continent de bucurie/ o pădure de pâini/ o armată de peşteri bărboase”.

Adept of non-counterfeited poetic beauty, of genuine expressiveness, Ion Caraion configures a text marked only by the endless variations and meanders of thought, with bursts of images and crisscrossings of registers and tonalities of the most diverse, fact noted by the critic Ion Pop: " the poetic text will know, therefore, willful disturbances, discontinuities, gaps, fragmentation called to concentrate a powerful tension node in the punctual notation, with surreal associative shocks, but also with poignant reflective accents, leaving, on the other hand, plenty of room for the reverberation of image (...) ". No idealization of existence is brought by the end of the poem either. War, with its tragic imprint, the absurdity of an existence in which natural gesture is replaced by reification, and the mechanical overlaps grotesquely with the natural, are the realities, or aspects of being mentioned here, in the last part of the poem, in steep lines with syncopated syntax, replete with heavy materiality, a materiality that seems to exclude any piece of ideal: “Omul profilat pe cer s-a uitat în pământ/ - pământul semăna cu toamna -/ «Dărâmaţi oraşul acesta,/ în care nimic nu mai e sigur» -/ spuneau trecătorii uitându-se-n urmă.// A fost o seară tulbure. Departe/ s-au auzit mitraliere. Veneau/ Pe brânci!/ În coate!!/ Acuma!!!/ - Dimineaţa ca o sârmă ghimpată/ s-a oprit în pieptul omului profilat pe cer.// El se uita în pământ/ pământul semăna cu toamna -/ şi nu mai vorbea nimeni.// Pe urmă, târziu, s-au auzit mitralierele în oraş…”. The poetry of Ion Caraion has therefore a structure that reflects, at the level of lyrical text, the structures of the "text" of the world. To the convulsions of history, to the anomie of an anxious and agonic time, corresponds a fragmentary lyrical structure,

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imbalanced and with an imaginary horizon placed in a register of the grotesque and randomly. As noted by Eugen Simion, "the poem irritates, exasperates like a superb dentition with a few missing teeth". It is, in its purest experience of modern literature, an anti-lyric unconventional poetry, where the violence of images and the tonality of an essential gravity render the absurd atmosphere of contemporary man, whose condition lies between the illusions of compulsory happiness and the seal of devastating time. The visionary character of such a poem is, as can be seen, a reversed one, mined by deceptiveness and anxiety. The signs of history, collected in a hallucinatory perception, put their seal on the being. The tension that dominates the entire poem is the tension of a lyrical voice for which the world no longer hides any illusion, for which the universe no longer has a mythicizing aura. Ion Caraion is a representative of "anti- literature" and "antipoetry" in the sense in which poetry and hence literature in its original meaning, of Orphic expression of the beauties of the world is no longer comprehensible, conceivable in a world subjected to anomie, incongruity, or absurdness.

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