# FLORIN IARU. THE APPEAL TO IRONY

One may assume, and rightly so, that the poetry of Florin Iaru emerges as an impulse of an irrepressible need to confess. The poet has the knowledge, at times superfluous, to express his own emotions, the tribulations of his body and thought, in an abrupt and exceedingly uninhibited verse, lacking any rigidity but, on the contrary – fetchingly – natural beyond any doubt. Charged with the energies of lyrical biography the verse exhibits expressive tensions and contractions, at times it is torrential, abusive or luxuriant, other times it is spontaneous, perfectly natural, with an irreproachably simple enunciation. The sequences of his own life are charged with literality, literature and existence mingle to the point of being indistinguishable, the avatars of events and the braces of bookishness meet within the generous contours of the poem, like in *Jocuri prea multe jocuri*: "Zile de-a rândul am trecut pe bicicletă/ Nopţi foarte scurte mi-am făcut pentru tine/ punte şi dunetă./ Am jucat popice cu tartorul popicarilor şi l-am ras/ - Eşti mare, tinere – şi m-a bătut pe spinare/ ca pe o balenă decolorată de soare/ Am urcat unsprezece etaje mai iute ca ascensorul/ Am sărit de pe balcon şi m-am prins în braţe:/ - Ce faci prostule? Mi-am zis/ Am scris cărţi nesfârşite/ despre adaptarea la mediu/ despre kilometrajul tandru între pat şi televizor/ şi am fost singur pe mii de pagini.// Am fost şi plictisit/ zile de-a rândul/ bruna bicicletă a stat răsuflată/ întoarsă pe burtă, fără-ntrebări/ la marile răspunsuri de la o vârstă cochetă/ Am fost şi enervat nopţi lungi/ şi ţi-am plâns pe ţâţe/ între braţele sufocante/ pentru nimic în plus/ la sentimentul meu de tine/ Am furat/ popicele popicarilor/ n-am luat/ nici un bilet pe tramvaie/ am fugit cu apa-nsetaţilor/ şi-am făcut baie./ Dar ce n-am făcut, Maria, ce n-am făcut!// M-am răsturnat – cuprins de o grozavă lingoare – / pe scut, în faţa oglinzii în care te fardai./ Mi-am tăiat un picior un nas şi-o ureche/ am fost duminica în Cişmigiu/ cu soldaţii subretele/ i-am cumpărat bretele lu' Iordache cel şchiop/ i-am dăruit panglicuţe Agripinei/ am învăţat lângă plutoanele de percuție din top/ conga fox-trot bee-bop".

Reality, as it is transcribed by Iaru in his verses, is nothing but make-believe invented by his dilated senses, his overflowing imagination. It is a verisimilar reality, but it has nothing truthful about it. The images of existence are often structured according to oneiric tectonics, where the objects have fluid contours, a strange morphology and a syntax that is more



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often than not chosen at random. It is a dreamed world or, at the very least, one that invents the ego that records it so passionately, with such solipsistic fervor. Between the parallel mirrors of the poem awaits a lyrical self that is pained by untreatable dilemmas, tortured by a world that no longer legitimates its structure and ceaselessly modifies its outlines and forms of existence. For instance *Aer cu diamante* is such a poem; in it the oneiric visions, the tectonics of dreams are extremely relevant and suggestive of the manner in which Florin Iaru positions himself in connection with his own writing: "Ea era atât de frumoasă/ încât vechiul pensionar/ se porni să roadă tapiţeria/ scaunului pe care ea a stat./ În iarna curată, fără zăpadă/ maşina uscată încerca s-o ardă./ Dar ea de mult coborâse când s-a auzit/ înghiţitura./ Şoferii mestecaţi/ au plâns pe volanul păpat/ căci ea nu putea fi ajunsă./ În schimb era atât de frumoasă/ încât şi câinii haleau/ asfaltul de sub tălpile ei.// Atunci portarul îşi înghiţi decoraţiile/ când ea intră în casa fără nume/ iar mecanismul sparse în dinţi/ cheia franceză şi cablul/ ascensorului ce-o purtă/ la ultimul etaj./ Paraliticul cu bene-merenti/ începu să clefăie clanţa inutilă/ şi broasca goală/ prin care nu putea curge/ un cărucior de lux (…)". Theatricality and performance is much more evident in the volume *Înnebunesc şi-mi pare rău*. In the poems from this volume more than in any other place one can perceive the author's passion for gabbing and carnivalization of language, for decorum and the revelations of the poem itself. Iaru's poetry, like that of other peers from the same generation, gets a composite, polychrome aspect, turns into an ebullient linguistic spectacle, of extreme lushness. This feature of the eighties generation has been noted by Nicolae Manolescu, for instance: "We are witnessing a triumph of discourse in Cărtărescu, Iaru, Magdalena Ghica and others. Their poetry is an empire of words. It is a talkative poetry, one that never holds its peace. Silences, pauses and, ultimately, that feeling, coming from Mallarmé and going throughout modernism, that not all is being said, have not value for Iaru, who is incomparably more attracted to the ability of lyrical discourse to be open, programmatic, challenging, vehement and persuasive. With Iaru everything seems to want full expression in words, all the way. Value is not attached to that which remains hidden, to suggestion or ambiguity. On the contrary, that which is not uttered does not exist, suggestion is felt to be too weak, and ambiguity is systematically destroyed through a maximum precision of detail. The poetics of speech is preferred instead of the poetics of silence. Its origin is



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clear". The comedy of language derives, as it has been observed, from the Muntenian spirit, with turns of phrases and elements of slang, with genuine revelations and desperations, with ellipsis and contortions of the familiar word, with inter-textual insertions and an irrepressible instinct for parody. The lyrical tonalities and registers intertwine like in a perpetual mirror game of text and inter-text, like in the poem *Adio. La Galaţi*.

Fear of living, the horror of feeling, to perceive an intolerable existence with an irrepressible acuity is quite often associated with an immersion into the lariats of the text. An extremely lucid post-modern consciousness, Florin Iaru sometimes denudes the mechanisms of the poem, exposes its articulations or knick-knackisms, and at other times he enters in an open dialogue with the reader, explaining himself, explaining all the reports and revelations within the text, the avatars of a language which seeks to rewrite an existence with a torrential sensory presence, but also bearing the tremor of death and of the destiny which is insinuated behind the polychrome expression: "Desigur, te-am văzut cerând aprobare morţii/ care-şi lăsase bărbia pe aripa umărului meu drept/ şi încercai să loveşti cu pleoapele, cu brazdele feţei/ imaginea unui plâns funerar, încercai să treci/ peste ecran cu izolir-bandul frazei tale moi/ cu chewing-gum-ul pe care-l mesteci în creier/ visând – ochii tăi violeţi sfârtecau violetul -/ visând o ieşire la mare, spre ochiul acela compus/ care-ţi dicta gesturi în puful urechii, încet (…)// Stai, cititor!/ Stai şi observă, te rog/ sinceritatea spaimei mele/ mecanice/ placată cu aur pe vidul creierului meu./ Observă, te rog,/ bruiajul discret cu care metafora/ umblă la butoane/ să schimbe postul./ Şi înţelege, te rog,/ mesajul meu întunecat, lovit de adevăr/ peste bot – cu tot cu amurgul cu fulgerare/ cu transfocarea violentă a spectrului/ aici/ la marginea indiferentă/ a lumii". With the air of an "incorrigible Pierrot stagy" (Nicolae Manolescu), Florin Iaru often displays and essential gravity. Underneath the mockery, his inclination towards linguistic hoax one may quite often glimpse a depth of vision that captures the dark, obscure substance of the world, the tragic or infernal tremor awaiting beyond its more or less ephemere creations. A plurality of discourses and tonalities vigorously intertwine here, with a naturality of phrasing, in a dynamics of randomness and necessity that renders a lyrical identity and legitimacy to the utterances. Laughter and grimace, the atrocious and the comical, the revelation that has an allure of existential solemnity and retransmitting into a badinerie, are all harmonized



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antinomies within Florin Iaru's lyrical discourse, they are contradictions that make peace inside his poems that characterize the lyrical, burlesque and inter-textual instinct of Romanian postmodern literature.

In an attempt to redraw the lines of force in the lyrical physiognomy of Florin Iaru, Eugen Simion emphasized the experimental nature of some of the poems, the neoavantgardist spirit of the young generation to which the author of *Cântece de trecut strada* also adheres*:* "Many of his verses have an experimental character. They first and foremost show what he does not want poetry to be. He abuses y and forces prosaism in order to separate himself from the abstract, initiating, hymnal poetry of his predecessors. The youth return to the language of reality with a lively consciousness of the farce and bookishness. The ambition of the young poet (in Floring Iaru's version) is to reach the ground zero of writing. To put it another way, it is to use words that are open, freed from their literary coating". We can also find all the conditional reflexes of postmodernism in the poem *De-a waţi ascunselea*. The title itself is able to fully suggest the spoof investiture of the utterances through alluding at electrical energy associated with a playful scenario not lacking in symbolical charge. The very first sequence in the poem lyrically designates a space of obscurity, of non-distinction and solitude. Here we may also find the poetics of the ridiculous, of humble objects that are, nonetheless, charged with an aura of materiality, with a metaphorical infusion ("the flower market of solitude") or inter-textual quotation; this brings to the poetical memory the Eminescian sensitivity. The feeling of love that makes its presence felt in this context is rendered relative through the rather subtextual presence of playfulness and irony **(**"Criza energiei a alungat bulevardul 1 Mai/ la periferie./ *N-auzi cîntări, nu vezi lumini de baluri;*/ maşina 34, înhămată la şoferi singuratici/ îşi cîştigă existenţa./ În piaţa de flori a singurătăţii/ eu cînt o baladă/ la pianul mecanic/ femeii/ ce a coborît în întunericul/ acestui de-a waţi ascunselea./ Ea se sufocă fragilă/ în dragostea mea/ lipsită de viitor").

Sentimental elegy visibly mingles with the linguistic prank in Florin Iaru's verses, just as the tragic background, extremely relevant for the poetics of this particular author, is hidden behind textual masks, behind a mixed rhetoric in which jokes, mockery, bantering and badinerie give shape to a carnivalesque physiognomy and the performance of derision and linguistic farce. The reverse of histrionics, verbal joggling is the melancholic rictus and the bitter taste of a nonsensical reality the senses of



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which have been deactivated: "– Dă-mi energia electrică – suspină ea –/ dă-mi voltajul, dă-mi amperajul/ dă-mi parfumul electrizat/ din care m-am coborît pînă la tine!/ Maşina 34 nechează ducînd-o înapoi./ Ea/ de la geam/ nu ştie vai dacă să mă regrete/ nu ştie vai dacă să rîdă cînd mă vede urcat/ pe epava pianului din piaţa de flori şi dîndu-mă/ peste cap la plecare./«Îţi pare rău» mă acuză un om albastru/ cu suflete de vînzare./ «Îţi pare rău?» mă întreabă o femeie ruinată/ din dragoste pentru asfaltul autostrăzii./ «Îţi pare rău...» conchid vidanjorii, sentimentalii/ mînuind pompa, aspirînd canalul/ aruncînd cu becuri uscate după cotoii îndrăgostiţi./ «De ce să-mi pară rău?» răspund/ căzînd de pe pian/ mai funcţionează şurubul/ pinionul/ şi piuliţa/ mai bate/ roata maşinilor de cusut/ se învîrte/ cilindrul cu găuri se aprinde motorul/ de la flacăra/ inimii mele/ Nu-mi pare rău!/ Prietenii mei dorm pe acoperişuri/ prietenii mei dorm/ dar ar putea depune/ ceva în acest sens". After the blissful parody in the middle, where the borderline between reality and unreality is questioned, and the poet's imagination transformed the essence of the objects into the imponderability of lyrical fiction, the poem ends in disappointment, with the aboulic notation of a reality that returns to its referential framework, within its prosaic limits: "Mai bine ajutaţi-mă/ voi, vidanjorilor/ tu, femeie de autostradă/ tu, albastrule somnambul/ ajutaţi-mă/ să trag această grea perdea/ a camerei mele/ peste viziunea maşinii 34/ înhămată la şoferi singuratici/ şi care continuă continuă/ să îşi cîştige existenţa". The shape of Iaru's poem emerges from a very craftily orchestrated tension between the freedom of imagery and an internal discipline that carefully dispenses the proportions of lyrical emotion, balances the distortions and retrieves the effluvium of sentimentalism in the retorts of pure irony.

The eighties' poet has not in the least been a stranger to the issue of knowledge, of knowing the world and history. Except that it was a relativising, wary, blasé type of knowledge. This peculiarity has been noted, among others, by Gheorghe Grigurcu: "No «search», no goal, no perspective truly attracts him, genuine meanings remain forbidden for him. An indifference that had also been cultivated by Romantics returns here, with the array of moral-cultural complications that characterize the end of our century but, oddly enough, not building on a certain emaciation and helplessness, on the contrary, building on energy and impetuosity. Even though he knows (too) much, the author is not intimidated by this knowledge". *Est etica* is a poem about contemporary history masked by an



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almost idyllic picture in which its demonical characters, the communist dictators, are represented with the faces of gentle old men who are selling their ideological merchandise at some market stands. Dismantling the spheres and mechanisms of history the poet begins by questioning, being uncertain about his own surrealist-ironical vision. In fact the poetical atmosphere presented here by Florin Iaru is an absurd one, where objects have fragile or unreal contours, things have improbable reports between them, it has a vaguely dreamlike air, and the syntax of the world is articulated through an inexplicable play of forms, contours and images. The agglomeration of things with its random dynamics and the continuous changes of angles and perspectives, the unusual epiphanies, the most bizarre reports established between the text and reference are all part of the demovian props that Florin Iaru knows quite well. Brilliant associations with absurd resonances, a delirium of images render the text the allure of a dreamlike architecture, with the sensation of a persistent or subliminal floating or falling, but at the same time with a weightless structure of images: "Ştiu că-i de necrezut, dar chiar azi dimineaţă/ l-am văzut pe Todor Jivkov cu legume în piaţă./ Era un cetăţean cumsecade, încîntat de ardei şi de roşii./ Lîngă el, Janos Kadar controla cocoşii,/ gîscanii, raţele, claponii, curcile la grămadă./ Nici nu părea să mă vadă,/ aşa cum explica, expert, preţul cu de-amănuntul/ lui Honecker ce-şi expusese smîntîna şi untul./ Lîngă tarabă, Brejnev Leonid, cu un succes nebun/ vindea carne tocată scoasă din tun,/ vindea puieţi de mesteacăn, ruseşti, veritabili./ La concurenţă cu Husak, păreau doi conetabili/ cînd cel de pe urmă, nu-l luaţi în tărbacă,/ vindea pulpă sau coapsă înmiresmată şi cehoslovacă./ Nici cumătrul Jaruzelski nu se lăsa mai prejos/ înconjurat de producţia mică a ochelarilor de os".

From this relativising-imitative kaleidoscope of a history that loses its demonic marking in order to be invested, according to the good ironical tradition, with the attributes of geniality and "humanity", the playful allure of Florin Iaru's verses emerges, for which reality loses its conformation and weight, history is deprived of "tragicalness", of the meanings of seriousness, in order to arrogate itself a spectacular standing. A hint of gratuity and improvisation floats above these absurd characters who display their products, smiles and ideological instruments. It is as if history and its grotesque heroes have lost their consistency and the verisimilar ontological references, transforming into quite the opposite, a ridiculous fair populated



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by rope walkers and puppeteers, of dummies facing the dilemma of a total discrepancy between the appearance of representation and the essence of their own being. Tragism and playfulness, fiction and refernce, rhetoric of action and gratuity; all these polarities manoeuvre at the same time the textual mechanisms of Florin Iaru's poems: "Toţi cumsecade, toţi cu faţă umană, toţi, deopotrivă,/ cuprinşi în aceeaşi cooperativă/ a lucrului bine făcut. Iar la loc de onoare/ trona încins în halat peticit, între sule, cosoare,/ un cizmar genial ciocănind cuişoarele./ Ştiu că-i de necrezut, dar lumea le zîmbea la piaţă/ iar ei zîmbeau lumii, verde, în faţă.// Şi peste verzeala zidurilor strălucea soarele". A poem that transcribes the articulations of a disenchanted history, *Est etica* is marked by the playful farce and the carnivalesque image of a world that carefully hides its distortions and mismatches, the absurdity and grotesque within the "green" rictus of some delirious characters. Florin Iaru's poetry has most often been regarded through the spectrum of lexical inventiveness, or sentimentalism and ironical fantasizing. To these we may add the numerous inter-textual insertions, the vague oneiric emphasis, the surrealist inflexions, the mingling of grotesque and sublime, comic and tragic, and all of this sifted through the retorts of an ironical and mocking discursivity. Such a polymorphous discourse bearing an immense verbalising force, extremely available for the avatars of the real probably shows great confidence in the possibilities of the lyrical language to assume reality in all its forms, manifestations and representations. Or else it is a sign of helplessness. It is a masque worn by a poet who is overwhelmed by a world in constant metamorphoses or perhaps it is a refuge into the friable and calm universe of the word, an attempt to exorcise an ever-expanding universe, outrageous because of the quantity of details it offers to the senses.

The refusal of the poetic is, according to Eugen Simion, an expressive characteristic of these verses: "Refusing the poetic in poetry is an old procedure and, as we know, in time it turned into a *poetics of refusal*. The procedure was first tried by the surrealists and by what we generally refer to nowadays as the old avantgarde. The new avant-garde introduces a novel element and this could be named by a concept from the sphere of linguistics: *inter-textuality*. The poetic text is conceived as a fabric of texts, the poetical invention is based on a cultural memory in which several layers of *readings* have been imprinted. The most innocent poetry (the so-called *poetry of the heart*) is born from another poem and the



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most sincere emotion has a *Book* behind it. Florin Iaru places inside this new *poetics of the ridiculos* a sentimental soul and a playful, jestful spirit, determined to poke fun at everything and, first of all, at poetry." In the poem *Adio. La Galaţi* (the title is jestful, alluding to Grigore Alexandrescu) the intertextual insertions and the ironical inflections are very obvious. The Caragialian atmosphere and tonality, the rushed juxtaposition of objects, the heteroclite universe and carnavalesque medium are the most eloquent particularities of the vision and style. The poetic atmosphere is dominated by an overwhelming sensation of heat under the impulse of which the contours of the object become fluid, forms dissolve, things fall into an apocalyptical sluggishness. It is a place where nothing happens, where events are awaiting, deeds are in expectation („Căldură mare tropăită de trupe terestre/ Se răsuceau creioane leneşe în ascuţitori clemente/ Soarele arunca pisici de sudoare-n ferestre/ Zidurile abureau peste creiere lente// Aşteptam să se-ntîmple ceva/ Căldura scîrţîită/ pompa gaz ilariant în butoiul tristeţii/ Rămîneau sălbaticii să tocească versiunea ascuţită/ Creşteau urechi şi rapoarte pe toţi pereţii"). The lyrical discourse continues to be syncopated, with elliptical, broken remarks, with intermittent utterances and half-written words, the poet seeking to faithfully record everyday speech, the vocal tics of his fellow beings, the inertia of thought and expression that we can hear and sense in everyday life: "Da da. Intraţi. Poftim. V-am spus că sînt singur.../ ştiţi... pentru mine... femeile... desigur... desigur să ridicăm patul/ nici nu mai fac gălăgie de-un an, de cînd am vîndut-o după dulap?/ E praful. În dosare? Hîrtie de scris. Chiar o folosesc la/ scris poezii. Astea sînt bonuri adeverinţe certificate/ de la frigider de la cuier de la călcatul de fier/ n-am nici o femeie n-am/credeţi că sub covor/ unde parchetul e mai uşor (e din cons) ceva undeva prin casă/ ziceţi că vă miroasă? E din construc/ am tăcut am înţeles/ sînt sincer vă jur vă dau cuvîn/ e o simplă lampă cu abajur.../ Ce femeie? Sertarul e gol – unde ce să ascund? Vă ascult/ Am înţeles/ să trăiţi. Dar, ştiţi, am o sticlă două de bere/ dacă... văă... face plăcere...? Am să mă potolesc da da./ Să trăiţi să trăiţi. Vă salut!"

The comedy of language is transformed in the poetry of Florin Iaru into a linguistical game in which we find a plethora of writings, lexical forms, turns of phrases from the most disconcerting registers. Slang words, neologisms, redundant expressions or, on the contrary, elliptical ones, meet in this poetical *puzzle* that has a distorted composition, where



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fragmentation is the preferred rule for lyrical structuring. Rendering everyday language is not solely aimed at the language of a certain human or social category, but even the idiolect, the language of the individual with its most subtle features: "Să mă-nţelegi, don florin (m-a oprit pe scară) care şi eu/ am fost tînăr care numa nevastă-mea zice – io am două fete/ aşa-i, don florin, două care io vrusesem băiat – d'aia am luat-o/ să facă şi a fost fată, a doua tot fată, ptiu! că mi-ar fi plăcut/ şi mie o fufă, un dans, o petrecere cu lăutari – da şi dumneata/ cu toate cinci faci baie şi ne inundă, hai lasă –/ mi-a spus mie cineva că le-a văzut – zbenguitele-n cadă/ prea multe – care şi eu ştiu mă-nţelegi ce e aia!/ Ce era să scriu în declaraţie!? Că zicea:vezi-ţi de treabă,/ le-am văzut io! Io de ce nu? De ce să ne le...?/ Că muierea-i a dracu! Am bani, bani... don florin, o facem?/ Le dau şi-o sută dacă mă lasă... Să-ţi facă nevasta fată!/ Ce zici? Mai încerc o dată?" Existence itself is nothing more than a sum of linguistic masks that human beings acquire for themselves, through which they live and (re)act. This very tirany of language in all its forms and manifestations is the alibi for existential void, just as a life led by proxy of verbs is marked by the fictional. The journey of the lyrical self through an existence "that lives itself" resembles for this very reason an incursion into an imaginary that is most separated from the real; confession itself is, from this point of view, a fictional, imaginary confession, a product of a cultural memory and to a lesser degree a biographical one. The poem's ending brings about the sense of a fake bitterness, verve of scepticism, a sceptical weariness: "Mai bine bogat şi cinstit decît... asta... mai bine hoţ şi cinstit.../ ptiu! mai bine sărac şi bogat... mai bine, mai bine.../ Mai bine despre poezie să vorbim, despre/ această inutilă amărăciune./ Şi să ne spunem adio/ pînă cădem sub masă cu conştiinţa datoriei împlinite". Florin Iaru is a poet who assumed the mission to abnegate the rhetoric of the poetic, to exclude from the space of the poem the solemnity and dogmatism of style. His poems are to a great extent a certain proof of success in this regard.



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