
P R O F I L E

IULIAN BOLDEA **Ion Mureșan**

*“Oh, dozens of her small
heads
round ends like copper
pennies.”*
(Ion Mureșan)

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THE POETRY volumes of Ion Mureșan (b. 1955, Vultureni, Cluj county, Romania)—*Cartea de iarnă* (The winter book) (1982), *Poemul care nu poate fi înțeles* (The poem that can not be understood) (1993) and *cartea Alcool* (The alcohol book) (2010)—put before us an abrupt verse, maximally tense, out of which emerge a tragic vision and a vocation of essentiality, together with an expressionist exaltation of vitality. The essential state of being presented by Mureșan in his poems is a state of crisis: coming to one’s senses and the pathetic contemplation of the world are replaced by a state of urgency that, refusing its own ecstatic enlightenment, settles for a prophetic, apocalyptic fervor. The poet perceives the contours of things with dramatic acuity, approaches them with a tireless passion for demythologization, drawing on a merely hinted nostalgia for paradise that imbues his visions with the vague energies of a prophecy of the fall. The collapse, decline, agony, twilight—typical states for a damned universe, lacking the coherence of senses, unexpected and disaggregate, have lost any trace of sacredness:

*Seven bleeding heads emerge from the waves
above the sea, in turn, spitting sand and blood
out of their mouths.*

*Tam-taram, are the seven rusty stoves cast away
at the edge of the cornfield,
the board against which the whole night you strike your fists and
you mumble, Tam-taram.*

It's the seven breasts darkness. ("Poem de vară"/Summer poem)

The poetics of existential disgrace embraced by Ion Mureșan has the aroma of perceptive magic: the poetic enlightenment is produced through spasm and fracture amidst an extraordinary existential and scriptural tension, and the most relevant image for the emergence of the poetic vision is the cut, the laceration, and the stripping of the flesh. The poet also cultivates a frantic vision, but an incongruous imagination, as the surrealism of perception turns into a tragic performance, like in the poem "Orfeu" (Orpheus):

*I turned my head and that I should have done
from the beginning.*

*I alone have carved the creamy air
and have seen so far away:
shield after shield.*

*And above each of them dozens of heads held
between hands
with black gloves.*

*Oh, dozens of her small heads
round ends like copper pennies.*

The tragic perception, apocalyptic vision, and terrifying projection upon the world are charged with literality through a significant expression, freed from utopian decay, imagining a definite semantic paroxysm. The poet feels with painful acuity the pressure of all convention, the resistance of patterns to the explosion of the vital flow and the falsehood of any pre-established norms. From this horror at falsehood, idyllization or idealization comes the dynamism of Ion Mureșan's verbs, the directness of his acute notations, and the naked, detached perception through which the poet registers the convulsions of reality. Distorted like reality itself, the poetic text quite lucidly claims for itself the role of lyrical transcript of a fragmented world, mired by the spectrum of distortion and dissolution. The poet is ruthless when it comes to the precariousness of reality, and one might say he is handling this ruthlessness through the medium of an eth-

ical dimension monitored by moral imperatives (hidden deep inside the text). The ethical requirements that he assumes for himself are relevant especially in those poems that deal with poetry, with the condition of the poet situated between ecstasy and agony, between enlightenment and disenchantment, between Life and Text. Between the “drapes of existence” the poet is a magician of images and a prophet of the apocalypse, hypnotized by the Idea, but at the same time enthralled by the spasms of reality, as in the poem “Poetul: Mărturia unui copil” (The poet: A child’s testimony):

*It was getting dark when I set a ladder under his window.
He sat in the middle of the room speaking quietly.
Two sticks, two floating rotten sticks were burning
above his head.
Piles of stones on the floor.
And dill in a silver box... But his words became swollen like balloons.
His grumbling, backbiting words in all
colors
surrounded and shut the monkey down.
When I left, only his head could be seen among the words,
the head of an old man, shouting something completely
confused,
in the middle of a herd of buffaloes.*

The virtuosity of the language and the remarkable verbal dexterity accompany in these poems a deep and troubling vision. The lyricism of the poet is one of substance, a lyricism in which interrogation and sarcasm collect their significant energies into a convincing poetic picture. How can enlightenment and skepticism coexist in the the same poem? How can desperation, anxiety of a most acute intensity and visionarism stand side by side? Such questions come to mind when reading the lines of Ion Mureșan.

They are unbelievably expressive lines, of maximally tense expressiveness, made up of frustrations and unforgiveness, visionarism and deception. Agony, painful voluptuousness, cruelty, the refusal of emotion, tremor—these are some of the terms of conceptual allure through which literary criticism has sought to define the identity of Ion Mureșan’s lyricism. It is beyond any doubt that in his poems lays hidden an always awake consciousness that lucidly watches the ridiculous spectacle of existence, a skeptical, at times abulic, other times sarcastic consciousness that always manifests doubt, repulsion or a polemical impulse towards the precarious composition of a reality the meanings of which have been demonetized.

One may also note that Ion Mureșan abandons any attempt to understand poetry as a “happy language,” as enchanting ecstasy or a compensatory space. On the contrary, poetry is in the poet’s view a receptacle of one’s own anxiety, a prompt alchemy of the ontic evil, a fractured enlightenment of disharmonies and spasms in things. The poet anticipates with a certain fervor the existence of a hiatus between living and expression; condemned to a fragmentary diction, to a deficient exhibition of a sense always hidden under the appearances of phenomenality, the author resorts to an allegorical language, to the symbolical allure of the word, to the allusive-coded dimensions of the poetic verb. Eugen Simion has highlighted precisely this lyrical stance:

Ion Mureșan has undoubtedly learnt from the expressionist poets this allusive, parabolic language, open to the great undetermined symbols. . . . One can easily observe the tension, the discrepancy that exists between the violence of the language at the surface of the poem and the undetermined nature of the symbol in its depths. It is a sarcastic poem, a sharp refusal of external things and of evident causalities, a harsh contestation of memory, and finally a hint of fear of the proliferating word. Some images are taken from literature. The poet is blind like Demodocus at the court of King Alcinous or like Tamiris the Thracian punished by the jealous Muses... In order to see with his mind’s eye he must lose his external sight, and in order to be able to communicate the essential, the incommunicable, the poet must not use the language of transparency.

In the poem “Înălțarea la cer” (Ascent to heaven) we find the same features of the lyricism that made the poet famous: an oracular vision with a vaguely hieratic symbolism, an allusive language that is nonetheless marred by a fundamental “impurity,” with concepts from the most remote lexical spheres, the projection of the everyday frame of reference into the horizon of metaphysics, etc.

The first part of the poem summarizes the image of the lyrical self situated within its own immanence, its secret rhythms beating in harmony with the rhythms of the senselessness of existence. Turning to biography, to everyday gestures, has a programmatic meaning here, as the poet focuses on events and things from the present, but also on echoes of past times, within a recourse to memory that tries to restore the ideal form of the being always subjected to the demonism of time. One can distinguish here two main features of his writing: first, a more intense focus on the details of reality, through which the apparently irrelevant elementary thing of minuscule significance is elevated to a monstrous scale, within an ample vision and, on the other hand, an almost surreal coupling of the elements of reality, assuming a poetics of chance, an almost accidental syn-

tax of the imaginary, through which the words deny their dual nature: referential (mimetic) and symbolical-transfiguring.

Paying attention to the details of reality the poet wants to capture the subtle mystery hidden behind gestures and the apparently incoherent, apparently trivial and insignificant surfaces. Symbolizing everyday life, remaking the metaphysical dimensions hidden within the layers of the profane, are actions that take place at the same time as the contrary reaction, that is, the demythologization of consecrated poetic themes and “objects.” The second sequence of the poem sets the foundations of an *ars poetica*, based on the direct, placental, unmediated connection between the poet and the elemental nature of the world. The identity of the lyrical self is therefore dependent on the degree to which reality is assimilated into the structure of the poem. A scenography of the hilarious and grotesque, of macabre miracles and a most acutely concrete infra-reality are revealed in these lines that do not lack visionary appetite, or metaphysical vision.

The following poetic sequence is marked by the energizing presence of poetic images representing the ascension, by suggestions on how to escape from the quasi-imprisoning terrestrial space and to ascend to the astronomical sign of an almost transcendental nature. Through writing, through confinement inside the fragile architecture of the script, the matter-of-factness of existence is enriched with new determinations and shapes, with a certain metaphysical prestige, a symbolic and visionary expansion. The end of the poem confirms such a denouement for the poetic vision, in which liberation from the constraints and limitations of actuality is done starting from the apparently insignificant detail raised to the level of fiction within a subliminal soteriological scenario. A poem in which anxiety, the terror of everyday life and the sub-textual belief of the triumph through poetry are brought together, “Ascent to Heaven” also has the allure of an *ars poetica*, a programmatic lyrical document, written in a rudimentary and sublimate manner and at the same time in a language in which the anecdotic nature of present everyday life is filtered through the lens of Orphism, of a sarcastic visionarism.

Hermetic brevity, oneiric neo-expressionism, the substantial outlining of the internal universe in ample emotional strokes: all these features of Ion Mureșan’s onto-poetics can also be found in his most recent volume entitled *cartea Alcool* (The alcohol book) (2010). Ion Mureșan’s book has been received differently by its first critics. Figurative, tense, of authentic expressive force, with compact meanings and hiding the great symbols under the appearance of everyday humbleness, “Poemul alcoolicilor” (The poem of the alcoholics) is a poem of undeclared sacrifices and of the redundancy of living, of abulic revelations and self-occultism:

*Alas, the poor, alas, poor alcoholics
how no one tells them a good word!*

*Especially, mostly in the morning when they go wobbling
along the walls
and sometimes fall on their knees and look like letters
written by a clumsy schoolboy.*

*Only God, in His great mercy,
pops a pub near them
because it's easy for Him, as it is for a child
who draws a match box.*

...

*And until noon the town turns purple,
until noon it's three times autumn
three times spring
three times the birds come and go to warm countries.
and they talk and talk about life, about life,
Generally, even young alcoholics express themselves
with a warm responsibility.
And although at times they may stutter or stumble,
It's not because they expose terribly deep ideas,
but, because, inspired by their youth,
they succeed in saying really moving things...*

Another memorable text is “Întoarcerea fiului risipitor” (The return of the prodigal son), a remarkable litany of being written in a liturgical manner and wedged between quasi-apocalyptic notes, in which the dominant feeling of evanescence is amplified through repetitions and accumulations.

The universe created by Ion Mureșan is one of existential damnation, where humanity is fragile and precarious, a universe represented in somber colors with things that are intermittently given a clear shape. The poems of Ion Mureșan excel, as it has been noted before, especially through the overwhelming force of vision, through the tension of certain images that have real ontic and poetic poignancy. Ion Mureșan was blamed for his discursiveness; for instance, Paul Cernat talked about dispersion and dilution; however, I do not think this applies to a poet who is so parsimonious in his lyrical manifestations, so careful in articulating his ideas and speech. The image of alcoholics, of a degraded humanity, of the pub as a place where meditations about the divine are articulated, of alcohol as “a vehicle of God” (Horia Gârbea)—all these things are beyond any doubt the primary data in the poems included in the volume *The Alcohol Book*. Beyond these primary data we may identify secondary data such as the submergence into the abyss of instinctiveness, transgressing the limits of humani-

ty, digging into infra-reality, the resurrection of the antinomies of being, but also the deceptive perception, spasm and convulsions as manifestations of an ulcerated ego marked by the effigies of damnation.

Lucidly assuming the flares and brushes of transitiveness, Ion Mureșan outlines in his poems a carnevalesque-Dostoevskian atmosphere in which human figures are reconstituted through a great diversity of discursive styles and the pub becomes the place where reality and dreams lend one another faces, masks, means of expression, being but an antechamber for the miraculous and the sacred. Physiology is given a metaphysical shape, the inebriated being gains supernatural characteristics, the pub itself is a space that allows one to escape reality for another dimension, that of the sublime and of the weightlessness of the being spared of the tyrannical determinism of space and time. Illustrating the poet's narrative methods even more acutely than the previous volumes, *The Alcohol Book* poignantly records obsolete emotional states (abulia, remorse, absence, memory, oblivion, etc.) transposed into an interiorized, wry writing that intermittently celebrates its own ontic and gnoseological limitations. Visionarism in the poetry of Ion Mureșan is invested with a negative sign, it is a reverse sign. The poet does not perceive the world in terms of beatitude and transfiguration but, on the contrary, through the filter of weary fervor, lacking any spiritual enthusiasm. □

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Abstract

Ion Mureșan

The paper presents the work of poet Ion Mureșan, or indeed the verse books *Cartea de iarnă* (The winter book) (1982), *Poemul care nu poate fi înțeles* (The poem that can not be understood) (1993) and *cartea Alcool* (The alcohol book) (2010), maximally tense, out of which emerge a tragic vision and a vocation of essentiality, together with an expressionist exaltation of vitality. The author highlights the features of the lyricism that made the poet famous: an oracular vision with a vaguely hieratic symbolism, an allusive language that is nonetheless marred by a fundamental “impurity,” with concepts from the most remote lexical spheres, the projection of the everyday frame of reference into the horizon of metaphysics, etc., outlining an *ars poetica* based on the direct, placental, unmediated connection between the poet and the elemental nature of the world.

Keywords

Romanian poetry, Ion Mureșan, poetic art, lyricism, metaphysical poetry, onto-poetics