

Lyrical Modes of the Aesthetic Protest at the Poets of the War Generation*

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Abstract:

The lyrical protest of the poets from the war generation exhibits a wide range of complexity. In their programmatically expressed desire to depart from the literary tradition, from the poetical canon of the period, the rebel poets make use of an arsenal of techniques and procedures through which they denounce the literature of the moment. Their target is poetry in particular, which is accused of being fake and sterile, of betraying its original mission, as a rotten fruit of an aesthetics of the literariness, devoid of substance, and of a factitious vision, tributary to the tradition and to the patterns of the aesthetics of the time. In the complex range of the new aesthetic attitude, defiance, bohemian attitude and evasion are fundamental modes of the lyrical protest, developed by the representative poets of the war generation.

Keywords: canon, aesthetical protest, the new poetry, lyrical modes, bohemian attitude, evasion

Ben Corlaciuc's first volume, *The Tavern Songs (Tavernale)* (1941), is under the sign of running away, of retreating, of evading into worlds that are parallel to the world of phenomena. Any place, any area seems an acceptable alternative to the world in which the poet exists, apparently, against his will. The poet searches for an alternative to existence as something given by destiny, by a transcendental force that he noisily and theatrically denies. He finds it either in Hell, or in the debts of the ocean or some other exotic places. When such spectacular solutions are not available to him, all that's left for the young rebel is the tavern, as a topos of anonymity, medium of the dissolution of the self, of the evasion in etheric and ethylic spaces. His volume starts, programmatically and intriguing, with a great, Faustian invocation which expresses the poet's option for the hell as an original and pattern generator place of the lost spirit, who sees existence as a chaotic journey

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through a sort of a confusing labyrinth. He is the lost son, a kind of Ulysses who wanders through the world, who aspires to go back to the origin. Existence as a failed experience, as a collapsed initiation in the adventure of life, poetry as *nostos* are the coordinates on which Corlaciuc's poetry seems to evolve, at least in this phase. A reversed *nostos*, however, a journey with a negative meaning of a son lost in the sinuousness of life and found in his option for the world with the minus sign, which shows the redemption in the world of darkness and places the hell in opposition with the apparent world. "Open, sky of the Hell, / For your lost Son to enter – / Your Son, returned from the journey of the worlds."¹ This is said in an emphatic and grandiose way by the poet named Benedict or, abbreviated, Ben., as another way of assuming a new identity, of descending into the trivial, of regressing into anonymity; actually, it is the option, made through negation, for a new ontological condition.

The earth is "mean and cruel", a place of sorrow where people are "cast away by other people", where there is no room for love and life, under the burden of the feeling of "being late", crawls agonizingly with no prospects for the future. The only way of surviving is for the poet and his lover to run away, run away towards "the bottom of the sea", "to the south"; thus they recompose the primordial pair and a new genesis through the retreat towards a new beginning. It is a way of affirming the failure of creation and of saying that the only solution for this corrupt and morally distorted world is abandoning it. A new world can be born through love, through the recreation of the original unity, through self-discovery and through the rediscovery of the essence of being: "The waters of my eyes will fade in waves, / Like the beginning of an unknown river. / Come to the bottom of the sea and we will hide / The sky in our regenerated chest. // We'll take with us the sun and wine, / Oh, that wine, the juice of stars! / The thought will be ours again and we will not / Sell it again on a night to what is mean!" (*Evading*)². Ben Corlaciuc descends, "through the passion of the 'aerial and unnatural travels', through the taste for strange, for unusual, from Baudelaire (*L'Invitation au voyage*), from Rimbaud's *Drunken Ship*, from Macedonski, somehow from Minulescu too" (Micu, 2000: 335).

¹ „Deschide-te, Cer al Iadului, / Să intre Fiul tău pierdut – / Fiul tău, revenit din călătoria lumilor.”

² „Apele ochilor mei se vor topi în unde, / Ca un început de fluviu, neștiut. / Vino în fundul mării și-om ascunde / Cerul în pieptul nostru renăscut. // Vom lua cu noi și soarele și vinul, / Ah, vinul acela, must al stelelor! / Gândul va fi iar al nostru și nu-l / Vom mai vinde, pe-o noapte, relelor!” (*Evadare*)

When he is not evading in remote and exotic places, the poet is trying to escape the burden of the existence, the unbearable life, in the tavern. The youngster that does not fit anywhere, rebel and unable to adapt, lives everything at great intensity, and his subjective experiences are mirrored in an amplified manner in his extremely sensitive self, reflecting themselves, transfigured and augmented, in the world. In these terms, love is lived as an obsession, an obsession that overwhelms and annihilates the being that is already chased by the storms of the outer, as well as the inner world. The escape, which is temporary, is running away from love, running away from one's self, "in a low pub" – topos of the refuge, the search for forgetting, annihilating the self through wine, the universal cure to the ontological crisis of the poet, which makes the obsession bearable: "A song came unheard, / far from the Northern regions, inhabited / by no creatures. That night I got drunk / And I laughed, and I cried, defeated and exhausted. // Everything was dead and it all seemed / even more fragile than shadow, that night. / From the Land of Infinity a murmur was growing / And above all it was just you: The Woman." (*Obsession*)³. Corlaciuc's bohème includes, as basic elements, the tavern, the alcohol, the evasion from the immediate world, the ego dissolution in confused, hypnotical moods, which crystallize, of images, obsessions and chimeras, parallel realities and universes. In *Tavernale*, the poet "records his goliardic, slightly picaresque obsessions [...], but Ben Corlaciuc specializes, in a way, in a positive mode of expression, in the bohemian, tavern attitude" (Manu, 2000: 141).

It is obvious that the attitude is characterized by literariness. Aside from the existential wander, a sort of assumed initiatory journey and, to a great extent, indulging in a kind of self-imposed ontological downfall, in this Corlaciucian Weltanschauung and in its aesthetical metamorphosis there is a lot of prose. Through a bohemian attitude and through evading the world with the help of alcohol as a solution to the existential challenges, the poet places himself in the company of famous poets whom, on an ontological and aesthetical level, he feels he resembles: Villon, Poe, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Oscar Wilde, Esenin and others. We are on the territory of the existential literariness and of a type of spiritual mimesis, in new aesthetical objectifications that search for, reach for, and seek after a firm poetical tone that is not always found, with its own aesthetical identity within the new poetry that is being

³ „Un cântec venea, de nimeni auzit, / din depărtările Nordului, neumbla / De vietăți. În noaptea aceia, m-am îmbătat / Și-am râs, și-am plâns, răpus și istovit. // Totul era mort și totul părea / Mai pieritor ca umbra, în noaptea aceia. / Din Țara Necuprinsului, un zumzet creștea / Și, peste toate, erai doar tu: Femeia.” (*Obsesie*)

configured. Anyway, for the period in which he writes and publishes, Corlaci, a very young poet (17 years old in 1941), among the youngest from the generation of the war, writes poems that represent something new, different from what is being written at that time and, more important, different from the canonical poetry, promoted by books and by the critical discourse at the level of the academia.

Lost in the world, the poet is nostalgic about his father. He who experiments extreme and antithetical conditions, “the ruler of the world”, through the freedom that is given to him by evading the contingent level, “slave”, through his human condition, the poet who cannot find peace in a time of crisis (“in a century pinned by the globe”) returns to the figure of his father, assimilated as an existential model and a refuge of the soul: “My father, the drunk, the silent / Of the taverns, the vine grower of the Heavens, / When he was the ruler of The City / Of thoughts and he caressed / A golden clod, thorn from the sun, / He had a son and cast him into the horizon, / Reading his future in the zodiac; / He showed him the meaning of life, hesitantly, / And when he cried, he stroked him with a flick of a finger // Gently, / Gently, as the kiss of a dreamer.” (*The slave of the sun*)⁴.

Wine is a means of evading the grey, indefinite world, an evasion similar to mortification, through the annihilation of the self, or to a road towards light, but a light entrapped by the ontological condition of those who search for redemption. From the grey, Bacovian tavern, a place of desolation and loss, the aspiration of the spirit towards light is under the sign of fatality and sadness: “The paths took the drunk towards the Sun, / Towards their Sun, glaring, too bright. / The golden disk stood in the prison, / Locked by heavy chains. // In the dirty, deserted slum, / The light of the tavern, sick, faded away. / From a wall, as a late shadow, / Just Gioconda watched over the place.” (*The end of watching over*)⁵.

The tavern is the place where devouring passions are consumed, a place of repressed desires, of longings, the refuge of the losers that drawn their sorrow and weaknesses in wine. Refugee in this space, “redeemting” by the alcoholic evasion from the unbearable reality, the poet is the acting character of his own lyrical scenarios, the actor of his

⁴ „Hei, tatăl meu, bețivul, taciturnul / Tavernelor, vierul Cerului, / Pe când era stăpân peste Cetatea / Gândirilor și mângâia / Un bulgăre de aur, rupt din soare, // Avea un fiu și-l arunca în zări, / Cetindu-i viitoru-n zodiac; / Îi talmăcea-nțelesul lumii, șovăind, / Și, când plângea, îl desmierda c-un bobârnac // Ușor, / Ușor, ca sărutarea unui visător.” (*Robul soarelui*)

⁵ „Cărările duceau bețivii spre Soare, / Spre Soarele lor, orbitor, prea aprins. / Discul de aur zăcea-n închisoare, / Cu lanțuri grele, ferecate, încins. // În mahalaua murdară, pustie, / Lumina tavernei, bolnavă, se stingea. / Dintr-un perete, ca o umbră târzie, / Singură Gioconda veghea.” (*Sfârșitul veghilor*)

own hallucinations. He is “a noctambulic actant, wandering through ‘some bad places’, degrading ones, in the ‘low pub’, where the gestures and words are impregnated by an amorphous triviality that the text transcribes in a nude manner” (Mincu, 2007: 501). A female florist in the obscure setting of the pub, with smoke and alcohol fumes, among the tables of those disinherited by fate, composes the theme of an exotic and tense painting that could have been drawn by an expressionist painter. In this crepuscular world, the poet in a Baudelairean state stands lost contemplating, with wild and impuissant eyes, the enchanting woman. The poem, reminding of Arghezi (*Tinca, Rada*), first published in *Albatross*, can be quoted entirely: “The gipsy florist smiled, smiled absent-mindedly, / to the lessened drunks – how sad her smile was – / In a setting of smoke and oriental dance, / With a basket on her bare arm, at my table. // Two breasts sighed slowly and bustled / Under the velvety parchment dress. / Her thighs curved at every step / Demure, as to maiden girls. // She lured me into buying flowers, the gipsy florist / And, bashfully, shy, she smiled. / I would have taken her home with me; / But, // I couldn’t even pay for my drinks.” (*The florist*)⁶.

The poet is undermined by a perfidious evil that devours him gradually, in a slow agony. It is an ontological evil, caused by the impossibility to adapt to the surrounding world of a spirit that is looking for something indefinite, a spleen aggravated, in a Bacovian manner, by a devastating autumn, a torment, an anguish, a sort of evil of the century that annihilates and alienates. Everything is enshrouded by an eerie silence, as if in a parallel, subjective dimension in which death is creeping in insidiously. The tavern is not only a refuge in itself, a place of evasion from reality, but also a medium of evading towards other worlds, a sort of purgatory through which the chased one runs away from the hell of the world in invented heavens with the help of imagination and alcohol. The wine predisposes to evading in other dimensions; it represents survival by running away from the real world. The stray poet, suffering from an unknown illness, an illness of the soul, finds salvation in the tavern, the place where he waits for death, a waiting that generates paroxysmal tensions, of alienation and madness: “Blue, sick, fogging the sockets, / Kissed by rain, autumn came, / as another death, in my tavern: // The death of the season. / Devoured by

⁶ „Zâmbea țiganca florăreasă, zâmbea absent, / bețivilor atrofiați – ce trist zâmbea – / Într-un decor de fum și dans de orient, / C-un coșuleț, pe brațul gol, la masa mea. // Gemeau doi săni, înăbușit, și se sbăteau / Sub rochia de pergament catifelat. / Coapsele, la fiecare pas, se arcuiiau / Sfios, ca fetelor de măritat. // Mă-mbia să-i cumpăr flori, țiganca florăreasă / Și, feciorelnic, rușinată, îmi zâmbi. / Pe ea aș fi luat-o și-aș fi dus-o acasă; // Dar, // Nici ce băusem nu aveam cu ce plăti.” (*Florăreasa*)

the lapse of time, // At the autumn's feet, I was crawling, exhausted, / *Insane that I haven't died yet*, / Breathing in the smoke in the tavern." (*Death in the tavern*)⁷. This time the existential evil comes from the tension of the searching and the hopeless waiting of a Man, a messianic character, a savior of the world from the profound crisis that consumes it. But he defers to appear, leaving room for autumn to devour the world and the soul: "I was searching for the Man, that unborn Man. / When no one poured me a drink, / The shivers of death embraced me. // The taverns, just the taverns loved me, / Sending me to sleep in the songs of the gypsies; / Only they grabbed me from the streets, // My illness, only they wept. // Blue, sick, fogging the sockets, / Autumn came, calculating my moments." (*Death in the tavern*)⁸. Corlaciuc's poetry of his first books is under the supreme sign of *dementia*, a permanent obsession, at a lexical and poetic level, the defining ontological status of the vagabond poet, hallucinated with strange chimeras, prisoner in the labyrinth of existence as a morass. "Ben Corlaciuc's poetical 'dementia' is very close to a 'clinical' state, and his 'vision' overlaps in a hallucinatory manner the syndromes of distorting perception characteristic to alcoholism" (Mincu 2007: 501).

Such a state, an indefinite and unnamed evil, occupies the scene of a different poem, in the gloomy tavern, clogged with smoke, with three characters overwhelmed by despair when facing the evil of the century. It looks like another expressionist painting, with drunks and fiddlers, alienated from themselves and from God, in a state of alcoholic trance, hallucinating with the phantasms which haunt their mental eyes. This is another evasion from the downfall of the world and of the soul in the void projected through the heavy, deceitful fumes of the wine. The scene is memorable: "Three homeless people were crying, sad, with their heads on the table, / Torn from the heavenly madness of the genius; / They were the unknown rulers of the millennium, / Belated, more gentle than three Christs. / They halted from the great road of the Sea / And emptied their glasses continuously. / Three were the rulers of the dark: / Lucifer, Corlaciuc and Stelaru." (*The halt of the night*)⁹.

⁷ „Vânăta, bolnavă, încetând orbitele, / Sărutată de ploaie, toamna venea, / ca o altă moarte, în taverna mea: // Moartea anotimpului. / Măcinat de scurgerea timpului, // La poalele toamnei, mă târam, istovit, / *Dement că încă n-am mai murit*, / Trăgând în piept fum de tavernă." (*Moarte tavernală*)

⁸ „Căutam Omul, Omul acela, nenăscut. / Când nimeni nu-mi turna de băut, / Frigurile morții mă-mbrățișau. // Tavernele, doar tavernele mă iubeau, / Adormindu-mă-n cântul țiganilor; / Ele, numai ele mă smulgeau maidanelor, // Boala mea, doar ele o plâneau. // Vânăta, bolnavă, încetând orbitele, / Toamna venea, măsurându-mi clipele." (*Moarte tavernală*)

⁹ „Trei vagabonzi plâneau, cu capul pe masă, triști, / Rupti din cereasca demență a geniului; / Erau stăpâni, neștiuți, ai mileniului, / Înopțați, mai blânzi ca trei Chrști." /

However, where does this alienation of the poet come from? In the City, he is a sort of Job, overwhelmed with suffering and misery. Ignored, abandoned by everybody, treated with disdain, indolence or aggressiveness, rooted in an existential downfall, he falls prey to despair. Suffering is echoed by indolence, despair by hatred. Only dogs feel sorry for him, more humane than people themselves. Such a representation, extremely polemic, brings forth the condition of the poet in an insensible, alienated and dehumanised world. The ontological evil, which lays at the origin of the poet's wander, of his straying through pubs and doomed places, thus is gradually revealing its intricate causes and resorts. The man that the poet is searching for (see supra) is the one that hasn't lost his humanity, his humane essence that distinguishes him among the natural kingdoms. For now Corlaciuc places the man, the dehumanised humanity in opposition with a model of "humanity" through dogs, sensible at pain that tremble humanely (the lost humanity) at the torments and the existential canon of the poet in misery. Swift, at the peak of the utmost skepticism, in a dark revelation about the human being, saw in horses a model of nobility, superior to the human species that had fallen prey to instincts, bestiality and abjection. In this scenario, Corlaciuc is a bitter idealist, a sort of Don Quijote in the search of an utopic human harmony, devoid of his gentle madness but tormented by serious frustrations and revolts, by devastating crisis and by unavoidable huffs of hatred. Here is the poet lamenting from the ashes of existences before the dehumanising rush of the others: "In their rush, the people from the City / Stepped, indifferent, on my wounded body, / Leaving me torn apart on the ground. // Dreadful, the claws of loneliness / Were tearing raw flesh from my wounds, / And no one wanted to hear me. // From time to time, just a swearing / Would kiss my scabby ears - / Awakening deep pains from the bones. // Just the dogs would lick my wounds, / Growling, obviously, too quietly; / Just the dogs, the dogs you poor poet, // Enticed by my heavy smell. // And no one wanted to hear me, / To hear my desperate cries, / Oh, those people from the city!" (*Shivers*)¹⁰.

The tavern is associated with the Bacovian autumn, in a desolated, gloomy atmosphere. Echoes from Poe and Baudelaire whiffle through

Poposeau din marele drum al Mării / Și-și goleau, ne-nterupt, paharu'. / Trei erau stăpânii înserării: / Lucifer, Corlaciuc și Stelaru." (*Popasul nopții*)

¹⁰ „În fuga lor, toți oamenii Cetății / Călcau, nepăsători, pe trupul meu bubos, / Lăsându-mă, sfârșit și rupt, pe jos. // Îngrozitoare, ghiarele singurătății / Rupeau din răni fășii de carne crudă, / Și nimeni nu voia să mă audă. // Din timp, în timp, doar câte-o-njurătură / Îmi săruta urechile răioase – / Răscolitor durerilor din oase. // Doar câinii mă spălau pe câte-o rană, / Mormăind, neînțeleș, prea-ncet; / Doar câinii, câinii, bietule poet, // Chemați de puturosul meu miros. // Și nimeni nu voia să mă audă, / S-audă vaetele mele, disperate. / Ah, oamenii aceia, din cetate!" (*Friguri*)

Corlaciuc's poetry: a crepuscular world, on which the silent and eerie night falls, a world that is preparing for its own end. At the tables there are men hallucinating from alcohol, staring in the distance, in whose eyes sequences of the void come one after another. Drunks, people that have been shipwrecked at the shores of life, among broken pieces of memories, dramas and tragedies, who exist only under the influence of narcotics, hypnotised by alcohol, are contemplating the nothingness that lurks around them. Ben Corlaciuc "builds, in 'the tavern songs' in the volume entitled as such and in the others [...] an even more baudelairian landscape, reportable to 'the Parisian scenes'" (Micu, 2000: 335). The tavern itself becomes a cell, a space of mortification through the nectar of the gods that gradually turns into poison. The solution is running away, evading through dreams in the open spaces of the sky; running away from death, from the self, from others. The evasion in the celestial space of shadows and lights is the ultimate way, under the sign of despair, of defying death. In the centre of the poetic painting lays the poet who embodies all the suffering of the world, all the evil of the century, in a state augmented in a literary manner, in a challenging hypostasis, with demonic allusions, the King of the Night. The other character is the Poet, who can be a schizoid projection, a reflection of his own self in the mirror: "Break these dirty glasses, / Friends of mine, friends of drinking. / This night is for journeys – / Fantastic journeys under the moon. // Chase away the gypsies, break the tables, / Embrace another Gioconda, / With your vagabond heart, / And instead of singing, cry. // Your friend, devoured by illness, / On the shoulders of leaves is taken far away, / Towards the dark secrets from the book, / Towards the sad autumn in the tavern. // Your friend, the King of the Night, / My friends, the Poet, / Spit in the dried eyes of death." (*Distance*)¹¹.

"A pilgrim of the night", as it is said in the volume bearing the same title (*The Pilgrim of the Night*, 1942), the poet is a vagrant who begs for pity, for whom life is a long and excruciating road. Running away in the disdain and sardonic laughter of the others towards distant and unknown horizons is the only way of evading his own existence, which he bears on his shoulders like a tremendous burden. In the terms of the same antithesis, the world in this vision encompasses, on antagonistic

¹¹ „Sfârâmați paharele astea murdare, / Prietenii mei, prietenii bețiilor. / Noaptea asta-i a călătoriilor – / Fantastice călătorii lunare. // Alungați țigani, mesele frângeți, / Îmbrățișați o altă Giocondă, / Cu inima voastră vagabondă, / Și-n loc să mai cântați, să plângeți. // Prietenul vostru, sfâșiat de boală, / Pe umerii frunzelor, e dus departe, / Spre tainele negre, din carte, / Spre trista toamnă tavernală. // Prietenul vostru, Regele Noptii, / Prietenul meu, Poetul, / A scuipat în ochii supti ai morții.” (*Îndepărtare*)

positions, the poet and the others. The poet, a vagrant of destiny itself, beggar for mercy and the love of others, is treated with a cruel irony, with coldness and hatred by “the people of the city”. After all, it is a parable of the poet who cannot find his place and meaning among the others, in a world that becomes less and less spiritualised in a time of crisis (1941). The night awakens the sap of hatred and anger in the poet that has been martyred by his own destiny and his own utopia that now revolts in vain: “I was a wanderer on the path of mercy, / my knees kissed rocks, / casting blood on dust and years, / as the sun on the thighs of the day. // I was a poor wanderer, dramatised, / hilariously dramatised by dry looks. / The bacilli of laughter carrying on my back, / I crushed distances, insatiable. // At thousand arms in the night I threw my fists, / waiting for an answer from the dark. / Tickled shamelessly under the ankles, / my arms the mad men chew.” (*The pilgrim of the night*)¹².

The evil of the century affects everybody, the same insidious evil that generates a state of inner void, of sterility, of losing the meaning of existence. Life becomes a wandering, as if under a collective hypnosis. Lunatic, people stray through the world as through a territory of perdition, haunted by the unseen presence of death. The poem can be read as a clinical report of an entire generation that goes through a profound ontological crisis, in an absurd time of alienation and dehumanisation. The phrase “the lost generation”, applied to the young writers from the perspective of the historical tragedy that came after the instauration of the communist regime and after their personal histories, thus reveals another meaning: a generation that is lost even from its very beginning through the latent evil that prevails it, that leads to the loss of coherence and of meaning of existence, generating a profound crisis of the human being, of the human being deprived of points of reference, of values and aspirations in a world similar to a cynical scene of wasting oneself. Thus the poet seems to be talking on behalf of the generation he belongs to, on behalf of a humanity lost through the evil of history: “How pale and thin we are, / our eyes are like a cold night, / as if we stepped in dreams, / as if we were torn from the moon. // Our chins are rooted in the ground / like a spiny, fruitless tree. / Look how the debts devour us, / the rains, look how they drench us! // It’s as if we were slaves of the marshes, / as if we hid reed in our chests, / every night we grow blinder, / sucked by the same southern mosquitoes. // Like a very

¹² „Eram pelerin pe drumul milei, / genunchii mei sărutau bolovani, / însângerând și praful și anii, / ca soarele coapsele zilei. // Un biet pelerin eram, dramatisat, / hilar dramatisat de priviri uscate. / Baccilii râsului purtând în spate, / depărtări striveam, nesăturat. // La mii de brațe, noaptea, zvârleam pumnii, / așteptând întoarcere din bezne. / Gâdilați nerușinat sub glezne, / brațele îmi ronțăiau nebunii.” (*Pelerinul serilor*)

used cauldron, the sockets / have hallowed our eyes and have defeated us, / swaying us against the wind / with the wings, the wings.” (*Change*)¹³. The feeling of collective and individual damnation, the image of a sacrificed generation as a victim of history circulates in the poems of other authors from the same generation, comrades in the act of ontological and aesthetic revolt. Here is how this image is objectified at other lyrical temperatures in the opening poem of the volume *Panoptic* (1943) by Ion Caraion: “We have written neurotically on the walls / and have loitered the neurasthenia to drink / dampness from the rain, brandy from the poem / dirty poison, the empty cry... // [...] With crippled, tattooed hands / we bear on our shoulders the all distant fields; / the flesh impales – snows, years / rocks have broken our heart, have murdered us... / [...] We are the insane that will die / on the edge of night and day / with no clothes, no shelter / next to this miserable century’s wise words.” (*The vestibule of the poem*)¹⁴. On the other hand, Corlaciuc’s poem seems to be a paraphrased answer to a poem written by Geo Dumitrescu in the familiar mocking key of the poet, in which he ironises the existential fallacy, the literary pose, the gravity devoid of substance: “Why are you so serious, my gentlemen, / Why are you so pale and thin?... / We all write poems, we all dream of love and women / and we all sew our unfastened buttons. // Why are you so sad and ravished, / why do you dream of the supreme gun fire? / We all have symbols and beloved friends, / the marsh of life and a ladder to the sky.” (*Problems, in Arithmetic, 1941*)¹⁵. Corlaciuc takes this idea over and applies it to his own generation, this time in a serious key, like an anguished confession, like a warning against the common destiny in a subjective and objective time mined by crisis.

¹³ „Ce palizi suntem și ce supti, / ca o noapte friguroasă ochii ni-s, / parcă-am fi călcat prin vis, / parcă-am fi din lună rupti. // Bărbile-n pământ ni s-au înfipt / ca un arbore țepos și fără rod. / Uite-adâncurile cum ne rod, / ploile, privește, cum ne sug! // Parcă bălților le-am fi sugari, / parcă treștiile-n piept le-adăpostim, / în toate nopțile mai rău orbim, / supti de-aceiași, dinspre sud, țânțari. // Ca un tuci călit, orbitele / ne-au încercănat privirea și ne-au frânt, / legănându-ne în contra-vânt / cu aripele, aripele.” (*Schimbare*)

¹⁴ „Noi am scris cu nevroză pe ziduri / și-am colindat neurastenia, să bem / igrasie din ploaie, rachiu din poem / otrava murdară, țipătul spân... // [...]Cu mâinile ciungi, tatuate / ne ducem în cârcă pusele depărtărilor toate; / carnea înțepă – zăpezile, anii / ne-au spart inimile, ne-au omorât bolovanii... / [...] Noi sântem nebunii care vor muri / pe marginea dintre noapte și zi / fără îmbrăcăminte, fără adăpost / lângă toate înțelepciunile veacului prost.” (*Antreul poemului*)

¹⁵ „Pentru ce atât de gravi, domnii mei, / pentru ce așa de palizi, supti?... / Scriem toți versuri, toți visăm dragoste și femei / și ne coasem singuri nasturii rupti. // Pentru ce atât de triști și răvășiți, / pentru ce visul supremului foc de revolver? / Toți avem simboluri și prieteni iubiți, / mocirla vieții și o scară la cer.” (*Probleme, în Aritmetică, 1941*)

In the volume entitled *Archipelago* (1943), in the eccentric line that he cultivates from the very beginning, Corlaciuc reveals a shocking identity, from the area of the malefic sacredness: “I am the poet Ben. Corlaciuc, / the second and most powerful demon. / I walk with my feet dirty with tar, / forever grumpy and miserable”¹⁶. Such a confession would be scaring if one could not read beyond it the blatant intriguing meaning of the lines, built upon a malign foundation of parody and desire to assault the common sense of the ordinary reader with such a poem. The poet builds a fantastic genesis that transgresses natural kingdoms with vague allusions to Arghezi. It is again to be noticed the regressive movement, the reversed aspiration towards the low, marshy areas of the existence, in a communion with its simple, archetypal forms and hypostasis, in the kingdom governed by ugliness, sordidness and promiscuity: “My mother was a turtle, / she had me with the tallest reed. / I was nursed by a scabby marsh – / my shelter was a marsh as well. // I am the poet Ben. Corlaciuc, / who grew up among rotten puddles. / My sky was the bottom of a marsh / abundant in old reeds. // A single lily got stuck to my neck, / once, long ago, in a night. / It hadn’t seen how ugly I was / and, warm, it sheltered at my armpit.” (*The child of the marsh*)¹⁷.

It is to be noticed the direct character of the confession, the poet’s intervention within the poem in an audacious act through which he goes beyond the canonical frontiers of poetry, entering brutally, with the boots of an implacable effusion, in its sacred space. The poet’s descending into the poem, with no warnings or precautions, not necessarily of the author and not necessarily into his own poem, is a recurrent phenomenon at the generation of the war. The self-referential strategy functions several times at Corlaciuc, but he refers to Geo Dumitrescu as well (“the man with wax teeth and palms, / the most resentful of my friends” – *Foretelling*, in *Archipelago*¹⁸, 1943). The same phenomenon will be encountered at Tonegaru, in an ironic self-evocation in the mirror of the others: “Look, this is Tonegaru, a decadent poet.” (*The public garden*)¹⁹. In a poem from *Panoptic*,

¹⁶ „Eu sânt poetul Ben. Corlaciuc, / al doilea drac și cel mai puternic. / Umblu cu tălpile pline de smoală, / mereu ursuz și nemernic.”

¹⁷ „Mama mea a fost o broască țestoasă, / m-a făcut cu trestia cea mai înaltă. / Am fost alăptat de-o baltă râioasă – / culcușul mi-a fost tot o baltă. // Eu sânt poetul Ben. Corlaciuc, / care-am crescut prin mlaștini clocite. / Cer am avut un fund de apă, / răscolit de trestii prea învechite. // Un singur nufăr mi s-a prins de gât, / odată, de mult, într-o seară. / Nu mă văzuse cât sânt de urât / și, cald, s-a cuibărit la subțioară.” (*Copilul mlaștinei*)

¹⁸ „omul cu dinții și palmele de ceară, / cel mai ofticos dintre prietenii mei” (*Prezicere*, în *Arhipelag*)

¹⁹ „– Uite, ăsta e Tonegaru, poet decadent” (*Grădina publică*)

Caraion alludes to Geo Dumitrescu, who lives in the rural peace of summer (“I will retreat with the mountains from the ball / or I will write to Geo Dumitrescu at the countryside” – *Initiative*²⁰) It is a way of making the poem frivolous and unsacred, of taking poetry into the ordinary, in the bare existence, in the immediate reality, in the spirit of the canonical reformation which the writers of this generation pursue. Poetry is taken into reality, the poet himself descends in the scene of the existence, like the author who comes into the scene to act himself in his own play; he becomes an executant in his own lyrical scenario or in another poet’s scenario, he plays himself in an act that is meant to reflect in the text the everyday life. Life becomes poetry and poetry, life, while the poet turns into a live actor of a play that is no longer a poetical fiction, but a prosaic sequence of life seen in its prosaic, banal and contradictory essence.

In Corlaciuc’s poetry the tavern is, more than in the poetry of Stelaru or Tonegaru, another two “bohemians” of the generation, a space of retreat, of closure, of isolation from the world and from civilisation. But precisely in this space of deliberate seclusion the poet feels truly free, he experiments in a dramatic way an inner freedom which makes him escape his self and live with intensity his frustrations, his passions, his phantasms. This inner disappointment, induced through alcohol, transfigures him and turns him into a subterranean prophet, a cynical guru of fundamental truths which no one has the courage to unveil but which only he can gabble in a sentential manner, judging the world, accusing, cursing and foreseeing. In a promiscuous and sordid world of vice, inhabited by a motley human fauna, among all who have been disinherited by destiny, the poet lives intensely and dramatically a tormented freedom, a delirious lucidity which make him see the essence of existence in an acute and monstrous manner, alternating between agony and euphoria on the background of the tragic awareness of the absurd that governs it. In a poem, after a night of heavy drinking, at dawn, the poet experiences the shock caused by light, which generate a sort of enlightenment and euphoric agony. The dawn turns the existence in a scene of confrontation between light and dark, between good and evil, with a degrading vision of the sky and the moon (in the spirit of Geo Dumitrescu): “Let all the demons perish – oh, if only they perished! – of grudge, / this light I shall not sell; yes, yes! / The sun is rooted in my chest; / upwards, downwards and from nine winds and from straight ahead, / stripes are scattered, like signs, / the stars are simple sad woods /

²⁰ „mă voi retrage cu munții din bal / sau îi voi scrie lui Geo Dumitrescu la țară” (*Inițiativă*)

set on fire and thrown into the sky. / The moon is a sad woman wearing no perfume – / she has never been a lover – / Only fools cry for nothing. / That’s enough wine, my child, enough, / our heart can no longer be impaled!...” (*Dementia*)²¹. An eerie presence is obsessively haunting the poet, who agonises between the narcotic state and lucidity. They eyes of his lover stare at him in a hallucinatory way from the dark: “Those eyes, like two infinite fields / bemired with dark – / that I have never managed to lock – / move around my glass again”²². The awakening from the darkness of the being generates twisted revelations, hallucinations gabbled in an alcoholic delirium, which mixes the hypostasis of the world, a reversed world: “Aren’t I gabbling? What the hell, am I insane or not?!... ? Are these lights blue or green? / So far the earth was not square, / the bible did not say that Ben got drunk / at that indecent wedding. / Nothing has ever been this way – and look, / now everything is turned upside-down: / the wind goes backwards, the lights are dead, / my lover, like a bewildered meteor, / is running with her head on the ground; / the hearts have migrated towards the legs, / that are vainly looking for a sun: / the everyday sun had committed suicide”²³. Some critics have pointed to the poet’s availability for extreme attitudes, that leads to the increasement of the theatrical nature of poetry and of the poetic dramatization. “More interesting becomes the poet when adopting the funambulist or the pesimistic way, when he plays the fool and the clown...” (Micu, 2000: 335). This confused state hides a great suffering, the suffering of love, of the abandoned poet who is obsessed with the tormenting eyes of his lover. The alcohol gives him the means of evading from the obsession of the eyes and of love and thus the tavern becomes a space of expiation and survival: “The guilty ones, / who should be impaled / and thrown / to the gaze of the moon, in the street, / are those big eyes, like two fields, / the sick eyes of my former lover, / the most

²¹ „Să moară dracii toți – o, de-ar muri! – de ciudă, / lumina asta n-o mai vând; da, da! / Mi-i soarele înfipt în piept; / din sus, din jos, din nouă vânturi și-nainte, drept, / se risipesc fășii, ca niște semne, / stelele sânt numai triste lemne / aprinse și svârlite-n cer. / Luna-i o femeie tristă și neparformată – / n-a fost amanta mea și nici a altuia, vreodată – / Numai nebunii plâng după nimic. / Ajunge vin, copilule, ajunge, / nu ne mai poate inima străpunge!...” (*Demență*)

²² „Ochii aceia, ca două stepe imense / mânjite cu întuneric – / pe cari niciodată n-am reușit să-i ferec – / iar se-nvârtesc împrejurul paharului meu.”

²³ „Nu aiurez? / La Dracu-s dement ori ce Dumnezeu?!... ? Luminile astea-s albastre sau verzi? / Pân-acum pământul nu era patrat, / biblia nu spune că Ben s-a-mbătut / la nunta aceia deochiată. / Nimic n-a mai fost așa – și, iată, / acuma, toate se răstoarnă pe dos: / vântul merge-napoi, luminile-au murit, / amanta mea, ca un meteor zăpăcit, / aleargă cu capul în jos; / inimile au fugit spre picioare, / ce caută zadarnic un soare: / soarele din fiecare zi s-a sinucis.”

gentle mare: ? Corina! / this crazy woman bears all the guilt. // So, pour more wine, dear child, pour, / and tilt the tables over, tilt them! (*Ibidem*)²⁴.

Somewhere, the poet with a hypertrophied self, in the hypostasis of a demiurge or of Lucifer, put in a metaphorical manner in “The blue bagpipe player”, proclaims his death and asks that the news be spread in the entire world, which he sees in three essential human hypostases: the vagrants, the lovers and the poets. What he says as a dying wish must be fulfilled, otherwise the dead one will haunt the sleep of the living in a prophetic and threatening way: “You do so, otherwise, I will come / at night, in your sleep, bare as a dog, / and I will cast in your ears the last song: / the song of the devouring fire of tomorrow.” (*A posthumous*)²⁵. There is a desire to defy, provoke and shock of the young poet (born in 1924), animated by a terrible histrionics. The self-referential thanatological reverie is situated in the poet’s way of referring to the world through the augmenting prism of the bohemia, of defying and of longing for evasion. It is likely that, in the context of the poem’s genesis, the state specific of the reverie in the tavern to be involved in the gloomy and aggressive revelation.

Corlaciuc’s poetry is a defying, contentious and eccentric poetry that seems to aim especially at provoking. With Corlaciuc, at least in this phase, the attitude seems to be more important than the poetry itself. And this is something obvious in his poems. Even if his poetic achievements are not always remarkable, his attitude is important in the transformation of poetry. Corlaciuc and the other members of the generation of the war bring a new attitude, a new and fresh air. He opens the windows of poetry and allows an air of freedom, a blow of renewal to come in. He brings poetry close to the ordinary, to life, like it had been programmatically suggested by the ones from the generation of the war and especially the ones around the *Albatross* magazine. Geo Dumitrescu is among the first if not actually the first to do the same thing, but with the instruments of irony, mockery, polemic intelligence, even refined derision of Wallachian origin, as it has already been noticed on several occasions. Corlaciuc takes part in this process of desacralisation of the poetry and of the existence with more unsophisticated instruments and means, provoking, defying, and

²⁴ „Singurii vinovați, / cari ar trebui trași în suliță / și aruncați / privirilor lunii, în uliță, / sânt ochii aceia imenși, ca două stepe, / ochii bolnavi ai fostei mele amante, / cea mai blândă dintre sirepe: ? Corina! / nebuna asta are toată vina. // Așa că, toarnă vin, copilule, toarnă, / și răstoarnă mesele, răstoarnă!”

²⁵ „Așa să faceți, că, de nu, voi veni / noaptea, în somnul vostru, gol ca un câine, / și-am să v-arunc în ureche cel din urmă cântec: / cântecul focului mistuitor de mâine.”(*Postumă*)

assaulting the common sense, the order of the existence and the aesthetical order of poetry. With Corlaciuc we deal with a way of living the new poetry. He not only writes, but also lives the new poetry. The dedication of this young poet is complete. Poetry is an aesthetical experience, but also an ontological mode. In essence, Corlaciuc writes and lives what he writes, or lives and writes down his experiences in poems. That is why his style is very particular, aggressive and violent. Poetry becomes (the more or less) exact transcript of existential, intense, violent and often extreme experiences. Corlaciuc's poetry borrows the colour of these experiences, a chromatic scale in somber tints, of great intensity and of expressionistic stylistic tone. It is a direct attack to the poetical canon and to the bourgeois ethics of the existence ossified in patterns, in comforts and common places. The analysis of Corlaciuc's poetry brings into focus position the attitude as a way of generating a new aesthetics. Most often than not, the poetical metamorphosis of the idea does not rise to the height projected by the attitude. The literary criticism underlined the specific nature of Corlaciuc's poetry in the fifth decade, which gives it its psychological and aesthetic identity. "In *Tavern Songs*, *The Pilgrim of the Evenings*, but, especially, in *Archipelago* and *Lyrical Manifesto*", the poet had "a specific note, that, by limiting him, would distinguish him, would make him unmistakable" (Micu, 2000: 335).

Corlaciuc is an interesting poet in terms of attitude and lyrical voice, especially within the concert of the albatrosses and within his generation, but also in the polyphonic concert of the period. Among poets such as Blaga, Barbu, Arghezi, Bacovia, Voiculescu, Pillat and an entire procession of other poets who sign the great interwar poetry of the Romanian literature, the young poet Ben. Corlaciuc writes about pubs, nights of drinking, obsessions, dramas, illusions, about a failed life and a world that has been annihilated by the human being's alienation, about depressions, deliriums and deep despairs. Poetry descends into a marginal, subterranean world that is crammed with the scum of society and the remains of the existence, of those forgotten by fate, who have just the share of the defeated. The only solution for survival is drowning oneself in alcohol, annihilating the self and living a hallucinatory existence in the contemplation of the void. In the young author's poetic ontology, the boheme is a way to survive and exist, but also to protest in a special way, which makes him a particular lyric voice. "Ben Corlaciuc is a poet claiming from within a manifesto-boheme..." (Manu, 2000: 141).

It is a pure bohemian attitude, sustained by the very essence of the poet, a Villonesc vagrant at a young age which, instead of revealing open horizons and deceitful lights, shows him the truth about life, about the essence of being in a somber key. It is a revelation experienced at

great intensities by the poet that lives but also plays his role, assuming it not only ontologically, but also literary. From this point of view, Corlaci is a pure voice of poetry, through the nature of the experiences, through the intensity of living, through the natural, direct and simple confessions or indictments he makes, all of them transfigured poetically in a fresh poetry, most often than not fumbling, but psychologically and aesthetically credible.

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