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THE TRANSNATIONAL CHARACTER OF THE METAPHOR IN ROMANIAN CONFESSIONAL FEMININE POETRY

Keywords: metaphor; ontological approach; confessional poetry; inner mechanism; duplicitous functioning,

Abstract: The poetry written in the 80's in Romania, implicitly the women poets of those times were largely influenced by the morphology and stylistics of the confessional text. Therefore, American poets like Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich, Anne Sexton became sources of inspiration for Mariana Marin and Marta Petreu's vision on metaphor in their poems, being thus the heralds of a new social, cultural and psychological identity the lyrical ego represents. Postmodern abstraction and metaphor are no longer considered to be, like in the era of modernity, the focal, metaphysical point of a poetry written on a totally different ontological background; or, if the metaphor is still used and appears inside the text, its accent shifts from the linguistic to the ontological approach. Metaphor comes to illustrate a psychological reality intimately linked to the postmodern schizoid conscience, thus showing, somehow paradoxically, its mimetic character. Defined by the duplicitous functioning of its inner mechanism which, as Paul Ricoeur observes, oscillates between the two instances: 'to be' and 'to be like', the metaphor catches things while they are developing and places itself on the mined ground of postmodern consciousness and protean reflection on the world. The disorder in the plane of metaphor reception will turn into the reflex before the external reality which, in its turn, shows the growing tendency to melt into the osmotic, inner, subjective vision of man on reality.

Tentacular Influences

The influence female American poets from the 60's exercised on the lyrical universe of certain Romanian poetesses such as Mariana Marin and Marta Petreu, despite the fact that it cannot be portrayed as exclusive, is undeniable. Although the official openness toward Western literature was, euphemistically, limited, the receptive channels of the young generation of the 80's have shown an unstoppable sensitivity and delicacy in the taste for freedom, added especially to the nerve of the freedom of expression. Furthermore, it represents the connection bridge between two completely different types of political mentality. They herald the dawn of a world that did not seem to exist, but it came out of the dark, paradoxically, despite admitting how utopian the fall of Dystopia was envisaged.

This very tentacular influence – sought for its subversive abilities on various existential levels: from the personal (the woman versus her old and new image of herself and her role in the world/society), to the social and political (in a full totalitarian regime,

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with individuality trying to manifest itself without inhibition or self-censorship) – provides a complex perspective on the Romanian textual feminine identity, appearing increasingly outraged and, by way of consequence, explosive.

The Cold War, transferred to the reactivity areal of American poetesses born after the Second World War, becomes volcanic. The mythologies of war crimes, previously intangible and impossible to demystify are, one by one, broken down and confronted with the disaster they brought forth. Considering two of the representatives of confessional poetry, as controversial as they are versed in their craft, we observe that Sylvia Plath and Adrienne Rich change their emphasis on the lyrical self, elevating the first person singular in its confrontation with both themes related to personal history and events, as well as with the image of war as collective trauma. After the formalist turn in poetry, with representatives like Robert Lowell, Theodore Roethke, Sylvia Plath, John Berryman and Adrienne Rich who now take the path of confessional paradigm which is defined as a spiritual compass, the latter becomes the answer to the ontological need to replace the loss of the boundaries of modern thinking with “the languaged self” (Harris 255) which is never totally different from the collective drama.

The way Adrienne Rich, Anne Sexton or Sylvia Plath design the psychology of their verses locked into a constrictive space of inner consumption and obsession (“Like Hiroshima ash and eating in/ The sin, the sin” – Fever 42°), the Holocaust in the heart of Sylvia Plath’s lyrical ego: “The ovens glowed like heavens, incandescent/ It is a heart/ This holocaust I walk in/ O, golden child the world will kill and eat” (Mary’s Song) and all these limited, alternative embodiments of the tormented mind have their counterpart in the communist regime and its oppressive textual repressions and outbursts: “Straight from the heart . . . / Out of the gap/ A million soldiers run./ Redcoats, everyone . . . / Whose side are they on? . . . / The pulp of your heart/ Confronts its small/ Mill of silence . . .” (Plath *Cut*).

A similar process is undergone by the verses of the local women poets studied. The technique of weaving immanence with the schizoid history causes significant turbulences for the individual and is found illustrated by Ileana Mălăncioiu and Mariana Marin in their verses: “Pe geamuri ploaia./Înăuntru felul în care/ți-a fost posedată conștiința” (Mariana Marin *Elegie*). While egocentric intimists such as Marta Petreu (“Da: posed inventarul exact/ al tuturor formelor de strivire (priviți/ creierul meu ca un melc mângâiat cu bocancul”) – *Solstițiu de iarnă*) and Angela Marinescu (“instrument al instrumentelor, creier descoperit/ umbră disperată frângându-ți înfățișările zdrențuite . . . /violența sunt eu.” – 7.***Blindajul final) tend to dissect each part of their body in the attempt to transform it into something eloquent lingering to contour a new organism on paper: a universe purified through the exacerbation of its frailty, by embracing and admitting fear and self-loathing as integral parts of an innovative seismic coherence. Thus, we find scattered all over these verses the recurrent metaphors of fragmented bodies: hearts, brains, lungs, the fountains of blood baptizing the new generation of women poets with their own poison of depression and melancholy disguised in the hunger for self-destructive acts. Because the identity of the lyrical ego the Romanian confessional poets show off cannot be separated from the historical background defined by the communist regime. In the same manner, their American predecessors could and did not want to separate their personal history from the history and trauma of the nation.

Adrienne Rich proves to be a militant for the depth morality of inner reactions with regards to border events in the recent history of woman perception and her limitations. Portraying strong, brilliant women, the latter underlines their strength which oftentimes stems from their frailty, anxiety and uncertainty – doubts which, seen from the outside, their bearers would always manage to overcome as if they were virtually inexistent, yet not without dire consequences: “Today I was reading about Marie Curie:/ she must have known she suffered from radiation sickness/ her body bombarded for years by the element/ she had purified . . . /She died a famous woman denying/her wounds/ denying/the wounds came from the same source as her power” (*Power*).

Carol Muske notes how this type of poetry: “. . . quickly became popular as a kind of verbal energy, the post-trauma voice . . . the enactment of the voice of extremity – not simply as a literary convention, rather as a moral event” (Muske 11). Moreover, Adrienne Rich, along with Sylvia Plath and joined by Mariana Marin in her first volumes (“Mutilarea artistului la tinerețe la – 15 grade/Nici gazul Sylviei Plath nu este posibil, . . . / Celebra urâtenie și gingășia lui Emily/n-au făcut să ajungă la mine decât acești mă răcini / ce-mi strâng aidoma unor cătușe/ talentul și viața.” – *Elegie*), deems metaphor to be the primary language which transforms the land of reverie and that of dreams or rebel imagination in a land called “home”, which proposes a reality adjusted to the intensity of its experiences. Thus, if we were to consider the importance of the dose of influence the American paradigm exerted on local poetry, an insight into the work of confessional poetry representatives would imply new meanings with regards to the themes, rhetoric and imagery of Romanian feminine poetry of the 70’s and 80’s.

The Metaphoric Cycle in Poetry

That said it is natural for the ‘metaphor status’ to change within confessional poetry. Drastically transforming in terms of vision, the relation with reality will also be mirrored through other constructs than classical metaphor and metaphorization. Thus, the relation with the reader will also be reconsidered and significantly improved.

Lyricism within modern poetry, intellectual lyricism remains the main weapon and efficient shield in the fight against reality. Because, as Hugo Friedrich underlines: “Modern metaphors...create an anti-world, opposed to the current world... nor do they have the purpose of representing an image next to reality, dissolving the very difference between the metaphoric and non-metaphoric language” (Friedrich 220-1). The profile of reality no longer corresponds to the internal aspirations of man, even if the promise of transcendence is still seriously taken into account. Yet, the manner in which to accede to the “higher forums” is no longer at hand, and, as a consequence, poetry becomes obscure, plunging into unearthliness, dehumanizes itself and parades an “empty transcendence”, in the attempt to present the sublime in its unrepresentable essence.

Moreover, the same Hugo Friedrich observes how: “This poetry acts consciously, and destroys the world through the ‘dream’s’ plenipotentiary ability, displacing it into the unreal, irradiating it with mysteries which, as long as the world remains real, would never issue thereof” (Friedrich 212). The metaphor becomes a ‘knot’ difficult, and sometimes even impossible, to untie, however, given its meaningless primary significance, this

figure, adds Lyotard, quenches the thirst for mystery and transcendence: “this abstraction itself is like a presentation of the infinite, its ‘negative presentation’” (Lyotard 43). Thus, “the negative categories” unveil their cathartic virtues – the humdrum of everyday life is replaced with an artificial ugliness, with the nostalgia for a continuously refused beauty – both from the outside, and, especially from the inside.

Modern aesthetics remains one of the sublime, albeit nostalgic. As Lyotard again notes, this “allows the un-presentable to be depicted only as a lack of content; yet the form, due to its recognizable consistency, continues to provide the reader or viewer with reasons for comfort and pleasure” (Lyotard 45). “The dictatorial fantasy” offers the world the restless search for consistency and the individual the almost demiurgical feeling of having built, through the language revolt and tensional substance, an acceptable state of mind. The placebo effect of metaphors represents one of the main features of modern poetry.

But this situation significantly changes especially in terms of confessional poetry, as well as of objectivism, personism, projectivism etc, because the mentality changes occurred are likewise significant. Transcendence collapses, fragmented into small personal and deeply subjective visions. The chaos, still kept in check by the former, penetrates the consciousness of the individual about the world, and casts him adrift. Objectivity is almost impossible to be acquired anymore, and becomes an issue of consensus and convergence of perspectives. “The un-presentable”, related to the sublime, remains as such, not because it could not be captured, with some effort, in some way or the other, but simply because it no longer exists. Hermeneutics unfolds its meaning in a world whose center is found in every point of its reflexive elements. I. Hassan, as well as J-F. Lyotard, depicts the change in paradigm by capturing the un-presentable in its very presentation.

Reality, if it does not become the very great fiction, is one of the fictions that cannot be overlooked. According to Mircea Cărtărescu: “Hassan believes that it is these ‘life-enhancing fictions’ that truly stand for postmodern art” (Cărtărescu 99), inevitably mentioning Nietzsche, while Baudrillard identifies, in turn, simulation, hyperreal and reality as concepts whose spheres encompass one another in different and always redistributed hierarchies which eventually tend to overlap.

Abstraction no longer sees its use in poetry that is written on a completely different background, or if the metaphor is still used, it displaces its ascendancy from linguistic to ontological plane. Orpheus swallows his lyre, giving birth to a new internal chaotic polyphony. Metaphor is used to illustrate, in addition to its traditional characteristics, a psychological reality intimately related to the schizoidism of postmodern consciousness, thus highlighting its mimetic ambition. It is still present in the poetry of Sylvia Plath, for example, of Berryman, Roethke and Ted Hughes, which reveals that its introvert character, linked to psycho-analysis, disintegrates the most obscure immanence into fragments, otherwise bulks extremely difficult to assimilate.

Not incidentally, it remains within the extreme confessional poetry, but in spite of itself, metaphor continues to search and represent the epicenter of profoundly subjective and personal epiphanies. Beyond the postmodern sense of subjectivity that questions, due to an excessive relativization, even its own legitimacy, the subjectivity of confessional poetry still remains one of the strongest values of modern origin of the paradigm, in no

case will it be stripped of the ability to believe in the other's words or personal view – after having been previously made absolute in terms of indeterminacy, displacement, heterogeneity.

The thinking of the confessional poetesses borrows the postmodern reference thinking, which reflects the existential chaos, duality, schizoidism, the inner lability, however, in the speech and text ontology, subjectivity is considered a central, stable element, one of the poet's integrating levers to exit oneself in order to be objective, to find equilibrium or the illusion of it at the confluence with the readers' ethos.

The poetesses' impulse to create a myth figure is related to the utopian side of the subject, the need for linguistic escape to another dimension of the self. It talks about the Western man's desire and eagerness to halve, which revolutionizes the language in the first person towards a new semantic of ipseity that deconstructs the individual, extracting the ideal figure or the most hidden, unconscious feelings of which even the one who reveals them does not necessarily know at that time if they comply with the reality of one's being. Therefore, it would not be unusual for a self-fictional pact, at first glance, to prove to be, at its core, an autobiographical pact or vice versa.

The way from poetry to autobiography and self-fiction that the eighties poetesses follow has undoubtedly authenticity as its destination. Capturing the reader's interest and then the conviction (that somehow sprouts in his mind) – that everything the author turns into poetry claims a real basis and can be found in the experience of the lived life and not purely in the poet's imagination – can become double-edged weapons; especially when it is discovered that a certain topic is a pure invention of the author. But even the psychological invention has coverage in the case of confessional poetry; therefore it falls within the "anthropological structures of the imaginary" context, endorsed by the need of immanence to regenerate through fiction.

What turns Mariana Marin and Marta Petreu into heretic postmodernists, though no less postmodern through the immanent condition and assumed status at the time, is the integrated experimentalism. Due to the ontological endorsement of the manner they choose, or are chosen to write, they remain faithful to a continuous need to turn to metaphysics as verbal artifice, rather than philosophical basis of the integrative thinking.

Besides the autobiographical pact that the confessional poetry implicitly proposes, we have the natural dose of self-fiction throwing phantasia into the heart of mimesis, to let us know that these two make a paradoxical symbiosis that has determined and still causes various theoretical speculations about the status of the lyrical and empirical self.

Thus, the metaphor – classically defined by the functionality of its intrinsic mechanism – now transcends to the level of postmodern consciousness and reflection on the world. The uncertainty of parallel speeches, the permanent duality, the fragmentation and evasiveness of the meaning of reality, remind us of the permanent slide into the realm of metaphor; more precisely, of being like between being and not being. According to Ricoeur, the process is represented as "being in fact – this might be the ontological function of the metaphoric speech" (Ricoeur 79). Disorder in the plane of metaphor reception will constitute the basis for reflexes before extrinsic reality. Yet, this extrinsic reality increasingly tends to blend into the intrinsic, osmotic vision of the world.

That said, reality can no longer be confronted or reflected in its essence through the metaphor alone, furthermore, it will turn the weapons against precise mirrors in confessional poetry: “reality in its entirety withdraws under the aegis of symbols . . . We are faced with a type of layered poetry with overlapping appearances” (Crăciun 292) as Gheorghe Crăciun confirms.

If modernity fails to shake the individual’s beliefs and identity to the very core – but only asks questions about the deciphering of the core and his power to crack the nutshell and have a taste – postmodernism envelops it into a spectrum of appearances that risk remaining as such. The risk of losing one’s identity, by losing faith in the reason of the existence of such concept, brings man and the poet closer to the data of his own life, of intimation which does not exclude the prosaism of the world in which he lives in, taking him by surprise in the search for self and its confines.

In a world of media sovereignty, where information is already expired during its very moment of distribution, speed eventually translates into disorder and chaos. Man only comes in for bits and pieces, knowing that the big picture is a giant puzzle whose pieces are always on the move. Therefore, the individual will always live in an unnatural world, because he misses glimpses of reality, feeling vulnerable. Yet, a properly outlined and strung vulnerability in poetry ends up converted into power.

From this perspective, the mythology of modern poetry can no longer be taken seriously, irony and self-irony manage to dethrone the metaphor, while reflexive language will be diluted or lose itself in transitivity altogether. One no longer holds on to mystery that would coagulate meanings, but comes down very close to life in most significant, ordinary, derisory or even absurd (apparently or not) forms of it. This is where the interweaving between living and inkhorn occurs.

And poetry ceases its attempt to purge itself from human data, from the feeling and emotion as such in favor of a linguistically accessed spirituality, as in the case of Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Valéry, but rather seeks to discard emotional convention, artificial gestures, even at language level. The tone obscured by a magical incantation gradually turns into a voice – restorer of the relation with the reader and a sign of individuality: “The poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages” (Crăciun 264), declares Frank O’Hara in *Personism: a Manifesto*, cited by Gheorghe Crăciun.

Once anticipating in one’s intimate universe the presence of quicksand, of a room with distorting mirrors threatening to swallow the personality, the natural gesture, in that particular moment, is to change the paradigm, as Mircea Mihăieș states: “We often talked about an ‘incoherence of the intimate’, which forced the individual, as a super-textual force, to revert to itself” (Mihăieș 93). Confessional poetry, aware of the descent into a much deeper level of the metaphor mechanism, turns to the symbiosis between flesh and spirit: a new form of response and struggle with, now, its own tradition.

And speaking of tradition and its relation, a hypothesis was issued, not without justification that Europeans have shown through their poetry – both in terms of language as well as content – a fiercer resistance to the abandonment of reflexivity, while Americans, more impersonal and relaxed with regard to their obligations to tradition, have adopted transitivity in a somewhat natural manner. However, one must note that biography is not classified and authenticated in its essence by transitivity.

In the American poetry, this mutation occurred along with Whitman and the annihilation of the “monolith individuality of the poet in order to give way to the contingent objective individuality”, as Gheorghe Crăciun calls it, “The fidelity of the power of analysis towards the authenticity of own sensitivity – this is the crucial lesson Whitman has taught all American poets of biography and persona . . .” (Crăciun 321).

The poetry written in the 80’s in Romania, implicitly the women poets of those times were largely influenced by the morphology and stylistics of the confessional text. Therefore, American poets like Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich, Anne Sexton became sources of inspiration for Mariana Marin and Marta Petreu’s vision on metaphor in their poems, being thus the heralds of a new social, cultural and psychological identity the lyrical ego represents.

For example, the biographical chart of Sylvia Plath, because of the procedure of mythologizing her own identity, constantly applied on her poems (even more rigorously than Anne Sexton’s, with whom she is frequently compared), has to be taken *cum grano salis* when her work is being dissected. Because we cannot talk, it is not even the case, about genuine sincerity – which would probably justify some speculations, otherwise inaccurate – but we should talk about authenticity and the very well transmitted impression of real experience, of spiritual biography.

And these two aspects, as we can infer, are very differently conveyed on paper. Mariana Marin uses the same writing techniques when she constructs or deconstructs the poem, she also transcends that extremely fragile side of her personality; Marta Petreu also super exposes herself, like Sylvia Plath does, each one of them managing to virtuously fulfill the initial goal to talk to the reader’s mind and soul at a very deep and emotionally implicated level.

Therefore, postmodern abstraction and metaphor are no longer considered to be, like in the era of modernity, the focal, metaphysical point of a type of poetry written on a totally different ontological background; or, if the metaphor is still used and appears inside the text, its accent shifts from the linguistic to the ontological approach, without, of course, totally losing its classical, basic identity.

The metaphor comes now to illustrate a psychological reality intimately linked to the postmodern schizoid consciousness, thus showing, somehow paradoxically, its mimetic character. Defined by the duplicitous functioning of its inner mechanism which, as Paul Ricoeur observes, oscillates between the two instances: ‘to be’ and ‘to be like’, the metaphor catches things while they are developing and places itself on the mined ground of postmodern consciousness and protean reflection on the world. The disorder in the plane of metaphor reception will turn into the reflex before the external reality which, in its turn, shows the growing tendency to melt into the osmotic, inner, subjective vision of reality.

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