

POETRY AND PRAYER - COMMON ROOTS

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Abstract

The process of modernisation and secularisation leads the present society to the loss of the Christian identity and to a departure from God. The individual finds himself in a continuous search for solid bench-marks and for solutions that would offer meaning to his existence, by being aware of his identity. One can enter the sacred through poetry and prayer, stemming from love. The poetry of religious inspiration triggers a state of self-reconciliation, of harmony with the world and of accepting your own destiny. The presence of divinity in the creative act offers the poet the chance to overcome his limits, to go beyond mysteries and to become spiritually enriched. Through invocation, the poet brings offerings to the deity, thus attaining some higher knowledge followed by the illumination reflected in poetry.

Keywords: *adoration, communion, spiritual identity, love, metamorphosis, prayer, sacred, suffering*

1. POETIC MYSTIC AND LYRIC

Mystic is, according to its definition, a way of entering the knowledge horizon, of spiritual fulfilment and an access gate towards the absolute. Through meditation, the individual goes beyond the worldly level and enters the stage of deification, of the sacred and of divine love. Mystical poetry is born of contemplation, going beyond the boundaries of the rationale and it is embodied in the dream, with the purpose of liberation and detachment from the perishable, biological condition. Faith and love are completely inseparable at the basis of mystic. Faith as a form of knowledge which supports the high aspirations, therefore offering the human being an ecstatic state, specific to enlightenment. Through literature, especially through the religious poetry, one reaches a form of interior knowledge, of the discovery of the sacred, of redefining his own identity. Puiu Ioniță considers that “the mystical feeling in Romanian poetry, respectively the mystical experience of poetry

manifests itself in numerous ways, but it is obvious, mainly in the artistic belief of the poet” (IONIȚĂ, 2014). Referring to religious poetry, the author states that there is a category of religious poetry which does not possess a mystical character and that there is also a lay poetry which reaches the profoundness of mysticism. The creation process presents a transhuman aspect and the its product defines the earthly destiny of the creator in the context of his insertion, through creation, into the sacred, superhuman horizon.

Christian Renoux (RENOUX, 1993) defines the mystic as a interpenetration between *modus agendi* and *modus loquendi*, the logos gaining mystical valences which sensitize the reader who takes note of its actions and to frenetically look for his spiritual identity. The logos becomes both the mediator of Creation and the saviour and of course “the substantial connection between the transcendent God and the world” (COULMAS, 1992). Mystical poetry is therefore defined as a state of beatitude, of enlightenment through the unending love for God. The poetry therefore becomes a catalytic agent in which feelings are refined and enter the sacred.

2. THE GREAT MYSTICS

From the universal literature of the medieval period, we note two extremely important figures of religious writings who combined their destiny with the poetry dedicated to divinity - Joan of the Cross and Tereza de Avila. These two representatives of medieval mystical literature opened new horizons towards understanding the literary text of religious inspiration.

Joan of the Cross is a remarkable mystical poet who transfers his inner feeling into poetry. Communion with God represents for Joan of the

Cross a way of purification and salvation of the soul. The poetic creative act builds a vision on life, from the perspective of the mystic. Joan of the Cross meditates on the theme of sacredness and his poems present a refinement which transform the prayer into poetry. His poems "Noche oscura del Alma" ("The dark night of the soul"), "Cántico espiritual" ("Spiritual singing") and "Llama de amor viva" ("The living flame of love"), written in renaissance metric present the purification, enlightenment and union with God, essential stages in the relationship between the individual and divinity. The poem "The living flame of love" presents the healing power of divinity which takes the individual towards an ecstatic state of content and worship of his own existence: "O burning incense! / O blagoslovite wound! / O, the gentle hand that caressed them all, / the eternal knowing / and the grieving sin, / through you, death is perceive as life!". These concepts, as well as the intrinsic relationship between the bride and the groom ("O, what night did you show / more like the dawn the secret way! / O, night that you linked / the lover of the lover - / the lover in her molten lover!" - ("The stanzas of the soul") are taken from the sacred text "The singing of the scales" and redefined in an original literary manner. Communion with God refers to a chastity obtained exclusively by the definitive renunciation of all that is worldly as well as by "active mortification" (SAINT JOAN OF THE CROSS, 2018), a fact which is presented in the verse full of meaning "with his light hand / the grumble hit me / and the senses He told them to shut up" ("The stanzas of the soul"). The bride in search of the groom lets go of all previous senses in order to get dressed in the new vestment of union, of marriage, letting go of her own will and mortifying herself. The love for God offers and ecstatic state, a spiritual union and the soul perceives the union with Him as complete happiness and success.

Tereza de Avila called Saint Tereza de Avila had a complex activity, both on a strictly canonical plan - as founder of the Carmelite monastery, and on a spiritual plan, as ascetic and mystical poet, and through her feelings the logos becomes the bearer of magical symbols. She assumes "the modest role of a healing writer of the spiritual life" (AVILA, 2020).

Her life was full of attempts, confuse wishes which tormented her soul, mysterious illnesses that she had ever since she was young (she had a poor health condition throughout her life). She gave up her worldly life in order to unite her destiny with God. The various attempts to understand her condition, to find her true path, her wish to be liked by others as well as her fear of not ending up in hell, as she herself presented in her autobiographical book ("The book of my life"), all led her towards a religious life and religious writing which present the beauty of faith, her continuous love the God which offers healing, relief and protection. Tereza de Avila is a representative figure of the Catholic mystic and of the universal religious literature, who presents her doctrine of a Christian life. Her works ("My life", "The road to perfection" or "The road to completion", "Inner castle" and "The foundations") present a different view on life starting from the first steps made by God towards the supreme meeting, the communion. She presented her doctrine about God's connection with the soul (a doctrine which she herself lived) not only to her colleagues, sons, and spiritual daughters, but also to the entire Church, which she permanently served. Her mystical experience presents the profoundness of her communion with God. There was a double perspective when referring to her creations: that of presenting her own Christian experience, therefore awakening it in the soul of the reader, making his want a communion with God and the second one which makes the reader fight for faith, get to know himself, love, dream and hope. Sacrifice should not be viewed as a canon, an obligation or some pressing pain, but a state of acceptance, wish, self-love and love for God. Tereza de Avila's poetry becomes a home for God, a castle and each step lead to the certainty of the existence of divinity: "he was sitting in me and I was all immersed in Him" (AVILA, 2020). "Inner castle" represents an analysis of the human soul using the allegory of the castle with seven rows of halidoms, closely connect to God. The itinerary of interiorization goes through seven stages: three ascetical (the awareness of the inner life, the fight against the evil inside use, the consolidation of virtues) and four mystical (the

beginning of the mystical life, the beginning of the union with God, the spiritual engagement and the spiritual wedding). The main topics of her works present the relationship with God, meditation and the shift from prayer to the mystical calling, topics which still preserve their novelty and the power to transform the soul of the reader who enters "a transfigured world, settled in deep, implicit meanings of the words derived from the feeling of sacred" (RUSU, 2018). The process of prayer is achieved through the acceptance of the self and of course through an accept in the own personal interior space and its survey in order to reach the superiority of the complete perfection, meaning the communion of the soul with God. This Bride-Groom matrimonial communion, specific to the Christian vision, becomes the central element of the works with a mystical character. The spiritual marriage is characteristic to a high divine union. "My life, my heart, body and soul, / everything that I am, God, / everything at your feet, my sweet Groom / everything I submit and give, / As a sacrifice of love I consecrate to You". The groom is the one who offers her Heaven, as a reward of the Only Love, a mystery greater than all the worldly mysteries. The poet is contemplative and her support stems from the inner prayer that she sends the others. The prayer is not a theoretical one, but a practical one, which analyses and describes the soul from all its angles. Description is made with special attention, outstanding poetic refinement and clear and simple language, which touches the heart of every reader. The sublime is expressed in verses of an incomparable candour "Eternal wisdom, unacceptable height, / Sir of my soul, / Do not get mad if my heart, who forgets its nothingness, / Today would like to dedicate to you a sweet hymn of love: / Tell me what you want from me, tell me, God!".

3. POETRY AND RELIGIOUSNESS

Homo religious avid of love and of the word rebuilds its own world present in poetry – a form of concrete communication with God which transfigures the soul of the individual. The poet is "a servant of the logos" and the poetry represents "the expression of some terrible love", "the joy of

the word" (IOAN, 1978; IOAN, 1985). Lyrical creations are isolated from exceptional virtues, becoming what Constantin Ciopraga calls "a durable poetic edifice", and their consolidation is based on "the abyssal memory, the archetypal signs and the ineffable resonances". By extrapolating the panoramic view of C. Ciopraga on poetry, one can also talk about a mystical poetry which reveals itself to the readers as a magical universe in which the logos is transposed in visionary, illuminated and idealistic astonishments. "As long as it is based on essences, on constants and variables, on analogies and inventions, its destiny is ensured. The great poetry represents a humanism in perpetuity: a magical humanism!" (CIOPRAGA, 2004).

Poetry surprises our common humanity and the common spiritual values, transforming the poems with a religious character into a strong catalyser for dialogue and peace. The religious feeling of the individual, *homo religious*, is presented through his dialogue with divinity, a dialogue that can be initiated only through love and knowledge, two complementary concepts.

In the Romanian literature, there are numerous sources of inspiration for the Christian poetry and they stem from the writing with a religious character. "The Holy Scripture" represents the most important source of inspiration for exceptional creative acts. The individual praises God through songs and prayers which are later on included in literary works that gain a mystical nature, where the existence of the profane is transposed in the sphere of the sacrifice. The religious poetry conveys the desire for salvation, purification and even an ascetic-mystical state of the need to receive answers to a series of internal questions that consume the thirst for knowledge. Faith frees the soul of the poet which is full of passions and offers it the chance to meet with the supreme voice that it decides to embrace.

The content of ideas of the poems with a religious character refers to the spirituality and the uniqueness of feelings. The poet manifests a large openness towards communication with God as an expression of the feeling of religiosity. The religious text and the poetical text of sacred inspiration exist in a relationship of complementarity. The logos with spiritual valences and preaching virtues transcends

towards the communication with the divinity, the dialogue with the self and the communion with God. Poetry and prayer enter into the abysses of the soul exploring the most personal inner feelings and presenting the need of the humanity to regain its spiritual identity. The poem therefore becomes a mixture between "the ontological profane and the theological sacred in a new product which leads to original and inexhaustible perceptions in the new poetic models of the objectual world" (RUSU, 2005).

4. POETRY AND DESTINY

The religious poetry produces a state of self-reconciliation, of harmony with the entire existence and of acceptance of the personal destiny. Destiny is part of the human nature which together with identity, freedom, authority and personality form a unitary whole in the definition of the individual. Michel Foucault reminds us in his work of the fact that Nietzsche found the point in which the individual and God belong one to the other, where the death of the latter is synonymous with the disappearance of the former and where the promise of the superhuman means first and foremost the imminence of human death (FOUCAULT, 1966).

The reference to divinity is honest, humble and full of meaning. The individual's relationship with divinity lies under the sign of the mystical existence.

In the poem "Remain above me", Mihai Eminescu presents in a mystical way the image of Virgin Mary, a symbol of the absolute beauty, before which he shows humility for the purpose of salvation and purification: "Give me my young, give back to me my faith / Come back from your circle of stars, / How my I adore you know and forever, Mary!". Through prayer and the rethinking of his own belief, Marin Sorescu emphasizes the power of God in our lives. The poem "Something like a prayer" reflects the restlessness, torment, doubts, hopes and even the disillusion which might refer to the Creator: "God, from what kind of clay / Have you taken me into your warm hands / And with what kind of saliva / Have you mixed and kneaded my clay? / Because I do not know what I have / That

I exist, / I do not know what I have / Because I do not have anything else, / Besides you".

Faith is a form of knowledge which metamorphoses the entire human being, and the act of knowing is, according to Osho, similar to a pregnancy, "you have to have it in you. You have to give birth to yourselves, and this means to rise again in eternity, to go back in time and to get towards the place where time is absent. This is a return from the mind towards the non-mind" (OSHO, 2018). Religion is an act of knowledge which belongs to the being, not to reason.

Suffering gives birth to creation, the pain, lack of trust, torment, confusion, lack of safety and solitude all find support in God. This is an aspect noticed throughout history that suffering becomes a means favourable to creation and therefore the terror which existed in the communist prisons offered an opportunity for some of the most profound human creations. Vasile Voiculescu, Radu Gyr, Nichifor Crainic, Traian Dorz, Sandu Tudor, Valeriu Anania, Alexandru Mironescu, Costache Ioanid, Valeriu Gafencu, Vasile Militaru, Petru C. Baciuc and Zorica Lațcu Teodosia are only some of the names of Romanian poets who, for their faith in Christ, endured the persecution of the communist prisons. For them, prison represented the opportunity to rediscover themselves from a spiritual point of view. Under the sign of the deterioration of the human condition, poetry will become the only way to long for the sacred. Here religiosity transcends towards the mystical presentation, therefore becoming a significant search for the spirituality of the existence.

5. MYSTICAL ROMANIAN POETS

An important figure of the Romanian lyric is that of Zorica Lațcu Teodosia, a mystical poet from the interwar period, less known to the public in comparison to the well-known female representatives of the Romanian lyric. She combined her destiny with that of the Church and of the pure poetry that ennobles a soul full of torment. Exactly as Tereza de Avila, Zorica Lațcu was confronted herself throughout her life with a physical illness, a congenital infirmity, and the

suffering of this illness transformed itself into an adoration for God, presented with the help of her ascetic-mystical poetry.

Zorica Lațcu's work, unknown for most of the public includes poetry volumes such as "The white island", "Hosanna to lights", "The poems of love", "Icons for the chapel" "From the exile", "The garden of the lady" and "Other poems". Her poetry covers the entire sphere of religion: the individual's relationship with God, the dialogue with God, the prayer, the definition of the prayer, the bride-groom relationship specific to the Christian view, all leading towards the love which represents God itself.

After three years of imprisonment, the church defined its opera. This suffering gave birth to goodness, adoration and the acceptance of the personal destiny. For her monastic life and not only, Zorica Lațcu become a model for Christian life. The poet accepted her suffering with love in the name of God. Her dialogue with divinity gave her the opportunity of spiritual enrichment and she transposed this into verses. "In the poetical view of nun Teodosia, poetry represents a demiurgical act through which the poet models, transfigures and harmonizes thoughts and words" (LAȚCU, 2008). Poetry becomes the most powerful expression of the entire being and the poet identifies himself with it, living with and through it. The poetry of nun Teodosia become a way of existence, a faith that should not be confused with the prayer since it is born from the divine talent, the inspiration coming from above and illuminating the soul of the one who is willing to open his mind. Nun Teodosia states in her work the fact that in poetry, in the creative act, the poet gives birth to poetry through everything that does and represents: "Sometime, at the beginnings, / You, poetry, caused me pain. / You represented a worm of pain / And you always chafed / From the middle of my soul. / You were there in my life, / Chaffing from it, / Chaffing from it, / How much pain there was - how much pain there was, / And how much you chaffed, / Until you grew up!" (LAȚCU, 2008), ("The poem of the poetry" -vol. "From the exile").

The presence of divinity in the creative act offers the poet the chance to overcome his limits, to go beyond the mysteries and to become spiritually enriched. Father Cornel Toma

considers that Zorica Lațcu's poetry and her poetical view is based on two principles: "the gifted inspiration of her poetry and the ascetical and mystical dimensions of the Christian poetry" (LAȚCU, 2008).

Through invocation, the poet brings offerings to divinity, therefore reaching a superior knowledge followed by the illumination that many people await. The human-divinity relationship is, according to the poet, completely different from the one approached by Lucian Blaga - The great anonymous, Tudor Arghezi - where God was hidden, unreachable, whereas for Mihai Eminescu God represents the Absolute. The poet's vision is different because of her relationship with divinity. She does not try to decipher the mysteries, the summon, the despair or the distance, the relationship between the human and God takes the form of a communion, of an intrinsic acceptance which involves reciprocity in love. The human is created by God and therefore the communion takes place through deep and profound love, God being present in each and everyone of us. This view belongs to the poet, God is not hidden and abstract, but present in our lives, offering beauty and love. God is love, beauty, wisdom, light, goodness and harmony as opposed to hell where everything is ugliness: "In the night without borders everything is deleted, / Colour, form, harmony, verse, / From hollows, which without bottom, / There is no beauty that can be born" (LAȚCU, 2008). ("Hello" -vol. "Hosanna to lights"). The poet resembles the love between man and divinity with the love between bride and groom, a theme inspired from "The song of the songs" and approached by the mystical universal literature, illustrated above through the figure of Joan of the Cross and Tereza de Avila. The bride-groom unity represents the unity of the supreme purity which produces a mystical bliss. The union is therefore a mystical wedding with Jesus: "And in all the rush of the slippery hands, / I shall be ready my love, in order to be appealing to You" (LAȚCU, 2008). ("Bedroom" -vol. "The poems of love").

Zorica Lațcu's poetry reaches the sublime through the construction of the images and procedures, the rhetoric used, taken from its

classical formation in order to present a religious thematic full of metaphors which go beyond the borders of prayer and lead towards redemption through penitence, devoutness, gratitude, joy, adoration and veneration. Her lyrical discourse takes the form of a prayer, but her verses offer musicality, the language takes on the elements of mystical writing, and the symbol builds the message of the poetic text. "Zorica's poetry always takes us on path of ineffable beauty to the meeting with God. It shows us how one can live out of love and for love, what it means to be able to love with Jesus's heart, in the same way Jesus does" (OȚEL PREDESCU, 2015). The evocation made by the confessor Aspazia Otel Petrescu emphasizes that Zorica Lațcu's poetry places us in the mystery of love, its unmistakable style being of classical beauty. Everything that her verse presents is clear, simple, straightforward. In her poetry everything is a song, grandeur and mystery.

The poet presents in her verses her infinite love towards God and his presence in the soul of the troubled individual: "I felt that the groom was exactly near me, / He himself a sign from the skies of the profound love, / And he revealed himself to me in mystery, exactly as I had asked" ("The Sign"), (LAȚCU, 2008).

Zorica Lațcu, Nun Teodosia found herself in poetry, permanently seeking God. Her poetry fulfilled her mission: it brought God into our souls and it taught us how to perceive him and how to love him. A soul tormented by the horrors of the communist regime does not lose its faith, on the contrary it is strengthened, highlighting the divine talent that she is gifted with in writing her poems. They present the supreme problematic of the human being, meaning his relationship with God. A tormented soul looks for shelter, peace by escaping into the sacred since this represents the only way in which it can regain its spiritual identity. The individual is dominated by two coordinates: a profane one and a sacred one, which defines his desire to overcome himself. "We consider that one can find, in this latter dimension of the human being, the fascination of the sacred and the ecstatic state which triggers poetry" (RUSU, 2005).

6. THE TRANSHUMANIST PERSPECTIVE

The transhumanist perspective is part of the destiny of the human being, but it cannot be fulfilled unless there is a connection with the divine otherness. Dante Alighieri, the advocate of a theist transhumanism stresses the meaning of the religious existence, "the human being is firstly summoned to understand his origin and his divine vocation and later on to choose, the individual is summoned to become much more than he represents on earth and to overcome his condition" (ISPIR, 2019).

The escape into the religious poetry represents an essential present-day need of the individual who can spiritually save himself by returning to the poetic word, to its sacred values. Poetry and prayer survey the deepest feelings and transpose the existential beauty that we completely owe to divinity. The individual's chance to detach himself from the moral crisis in which he lives and to regain his spiritual identity is to hide in the poetic logos with sacred valences, therefore achieving a re-humanization in the cultural plan.

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