

CEZAR BALTAG’S POETRY

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Cezar Baltag is part of the generation of the 60s poets alongside Nichita Stănescu, Marin Sorescu, Ioan Alexandru, Adrian Păunescu, Ion Gheorghe and Ana Blandiana.

An austere poet, he is the author of several volumes of lyrics from which we mention here: *The Golden age* (1960), *Planetary Dream* (1962), *Reflections* (1966), *The Monad* (1968), *Stillness in wailing* (1969), *Madonna from the mulberry tree* (1973), *Unicorn in the mirror* (1975), *Poems* (1981), *Dialogue on the shoreline* (1985), *Eurydice and the shadow* (1988), *The calling of the name* (1995), *The eyes of silence* (1996).

The poet succeeds, as his generation did, to free himself from the realist socialist yoke since its first volume of verses called “*The golden age*”.

Edifying in this respect is a poem as “Ovidiu”, dedicated to the memory of the Latin poet who, as is well-known, was exiled at the Euxin Pontus. We see, starting from now, the musicality specific to Cezar Baltag's poetry in verses like these: “*The leaves of the eyes were falling fiercely, / They were rising up, melting into the sea / Butterflies of the lather smoothed by the wind / Were saying the same sad call.*” The solar character of the poem we are referring to is noticed by Gheorghe Grigurcu in one of his books: “*Less beholden to the nocturnal, to the sleep, his dream appears to us as inspired by Apollo, the solar self, who directs the imaginary.*”¹

The poem “*Here is Cotmeana*” from the second volume called “*Planetary Dream*” reminds of Alexandru Macedonski's *Rondel of the Past*, which began with a verse like this: “*Here are the Pomestii, here is the Adancata*”. The questions do not stop to assail the poet and he does not hesitate to express them in the beginning, from the incipit of the poem where we read lyrics like these: “*Here is Cotmeana. I know her from childhood, since / towards the evening, because I didn't like the game anymore, / I wondered why it sometimes rains on the earth / and what the stone and the fire is, / why sparrows have wings and fly / from the elm to the maple tree, the umpteenth time / and it is again spring and summer*”.

It also doesn't lack the written figure of the author, his portrait or in letters or, as Eugen Negrici said, the figure of the creative spirit: “*My face was like the empty sky / / furrowed in slower intervals of stars, / and I walked all night unhurried, / for fear, perhaps, that the questions will collide with each other*”. Noteworthy here would be the distinctive musicality of the lyrics, specific to Cezar Baltag's poetry: “*The wooden bridges from which I looked / the riverbed far away in the valley / were for me possible ways / towards the stubbles in the south*”. Strange things sometimes happen in this poetry whose musicality, as I said, does not waver to delight our hearing: “*But up in his frantic flight, / hit by the sounds' whine / a half-sound god / went crazy in the air.*”

Regarding Cezar Baltag's debut albums and the following ones, the critic Aureliu Goia expressed with great concision: "Ignoring the beginning volumes, the vitalist-rhetorical, the Labis's impetus - the 1960 *Golden age* and the 1964 *Planetary Dream*, the poet seems to reverse the chronological stages of Ion Barbu's poetry: a hermetic period, with a lyrical speech indirect and encrypted in *Reverberations* - 1967, *The Monad*-1968 and *Stillness in wailing* - 1969 followed by a period of pure, oracular and delightful ludic from *Madonna from the mulberry tree* -1973 and *Unicorn in the mirror* - 1975, in *Dialogue on the shoreline* - 1985 and *Eurydice and the shadow* -1988 to reach a tragic ballad – the confession.²

The speech is sometimes almost oracular, the words with a force in themselves, even if, formally speaking, the lyrics are beholden to tradition: "*Reverberated, the pupil's tender secret/ the sensitive body becomes detour / of mirroring around, the Pillar/ of the sight in the endless void*". The purity is now breathing in words: "*We will pass hand in hand through the heart / of the north and / in Berenice's Hair melting us/ towards the day we will fade away*".

The burnings are intense, the purity leaves no room for doubt and, above all, the beauty overflows in the word: "*You, July, a sundial of fire. / the yellow hill of silence / my love from place to place / burnt on the summer's stubbles, / and rose again.*"

Love, like an endless romance, I shall say, because the poetry in question is called-just like that! - *The endless romance*. Not all poems are at the same level of artistic achievement in this volume. Sometimes the lyrics seem to come closer to the folk, and in other situations, as if, we could distinguish, one of Eminescu's romantic waves brought into full neo-modernism: "*The dawn is fluttering its wings.*" / *Enter where do you come from? A leaf hit me in the chest/ and I started a new day.* "

Sometimes, there aren't missing the images of the dissolution with apocalyptic odour, in the case of a poem entitled *Separation*: "*Nebulae twilight. The horizon exploded / in tragic back and forth, as if heavily breathed / by the lungs of another higher gravity,/ attracting me, rejecting my molecules all the time.*" The disaster is not so big, it would be more to say, bigger it seems to be the disorder! Or the confusion...

The following volume, entitled *Reverberations*, appeared in 1966. Although somehow belonging to the tradition, Cezar Baltag remains within modernist poets, namely neo-modernists, we can only subscribe to a critic's allegations, like is Marius Mincu in one of his books in which he resumes Manolescu's classification: "In the second category (to say "the second way") of the modern poetry are included Macedonski, Petica-Savescu-Anghel, Blaga, Bardu Philippide, Maniu, Dan Botta, Arghezi from the Psalms and Evening verses, Dimov, Doinas, Maria Banus from the last books, Nichita Stanescu, Cezar Baltag, Florin Mugur and "the others"³.

The ludic is felt to the full in this and, therefore, a poem such as the *Clockwork* fully confirms this assertion, adding by all means the observation that appears as one of Nichita Stanescu's "follow-up" in verses, although the musicality clearly carries Cezar Baltag's mark: "*They live in my eyes,/ they love me in my eyes,/ they think in my eyes / my eyes remember them.*" Another poem titled *Reverberation in the road flame* does not exclude the bookishness, the "*prince of thought*" from here, making us think of Hamlet, the famous Danish prince in Shakespeare's play, who seems to take over here, at some point, the poetic discourse.

As in these verses: "*Horatio, my friend, / today I will desert the north,/ galloping,/ galloping, / until the fate blows up in the air ...*" There are in this volume anthological verses, memorable stanzas like in a poem such as *Reverberation in the memory of the sun* in which the

beauty and the miracle seem to join hands for the glory of the poetry: "All are under your sign, Apollo. / Moments are pouring in us. / Yesterday an elm laughed. A full-summer / a woman loved a hill." In other situations, the lyrics bear the seal of memory, although the poet does not have much to do with this theme: "It was a calm Dambovita / when the starry rose / of an autumn love / exploded in my body ...)"

In *Reverberation of yore*, it comes back to – with one of Nichita’s phrase - the sweet classical style: "Mother, my clean words will strengthen into making / my mystery bent mainly towards peace."

Cesar Baltag's musicality implies, in our opinion, a certain Orphism: "Take me, circle of memory, back to the magical sweet end / of the autumn day that / wooed a maple-maiden."

In *Reverberation of the plain* it seemed that Verlainian musical reflections get through. As in *Chanson d'automne (Autumn song)*: "Young blazing heat / my heart carved out / from dust and sun / at dawn".

Or even Rimbaudian, as in *Chanson from the plus haute tour (Song from the highest tower)*: "Ialomita slowly / passed through my chest. "

In *The Geometry of a dream* (the dream is clearly a romantic brand!) we almost feel the existence of Edgar Allan Poe’s architextuality: "Where are they, I said? / In dream / did the dice send me again? / Where is it I shouted at the slender suite, / where is the speechless one." Because, furthermore, in a poem like *Astarteea*, the almost oracular tone, the surprising speech approaches a certain Nichita Stanescu: "I know well who you are and who you are not, / she said laughing and fearing, / and I called you because my days were broken. "

Regarding the next volume called *Stillness in wailing* (1969), Ion Pop will have stated at that time, the following: "A wider attempt of a mythic construction, representing all that the poet has given deeper, is the volume "Stillness in wailing" (1969), presented fragmentary, under the name of *The Futile Shoreline*, in the selective collection "The Monad" (1967).

Matei Călinescu⁵ talked about the "solar regime" of Cezar Baltag’s world, and Eugen Simion said about the poet in question that he is a "seraphim".

Nicolae Manolescu, at one point, considered that the volume *Stillness in wailing* (1969) contained a certain clenching of the auctorial voice, but also a certain influence from Nichita Stanescu: "Anyway "Madonna from the mulberry tree" is a very charming volume of poetry, from which it disappeared the clenching easily noticeable in the previous ones (*Stillness in wailing* was dangerously close to Nichita Stanescu's lyrical philosophy) and, at least, the poet's congenital mannerism is here openly recognized, benefiting from it."⁷

In his turn, Lucian Raicu observed the importance of this poet's volume through a series of pertinent remarks: "Such a decisive moment of crisis, of radicalization of the feeling of being, of aggression of "life" against the formed personality and the security of the self, is represented for Cezar Baltag by the volume of *Stillness in wailing*, the abrupt and sharp radiography of the whole being revealed, of a capital experience, that of surprising, almost unexpectedly, through living."⁸

Also M. Nitescu without any doubt acknowledged the value of this volume of poetry: "Full poetic maturation is accomplished in the *Stillness in wailing*, which continues the cycle of the "reverberations" and which, through its exceptional value, is one of the most successful achievements of poetry in the last fifteen years."⁹

The theme of oblivion is sometimes combined with that of the void, the man feels crossed by it: *"It was a man / that was me. / I go in his place. / And the one who goes in me is the void"* (*Oblivion*)

Something further, it appears, surprisingly maybe for Cezar Baltag's poetry, the acute feeling of tardiness: *"Oh, it is late on the earth, have all the hours gone?"* And the poem that could only be, with the title of a poem, a *"stillness in wailing"* or a *"burning agony / of the sun?"* The remoteness is now defined as *"zero in the mirror"* while: *"A man with thirst bones / is counting the trees."* The poet would want a return in the present, but only to be certain that this is possible at the *"springs of escape, / where the fountain of nothing goes."*

Blind shah, a volume published at Eminescu Publishing House in 1971, contains, according to Ion Pop, some remarkable essay-poems: "Cezar Baltag's new poetic experience (we should not forget the essay-poems from *Blind Shah - 1971*) announces the stage truly representative of his creation¹⁰. The poetry now becomes a desideratum: *"I want a flower to forget the world / a grass to dream the words of the blind's teardrop."* A title such as *The Ivy* can highlight the textualization of modern poetry to the detriment of the romantic symbol: *"That's why her convoluted body actually represents the ascending spirals of the god of the day"* (*Ivy*). There are not missing certain folk motifs poetically processed: *"When I will wane, you will fade, when I will escape, you will be sadden"* (*Centaurea*)

Madonna form the mulberry tree, an unlikely title of a volume of poetry, published in 1973 at the Eminescu Publishing House, represents, in Aureliu Goci's opinion, *"a period of pure, oracular and charming play"*.¹¹

Nicolae Manolescu noticed in this volume the disappearance of a certain clenching from the previous books.

Lucian Raicu noticed the intensity of the poems in this volume, and Mircea Iorgulescu detected in these verses the originality of the poet.¹⁴

As far as we are concerned, we observe here a strong ludic source, like Aureliu Goci: *"I know a rumour by heart, / the instant passes into the day / what will be it was before, / what it was would be again"*. (*Remember*) And to this impression it is added the use of some choruses with strange sounds like these: *"Hai merau, merau, merau / andar sosté gianau"*. What would have been the ludic meaning of these poems, here is a question to which the literary critique of time answered through the voice of the same Lucian Raicu: *"The deeper purpose of the game, in which the reader seems to feel the desire to understand, it is precisely this, to convert into a pure act, offered to contemplation, the unstoppable incentives, the blaze of the consuming passions."*¹⁵ It was precisely this "blaze" that Lucian Raicu spoke about, that was easily let to be detected in lyrics like these: *"Who can find / his way through the flame? / It was what it will be? / It will be what it was?"* (*The Dust*)

Strange things can happen now in this imaginary universe: *"The apprentice rainmaker / with the shirt of nettle / came with two tassels, / filled my house of butterflies"* (*Of laughing*). In a poem like *Star sign*, the ludic comes back to life, reminding us of a certain Nichita Stănescu: *"I was towards, I was anear, / where the left flower grows, / I was toward, I was until, for a week"*. As in Arghezi, who saw God with the shadow cast on the oxen, while ploughing, or Blaga, who spoke of "the transcendence that descends," we witness such miraculous events at Cezar Baltag: *"God with a blossom in His mouth / walked over the furrow"* (*The Birth from the mulberry tree*).

The book titled *Tarot (Two Gypsy Poems)* reminds us of Federico Garcia Lorca from his *Romancero gitan*.

A certain change in the poetic plan is brought by the volume *Unicorn in the mirror*, published in 1975, at Eminescu Publishing House and about which Lucian Raicu said the following: "*Unicorn in the mirror* is the book through which Cezar Baltag, by abandoning the valorisation of the sour amazing virtues and the latent of musicality of his poetry, to the stylistic seduction, which he has at his disposal, and opts for the essential expression and the austere of the inner contents."¹⁶ Also, about this volume, with a special reference title M. Nitescu expresses his opinion: "The Unicorn is the symbol of the One, and the mirror metaphors its multiplication in an infinity of paradigms."¹⁷ The references to the fairy tale paradigm form the poem *The Fairy Pattern* are not missing from the book: "*And to make / a cane of iron and peasant sandals/of iron ...*". Here it is a thirst spoken on the inner rhythms of words, a thirst that hardly articulates in song, in obedience, in poetry. There is also present the dialogue with the angel, like in Nichita Stănescu's: "*Far it is/your halo, angel/and I am really toiled*" (*Myth*) Unusual seems a verse like this one: "*The world is a fork with two huge teeth*" (*The Face of Two*). Sometimes there is also present an event, perhaps somehow unexpectedly: "*This autumn morning/ a bird squawked towards the south and wrote to me/once, three times and then again the name / in ovals of flight*" (*The Seed*). Although irrationally separated from the word, the artist has not lost all his qualities, because he utters the snow and the snowfall, it whispers "*Middays and snow-bound wells*". The call is now strange, for "*the snow of the world shouts the snow of a horse*" (*From a while I speak snow*). The poet is like the Emperor's lad from "*Youth without old age and life without death*", and the lyrics emphasize the poetics of this volume: "*Emperor's lad in/ bird robe/ where you are?*" (*Cenotaph*)

A portrait of the mature artist was made to Cezar Baltag by the critic Aureliu Goci: "*The discrete presence, without any advertising effort, a man of deep culture and in love with books, even an erudite in the field of religious beliefs, oenologist and anthropologist, Cezar Baltag lived modestly, secluded, away from the now explosive and politicizing agitation of literary life.*"¹⁸

But the image of the creative spirit appears even more prominently in one of Lucian Raicu's books, in which we can read lines such as the following: "*A penetrating and laborious spirit, at the antipode of any temptation of superficiality, the poet became, within a vision inside his own, a philosopher, an aesthetician and a physician.*"

Cezar Baltag remains one of the emblematic figures of the 60s in our neo-modernist poetry.

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