



world poetry in the postmodern age
la poésie mondiale à l'époque postmoderne
la poesía mundial en la época posmoderna
lyrik der welt im zeitalter der postmoderne

4 - 1999

interlitteraria

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TARTU ÜLIKOOLI
KIRJASTUS

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The emblem of the 2nd International Conference of the EACL
(an indian-ink sketch by Lembit Karu).

Introductory Note

The 2nd International Conference of the Estonian Association of Comparative Literature took place in the early days of October, last year, in Tartu. This second effort to bring comparatists from different parts of the world together to the old Estonian university town, where Yuri Lotman (1922–1993) developed his by now world-famous theory of cultural semiotics, was generously supported by the Estonian Science Foundation and also by the Estonian Ministry of Culture. To them goes our sincerest gratitude. The event coincided with the centenary of birth of Prof. Villem Altkoa (1898–1975) who, along with Lotman and many other “grand old men”, powerfully supported the spiritual survival of humanities at Tartu University during the ideologically and intellectually repressive Soviet decades.

Our conference was a dedication to Prof. Altkoa's memory. Thus the present issue of “Interlitteraria”, gathering the papers of the conference, opens with an essay by Jaak Rähesoo, who does not only finely resuscitate the figure of his former Chair and the teacher of many of us, but also illuminates thoroughly the ideological and cultural environment in which comparative literary studies in Estonia have developed until recently. I may add, on my part, as regards Villem Altkoa's relationship with poetry, that he was the editor of a series of bulky anthologies of world literature in Estonian (Medieval and Renaissance literature, etc.) through which I myself and, I am sure, so many others have experienced the first spell of *Chanson de Roland*, *Cantar de Mio Cid* or *Nibelungenlied* (of course, thanks to the wonderful work of our great translators Johannes Semper, Ain Kaalep, Jaan Kaplinski and Rein Sepp). Remembering Altkoa, I can still vividly recall him reciting during his lecture, by heart, with half-closed eyes, one of his favourite poems, Paul Verlaine's *Chanson d'automne*, in the inspired translation by Johannes Semper.

Tartu is not only a scientific and intellectual centre. Historically, its spirit has been immersed in poetry. Not only was the first

great Estonian-born poet Kristian Jaak Peterson (1801–1822) a student of Tartu University, and the author of our national epic *Kalevipoeg* (1861) Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald a medical graduate of it. Not only did Lydia Koidula (1843–1886) write here her most famous patriotic poems, stimulating vigorously the spirit of the national “awakening”. As we can read from the article by Ausma Cimdina, also the beginnings of Latvian poetry have to do with Tartu. Let me add more humorously, even the beginning of German “cultured” poetry — as Paul Fleming, the first among the disciples of Martin Opitz, during his long Oriental odyssey fell in love in the Estonian capital Tallinn (Reval) with the daughter of a local merchant, Elsabe, who later, to Fleming’s distress, was taken over by a professor of Tartu University.

From the immediate past, I may recall that one of the basic monographs by Yuri Lotman was centred on the work of Alexandr Pushkin, whose bicentenary is being celebrated this year, and that, in fact, a romantic-poetic spirit was never absent in Lotman’s “semiotic adventure”, maybe it was the core of it. I may also mention that several of Estonian renowned modern poets have either lived or live in Tartu: like Artur Alliksaar, our greatest surrealist and “language poet” (1923–1966) whose exceptional poetic gifts have deservedly merited close attention in the article by Arne Merilai, who recently made his debut as a poet, or Ain Kaalep, Hando Runnel, and Jaan Kaplinski (who, by the way, has recently joined our Association), as well as several others.

Tartu was, thus, a good place to hold a conference on world poetry in the postmodern age. The idea was to bring together scholars capable of synthesizing a world-wide vision of poetic theory and practice in the last thirty or forty years. Naturally, it was not so easy. As Ene-Reet Soovik rightly mentions in her article on Tranströmer and Kaplinski, the “brain-trust” of postmodern theorists has dealt, up to now, almost exclusively with prose fiction; poetry, with its slimmer volume, has been notably left in the shadow in our postmodern age so enthralled by pulp and body. Thus the more is there the need, I think, to try to illuminate this ethereal tiny essence which, even though in the shadow, contrary to all predictions of the technologically-orientated man, persists in

all parts of the world — as this issue of *Interlitteraria* eloquently proves.

I think it is also good that several of the scholars who were participants of the conference and present their articles here, are poets themselves: thus we can also, perhaps, grasp something from the “inside” — what is taking place in the “shadow”, how the challenges of globalization and “transculturation” interfere with the poetically creative mind, and to what extent the latter can be adapted to the moulds of postmodern theories, built up mainly on the example of prose fiction. Thus, an example of how a critical mind, aided by that of a philosopher (Heidegger) can “poetically dwell” in the reality created by another poet (Elizabeth Bishop), is presented by Reet Sool. As we see from the article by Thomas Salumets (himself a “child of transculturation”, as he was born in an exiled Estonian family in Germany, and now teaches in English at the University of British Columbia, Canada), even the man who in theory could see a solution for the future world in an inter-dependent altruistic individualism, Norbert Elias, in fact, could not establish an authentically dialogic contact with his fellow beings without the help of poetry. Poetry, thus, has been, is and will be of enormous importance in letting mankind listen to its inner voice, despite the most radical changes and convulsions that continue on the surface. As Indrek Tart passionately argues, the more the technological age alienates us, from nature, from ourselves as natural beings, the more there should be room for poetry in man’s heart.

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of postmodern poetry or, to be more precise, of poetry in the postmodern age, is the great and often contradicting variety of responses and discourses both in the West and the East, as well as on the “border” (see the wonderfully penetrating overviews, respectively, of Catalan, Chilean, Chinese, Indian English, Latvian and Lithuanian poetry, by Josep Maria Sala-Valldaura, Ariel Fernández, Li Xia, Mohit K. Ray, Ausma Cimdiņa and Donata Mitaite). It seems to be unquestionable that the mainstreams of poetry have fully responded to the collapse of dogmatized idealism of any kind; in fact, poetry has itself essentially contributed to making the world freer, less subjugated to ideological dogmas and traditional thinking. Poetry’s liberating role under political totalitarianism, its undermining

activity in the “official culture” is echoed in the articles by Sirje Olesk and Kersti Unt, who write about Estonian “alternative poetry” (or the “poetic underground”), and myself, as I try to characterize the “on-the-ground” responses of our two major poets, Jaan Kaplinski and Hando Runnel, under the recent Soviet regime.

The historical situations in which poets feel, think and write, vary considerably — despite globalization and other levelling processes. Cultural intertextuality may act as a liberating means, opening up another, different kind of knowledge (as it has been well shown in the article by Alfredo Saldaña’s); the irony of the “impossibility of form” (as Rein Raud has put it), may still turn out to be a postmodern “possibility of form” (as the examples from the West and the East, provided by Rein Raud himself, splendidly demonstrate). Some old literary forms, like the Gothic way of expression, may suddenly be revitalized and produce a refreshing and even positive world-vision in the postmodern context (as shown by Mattias Fyhr, from Stockholm, on the examples of the Swedish Estonian poet Mare Kandre). Though deeply critical of the dehumanizing tendency of “antipoesía”, which has prevailed, in the footsteps of Nicanor Parra, in the recent decades in Chilean poetry, Ariel Fernández, in the closing words of his article, still envisages the appearance of new poetry, capable of penetrating into the changing reality beyond the layer of its mere appearances.

Liberation in postmodern poetry may appear short-lived and only illusory, if the new poetic knowledge itself dogmatizes its “otherness” (at what Saldaña, too, hints) or forms, by means of the “power mechanisms” of a cultural “centre”, a canon rejecting and deafening, in fact, all those voices that dare to dissent (as it can be seen from the article by our good friend and colleague from Granada, professor Manuel Cáceres Sánchez who, by the way, along with the Cuban semiotician Desiderio Navarro and the Italian comparatist Giuseppina Restivo has done more than anybody to spread the heritage of Yuri Lotman in the Mediterranean language area). A wittily humorous depiction of how poetry may acquire shades of the grotesque, once it loses contact with its immediate environment — relying mainly on imported cultural intertextuality — can be found in the article by the Romanian scholar Liviu Papadima.

The dangers of "canonization" are referred to also in the article by the Chinese scholar Li Xia who rightly mentions the insufficiency of Western critical canons in approaching Chinese (or, generally, Oriental) literature. As the relationship between the modern and the postmodern expression seems to occupy a key position in revealing the aesthetic novelty of the latter, some of our authors (like the Hungarian András Kappanyos) tend to voice skepticism about that novelty, while others (like the Swedish Estonian Peter Talme) disclose strong aesthetic dependence of the postmoderns on the moderns.

It is obvious that while some flourishing poetic areas of the world have found their vivid illustration on the pages of the present issue of *Interlitteraria*, others, not less rich, have been left aside or have been described only in their minor fragments. At the conference, a paper illuminating some recent trends in Austrian poetry was presented, but we did not have luck enough to receive the text, so we could not include it in *Interlitteraria*. Thus, the German-speaking area is this time entirely absent. Although nobody from France, England or Russia attended the conference, we were still fortunate to listen to the papers by the young Japanese Ai Kuroda about the work of the French poet Jacques Réda, while our Tartu scholars Pilvi Rajamäe and Marina Grishakova, with their papers on Geoffrey Hill and Timur Kibirov, have provided insights into English and Russian poetry, respectively.

The postmodern end-of-the-millennium is, in fact, so abundant in poetic experience — both "canonized" and falling out of the canon —, that many more efforts are needed to grasp all the vibrations of its undercurrents. *Interlitteraria* will remain open to the discussion on poetry that closes our century and opens the next. The first chance to contribute on these lines will be the next issue of *Interlitteraria* (5, 2000) where we will basically include papers of the forthcoming third international conference of the EACL, "Culture and Nation at the Turn of the Millennium" (Tartu, Oct. 3–6, 1999). A year after, hopefully, we will publish another *miscellanea*-issue.

The manuscripts for *Interlitteraria* 5, 2000, should arrive by January 31, 2000.

We wish that all our good friends and contributors meet the New Millennium in full creative vigour, with eyes turned towards an ever-expanding “horizon of expectations”.

Jüri Talvet,
Editor

**Functioning in Times Out of Joint
(Speech for the Opening
of Prof. Villem Alttoa's Memorial Exhibition,
Oct. 4, 1998)**

JAAK RÄHESOO

It is a happy occasion that our international conference here in Tartu coincides with the 100th anniversary of the birth of Prof. Villem Alttoa. For thirty years, from 1945 till his death in 1975, Prof. Alttoa taught world literature at Tartu University. For many generations of students he was virtually the incarnation of world literature. He was a popular lecturer, one of the few sources of light in those dark years. Again and again his name crops up in memoirs and recollections of people who attended the university in that period. It is clear that for them he reflected something of the liberal spirit of the pre-war university.

It is also an occasion to recall how times have changed. I am not only referring to the fact that the first ten years of Alttoa's lectureship at the university fell into the most brutal phase of Stalinist terror in Estonia when arrests, killings and mass deportations were common events and practically everybody had to fear for his or her safety. I am also referring to the fact that for the whole Soviet period Tartu remained a closed town because of a big military airfield on its outskirts. At best, foreign guests could be taken here — with special permission — for hurried one-day trips only. An international conference would have been an impossibility. It is sad to think that Prof. Alttoa did not live to see this opening up of academic life.

In the Soviet system of higher education a lecturer in world literature usually had to cover the whole field from antiquity to

modernity. So had Altkoa. There were few opportunities for more limited special courses or for dividing different literary periods among a number of lecturers. General textbooks were few and usually bad: a conscientious lecturer felt obliged to correct their simplicities and distortions for the sake of the students who would otherwise have remained in ignorance. Oral discourse was still freer than meticulously censored printed texts, although any lecturer was of course aware that there were informers among the listeners. So deviations from official dogma were usually given in the form of indirect hints and ironies. But it was a society of hints and ironies, and the young audience was pretty competent in catching them.

The duty to cover the whole course of literary history necessarily brought about a certain shallowness. But it gave a lecturer a wider horizon in different ages and genres: it was impossible to shut oneself up among one's own narrower preferences and enthusiasms. So Prof. Altkoa also divided his interests almost equally between poetry, drama and fiction. But it was realistic fiction where his heart clearly lay. His critical inheritance is centred around extensive studies of the masters of turn-of-the-century Estonian Realism — Eduard Vilde, August Kitzberg, Ernst Särgava-Peterson. Indeed as a scholar he dealt almost exclusively with Estonian authors. His writings on world literature are relatively few and almost all of a popular character, usually in the form of a newspaper article on the occasion of an author's anniversary or of a short afterword to a translation of a classic novel. Needless to say, his erudition still filtered through in his studies of Estonian literature, giving them a wider background. In those years of forced intellectual isolation this was unfortunately not at all common among literary scholars.

But although poetry, the subject of the present conference, was not Prof. Altkoa's most vital concern, there was still an intimate biographical connection. It was provided by his own teacher, Gustav Suits, a man he deeply revered. Indeed, reverence towards Suits probably helped Altkoa to overcome his doubts in taking over the chair of world literature in 1945, when Suits (like so many Baltic intellectuals and artists who remembered the atrocities of the first Soviet year in 1940/41) had fled before the re-advancing

Red Army and gone into exile in Sweden. For until then Villem Alttoa had been a simple schoolmaster and had published only a couple of popular treatments of Estonian authors. But somebody had to carry on the work of Suits even among all the terror and hunger and intellectual impoverishment of the post-war decade. And Suits had established very high standards as a teacher and scholar. His exactingness both in relation to himself and his students had become proverbial at the university. When he felt he had not mastered the subject of a lecture, he simply cancelled the lecture; and an examination (cross-examination, one might say) often took a student more than a day. One can only vaguely imagine the amount of work Alttoa felt obliged to do in his already somewhat advanced years, once he had taken over Suits' chair, in order to fill it with dignity. And in the context of his time he did succeed: he too became a legend and an object of reverence for his students. It is pointless to argue that in happier times his stature would have looked much smaller. We can be grateful that in those years there were people at all to whom students could look up with reverence.

Now, Gustav Suits was not only the father of Estonian literary scholarship; he was also the father of modern Estonian poetry. This is the connection I was referring to: in his person poetry and the study of world literature became intimately united from the very opening of the Estonian-language Tartu University in 1919, when the country was still waging its war of independence. Not everybody was happy about that union. Many suspected that the weight of academic duties was to be blamed for the drying up of Suits' poetic output in the inter-war period — that the poet Suits had succumbed to Professor Suits. But the workings of a creative mind are hidden; so such opinions remain mere guesses. What is important here is that Suits brought the spirit of openness and innovation, so strong in modern poetry, also to his lectures and thus influenced a whole generation of students, including Villem Alttoa. For although Alttoa's taste for Realism reflected a certain conservatism of the Estonian literary scene of the 1930s, he remained sufficiently aware that other and equally "legitimate" forces were active in the modern world. So he could not go along with the Soviet dogma that Realism, the purported forebear of that

ideological bastard Socialist Realism, was always right in its quarrels with other literary trends and movements.

The title of our conference includes the words "postmodern world". It is perhaps appropriate to recall here that the formation of the Estonian nation and culture falls entirely within the period of modernity. This thesis holds true both when we place the beginnings of modernity to the end of the 18th century, with its industrial turn, large-scale political revolutions and rise of nationalism, whose distant rumblings reached the Baltic shores and gave birth to gradual national awakening. It also holds true when we bring the beginning of modernity to around 1870, when the Estonian national awakening finally came to full swing. Before that awakening Estonians had had only folk culture, peasant culture, although its roots were deep and strong. Now they suddenly started to create their version of European "high culture", with their own literature, music, painting, theatre. There had been no vernacular Middle Ages or Renaissance or Baroque in Estonia. Now Enlightenment, Romanticism and Realism, all necessarily in a shallower and shortened version, were hurriedly and belatedly crammed into a single century. This late development is a peculiarity of Estonian culture shared in the European context only by our closest neighbours the Latvians, Lithuanians and Finns. It means that acceleration of change, a general characteristic of modernity, has in the Eastern Baltic cultural region acquired an even more hectic speed. The recurrent slogan here has always been that of catching up with the more fortunate European nations. And indeed, in a mere half-century Estonian literature proceeded from fairly primitive didactic stories to the refinements of contemporary European Symbolism, the artistic creed of the Young Estonia movement of around 1905, whose leader was Gustav Suits. In another decade the younger members of that movement were already rushing headlong into the ultra-modern trends of Futurism and Expressionism. "Making it new", to borrow a phrase from Ezra Pound, was taken for granted in this atmosphere: these people were creating a new national culture, and they were doing it in what was seen as a new age of global development. For the most part they seem to have been exhilarated by its prospects.

Naturally this modernistic spirit functioned in a situation markedly different from that of the leading European literatures where Modernism was very much a reaction against previous trends and attitudes. The short history of Estonian culture provided little to react against. It was even felt that the rush into an uncertain future had come too soon — that a proper background was still lacking. So in both poetry and fiction a step backward was taken in the late 1920s. It was of course in harmony with a temporary retreat from experimentalism all over Europe. But because of the special conditions of a young culture it was more complete or more noticeable than in some other countries. It was as if Estonian literature had only now time to fill in some of the gaps of its previous development. As I said, Alttoa's taste for Realism reflected that phase of Estonian history. And yet the hectic drive to absorb as much of world culture as possible remained as true for his generation as it had been for the previous one: they were still engaged in and exhilarated by the superhuman effort to know everything. I remember Prof. Alttoa mentioning Martin Eden, the title character of Jack London's novel, as the hero of his youth. It is a character many people of his generation have named as their example. It was Martin Eden the self-made-man who had taken high culture in his stride they identified with, not Martin Eden who committed suicide: the tragic end of the novel was resolutely ignored. Like Martin Eden, most of these young people were of humble origin — as was Alttoa. Many foreigners were actually surprised at from how poor a background most students of Tartu University came. It is a peculiarity of Estonian history: this ardent faith in education as the royal road of opening up the world. It made even very poor families ready to sacrifice their everyday needs in order to send their sons and daughters to university. And those sons and daughters were also ready to combine Spartan living conditions with high intellectual pursuits. This attempt to open up the world was something to which Soviet isolationism later put heavy restrictions. In this respect the conditions of the last ten years may be nearer to Alttoa's youth than my own student years in the 1960s. On the other hand, as far as material temptations go, the 1960s were certainly more like the 1920s.

Finally a brief reflection on how a scholarly or critical approach can function in totally different psychological ways for different generations. It is quite clear, for example, that the Anglo-American New Criticism and its parallels in other countries were seen by the young scholars and critics of the 1920s and '30s as something of a liberation: for them it had freed the literary text from the burden of all kinds of biographical and sociological information amassed by previous positivistic studies. Once New Criticism became established, however, its exclusive concentration on texts was seen as a restricting prison-house by the following generations: for them liberation could only come by going outside the text. In this respect, Prof. Alttoa's studies, written in the good old positivistic vein, with a quiet conviction in the virtue of facts, may seem a far cry from the postmodernist stress on the unavoidable dependence of facts (or "facts") on our previous assumptions and prejudices, which may be pretty arbitrary. It is not only a question of neither of these approaches, taken to their extreme, being satisfactory. It is also important to see that for Prof. Alttoa the faith in facts was a guarantee of his scholarly integrity, freedom and independence in opposing, however obliquely, the arbitrariness of Soviet dogma. While for other people in different circumstances a reliance on open arbitrariness may have fulfilled the same functions of spiritual freedom and independence. It is instructive to see the functioning of these psychological attitudes in order to understand one's own motives. And it may also bring us to acknowledge a deeper unity in the conflicting efforts of different ages. In this way Prof. Alttoa becomes a living presence among us.

Poetry and the Human Sciences: the 'Other' Norbert Elias

THOMAS SALUMETS

Introduction

At the turn of the millenium, as the first section of this paper aims to show, interest in poetry is waning. It is as if poems, addressing a less and less visible dimension of individual consciousness, have no longer anything important to say to our world. Coinciding with this development is the process that merges individual consciousness — part of which still is, as will be argued here, what in this context we might call 'the isolated ego' — with the general consciousness and hence reduces its usefulness, even its meaning. As forces of segregation diminish and the crossing and joining of boundaries has come to dominate social, political, and cultural discourses in many parts of the Western world, the isolated ego is widely perceived to have lost its *raison d'être*. Apart from more obvious forces of fragmentation, it is as if it, too, did not matter any longer.

Yet, this is not true. They both do matter. Although increasingly hidden from view, the isolated ego and poetry are all but insignificant. It is the aim of the second part of this paper to address this paradox by looking at an intriguing example: the case of Norbert Elias. As a sociologist, he argued that the lonely, closed off individual is not real but a construct of the imagination which, in the course of the civilizing process, came to be mistaken for fact. However, the 'other' Elias, including Elias the poet, acknowledged that he himself was implicated in this apparent fiction of the *homo clausus*. Contrary to what his persona as a human

scientist suggested, it appears that he also resisted rather than embraced this general consciousness. In other words, in certain ways he remained a static example of the isolated ego. It was part of his habitus, and, as such, was fact and not fiction. To address this contradiction he wrote poems. Where his theory had failed and trapped him, poems were meant to bridge the gap between himself and his fellow human beings. With the help of poetry, he wanted to overcome his isolation.

The complex and ambiguous place of poetry in contemporary consciousness and the role it plays with regard to the isolated ego as a reality is difficult to see for several reasons: It is, in this specific case, overshadowed and rendered unrecognizable by Elias' powerful theory of the Western European civilizing process. Furthermore, it is dwarfed by the strong influence of postmodern thought in general. And it assigns significance to poetry at a time when the evidence overwhelmingly points in the opposite direction suggesting that poetry is, at best, an "endangered species" of sorts.

An "Endangered Species"

In 1998, the University of California Press published the second of its two volume anthology entitled *Poems for the Millennium*. On nearly 900 pages, the editors have assembled poems written in the last five decades of this century by more than 200 authors worldwide. Judging by the quantitatively and qualitatively monumental scale of this publication containing poems ranging from the dark experiences of war to the cyberpoetics of the digital age, poetry ought to occupy centre stage in our culture, at least in North America. Instead, as we all know, the opposite is more likely to be true. While poets may still arouse curiosity, poetry hardly ever does any longer. It appears to be at odds with the demands of our fast-paced, increasingly information-based digital world. As a consequence, we do not see poetry as an essential cultural resource. Instead, it looks to many, in the words of a Canadian reviewer, like "jibberish in a strange language" (Persky 1998). As John Hollander recently observed in his *The Work of Poetry*: "Although many books may be on the shelves, there is an absence of poetry in many

cultural places where it used to be in evidence. University curricula in literature are increasingly uneasy about it. School children are no longer required to commit poems and passages of verse to memory. College students are no longer trained to read it closely as a first step towards more extensive and elaborate construing of literary and nonliterary texts. University teachers-in-training in most graduate programs feel more and more that the study of poetry per se is marginal, and when poetic texts are studied, they are, like novels and plays, little blobs of condensed contextualization. For many schoolteachers and bureaucrats and poetasters outside the academy, poems are little blobs of sentiment" (Hollander 1997: 9).

Institutionally, poetry is not firmly entrenched. As a matter of fact, many would argue, it does not even exist as a profession. There are no degrees in poetry and there are no academic disciplines exclusively devoted to it. But this institutional absence is also the source of its principle power. Where poetry is understood as an "approach to the out-of-range" (Dragland 1995: 10), or an "antidote to ideologies" (Hollander 1997: 4) rather than as a closed system designed to enhance our values and our ability to predict and control, poetry derives a good measure of its strength from being 'outside' in this sense: The constraints and conventions specific to poetry are potentially enabling in that they invite the unpredictable (Levi 1990: 113), encourage interventions in the everyday, question the apparently normal and natural and reconnect us to the forgotten, give voice to the unspeakable, the silenced and — urging "meaning on the move" (Dragland 1995: 16) — break across other separating boundaries.

Poetry understood in this way is essential to the well-being of community. But its relative power is nevertheless linked to its position outside the very community it serves. As forces of segregation retreat, fringes are disappearing and poets are increasingly pushed into a space which threatens their identity. With nowhere else to go, they are becoming mainstream. As a result of what could also be called — to put it in more political terms — a transnational democratizing process, poetry is increasingly less distinguishable from other discourses, not unlike literature in general.

It too is implicated in its own demise in this postmodern continuity of change. And yet, poetry is particularly hard hit.

This is how I would situate, for example, Primo Levi's argument who in *The Mirror Maker* speaks of an oversupply of poetry. According to Levi, just "as we speak and walk, we are all of us, at least potentially, poets" (Levi 1990: 111) and share "the need for singing" (ib. 112). It is possible to meet this need with greater ease today than ever before, argues Levi, since knowledge of poetic form, including classical metrics, is not a prerequisite any more (ib.). Instead, there is a "nearly global commitment to free verse" allowing for the widest possible range of subjects and themes: "from the most demeaned to the most exalted, from the most commonplace to the most learned, from myth to history and back, from present into past and future," as the editors of the above mentioned *Poems for the Millennium* put it (1998: 6). "This apparent freedom", to quote Levi, "has flung open the doors to the army of born poets. From these two sources, the need for singing ... and the falling away of formal shackles, comes the flood of poetic books" (Levi 1990: 112). The result: a surplus and subsequent devaluation of poetry and hence more difficulty in finding the more interesting voices (ib.).

In short, poetry is an "endangered species" of sorts (Rothenberg and Joris 1998: 12). It is exposed to a twofold threat: as fewer and fewer know how to read traditional poetry, it is in danger of becoming readerless. And if marks of distinction go hand in hand with making something meaningful, 'free' postmodern poetry is in danger of becoming meaningless.

The same, in principle, holds true for imaginative literature in general: It too has become a victim of its own success. We are witnessing what could be called the literary turn of the human sciences. Interest in imaginative literature has spread well beyond its traditional territory into non-literary areas. As a matter of fact, "literary studies have never enjoyed greater interdisciplinary prestige" (Loriggio 1995: 258). As one critic recently put it: "Whatever the eighties and the nineties have been or are, they are that portion of the century in which notions hitherto identified with literature have become suddenly portable, in which sociologists and anthropologists have been able to liken society or a particular

strip of the life they have observed to a text and cognitive scientists have been able to speculate more seriously than ever before about the role of the imagination in their debates on how the mind operates" (ib. 257).

This literary turn of the human sciences, as flattering as it is for those engaged in the production of literary texts or literary criticism, comes at the expense of, among others, the identity of those practitioners. What was once their own, they now have to share. As a result, they are less extraordinary. "It's the same with poetry", to quote a poem written by Estonia's Jaan Kaplinski,

seen from afar
 it's something special, mysterious, festive.
 No, poetry is even less special than a sugar cane
 plantation or potato field.
 Poetry is like sawdust coming from under the saw or
 soft yellowish shavings
 from a plane. Poetry is washing hands in the evening
 or a clean handkerchief that my late aunt
 never forgot to put in my pocket.
 (Kaplinski 1987: 56)

Contemporary western consciousness is increasingly shaped by what is often equated with the postmodern turn. It is above all characterized by a perception of reality in aesthetic categories. Today, hard truth and thinking realistically means to think and act in ways we commonly associate with strong poetry (Welsch 1991: 40–53). To quote from D. H. Lawrence's (1885–1930) poem *Mystic*, we do not have to "hog" an apple "down like a pig" anymore "and taste nothing" to call it real. Instead, experiences of the senses are now part of that order. It is real, not mystic, to taste in an apple "the summer and the snows, the wild welter of earth/ and the insistence of the sun" (Lawrence 1996: 36).

Postmodern poets and practitioners in the human sciences then are not bound by the quest for objectivity, the desire to predict and control. Not rest and a constant, secure vocabulary is their goal but instead a "richer and better human activity" (Rorty 1991: 39), as much consensus and "reciprocal loyalty" (ib. 45) as possible. They share in an "edifying" project which (Rorty 1979: 365–379), as we

know through the work of Richard Rorty, is designed to substitute "conversation with foreigners for conquest of them" (Rorty 1991: 25). It is a project which consequently sees poets and scientists as part of one continuously changing web of human beings engaged in the construction of community rather than the discovery of truths. As a consequence, isolationism is frowned upon, considered a vestige of times past. Attitudes towards and changes in contemporary poetry reflect that.

Have we then gotten "rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego," as Charles Olson put it? (Rothenberg and Joris 1998: 8). To raise the same question differently, does the breakdown of distinctions really reach as far as postmodern consciousness suggests? We know all too well that at the end of the millennium the opposing paradigms of globalization and fragmentation compete: on the one hand the coalescence of developments regarding global economy, communication, and increasing mobility is shaping the world; on the other, as political and other boundaries change, factors of national culture, ethnicity come to the fore in often bloody and destructive ways. Although we know better, traces of longstanding egocentrism are deeply ingrained in our habits of speech. We still, for example, say of the sun that it sets and rises — as if the earth and with it the individual, the way infants see themselves, occupied the centre of the universe. There are also many who say 'I' in a much more deliberate effort to affirm, even celebrate the individual in its own right. If "this were not so," argues Primo Levi, "what point would there be in continuing with Nobel Prizes?" (Levi 1990: 121). What point would there be in selecting "the man of the year" or "the hundred most influential people of the century"? Why do we resist cloning? It must be appealing to imagine the world neatly divided into "self" and "other" or "passengers" and "drivers", as a popular North American series of VW commercials has it. Why else would it help sell magazines, newspapers, cars and books like Slavenka Draculic's *Café Europa*. The Croatian author and journalist writes in the opening chapter of her 1996 bestseller: "I hate the first-person plural" (Draculic 1996: 2). "'We' means fear, resignation, submissiveness, a warm crowd and somebody else deciding your destiny. 'I' means giving individuality and democracy a chance"

(ib. 4). Clearly, the isolated ego is still part of Western consciousness. And, as long as it is, there is a function for poetry. It helps individuals break out of their shells, simultaneously affirming and contesting their singularity. Not surprisingly then — although there is a great deal of talk about the demise of poetry and a new kind of individualism in which ‘self’ and ‘other’ merge — poetry and the self-image of the isolated ego are not to be ignored. On the contrary, they are forces to be reckoned with, even where we least expect it.

One of the Great Sociologists of the Twentieth Century

There are strong voices who would argue the reverse. While speaking for the individual, they assert that the conception of the lonely individual is not rooted in fact. It is simply unproductive, anachronistic and self-defeating. Among them is the sociologist Norbert Elias (Elias 1897–1990). In his autobiographical *Reflections on a Life* and throughout his many publications he consistently argued that we “are not ‘independent’; no one is that ... We are mutually dependent” (Elias 1994: 78). The reason for this is deceptively simple: There “can be no ‘I’ without ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘we’, ‘you’ or ‘they’”. It is plainly very misleading to use such concepts as ‘I’ or ego independently of their position within the web of relationships to which the rest of the pronouns refer” (Elias 1978: 124). In Elias’ opinion, it was thus futile to take as a point of departure the apparently closed-off individual. The self-image of a *homo clausus* is a myth which in the course of the civilizing process, as Elias saw it unfold, was mistaken for reality. To correct this error, Elias focused his efforts on human interdependencies. Early on in his life he expressed the need for a more open and fuller consideration of the complex and continually changing ways in which we are connected. The ensuing quest for long-term continuities of change in human relations dominated his entire adult life. It culminated in a wealth of publications; all of them in their own right issuing compelling challenges to what in his view

was an anachronism, a leftover of our geocentric past, the myth of the isolated ego.

For a variety of reasons — ranging from his unconventional style of writing to his background as a German Jew — recognition for his achievements came late, not until well after his formal retirement from the University of Leicester in 1962 and the subsequent brief period as chair of Sociology at the University of Ghana. And even then, interest in his work was initially largely confined to a small group of admirers and loyal supporters. Although Elias did not give up, the lack of wider acknowledgement and his status as outsider in general over all those years was especially difficult for him. In complex ways, his work on human interdependencies is also an expression of his need to be recognized. For he was convinced that “the meaning of everything a person does lies in what he or she means to others” (Elias 1985: 33). Life without recognition, as he put it in his, in many ways autobiographical, study of Mozart, is “the kind of meaninglessness that someone can die of” (Elias 1993: 6).

Although it probably never reached the point he himself had wished for and it came rather late in his long life, Elias, unlike Mozart, lived to see his popularity soar. He was almost eighty years of age, when the years of recognition were about to begin. In 1976 *The Civilizing Process* was re-published. The paperback edition of his *magnum opus* turned into a bestseller in Germany, the country he had fled shortly after the Nazis came to power. A host of books, lectures, interviews, and an increasing number of other publications followed. But Elias still remained an outsider of sorts. Although his success apparently suggests otherwise: When Elias died on August 1, 1990 in Amsterdam, he was well known throughout Europe. His books have since been translated into many languages and his exceptional contributions to our knowledge of human interdependencies have earned him the distinction of being one of the great sociologists of the twentieth century.

Hidden Dimensions

When asked how he thought that he would be remembered by future generations, his reply casts doubt over his achievements as a sociologist. The almost 90-year-old Elias surprisingly answered that in the memory of others he would not survive as a scientist. Instead, he would be remembered as a poet. (Schröter 1997: 307).

Elias wrote poetry throughout most of his life. In 1987, on the occasion of his 90th birthday, a collection of his poems was published in Germany. It contains forty poems — most of them in German, some in English, ten so called “*Nachdichtungen*” (adaptations and/or translations) as well as a ballad (“*Die Ballade from armen Jakob*”) about the fate of outsiders, as Elias saw it. This ballad about “poor Jacob” the Jew — which Elias wrote in an internment camp on the Isle of Man in 1941 — has recently (1996) been published separately. Quantitatively the body of his poetry amounts to a rather modest output, especially in view of his many other publications. And yet, Elias must have felt a much stronger affinity with poetry than his preoccupation with sociology suggests.

Still, poetry was not his first choice. Instead, he decided to devote his life to the investigation of human interdependencies. Curiously, despite his professional interest in social relations he remained an outsider. To cope with this contradiction, I would like to suggest, Elias turned to poetry. In the case of this sociologist, it is thus not sufficient to point out that our primary reality may indeed be increasingly seen in terms of aesthetic categories. This does not help explain the poet Elias. The in some ways pertinent argument that Elias has shown how the separation of imaginative literature from scientific discourse can be eliminated, also misses the point. (Käsler 1996: 439). As a matter of fact, this kind of reduction not only hides significant complexities in the relationship between poetry and the human sciences as they emerge in the case of Elias; it also moves out of sight the special quality of poetry as medium between self and other. Poetry is potentially less likely to contribute towards this split than other discourses. And what is more, such an oversimplification may indeed help disperse that part of contemporary consciousness which imagines indivi-

duals in the singular rather than the plural. Not acknowledging existing egocentrisms, it might in turn increase the danger of further social fragmentation. But this is difficult to recognize because egocentrism is also characteristic of those who apparently have moved beyond it. Elias is a case in point.

Resisting Relations

As the historian Jeroen Duindam put it, Elias “chose to negate or shroud most allegiances, to pose as an individual *sui generis* — somewhat similar to the ultimate *homo clausus*, the recurrent target of his own writings” (Duindam 1997: 85). Elias’ long-time assistant and chief editor Michael Schröter writes in his recently published book *Erfahrungen mit Norbert Elias* that Elias usually did not care much for the opinions of others (Schröter 1997: 281), that his assistants were nothing but “living dictaphones” (ib. 281), that relationships with Elias were distinctly unidirectional, shaped by him and no one else (ib. 284). As Karl-Siegbert Rehberg has it, Elias was not open to discussions, his conversations were not really dialogical but served as opportunities to defend his own ground, to win others over (Rehberg 1996: 13).

While consistently arguing for human interdependencies, he resisted them elsewhere, too. It is almost as if he himself was not or could not be subject to his own theory. Elias, for example, did not show much interest in the work of his colleagues. To be fair, this reluctance to conform to established academic patterns of behaviour and style of writing was in his later years probably above all a matter of priorities and energy. His age and failing eyesight may have been contributing factors as well. One could also make a case for it being consistent with his view of human beings and knowledge, his critical stance towards present-centred rather than long-term investigations and his, on balance, more synthetic than analytic approach in general. As a rule, he therefore did not engage in the kind of sustained dialogue with his peers, at least not in the usual way. “If you complained to Elias that he had failed to address the contemporary literature, or suggested that he was out

of date, he would reply that you had a fetish for the new" (Kilminster 1991: IX). When he discussed the views of those who differed substantially from his, his treatment was often reductive, antagonistic, producing rather than resisting clichés, caricature-like (Rehberg 1996b: 33). "Perhaps more than any of his accused", as Dick Pels put it, "Elias himself has been *homo clausus*, turning his back upon an intellectual world which would never listen to this particular stranger's voice" (Pels 1991: 182). Rather than growing more inclusive, in accordance with his theory, Elias' publications display a trend which points in the opposite direction. They became, with few exceptions, less and less empirically based, time and again returning, albeit in rather intriguing ways, to a set of concepts developed in his *magnum opus*, *The Civilizing Process*, extending, refining and applying them. Concentrating more on writing rather than research, his evidence is on occasion limited to one secondary source. A good part of his book on Mozart, for example, is largely based on Wolfgang Hildesheimer's biography *Mozart* (Schröter 1997: 322). "At times", as one of his former student reports, "the data were treated in a possibly cavalier manner" (ib. 230). Another example of his habitus that can be called isolationist in Rorty's sense is the extraordinarily high value he placed on his own work. It was more important to him than anything else. It came first, even at the expense of relations with others. Editors and publishers of his work learned quickly of his perfectionism and reluctance to let go of his texts (ib. 230-235). For example, he valued his *The Court Society* most of all of his publications because he was able to correct and change the manuscript, even in the proofs, as he pleased (ib. 235). When asked why he never married, he answered: "Well, I noticed very early that the two do not go together: to do that I wanted to do and to be married. There is always a rivalry" (Elias 1994: 78). It is an altruistic but still Promethean spirit that seems to have been the driving force behind the scientist Elias. In a discussion of Prometheus, Goethe wrote that significant achievements require isolation and that, in the end, the individual is dependent only on himself (Goethe 1988: 47f.). As Goethe put this desire for absolute independence in the final stanza of his poem *Prometheus* (1774): "Here I sit, forming men/In my image,/A race to resemble me:/To

suffer, to weep, /To enjoy, to be glad — /And never to heed you, /Like me!" Not surprisingly, in view of the argument presented here, Elias called *Prometheus* — a poem which both denounces authority and celebrates self-centred creativity — one of the world's most magnificent poems (1979).

In short, Elias was not only the successful defender and practitioner of the human sciences who argued for a processual, relational and long-term view of the social world. He was also what in German is called a "Selbstdenker", a "thinking statue" of sorts (Elias 1991a: 113), someone who thinks *for* and *by* himself. From this point of view, he was indeed a "complete outsider" (Elias 1994: 75), someone whose consciousness clearly also included what we referred to here as the isolated ego.

This is not to say that this relative isolation left Elias indifferent. On the contrary, he was painfully aware of his social disconnectedness. A recurring dream Elias related in *His Reflections on a Life* is quite telling in this regard: It concerns a telephone conversation. The anonymous voice on the other end says: "Could you speak louder, I can't hear you." Elias then shouts into the receiver. The response is the same. "Speak louder, I can't hear you" (Elias 1990: 73f.). Despite his success towards the end of his life he still had this fantasy (Elias 1990: 73). His editor and former assistant Schröter sees in this telephone dream a deep-seated loneliness of a scientist who at times catches himself as if indeed separated from his fellow human beings "just sitting and thinking" (Schröter 1997: 201).

Mixed Feelings

Not unlike Mozart, as Elias sees him in his *Portrait of a Genius*, who "began to feel himself a man defeated by life" (Elias 1993: 3), Elias marginalizes himself through his work. Although its subject matter is an attempt to re-focus the social sciences on human beings and the manifold, continuously changing ways they are connected, Elias pushed himself away — and further than he wanted. Here his work as a poet takes on a special significance. But could imaginative literature really be of any help? Elias had

doubts. Poems, unlike scientific texts, he argued in his unpublished "Gedanken über die Dichtkunst" engage all our senses and work on all levels of human consciousness when they are read or sung and when they are made visible. A world of specialists, however, demands a high level of foresight and discipline (Elias Archive, File # 878). There is less room for spontaneity. People become increasingly one-sided and accustomed to responding primarily on one level. The merging of many levels — such as cognitive, social and emotive — is met with a high degree of resistance. Since poetry demands such a synthesis, Elias concludes, the task of a poet is correspondingly difficult (ib.).

Elias appears to have been of two minds when it came to the value of imaginative literature in general. On the one hand fictional writing was of such appeal to him that he wrote poetry of his own and he prominently integrated literary texts into his work as a sociologist. On the other hand, he argued that literature does not belong in the human sciences.

As a young man he seems to have been strongly influenced by German Classicism. In his *Reflections on a Life* he lists Kant and the giants of German literature, Goethe and Schiller, as major influences (Elias 1994: 18): "they were the great men in my life." His exposure to main-stream German literature — he specifically names Goethe, Heine, Mörike, and Eichendorff (ib. 85) — is also mentioned when he talks about long-term factors which, according to his self-assessment, co-determined, by way of identification or critical distance, his approach to social problems (ib.). The German classics "played a part in giving me broad and deep access to human problems" (ib. 85) the 87-year-old Elias remembered in retrospect.

His relatively frequent use of literary texts in his scholarly publications bears witness to the importance Elias assigned to imaginative literature. The spectrum of literary texts used by Elias in one way or another ranges from relatively obscure to very well-known texts and includes prose, poetry as well as references to drama, even science fiction. In his important *The Civilizing Process*, there is an entire section entitled "Literary Examples of the Relationship of the German Middle-Class Intelligentsia to the Court" (Elias 1994: 18–24) and an interpretation of the 'Minne-

sang' in relation to the habitus and social position of medieval knights (ib. 323–334). In *The Loneliness of the Dying* he quotes and discusses a poem by the Silesian baroque poet Hofmann von Hofmannswaldau (Elias 1992: 19–23). The 'Notes' to part I of *The Society of Individuals* contain quotes from poems by Rilke and Goethe (Elias 1991: 64–66). A short case study published in the German edition of his *The Established and Outsiders* (295–305) is based almost exclusively on his reading of Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Edgar Allan Poe's story "A Descent into the Maelstrom" is used in his discussion of the "double-bind" in his *Involvement and Detachment* (Elias 1987c: 75–184, in particular: 79–80). In his recently published *The Germans* he incorporates passages from two little known novels by Walter Bloem entitled *Der krasse Fuchs* [The Crass Fox] (Elias 1996a: 109–11) and *Volk wider Volk* [Nation against Nation] (ib. 181–182). There are many more examples, including Elias' use of texts by the controversial expressionist/realist writer Ernst Jünger, of French literature in *The Court Society*, and his lecture and subsequent article on 17th and 18th century German poetry (Elias 1987a).

Against Literature

Despite the substantial role of literature in his research, he banished literature, as if in a complete turnaround, from his 're-public'. He equated literature with myths suggesting that human beings are better off without them. They do not, as he put it, "correspond to the observable facts" (Elias 1978: 52). Myths therefore need to be identified and, as one might add, deconstructed. This, according to Elias is the task of sociology. In his *What is Sociology?* sociologists are thus defined as destroyers of myth (ib. 50). This is not to say that, in his view, there is no place for myths at all. Instead, fantasies "can be milestones" in the quest for more adequate knowledge (Elias 1991b: 75). "The road to a finding that is reality-congruent", as he put it in his *Symbol Theory*, "may lead through a whole series of imaginative assumptions with the dominant character of fantasies" (ib. 75) Myths

are also needed when we have reached the limits of our tolerance for uncertainty: "Fantasy knowledge [...] had a high survival value for human beings. Myth closed the gaps of their realistic knowledge. It protected them from the horror of having to know how much they did not know" (ib. 133). When and where human beings are compelled to seek refuge under such "fantasy shelters", they ought to, as Elias argued, turn to literature, write poetry, as he himself did (Elias 1994: 40).

Creations by Human Beings for Human Beings

Perhaps this too can be understood in terms of Elias' own isolation, his need for recognition and desire to be closer to others. His poems may have served him as a retreat, a "fantasy shelter" in difficult times where his discoveries could become real without the need for justification. Literature would thus turn into an imaginary world where, as his poems time and again assert, there is no doubt that we human beings are interdependent, both in cooperation and in conflict, that all we have is one another "Wir haben nichts als uns" (Elias 1996: 33), "Dass man in Menschen auf/ in Menschen untergeht/ ... das ist unvermeidlich/... Schmerz und Erlösung/ kommen aus Menschenhand, (Elias 1987b: 52), that life is "feast without host" (ib. 81), that there are no beginnings and endings, only change, "born from a storm of disorder/ nomads of time without tiding/ in a void without border/ riding the storm" (ib.), that there are no easy, ready-made solutions, enchanting as they may be; that the continuously changing complexities of human relations cannot be reduced to lazy mobilities, handed down by others without creating yet another system of limits: "Wollt ihr dass ich euch/ biete ein Vorgekautes/ Brei/ gesüsste Schlückchen Leben/ weichgekocht ...?" (ib. 68).

Given the special qualities Elias attributed to poetry and literature in general, literary texts are seen as a relative autonomous extension of human relations signifying stage-specific thresholds of shame and repugnance. Literature, according to Elias, belongs to those "human products" (Elias 1971: 367) he referred to as

“semi-autonomous” (ib.) because of their transplantability. Texts can, as he put it, “be transplanted from their originating society, from the stage of social development at which they are produced, into others often very different in structure and momentum” (Elias 1971: 367). Literature is relatively autonomous and as such can be distinguished from other texts but not separated from them. Where literary texts are treated as if they existed in a vacuum, as if they were absolutely private, Elias argues, “[a]rbitrary interpretations will be the norm, wrong conclusions the rule” (Elias 1992: 20). Furthermore, it is, in his view, necessary to situate literature in its human context of origin; it is necessary to see it as a creation by human beings for human beings, to see it as a means of communication. Literature too, is thus a matter of networks of human beings. Observing this literary context, Elias suggests, helps us understand how we were and are connected (Elias 1987a: 453–454). Seeing and understanding connections is central to all of Elias’ work. For him, this ability holds the key to a better future. If human beings “want to arrange their lives better than they are now, they have to know how things are connected together” (Elias 1994: 47). To this end, he believed poems to be useful as well. To this end, I believe, Elias hoped they could help him escape the isolationist double-bind he was trapped in to a good measure by his own design.

Poems, according to Elias, can tell us a great deal about human beings in their own time and space (Elias 1987a: 453). Often, however, we don’t hear their voices. The more we are driven by ideas rather than by human beings, the more we run the risk of losing sight of interdependencies and with that we run the risk of excluding what in Elias’ view ranks among the most valuable quality human beings possess: affection towards one another. As Thomas Scheff sees it, it was Elias who discovered one of the “Master Emotions”, namely shame, “bare-handed” (unpublished paper). Literary texts figure prominently in this discovery, whether, for example, in an effort to provide glimpses into the emotions of an emerging bourgeoisie, or, as Helmuth Kuzmics explains in the case of *Werther* to make visible the feelings of inferiority which “vexed members of the German bourgeoisie had in the face of aristocrats, the social cleavage between them and the

compensatory strategies of the former when humiliated and excluded from social intercourse with their 'superiors' (unpublished paper). In *The Loneliness of the Dying* (Elias 1992: 19–23), advancing thresholds of shame and repugnance are the focus of Elias' reading of a baroque poem by the Silesian poet from Elias' hometown (Breslau, today Wrocław). The first two lines of the poem entitled "Transience of Beauty" read as follows:

Pallid death shall with his chilly hand
At last, with time, your breasts caress;

Rather than interpreting the poem as a highly private and individualized invention and the relative openness with which death, human decomposition and sexual relations are treated in this poem as a sign of "morbid interest ... [and] loose morals" (ib. 21), Elias argued that we first need to observe ourselves more closely. Increased awareness of our habitus, greater detachment, will allow us to read the poem more in terms of its own time and space. This way the particular threshold of shame and embarrassment the poem signifies — a relatively open discourse on death — will become more visible and we are less likely to confuse it with a perspective more typical of our own stage of civilization. This kind of reading will in turn increase our own self-awareness. It is characteristic of Elias' approach that literary texts are always integrated into the wider long-term context of directed but unplanned changes in mentality and social structure.

Poetry as Bridge

Framed in this way, his interest in poetry becomes indicative of a complex, and at times contradictory struggle to grow closer to others. Poetry, for Elias, is a social art: "Im Grunde verstehe ich Dichten als eine gesellschaftliche Kunst" ("Kommentar zum Gedicht Dämmerung", file # 1364: 2). His poems are an appeal to listen more carefully, to "behave more considerately towards innovators", perhaps including innovators like him (Elias 1993: 14). It is as if poetry was meant to be the bridge between his

isolated ego and the human beings in the plural he argued for but resisted in his own behaviour.

Sensitive to the possibility of creating yet another system of restraints with words, of creating limits rather than working against refinements, formal abstractions, and reifications, Elias turned to writing poems: "[...] und im Grunde liegt es mir sehr am Herzen [...] der ausgeklügelten und formalisierend[en] Abstraktheit des Denkens und Sprechens [,die] heute vorherrscht [,] ein Bein zu stellen" (file # 878). Poems, in his view, are in many instances opportunities to communicate in simpler, clearer ways and are less likely to contribute to the perpetuation of the problems they address than scientific texts: "Es ist zum Beispiel möglich, Gedanken, die man als Gedanken hat, aber die wissenschaftlich nicht leicht aussprechbar sind, klar und verhältnismäßig einfach in einem Gedicht zu sagen" (ib. 8). Driven by his desire to create complex images in uncomplicated ways, Elias regretted that there is no tradition in European writings similar to Japanese Haiku: "Ich wünschte manchmal, man hätte in den europäischen Ländern eine Tradition des japanischen Haiku, in der man in vier fünf Zeilen ein Bild heraufbeschwört" (file # 1364: 26). Poems, Elias argued, are potential sources of emotive enrichment. They can help us achieve a positive pleasure balance without contributing to decivilizing processes: "Aber es ist gewiss nicht nur die Bereicherung des Sehens auf der Wirklichkeitsebene, die man von einem Gedicht erwarten darf, sondern zugleich die Bereicherung des Empfindens" ("Kommentar zum Gedicht Dämmerung", file # 1364: 3). In the context of these kinds of emotive thought experiences he often spoke of music and the musicality of poetry. Perhaps unknowingly, echoing his own Jewish past and the importance Jewish culture attributes to oral traditions, Elias refers to what he called "word-music". Writing poetry is like playing music. But the kind of music which at the same time makes it possible to communicate on several levels simultaneously in an open, dialogical way: "Dichten erschien mir immer als eine Art des Musizierens. Im Unterschied von einem reinen Musikstück aber kann ein Gedicht mit den Tönen zugleich auch Gedanken von einem Menschen zum Anderen tragen; und zwar mit besond[ere]r Prägnanz, weil man beim Dichten Fühlen und Denken nicht zu trennen braucht [,] also mit

anderen Menschen auf mehreren Registern der Person zugleich kommunizieren kann. [...] Reine Musik appell[li]ert nur an ein Register der Menschen [,] reine Wissenschaft nur an ein anderes, Gedichte an beide – an alle Register. Vollkommen gelingt das eigentlich nur [,] wenn man Gedichte spricht oder singt und sichtbar macht” (“Gedanken über die Dichtkunst”, file # 878: 1). Was he including himself when he wrote in one of his poems about being one with everyone and everything? “Verschlungen Dasein Mensch und Stern und Tier/ wächst eins im andern Du und Ich sind Wir” (Elias 1987b: 79).

In contrast to his output as a human scientist, it is as a poet where he not only acknowledged but also explicitly engaged co-operatively in the work of others. Elias’ adaptations of poems by T. S. Eliot, Dylan Thomas, Thomas Hardy, and William Blake are examples of the kind of open, co-creative, immediate and affirmative merging which in this form and to this extent is largely absent from his publications as a sociologist (Elias 1987). Elsewhere, he spoke of poems as texts with an open-ended succinctness (file # 433) capable of making the hidden visible and thus pushing our limits further, challenging ingrained habits (“Kommentar zum Gedicht Dämmerung”, file # 1364: 2), perhaps including his own.

Being much more dependent on the reader or listener than scientific texts, poems, for Elias, were part of a constant dialogue in the making, extending, as it were, the necessarily limited scope of individuals to partake in the lives of others. Readers, according to Elias, have to add their own voice because poems, like human beings, are unambiguously open-ended: “Dies also haben Gedichte mit Menschen gemein. Sie sind eindeutig vieldeutig [...] im offenen Rahmen ihrer Eindeutigkeit müssen sie andere Menschen, die sie lesen oder hören [,] mit ihrer Bedeutung füllen” (Elias Archive, no title, file # 878: 2). The invitation Elias extended to the readers of his poems to fill them with their own meaning is absent from his published research. It becomes obvious that he wanted to overcome his isolation. And it is here, where his work as a scientist, as powerful as it is, had reached its limits. Elias turned to poetry.

Conclusion

Elias' poetry, his views on and use of poetry and imaginative literature can, in short, be understood as expressions of his desire to further his argument as humanist cum scientist and to more fully live his life according to what he knew to be true: all we have is one another, we are interdependent, not independent. Isolating himself contradicted that. His poetry was meant to address this conflict and serve as a bridge to those fellow human beings who were out of reach for him as a sociologist.

This aspect of Elias' habitus has remained hidden from view not only because it challenges his project as a scientist but also because interest in both poetry and the isolated ego continues to fade. Yet, as emerges from the 'other' Elias, neither has in fact disappeared. Instead of marginalizing them, we therefore need to reassess the place of poetry in contemporary consciousness and the salutary role it plays with regard to the isolated ego. As long as the isolated ego is part of individual consciousness and as long as human beings are able to create and absorb poetry, this is what the 'other' Elias suggests, pushing poetry out of our lives is self-defeating.

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**Confucius, Playboys and Rusticated
Glasperlenspieler.
From Classical Chinese Poetry
to Postmodernism**

LI XIA

In a sense all scholars of Chinese literature outside China are faced with the same problem: how to make this very "Chinese" body of literature comprehensible to non-Chinese readers. Against typical Western standards of literary criticism, this literature can be found deficient in many respects.

Leo Ou-fan Lee: Foreword to Jaroslav Prusek:
The Lyrical and the Epic (1980)

To put it in a nutshell: Chinese poetry has developed in three major steps.

First, Classical (traditional) Poetry collected and interpreted supposedly by Confucius himself and his followers (eg. Mencius). Confucian ethics and views on literature became state canon under the Han Dynasty and fulfilled that function throughout the history of Imperial China until 1912. Classical poetry was written in a highly developed literary language characterized by compressed syntax and an elaborate, allusive vocabulary. Although other forms of literature also existed, only poetry and essays were recognized as true, serious literature and understood as an institution of art which was inseparably connected with social practice. Fiction and

drama (written in vernacular languages) were regarded as popular entertainment. (McDougall 1997: 3)

Second, Modernism: it functioned as a defining element in modern Chinese history, differentiating it from its feudal past and a progressive future. It had its roots in the opening up of China to the West after the establishment of a Republic by Sun Yat-sen in 1912 and the May Fourth Movement of 1919. It enthusiastically embraced Western modernist methods, but politicisation and civil war prevented sustained development on the mainland with a few exceptions in the late 1940s (Nine Leaves Group). In the post-Mao period of the late 1970s and early 1980s it experienced a kind of Renaissance or continuation which was closely associated with intellectuals of the *zhiquing* generation who had been sent to the country by Mao Zedong under the famous slogan “go up to the mountains and down to the villages” to be “rusticated” by the peasants. After the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) some of them took up writing and formed a group which is widely known as the *menglong* movement, the first modernist movement of the literary New Era, also known as the school of “misty” (“obscure”, “shadows”) poets. (McDougall 1983: 7) Under the guidance of Bei Dao, the group set up the influential literary magazine *Jintian* (*Today*) in 1978, which was exclusively devoted to artistic and literary matters and became one of the most popular unofficial magazines during the Beijing Spring of 1978. (Duke 1985: 108) The main representatives of this group included Bei Dao, Gu Cheng, Shu Ting, Duo Duo, Yang Lian, Mang Ke, Chen Maiping. The group travelled widely and attracted enthusiastic audiences all over the country very much like rock stars. (Hong & Zhao 1993: 203) However, they represented the voice of the intellectual elite and their major sources of influence were the great icons of Western modernist literature, such as Eliot, Pound, Yeats, Joyce, Valéry. A great deal of their poetry (particularly Yang Lian’s) is extremely complex, inward-looking and difficult, which alienated many of the followers. Bonnie S. McDougall characterises their style as follows: “The syntax is often unclear, and the connections between image and idea or between one image and another are often not stated but left implicit. Another important aspect of its

incomprehensibility is that shadows poetry relies heavily on imagery that is largely private.” (Ib. 7).

The “uncompromising intellectuality” in which Harry Levin saw the genius of modernist literature (Levin 1966), turned some of the “misty poets” into exemplary *glasperlenspieler*. (Hesse 1951)

Third, Postmodernism: in 1986, a new generation of poets (the Third Generation) appeared on the scene and declared the “misty poets” obsolete and irrelevant: “Goodbye, Shu Ting and Bei Dao” was the title of an article published in the *Wenhui Daily* of January 1987. (Ib. 431) The Third Generation poets rejected the “high rhetoric and moral seriousness” of misty poets, their emphasis on the heroic, and on abstract and philosophical concepts, their elitist attitude to ordinary people, their remoteness from ordinary life, a remoteness which showed itself also in the language of their poetry. They also ridiculed the “ivory tower” position of the “misty poets” and their actual (or spiritual) desertion of their homeland. (In fact, only Shu Ting and Mang Ke stayed in China, and Mang Ke no longer wrote poetry). Significantly, most of the Third Generation poets came from Shanghai, Shenzhen and northern provinces, the heartland of Deng Xiaoping’s brave new world of Western capitalism and impending onslaught of Western consumerism. Shenzhen and Shanghai — beneficiaries of the Pearl and Yangtze River Delta Projects — are the only locations in China with exemplary postmodern architecture. Alluding to Robert Musil, Professor Kohlhaas from Harvard has referred to Shenzhen as a “generic city” or “Stadt ohne Eigenschaften” (*The City without Qualities*). It is, therefore, not surprising that the urban milieu forms the background of the majority of Third Generation Poetry (and fiction); and it is the present (instead of a distant, mythical and abstract past) in which existential anguish and disillusionment is experienced. The consequences of the intoxicating influence Westernization has exerted particularly on the Chinese intelligentsia since the beginning of this century are bound to come to a head initially in this very area and ultimately all over China. The immediacy and urgency of this problem seems to be one of the motivating forces of the Third Generation poets; their disquiet has been shared with mainstream postmodern artists and thinkers. So

far I have provided a synoptic sweeping overview of the three millennia of Chinese poetry. In the following part, some of the issues raised above will be examined in greater detail.

In the December 1969 issue of *Playboy*, the American literary critic Leslie Fiedler published a programmatic essay on post-modernism entitled: "Cross the Border — Close the Gap". (Fiedler 1969) Not as to be expected in one of the highly respected scholarly journals, but in *Playboy* and (tongue in cheek) with a title which was to raise titillating expectations in the *Playboy* readership worldwide. In an obvious allusion to Nietzsche, Fiedler announces right at the beginning of his article the death of literary modernism in 1955 and the birth of "postmodernism". The claim of "modernism" to represent ultimate perfection with respect to poetic sensitivity and formal subtlety, which precluded further developments, was in his eyes presumptuous and untenable. Literary modernism which had reached its heights between the years preceding World War I and World War II was dead, i.e. history was no longer relevant. As far as the novel was concerned: the age of Proust, Joyce, and Mann was over; also, the poetry of T. S. Eliot and Paul Valéry was "*passé*". Fiedler rejects with overt irritation the notion of literature for the educated elite and a kind of second class art for the uneducated masses. This was a remnant of an industrial society, a societal structure based on classes, but obsolete and unacceptable and inappropriate now. In postmodern literature such borders and demarcations had no justification and had to be crossed. Postmodernism was to address the majority of people, particularly the young. It was to offer freedom and rid society of the recalcitrant literary elite which protected its privileges and was scared of equality and freedom for the masses. Postmodernism was to close the gap between the literary critic and the reading public at large. However, the literary critic would act as a professional and guide the general public (amateurs) in matters of aesthetic judgment and literary standards. "Closing the gap" also implied a radical integration of a wide variety of themes and literary techniques which appeal to the masses, and not exclusively to the socially and educationally privileged elite. "Closing the gap" also implies "crossing the borders" between the fantastic and ordinary, reality and myth, the middle class world of

accounting houses and private comfort and the realm of kings and queens, i.e. the world of fairy tales from time immemorial, which had been removed from the literary canon as fantastic madness. Dreams, visions, ecstasy: they all must become an integral part of literature again. Postmodern artists realize, like our ancestors at the dawn of time, that the principal purpose of art is not simply to instruct and to entertain. It must become the main objective of postmodern literature to bring back the liberating power of poetic imagination into our technical world in order to transform and change it. The postmodern artist is, therefore, at home in the world of technology and in the realm of the miraculous and always ready to explore also the world of myth and eroticism. This can not be achieved by reductive simplification in the work of art, but by artistic variety and pluralism. Artistic multifacetedness is the hallmark of postmodernism. Not only on a linguistic level, but also on a sociological level. Postmodern literature closes the gap between reality and fiction, between literary standards of the educated elite and the popular demands of mass culture. Variety within the literary text and the endeavour of making literature accessible to the masses constitute the core of Fiedler's postmodernism manifesto in *Playboy*.

The global success of Umberto Eco's best seller *The Name of the Rose* encapsulates in exemplary fashion much of what Fiedler had in mind when he addressed the *Playboy* readership. The book and the subsequent film have also been an enormous success in China, although the world conjured up by Eco is totally alien to both the educated and uneducated Chinese reader. It was translated into Chinese shortly after publication in Europe and quickly became a status symbol of young Chinese intellectuals (and yuppies). As a matter of fact, Umberto Eco has had close links with China for a long time. He visited Beijing University frequently to attend conferences and to lecture to students on postmodernism. Significantly, the book and the film attracted great interest among the Chinese population. The universal appeal of the book highlights the practical realisation of Fiedler's "closing the gap" appeal. However, the contours of classification are blurred and text (not author) specific. For example: James Joyce's *Ulysses* also has many of the qualities which warrant a postmodern classi-

fication. Indeed, the book has also been a global success. *Finnegan's Wake*, on the other hand, does not fit the label and would not qualify for a modernist tag from Fiedler's point of view, although the work has also been claimed by postmodernists (ib.). The difficulty of differentiating between modernist and postmodernist texts is even more difficult with regard to poetry and also poses a considerable problem in the demarcation of the poetry of the "misty/menglong poets" (modernists) and the postmodernists who subscribe to many of the points listed by Fiedler in his *Playboy* manifesto. Indeed, Yang Lian, one of the leading modernist (misty) poets of China, was criticized in the *Literary Bulletin* of March 1984 very much along the line of Fiedler's attack on modernism (i.e. elitism, arrogance, contempt of the masses, obliqueness): "In order to enhance the supreme sanctity of his 'male deity', the broad masses are portrayed as muddle-headed and insensitive... This is not the cry of a nation, not the call of an era; it is the voice of one individual over-riding a whole nation and a whole era. Its incantatory riddles express a presumptuous will to dominate." (Ib. Zhang: 402).

The criticism directed at the *menglong* poet Yang Lian also highlights his apparent abdication from the longstanding role of the Chinese poet as guardian and articulator of national awareness and collective memory (in this instance national shame and humiliation inflicted on the Chinese by foreigners). The perception of a special status of the poet in society (which did not exist in the long tradition of classical Chinese poetry and Confucian ethics which permeated the public understanding of the role of the poet) is reflected repeatedly in Yang Lian's view of himself as a poet: "Without this inner substance, so-called feeling seems to me to be an illusion. It is only in the works of those comparatively few artists who have matured in this way and who possess this firm consciousness, that bright imagery is endowed with a precise and emotionally convincing meaning. This is the only real kind of "creation" (Yang 1998: 153). In the light of longstanding traditions and the political situation of the day, such an attitude was bound to cause problems.

Postmodernism became a critical issue at the time of Culture Fever in the mid-1980s (1985–1989) as the latest round of the

century long social and cultural confrontation between China and the West. It became the centrepiece of the Great Culture Debate concerning the future of China in a world of massive social upheaval and change in Deng Xiaoping's new vision of China. The country was flooded with Western thoughts and ideas which were absorbed by the intellectuals with boundless enthusiasm. The writings of Althusser, Lacan, Derrida, Metz, Eco, Heidegger, Adorno, Gadamer, Deleuze and others were translated into Chinese by new wave critics and their allies in the area of literary criticism and philosophy. Fredrich Jameson and Umberto Eco lectured at Beijing University (Zhang 1997: 409). The works of Habermas and Lyotard, and above all, the lectures of Jameson were published in Chinese and became instrumental in focusing the discussion on a cultural reflection of postmodernity in relation to modernity (Wang 1997: 501). Under Jameson's influence post-modernism was still widely associated with postcolonialism, and leading modernist intellectuals and Marxists questioned the appropriateness of postmodernism as a cultural and historical paradigm. The blurred contours of Western postmodernism with its different schools (American, French, and German) added to the confusion of the debate and the inconclusiveness of its outcome. However, with regard to literature a position similar to the one propagated by Leslie Fiedler and Susan Sonntag in the mid-1960s emerged and identified the masses as the addressees whose demands and expectations had to be accommodated. A shared sense of community and sensitivity was to be propagated as opposed to self-indulgent, arrogant heroism (individualism) and elitism. In other words: the modernist *glasperlenspieler* had to be abandoned if a new cultural consciousness was to be generated. This involved a closer relationship to the masses, closing the gap to the masses and the deconstruction of the modernist individual and its reconstruction out of the collective, objectivation (reification) and fragmentation of the "I", abandonment of modernist cult figures (Yeats, Pound, Baudelaire, Mallarmé), exploration of the new urban reality ("generic city") and its reality. Or in the words of a critic: "While the former's poetics was judged 'amateurish', their metaphysical rhetoric and narcissistic obsession with the self (which became the trademark of "misty" poetry) were read by

newly generated social agencies transparently as a labyrinth of political maxims and aphorisms on the philosophy of life. Ironically, only a few years before, it had been Bei Dao and his comrades who had accused the establishment of writing "non-poetry" or "slogan poetry" (ib. 145). The writer Xi Chuan offers a succinct general assessment of the poetic situation after 1979 (i.e. the end of the Cultural Revolution and the beginning of modernist literary production) and lists three major achievements: "1) the Misty poets reintroduced "conscience (*liangzhi*) and common sense" into poetic language, 2) the New Generation poets 'subjectively' endowed poetry with a touch of the masses, and 3) a few individuals who cannot be categorized endowed poetry with "spirituality" (*jingshen xing*) and "independence". (Ib. 402). With regard to poetic production in general, he identifies the following problem areas: "... stale notions of *belles-lettres*, unstable style, inappropriate sincerity, disconnection between language and consciousness, alienation of art from being, sense of inferiority and egomania, one-dimensionality of thinking, petty cleverness, petty inspiration, petty philosophy, and so on." (ib.).

The confrontation of modernism and postmodernism is essentially also a generation conflict: while the *menglong* poets (*zhiquing* poets) are contemporaries of the People's Republic, the New Generation poets were born in the mid-1960s and had not experienced the upheaval and turmoil of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) immediately. Therefore, they were not always taken seriously by their predecessors. Chen Xiaoming offers the following observation about the perceived generation gap: "The latter have had extraordinary experiences of bitter struggle, their anguish and tribulations have already been engraved on the tombstone of history. What do these newcomers possess? Cheerful and pale childhood and adolescence? They are the *late-comers* to life, condemned to anxiety over being "late born" in terms of the history of art and the history of life. To ward off this anxiety, they turned to expressions of new artistic experiences." (Chen 1991: 132).

Despite their apparent lack of "extraordinary experiences" and fragmentation, the *avant garde* (also *campus* poets) had a great impact on the development of poetry in the second half of the eighties. And despite their rebellious campaign against the *misty*

poets (modernists) with slogans such as “Down with Bei Dao”, they nevertheless benefited greatly from the poetic innovations of the *menglong* movement. It is therefore understandable that the contours of their poetry are rather blurry and ambiguous in relation to *menglong* poetry. Their most important representatives are: Hai Zi, Xi Chuan, Han Dong, Yu Jian, Lü De’an, Chen Dongdong, and Zang Di (ib. 144), and as indicated previously, most of them come from Shanghai, Shenzhen and the Northern and Northeastern provinces. (It should be mentioned here that this generation also produced such outstanding and groundbreaking novelists as Gei Fei, Yu Hua, Su Tong; and, internationally even more important and successful have been the film makers of that generation, all 1982 graduates — the first class after the Cultural Revolution — of the Beijing Film Academy: Chen Kaige (*Yellow Earth, King of the Children, Farewell my Concubine*) and Zhang Yimou (*The One and the Eight, Red Sorghum, Ju Dou, Raise the Red Lantern, The Story of Qiuju*) and Tian Zhuangzhuang (*Horse Thief, Blue Kite*), to mention only the most important ones (ib. 409). They have translated into cinematic imagery views of such postmodern theorists as Gilles Deleuze (whose *Rhizom* paradigm of reality became the emblematic metaphor of postmodernity which Umberto Eco subsequently translated into an elaborate labyrinth metaphor in his *The Name of the Rose*), Walter Benjamin, Fredrich Jameson, André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer. (Welsch 1997: 162). Their cinematic language has broken truly new (postmodern) ground and brought international acclaim to Chinese film-making (ib.).

In order to provide a paradigmatic sample of postmodern poetic practice, Xi Chuan’s poem *A Dead Leopard* (1988) and Zang Di’s *Swallow* are given here in full. Clearly these poems also illustrate that the line dividing them from modernist poetry is by no means unbroken and straight, despite readily recognizable features of their own:

A Dead Leopard

A yellow-brownish leopard
 Its tail knocked the moss-covered
 Mountain rock, knocked
 My palm

I moved, like a moving garden
 The wild pearls of grape
 Rolling in the wind, the reticent
 Lilies radiated in pale

Body without movement
 We cannot call it body
 This aged leopard, drifted gently
 Indolent as flowing water, its vigilance slackened

On my palm I heard the water drop
 Sleeping on my palm beneath its paws
 Sound of water agitated the scarred morning glow
 And in its eyes serenity prevailed

Now it wanted to die its own way
 Letting the garden on its back
 To seize an inch of soil to blossom splendidly
 Its tail knocked the mountain rock

Knocked my angel's green palm
 Water, oh, water, after the robin left
 Phantom appeared
 It slept on my green palm

I've had since a chunk of amber hanging at my waist
 It's originally the treasure of the land

(Ib. 144)

Swallow

You can be sure it was a swallow flying
 Outside the window, above the island like roofs
 Its flight resembled the light of a razor, cutting
 The chess game left by the lone rainy cloud at dusk

A swallow flew
 Before it came, it was a flock of doves flying
 Before the doves, the clocked chirping of cicadas
 I want you to guess, what was the violent noise before that

I can tell everyone in my letter to God
 It's a swallow flying, like the shadow of an iron anchor
 Like the splinter of belief: at its lowest
 The hovering was as high as an unmatched leather shoe

I'd also like to explain to the soul of the victim
 The various gestures of a flying swallow
 I drop the notion of "the best": Oh look! It hovered up
 Then surfed down like an arrow met with a breaker

In short, I love to give to a swallow
 The period of time following dinner
 Yet should it try to break into my thoughts with gloomy
 Background and omen, I'd say "go to hell" without a frown.

(Ib. 145)

The rise of aesthetic modernism in Chinese poetry is intimately connected to China's opening up to the West and modernisation programmes, in the first instance with regard to the study of science and technology, and the radical rejection of traditional conventions and values, including those related to classical poetry which Confucius had declared in *Lunyu* (*The Analects*) essential for the moral and cultural development of the individual and the nation as a whole. For that reason, poetry (in form of *fu*-rhymed-prose) and *shi* (regulated verse) was made the principle element in the "three-part-curriculum" (Poetry, Ritual, Music) and essential to passing the Civil Service Examination from the seventh century until its abolition in 1904. (Ho 1962). Suddenly, the function and social relevance of poetry (art) in a national context had become unclear and required radical re-evaluation. As a consequence the "art for art's sake vs art for life's sake" debate took place and led to the liberation of art from the Confucian bondage to state interest and ethical/moral considerations. This view was also reinforced by Western Modernism (eg. French Symbolists) and the writings of Kant and Schiller, though the principle impetus originated in

China and was propagated by Chinese writers and intellectuals. Among them was Lu Xun, one of the leading writers of twentieth century in China, who stood up for the autonomy of art and literature: "... granted all literature and art is propaganda, but not all propaganda is literature and art... The reason that revolutions use literature and art in addition to slogans, posters, reports, telegrams, textbooks... is because it is literature and art." (Lu Xun 1981: 84).

These efforts found support by the May Fourth Movement of 1919 which reassessed the traditional role of literature and introduced radical changes (e.g. the use of vernacular language in poetry) which ushered in literary modernism in China. However, these changes were short-lived since they were replaced by non-poetry or "slogan-poetry" in Bei Dao's terms and came virtually to a standstill under Mao Zedong's regime in the internal upheaval and social conflict of the time which reached a destructive climax during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) when literature and art served the interest of politics exclusively. With the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the execution of the "gang of four" in the same year, a group of young intellectuals who had been sent to distant provinces to work on farms, i.e. to be "rusticated", began to publish poetry which became an immediate success among young Chinese who idolised them like pop stars and looked for inspiration and intellectual guidance from them. Although most of these poets had hardly any formal education, they all had an intimate knowledge of Classical Chinese poetry (taught by their parents) (Kubin 1991: 107–113) which had a lasting impact on their future writing, although they also quickly absorbed Western poetic principles and techniques. Virtually all the icons of Western Modernism (Baudelaire, Valéry, Apollinaire, Mallarmé, T. S. Eliot, Yeats, Pound, Saint-John Perse) and many European and American writers (from Walt Whitman, Friedrich Nietzsche, Franz Kafka to Sartre, Camus, Dylan Thomas and Paul Celan) are claimed to have influenced them in some way or other, although these claims are often rather dubious, as most of them had little or no knowledge of foreign languages, and had to rely at best on translations (often bad ones) and prose summaries (ib.).

What is probably not widely known is the important role Classical Chinese poetry played in the making of Imagist poetry in the first place, particularly with regard to Ezra Pound's syntactical innovations based on his discovery of the Chinese character (ideogram) as a medium for poetry (Fenollosa 1936), the marked sparseness of syntax in Chinese poetry, the tenselessness, the lack of use of personal pronouns, and a poetic reality which is not rigidly structured and riveted together by grammar and content, thus leaving it up to the reader to establish the appropriate connections. (Yip 1997). The philosophical and interpretative (heuristic) implications of this situation (not to mention problems of translation) are highlighted by Martin Heidegger when he warns of the inappropriateness of Indo-European languages for the discussion of Asian poetry). (Heidegger 1971: 4–5). Therefore, there is some irony in the Imagist-orientation of young Chinese poets in the 1980s who claimed to have been influenced by Ezra Pound who was influenced by Classical Chinese poetry.

Like their predecessors of the May Fourth movement, the poets of the post-Mao era felt initially the responsibility to comment on social matters and criticize social injustice. During the Beijing Spring of 1978, they founded the magazine *Jintian (Today)*, the first underground literary journal that was exclusively devoted to artistic and literary matters which marked a “watershed in modern Chinese poetry.” (Yeh 1991). The key figure was Bei Dao (b. 1949) who is widely regarded as the intellectual leader of the *menglong* (or “misty” or “obscure”) poets, the main representatives of Chinese literary modernism. He was immensely popular among students and his poetry was initially learned by heart and quoted widely among students. Bei Dao epitomizes the experience of the *zhìqīng* generation and came soon into conflict with the authorities. His disillusionment and cynicism gradually alienated him also from the younger generation. Most of his poems are permeated with the traumatic experiences his generation had been through, they also reflect a deep sense of humanity. “All” is one of the early, more poster-like poems:

All

All is fate
 All is cloud
 All is a beginning without an end
 All is a search that dies at birth
 All joy lacks smiles
 All sorrow lacks tears
 All language is repetition
 All contact is first encounter
 All love is in the heart
 All past is in a dream
 All hope carries annotations
 All faith carries groans
 All explosions have a moment of quiet
 All deaths have a lingering echo

The probably best-known poem is "The Answer" which he wrote after participating in the April Fifth demonstration on Tian'anmen Square:

The Answer

Baseness is the password of the base,
 Honour is the epitaph of the honourable
 Look how the gilded sky is covered
 With the drifting, crooked shadows of the dead.

The Ice Age is over now,
 Why is there still ice everywhere
 The Cape of Good Hope has been discovered
 Why do a thousand sails contest the Dead Sea?

I come into this world
 Bringing only paper, rope, a shadow,
 To proclaim before the judgment
 The voices of the judged:
 Let me tell you, world,
 I — do — not — believe!
 If a thousand challengers lie beneath your feet,
 Count me as number one thousand and one.

I don't believe the sky is blue
 I don't believe in the sound of thunder;
 I don't believe that dreams are false;
 I don't believe that death has no revenge.
 If the sea is destined to breach the dykes,
 Let the brackish water pour into my heart;
 If the land is destined to rise,
 Let humanity choose anew a peak for our existence.

A new juncture and glimmering stars
 Adorn the unobstructed sky,
 They are five thousand year old pictographs,
 The staring eyes of future generations.

Bei Dao has written a great variety of poems, from the one word poem (in the Chinese original) "Living / A Net" to love poetry and complex and difficult cycles of poetry. His work has been translated into most European languages. He is undoubtedly one of the leading contemporary Chinese poets. He lives in Sweden.

Yang Lian (b. 1955) is another leading poet of the *menglong* group. His poetry constitutes an extremely complex fusion of Classical Chinese poetry (which his father made him learn by heart in his early childhood), permeated with elements of myth and historical and literary allusions. The poems are frequently arranged in long cycles and written in a highly eclectic vocabulary and a highly personal symbolic system. His preoccupation with Nietzsche, his translations of T. S. Eliot (*Four Quartets*), W. B. Yeats (*A Vision*) and poems by Dylan Thomas make him one of the *glasperlenspieler par excellence* of the misty poets, often associated with such great poets of twentieth century poetry as Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Charles Olson and Pablo Neruda. (Golden & Minford 1990: 121). Yang Lian is also a great master of prose which he uses extensively to reflect on poetic practice and which has some of the linguistic exquisiteness of Friedrich Nietzsche whom he admires greatly:

"In China, everything is intrinsically bound up with history. Or may we say everything is forever in a state of cross-temporalisation. Yesterday and today are inseparably fused into one. History is present,

while the present merges with history in the twinkling of an eye, as in a dream... And yet you have no choice but to go on, to turn into one dead end after another... until every sensation, every experience, every thought, all language, your very age, all is compressed into one great black mass. Birth and death, old age and youth, noise and silence merge indistinguishably into one. Then you no longer need to remember your face and name... Your possession is a small fossil. No one knows whether it is he who is buried in the depth of the fossil, or the fossil which is growing quietly outward within his body.

The poet comes walking across the loess plateau, where the sun, the soil, and the human faces are all an over-burnished gold. A green river winds past him, blasts of wind descale the silt, uncovering heaps of debris beneath: ruins everywhere. The Tang and Ming dynasties seem never to have gone; they seem to revive every moment, causing the living to bear their massive pressure still...

So, each poem becomes an exploration into human experience and the ability to express it. Each poem borders on infinity: present and eternity can be found in carved stone astronomical chart of the Southern Song dynasty; the terror of creation, the tragedy of atomic energy, can be seen in the fish design on a pottery jar from the Neolithic age; poetry gathers all this back before Man, making everything on earth which is tightly trussed up by the net of Time override Time again.

A vital fossil, moistened by the sap of History, holds up a revers light from the darkest and deepest spot; it finds the last, the most unyielding symmetry when everything else loses balance." (Ib. 134).

As an illustration of the linguistic and thematic complexity of Yang Lian's poetry, with its allusions to Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism (*shizhe* concept), a stanza from his long cycle *Changes* is quoted here:

Changes

The celebration of the setting sun,
every step leaves a lotus blossom,
marching slowly toward the occident of death....
Immortal as this: the sinking of light
With face veiled
another plateau, looking down from the saffron sky
A heart of mine burns in the sundial

A gold lizard steps over the azure,
resurrects again and again
on the nameless upland
Looking down and thereby looking down upon....

I deliver a child from the opening grave....

Gu Cheng (1956–1993) is another poet closely associated with the *menglong* group. It was actually his tragic death on Waiheke Island in New Zealand which drew international attention to the group again, after the New Generation poets had declared them “dead” in 1986. Gu Cheng had hardly any formal education and spent his childhood with his poet father (who introduced him to Classical Chinese poetry) in the remote province of Shandong herding pigs. He wrote poems in the sand and wiped them out after completion, in order to avoid being discovered and punished. He did casual work prior to joining the *Jintian* group. Gu Cheng has produced a large number of poems. They are as a rule much shorter than those of Yang Lian, but also extremely complex and often opaque with regard to meaning. However, he has also written many short poems which are more accessible for the reader. Two short poems: *Feeling* and *The End* are provided here as representative samples:

Feeling

the sky is grey
the road is grey
the buildings are grey
the rain is grey

in the dead greyness
 two children are walking
 one in bright red
 the other in pale green

The End

In the wink of an eye
 The avalanche stopped
 On the riverbank, giants' skulls piled high

The junk in mourning clothes
 Slowly passes by
 Spreading a yellowed shroud behind it

Many handsome green trees
 Their trunks twisted in pain
 Are consoling the brave with tears

God has buried the hacked moon
 In thick fog
 All has come to an end
 The gloomy contours of the hills
 Represent a vague history
 Still being recorded.

The poets of the *Jintian* magazine who came into prominence during the Beijing Democracy Wall Movement of 1978 and 1979 are commonly identified as "modernist poets". Their work constitutes a clear break from Mao Zedong's literary concept of socialist realism developed in 1942 at Yan'an and enforced until his death in 1976. Despite their great literary achievements they remained relatively unknown in China. They were finally declared obsolete and irrelevant by the *avant garde* of the 1990s and only the sensational death of Gu Cheng in 1993 rekindled interest in their activities.

No doubt, Chinese poetry has seen major changes since the early decades of this century. And yet, even the most experimental, modernist and *avant-garde* poetry documents a surprising degree of continuity, underpinning the not sufficiently known fact that the

nature of literary (cultural) change in China deviates significantly from Western notions of change, where new fashions and interests supersede their predecessors. Cultural and aesthetic change in China seems to be essentially accretive, with new style and forms added to older ones which themselves were in constant change, but rarely abandoned. Without doubt, the texture of modern and post-modern Chinese poetry is permeated with elements of Classical Chinese poetry in form and content, albeit of varying complexity, which generates a powerful tension between old and new. Unfortunately, these aspects tend to be lost in translation and in the interpretative discourse. Martin Heidegger's warning concerning the inappropriateness of the rigid syntax-grammar-semantically structured Indo-European languages in dealing with Chinese (and Japanese) has fallen on deaf ears in literary criticism and translation theory and practice. (Yip 1997). Ezra Pound and other American imagists (and such poet-critics as W. Empson, I. A. Richards and K. Burke) on the other hand have successfully exploited this in their poetry. There are big gaps to fill and borders to cross with regard to concepts of literary criticism which lack the clarity, purpose and insight of Confucius' and Mencius' poetics, developed well over two millennia ago. Finally, to come back to the motto placed at the beginning of this paper: it is not Chinese literature that is deficient, it is the inadequacy and inappropriateness of Western critical concepts and their criteria of relevance which make it difficult for Westerners to understand Chinese literature and art.

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Contemporary Indian English Poetry and Postmodernism

MOHIT K. RAY

Indian English Poetry arose out of a vital interaction between India and the West and developed with the spread of English education in India during the British rule. India became independent on 15 August 1947 but continued to be a member of the British Commonwealth. As a result while the political bondage to Britain was severed the cultural bondage became stronger and ensured the continuity and growth of Indian English literature. The post-Independence Indian scene with its rapid socio-political changes in a country with strong literary tradition and rich cultural heritage evoked all kinds of changes and challenges. The break with the colonial past resulted in three identifiable manifestations. 1) A past-oriented vision: a nostalgic idealization of the past and a sense of loss and hopelessness leading to cultural pessimism. 2) A future-oriented vision: a strong desire to re-discover one's roots in the ethos of the ancient India and remake the country in the light of this discovery. 3) A present-oriented vision: an examination of the present situation in the light of Western reason and Enlightenment.

Postmodernism officially had its beginning in October 1966 when Jacques Derrida presented his now famous paper "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Science" in a Symposium held in John Hopkins Humanities Center. In the case of Indian English poetry we can take 1966 as the cut off year because it was in 1966 that quite a few important volumes of poetry were published: A. K. Ramanujam's *The Strides*, Kamala Das's *Summer in Calcutta* and P. Lal's *Change! They said and other poems*, for example. Furthermore, by 1966 Indian English

poetry had come of age. The initial hesitations and difficulties had been overcome and it had found its own voice and identity. However, I must admit that the cut off year of 1966 is more a matter of convenience than conviction. Today Indian English poetry is recognized as one of the many new literatures in English. In the English poetry of the immediately post-Independence period efforts could be seen to write poetry as good as that of British, American and Irish poets. But gradually a change came over. The poets began to express Indian sensibility, wrote about Indian lives and conditions and creatively moulded that English language to suit their needs.

The purpose of the present paper is to focus on the contemporary Indian English poetry and trace the elements of post-modernism in it. Hundreds of poets spread all over the country have been writing poetry in English and quite a few of them are first rate by any standard. However, it is neither possible nor necessary to discuss all of them. I shall try to confine my discussion mainly to a few celebrities, which I hope will give a feel of the range and variety of Indian English poetry. Some of the important exponents of contemporary Indian English poetry are Jayanta Mahapatra, Nissim Ezekiel, Keki N. Daruwalla, Kamala Das and Shiv K. Kumar who were honoured by Sahitya Akademi (National Academy of Letters) in 1981, 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1987 respectively.

Jayanta Mahapatra's *Relationship* (1980) is a long poem set in Orissa, which combines within it history, myth and vision. The poet is caught in "currents of time" and attempts to "go into the unknown in me". The entire cultural history of Orissa is revived through a series of scenes, comments, characters and situations. The Mahanadi, Konarka and maritime ancestors remind the poet of a glorious past of the land of his birth and gives him a sense of belonging: "Only the stones were my own / waiting as mother or goddess or witch / as my birth feeds on them / as though the empty days of sorcerous thought." Memory of the heroic past creates in him a "guilt consciousness" as it dawns on him that his generation has not been able to live up to the martial tradition set down by his ancestors. The climactic Kalinga war that changed the Emperor Ashoka, the great, from a despotic monarch to a deeply religious

man, is a thing of the past. The river Daya acts as a silent witness to the great Kalinga war and the heroic acts of the poet's ancestors all through the ages: "Orion crawls like a spider in the sky / while the swords of forgotten kinds / rust slowly in the museum of our guilt". The poet is overwhelmed: "Now I stand among the ruins, / waiting for the cry of a night bird / from the river's farside / to drift through my weariness, / listening to voices of my friends ... / with the smells of the rancid fat of the past." Mahapatra's conception of a man's relation to what he perceives brings him face to face with history and myth where his "self" is discovered in the "act of attention". The interaction between self and reality — the reality that leads him to continue his quest for an "essence divine" and for "grace" in relationship between man and man, man and God, and man and sculptured art.

It is not difficult to discern postmodern features in the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra. The way his poems express restlessness in the form of self-conscious instability, a rejection of explanation and a questioning of the boundaries of personal identity is essentially postmodern. Mahapatra's search for roots and his quest for identity remain unresolved. The historical panorama presented in his poetry remains incomplete and open-ended, and even his relationship with the past, ancestors and the landscape remain finally undefined and uncertain. In other words, it remains part of an ongoing process.

Like Jayanta Mahapatra, Nissim Ezekiel is also an academic, a Professor of English. A major shaping factor in Ezekiel's poetry is the fact that he belongs to Bene-Israel family of Jews that migrated to India many years ago. Thus Ezekiel is acutely aware of his alienation from the core of the Indian ethos. With Marathi as his "lost mother tongue" and English as his "second mother tongue" Ezekiel's quest for integration is reflected in the alienation theme which is central to his work and colours his entire poetic universe. What he had written long back in *A Time to Change* (1952) is still valid for his poetic vision that tries to encompass life and poetry : "It is the why / The how, the what, the flow / From which a poem comes, / In which the savage and the singular, / The gentle, familiar, / Are dissolved; the residue / Is what you read, as a poem, the rest / Flows and is poetry." In "Background, casually" Ezekiel

states his position fairly unambiguously: "The Indian landscape sears my eyes / I have become a part of it / to be observed by foreigners", and then he proceeds to announce his decision: "I have made my commitments now. / This is one: to stay where I am, / As others choose to give themselves / In some remote and backward place. / My backward place is where I am." He takes a firm decision and in "Island" he declares "I cannot leave the island / I was born here and belong." And yet an element of uncertainty marks his thought, and he muses: "Do I belong, I wonder to the common plain?" It is this uncertainty and indeterminacy as well as the self-reflexive nature of his poetry that makes Ezkiel a post-modern poet. Another important feature of his poetry is the profuse use of irony. The superstition and folk belief that exist in the society — particularly with the common illiterate mass is a favourite subject of Ezkiel. In "Cows" the author's mother, a sixty-year-old lady, collecting money for her school complains about the cows on the pavements. "She knows that cows are holy, / Worshipped by the parents / Of the children in her school / Even gods ought not to clutter up / The pavements — that's her view. / She is not against beliefs : believe / What you like, she says / But get out of my way." Ezkiel's style gets personalized in "Night of the Scorpion." The mother is stung. The father with man's reason tries "every curse and blessing powder, mixture, herb an hybrid" as the peasants swarm in to recommend diverse elaborate rituals. The mother's reaction to her own suffering "Thank God the scorpion picked on me / and spared my children" ironically cancels out all the earlier responses, both primitive and modern. The simple words of the mother reveal her character and emphasize the ordinariness of the event. By incorporating the actual words of the mother in the narration of the incident Ezekiel brings in a dialogic element in the poem and it is a postmodernist element in the way it opposes the privileging of any particular voice.

Another persistent postmodern motif in Ezekiel's poetry is an obsessive sense of failure, leading to agonized bouts of self-doubt and self-laceration as a result of which the poet is seen to be "in exile from himself". In Jamini Ray, the painter he finds an ideal which he himself has failed to attain — an artist who "travelled so he found his roots", an urban artist who discovered the laws of

folk art with astounding results. But Ezekiel makes no serious attempt to find "a final formula of light", because he is not sure whether there is really any final formula of light, and this postmodern indeterminacy is reinforced by the concluding lines: "Belief will not save you / Nor unbelief." Ezekiel's *Hymns in Darkness* (1976) is postmodern in more ways than one. The poem is about a middle-aged city-dweller who is unaware of reality and searches for it in his unconscious mind or buried self. He is an individual as well as a type. In course of the development of the poem the poet comes into the picture and the poem moves on from "He" to "I" and finally to "You" — which refers to the universal man. Through a series of paradoxes and occasional ironies the poet arrives at the truth that all we can do in this world is to be aware of a sense of reality. The entire poem is an example of the tendency of postmodern poets to deploy a stylistic melange. As in Jayanta Mahapatra so here also the quest remains incomplete and the most important postmodern aspect of the poem is the way in which, in the course of the poem, the boundary between Art and reality simply collapses, leading to an easy interaction between the world of Art and the world of reality.

Keki H. Daruwalla, another important contemporary Indian English poet is a police officer by profession and this fact has relevance to his perception of men and women. Daruwalla, too, like a police officer, observes the Indian scene with a trained eye, but cannot, in spite of his training, remain absolutely detached. Though he declares "Between my pity and contempt / I find no difference" the difference is unmistakably there. He is determined to avoid the "maudlin mud" of sentimentality, but deprivation and misery, disease and death do move him. The images of disease in fact abound in his poems. The Taj is "doomed leprosy", rain is "arthritic" and the river is "dark as gangrene". In brief, Daruwalla's poetry registers a move from acute perception of the social malaise to a more inward kind of poetry.

Daruwalla's postmodernism mainly consists in his deliberate and systematic reversal of values. In "Myth-talk", for example, the debunking takes a simple form of limiting itself to the truth about the repertoire of stock phrases: "But already you are afraid of disillusion / beneath every cliché as it floats like spawn / you hope

to see the myth-mask. / Already you know / behind the gummy-eyed images / like "dark night of the soul" / there is no fiendish grin / on rape-smile of a bleeding womb / only perhaps / a blank face / that thinks there is something / speech in its smile." If subversion of myth is the postmodern element in "Myth-talk" in "Poetry-talk" it is the bitter, scornful, satiric tone: "My conscience is a road / — a childhood has been tramped here / concretised and stamped over / with the feet of passing years / we erode each other, the road and I / neither giving way, / I scrape the road's back as I walk / my heel is horned / calloused and worn away." The lines focus on private and intimate moments bordering on the carnivalesque. The carnivalesque note becomes prominent as the poet's asides accentuate the sterile intellectual verbosity of all academic discussions about curved universes where straight metric lines flounder in a rut and about portly traditions supported by dimensions of space, time, dreams memories and senses: "In a curved universe, a straight metric line / is floundering in a rut / you must give it multiple meanings. / A work of art must hit you in the gut / I strike an attitude and knife a pig / and tough-guy that I am, I bring out his guts, / three dimensions of space, one of time / dreams, memories, senses — your meagre tools / — and a tradition that is portly / can you fashion reality with these tools? / I agree. I will be starting / a sausage factory shortly." The self-reflexive, satirical tone of playfulness makes the lines eminently postmodern. According to Bakhtin every parody is an intentional dialogized hybrid within which languages and styles actively and mutually illuminate one another. The controlling metaphor of the hybrid here works not just thematically but self-reflexively as the act of creation involves the bastard mingling of languages and perspectives. In parodying Shakespeare he becomes carnivalesque in his reference to the body in one of its most pressing, grotesque moments: "littleness is all: / the fault, dear brutus / lies in the passage of mother uterus / that we are so small". Even Brutus is trivialized as it is spelt with a small "b". The reference to the lower bodily stratum can also be found in "The Ghaghra in Spate": "At night under a red moon in menses / she is red weal / across the spine of the land." When the river Ghaghra is in spate "the ghaghra steers her course / thatch and dung-cakes turn to riverscum / a

buffalo floats over to the rooftop / where the men are stranded. / Three days of hunger, and her udders / turn red-rimmed and swollen / with milk-extortion." The reversal of value is evident in his attitude to the holy city of Benares. Benares which has been traditionally held as a holy city, a sacred place of pilgrimage is seen as an "octopus city", an "unreal city": "Dante would have been confused here. / where would he place this city / in paradise or purgatory or lower down / where fires smoulder beyond the reach of pity? / The concept of the goddess baffles you —/ Ganga is mother, daughter, bride. / What place of destiny have I arrived at where corpsefires and cooking-fires / burn side by side?" The disillusionment about Benares is only a function of a greater disillusionment about religion. He taunts the rituals: "All is spider-thread ritual here: / sandal-paste and mantra / chanting of the gayatri / shaved head and the pin-dan."

Kamala Das is the fourth Indian poet to receive the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award. Born in Kerala and brought up in Calcutta she has also lived in Delhi and Bombay and thus has developed a free, cosmopolitan outlook. A bilingual, she is a distinguished author in her mother tongue, Malayalam. The most obvious feature of Kamala Das is the uninhibited frankness with which she talks about sex referring to "the musk of sweat between my breasts", "the warm shock of menstrual blood" and even "my pubis". But a closer reading reveals that it is not just a cheap exercise in "stretching my two-dimensional / Nudity on sheets of weeklies", not a wanton deploy of "thighs and sights", nor is it merely a case of "from bed to verse". She is simply "every woman who seeks love". She is the "beloved and the betrayed" expressing her "endless female hungers", "the muted whisper at the core of womanhood". She may "flaunt..... a grand, flamboyant lust" but in her heart of hearts she remains the eternal Eve proudly celebrating her essential femininity. Arising out of her experience of a traumatic frustration in love and marriage her poetry becomes confessional, like Sylvia Plath's, but more obsessively mulling over love, sex and body's wisdom. In the process we can see several faces of Eve-woman as lover, flirt, matron and, above all, woman as an exponent of the female quest for identity. Love too appears in several roles such as "skin-communicated thing", an

overpowering force, an escape, a longing and a hunger resulting in satiety. She voices the feelings of a marginalized, exploited woman when she records her reaction to her husband: "The strong man's technique is / Always the same, he serves his love in lethal doses / For, love is Narcissus at the water's edge haunted / By its own lonely face..." or when she remarks "Can this man with / Nimble fingertips unleash / Nothing more alive than the / Skin's lazy hungers?"

Feminism is almost coeval with postmodernism. And it would not be wrong to suggest that feminism is an aspect of post-modernism. In this connection it is worth quoting Patricia Waugh. She writes in *Postmodernism: A Reader* (1992): "Feminism..... has developed a self-reflexive mode: questioning its own legitimating procedures in a manner which seems to bring it close to a Postmodernism which has absorbed the lessons of Post-structuralism and consists at the most general level of a crisis of legitimation across culture, politics and aesthetic theory and practice" (189). And again, "Fragmentation and dehumanization are part of a 'postmodern' assault on the bondage of thought to regulative ideals such as 'unity' and 'truth'" (192). And finally: "Both feminism and Post-modernism have extended our awareness that one of the effects of modernity is that knowledge reflexively enters and shapes experience and is then shaped by it in an unprecedented self-conscious fashion" (194). Kamala Das is post-modern not only in her strongly feminist position but also in her preoccupation with the celebration of the body and the lower bodily stratum.

Like Nissim Ezekiel, Shiv K. Kumar who received the Sahitya Akademi award in 1987 was also a distinguished Professor of English. Kumar's poetry is diverse, measured, terse and clinically precise. His images are sharp, chiselled and his work reveals a mastery of both the confessional mode and ironic comment. In the confessional poems he often creates patterns out of "nerves... / Twisted, knitted and tortured". His persona sometimes takes a dark view of love ("loving you / Is like walking on treacherous ice"), sex ("lashing our diabetic bodies / Into a semblance of orgasm") and marriage ("We wear each other like soiled underwear"), but is also capable of more delicate perceptions as in "A man should

come to his woman whole / Not when the mind is a perverted sunflower / Turning to darkness". In contrast to these the poems like "Cambridge Revisited", "Kovlan Beach" and "A Letter from New York" taunt human inadequacies. The influence of the poets like Donne and Eliot are conspicuous in his poetry. "Parting", for example, is cast in a manner of John Donne and a few words like "mandrakes", "forked roots" etc. remind one of Donne. Similarly we can hear the echo of Eliot's "Burnt Norton" in lines like "As your footfalls fade away / down the stairs of uncertain future" etc. Again the lines like "This is the face that launches / a thousand paperboats down my blood stream" hark back to the mighty lines of Marlowe.

Kumar is by and large a modern poet. But there are postmodern aspects also. Oscillating between a subtle confessional mode and an ironic perception of reality his poems, in spite of his avowed purpose, often become open ended. Take the poem "Love Letter", for example. "The words squirm / like bloated scorpions, / A grotesque dwarf is drinking / from my cup. / No exit now. / A mere scrap of paper / can be one's undoing. / I wonder who this woman is. / Signs herself with a pair / of rouged lips. / And he somnambulates at noon / from room to room cursing God for his monism. / What's it that one woman has / and the other hasn't / With me he's now civil — / only stares / with basilisk eyes." Kumar is postmodern in his use of irony, indeterminacy, inter-textuality and unresolved quest for identity.

Apart from the Akademi award winners two more poets deserve special mention. They are: A. K. Ramanujan and R. Parthasarathy. Ramanujan, a senior academic and a self-exile teaches Dravidian linguistics in the University of Chicago. His first volume, *The Strides* (1966) won a Poetry Society recommendation. Ramanujan remarks: "English and my disciplines (linguistics and anthropology) give me my 'outer' forms — linguistic, metrical, logical and other such ways of shaping experience, and my first thirty years in India, my frequent visits and fieldtrips, my personal and professional preoccupations with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folklore give me my substance, my 'inner' forms, images and symbols". His poetry thus draws its sustenance from his intense awareness of his racial burden, his Hindu heritage. This aware-

ness, however, does not lead to a blind acceptance, for he is equally alive to both the strength and the weakness of his racial ethos. He deprecates, for example, its uncritical acceptance of tradition and its neglect of the individual. Occasionally, he also tries to ironically juxtapose the ancient Hindu ethos with the situation of the modern Hindu as in "Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day" and contrasts the Hindu view of life with the Western view as in "Christmas". In his poetry memory plays a vigorous, creative role. Time and again "a hood of memory like a coil on a heath" unfolds in his mind. This memory is fruitfully creative when it attempts an almost total recall of sensuous childhood impressions of fear, sorrow or death as in "Snakes", "Breaded Fish" and "The Opposite Thumb"; and also when a childhood impression recalled years later and properly understood from the vantage point of adulthood suddenly yields a surprisingly new significance as in "History". Ramanujan's deepest roots are in the Kannada and the Tamil past and he has revived and brought that past into a significant, dynamic relationship with the present. "Prayers to Lord Murugan" is an imitation of the *Tirumuru Karrapatai* in which the Tamil poet Nakkirun sings the praises of Murugan, the Dravidian god of youth, beauty, love and war. In Ramanujan's poem Murugan is vividly invoked in the tradition of Tamil heroic verse. "Lord of new arrivals / lovers and rivals / arrive / at once with cockfight and banner / dance till on this and the next tree / hills / women's hands and the garlands / on the chests of men will turn like / chariot wheels."

Ramanujan's poem is a significant step towards establishing an indigenous tradition of Indian English poetry. His poetry, in fact, indicates a complex interaction of psychological forces kept under linguistic formal control. It may be said that his poetic sensibility operates more in terms of the landscape of the mind, the interior landscape in which memories of India are relived with a gusto which belongs to the present.

Ramanujan's postmodernism consists as much in his continuing dialogue with the Tamil past as with the highly innovative lineation of his poems. Quite often a single word stands alone and constitutes a line and carries the entire semantic load of it. The effect of such lineation is similar to visual effect of the analytical

cubism of Picasso. The cubist analogy is particularly relevant as a clue to the nature and extent of Ramanujan's postmodernism which consists largely of the multiplying of perspectives upon a stabilized subject-matter.

A fellow Tamil poet and an artist equally concerned with his native heritage is R. Parthasarathy, a poet acutely conscious of the complex relationship between "the hour glass of the Tamil mind" and "the exact chronometer of Europe". *Rough Passage* (1976) is a poem in three parts dealing with the quest for identity of an Indian who has been exposed to two cultures. "Exile", the first part, opposes the culture of Europe with that of India and examines the consequences of the British rule on an Indian. The most important consequence is the loss of identity with his own culture and therefore the need for roots. Against the turmoil of non-relationship, personal love holds out the promise of belonging. The second part, "Trial" celebrates love as a reality, here and now. The third and final part "Homecoming" explores the phenomenon of returning to one's home. It is the story of a home-bound exile.

Parthasarathy seems to have taken a clue from Ramanujan to acclimatize English to an indigenous tradition. In fact, the tenor of *Rough Passage* according to him is to insinuate a dialogue between himself and his Tamil past. He tries to salvage whatever is left over of the Tamil tradition and tries to "naturalize it in English — the flavour, the essence, the Tamil mores." The main purpose is to use images from the deposits of common tradition so that the validity of the work is at once recognized by the reader. An introspective study makes him realize the futility of his dreams about England: "There is something to be said for exile / You learn roots are deep / That language is a tree, loses colour / Under another sky." And he returns home after getting disillusioned with the English language and England. He says: "... I return / to the city I had quarrelled with / a euphoric archipelago, / to the hard embrace of its streets / its traffic of regulated / affections, uneventful but welcome." And it seems impossible to bridge the gap: "Through the holes in the wall, as it were / lamps burned in the fog. / In a basement flat, conversation / filled the night, while Ravishankar / Cigarette stubs, empty bottles of stout / and crisps provided the necessary pauses." Ravi Shankar suggests a link of

the poet with his cultural past in sharp contrast to cigarettes, stouts and crisps which provide a western atmosphere. Lamps in the fog may burn but fail to illumine. They look like holes in a wall, like the poet's futile efforts to bring down the cultural wall.

As in the case of Ramanujan, so in the case of Parthasarathy also it is his continuous dialogue with his Tamil past and the self-reflexive nature of the narrative that makes his poetry eminently postmodern.

Poetry of the seven poets that we have very briefly discussed constitutes only a fragment of the total body of contemporary Indian English poetry. There are large numbers of Indian English poets scattered all over India who have made quite a significant contribution to the development of Indian English poetry. It is not possible to discuss them in this paper. But suffice it to say that, by and large, contemporary Indian English poets evince postmodern tendencies in their insistence on the estrangement and the dialogic and with their hesitation between realism, modernism and postmodernism. They do not seem to allow any single technique or any single stylistic idiom to dominate, thus producing an open-endedness and a sense of a plurality of voices. Most poems are self-reflexive and show an indeterminacy which is the hall-mark of postmodernism. The contribution of contemporary Indian English poetry to the world poetry in the Postmodern Age is immense.

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What Do Poets Prophecy? Romanian Poetry of the '80s and the Debate on Postmodernism

LIVIU PAPADIMA

Would it be inconsiderate of me to confess at the very beginning that I have conceived this paper starting from the assumption that you know quite little about Romanian literature? I hope not.

You may have seen, nevertheless, about ten years ago, some images of what Western commentators have considered one of the most fascinating live TV shows of the last decades: the Romanian revolution at the end of December 1989. Let me please remind you of a bizarre snapshot presenting a group of extremely excited people, chaotically crowding in front of the camera, trying to find out what they are going to do. It was no theatre show, neither Brecht nor Pirandello. There were no characters in search of an author — at least, for the moment. In case you have seen this picture you perhaps do no longer remember that the one in front of the others, nervously rubbing his pullover, looking for the proper words to convince Romanian people that what they were witnessing was real, was a poet, Mircea Dinescu. Next to him, backing him up, was Ion Caramitru, an actor — Minister of Culture at present.

Has this picturesque scene any relevance or is it merely a souvenir to be kept in the family album of our history?

There are plenty of things which poets can do, and occasionally even do. They can, of course, write poetry, even though this is not always the main point about them. Feeling melancholy because of the uselessness of their striving — one of the favourite topics of Romanticism —, they will promise now and then to give up

writing. Sometimes they even succeed, like Rimbaud later on. Or they come to encode in their poems the failure of their writing itself, accusing a gloomy fate — for example, the inescapable divorce of language and being, a modernist hobby-horse, it seems —, or pretending they somehow enjoy the idea of failure, in a rather postmodernist fashion, like in the following pseudo-haiku published by Bogdan Ghiu by the beginning of the '80s: "Poor me!/ I can't continue (not in the least)/ this marvellous/ poem". Poets are supposed to be great lovers — can you remember Saul Bellow's main character in *Humboldt's Gift* or the charming novel by Milan Kundera, *Life is somewhere else?* — but they might also prove to be fine cooks, like the Romanian Al. I. Teodoreanu, who could compose, between the World Wars, most appealing recipes, both in verse and in prose. From the times of yore, poets have been known to have special connecting abilities, linking the earth to the heavens, men to gods, the seen to the unseen, thoughts to the unthinkable. They could be taken — or mistaken — for priests of no religion, disciples of some metaphysics belonging to no philosophy, servant sorcerers of a missing magic, drummers to awake our consciousness, actors of their own ego, doctors of the hearts and what not. But obviously each culture and each epoch has its own favourite choices among the pictures in this huge exhibition.

I would like to briefly specify in the following some aspects which I consider to be of great help when trying to understand the particular nature of Romanian poetry. I do not mean to play the part of the librarian — not in the least the one of Jorge from Burgos — who would lead you within the labyrinth of Romanian verse. Instead of a journey through such a virtual anthology, I would rather view poetry in terms of a cultural practice.

Romanian modern culture is born quite late. It definitely parted with medieval times no sooner than at the beginning of the 19th century. The Romantic creed thus firmly stamped the self-consciousness of the poet, as well as his — or, quite accidentally during the last century, her — public image. Victor Hugo's vision of poetry was not only admired by Romanian writers, it was also put to the test of history. The visionary, the law-maker, the voice of mankind or Herder's *Stimme der Völker* have meant for the writers caught up in the turmoil round the year 1848 ideas, and

ideals, which aimed far beyond the realm of poetry as mere word artefacts. In the same Romantic spirit, the poet portrayed the individual capable of 'naturalizing' culture, balancing the shock caused by the massive cultural importation from the West by the middle of the century. The result was a double-faced type of consciousness, pleading for 'progress' on the one hand, fearing and lamenting the vanishing of the 'good old times' on the other, warmly embracing the universalist ideas spread by the French Revolution while, at the same time, waving the banner of national identity.

Why did I have to make such a large detour? Because I think that Romanian poetry and poets are still more or less shaped by this original matrix — a fact that one should not ignore even when trying to understand our very recent history. Undoubtedly Romanian poetry has changed immensely in the last one and a half century, at pace with European literatures. The pieces of verse from the time I have been talking about could hardly meet the requirements of the present day reader any longer, taking refuge in scholarly literary histories and school books. If something has endured, it has almost nothing to do with the stylistics or aesthetics of poetry, but it concerns the general attitude towards this form of art. It is the tendency to concede the poets some sort of informal leadership, to believe that, insofar as they *really* are poets, everything they say and do should be right, even when we are unable to rightly grasp the meaning of their words and deeds. I would not enlarge upon this matter, just sticking to one striking example. Mihai Eminescu (1850–1889), honoured as our 'national poet', one of the last great European Romantics, shared a highly 'reactionary' ideology. In a period of accelerated modernization, of abrupt changes, he dreamt of the restoration of the 'patriarchal' Romanian values of the 15th century. He was so fierce an opponent of the Liberals and their politics that, when demanded to temper his attacks against the adverse party, he eventually came to disagree with the political leadership of the Conservative newspaper he had been working for a couple of years. In early 1990, shortly after the fall of the communist dictatorship, on the 15th of January, the birthday of the poet — traditionally a national celebration —, his

portrait could be seen in the window of the recently re-established National Liberal Party.

The poetry and the poet, as symbolic entities, were thus assigned, in various periods, an overwhelming, paradoxical task. They were supposed to stand for both the leading ideas of their time and the criticism and even rejection of these. In Virgil Nemoianu's terms (Nemoianu 1989), I would say that Romanian poetry was often held responsible for supporting and legitimating the historical 'mainstream' on the one hand, and for the elaboration of alternative, 'secondary' views on the other hand. The dialectics of the principal and the secondary is often blurred in and by Romanian poetry, demanded to attain the blissful *coincidentia oppositorum*.

A similar baffling duplicity may be traced in the so-called Romanian postmodernism. More generally, the main problem with the notion of East-European postmodernism is to decide to what extent and in what respects there has existed in the totalitarian Central and East-European countries a parallel evolution — of poetry? of arts? of humanities? of society? — to the one in the democratic West and to justify this umbrella-term.

The term 'postmodernism' appeared in Romanian around the beginning of the '80s, at first in the quality press, with a rather vague meaning. It attracted mainly the intellectuals dealing with literature — literary critics and writers, especially younger ones —, who granted it a prominent significance and some popularity especially in the academia (Cârnci 1995: 173; Papadima 1995: 226). The main landmark of the rapid career of the term in Romania is the substantial issue of the review *Caiete critice* (1/1986) which appeared in 1986 but had been conceived and prepared for print at least one or two years before, as far as I can remember. By the end of the '80s 'postmodernism' was one of the key-words of the Romanian critical and theoretical discourse about literature, being used in various contexts, usually with a strong attitudinal connotation.

There are several reasons which explain the swiftness of this success. Firstly, Romanian intellectuals felt a strong urge to be 'up-to-date', to remain in contact with the Western culture, which became more and more inaccessible on the officially accepted

public channels. But not all the notable novelties in the West had equal chances to be taken in. The *Paradigmawechsel* announced in the early '70s passed almost unnoticed in Romania, for reasons which I am not going to comment on here. Additional internal conditions should be looked for. One might be tempted to think that the Western debate on postmodernism became so momentous in Romania due to its 'global' scope and the fact that it was no longer restricted to a particular domain of study, while it undertook to tackle with the situation of the contemporary world from varied viewpoints. However, this was not the case. For quite a long time, 'postmodernism' was perceived in Romania as strictly a literary, aesthetic notion, referring to some 'stylistic' category, in the broad sense of the word: a set of characteristics which individualizes a creative area, be it defined in a historical or in a typological perspective. Caius Dobrescu, a poet of the younger generations (b. 1966), remarks quite acrimoniously: "However strange it may look, during the 80's, when the Polish *inteligentsia* was deeply involved in *Solidarnosc* and in *samizdat*, the Romanian *inteligentsia* passionately talked over postmodernism!" (Dobrescu 1995: 179–180) Only during the '90s, after the fall of communism, the network of implications the notion of 'postmodernism' hints at — social, political, psychological, epistemological etc. — began to be taken into consideration. It would be also definitely wrong to conceive of 'postmodernism' as a term taken over because it corresponded to some socio-economic conditions similar in the West and the East. No Central or East-European country, certainly not in the least Romania, had anything to do with the 'post-industrial' civilization diagnosis, according to some theorists, for postmodern times (Cârnelci 1995: 172). Instead there was something *within* the literary camp that favoured the importation of the notion, something that I would designate as the intuition of a 'threshold'.

This intuition was strengthened as the so-called 'generation of the '80s' emerged, a few years before the label of 'postmodernism' crossed the Romanian boundaries. "We are, willingly or not, post-modern" — stated Magda Cârnelci in an article published in 1986 (Cârnelci 1994: 177).

It is quite difficult to tell in a few words the story of this group of poets and prose-writers and often literary theorists, too. Critics,

as well as recognized hard core members of the generation, cannot even agree as to who should belong here. The lists of authors put together in critical studies or in anthologies are often substantially different. Anyway, the date of birth seems not to be the crucial criterion, and neither is the date of the literary debut. It is, perhaps, a joint *Kunstwollen* that marked the 'generation' from the very beginning, even though it evolved in a rich spectrum of poetic forms and visions. One critic, for example, identifies the following five divisions within the generation: the prosaic and burlesque poetry of everyday life; the gnomic, esoteric and mannerist poetry; the abstract and hermetic phantasms; the poets of sarcastic and ironic pathos, dealing with the crisis of inner life, and, finally, the poetry of histrionic criticism, staging in verse the 'comedy of literature' (Țeposu 1995: 216).

What made these young poets join their endeavours and act as a compact group in the literary arena and what justified their converging *Kunstwollen* was their common educational background on the one hand and their similar frustrations on the other. Most of them were students or graduates from philological faculties, with a keen insight in literary theory, with wide readings in foreign contemporary literatures. Most of them had thus a rather reflexive attitude towards poetry, a sensitive awareness of its tricks and dilemmas, which would encourage the 'I know that you know that I know' techniques in their writing. Irony, as a means to move away from the fallacy of 'creation' was highly appreciated. Still, the poets of the '80s used to combine, in various ways, this distant approach to literature as a melting pot of ready made verbal objects with the expression of a vulnerable sensibility, with the acute sense of the traumas of everyday life and a paradoxical 'sincerity'. They rejected the 'lyrical metaphysics' which they considered to be a prominent feature of modern poetry, be it the transcendental quest whose failure revealed the human conditions or the 'void metaphysics' of the *poésie pure* (later on, the former came to be identified with Lyotard's *grands récits*). The biographical and the narrative discourse displaced the symbolical and the metaphorical, as the concrete, *hic et nunc* ego displaced human nature.

There is now quite a firm consensus regarding the distinctive features of the poetry written by the generation of the 80's:

narrativism and explicit biographical reference; multi-stylism — like the blending of ‘popular’ types of discourse or crude orality with refined forms of expression; thick intertextuality — such as overt or covert quotation, parody, pastiche and collage (Cârneli 1995: 174–175, Lefter 1995: 170, Dobrescu 1995: 182).

Not equally undisputed is the cluster of values to be associated with the ‘poetics’ established by the group of young authors. They started to write and to publish at a time when the main problem in Romania was the more and more obvious divorce between the society and the political regime, each of the two aiming at strikingly contradictory ends: dim and often humble wishes to recover one’s private liberty and access to a decent living *versus* the megalomaniac utopia of a compact social body exerting itself to the outmost to make Romania a great nation. In this respect, the poetry of the ’80s had an emancipatory impetus, which was easily assimilated afterwards with the more general anti-authoritarian stance of postmodernism. One should not forget, though, that this generous disposition was obscured by the rather sophisticated manner of dealing with poetry, which demanded from the reader a good mastery of former lyrical aesthetics in order to realize what was at stake. The ‘new’ poetry was thus simultaneously direct and oblique, spontaneous and elaborate, appealing and elitist, passionate and sceptical, committed and relativistic, a mixture to which authorized critics of the time attached various labels: late modernism, the resurrection of the inter-war avant-garde, postmodernism. The latter reinforced inescapable disagreements within the group.

Some of the poets of the ’80s became resolute advocates of the Romanian postmodernism, even when they gave up writing poetry, such as Ion Bogdan Lefter, an appreciated journalist after 1989 and professor of Romanian literature at the University of Bucharest as well. Not accidentally, he is one of the most dedicated supporters of the already ‘traditional’ doctrine of synchronization.

Alexandru Mușina still thinks of himself as being primarily a poet. He considers that the association of the poetry written by his generation with postmodernism is rather arbitrary, anyway misleading. In his opinion, this poetry proposes as a substitute for the failure of postmodernism to solve the ‘metaphysical void’ inherited from modernism an existential project, which he calls

'new anthropocentrism' (Muşina 1995: 165). In the preface of a substantial anthology of Romanian poetry of the '80s and '90s translated into English, Andrei Bodiū and Romulus Bucur warn against rash generalizations: "This is not the right place to discuss the relationship between modernism and postmodernism, although some have adopted the latter fiercely, while others would not dare to admit their adhesion publicly to the former. The meanings of the terms are too shifty (as well as being manipulable) for anyone to derive profit from this" (Bodiū *et al.* 1999: 11).

One of the most remarkable poets of the generation, perhaps the best known Romanian contemporary poet at present and a brilliant prose writer over the last years, Mircea Cărtărescu, wrote shortly before 1989 a twelve canto epic, *Levantul* (*The Levant*), which epitomizes the postmodern trend in our literature. The poem tells the story of an adventurer who, in the first half of the last century, leaves the Romanian provinces for Greece, where he intends to start a revolution. The main character does not, as you may think, imitate Byron, but the Romanian revolutionaries of the time who, fleeing into exile, had imitated him. The hero chooses to travel by an air balloon, but the winds are whimsical and geography is tricky, equipped with unseen slots which open towards unpredictable worlds. One of these is some sort of a huge museum of Romanian literature, depicted in the most astonishing texture of hidden quotations and stylistic paraphrases ever fabricated in the Romanian language.

Mircea Cărtărescu also teaches literature at the university. I heard him once, in a public conference, as he was working on his PhD paper on — what else? — Romanian postmodernism, confessing that the closer he came to the notion, the more troubled he felt by what appeared to loom behind it: a world in which the trumpeted 'merry Apocalypse' was neither merry, nor, at least, apocalyptic. Meanwhile the paper has been published: a bulky volume, with a solid architecture, extensive information and fine critical inquiry. It will certainly stir plenty of comments. Strikingly, the academic outfit of the study covers a passionate plea for postmodern poetry, which is somehow perceived, to paraphrase Fukuyama — largely discussed by Cărtărescu among the theorists of postmodernism! — as a (*happy*)end of literature.

Does the good old battle of books really play its final act? The outdated modernist Hegel would certainly have his revenge. Meanwhile, it is not altogether clear whether present day poetry in Romania is a 'recovery' (*Verwindung*) from modernity or it concludes it, whether it brings in the 'new' world or it just prophesies its forthcoming.

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The Impossibility of Form

REIN RAUD

Little if anything has ever been said or written on poetry that would equally hold for all poetries of all ages and spaces, and at the same time the distinction between “poetry” and “prose” (in M. Jourdain’s sense) has often been pointed out (see Group m, *Rhétorique...*, 1990: 9) to be the one and only line of division that is truly universal and characterizes all verbal cultures¹. It therefore seems that every culture must, in the process of its reproduction, constantly redefine poetry (along with all other practices it consists of), and that has to be done in such a manner that all previously existing forms of these practices, no matter how obsolete, would still also fit the new definition. For instance, it would not do for a medieval theorist to assert that poetry is all that rhymes (and hexameters are accordingly something else). A redefinition of poetry is also and perhaps especially necessary in the post-modern period, where the entire cultural field is once again reorganizing itself and various ends — of history, of ideology, of literature — proclaimed and discussed. Below I will try to show, among other things, that in spite of the radical changes that have affected all discursive traditions of the world, the cultural process itself is nevertheless developing within a surprising continuity, according to an inner logic — in other words, that “modernism” is the predictable outcome of the pre-modernist literary discourses and that practices

¹ It is evidently advisable not to use the term “literature” for some verbal cultures that nevertheless maintain the difference between “poetry” and “prose” by requiring of certain categories of texts, like magic spells or annals of history such use of language that is typical of poetry in other cultures.

we now call post-modern are already contained and have been developed within the modernist paradigm.

Perhaps we could, for the present purposes, envisage poetry to be situated at the juncture of three kinds of constraints, all of which have also given rise to specific discourses on poetry. The first of these we could call perceptionalist — the view that poetry is the textual expression of a certain special kind of perception, an inner vision or a state of mind either characteristic of a certain kind of people (shamans, romantic geniuses etc.) or can be achieved as a result of psychotechnical practices (Buddhist meditation, drinking of absinth etc.) This view is now rather unfashionable in the critical circles — after all, it privileges the author beyond the reach of the critic — but in many traditions it has been the predominant theory of poetry for long periods. This view suits very well both a hierarchically organized or “traditionalist” society where the options of self-realization open to each individual are determined by his/her status, or, in general, any community in which symbolic values take precedence over measurable ones. Not surprisingly the view that a specifically poetic perception lies behind any act of genuine creation is usually being defended outside academic discourses, and mostly by poets themselves.

The second view, which we could call grammaticalist, entails that poeticity is to be found in the linguistic structure of a text, that poetry is a certain linguistic usage that follows divergent norms. Anything that allegedly exists or happens outside the text, e.g. in its author's mind, is accordingly claimed to be irrelevant to any serious analysis of poetry — the perceptionalist theory is thus rejected and the historical author is claimed to be “dead”. The landmarks of this argument are well known: first suggested by Wimsatt and Beardsley in their celebrated article, “The Intentional Fallacy” (1946), it is developed in full by Roland Barthes in his equally famous “The Death of the Author” (1968), which, in turn, has been usefully supplemented by Michel Foucault in “What is an Author?” (1969). As a result, current criticism is inclined to view the author as an element of the text, a name or signature and not the historical person. This view, still rather privileged, is concordant with the prevalence of rationalistic discourses in a culture. We know it at best through modern literary theory, from Russian

formalism through New Criticism to structuralism, with Roman Jakobson as its chief exponent², and in this form the view corresponds roughly to the development of “modern” or modernist poetry. But we can discover a similar attitude in the writings of French classicists, for instance, and it seems quite telling that Boileau wrote his *L’Art poétique* at a time (1673–1674) when the theories of René Descartes had entered wider circulation.

The third view holds that everything is “poetry” that is believed to be such in a given culture, and that all other cultural practices can be defined or delimited in a similar way. We could call this view sociocentric, and it is beginning to overtake the grammaticalist view in academic discussions. Exposed in the writings of Pierre Bourdieu³ and other sociologists of culture, the sociocentric view opposes the grammaticalist position by denying the existence of any self-sufficient linguistic rules or mechanisms that would separate poetry from prose, but at the same time it endorses the grammaticalist critique of the perceptionalist view and is not very keen on resurrecting the historical author. Although the theory has first been elaborated by Bourdieu on the French literary situation at the turn of the 20th century — on the home ground of grammaticalist modernism, so to say — it gains in credibility in the current post-modern situation, since it offers an effective explanatory framework to the multiplicity of literary traditions and the radical experiments with poetic form contained in the post-modern: as long as you can get away with it, it is the real thing.

The sociocentric view is very difficult to oppose. It seems to be doing to structuralism and its derivatives the same thing that structuralism once did to Marxism: the newcomer feels no need to refute the tenets of the retreating paradigm, since those will simply become irrelevant when the new theory is accepted (Ansart 1990: 18). This breaking point is well seen in Michel Riffaterre’s critique (1970) of the article by Jakobson and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962/1977) on Baudelaire’s “Les Chats” — while Riffaterre

² His *Linguistics and Poetics* (1958), probably the most succinct expression of his views on the subject, also contains several seminal tenets that most adherents of this theory agree upon.

³ For a condensed presentation of his views, see Bourdieu 1993.

(1970: 191) is still attacking their position from the inside of structuralism, as it were (“...there may well be strictly poetic structures that cannot be recognized as such by an analysis not geared to the specificity of poetic language”), from sociocentrist position the argument of Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss does not have anything to say about the poem at all.

A grammaticalist critique (“not everything can be declared poetry, but only texts which have relevant linguistic features”) could easily also be declared conservative, as it is (most of the time, quite rightly) being done in the field of contemporary art: the sociocentrists and post-modernists claim that there is no point to this argument other than an effort to withhold the right to define the “relevant features” that constitute an acceptable work of poetry of art.

But other aspects of the sociocentrist view are more problematic. It seems that a strict sociocentrist should necessarily hold that the corpus of poetry is not historically constant: some texts that have been considered poetry in the past may not be seen as such any more, and others that have not been viewed as poetry in their initial context might become such when the context changes. Therefore, there is no guarantee that any of the texts that we now call poetry will maintain that status in the future. Therefore, the very notion of poetry should be purely arbitrary and definable only by its socio-cultural functions. However, the correlation between the formal aspects of poetry — like the use of typologically similar rhetoric devices — is clearly visible in the majority of cultures, whereas the socio-cultural functions of poetry vary to a considerable degree: some poems written as parts of the Confucian officials’ examinations in Tang China might resemble elegies of the Arcadian salons that enacted pastoral fantasies in late 17th-century Italy, but their socio-cultural functions were totally different.

The most problematic aspect of sociocentrist theories is nevertheless the question of which instance or institution could declare a certain set of texts to be poetry (or art, or music) without invoking market indicators and officially canonized literature. Thus sociocentrist theories tend to reduce the mechanisms of the cultural process to the workings of capital and power and, in some

cases, to privilege bestsellers of all genres since these form the stuff of culture that the majority of the members of a certain community actually use. The increasing quantity of research of comics and soap operas (not as sociological material, but works of art) testifies that such an attitude has gained currency in academic circles as well.

Although each of these views might seem self-sufficient in a suitable cultural moment, I think that a combination of the three would yield us with a more tenable definition: there would be no poetry without specific linguistic constraints, nor without an underlying shift of perception, nor without socio-cultural factors that allow poetic discourse to circulate and enjoy a certain status in the respective community.

The same factors apply to the post-modern cultural situation as well. Or should we rather say situations — it has somehow become customary to link certain cultural trends to the socio-political aspects of the post-modern (as postdating the “modern”), although similar cultural situations have also occurred earlier and elsewhere — for example, the verbal culture of classical Sanskrit in India and the poetry of the turn of the 13th century in Japan have more in common with post-modern literature than with most other periods in European literary history, although the socio-cultural functioning of these texts was markedly different. What renders the present situation truly unique, however, is the global nature of “our” post-modern, wherein heterogeneous traditions exist side by side.

The post-modern condition of poetry is characterized by two major factors: firstly, our cultural horizons have widened to cover the entire world and we now have to accommodate very different traditions in our own understanding of what poetry is, and secondly, the radical transformation of the poetic form that has taken place in many cultures of the world during the last 150 years has profoundly affected our understanding of both the content and the form of poetry in general. It could be asserted that the change has occurred and been initiated first and foremost in West European cultures, which is true in a sense, but the change has not been less radical in those countries that have, during that period, come into closer intellectual contact with other cultures of the

world, including European ones. And not always has that change been initiated by European modern literature: some cultures have received equally significant influence from traditional European poetic practices. Thus, for instance, the "poetry in the new form" (*shintaisi*) that emerged in Japan in the 1880s was catalyzed by translations of Wordsworth and Schiller rather than contemporary authors.

To speak of post-modern poetry is to speak of the voices of a decentralized space in which a huge construction consisting of heterogeneous elements has first been put together and then taken into pieces again, whereas those pieces are not the same that were used for the initial project. The mechanism that has brought about the radical transformation of the poetic form has been effective in the structure of European cultures at least since the French Revolution: unlike the vast majority of other cultures that produce new phenomena by transforming the old, in the cultures of the 19th- and 20th-century Europe (and their derivatives) it has been customary, indeed necessary to overthrow the old in order to bring about something new. The biological mechanism of generation gaps and the logic of political revolutions have been transplanted into the cultural process and, as a result, the poetry of each generation has had to stand out in contrast to the previous one. In its efforts at being as anti-canonical as possible all the revolutionary movements have thus been as dependent on canonic norms as traditionalists would have been: the latter strive to adhere to the norms of their canon, the former need them to break them.

The quick development of the poetic form from the still rather traditional sonnets of Baudelaire, the major poetic innovation and scandal of its day, through the linguistic experiments of Mallarmé to the automatic writing of the dada was only to be expected under the circumstances. It took only about 60 years to accomplish this: *Les Fleurs du mal* was published in 1857, *Les champs magnétiques* by André Breton and Philippe Soupault was written in 1919. It should also be noted that the latter, a far more radical rupture with the poetic conventions of the preceding generation, caused much less controversy than the former.

It seems that deviant verbal behaviour could not be taken much further than some of the extreme manifestations of the dadaist

movement did so that it would still carry meaning (and remain capable of being declared poetry), which is why most subsequent developments in European poetry might be viewed as retreats, movements back into the realm of tangible form.

The moment of this retreat is, in a sense, the starting point of European post-modern literature. It is significant that it coincides with a new wave of non-European influence in many spheres of culture, including poetry, where the impact of Japanese poetry on the imagists is perhaps one of the most visible influences, but the interest Modigliani or Picasso felt for African sculpture belongs to the same trend. The goal of an ultimately revolutionary poetic practice is silently abandoned, and simultaneously the great tradition of the first world starts to break into a multitude of little, local, intrinsically equal narratives — a long process that finally produced our post-modern condition. Thus we might find one of the first post-modernists in the figure of Ezra Pound, whose immense erudition allowed him to stroll in many literary traditions of the world with seeming ease, and who demonstrated in his translations and paraphrases a near-perfect mastery of various poetic forms.

It seems at first glance that when the chain of radical innovation is broken and the need of destroying the immediate past subsides then poetic form is reinstated in its former capacity, but that need not be so at all: having been so close to the edge, poetic form has lost its functional purity. The use of any poetic form, even the most simple *vers libre*, can now only be a conscious choice, and each poetic form also invokes a certain set of background conventions with which the author has to reckon, for instance, by deliberately ignoring them. When Petrarch, Shakespeare or Alfred de Musset wrote a sonnet, there was nothing remarkable to the fact itself, but now it can only be done in dialogue with the tradition. The rhythm of a popular tune has the same result. Form is always already intertextual, and therefore signifies, i.e. it is by itself more than just form, and accordingly it is not form any more.

Obviously poets are more often than not conscious of this fact, which may be well put to use. For instance, the Icelandic poet Thórarinn Eldjárn has written large compositions using the

traditional verse forms of Nordic sagas, but in the work, figures from the world of Walt Disney's films have taken the place of ancient heroes, just as they have done in real life (*Disneyrimur*, 1980). The result is neither a sample of popular culture nor, of course, a traditional work, but an entirely new quality. The Lithuanian poet Juozas Erlickas has created a textual world consisting of inverted clichés from both Soviet and post-Soviet times, which is deeply tragic and utterly hilarious at the same time (*Raštai ir kt.*, 1987, *Knyga*, 1996). But perhaps one of the most sweeping successes of post-modern poetic form is the book *Sarada kinenbi* (*Salad Anniversary*, Kawade shobô, Tôkyô 1987) by the Japanese poetess Tawara Machi.

Born in 1962, Tawara graduated from the Waseda University in 1985, where she had studied under the poet Sasaki Yukitsuna, who encouraged her to write as well. Sasaki represents the school of modern tanka and is rather well-known in tanka circles. Tanka is formally identical to waka, the most important form of classical Japanese poetry the tradition of which goes back well into the 8th century, and which continued to be written after the Meiji reforms in the 19th century as well. Tanka was reformed alongside with haiku by Masaoka Shiki at the turn of the century, but after a brief flourish in the 1900s tanka had constantly lost popularity, and since World War II it had become an almost totally hobby-circle affair. There were always exceptions, of course, poets who published a book or even several, and were read also by a larger poetry-reading audience, but since most tanka authors continued to follow the norms of the "new" tanka aesthetic from the beginning of the century, the general public had no interest for their work at all. Thus the sales over 1,000 copies would have been quite a remarkable success for a tanka collection.

Upon graduation, Tawara started to work as a teacher of Japanese literature and continued to write, until she gained a reputation in the tanka circles as well. But the publication of *Salad Anniversary* in 1987 broke all barriers. It not only brought her the acclaim of critics and a major literary prize, but also sold over 2,500,000 copies and is still in print and widely read. It has also given rise to imitations as well as parodies — volumes have appeared wherein each single poem of the original collection has been parodied

(*Otokotachi-no...1987*), but also comics and even a CD with music of Chopin and Debussy to be listened to while reading the book (Winters Carpenter 1990). Tawara's subsequent work, not inferior in quality, has also been received quite well, though no other of her books has paralleled the success of the *Salad Anniversary*.

The secret of the book is evidently in its use of form. The ambiances and feelings of Tawara's poetry have all been expressed before, both in poetry and prose: they are characteristic of present-day urban Japanese of her generation. Parts of the book are not even readily intelligible to foreign readers to whom the realities of Tokyo department stores, restaurants, suburban trains and fashionable holiday resorts are unknown. The naïve and uncritical acceptance of the shining surface of contemporary Japanese life might make us a bit uneasy, but, then, *waka* has never been a vehicle of social critique. There are, however, two things that make the book remarkable. First, Tawara's knowledge of classical Japanese literature allows her to bridge her own world to that of Japanese courtiers, who conducted their amorous correspondence in the same poetic form, and enable the contemporary romantic youth feel themselves as part of a long tradition. The second, and perhaps even more important thing is the character of the form itself: its extreme brevity fits well the fragmented and discontinuous character of the post-modern world. The fleeting moments of contemporary Japanese reality allow themselves to be caught in these short poems better than larger structures could hold them, and again, ephemerality of life is one of the basic recurring themes of the classical *waka* tradition. But in spite of all its links with the tradition, the attitude of the *Salad Anniversary* toward the literary past of its form remains casual and unburdened by convention.

There are two full English translations of the *Salad Anniversary*. Unfortunately the conventions of translating *waka* poetry into English do not require the preservation of form, so that Tawara's poems look deceptively like plain *vers libre*. The following examples have been taken from the version of Juliet Winters Carpenter:

*kimi to hamu
sambyakuen no
anagozushi
sono oishisa o
koi to koso shire*

Eating takeout sushi with you,
only 300 yen —
tastes so good I know I'm in love (p. 31)

*enoshima ni
asobu ichinichi
sorezore no
mirai ga areba
shashin wa torazu*

A day playing at Enoshima Beach-
you have your future, I mine,
and so we take no snapshots (p. 32)

*kimi no tame
kūhaku narishi
techō ni mo
yotei o irenu
empitsugaki de*

Spaces in my appointment book
I'd been saving for you —
I fill them in, in pencil (p. 66)

*dare kara mo
wasuresarareta
yō na yoru
tonari no heya ni
beru nariyamazu*

On a night when the world has forgotten me
the phone next door rings
on and on (p. 147)

Tawara's language is usual spoken Japanese combined with occasional classical forms: some poems are almost like sentences in plain prose except for their syllable scheme, others make recognizable use of the classical rhetoric of waka. The result is a delicate mixture of past and present, of simplicity and elegance, a text that simultaneously belongs to the long poetic tradition of waka/tanka and reverses it without any touch of irony. This operation is, in my mind, significant and typical of post-modern poetry in general, but quite naturally it is always performed differently, because none of the local poetic traditions is exactly alike any other. However, the basic movement remains: Tawara's poetry is doing to its tradition the same thing that others have similarly accomplished elsewhere: it exploits in full the impossibility of its own form.

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The Case of the Missing Genre

ANDRÁS KAPPANYOS

It is surprising that such a thing as post-modern poetry exists at all. I'm not even sure it does.

This doubt is partly based on experience and partly on theory. So I shall begin with a few words about the present state of Hungarian poetry. In the global view we can distinguish four main tendencies. The first and the most traditional one, we may say, has been exhausted as a creative force, but is still alive in readers' expectations. It keeps the forms and moral, even political commitment of last century's national romanticism, without ever reflecting the archaism or anachronism of such a position. The aim of the poetic manifestation here is usually something independent from poetry or language: it's a part of 'reality' or 'life'. The second tendency could be called 'classical modernity', and it has close connections to the 'neo-classical' views of the first half of our century. The poet's personality is kept in the background. The aim is to express the inexpressible, to communicate a certain meaning that cannot be communicated in any other way, but which has a well-defined existence outside the language. The poet's moral commitment is to save the cultural values of the past through hostile times of the present for a happier future. The third tendency is very easy to distinguish: this is the avant-garde. The lyric self here has a very limited role, usually even the lyric situation is given up. The poet is regarded as an inventor who works on the renewing of the means of poetic expression, often leaving the field of language. Ironically the best avant-garde works are the experiments of rather traditional poets.

And so we arrive at the fourth tendency, that we can call post-modern, until we find a better name for it. It was initiated around the end of the sixties with the independent appearance of a few young poets, most notably Dezső Tandori and György Petri. Its foundation is an epistemological scepticism, the realization of the inscrutability of reality. The belief in the unity of the world and the reliability of language is shaken. The aim of the literary work of art is not some *ab ovo* meaning that exists outside language, nor the most intensive communication of something *given*, or the finding of the only possible form of a certain idea, rather, the exploitation of the creative uncertainty, rich multiplicity inherent in language. The post-modern poet creates open, interactive texts instead of finished works with unambiguous codes. As both the material and the subject of these texts is language itself, self-referential gestures, quotations, allusions and generally the tropes of irony are very frequent.

The post-modern view of the language questions the very foundation of the lyric genre, as the expressive manifestation of the 'self'. The post-modern poet has to face the dangers of this contradiction. Tandori answered this challenge with the building of a very complex and self-containing private mythology, with sparrows and teddy bears as characters, and Petri created a kind of political poetry in which he could exploit the possibilities of irony to expose the language of power (that is language as a means of exercising of power.) Other members of their generation and those following them worked out several ways to make lyrical manifestation and the doubt in the reliability of language compatible with each other. It is characteristic, however, that many of them turn towards short and longer prose forms, and those who hold up to the lyric context gradually give way in their texts to the narrative or the dramatic.

This phenomenon seems to back up the above doubt. And there's another experience that supports it: in our times the lyric is very often left out from the taxonomic attempts to divide the field of literature. One of the possible causes is that the *plurality* of the post-modern cultural situation makes more and more impossible the *singular* situation of the lyric subject, the 'self'. One could object that a poet like Fernando Pessoa clearly had a plural self.

That is true, but if you read any of his poems, you can see a well defined, centred personality who utters his views and expresses his feelings. The fact that all these imaginary persons are the projections of the same real-world person has some post-modernistic aspects, Pessoa can be seen as a post-modern poet, but it does not make any of his texts post-modern.

Preparing this article I was looking for a piece of contemporary poetry on which I could demonstrate my views. To use a Hungarian poem seemed hopeless. The more characteristic ones, that use the self-mimetic feature of language, are simply untranslatable. Others could be translated technically, but would have required complex cultural or political explanations. So I tried to find a piece of world poetry that every participant in the conference and every reader of the paper would certainly know. I have to report a failure here. I could not think of one single poet whom we would unanimously know and respect as we know and respect García Márquez, Eco, Rushdie, Pynchon or Calvino — or as we know and respect Apollinaire, T. S. Eliot, or, say, Majakovskij. In this view, it seems, there is no poetry today that would be part of world literature.

What to do then? We should reconsider the idea of the lyric, but we cannot do it without referring to a text. And if we cannot find a proper contemporary example, we shall look further back in time for a poem that everyone knows. The one I chose has the advantage that it corresponds to my title in another way: it is a literary work of art that has no genre. This so-called poem is usually considered a par excellence modernist work of art, but it also had a great part in eliminating lyric as a genre, or probably it was one of the initiators of this process. And the most obvious advantage: it uses most of the linguistic and poetical means that present-day post-modern poetry uses. What can genre theory do with such a text as T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*?

'No contemporary poem has been subjected to more detailed analysis than *The Waste Land*, yet no critic has either confidently assigned it to one of the traditional kinds of poetry or, if he considers it as the invention of a quite new kind of a poem, has invented a new name for that kind.' (Fraser 1953: 28). Though both parts of this utterance seem to be true, the latter part is more

interesting for us. It clearly describes the main problem in the critical reception of the complex, polymorph, polyhistoric, polysemic texts like *The Waste Land*: the work cannot be classified by any taxonomic system. It did not fit into any category present at the time of its publication, and it did not create a new category. This fact can be considered in several ways. It can be used, as it were, to support a hoax-theory about the poem (for examples of the 'hoax-theory', see Cox 1968: 11), a view that is similar to the position of the old man in the joke, who seeing a giraffe in the zoo declared that such an animal does not exist.

This taxonomist status is ridiculous from a pragmatist point of view: Rorty or Fish would not make a category even of two giraffes. And we also can say that there are other lonely masterpieces as well: we can define such a category as 'a picaresque chevalier-novel-parody enriched with interwoven pastoral novel-las'¹, but we will not find another tenant for this category than the great novel of Cervantes. And quite similar things can be said about the works of Rabelais or Sterne. Eliot said this on the matter: 'the only obvious common characteristic of *The Road to Xanadu* and the *Finnegans Wake* is that we may say of each: one book like this is enough.' (Eliot 1957: 108). And probably we also may say this about the above mentioned works, including *The Waste Land*. Hypothetically we may say of these works that they do not belong to an archetype, they do not have an architext, they themselves are architexts in some way.

For similar phenomena in the visual arts Hans Richter has a promising suggestion: 'If, like Duchamp's, they are first of their kind, such works may be preserved in museums, as the old aeroplanes in the Smithsonian. If so, one would need to have a sort of resting-place for works of "art for a day". But this would be a museum, not an art gallery.' (Richter 1965: 208). The solution cannot be applied to literary inventions, because their aesthetic effect or meaning does not exhaust itself after the first perception.

If the work of art is a thing and a sign simultaneously, as Mukařovský says (1977: 89–128, esp. 106), then the difference is

¹ This 'category' is based upon the description of Szerb 1945: 23. This is still the most popular general account of world-literature in Hungary.

probably caused by the different materials of kinds of art. What Duchamp does, is putting a *thing* in a context that has been so far reserved for *signs*. He forces us to consider as a sign something that does not contain any imminent meaning, something that is originally made not for understanding, but for use. We have to extract a meaning that is not put in; to decode something no one has coded.

Thus, Duchamp's ready-mades can be interpreted in the frame of a hoax-theory (though these are obviously very clever hoaxes). In literature it would be much more difficult to create such clear examples of hoax, because language, the raw material of literary works of art, cannot get rid of its sign-function, the reference to something other than itself. A linguistic artefact can never be uniquely a 'thing' and cannot be transposed to the context of 'things' as Duchamp did it in the other way. Even Kurt Schwitters' one letter poem (W) (see Motherwell 1981: xxviii) keeps its linguistic sign-function as, becoming also a 'thing', it takes up its new, aesthetic function.

The latter is also a piece of which one is enough, and that could be placed in a museum among many similar avant-garde pieces. But the work of Cervantes, Rabelais, Sterne, Joyce or Eliot cannot be sent into a museum, because their meaning cannot be extracted in one perception, rather the opposite, the process of this extraction does not seem to reach any resting point, and, especially with the latter two authors, does not seem to aim at any kind of consensus. The radical quality of these works is not in their simplicity (as in the case of Duchamp or Schwitters), but in their complexity. And this complexity is very important for genre theory.

We reached our main theoretical question: how do we know of a literary work of art that it is a lyric. E. D. Hirsch answers this question by suggesting the change of Gadamer's notion of prejudice (Vorurteil) to that of pre-understanding, which is in fact the recognition of the genre. (Hirsch 1967: 245–264, esp. 258–264: "Prejudice and Pre-Understanding"). In his view this pre-understanding is a hypothesis on the genre of the text as a whole, that is not determined by the prejudices the reader brings with her/himself, but by the genre's imprints in the parts.

This difference is dissolved in Jauß's idea of expectations' horizon (Erwartungshorizont), which is by definition both historical and imminent. (Jauß 1970: 145–206). According to Jauß it is possible that a text builds up an expectations' horizon of its genre, and then systematically destroys it; his example is the *Don Quixote*. Joyce's *Ulysses* multiplies this process: it changes the genre, the mode and point of view of narration and the whole thematic frame chapter by chapter. If 'the continuous process of horizon-building and horizon-changing determines the relation of a particular text to its genre-creating set of texts'² then *Ulysses* reverses this relation. There is not one but several dozens of 'genre-creating sets of texts' the text refers to, so there is no particular set of texts that could contain the *Ulysses*, while *Ulysses* contains several genres.

The case is very similar with *The Waste Land*, with the important difference that horizon-changes are much more frequent and less obvious, and, because of the shortness and fragmentary quality of the parts, the particular horizons are much more difficult to identify. To make the matter even more obscure, the context here suggests the lyric genre, where there is no such soft and undefined category as the novel in the epic genre.

It seems to be useful here to turn to the classical categories of genre theory. According to Tzvetan Todorov it looks like this: 'lyric = those works where only the author speaks; dramatic = where only the characters speak; epic = where both the author and the characters may speak.'³ This seems simple, but in many texts including *The Waste Land* no one can tell in advance who speaks at a certain point. We have to build our hypotheses upon other hypotheses. The other problem is that it seems doubtful whether the author speaks at all in a text. We would rather say that the

² 'Ein entsprechender Prozeß fortgesetztzt Horizontstiftung und Horizontveränderung bestimmt auch das Verhältnis vom einzelnen Text zur gattungsbildenden Textreiche.' Ib. 175.

³ 'lyrique = les oeuvres où seul parle l'auteur; dramatique = les oeuvres où seuls parlent les personnages; épique = les oeuvres où auteur et personnages ont également droit à la parole.' (Ducrot-Todorov 1972: 198).

voice of the author belongs to the author-function (in the sense of Foucault), so it is only one of the characters.

So we may modify the scheme this way: lyric = one character speaks; dramatic = several, co-ordinated characters speak; epic = the other characters are subordinated to one character. It can be seen now that we have switched from genres to 'modes'. According to Genette, in the dramatic mode the situational discourse appears outside the text proper, as a paratext (the character's name, instruction); while in the narrative mode it appears within the text, through a specific character, the narrator (Genette 1986: 89-159). These modes rarely prevail in their purity; the great majority of literary texts are mixed. But the change of the modes doesn't mean a change of the genres, as it does not invalidate the genre-code of the whole text as a specific speech act. Usually we can identify the dominant mode.

In this taxonomy there is no room for the lyric mode. Let's turn to another authority: Benveniste says that there are two separate but complementary systems working in the language: that of the story and that of the discourse (Benveniste 1966: 238). If we translate this to genre theory, we can say that in the dramatic mode the system of the story is embedded into the system of the discourse (character's name, etc.); in the narrative mode both systems are inside the text proper; and in the lyric mode the system of the discourse is embedded in the system of the story that is usually not explicit (but think of certain titles like 'Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey'.)

Aristotle, the definitive authority in genre theory, also knows of three modes: 'Given both the same means and the same kind of object for imitation, one may either speak at one moment in narrative and at another an assumed character, as Homer does; or one may remain the same throughout, without any such change; or the imitators may represent the whole story dramatically, as though they were actually doing the things described.' (Aristotle 1984: 2317). The first mode refers to the epic and the third to dramatic poetry. The second is usually understood as the mode of the lyric, but it seems to be the arbitrariness of posterity, as Aristotle tells about the modes of imitating an act, and according to our modern ideas acts or imitation do not belong to the nature of the lyric.

If we put together Genette, Benveniste and Aristotle, we can draw the conclusion that the main distinctive feature of the lyric mode is the absence of the story, or *sujet* — that is a very weak criterion. Now let us put the question this way: is there a *sujet* in *The Waste Land*? There have been several affirmative answers to this question, but unfortunately, very different ones. The work has been a spiritual autobiography; an urban apocalypse; and the expression of a generation's lost illusions, to mention only the most characteristic. These obviously exclude each other, and such divergence will not help in deciding about the genre.

We have limited the lyric mode to one criterion, but it has not proved decisive. Let us recall then the intuitive meaning of the lyric mode and imagine our example, *The Waste Land*, based on this. There is an individual in the centre who stays intact and remains unchanged while s/he projects, hallucinates, spiritually experiences all the embedded narrative and dramatic elements. The monograph of Calvin Bedient is based upon such a concept (Bedient 1986). He postulates a protagonist, an actor, who (in the theatrical sense) plays all the characters. Thus the whole lyric process is subordinated to a narrative aim, a story that has to be told in the preface. What is more, a spiritual theatre has to be constructed. The concept creates a certain unity, but it forces all the dynamic changes to a subordinated level, making them projections or roles for an allegorical actor.

It seems we are not able to give a definition of the lyric, though the dramatic and the epic still have some formal criterions. If before the text proper we read 'The Protagonist: [colon]' then it is dramatic. If at the end of the text proper we read 'said the protagonist' then it is epic (or narrative). But what if there is neither of the two? Is this the only criterion of the lyric we can have? This is the point where the difference between the genres dissolves. Post-modern plurality brings an end not only to the lyric, but to genre theory as well.

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Poetry in the Global Age. The Ecology of Mind and Globalization

INDREK TART

I cannot read Norwegian poetry, but if I were told that no more poetry was being written in the Norwegian language I should feel an alarm which would be much more than generous sympathy. I should regard it as a spot of malady which was likely to spread over the whole Continent; the beginning of a decline which would mean that people everywhere would cease to be able to express, and consequently be able to feel, the emotions of civilized beings.

T. S. Eliot (Eliot 1957: 25)

These words spoken at the British-Norwegian Institute in 1943 by the great reformer of modern poetry and Nobel laureate Thomas Stearns Eliot addressing the social function of poetry, sound extremely precise in the end-of-the-millennium atmosphere. After decades of triumph of exact sciences and technological inventions producing new fascinating machinery and digital logic of thinking — more technical assistance, more better life — the mankind is discovering again emotions, affections and presents of the omnipotent Nature in its surroundings. Along with declarations of the arrival of heavenly times, distributing free individual choices for perfecting the body and mind, everyday harms, sorrows and pains are becoming public, are being rediscovered. The seemingly inexact voice of poetry emerges again.

At the time of Eliot's speech even cybernetics was a harbinger of the future, not to mention TV sets, computer systems, mobile

phones and the Internet. Faith in the scientifically supported development was deep. Logical, rational thinking and inventing new powerful machines were highly appreciated, while the modestly steered system of capital accumulation with redeeming wealth (for everybody), at the top, was a most natural thing. As well as challenging and crushing the totalitarian system. The dream of a beautiful and liveable post-war world was stronger than ever. Poetry, to the contrary, was losing its place even in intellectual circles as an instrument of mind's strength, giving way to the logic of science.

Drastic changes in the human population have also occurred: from 2.5 billion people in 1950 to 6 billion now. More than twice in only two incomplete sociological generations. More urbanized, more educated, more selfish! These are the facts to be taken into account when speaking of the contemporary world. Has the functioning of the modern world system based on the accumulation of capital made the human being happier? Has it provided more comfortable and sustainable living conditions? Has it made the characters of people stronger and more suitable for living under the everyday pressures? Have more formal knowledge, higher educational statuses, less hard physical work, higher cognitive possibilities changed the human being radically? While beneath our rationality and rational reflectivity our feelings, the very source of poetry is hidden. Unconscious but powerful! Out of reach for digitalization! That's what I want to consider on the following pages — how the global crisis, mostly understood and felt in ecological terms, sheds its light on contemporary poetry, its status and future.

I am assuming the standpoint of contemporary social sciences in order to look at poetry's situation and place in our world. According to World Values Survey (Inglehart 1997) there occurred a significant change in peoples' value attitudes in the 1980s and 1990s; this supports the scheme of the shift from Modernization to Postmodernization (look at Figure 1). The first process accompanied the industrial revolution and brought us from societies dominated by traditional religious and communal values to modern urban-industrial-market areas of strong nation-states based on legal instruments exercising the power. Postmodernization that has fol-

lowed is characteristic of welfare states bringing about postmaterialist values which, instead of profit, appraise well-being and, being overwhelmingly self-directed, de-emphasize any authority.

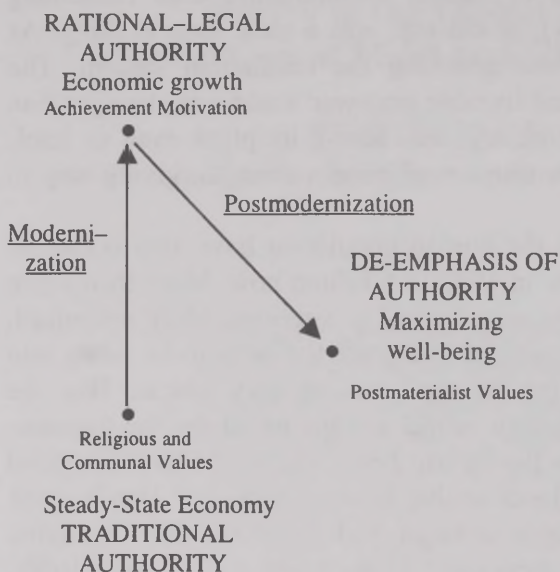


FIGURE 1. The shift from Modernization to Postmodernization.
Source: Inglehart 1997: 75.

Parallel processes are taking place in the field of poetry: from religious, mostly anonymous oral folk-songs or praising God in religious devotion to the individually marked (authorized) written poetry of modern times, with strong national accents, and then to more cosmopolitan and free means (talk poetry, visual poetry, electronic poetry etc.) of self-expressing individuals. Poetry, too, is detaching itself from the society's body to regain a body of its own and find its agents. The real situation is, of course, more complicated, as all three types of value systems and, correspondingly, societies exist simultaneously on our unique Earth. As any diversity, it seems to counter the power of monopolies, but can also be a source for misunderstandings.

Even naming the process of our time can sound poetical, like "what has variously been called the world-system, the global

system, world society, global society, the global acumen, the global arena or the global field" (Robertson and Khondker 1998: 33). It reveals the tendency that even under strong symbolical guidance we cannot find a unique and exact solution (logical decision) in the case of a principal issue. A need to be poetical!?

Does poetry fit into the frames of contemporary social and human discourses? And how it does? Let us first ask if it is visible at all in national and global areas? Is there any symbolic or real commodity called poetry? Is it appreciated or denied?

It is complicated to measure the status of poetry in the contemporary world. You can find it surviving in all countries (in developed ones poetry books share from 2 to 6 per cent of book titles published every year), acknowledged in all educational systems, but it is extremely hard to define its real place, value and power. There are more poets and amateurs publishing poetry books than ever before but poetry's real role in national areas looks much more vague than it was in previous centuries. The truth of poetry is hidden in the position of the language that varies from one society to another in the age of commercialization, mass consumption and electronic communication. Global unification seems to erode differences on what poetry stands: different feelings, different languages. If there is only one acknowledged mode of versification that follows prescribed trends and sells well to masses, then the battle is lost. There have been several attempts to set up a literary canon for all Europe, a common ground for shared literary tastes from the Mediterranean to the Nordic countries, from the mists of Albion to the fields of Russia. However, what really matters is the nationally based decision of the inclusion/ exclusion of a particular poet or poetic style. National canons serve nations and their languages, not the cosmopolitan community and continental bureaucracies. If a nation loses the activity of its language, choosing some other language to serve some of its vital areas (e.g. commerce only in English), then the alarming situation depicted by T. S. Eliot is nearby. Fortunately, it is not so.

FIGURE 2. Poets-Nobelists

Year	Poet (age at prize-winning year)	Country
1901	Sully-Prudhomme, René François (62)	France
1903	Bjørnson, Bjørnstjerne (71)	Norway
1904	Mistral, Frédéric (74)	France
1906	Carducci, Giosuè (71)	Italy
1913	Tagore, Rabindranath (52)	India
1916	Heidenstam, Verner von (57)	Sweden
1917	Gjellerup, Karl Adolph (60)	Denmark
1923	Yeats, William Butler (58)	Ireland
1931	Karlfeldt, Erik Axel (67)	Sweden
1945	Gabriela Mistral (56)	Chile
1948	Eliot, Thomas Stearns (60)	Great Britain
1956	Jiménez, Juan Ramón (75)	Spain
1958	Pasternak, Boris (68)	USSR
1959	Quasimodo, Salvatore (58)	Italy
1960	Saint-John Perse (73)	France
1963	Seferis, Giorgos (63)	Greece
1966	Sachs, Nelly (71)	Germany
1971	Neruda, Pablo (67)	Chile
1974	Martinson, Harry (70)	Sweden
1975	Montale, Eugenio (79)	Italy
1977	Aleixandre, Vicente (79)	Spain
1979	Elytis, Odysseus (68)	Greece
1980	Milosz, Czeslaw (69)	USA, Poland
1984	Seifert, Jaroslav (83)	Czech
1987	Brodsky, Joseph (47)	USA, Russia
1990	Paz, Octavio (76)	Mexico
1992	Walcott, Derek (62)	Saint Lucia
1995	Heaney, Seamus (56)	Ireland
1996	Szymborska, Wislawa (73)	Poland

To exemplify, let us look at the Nobel Prize of literature. From decade to decade the part of poets honoured by it is growing. Does this mean that poetry is appreciated more than other genres of literature? Does the Nobel committee feel that literary truth is hidden more in poetry and is understood by the literary community of the whole world? Figure 2 represents the poets-Nobelists. In

parenthesis the age of the laureate at the moment of his/ her honouring is mentioned. Among 95 Nobelists in literature, 29 are poets (30.5%) who represent the decades followingly: 4-3-1-1-2-3-3-5-3-4. The greatest number of poets was honoured in the first two decades of the century, as well as in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Can we deduce from it that the postmodern condition favours poetry? Neither can the Prize be blamed for anglomania: fourteen different languages are represented, with the Spanish in the lead and five non-Europeans ones included. Yet the prize is male-centred — only 3 women (10%) — and dominated by elderly prize-winners (belonging to the age groups from 70 to 74 and from 65 to 69).

But things do not look so good from the business side. Poetry is appreciated in every nation and has been able to spread (overcoming translation difficulties) over the national borders. However, who are those translated? Does the literary translation market really “see” poets? The UNESCO statistics based on “Index translationum” in 1961–1987 lists only 27 poets among 400 authors. These are mostly classics (Shakespeare, Pushkin, Goethe, Homer, Dante etc.) canonized and widely taught at European schools. The most contemporary author is Charles Bukowski. Thus business likes itself, not poetry!

Poetry remains honoured, but within national language borders where its function is strengthening the national (and cultural) spirit. As the self-consciousness of national states is revealed through written texts, and history is a by-product of it (Y. Lotman), national memory is kept alive and opens itself in and through language, being a kind of affective memory, that of contexts and situational feelings (what is worth remembering and what not) that suits poetry well. Dense symbolic values extracted from reality characterize it.

It is remarkable that among the literary marketing hierarchies poetry occupies even now the same place as in the late nineteenth-century nation-building: “The complex structure of this place [of the symbolic hierarchies] can be explained by means of a simple model taking into account, on the one hand, the properties of the different arts and the different genres considered as economic enterprises (price of the product, size of the audience and length of

the economic cycle) and, on the other hand, the negative relationship which, as the field increasingly imposes its own logic, is established between symbolic profit and economic profit, whereby discredit increases as the audience grows and its specific competence declines, together with the value of the recognition implied in the act of consumption." (Bourdeau 1993: 48) Poetry in this scheme holds the position of extreme sovereignty, being situated far from profit and mass audiences. This has saved it from slipping into the black boxes of consumption and commercialization. Is poetry, then, rather immaterial than real?

How can poetry play its role in our postmaterialistic and technologically overdeveloped/ saturated world? There are two main tendencies: to unify technologies and products all over the world and to individualize (raise individual consciousness and needs of) people. Humanness versus technologically originated difficulties nurtures poetry. Outside turns inside and finds its utterance! Poetry is not only the means of replacing/sublimating difficulties, but it calls for activities, opens inner forces to struggle for the unknown and unrecognized.

In our lives we have to face the "fabricated uncertainty within our civilization: risk, danger, sideeffects, insurability, individualization and globalization" (Beck 1996: 1), where three types of global threats are present: first, "*wealth-driven* ecological destruction and technological-industrial dangers, such as the hole in the ozone layer, the greenhouse effect or regional water shortages, as well as the unpredictable risks involved in the genetic engineering of plants and humans" (ib. 14); second, poverty-driven destruction and inability to react to technologically capable endangering of the environment and human life, and third, threat from NBC (nuclear, biological, chemical) *weapons of mass destruction...* /---/ These various global threats may very well complement and accentuate one another: that is, it will be necessary to consider the interaction between ecological destruction, wars and the consequences of uncompleted modernization" (ib. 15). Those are accompanied by the ruin of firm ethical principles for the people and national governing bodies, even all political-economic measures of dealing with risks and responsibilities are losing ground. In a world risk society "the new dangers are removing the conventional pillars of

safety calculation. Damage loses its spatio-temporal limits and becomes global and lasting. It is hardly possible any more to blame definite individuals for such damage: the principle of a guilty party has been losing its cutting edge." (Ib.)

Poetry in different languages has dealt in detail with all those threats and their by-products on declarative as well as intimate levels. Special books and collections of poems dealing with ecological aspects of living abound: they are directed against nuclear war, killing animals, destroying tropical forests with its human tribes etc. But those warning actions do not seem to be the central zones of the poetical action: beside the destruction of our environment our minds are under attack. Our abilities of self-reflection, even mental self-aid. And here the field for a fruitful poetical action begins. Loose ethics, the loss of responsibility, the feeling of being doomed — all this can inspire protest by poetry.

"We believe that we know, that we already possess the required wisdom, that we are all experts on ourselves and have little left to learn. Introspection, we assume, requires no learning, and the expression of intimate feelings we leave to poets, particularly now with the increasingly grave external problems competing for our attention. /---/ It is the "external planet" that preoccupies us behind the fears, appeals, and projects voiced by the environmentalists./ Yet there is another planet caught up in the radical process of transformation sweeping over us: the inner planet consisting of the biological, emotional, and cognitive structure that underlines the experience and relations of us all. /---/ the possibilities open to it and the dangers to which it is today submitted have reached critical dimensions from the point of view of both the life of the individual and the future of the species." (Melucci 1996: 57–58)

We are humans in our own inner environment faced with "the ecology of the mind"!

In that area poetry has an important place in the age of "planetary interdependence", as an instrument of struggle for personal

integrity, sane identities and common understanding. Development has put us under the same dangers and nobody is marked out as an exception or an external observer. "We have come to the end of linear causality, of monocausal explanation, of end-directed reasoning. /---/ We must include in our field of observation the purposes, the affects, and the fragility of the observer: everything that has always been considered to be subjective distortion and extraneous to the method of an authentically "hard" science." (Ib. 58-59)

Thus in social sciences poetical subjectivity regains acknowledgement: the unique stands alongside with the standardized and is no longer pushed aside but is examined with the same attention. The inner planet opens up to viewers through the lens of an unimaginable form.

"Industrial society organized its experience around the inevitability of economic laws and technical power. The ecological issue shows that the key to survival is no longer the system of means founded on purposive rationality. Our salvation lies in the system of ends, that is, in the cultural models which orient our behaviour. Culture — as the capacity to lend meaning to objects and relations — is the unbreachable confine within which questions concerning destiny of mankind must be posed." (Ib. 59)

The industrial world dislikes poetry, as its rationality is an antidote to the miracle of a poem, to words that flow and speak through imagination. And now ecological issues, as consequences of previous development, are bringing poetry back to centre stage to rediscover the hidden potential inside human beings themselves, not in machines constructed by them.

"Our reality is a cultural construct, and our perceptions filter our relationships with the world." (Ib.)
 "/---/ logical-rational thought, the calculation of means and ends, does not exhaust human experience, and that the dimensions of intuition, feeling, and an immediate and global relationship with the reality are equally important constituents of our being." (Ib. 62)

This leads us to the problem of identities and poetry's possible role in it. As seen above, culture and cultural identity are playing a crucial role in defining the place of man in the living world. National identity comes into action, but only as represented by shared cultural roots (including language!), not by citizenship. Memory of shared history, traditions etc., not shared responsibilities before nation state bodies. And poetry comes to life when we realize the importance of culture, when cultural identity stands out from our multiple identifications and takes the lead. When emotional memory acts bring back humanistic grounds of our development, where relationships and understanding cannot move at the speed of light. There is a fundamental incompatibility between technical possibilities and human dimensions. Poetry realizes the possible world denied by the one-way logic of technology — a logic that rejects any negotiations and compromises. For our multiple self "identity is a relation embracing both our ability to recognize ourselves and the possibility of being recognized by others. This polarity between auto-recognition and hetero-recognition falls along the two dimensions which were previously indicated as constitutive of identity: unity and difference." (Ib. 33) Poetry gives us that opportunity!

Facing the imminent and possible destruction of external nature we discover that "the body, however, is not a machine commanded by the mind; rather, it "embodies" the mind and enables us to exist as unified whole." (Ib. 62) A poem like the body works as a functional whole where every word and rhythmical construction serves its function and cannot be removed without the severe consequences of amputation. We are inside a sphere of "an ecology of the everyday, of the words and gestures with which we call into being or annihilate the inner planet" (ib. 69) and "the inner planet, the point where body and language meet between behaviour and reflexivity, is the connection, the conjunction between earth and sky." (Ib.)

A strong personal body and a vivid personal language are important for preserving personal integrity! The selection of words and styles so dear to poetical minds and ears stands side by side with the need to meet dangers facing mankind. Poets hear voices from the past and the future, but only readers capable of inter-

preting poetical signs can act in accordance with prophecies. And teaching people such possibilities beyond the linear clock-time dimensions of modernity is the task for social scientists as well as for poets. To discover and strengthen our inner planets' autonomies and sensibilities, to hear otherness, other voices and solutions in sympathetic spirit, without rage and fear, in joy. Such is the lesson taught by global ecological reasoning — somewhat naïve, as any poetry is.

We must not forget the role of the language in making and keeping poetry in its cultural and nation-making/keeping role. Body keeps the language: not any language but the mother tongue or what fulfils its position. Language connects communities that may become the most important entities in times coming, as large as nations or as small as a group of fans of a local poet. Language is not an exclusive means for trade contracts but to embrace the wholeness and difference of human beings. Language is a meta-media for all kinds of media, a great keeper of cultural/ national identities: "And this appears perfectly natural when we realise that poetry has primarily to do with the expression of feeling and emotion; and that feeling and emotion are particular, whereas thought is general. It is easier to think in a foreign language than it is to feel in it. Therefore no art is more stubbornly national than poetry." (Eliot 1957: 18)

Mankind has come through three significant mediamorphoses: the spoken language, the written language and the digital language, with accompanying resources for each. Previous languages "— expressive, spoken and written — were developed to facilitate communication between humans. Digital language, which uses numbers to encode and process information, was developed to facilitate communication between machines and their components. Only through a mathematically mediated translation process can digital language be used for communications with and between humans." (Fidler 1997: 71) Each of them has changed conditions for poetry's existence.

Domains for communication media are developed not only in time but also on broadcast, interpersonal and documentary levels. More and more communication acts are taking place not in face-to-face or even voice-to-voice situations, but at the same time the

degree of intermediation is high and symbols are added. To understand and deal with all those symbolic interactions and actions, literacies are highly needed, as any media is creating its specific means and cultural sign-surroundings to decipher their messages. In the globalizing era we are more concerned with situations emerging from the most recent changes in the media field: digitalizing and converging most previous media into the body of the computer. Radio, TV, on-line newspaper, writing and exchanging letters, articles, opinions — all can be intermediated by a complex and complete apparatus. The synthesizing effect of the digital world is enormous.

But let us remark that previous forms of communication instruments also continue to function: snail-mail, ordinary print products, radio and TV programs. Such a mixture produces a new situation where traditional and highly commercial new vehicles of communication may be chosen by anyone at any moment. As well as national and cosmopolitan modes of thinking and behaviour. "We cannot escape our symbolic inclusion in a cosmopolitan culture which expands and multiplies the possible worlds of our existence, while at the same time confronting us with their complexity and the necessity to make choices." (Melucci 1996: 44) The choice (risk) enters into our everyday and life styles turn into an important component of personal and collective identity-making. The global world is nearby at any moment, as well as our need to react to its existence.

A continuous and risky choice between unity and difference is unavoidable in the global age where identity forming processes in cultural and communal units are guided by the same categories. Let us recall that globalization has been characterized as a complicated set of changing conditions and actions in a unique world of multifunctional biological, technical and material objects. Its slogans are: We are all in the same boat! Think globally, act/dance locally! "What is involved in globalization is a complex process involving the interpenetration of sameness and difference — or, in somewhat different terms, the interpenetration of universalism and particularism" (Robertson and Khondker 1998: 28) The divergence of the notion in different discourses is so great that we may talk about globalizations.

"In its most basic sense globalization involves the compression of the entire world, on the one hand, and a rapid increase in consciousness of the whole world, on the other. Contemporary globalization has produced a global circumstance in which civilizations, regions, nation-states, nations within or cutting across states, and indigenous people, are increasingly constrained to construct their own histories and identities — or, at least, reappropriate selectively their own traditions." [Sic: poetry at least in European nations has been a substantial part in nation-making and keeper of national identities at large.] And quite unexpectedly "globalization has consolidated the nation-state as a formidable actor in the global arena. /---/ we are witnessing *both* trends in the direction of a borderless world and, at the same time, the shoring-up of the nation-state. /---/ The nation-state has developed as an *aspect* of globalization, considered as a long-term historical process." (Ib. 30)

Also "in the transition from traditional to modern industrial society the site of the identification processes gradually shifted from outside of society to its interior, from gods and ancestors to actual social relationships." (Ib. 31) In this description cultural identities and diversity of languages (poetics, poetries) are not enemies but allies of globalization. Poetic consciousness finds its place on the planetary scale.

It makes us think of the naturalness of poetry, the normality of language functioning, the defence mechanisms for our inner (bodily) cosmos. "Appeal to nature is the strategy with which we resist external pressure, the logic of efficiency and calculation, and the obligation to communicate at any cost." (Melucci 1996: 26) We are always under the constraints of social relations — limited and unequally distributed material and mental (time, information, sensibility) resources.

"The internalization of the cultural universe of our society together with our capacity to give a cultural interpretation of our needs substitutes our "natural" dependence on the environment: first as an integra-

tion with this symbolic universe, then as a process of individuation whereby we acquire sufficient independence from the system so as to be able to produce autonomously what we formerly had to obtain from others. Adult identity can therefore be described as the ability to produce new identities by integrating the past and the choices available in the present into unity and continuity of the individual life-history." (Ib. 30)

How does this description suit poetical activities characterized by rich symbolic peculiarities in a unique message, universal signs for specific audiences, for individuals inside individuated time? Inside rhythms that are not in accord with social or universal times, but close to inner specificity, inner times where affections reside: dreams, love, sleep? Poetry as the other and the sage? The reminder of an ancient past? A link between the past and the future: there has always been love and that will continue, always has there been affection and its power is not diminishing, our body is not an instrumentally steered machine, but humanly reacting to the events around us. The machinery of the industrial capitalism is not eroding our feelings, our redemption is kept alive. Poetry binds together remnants of religious feelings with national and private ones on the path from traditional to post-modern values of human existence.

Poetry's "mission will not to be to provide new ideas but to announce what has been obstinately forgotten for centuries. Poetry is memory become image, and image become voice. The *other* voice is not the voice from beyond the grave: it is that of man fast asleep in the heart of hearts of mankind. /---/ It is our grandfather, our brother, our great-grandchild." (Paz 1991: 155) We identify him/her and understand the meaning of her/his message. This strengthens our identities: personal, national and human ones. And the capability to challenge global risks and threats on the personal level — singing, meditating, acting, giving meaning. Keeping the wholeness of our inner cosmos.

Poetry is a very weak market commodity, that embodies its power (of independence, of cultural/national/tribe struggle for independence etc.), as well as its weakness (no money, no power in the legal sense, etc.). In the global age poetry is gaining its secret strength from the growth of individuation where the need for special word utterance, intimate meanings, local flavour flowers again. Expressing itself in all kinds of forms: stressing silence, text-sound texts, rhyming rhythms of our body, opening our bodily memory, keeping away the clock's insistence. Each human body has its own metronome, and only if its high vibrations coincide with those of somebody else (a poet) or something else (a poem), the possibility to share philosophy, music, poetry can arise. Under their common heaven of global times.

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Globalización y transculturación en el lenguaje de la posmodernidad: angustia y ansiedad en la poesía actual

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La globalización sistemática con la consiguiente transculturización que los medios de comunicación masiva hace llegar a cada hogar en el mundo, nos pone frente a una realidad que no sólo modifica la expresión lingüística sino también la intimidad subjetiva del hablante. En estas circunstancias, no sólo se transforma el hábito de expresión; también sufren modificaciones nuestra existencia ideológica, sensitiva y auditiva. Uno de los aspectos más relevantes es la crisis por la que pasa toda expresión artística. Para nadie es novedad que está inmersa en un período que puede calificarse de decadente, de transición o de consenso en las ideas. Mucho tiene que ver con el derrumbe de las ideologías. Ya no existen ideales doctrinarios, utopías sentimentales, tampoco el barroquismo de la superabundancia adjetiva. Hoy, se ha reemplazado al ser humano por la apariencia de lo humano, calificado en lo que posee y representa: poder fáctico, decisión económica. Los ideales han desaparecido por una forma de subsistencia que puede definirse como puro éxito, pura apariencia, es decir, ser el mejor, estar en la cúspide y tener influencias.

Por otra parte, la televisión ha creado una ruptura cultural que nos lleva a la presencia de un hombre distinto. Este hombre no utiliza la reflexión; está llamado a actuar de acuerdo a los estímulos visuales y auditivos, es decir, apariencia y órdenes. Se ha roto el cordón umbilical de todo proceso generacional. No existen valores referenciales, sólo lo que está al alcance de la comprensión inmediata: el lenguaje coloquial, lo cotidiano como fuente de

formación cultural. Las respuestas no son pensadas sino instintivas o inspiradas en los cánones de un unanimismo populista. En este aspecto hay una suerte de animalización imitativa; ya que la animalización, distinta al concepto que expresa Vargas Llosa como referente para afrontar al hombre estigmatizado por dogmas sociales, religiosos o culturales, no proviene de una libertad interior, por el contrario, ésta se hace realidad debido a la sistematización globalista de los medios de comunicación masiva. Si esto lo llevamos al campo de la literatura, la situación se torna dramática. ¿Cómo puede evolucionar una sociedad sin pensamiento propio? Dentro del marketing de las asociaciones, podríamos definir que la globalización lingüística que se está introduciendo en las culturas, conlleva efectos de las grandes transnacionales del pensamiento fáctico.

Todo arte, como bien lo determina André Malraux, no es una eternidad, es una metamorfosis. Para que ello ocurra, debe hacerse libélula para llegar a mariposa, es decir, debe originarse en substratos culturales que conforman la identidad subyacente de todo creador.

La poesía actual ha consumado lo divergente. Se han unido la dispersión y la desacralización en torno a ella. Junto a los anti-poetas se han sumado los anticríticos. Esta amalgama de intereses que sólo se atiene a conducir la evolución de la cultura de abajo hacia arriba y no de arriba hacia abajo, es como invertir la pirámide, tiene sus orígenes en la demagogia hablante que en sociedades aún en proceso de madurez, se tornan piedras sillares del "status" que sostienen los grandes contubernios políticos en demanda de sus propios intereses de poder y continuismo electoralista.

Esto hace que los estamentos literarios: novela, cuento, poesía, drama, sean un mero pasatiempo de una sociedad que sólo busca cambiar constantemente para enfrentar la soledad de una posmodernidad que ha perdido el centro de sí mismo. La modernidad tenía en su centro a Dios; ahora, la posmodernidad ha perdido el centro que lo sostenía; ya Dios no está en la tierra, en la misma concepción antropocéntrica de la existencia; se encuentra fuera de nuestro planeta, en el cosmos recién inaugurado por lo vivencial de la ciencia. Esto no es novedad, en la especulación de los grandes

filósofos estaba inmerso este sentimiento principal; este accionar del pensamiento que se identifica con los grandes postulados de la creación. Es decir, todo lo que el hombre piensa, habla o ejecuta, ya estaba impreso en el fuego que lo anima. Son los caracteres esenciales de la naturaleza y, como tal, el hombre siendo naturaleza, proyecta y ejecuta su propia evolución. No puede detenerse; su vida es fluyente, su pensamiento es fluyente, su palabra es fluyente. Todo lo que lo anima y lo toca va muriendo y renovándose; recreación de vida y muerte al igual que los planetas. El camino de las galaxias cumple el ciclo vital de nacimiento, desarrollo y decadencia hasta ser en la expansión del universo, féretros cósmicos en un cementerio insondable de espectros. Esos mismos espectros que podrían definirse como los fantasmas del escritor. Todo lo que se escribe, se piensa y se revela, se ejecuta como una respuesta de un acto esencial y como tal, se metamorfosea en el espacio-tiempo en el cual se contiene y produce.

La literatura en general testimonia estos cambios de orientación: de lo meramente social, político o cultural, deviene en una ósmosis del pensar que asume una epistemología de las epistemologías. En los arquetipos que la tragedia griega nos ofrece, reparamos en primer plano la concepción del destino que los griegos asumían en torno a una dualidad o unicidad que es lucha entre lo apolíneo y lo dionisíaco. Por otra parte, el Destino se enlaza según el carácter y la acción del hombre que desde un primer momento se aparece como inevitable. Pero lo que determina los hechos es el interior del hombre, la manera como los caracteres se desarrollan. Nietzsche había asumido esa misma condición al decir que el hombre no es una meta, es un puente. Este pensamiento nos pone frente a la realidad más intrínseca de la existencia humana; los hombres llevan en sí los elementos que deben enfrentar continuamente, el ideal y el espejismo de la propia materialidad. El pensamiento es siempre joven, la materia envejece, haciéndonos creer, a veces, que aún somos muy jóvenes. Borges, que siempre sostenía entre sus palabras el arquetipo de las acciones, percibía la muerte sucesiva a la que el hombre estaba expuesto. En uno de sus cuentos, se declara culpable por haber asesinado a un niño. El Borges culpable ante el Borges niño, son dos realidades que viven y sobreviven en el mundo esencial de las

ideas. El simbolismo heraclitano y la concepción de las ideas platónicas son dos aspectos fundamentales para iniciarnos en la búsqueda de un mundo donde la realidad más oculta, aquello que está en el fondo del corazón, pueda iluminar el sendero hasta encontrarnos con nuestra propia identidad.

Los últimos años de la poesía y el pensamiento crítico de la literatura se ha conducido en una especie de ladera que no siempre alcanza el verdor de los valles fértiles, sino lo cáustico de una realidad distorsionada por la falta de pensamiento, de indagación existencial, reemplazada por la ilusión de dominar un mundo que no es el mundo; una realidad que no es una realidad sino una ilusión de vida virtual. Cuando en Chile surge la figura de Nicanor Parra como oposición al sentido poético de Neruda, lo hace en el primer momento para definirse como antipoeta. No sólo da un golpe lingüístico a la poesía sino también al concepto mismo de una subjetividad que encontraba en la palabra su expresión más íntima, su reflexión más penetrante, su sabiduría esencial. Se creía en la palabra como revelación de lo que estaba en la esencia del hombre y por eso su rescate era profundamente emocional, ideológico y sustantivo. Al surgir la antipoesía como un frente desacralizador de estilos y formalidades líricas, se produce el gran abismo. Entendamos que no me estoy refiriendo al lenguaje coloquial cuando éste se integra a un proceso de sentimentalidad poética, como lo serían en este caso, las "odas Elementales" de Pablo Neruda. Toda la antipoesía va a rescatar lo que otros dicen en su lengua popular; el antipoeta carece de voz propia; Parra habla por lo que otros dicen. Es un compilador de frases, eslóganes publicitarios. Las generaciones parrianas buscan el lenguaje de las multitudes, la socarronería criolla, la surrealidad de los marginados sociales, el "underground" lingüístico, el chiste directo; van a constituir el testimonio de sus antipoemas. Esta actitud que ha inscripto muchos adherentes a esta forma de lenguaje: Ignacio Valente (cura José Miguel Ibáñez Langlois), Tomás Harris, Diego Maquieira, Adán Méndez, quien resultó un disparo publicitario al vacío; Florido Pérez que lleva a extremos la intertextualidad proyectada por Parra, tomando versos de otros poetas, junto a Jaime Quezada, quien en uno de sus escritos hace espolvorear el cuerpo de su abuela con tanax porque tenía tifus exantemático;

Alfonso Calderón, escribiendo antipoemas en torno a Max Factor Hollywood y Marilyn Monroe, en un discurso que nada tiene de la emotiva caridad de Ernesto Cardenal. Pareciera que desde este punto de vista, la antipoesía resulta como un oportunista juego de dilentatismo "intelectual", sirviendo de referente cultural de una sociedad que se organiza en la urbe. Sus seguidores han escuchado el llamado de su líder antipoeta, y han llevado los mismos aditamentos a su propio nivel; ya se trate de fórmulas físicas, químicas o matemáticas, con la rutina de una explicación a lo explicado. Se rompe la lógica y la armonía de una frase, se recurre a tratamientos monosilábicos para expresar, por ejemplo, lo que puede ser un parto antipoético: silabeo, rupturas gramaticales, todo para el iniciado en esta corriente de desnaturalización poética y etimológica. Para ello han creado dudosos neologismos eliminando palabras para apurar la acción del discurso antipoético.

Este proceso de las generaciones posparrianas es más un problema sociológico que literario. Esta actitud ha penetrado en todos los estamentos culturales: en el teatro, en la danza, en la pantomima de bailarinas experimentales que más parecen acróbatas de circo. El culto al feísmo, a lo vacuo, a ser artista por constancia y no por vocación, ha generado un llamado de alerta por la falta de formación, por la anulación total de un pensamiento crítico y, sobre todo, el haber roto el cordón umbilical de un proceso cultural al que cada vez se entiende menos y se desconoce por las generaciones actuales, salvo en pequeñas dosis de síntesis informativa. Es evidente que el joven poeta no ha tenido otra formación que la de los adultos antipoetas; y éstos, por una supervalorización del éxito inmediato que exige la sociedad consumista actual, han querido demostrar que el arte es una mercadería más que puede adquirirse en los supermercados, accesible a todos y cada uno de sus clientes, puede ser también un productor de sensaciones. ¡Abajo la cultura, viva la cultura antipoética! La libertad está en el acceso a toda fuente de información con el mínimo esfuerzo. Hoy se habla de un poeta o novelista, sólo por referencias ya sea de un escritor o un periodista, pero su obra no se ha leído ni se leerá jamás por los mismos que aducen su conocimiento. Si consideramos que en el arte debe haber crisis como sostiene Gonzalo Millán, y que esa misma crisis, como afirma Primo Levi, "afectó el

uso del lenguaje, también es cierto que donde se inflige violencia en el hombre, también es infligida en el lenguaje" (Levi 1987). Es así como nuestro poeta insiste: "Hay una crisis tremenda de no confiar más en el lenguaje, de no creer más en la poesía".

En esta disyuntiva se ha formalizado un frente común de búsqueda como lo es los que se han reunido en torno a la poesía cósmica en busca de sus arquetipos, en esa visión de donde proceden de un arcano de sensaciones-ideas, donde la tierra es un acceder para sentir la nostalgia trágica de lo perdido. En esta poesía surgen claramente las instancias de un metalenguaje, el que nos permite penetrar esa zona oscura, densa de sugerencias y lenguaje esotérico. Es la respuesta ante una antipoesía gutural, arraigada en los espejismos que duran lo que la circunstancia de una generación la considera como apertura de espejos que, cuando se rompen, sólo queda el marco, y no saben que el espejo es su propia visión. Nos recuerda a Jacques Rigaut, el protagonista de la travesía del espejo, cuento del surrealista Braulio Arenas, que sólo podía atravesarlo disparándose un tiro, quebrando de ese modo el vidrio para encontrarse al otro lado, diciéndole adiós a la realidad.

Al analizar el proceso de la poesía latinoamericana en general, nos enfrentamos que la angustia existencial que sustenta la Edad media y la Modernidad, ha sido reemplazada por el signo de la ansiedad en la posmodernidad. El hombre medieval se sentía un ser fugaz, de paso por la tierra, anhelando hallar la salvación. Un mundo contaminado por el pecado original; un mundo, obra de Dios, aspecto muy significativo en esta búsqueda del hombre y su destino. Sus actos eran canalizados a través de una ética de la acción, armonizándose con los postulados que representaba. Una cultura occidental, maciza, sin transculturizaciones manifiestas, adscripto ese hombre a un plan infinito donde él era un conocimiento finito. La verdad de ese mundo se le presentaba al hombre tal como es en su esencia inteligible y en su aspecto sensible. De esa actitud se ocupan las obras de Santo Tomás de Aquino, San Francisco de Asís, Abelardo, Duns Scoto, Dante y tantos otros. Se sentía la unión con los grandes filósofos antiguos, Sócrates, Platón, Aristóteles. La fe conducía a la salvación final. Sabemos que desde el punto de vista de la crítica histórica, la modernidad se origina en la Reforma protestante iniciada por Martín Lutero, en el

siglo XVI. Dicha ruptura con la Edad Media se produce bajo dos conceptos distintos que tendrán mucha gravitación en el futuro: el primero, es que el justo se salva individualmente sólo por la fe; el segundo, es que no se puede redimir el pecado dado que las obras no están a la altura de Cristo, en consecuencia, debe procurarse el mayor bienestar de los hombres en este mundo. En su accionar cotidiano, el hombre debe preocuparse de hacer felices a los hombres, no pensando en la recompensa divina por sus obras. Como lo sostiene Occam, para conocer el mundo basta el conocimiento sensorial, lo mismo ocurre en el acercamiento a la Biblia, sin notas o comentarios "a priori". Se hace realidad la voz íntima de la conciencia en contacto con la verdad bíblica. Se produce entonces la separación entre el mundo religioso y el mundo secular. El hombre ha quedado bajo la realidad del conocimiento, iniciando así el período de la modernidad. Esto va a tener consecuencias directas sobre los procesos que se racionalizarán en los estamentos socioculturales de la posmodernidad.

Este siglo que está por terminar, nos ha dado referentes claves en la constatación de un proceso de pérdida, encuentros y desencuentros. Cuando leemos las obras de los poetas actuales, en todos ellos está la palabra desacralización. Son poetas que se han formado en la antiliteratura, tomando retazos de la poesía beatnik. Sin grandes teorías ni manifiestos, se detectan destellos tomados del futurismo, expresionismo, surrealismo o cubismo. A pesar que los signos de un cierre de ciclo producen la sensación de un corte transversal; ello nos lleva a considerar si no nos acercamos a un nuevo expresionismo.

Si analizamos el hombre histórico que accede a su circunstancia, el que vive y se somete a su temporalidad, ese hombre que ha abandonado lo planetario como lo representa Pablo Neruda o la tonante voz de Pablo de Rokha; la constante divergencia que se traduce en angustia en Humberto Díaz Casanueva, discípulo de Heidegger; o la búsqueda trascendente del mito asociada al asombro poético en Rosamel del Valle, o el símbolo de Icaro en Vicente Huidobro con su "Altazor", tal vez sea este último un presentimiento de lo que sucedería en esta época de robots cibernéticos. El Icaro-Altazor de Huidobro es un descenso que recuerda "Así habló Zaratustra", cuando le preguntan: "¿Es que intentas

ahora bajar tu fuego al valle? ¿Acaso no temes las pensa que se aplican a los incendiarios?" El aullido final conque termina "Altazor", cerrando su periplo metafórico, nos recuerda onomatopéyicamente ese primer testimonio de Dadá. Pareciera que en esta simbología está presente la desacralización de todo un lenguaje para volver a empezar.

Insistimos en este punto porque creemos que determina la inquietud que produce el conocimiento cuando se lo impulsa desde un plano superior al hombre común. Esto conlleva la respuesta y la acción de la cultura, de sus representantes, lo que ha sido reemplazado por el populismo de las artes, donde el pensamiento profundo debe ser alejado porque es un producto del ocioso burgués. Debemos dejar aclarado un aspecto esencial en nuestra crítica. Una sociedad que ha sido conmovida tan profundamente por las instancias dramáticas de este siglo que está por fenecer: dos guerras mundiales, desajustes geopolíticos, históricos, sociales, culturales y económicos, plantean serias interrogantes hacia el próximo milenio. Si la angustia de la época moderna ha sido reemplazada por la ansiedad en la posmodernidad, estamos enfrentados a una disyuntiva vital como afirma Vintila Horia: "El principio de incertidumbre, con su inmensa carga a favor del hombre, no toca siquiera las conciencias de los políticos" (Horia 1989). Esta incertidumbre niega el determinismo. Abismo tal abierto entre ciencia, filosofía y arte; y en consecuencia, resalta el desconocimiento de los políticos, desconocedores del organismo microfísico del hombre en contraposición a lo macrocósmico. Cada individuo posee una expansión vital que no es otra cosa que la incertidumbre; y ésta aparece como una instancia que no tiene límites. Por eso, el hombre es indiviso, una unidad en sí no igual a otro, es un microcosmos y no un macrocosmos. Esa identidad es única y, por tanto, todos los fracasos de las doctrinas políticas han surgido por considerar al hombre una masa compacta de adherentes. Así fueron llevados a la guerra, a los destino históricos más trágicos, que pudieron haberse evitado. Pensemos un momento en los manifiestos de Marinetti, Tristán Tzara, el grito de Dadá, para continuar con la necesidad de salvación durante el expresionismo, los postulados cubistas o los planteamientos surrealistas. Walter Falk dice que "En el siglo XX, la poesía ha

puesto de manifiesto que el hombre se ha precipitado en un abismo. Esto se puede describir de forma muy variada. Pero en ninguna descripción podrá pasarse por alto que se trata de un abismo del sufrimiento”.

Existe un individuo que palpita herido de soledad, llevado por una angustia constante ante la disolución de una sociedad indifferente, expuesto a la masificación. Así lo entenderá Ionesco al gritar su personaje ¡Soy un hombre! Mientras la manda de rinocerontes ha invadido el mundo del microcosmo, del individuo. El macrocosmo a sido lanzado a un destino irracional: Primera y Segunda Guerra Mundial, unidas a las otras seculares que invaden y desmembran territorios. Es el enfrentamiento de las culturas. Los pueblos han creído en esta asociación y fueron dispuestos a morir. Algunos escritores entendieron la realidad interior, y se bañaron en las aguas orientales de un pensamiento esencial para hacer frente a esa incertidumbre que les deja la posmodernidad. Si la cultura europea está en crisis, según Husserl, Nietzsche, Spengler, ¿qué queda para nosotros los latinoamericanos, que somos fruto de las transmigraciones culturales de la vieja Europa?

En Chile, la poesía ha sufrido los embates de los ideologismos. Podemos hablar de un antes y un después, es decir, el proceso antes de la caída del gobierno socialista de Allende en 1973, y después, la desestabilización política democrática ante el régimen militar de Pinochet. La poesía se vio enfrentada a su propia disyuntiva: encerrarse en un esteticismo que no ofreciera peligro ante el poder instaurado o pasar a la ofensiva literaria, el mensaje encubierto o explícito. No importaba lo formal, la urgencia era lo que definía un contexto poético, identificarse en el plano de la acción política. Al mismo tiempo, un factor de desolación animó las vertientes nuevas, más aún, no creyeron en el proceso anterior; el pasado era un pesado lastre. Neruda fue el símbolo, pero sin la esencia poética que contenía su obra; se consideró el desafío político que implicaba su nombre. Se instauró una poesía que venía desde el exilio con influencias de las más variadas culturas; otra que se fue configurando en lo urbano. Se produjeron varias vertientes: las que se encerraron en la nostalgia lírica y en el lenguaje de una inocencia perdida sin desprenderse del realismo social, transfigurado por Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot. En Jorge Teillier

se sentía que el poeta cantaba sus raíces, su pueblo natal, los trenes que fueron su niñez, su sentimiento poético entraba por su sangre, más allá del espacio y el tiempo histórico. En esa línea nos encontramos con los últimos eslabones de la generación de 1938, la del Frente Popular y las reivindicaciones sociales: Edmundo Herrera convocando al prójimo desde su herencia nerudiana hacia un nuevo despertar del pueblo; Mario Ferrero, poeta de profundas significaciones metafóricas-existenciales en su extensa obra literaria, ha dejado valiosos testimonios sobre el criticismo histórico en Neruda y Vallejo; Juvencio Valle bajo la simbología del azul de Rubén Darío, modernismo y un acendrado espíritu campesino con sus más de noventa años. En la poesía femenina encontramos en Daisy Bennett, el transcendentalismo metafísico con un sentido profundo de sensualidad, en una palabra que se enfrenta a las esencias de los conocimientos; otros aportes hallamos en la obra de Francisca Ossandón, quien con un lenguaje de ahondamiento subjetivo, nos ubica ante el tono de una larga confidencia.

Los aportes que han alcanzado una primera etapa de definiciones, no sólo datan de los años sesenta (Gonzalo Millán); o la prolongación de los años cincuenta como el caso de Enrique Lihn, en su primera inmersión de poeta, después se inscribiría como antipoeta, atesora prosaísmo y una receta como preparar un caldo de tortugas en su libro "París, Situación Irregular"; José Miguel Vicuña, heredero de una sólida cultura clásica; Miguel Arteche, en un derrotero de lejanías y añoranzas a través de un cristianismo metafísico conocedor del siglo de oro español y de los poetas ingleses y alemanes; otros como Eduardo Anguita, encendido de un catolicismo filosófico. Antonio de Undurraga, fiel a su éxtasis helénico, penetrando el mundo actual con rupturas que significaron la huella de los poetas rusos de los años sesenta. Alfonso Larraona Kasten, al igual que Arteche ha expresado en sonetos una verdadera creación y dominio de la forma sin perder la expresión lírica en su natural decir. Andrés Sabella, heredero del desierto nortino de Chile, asume una poesía de valor sintético, expresión de ideas y actitud lúdica. Así encontramos las experiencias poéticas de un cerebral Armando Uribe Arce, entre muchos otros que han dicho su palabra generacional. Asimismo, Gonzalo Rojas, quien en su obra adopta herencias parrianas bajo un sofisticado cono-

cimiento de las culturas clásicas. En estas últimas promociones es evidente que el nombre de Raúl Zurita desata controversias, desde las más exegéticas críticas, donde se analizan las influencias que en su poesía han ejercido las más variadas fuentes: Bob Dylan, los poetas beatniks, la teorización matemática que ensayó Pablo de Rokha, junto a simbologías como las de Melville, además del planteamiento que formula desde una geometría no euclidiana, hasta alcanzar una adhesión sin límites entre ciertos críticos que obedecen a un revisionismo de las teorías liberacionistas.

Por otra parte, la presencia sustantiva de la etnia mapuche se hace notar con Elicura Chihuailaf, quien afirma que "Poesía es el canto de los antepasados el día de invierno que arde y apaga esta melancolía tan personal". Es el canto de la tierra desheredada; de los años de lucha contra el conquistador y, después, el desarraigo por los intereses de una macroeconomía que lentamente, va dominando los espacios de sus dioses y antepasados. Es el problema de la transculturización de un pueblo con la consiguiente erradicación de sus valores míticos. Una especie de fagocitación de una cultura a otra. Le siguen en este Apocalipsis de sus tierras Rayen Kuyen, Lorenzo Aillapán y Leonel Lienlaf, entre otras voces.

En esta pluralidad de caminos y sentimientos ondulatorios, en estos últimos treinta y cinco años, ha emergido una poesía que se define a sí misma como urbana. En ella surgen los mismos elementos de desacralización. Hay un alejamiento formalista; no se cree en los procesos; el poeta escribe lo que se le ocurre, una suerte de automatismo heredado de las etapas experimentales que nos entregaron las experiencias surrealistas, pero sin la teorización científica que ellos deducían de sus encuentros con la filosofía y el psicoanálisis. Nombres como Oscar Hahn, Waldo Rojas, Alberto Rubio, Omar Lara con fragmentos impresionistas nos deja sus envíos postales; Hernán Lavín Cerda, recrea la carnavalización de un lenguaje discurrente; Juan Camerón, José María Memet, Eduardo Llanos, entre muchos otros autores que utilizan giros coloquiales, fermentos anecdóticos, actitudes conversacional que a veces adoptan la figuración del verso. Ha sido una respuesta a situaciones conflictivas que entrabaron la historia, otorgando a lo exterior una realidad confusa, diluida entre el término de un discurso poético y la reacción ante un lenguaje que no los re-

presentaba. Juan Luis Martínez, adherido a los collages originados en artículos periodísticos, con materiales entresacados en la experiencia visual de un Antonin Artaud y semejante al pop-art americano de los años sesenta.

Una experiencia nueva en la literatura chilena es la aparición de una generación de mujeres que toma posesión de un espacio que antes no se le había permitido. Si bien, en el año 1912, Gabriela Mistral conmueve a la sociedad de su tiempo, al dar a conocer sus "Sonetos de La Muerte", surgiendo con ellos una voz apasionada que polemiza teológicamente con Jehová, el Dios castigador. Nunca antes una mujer había desafiado con tanto ardor la conciencia conservadora y moralizadora de su época, al expresar en su poesía el erotismo necrofilico hasta lo más profundo del dolor. Esta identidad de lo femenino, se proyecta en la generación del ochenta y es, precisamente, cuando la mujer que ha perdido a su esposo o compañero en el exilio, asume el hogar como madre-padre. Unido a esta nueva realidad su ideal de lucha, no sólo en el campo social sino también en el político contingente. Son años duros, crueles para su naturaleza. Surge así la concepción feminista como elemento disidente de la sociedad paternalista, la que se traducirá en diversas obras donde la liberación de los sexos marcará profundamente esta nueva relación, emparentada con la aceptación del tercer sexo. Comunidades homosexuales harán valer sus derechos en todo el mundo ante las calificaciones de una sociedad conservadora, prejuiciosa y machista. Así se conforma un esquema feminista que tendrá consecuencias profundas: Lucía Guerra en su ensayo "La Mujer Fragmentada: Historias de un Signo" (Guerra 1995) dirá que Dios creó a la mujer sacándole una costilla a Adán mientras dormía; no la creó desde el pensamiento sino desde el inconsciente, dejándola sin inteligencia, sometida al cerebro masculino, ejerciéndose una subordinación que llega hasta el día de hoy en algunos substratos sociales donde impera el paternalismo.

Por otra parte, la poesía femenina de las últimas generaciones mantiene en su cauce la forma antipoética; en algunos casos ésta se traduce en una experiencia prosística con ciertos aditamentos imaginativos que intentan romper el esquema rutinario en busca de la originalidad perdida. Es un grupo que se define a sí mismo

como un "Cuarto Propio", es decir, un espacio de la casa donde la mujer asume su liberación de una sociedad machista, conservadora en sus principios con un aditamento aburguesado en sus propias proposiciones lingüísticas y, al mismo tiempo, exige hablar ella de su propia sexualidad como de sus sentimientos que están ejemplarizados en algunos casos, en una concepción humanística-cristiana. En otros, se plantea la diversidad de caracteres y experiencias al afrontar el sexo y el erotismo, donde antagonismo y placer se sitúan en un plano de relevancias confrontacionales, junto a la angustia metafísica que se retoma desde un camino orientado por la argentina Alejandra Pizarnik. Entre este heterogéneo grupo podemos mencionar a Paz Molina, Alejandra Basualto, Carmen Berenguer, Eugenia Brito, Teresa Calderón, Francisca Agurto, Rosanna Byrne, Astrid Fugellie, Heddy Navarro, Verónica Zondek, entre otras. Muchos nombres han quedado en el camino; otros han publicado diversos libros; pero en todos ellos surge un afán de experimentación antipoética que no todas las veces retoma la herencia de una cultura donde lo apolíneo es un paso a lo dionisiaco. Estamos en un tiempo donde los acomodos existenciales de un lenguaje extranacional intimidan al hablante por no parecer barroco, sumido en su propia lengua heredada; donde las culturas se interponen con una velocidad de información, incapaz de ser asumida y reflexionada en la propia interioridad del ser nacional; ha de producir cambios notables en la conformación del hombre del futuro.

Es evidente que si hablamos de poesía, no podemos dejar de mencionar el nombre de uno de los poetas más representativos en estos últimos años: me refiero a Jorge del Río, quien representa la soledad del individuo en su más profunda experiencia metafísica, donde la circunstancia histórica nos lleva a la realidad de un hombre que se adentra en la territorialidad raigal de su propia experiencia. Sin dejar de lado el fervor lírico de sus metáforas, la armonía visual de sus ensoñaciones; es hoy por hoy, una de las voces más creadoras en la confidencia lírica. Otra de las representantes de su generación, es la de Isabel Gómez, quien aborda los temas de una sexualidad alegórica sin estigmas a través de una verdad poética donde la palabra concuerda con una subjetividad yacente y expositiva.

Dentro de estas promociones, es indudable que la voz de Stella Díaz Varín es considerada como una presencia combatiente donde la mujer se asienta en su propia territorialidad anímica e ideológica, como líder.

¿Qué nos depara el futuro? Tenemos grandes manes, grandes conturbadores de los que no piensan. Pero hallamos cierto grado de intelectualismo que tiene su centro en la idea más que en los sentidos; en el objeto más que en el individuo; introspección de la piel pero no de su sentido más profundo; gusto por desvariar en axiomas científicos; poco análisis, más bien sucesos. Es decir, una poesía experimental que desconfía del idioma; una poesía que no surge de lo profundo, sino de lo exterior, del objeto; y ella va dirigida a la conciencia común, el adherirse a fórmulas de verbalismos rupturistas, a constituir sociedades iconoclastas en la letra, pero administradas por dogmatismos seculares, bajo una supuesta actualización que asume la posmodernidad. La dinámica de cada generación es como decir ahora nos toca a nosotros. Es una irrupción solidaria de un grupo de jóvenes que quieren apoderarse de los medios culturales; son más bien ejecutivos de la cultura con valores que están inmersos en la economía de libre mercado.

Nos acercamos a un fin de siglo, y en él están los caminos hechos. Nada hay nuevo bajo el sol, se dice. Y es en este horizonte, donde dando vueltas al planeta, nos encontraremos indefectiblemente en el renacimiento. Las raíces ontológicas están ya desarrollándose. A una época de desconcierto, de arbitrariedades semánticas, de comprensión aliteraria, de escritura automática, donde se ha perdido la relación sujeto y objeto, observador y observado, tendremos hacia adelante el proceso cognoscitivo. Dejaremos de ser observadores, de creer en el realismo virtual como realidad objetiva; esto nos conducirá a una subjetividad que ha estado siempre inmersa en la trascendencia de lo humano; aquello que está más allá de lo inactivo; la realidad fluyente en el espíritu de las cosas.

Un ser nuevo, aprehendido de su pasado, se impondrá con la nueva aurora, en este difícil y vacío mundo donde las ideologías han caído para dejar espacio al pensar, el comienzo de toda luz, el haz que iluminará la caverna de las cavernas, el hombre del siglo XXI iluminando con un faro su semejante.

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Poesía española y postmodernidad: ideología y estética

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Pensar la postmodernidad requiere, entre otras cosas, pensar el pensamiento, cuestionar los dispositivos y las estrategias de análisis que hemos heredado y valorar en qué medida esos dispositivos y esas estrategias resultan útiles para comprender el mundo en que estamos instalados. Y es que pensar el mundo actual pasa antes por pensar el modo en que pensamos.

Quiero comenzar planteando algunas preguntas con objeto de centrar el análisis, preguntas que actúen como detonantes de la reflexión y la crítica y provoquen el debate. Por ejemplo: ¿es la postmodernidad un acontecimiento o un discurso?, ¿se dan elementos, rasgos, características específicas en nuestra época que permitan hablar de una sensibilidad postmoderna? Si la respuesta es afirmativa, ¿hay detrás de esa sensibilidad una particular ideología?, ¿cómo se manifiesta dicha sensibilidad en la poesía española de estos últimos cincuenta años?, ¿es lícito hablar de un canon hegemónico en la poesía española postmoderna?, o, por el contrario, ¿aconseja la variedad de formas que presenta esa poesía prescindir del canon y apreciar su singularidad específica en la suma de sus diferencias, en un paisaje polícromo caracterizado por la diversidad?¹ Si procede, ¿requiere el análisis de la poesía

¹ Jenaro Talens (1989) se ha referido a los prejuicios y las falsedades que supone la consideración del *canon* en cualquier análisis de la realidad. Sobre el literario en particular ha escrito: "Aceptar el modo en que se estudia y se enseña lo que entendemos por canon literario, implica aceptar también la existencia misma de dicho canon como

española postmoderna una sensibilidad diferente?, ¿son necesarios nuevos modelos teóricos, críticos y analíticos que se adapten a las especiales circunstancias — si las hubiere — con que se presenta el objeto poético postmoderno? Y, por último, en relación a las categorías pragmáticas del autor y el receptor, ¿desde dónde se habla en esos objetos, con qué registros y a quiénes se dirigen?

Mientras que la modernidad representó una actitud caracterizada por la crítica implacable (al pasado — del que pretendía a todas luces diferenciarse —, a sí misma y al futuro, que trató inútilmente de construir), la postmodernidad se encuentra asolada por una profunda crisis que ha afectado a la estabilidad de sus débiles estructuras. Se habla así con frecuencia de un cierto descrédito de las ideologías y de los grandes discursos de emancipación fundados en esas ideologías, de desprestigio de ciertos valores (solidaridad, generosidad, altruismo, justicia, autenticidad) y, por el contrario, de alza de otros (competitividad, egoísmo, individualismo exacerbado, fomento de las desigualdades, apariencia), de ausencia de criterios y principios rectores que valoren y enjuicien las diferentes conductas éticas y estéticas. Todo ello ha

algo cuya consistencia viene avalada por la fuerza de la tradición. Qué autores estudiar, cómo abordarlos y en torno a qué principios explicativos son cuestiones que la presencia indiscutida del canon deja de lado por innecesarias. No planteárselas, sin embargo, supone asumir la distorsión ideológica que sirve a aquél de base y fundamento epistemológico" (Talens 1989: 3). Frente a la visión de la literatura como una práctica discursiva burguesa encaminada hacia el disfrute privado (idea que encontramos en algunos cualificados historiadores y críticos literarios españoles de estas últimas décadas), el Colectivo Alicia Bajo Cero (1997) plantea un análisis material de la escritura literaria que tenga en cuenta sus contenidos ideológicos y su trasfondo social. Por su parte, José María Pozuelo Yvancos (1995) se ocupa del concepto de *canon* en la teoría literaria contemporánea y aboga, frente a planteamientos centrados en la búsqueda de universales estéticos, por una interpretación histórica, dinámica e ideológica del canon: "Todo canon se resuelve como estructura histórica, lo que lo convierte en cambiante, movedizo y sujeto a los principios reguladores de la actividad cognoscitiva y del sujeto ideológico, individual o colectivo, que lo postula" (Pozuelo Yvancos 1995: 38).

promovido la aparición de un panorama extraordinariamente complejo en el que resulta muy difícil orientarse. Ahora bien, cabe suponer que la carencia de guías de comportamiento, la inconsistencia y debilidad de algunos de los relatos surgidos en estas últimas décadas, la desconfianza frente a todos los discursos sistemáticos y la defensa decidida de la libertad e independencia del artista como características inherentes de la postmodernidad pueden y deben actuar como detonantes de una nueva y necesaria *sensibilidad crítica postmoderna*.²

A mi juicio, ese descrédito de las ideologías y ese eclecticismo artístico que, heredados de la modernidad, la postmodernidad ha hecho suyos han propiciado el surgimiento de dos modos de conocimiento, explicación y valoración de la realidad postmoderna perfectamente diferenciados entre sí. Aunque los dos modelos responden a actitudes postmodernas igualmente lícitas y extendidas, se distinguen por presentar distintas ideas del mundo. La ausencia de discursos dominantes en las diferentes parcelas del saber histórico, filosófico, económico, político, etc. y de la producción artística ha favorecido la pugna, el debate, la tensión, la lucha dialéctica entre las distintas opciones ideológicas y entre las diversas maneras de representación artística. Y ello, desde mi punto de vista, es bueno y debe ser aprovechado en favor del progreso individual y colectivo. Dos modos, decía, de conocimiento, explicación y valoración que han surgido de una misma realidad postmoderna y ante la que presentan, sin embargo, diferentes y en ocasiones contrapuestos análisis. Mientras que uno de ellos, reflejo de una postmodernidad acomodaticia, dócil, irreflexiva, sumisa y acrítica, se limita a dar cuenta del caos teórico y artístico en el que

² En otro lugar (Saldaña 1997) he intervenido en el debate planteado a lo largo de los últimos doscientos años en el terreno del pensamiento crítico y estético, un debate protagonizado, de una parte, por los defensores del proyecto de la modernidad y los partidarios de una recuperación selectiva de ese mismo proyecto, y, de otra, por los que, desde la modernidad o desde la postmodernidad, han mantenido actitudes profundamente críticas con el desarrollo de dicho proyecto o han argumentado la inviabilidad del mismo en la sociedad por ellos denominada como *postmoderna*, *postindustrial*, *posthistórica*.

estamos sumidos, donde se desenvuelve con una gran versatilidad, el otro — según creo, mucho más interesante y merecedor de nuestra estima —, resultado de una postmodernidad crítica, reflexiva, inconformista, inquieta y deseosa de transformaciones, no sólo se dedica a describir ese mismo caos teórico y artístico, sino que también lo denuncia y trata de promover alternativas. Mientras que el primero, carente de ideología, profundamente inmovilista, se limita a conservar un presente que ni tan siquiera trata de analizar y comprender pero en el que se encuentra muy a gusto, el segundo, mucho más dinámico y progresista, se orienta hacia la superación de las condiciones que rigen ese presente y la conquista del futuro.

Pudiera parecer capciosa y maniquea la descripción del panorama postmoderno que acabo de esbozar pero lo cierto es que ambos modelos de pensamiento, el conservador y el crítico, surgen de una misma desconfianza generalizada en la postmodernidad frente a todos los discursos sistemáticos heredados de la modernidad y de la necesidad de recuperar unas pautas de investigación adecuadas a nuestro presente histórico (o, según algunos postestructuralistas, posthistórico). La desconfianza frente a todos los discursos sistemáticos ha fomentado en muchos casos actitudes pasivas y acríticas de conocimiento fundadas en la ausencia de reflexión, contrarias a plantearse interrogantes y a proponer explicaciones que traten de iluminar las auténticas condiciones que rigen nuestra presencia en el mundo. Se trata, en todo caso, de actitudes perniciosas, desprovistas de la más mínima capacidad de enjuiciamiento crítico, reacias a mantener cualquier tipo de relación conflictiva con el presente, de actitudes que han olvidado que el progreso es, en gran medida, fruto de la duda, la reflexión, la crítica y el debate. Si, por una parte, la desconfianza frente a todos los discursos sistemáticos ha propiciado este tipo de actitudes pasivas y acríticas, por otra ha provocado el desarrollo de modelos que muestran abiertamente su disconformidad y su enfrentamiento con respecto a la realidad postmoderna de la que surgen, una realidad que tratan a toda costa de superar. Así pues, tanto la desconfianza más o menos justificada frente a todos los discursos sistemáticos como la carencia de guías de comportamiento ético y la defensa de la libertad e independencia del artista para elaborar

su obra caracterizan una determinada sensibilidad postmoderna e intervienen en la configuración de su paradigma estético, un paradigma que es resultado de la crisis heredada por una postmodernidad perpleja que carece de una razón dominante y que, confundida por la complejidad de un presente que no sabe, puede o desea asimilar, fomenta con cierta frecuencia actitudes caracterizadas por un tipo particular de individualismo hedonista, un tipo de individualismo que tiende a valorar más el placer y el triunfo a corto plazo que el esfuerzo y la lucha por alcanzar el futuro.³

Todo esto afecta a la posible y, a mi juicio, necesaria constitución de una teoría estética postmoderna interesada en restaurar las dimensiones ideológicas y políticas que laten en el fondo de cualquier actividad intelectual (Connor 1996), una teoría estética que sea el resultado de nuevas actitudes y sensibilidades, cuyo principal objetivo no consiste tanto en la negación de cualquier orden estable como en la deslegitimación de la supuesta coherencia y estabilidad de todos los órdenes heredados de la modernidad (que muestran abiertamente su incapacidad a la hora de abordar el complejo panorama artístico postmoderno) y en la propuesta de nuevas pautas de investigación que afronten con las garantías necesarias las distintas manifestaciones artísticas que se producen en ese panorama. Por otra parte, no podemos ser tan ingenuos como para pensar que esa posible, necesaria y compleja constitución de una teoría estética postmoderna pueda surgir de la nada, en el vacío, al margen del legado transmitido desde la modernidad. Más aún, no sólo no hay que perder de vista determinadas prácticas de recuperación selectiva de la modernidad, sino que desde la misma modernidad se han propuesto diferentes planteamientos de anticipación de lo que podemos considerar una teoría estética

³ En otro trabajo (Saldaña 1994-1995) he tratado de mostrar cómo la razón moderna se ha revelado inútil en el momento de ofrecer soluciones de convivencia en una sociedad como la postmoderna, tremendamente tecnologizada e irracional en muchos de sus aspectos, en la que las relaciones económicas y los medios de comunicación de masas se han hecho con el lugar de privilegio que ocupaba la razón y desempeñan papeles decisivos.

postmoderna⁴. Incluso Michel Foucault, un pensador en absoluto entusiasmado con los itinerarios que ha recorrido la modernidad, recomienda “hacer el análisis de nosotros mismos en tanto que seres históricamente determinados, en cierta medida, por la *Aufklärung*” (Foucault 1993: 13–14). En este sentido, la crítica esgrimida desde algunos sectores de la postmodernidad implica una lectura y una recuperación selectivas de la herencia cultural e intelectual de la modernidad, que se presenta, al igual que sucede con la postmodernidad, como una actitud o una sensibilidad más que como un simple período histórico.

De este modo, leer críticamente la poesía española postmoderna exige desprenderse de numerosos prejuicios culturales, morales y estéticos, adentrarse en un vasto paisaje polifónico en el que es preciso diferenciar las voces de los ecos, viajar por caminos inexplorados y recorrer de nuevo — esta vez libres de espurios intereses — los otros excesivamente transitados, reescribir, en definitiva, lo ya escrito y sancionado⁵. Tal lectura supone, entre otras cosas, constatar la pérdida de importancia de conceptos como la *autoridad del sentido* o el *significado trascendental*, que han dominado y condicionado durante mucho tiempo nuestras sesgadas relaciones con los textos artísticos, unos textos que se presentan ya como piezas de un inmenso engranaje ideológico, político, estético y cultural y en el que únicamente adquieren pleno sentido si son vistos y leídos a la luz de otros textos ya escritos, algo que favorece la práctica de propuestas interdiscursivas y metapoéticas puesto que si es verdad que el mundo, o una parte de él, ya no puede ser aprehendido de forma fiable en un texto literario, “Si la

⁴ Todo ello supone valorar en su justa medida, sin vehemencia, la carga de originalidad de la postmodernidad y sus vínculos con el pasado, y nos enseña algo que no debemos perder de vista: “El programa adecuado para el postmodernismo no es una simple extensión del programa moderno [...], ni una simple intensificación de ciertos aspectos del modernismo, ni — al contrario — una total subversión o rechazo tanto del modernismo, como del llamado premodernismo: el realismo burgués ‘tradicional’” (Barth 1985: 16).

⁵ Un análisis más detallado de los presupuestos ideológicos, políticos, estéticos y comerciales sobre los que se asienta esta poesía puede leerse en Alfredo Saldaña (1997a).

poesía ya no puede hablar del mundo, hablará, al menos, de cómo otros poemas han hablado del mundo. El discurso del método suplanta así al método del discurso" (Talens 1989a: 56). El mundo desaparece detrás del texto y sólo tenemos acceso al texto del mundo.

Sin ser algo exclusivo de nuestro tiempo, la escritura poética de la postmodernidad ha mostrado con insistencia creciente este fenómeno y, así, dicha escritura puede contemplarse como un Libro de libros, como un conjunto de textos cuya suma remite a un único e ininteligible (por inacabable) Texto. Esta situación explica la obsesión por la intertextualidad que caracteriza la literatura postmoderna, según la cual el sentido de unos textos depende de (o se encuentra en) la lectura de otros precedentes⁶. Así pues, si el texto poético encuentra a su autor con frecuencia en otros textos — casi siempre literarios — ya escritos, parece indispensable reformular el concepto de *autoría textual* a la luz de esta situación, algo que afecta a una parte significativa de la poesía española postmoderna, aquélla que ha hecho de la literatura un tema literario con una entidad semejante a la de otros temas ya clásicos.⁷

⁶ Un caso paradigmático de este tipo de escritura en la poesía española de estas últimas décadas lo encontramos en la obra de Ignacio Prat, sobre la que Túa Blesa (1990: 16) señala: "leer los textos de Ignacio Prat es partir hacia un universo de sinsentido, una patria donde se habla la confusión de lenguas, hacia una escritura que llegará a devorarse a sí misma — en su afán por deglutir los textos de otros —, y es también releer la poesía de las últimas décadas". El poema dialoga consigo mismo y con la tradición y en el mismo poema se produce un diálogo entre el autor y el lector. Según Juan José Lanz (1995: 184–185): "Este diálogo múltiple desarrollado en la escritura poética no es privativo de la poesía postmoderna, pero sólo en ella adquiere un valor absoluto, transformando la intertextualidad, característica de toda creación literaria, en el ser único de la creación contemporánea".

⁷ Estos rasgos no son exclusivos de la poesía, sino que afectan a otras modalidades artísticas. Así, según Ken Benson (1994), la narrativa española postmoderna se caracteriza por la intertextualidad, la crisis de la autoridad cultural, la indeterminación, la crisis de la subjetividad y la fragmentación.

Por otra parte, leer críticamente la poesía española postmoderna implica contemplar un mosaico de culturas y tradiciones artísticas diversas a las que esa poesía acude de diferentes maneras, con distintas intenciones y con diversos objetivos. Sin embargo, el panorama que aparece ante nuestros ojos no resulta, al fin y al cabo, tan novedoso puesto que situaciones similares encontramos en otros momentos de la tradición literaria, por ejemplo, en el modernismo, estética encumbrada y reivindicada por un poeta central de los setenta, Pedro Gimferrer. Así, José Olivio Jiménez (1989: 1) se ha referido a “la coincidencia entre el eclecticismo — el sincretismo — del Modernismo [...] y el paralelo que se dio en la estética que iban configurando los jóvenes de España hacia 1970”. Frente a la quiebra y la transgresión permanentes de una modernidad que se presenta como la *tradición de la ruptura* (O. Paz *dixit*⁸), cierta sensibilidad artística postmoderna — desprovista de la capacidad crítica que acompañó a un buen número de manifestaciones modernas y asolada por una profunda crisis que afecta a la configuración de su paradigma estético — ha propiciado los contactos con una tradición a la que se siente estrechamente vinculada. Frente al deterioro que experimenta la tradición en significativas actitudes modernas (recordemos cómo Hölderlin basaba su oposición antigüedad clásica frente a modernidad en buena medida sobre la aporía de la imitación clasicista por parte del arte moderno; cómo Baudelaire renegaba del ideal absoluto, rechazaba el principio de imitación y abogaba por la ausencia de modelo; o cómo, en fin, Adorno se refería a la modernidad como un período en que la tradición es vulnerada continuamente), desde algunos sectores artísticos de la postmodernidad se ha optado por reabrir los canales de comunicación con una tradición que ya no se contempla como algo impuesto, sino que es aceptado con frecuencia de manera indiscriminada.

⁸ Octavio Paz (1995) reconoce que la modernidad — a pesar de asentarse sobre dos formas de ruptura que actúan como señas de identidad (la revolución política y la revolución estética) — es deudora de dos restauraciones previas a su aparición: el Renacimiento y la Reforma protestante.

De esta manera, parte — y parte muy aplaudida — de la poesía española postmoderna contempla la tradición como un pasado en ruinas dispuesto a ser reproducido o, en el mejor de los casos, reactualizado sin atender a ningún tipo de criterio normativo. Es la *auctoritas* de una tradición sancionada por el uso y la reiteración lo que parece imponerse, pero esto, en sí mismo, no resulta novedoso ni perjudicial puesto que, tal como defiende el Colectivo Alicia Bajo Cero (1994: 10), es “evidente que es imposible escribir desde la ausencia de tradición y que el problema no es éste: es a qué tradición se adscribe cada práctica y cómo”. Por otra parte, conviene no olvidar que, como recuerda J. J. Lanz (1995: 196), ha habido “un uso sesgado, viciado, de los conceptos de *tradición* y *clasicismo* aplicados a la poesía española actual por buena parte de la crítica”. Así, por lo que a la lírica española postmoderna se refiere y dejando a un lado la actividad transgresora y rupturista que encontramos en los primeros textos de algunos novísimos, esta recuperación del pasado artístico y cultural se materializa, entre otros aspectos, en el tratamiento de determinadas formas, estrofas, tendencias, temas y motivos tradicionales.

En los casos más interesantes esta reactualización se produce de manera crítica, con lo que sus protagonistas renuncian así a la elaboración de fastuosos ejercicios de arqueología artística. Sin embargo, lo habitual es que la mera reproducción y el principio de imitación como tal primen sobre la mirada crítica y el proceso selectivo⁹. La reacción y el pasado parecen tener mayor entidad que el progreso y el futuro. Se han establecido unas relaciones con la tradición artística y cultural extraordinariamente estrechas, hasta

⁹ Este fenómeno ha sido percibido y, en algunos casos, denunciado por diferentes críticos. J. O. Jiménez (1989: 2, n. 1), por ejemplo, ha afirmado: “El culturalismo extremado y gratuito, convertido ya en *pastiche* libresco y superficial (lo cual tampoco faltó, por momentos, en los novísimos y dominó aún más en sus inevitables epígonos) habría de ser la piedra de toque contra la cual reaccionarán, y por fortuna, los más jóvenes poetas españoles de hoy”. J. J. Lanz (1995), por su parte, no ve la situación de la misma manera y señala: “en el diálogo que gran parte de la poesía actual establece con la tradición, no existe una voluntad de análisis profundo, sino la pretensión de acceder a un espacio determinado que otorga patente de calidad” (Lanz 1995: 197).

el punto de que se ha llegado a hablar de *culturalismo poético* o *poesía culturalista* (si no dominante, esta tendencia ha tenido un peso específico relevante y ha sido enormemente valorada en ciertos e influyentes sectores de la poesía y la crítica literaria españolas de estos últimos años)¹⁰. Se trata, en la mayoría de los casos, de poetas afónicos; su voz es el altavoz — y no precisamente la voz más alta y elevada — de una determinada cultura.

Leer críticamente la poesía española postmoderna requiere, en este sentido, ser conscientes de la crisis heredada de la modernidad, del estado de quiebra y orfandad que asola a nuestros sistemas de pensamiento, del final al que ha llegado el viejo ideal clásico que soñaba la obra de arte como un organismo acabado, cerrado y perfecto. Así, una actitud postmoderna crítica y vigilante ha de imponerse unos enormes esfuerzos epistemológicos si desea emprender la labor de reconstrucción de un determinado panorama artístico. Esta labor de reconstrucción comienza, como ya advirtiera Adorno, con la aceptación de la falta de unidad de la obra artística y, por otra parte, con la negación de la validez de un sistema estético capaz de dar cuenta de la producción artística

¹⁰ Una cierta crítica de urgencia interesada en ocultar la policromía de un paisaje bajo una sola tonalidad ha sido la principal impulsora de esta tendencia. Esta crítica, practicada en diferentes medios de comunicación (emisoras de radio, programas de televisión, suplementos culturales de periódicos, etc.) y avalada por influyentes firmas del aparato literario, se ha esforzado en disolver la compleja realidad de unos hechos tras la monocorde y monótona virtualidad de un discurso que se ha convertido ya en un lugar común en la reflexión literaria española de estas últimas décadas. Un lugar común en el que ha caído — a mi juicio, de manera equivocada — J. O. Jiménez (1989), al afirmar, refiriéndose a los poetas de los setenta, que tanto el esteticismo como el culturalismo “proveerán, de un modo más sostenido, los parámetros que ayudarían a encuadrar lo más característico en la general voluntad de estilo de esta promoción poética” (Jiménez, 1989: 2). De igual modo, este tópico ha sido abonado por algunos críticos extranjeros que se han ocupado de la poesía de este período. Así, Jonathan Mayhew (1994: 108) afirma: “The most striking feature of Spanish poetry in the 1970s is its ‘culturalismo’: an obsessive and at times excessive citation of artistic and literary intertexts”.

postmoderna considerada en su conjunto. Procede entonces, si queremos alcanzar una visión esclarecedora de la lírica española postmoderna, partir de las complejas relaciones que se dan entre esa poesía y los elementos que actúan a su alrededor, transformar la negatividad resultante de la unidad descompuesta de esos textos poéticos en agente de reflexión que suscite el análisis y fomenta la crítica de esos mismos textos, valorar — como ya reclamara Hugo Friedrich para la lírica moderna — el empleo y la significación que adquieren algunas categorías negativas, entre las cuales ocupa un lugar destacado el fragmentarismo, fragmentarismo que ha afectado, como ya sabemos, tanto a la disolución de la estética sistemática en poéticas particulares como a la desintegración de la unidad de la obra artística.

Si el fragmentarismo supone negación de la unidad de la obra artística e implica descomposición, resquebrajamiento y pérdida, el establecimiento de lo que en otro lugar (Saldaña 1997a) he denominado *estética de la otredad* (otra categoría en cierto modo negativa, resultado inmediato del desbordamiento del canon clásico de belleza que se produce con el tratamiento de territorios artísticos inexplorados por ese canon) significa, por el contrario, ya no la pérdida o el desprestigio de determinados materiales artísticos, sino la inclusión de otros nuevos que adquieren a partir de entonces valor estético e intervienen en la configuración del canon de belleza, que ya no es el mismo, sino, artificialmente, distinto. Esta estética de la otredad — que desarrolla los postulados de Baudelaire de una poética de la extrañeza, la extravagancia y el capricho y que ve en la poesía, como quería Rimbaud, un acto de indagación en lo desconocido, un acto en el que se produce un desajuste en los sentidos — no sólo supone una crítica del canon clásico de belleza y una ampliación cualitativa de la temática artística que constituye ese canon, sino también — y esto es lo más importante — somete a un cuestionamiento profundo todo lo relacionado con el arte (formas, categorías, sensibilidades, actitudes, estructuras, condiciones).

Crisis, escepticismo, diseminación, disolución, ocultamiento, disfraz, fragmentación, mezcla de códigos, eclecticismo, pastiche, ironía, parodia son otras categorías negativas que inciden en la constitución del paradigma estético postmoderno, que se ve

afectado por ese desmoronamiento de la tradición y de la autoridad cultural heredado de la modernidad que desencadena en la postmodernidad pluralismo, divergencia, desplazamiento de los centros de influencia y de poder, orfandad, melancolía¹¹. Ese mismo desmoronamiento ha afectado no sólo a los modelos canónicos de representación artística ensayados en la modernidad, sino también al propio estatuto del saber que las sociedades postmodernas han tenido que edificar desde la destrucción.

A pesar de que la perspectiva con la que abordamos la postmodernidad no es todavía lo suficientemente amplia y, por lo tanto, no resulta fácil establecer una mirada crítica e independiente, desprovista de prejuicios, parece necesario un desplazamiento del punto de vista desde el que es contemplada la producción cultural postmoderna, un desplazamiento que, en ocasiones, implica la deconstrucción de sistemas filosóficos, estéticos y de pensamiento elaborados durante la modernidad y que, sin embargo, no siempre proporciona resultados satisfactorios. Este desplazamiento, por lo que al estudio y análisis del lenguaje poético se refiere, se ha orientado hacia el texto como escenario privilegiado para apreciar el valor estético, lo cual no quiere decir que se haya desestimado el papel que desempeñan en el proceso de la comunicación artística otras categorías de índole pragmática. Así pues, no se trata de reivindicar un enfoque exclusivamente inmanentista a la hora de analizar y criticar la poesía española postmoderna, sino de, sin renunciar al estudio de determinadas categorías extratextuales, recordar — si todavía fuese necesario — que estamos ante objetos verbales, lingüísticos, retóricos y que, por lo tanto, los propios textos (poéticos, críticos y teóricos) nos

¹¹ Al parecer, esta visión, simultáneamente, ha propiciado actitudes iconoclastas y proteccionistas. Si, por un lado, se ha tratado de romper el cordón umbilical que nos unía a la modernidad a través del pluralismo, la divergencia, la diferencia, la diseminación y el descentramiento, por otro, se ha intentado mantener activo ese contacto mediante una recuperación de las formas tradicionales de expresión, en las que lo referencial y lo figurativo, lo anecdótico y lo narrativo han cobrado un renovado protagonismo. Algunas de estas formas se aprecian claramente en la poesía española de estos últimos años.

proporcionan los mecanismos adecuados para reflexionar desde posiciones privilegiadas sobre el valor estético de esos mismos objetos. Dado que en la postmodernidad se han alterado con respecto a la modernidad las condiciones de representación e interpretación de los objetos estéticos, parece necesaria la elaboración de nuevos paradigmas de conocimiento adaptados a las especiales circunstancias con que se presentan dichos objetos. Asistimos en la postmodernidad a una situación en la cual no sólo el tiempo y el espacio han sido dinamitados por unas nuevas condiciones de representación, sino que, de un modo parecido, también la cultura artística y la idea del mundo se han visto alteradas profundamente por esas mismas condiciones, unas condiciones que afectan al aprendizaje, a la conservación y a la transmisión de conocimientos en unas sociedades donde el estatuto del saber ha sido plenamente modificado.

Con anterioridad, ese estatuto del saber se había visto convulsionado con los trabajos de Albert Einstein y Sigmund Freud. La Teoría General de la Relatividad de Einstein y las interpretaciones psicoanalíticas de Freud, elaboradas a comienzos del siglo XX, en plena modernidad, constituyeron unas duras réplicas al sistema analítico-referencial que ha dominado el pensamiento filosófico y científico desde Descartes y Newton y que tanta influencia ha tenido en la elaboración de la episteme moderna. A juicio de G. Navajas (1987), una cierta sensibilidad postmoderna ha heredado y ampliado esta oposición al sistema analítico-referencial que ya quebró en su día la modernidad. Por lo que se refiere a la literatura, desde la postmodernidad se han propuesto ya los suficientes análisis críticos de esa episteme como para apreciar y valorar algunas conclusiones significativas. Por una parte — retomo aquí las ideas de *diferencia*, *contraste*, *oposición*, *divergencia* y *negatividad* como características inherentes del pensamiento postmoderno —, la sensibilidad postmoderna “se opone a un concepto orgánico de la obra y niega la existencia de un orden lineal y una unidad definida en el texto” (Navajas 1987: 15), algo a lo que ya me he referido más arriba; por otra, esa misma sensibilidad postmoderna, opina Navajas en consonancia con Jean-François Lyotard más que con Jürgen Habermas, “disiente del concepto de la literatura como una institución estructurada según criterios uni-

versales de clasificación y evaluación aceptados consensualmente" (ib.). Se habla aquí, entre otras cosas, del fragmentarismo, y, por lo que se refiere a la poesía que ahora nos ocupa, José María Castellet (1970: 41), centrándose en sus novísimos, ha declarado que "se trata de evitar el discurso lógico, de romper la expresión silogística, para crear, en algunos casos, una 'ilógica razonada' y, en otros, un 'campo alógico' signifiante, cuya lectura exige un esfuerzo más visual que racional", algo sobre lo que Víctor García de la Concha (1986) ha insistido señalando que

la crítica ha constatado la aparición en esa segunda parte de los años sesenta, de un nuevo modo de aprehensión poética, que no persigue la estructuración lógica y que se vierte en un discurso plagado de interrupciones y elipsis, y tejido con elementos semánticamente dispares [...], tales interrupciones, al tiempo que reflejan la fragmentación objetiva de la realidad, contribuyen a fijar la mirada más en el proceso de percepción que en lo percibido (García de la Concha 1986: 20).

Como podemos comprobar, las categorías negativas (primeros términos de las oposiciones diversidad / unidad, divergencia / convergencia, diferencia / afinidad, caos / armonía) continúan siendo las dominantes y las más adecuadas para el estudio de la literatura postmoderna, una actividad artística que se presenta no tanto como una "literatura del no-conocimiento" (Navajas 1987: 15), sino como, en mi opinión, una *literatura del conocimiento otro*, de acuerdo con la *estética de la otredad* a la que he hecho referencia más arriba. En este sentido, el conocimiento del mundo que nos proporciona la literatura raras veces coincide o mantiene elementos de contacto con los que nos puedan proporcionar conocimientos de otro tipo. Que esto sea así no quiere decir, en absoluto, que la literatura carezca de *conocimiento*, que sus contenidos y asuntos no sean *verdaderos*, que sea incapaz de ofrecernos imágenes y representaciones *reales* del mundo; que esto sea así supone, entre otras cosas, que es *otra* la perspectiva y son *otros* los referentes desde los que se nos habla en los textos literarios y que, por lo tanto, han de ser *otros* los conocimientos obtenidos; que

conceptos como *verdad* y *mentira* literarias no pueden valorarse con los mismos criterios con que valoramos esos mismos conceptos en su acepción moral (recuérdese el clásico texto de Friedrich Nietzsche *Sobre verdad y mentira en sentido extra-moral*)¹². Así pues, más que de una literatura de la “no-significación” (ib. 17), cabría hablar de una literatura postmoderna de la *significación otra*, en consonancia con el proceso de desgaste sufrido por la razón y con la quiebra de las formas convencionales y tradicionales de conocimiento impuestas por esa misma razón. Falla la razón y fallan las diferentes formas de investigación basadas en esa misma razón como modos de acceso a la realidad, que ya no puede ser transformada ni tan siquiera aprehendida; algunos textos literarios postmodernos rompen sus vínculos con esa realidad y experimentan un repliegue sobre sí mismos, sobre sus propias categorías constitutivas y tienden a presentar un universo poético-imaginario centrado en las erosionadas y conflictivas relaciones que se establecen entre el yo y su lenguaje, entre un yo que se resiste a desaparecer en el balbuceo del habla y un lenguaje que trata de ahogarlo en la profundidad del silencio ya que si nombrar es crear, tal como enseña el Libro de los libros, el yo poético postmoderno parece encaminarse en ocasiones hacia la desintegración puesto que carece de un nombre con el que identificarse. En un mundo en el que todo tiene un nombre y se es en la medida en que se es nombrado, carecer de un nombre, ser un anónimo, es iniciar el viaje hacia la no identidad, hacia la inexistencia, hacia el no ser. Este proceso de despersonalización no surge en la postmodernidad, sino que resulta, una vez más, algo heredado de la lírica moderna (Baudelaire es uno de sus cultiva-

¹² José Luis Rodríguez García (1994) analiza los complejos vínculos que suscita en la modernidad la relación Verdad-Representación-Escritura, y afirma: “la *variedad de las representaciones* no parece motivada por el cansancio retórico o la fabulosa invención imaginativa: es el cataclismo que afecta a lo que llamamos verdad histórica para posibilitar la *emergencia de una otredad* que vuelve a denominarse de la misma manera — sin que sepamos muy bien por qué — lo que impone la deslumbrante readaptación de la materialización de la espiritualidad y de las ideologías”. (Rodríguez García, 1994: 20, los subrayados son míos)

dores iniciales). Frente al proceso de despersonalización, anonimia y vaciado de la identidad que experimenta el sujeto poético, éste se ve en la necesidad de reafirmar su singularidad mediante formas transgresoras, disidentes y, en ocasiones, heterodoxas.

La sexualidad y el erotismo son escenarios en los que estas formas se presentan con cierta frecuencia, y ello es así gracias en buena medida a la apertura temática a estos territorios experimentada en la modernidad y al “movimiento de ruptura con el tabú sexual que inicia el freudianismo” (ib. 24). En este sentido, el tratamiento poético postmoderno de temas, asuntos y motivos sexuales y eróticos infrecuentes supone, en cualquier caso, la puesta en tela de juicio de un orden y de un sistema de poder dominantes y hegemónicos (parte de la crítica feminista ha desempeñado a este respecto un papel considerable en la deslegitimación del código masculino, que ha sido durante mucho tiempo el imperante en las relaciones no sólo sexuales, sino también sociales). José Luis Brea (1983: 15) ha señalado cómo la postmodernidad ha descubierto “el emplazamiento microsocioal del sujeto, las relaciones interactivas que allí se constituyen, y, sobre todo, el ámbito de lo pasional” como lugares proclives al desarrollo del activismo político. A su juicio, el *afterpunk* representa con nitidez una profunda transgresión de lo que podemos entender como una política dominante de lo pasional puesto que, en lo esencial, violenta los códigos heredados y promueve alternativas basadas en la subversión, la radicalidad y la constante generación de intensidades.

Si más arriba prefería hablar de la literatura postmoderna como de una literatura del conocimiento otro frente a una literatura del no-conocimiento, ahora considero igualmente más apropiado y oportuno referirme, frente a una “literatura de la amoralidad” (Navajas 1987: 29), a una *literatura de la moralidad otra*, puesto que el desprestigio y la caída en desgracia de ciertos modos y comportamientos éticos (individuales y colectivos) y el alza y la revalorización de *otros* distintos no implican necesariamente la carencia de un determinado sistema moral, sino la aparición de uno nuevo adaptado a las específicas condiciones y circunstancias que imperan en cada momento dado. Contra esa ausencia de moral y ese escepticismo debe mantenerse siempre vigilante una *sensibilidad crítica postmoderna*.

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**Sobre poesía española
de los últimos veinte años
(A propósito de una antología inédita)**

MANUEL CÁCERES SÁNCHEZ

Sobre las antologías en la historia de la poesía española

Si el fragmentarismo es nota característica de la poesía postmoderna (y no sólo de la poesía), quizás sea la antología una de las manifestaciones más significativas de ese fragmentarismo en la poesía española de esta segunda mitad de siglo. La antología poética, al menos en España, se ha convertido en estos últimos treinta años en un medio de divulgación privilegiada. La antología, que es un texto de textos, una práctica hipertextual (en el sentido genetiano), es también, de una u otra manera, un modelo de representación de una totalidad (la de la poesía de un autor, de un país, la escrita en una determinada lengua o en una época concreta, etc.). A veces explícitamente, en la mayoría de modo implícito, la selección se presenta como la representación del todo e impone determinadas pautas de lectura, constituyendo una referencia básica para la formación del canon crítico y generacional de la poesía española de estos últimos treinta años (Falcó 1994: 39).

Alrededor de trescientas antologías poéticas tuvo en cuenta, en 1986, José Luis Falcó para estudiar la poesía española, escrita en castellano, entre 1939 y 1970. Y en los casi treinta años siguientes es posible que se hayan publicado, al menos, otras tantas. La importancia que adquiere la antología en nuestra poesía es tal que los historiadores y críticos suelen atenerse a lo seleccionado por los antólogos en vez de tener en cuenta — tarea imposible, es cierto — el conjunto de poetas y textos (antologados o no). Así

que la historia de la poesía española de los últimos decenios del siglo XX se reducirá, irremediablemente, al estudio de sus antologías. No estoy de acuerdo, pues, cuando se afirma que las antologías constituyen “el camino más recomendable” para conocer “el bosque de la poesía actual” (García 1992: 96–97). En mi opinión, no se trata de que sea el mejor de los caminos posibles, sino que, en no pocas ocasiones, se ha presentado como el único posible.

Uno de los efectos distorsionadores de las antologías (y, en general, de lo que se publica frente a lo que no llega a difundirse) es que, aunque se corrijan “juicios apresurados” sobre algún escritor o se incorporen más tarde “algunos nombres injustamente silenciados”, en muy pocas ocasiones logran modificar “el marco genérico donde se insertan, al menos, de manera más o menos inmediata” (Talens 1989: 9–10). Así sucede, por ejemplo, con el llamado ‘boom’ de la novela hispanoamericana, en el que la editorial Seix-Barral juega su papel comercial, además de encargarse de difundir en España y en Europa a unos autores que, de otra manera, “posiblemente habrían tardado años en traspasar los límites de los *connaisseurs* hasta convertirse en *best-sellers*” (ib. 9), y en el que la crítica académica se encarga de presentar — por activa o por pasiva — como *la* novela hispanoamericana. De este modo, la presencia de García Márquez o Vargas Llosa, por ejemplo, está ocupando también el espacio de aquellos otros narradores que, al no entrar en su momento en las *listas* de ‘representantes máximos’ que figuran en los “libros seleccionados oficialmente para su enseñanza”, son ‘silenciados’ y, en el caso de ser ‘recuperados’, casi nunca alcanzan la categoría de los incluidos en la nómina ‘oficial’. Esto también sucedió, por ejemplo, con el poeta Alfonso Costafreda (1926–1974), que, por razones ‘extra-literarias’, no llega a figurar en la antología *Veinte años de poesía española (1939–1959)*, de José María Castellet, publicada en 1960 (Costafreda 1990). Las “historias canónicas” ni lo mencionan y, cuando lo hacen, “rara vez se le dedica espacio específico frente a otros poetas cuyo mayor apoyo bibliográfico vuelve su obra más asequible para la explicación de clase” (ib. 10).

Sin embargo, el estudio de las antologías poéticas puede servir también para ofrecer una perspectiva diferente de la historia literaria. Esto es lo que José Luis Falcó consigue con sus estudios

sobre las antologías poéticas posteriores a la guerra civil. Frente a una periodicidad basada en la idea generacional, que se había impuesto en los estudios literarios españoles, Falcó (1994: 30–33) propone distinguir tres periodos:

- 1) el de la *inmediata postguerra* (1939–1946), en el que se pretende un ‘reencuentro’ con “un supuesto pasado ‘heroico’ y ‘glorioso’, utilizado como modelo y correlato de la recién estrenada ideología del Régimen” (la antología de Luis Rosales y Luis Felipe Vivanco, *Poesía heroica del Imperio*, de 1940, es la mejor muestra);
- 2) el periodo de la *primera postguerra* (1947–1952), en el que destacan las antologías ‘geopoéticas’ y las de tema religioso (que, como la de José María Pemán, *Poesía nueva de Jesuitas* (1948) o la de Lázaro Montero, *Poesía religiosa española* (1950), “establecían con las de la inmediata postguerra un hilo de unión ideológico en aras de la sustentación del Régimen”), junto a la primera antología ‘fundacional’ o ‘generacional’ de la postguerra, debida a Francisco Ribes y titulada *Antología consultada de la joven poesía española* (1952);
- 3) y, por último, el periodo de la *segunda postguerra* (1953–1961/63), con el que se cierra ya la posibilidad de “seguir hablando con propiedad de poesía de *postguerra*”, que se caracteriza por la publicación de antologías que — como las de Rafael Millán (*Veinte poetas españoles*, 1955), José Luis Cano (*Nueva poesía española*, 1958) o José María Castellet (*Veinte años de poesía española*, 1960) — suponen “una apología del ‘realismo’ ya apuntado en la *Consultada*, al mismo tiempo que en los poemas antologados se detecta una progresiva tendencia hacia la narratividad y el autobiografismo”.

Las antologías que se publican entre 1964 y 1970 pretenden revisar y recapitular la poesía española de postguerra: este es el objetivo de *Panorama poético español (Historia y antología: 1939–1964)*, de Luis López Anglada (1965), o *Poesía hispánica (1939–1969)*, de Jerónimo-Pablo González Martín (1970).

Parece unánime la opinión de que la antología de Enrique Martín Pardo (*Antología de la joven poesía española*, 1967) y, sobre todo, la de José María Castellet (*Nueve novísimos poetas*

españoles, 1970) certifican el nacimiento de un nuevo periodo en la poesía española. Si la primera es considerada como “continuista y generosa”, la segunda se presenta como la de la “*ruptura* con la tradición poética inmediata” (Falcó 1994: 34). Que el poder y la poesía en España (como debe suceder en tantos otros lugares) andan de la mano (a veces de forma voluntaria, a veces también a su pesar) nos lo demuestra esta selección de Castellet; o, de modo más exacto, la construcción y la instrumentalización que de ella se ha hecho. La publicidad, a través de la crítica académica, ha convertido en canon poético de los 70 lo que en España se conoce con el nombre de “novísimos”¹. En efecto, éstos han sido identificados, explícita o implícitamente, con el *postmodernismo español*, lo que, por otro lado, no deja de ser un contrasentido en esta época que si por algo se caracteriza es por la diversidad.

El problema en este caso es más complicado, pues interviene, además, una farragosa e inútil nomenclatura con la que los críticos parecen querer castigarnos cuando escriben sobre la poesía española de estos últimos veinte o treinta años. Baste por ahora señalar que, en el caso de *Nueve novísimos*, no se trata sólo de que no estén todos los que son (o todos los que deberían estar), sino que, además, de los nueve poetas — Manuel Vázquez Montalbán (1939), Félix de Azúa (1944), Pedro Gimferrer (1945), Ana María Moix (1947), Vicente Molina Foix (1946), Guillermo Carnero (1947), José María Álvarez (1942), Antonio Martínez Sarrión (1939) y Leopoldo María Panero (1948) —, dos especialmente han estado silenciados por la crítica, precisamente “las dos propuestas más radicales” de la antología: las de Manuel Vázquez Montalbán y Leopoldo María Panero (sobre éste, véase Blesa 1995): “Cuando

¹ El modelo nos viene de Italia, “siempre tan aventajada en inventiva cultural y tan ágil en la producción de ideas y de modas”, como recuerda Antonio Carvajal (1997), que califica esta antología de “canónica y neodictatorial”, de “oportuna y eficaz (esto es, oportunista)”. En efecto, parece que en el origen de este término se encuentra la antología de Alfredo Giuliani, publicada en 1964 por la turinesa Einaudi con el título *I novissimi*, aunque, para Jenaro Talens, se trata “de una incorrecta lectura de lo que había significado en la poesía europea” este volumen (Talens 1989: 16).

se les cita, fundamentalmente, es para subrayar el paso de Vázquez Montalbán a la novela y el carácter extraño, 'atípico' de Panero, no para analizar en qué consiste su propuesta discursiva" (Talens 1989: 34). Pero, más allá de los nombres y al margen del papel positivo que se pueda apreciar en esta antología — como "catalizador y revulsivo en unas circunstancias en las que la poesía española parecía pasar por una situación de *impasse* difícilmente superable" —, lo cierto es que buena parte de la crítica — y algunos de los poetas antologados — ha tomado "como joven poesía española lo que no era sino un pequeño aunque importante sector de la misma" (Falcó 1994: 35).

En un reciente trabajo, Juan José Lanz se pregunta si no estamos asistiendo en estos últimos años a una repetición de "nuestra historia literaria más reciente, creando fantasmas, imágenes de figuras inexistentes que sólo toman cuerpo de antología en antología, siendo la única voz verdadera la del antólogo" (Lanz 1998: 281). Hay, sin embargo, antologías que no sólo no esconden su carácter subjetivo, sino que lo declaran abiertamente; que no se presentan como *modelo* que pretenda sustituir la totalidad, sino como *muestra* de autores y textos cercanos estéticamente al antólogo. Una antología de este tipo es la que realiza, en 1997, Antonio Carvajal para ser traducida y publicada en la revista de la Unión de Escritores de Estonia, *Looming (Creación)*.²

De una antología inédita: poesía española actual en Estonia

Hasta ahora, la difusión de la literatura española en Estonia ha sido una labor realizada totalmente desde ese país, mientras que en España se sabe muy poco de la literatura estonia (y de su lengua y cultura). Se pueden citar todas las publicaciones, pues se reducen a

² Esta revista, de larga vida en la historia cultural de Estonia, fue fundada en 1923 y sigue siendo hoy una de las más prestigiosas de este país, junto con *Akadeemia*, *Keel ja Kirjandus*, *Teater. Muusika. Kino*, *Vikerkaar*, o la más joven pero ya internacionalmente reconocida *Interlitteraria*.

cinco libros traducidos al español y a dieciséis poemas escritos por una docena de poetas y que aparecen en dos revistas literarias andaluzas de escasa difusión³. Estamos, pues, ante un claro ejemplo de “desigualdad radical entre las culturas mayoritarias y minoritarias”, a la que se refiere el profesor Jüri Talvet en su espléndido y documentado ensayo *El hispanismo en Estonia* (Talvet 1996)⁴. En efecto, especialmente desde la restauración de

³ Los libros son los siguientes: una selección de *Cuentos tradicionales estonios*, realizada por Jüri Talvet y traducida por Hella Aarelaid, que se publica en la editorial Perioodika, de Tallinn, en 1990, con maravillosas ilustraciones de Jaan Tammsaar; dos novelas de Jaan Kross (*El loco del zar* y *La partida del profesor Martens*), traducidas del francés por Joaquín Jordá y revisadas éstas, a partir de las ediciones originales en estonio, por Jüri Talvet, que la editorial Anagrama publica, en 1992 y 1995 respectivamente, dentro de su serie “Panorama de narrativas”; la novela de Emil Tode *Estado fronterizo*, que, traducida por Ruth Lias y Alberto Lázaro Tinaut, ha publicado en 1998 la editorial Tusquets (del mismo autor, aparecerá en breve *El precio*); y el libro de Viivi Luik, *La séptima primavera de la paz*, traducido por R. M. Bassols y publicado por Seix Barral en 1993. En cuanto a los poemas, traducidos por Tiiu Põder y Jüri Talvet, pertenecen a Artur Alliksaar, Betti Alver, Andres Ehin, Ain Kaalep, Jaan Kaplinski, Viivi Luik, Kersti Merilaas, Ene Mihelson, Hando Runnel, Paul-Eerik Rummo, Jüri Talvet y Juhan Viiding. La primera selección, compuesta por doce poemas (uno de cada uno de los doce poetas citados), aparece con una breve nota mía en el número 3 de la revista universitaria granadina *Carmina Burana*, correspondiente a Enero de 1993 (21–34). La segunda se publica, en ese mismo año, en el número 5 de la cordobesa *Angélica. Revista de Literatura*, y consta de cuatro poemas de Ain Kaalep, Hando Runnel, Jaan Kaplinski y Jüri Talvet, también brevemente presentados por mí (237–244). En el momento de revisar este trabajo, el profesor Talvet me ha hecho llegar una breve antología de Jaan Kaplinski: se trata de una docena de poemas, seleccionados por el mismo J. Talvet y traducidos por éste y por Albert Lázaro Tinaut, publicados por la Casa del Traductor en la serie “Papeles de Tarazona”.

⁴ En el caso de la difusión de la literatura catalana, merece destacarse la espléndida edición bilingüe de diecinueve poemas de Salvador Espriu, seleccionados por J.-F. Ainaud y A. Lázaro, con la colaboración de J. Talvet, y traducidos al estonio por éste y por Ain Kaalep. La edición

la independencia de Estonia, la presencia de lo hispánico se ha ampliado considerablemente. Una notable lista de traductores y un pequeño pero activísimo grupo de profesores de español son los responsables de ello⁵. Y, hablando de responsables, acabo de citar el nombre de Jüri Talvet, quien no sólo ha traducido y publicado monografías, artículos, ensayos sobre literatura en lengua española o sobre cultura española e iberoamericana en general (además de otras numerosas publicaciones sobre literatura general y comparada). Ha sido también quien, desde la cátedra de Literatura Mundial, introduce y dirige los estudios hispánicos en la Universidad de Tartu desde 1992, contando ya con los primeros licenciados en filología española no sólo en la historia de Estonia, sino en la de los Países Bálticos. He tenido la suerte de haber sido testigo (y modesto colaborador) de su admirable trabajo y del que realizan otros profesores y traductores, tanto en Tartu como en Tallinn.

La selección realizada por Carvajal consta de dos partes, introducidas cada una de ellas por ensayos de Carvajal («Notas sobre poesía española (en castellano): 1977–1997») y de Juan Ramón Torregrosa («El cuento en España: balance provisional de veinte años»). En la primera parte se seleccionan poemas de siete poetas, nacidos entre 1940 y 1951. Ordenados por la fecha de nacimiento, aparecen los siguientes: Jesús Munárriz (San Sebastián, 1940), con siete poemas⁶; Diego Jesús Jiménez (Madrid, 1942), con cuatro

incluye una docena de espléndidas ilustraciones de Lembit Karu, inspiradas por la lectura, en 1977, de la antología poética de Espriu, *Labürindi lõpp* (*Final del laberinto*), que aparece en Tallinn ese mismo año, con prólogo de Jüri Talvet (Ainaud, Lázaro, Talvet 1994).

⁵ Los primeros son continuadores de la labor de Aita Kurfeldt, autora de la primera traducción completa en estonio del *Quijote*; de Ain Kaalep, quien, en 1966, publica una selección de la obra poética de Federico García Lorca con el título *Kaneelist torn* (*Torre de canela*); y de Ruth Lias, que hace poco pudo ver impresa su traducción del ensayo de Unamuno *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida*. En cuanto a la enseñanza universitaria del español, es fruto de la labor inaugurada por Arthur-Robert Hone en los años 60 y continuada por Ricardo Mateo y Jüri Talvet desde principios de los 70.

⁶ Son los siguientes: «Poder vuestro», «Los nuestros», «Cambios», «Transbordo en Sol», «Perspectiva», «Fast food», «Ver morir», «Ecos

poemas de su libro *Itinerario para náufragos* (1986)⁷; Antonio Carvajal (Albolote, Granada, 1943), con siete poemas de su libro *Testimonio de invierno* (1990)⁸; Aníbal Núñez (Salamanca, 1944-1987), con trece poemas⁹; Jenaro Talens (Tarifa, Cádiz, 1946), con nueve poemas¹⁰; Antonio Piedra (Salamanca, 1948), con dieciséis jaiquillas de *Calindario profano*, de 1990 y siete de *La moneda de Caronte*, de 1995¹¹ y Francisco Castaño (Salamanca, 1951), con nueve poemas¹². En la segunda parte se incluyen cinco relatos de Juan Eduardo Zúñiga, Javier Marías, José María Merino, Manuel Rivas y Luis Mateo Díez¹³.

de sociedad», «Creencias», «Lección», «Vincent», «Navidad y «Plano medio».

⁷ «Júcar», «El lingüista», «Lugar de la palabra» y «Poética».

⁸ «Enero en las ventanas», «Episodio en otoño», «Una escena doméstica», «Testimonio de invierno», «Una figura herida», «Moros y cristianos» y «Señor y perro».

⁹ «Vista del jardín de Villa Médicis», «Liliput», «Ruinas de Diderot», «Filacteria», «Consuelo en la escritura», «Teso de San Cristóbal», «Pebetero», «Arte poética», «Sepultura de Ícaro», «Himno del desierto», «Desdén de arquitectura», «Cuarzo» y [«Batalla entre Alejandro y Darío en Isso»].

¹⁰ «Estoy implicado en algo», «El otro, el mismo (A la manera de Wang Wei)», «Flashes en el Brick Oven», «Epilogue & After», «Pequeñas resurrecciones de cada día (Canción de primavera a la manera de Hsüeh Tao)», «Noviembre como hipnosis», «Pic-nic en Hiawatha Lake», «Retrato de poeta en Nueva Granada» y «Epitafio».

¹¹ Las jaiquillas de *Calindario profano* son las numeradas 30, 38, 42, 43, 52, 62, 64, 66, 78, 86, 103, 116, 121, 128, 133 y 140; las que corresponden a *La moneda de Caronte* son las siguientes: 64, 80, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90.

¹² «Fondo de agua», «Presente insostenible», «Otoño en París», «Soliloquio de la tarde en la luz última», «En febrero la luz viste medias de seda», «Bajo el canto de un pájaro invisible», «La luz no sigue la historia de los hombres», «Maneras de la luz», «Esta imposible nitidez».

¹³ Los relatos son los siguientes: *La esfinge*, de Juan Eduardo Zúñiga (incluido en *Misterios de la noche*, 1992); *En el viaje de novios*, de Javier Marías (*Cuando fui mortal*, 1996); *Cautivos*, de José María Merino (*El viajero perdido*, 1990); *¿Qué me quieres, amor?*, de

Lo que escribe Ramiro Fonte de Joaquim Manuel Magalhães — a propósito de su amplia y rigurosa antología bilingüe *Poesía espanhola de agora* — puedo suscribirlo para el caso de la antología de Carvajal, aunque ésta sea mucho más breve: tiene el mérito, entre otros, de ser “el antólogo [...] un poeta, y procede como tal, escogiendo los poemas de los otros con el mismo espíritu que si escogiese los suyos propios para incluirlos en un libro. Está [además] elaborada desde los mismos poemas, desde una experiencia de lectura y [...] no desde el estatus o el significado que uno u otro puedan tener en el panorama de la poesía española de hoy” (Fonte 1997: 72).

En el número 6 de *Looming*, correspondiente al mes de junio de 1998, aparecen traducidos al estonio casi todos esos textos (por Ain Kaalep, Klaarika Kaldjärv, Marin Mõttus, Tiiu Põder, Asta Põldmäe y Jüri Talvet), a los que acompañan unas anotaciones informativas de Arturo Dueñas sobre los escritores seleccionados y un ensayo del profesor Talvet sobre el teatro español del siglo XX.

Me interesa en esta ocasión, sin embargo, detenerme no tanto en lo publicado por *Looming* como en la versión original e inédita preparada por Antonio Carvajal.

De poesía española actual (en lengua castellana): la antología poética de Antonio Carvajal

¿Por qué decide Carvajal iniciar su panorama poético precisamente en el año 1977? Es indudable que por esas fechas se vive en España un momento de especial relevancia en el terreno político, cultural y estético. Como él mismo aclara, es el año en que los españoles “estrenamos democracia”; es el año en que Vicente Aleixandre obtiene el premio Nobel de Literatura, cerrando su obra “con los maravillosos *Diálogos del corazón*”; es por entonces cuando desaparece la censura y se crea el Ministerio de Cultura. Y también es el año en que algunos dan por finalizado el proceso de renovación de la poesía española (en lengua castellana).

Manuel Rivas (del libro de relatos de igual título, 1996); y *Brasas de agosto*, de Luis Mateo Díez (del libro de relatos de igual título, 1989).

Como ya he indicado, se suele señalar el periodo comprendido entre 1965 y 1977 como el de la renovación de la poesía española, en el que una “nueva generación poética” surge — según esos historiadores y críticos — frente a la poesía social, realista, de los años 50; una generación que es caracterizada por “encarnar una estética rompedora” y por la “insólita precocidad” de algunos de ellos, como Pere Gimferrer y Guillermo Carnero, citados por el crítico, historiador, poeta y antólogo García Martín (1992: 97). Pero no parece que esta opinión — ampliamente difundida hasta hace pocos años — pueda sostenerse sobre bases serias, pues la poesía *novísima* no supone ruptura alguna con el pasado: sus propuestas estéticas no se imponen a costa de la tradición poética inmediatamente anterior. De hecho, como recuerda Antonio Carvajal, es más justo y exacto buscar los orígenes de la renovación antes, precisamente en la poesía de los años 50, como ocurre con la cultura española en general, que “se configura en un largo proceso de modernización que se inicia en la década de los cincuenta” (Sotelo 1991: 12).

Este proceso de renovación no concluye en los 70, sino que continúa hoy tanto en algunos de los poetas antologados por José María Castellet en *Nueve novísimos*, como, sobre todo, en los poetas ‘silenciados’ entonces. Un proceso que no es ‘estridente ni revolucionario’, sino *apacible* (como lo califica Carvajal), y en el que están presentes las ‘fuentes más diversas’ de la tradición poética española: lo que queda del 27 (con Rafael Alberti todavía hoy entre nosotros, y hasta comienzos de los 80, vivían también Guillén, Dámaso Alonso, Aleixandre, G. Diego, y con la presencia de las obras de Lorca, Cernuda y Salinas); los poetas algo más jóvenes, como Elena Martín Vivaldi (granadina, recientemente fallecida), Francisco Pino, Muñoz Rojas (reciente Premio Nacional de Poesía 1998), Juan Gil-Albert...; la poesía social (sobre todo, la que, desde Gabriel Celaya y Blas de Otero, tiene su continuación en José Hierro); la renovación de la poesía en la época de la dictadura: María Victoria Atencia, Gil de Biedma (que se convierte en referencia fundamental para la poesía de los años 80, según J. Siles, 1991), Claudio Rodríguez, José Ángel Valente, Ángel González, Sahagún, Ángel Crespo, García Baena, Francisco Brines... (Carvajal 1997).

Aunque entre la poesía española (en lengua castellana) y la que se escribe en los países vecinos (Francia y Portugal) durante este periodo no encontremos muchas conexiones (por razones diversas), sí se puede hablar de una actitud similar respecto a la presencia de la tradición poética. Así, en la poesía francesa actual, se puede rastrear “la vigencia de ciertas herencias de la poesía de la primera mitad de siglo” en los poetas de hoy. Apollinaire, André Breton, Aragon, Jean Cocteau, Claudel, Prévert o Senghor forman parte de “una herencia recogida, modificada y continuada, de manera distinta, pero con una raíz notablemente fuerte en muchos de los poetas de esta segunda mitad del siglo” (Teissedre 1997). Tampoco sus valores poéticos parecen diferir de los que caracterizan a la poesía española (“espontaneidad expresiva — o la apariencia de la espontaneidad —, la sorpresa y la oscuridad y el uso de la imagen y de la metáfora en disociaciones de tipo onírico” son los que destaca Isabelle Teissedre)¹⁴.

¹⁴ Isabelle Teissedre es la responsable de una antología, muy cercana por su extensión a la antología de Carvajal, realizada para la revista granadina *Hélices*, que se publica en el mismo 1997. Su *Especial poetas franceses de hoy*, recoge poemas de siete autores (cinco de cada uno, salvo en dos casos, en los que son seis los poemas antologados), nacidos entre 1949 y 1958. Entre los poetas seleccionados, Yves di Manno (1949, que comienza a publicar en 1977 y cuenta con una docena de libros de poesía publicados) y Antoine Émaz (1955, cuyos inicios poéticos se sitúan en 1986, a pesar de lo cual, ha logrado publicar catorce libros), son quienes “han indagado en las posibilidades de esos valores” expresivos, mientras que Bernard Simeone (1957), en sólo cuatro libros (publicados entre 1988 y 1993), “ha sabido cristalizar una mezcla de acción, cotidianeidad y onirismo, más cerca de la poesía italiana de principios de siglo, de la que además es traductor y estudioso”. Yves Leclair (1954) desarrolla, en sus tres libros publicados en los años 90, “los efectos de la depuración y las imágenes desnudas a la manera de los haikus y los organiza en torno a historias, que pertenecen a lo que él mismo llama una ‘novela-poema’”. Michel Houellebecq (1958), con dos libros publicados en 1992 y 1996; Dominique Sampiero (1954), que desde 1987 ha publicado catorce libros; y Lydie Dattas (1949), la única mujer de la selección, con dos libros de 1990 y 1994, completan esta interesante muestra.

También en Portugal se habla de una generación poética del 70, de la que forman parte, entre otros, João Miguel Fernandes (1943), Joaquim Manuel Magalhães (1945) y Nuno Júdice (1949). En ellos destaca, junto a la presencia de la tradición poética portuguesa (de la que Fernando Pessoa sigue siendo la figura más conocida en España), la de la poesía anglosajona (Eliot, Pound, Dylan Thomas...) en los dos primeros o el romanticismo alemán en el tercero (Molina 1987: 6). Tanto Magalhães como otros poetas portugueses siguen con atención la poesía española actual, lo que no es ninguna sorpresa cuando sabemos que, en general (y por causas en las que no podemos detenernos ahora), el conocimiento que poseen los portugueses sobre nosotros es mucho mayor que la atención que se les dispensa en España. Una excepción la constituye la recepción de la poesía portuguesa en Galicia, donde, según Basilio Losada (1990: 13), los poetas en lengua gallega de los años 80 siguen muy de cerca la poesía lusa (la de Heberto Helder sobre todo, pero también la de Sena, Cesarini, Ramos Rosa, O'Neill, Melo e Castro, Assis Pacheco, etc.).

Ya hemos aludido con algunos ejemplos a la 'poesía del poder' (del entretejido sistema que se articulan en torno a las grandes empresas de comunicación, y en el que intervienen además, de un modo u otro, editoriales más o menos independientes, revistas, críticos, profesores, escritores...) y a cómo pretende convertirse — apropiándose — en el 'poder de la poesía'. Como señala Carvajal, la poesía española actual "no mueve montañas, pero sí muchos millones" en forma de premios, ventas editoriales, etc. Si el fin de la dictadura puede ser un *hecho generacional*, lo es también sin duda el desarrollo (la transformación) de la industria cultural, que se rige por reglas y normas de funcionamiento que la crítica académica acaba asumiendo: "De entre esos principios, el más importante es el de la publicidad [...] y que Jean Pierre Voyer definió como la capacidad de un discurso que habla de lo que no vende para poder vender mejor aquello de lo que no habla" (Talens 1989: 29-30).

Seguramente, la selección poética de Carvajal no corre estos peligros. Los siete poetas están ahí porque son los más cercanos al "concepto y práctica de la poesía" de Carvajal y porque éste no desea mostrar "generosidad" con aquellos que lo han sido "poco o

dudosamente" con él. Es, pues, su *antología personal*, la que le ha salido de "más adentro"; ha elegido seis poetas que, como el mismo Carvajal, no se limitan a ser cómodos espectadores o meros imitadores en la poesía española actual.

Son poetas que, como he dicho, nacen entre 1940 y 1951 y siguen escribiendo y publicando en la actualidad, participando, pues, de ese proceso iniciado en la poesía española de postguerra. Cuatro de los antologados comienzan a escribir durante los 60 (D. J. Jiménez, Talens, Núñez y Carvajal), Jesús Munárriz lo hace a mediados de los 70 y dos, Francisco Castaño y Antonio Piedra, a mediados de los años 80. Cada uno de ellos con trayectorias muy diferentes, pero entre los que podemos intuir una *atmósfera poética* común.

Sólo uno de ellos, Aníbal Núñez, ha dejado definitivamente de escribir, pues falleció en 1987. De los siete, Jenaro Talens, Aníbal Núñez y Antonio Carvajal han sido los que han publicado más libros de poemas y también los que han recibido más atención por parte de la crítica, pero también los demás antologados tienen ya una considerable obra editada. Entre algunos, además, se da otra circunstancia: al menos tres de ellos, tienen una segunda profesión relacionada directamente con la literatura como institución: Munárriz dirige la editorial Hiperión, una de las más importantes para conocer una buena parte de la poesía española actual, mientras que Talens y Carvajal son profesores universitarios¹⁵. Por otro lado, tanto Munárriz como Talens destacan por sus traducciones y/o ediciones de literaturas extranjeras.

En la antología está presente el humor y la ironía, la denuncia social y la poesía paródica de Jesús Munárriz¹⁶. Un ejemplo de

¹⁵ No es infrecuente la presencia de la figura del poeta-profesor (o profesor-poeta) en nuestra literatura: de Dámaso Alonso, Jorge Guillén o Pedro Salinas, hasta Ángel González, Jorge Urrutia, Andrés Sánchez Robayna, Jaime Siles, Álvaro Salvador, Jorge Riechmann, Jon Juaristi, Miguel D'Ors, Guillermo Carnero, Eloy Sánchez Rosillo, Luis Alberto de Cuenca, Luis García Montero o Antonio Jiménez Millán.

¹⁶ Entre sus libros de poemas se pueden citar los siguientes: *Viajes y estancias* (1975), *De aquel amor me quedan estos versos* (1975), *Cuarentena* (1977), *Esos tus ojos* (1981), *Camino de la voz* (1988), *Otros labios me sueñan* (1992).

estructura paródica en la que están presentes la ironía y la crítica social lo encontramos en «Poder vuestro»:

Poder vuestro, que estás en todas partes,
 aborrecido sea tu nombre,
 nunca nos alcance tu reino,
 deshágase tu voluntad
 aquí en la tierra,
 que poco el cielo a ti te preocupa.
 El pan nuestro de cada día
 no nos lo robes hoy,
 ni incrementes nuestras deudas
 encabezando a nuestros acreedores,
 y no nos hagas caer en las garras
 de la administración,
 olvídanos sin más,
 amén.

La solidez que, en mi opinión, caracteriza la obra de Carvajal no es fruto solamente de un profundo conocimiento — teórico, crítico y artístico — de la poesía. No se trata exclusivamente de sus dotes, ‘naturales’ y adquiridas, para dominar la versificación española, ni de que escriba “como un poeta barroco — un discípulo de Góngora capaz de emular al maestro — que fuera rigurosamente contemporáneo” (García Martín 1992). Antonio Carvajal es, desde hace bastantes años, lo que se dice un poeta *completo*, ya *hecho*, no una promesa que empiece a despuntar¹⁷. Aunque durante dema-

¹⁷ La obra completa publicada de Carvajal comienza con *Tigres en el jardín*, de 1968. Desde entonces ha publicado las siguientes obras: *Serenata y navaja* (1973), *Casi una fantasía* (1975), *Siesta en el mirador* (1979), *Selección de poemas* (1980), *Sitio de Ballesteros* (1981), *Servidumbre de paso* (1981), *Del idilio y sus horas* (1982), *Extravagante jerarquía. Poesía 1958-1981* (1983, con epílogo de Ignacio Prat, incluye, además de los cinco primeros libros, *Sol que se alude*, inédito hasta entonces), *Después que me miraste* (1984), *Del viento en los jazmines* (1984, incluye *Servidumbre de paso*, *Del idilio y sus horas* y *Después que me miraste*), *Noticia de septiembre* (1984), *La puerta grande* (1985, con grabados de Antonio y Jesús Conde), *Aldaba de noviembre* (1985), *Enero en las ventanas* (1986), *Lettere*

siado tiempo no ha recibido la atención que merece, entre otras cosas por no haber formado parte de la *lista* de los novísimos de Castellet¹⁸, en 1991 se le otorga el Premio Nacional de la Crítica por su *Testimonio de invierno*.

En sus poemas destaca la presencia de una rara — por sencilla — perfección formal en la que los versos multiplican sus efectos lírico-expresivos de emoción e intensidad. Ignacio Prat ha dejado escritos varios artículos (publicados en *Ínsula* y *Hora de Poesía* y que pueden leerse también en Prat 1982) sobre la poesía de Carvajal, pero quiero citar las siguientes palabras, de 1980, que, a mi juicio, resumen perfectamente este buen hacer poético:

veneziana (1986, con serigrafías de Miguel Rodríguez-Acosta), *De un capricho celeste* (1988), *Si tú quisieras, Granada...* (1988, con serigrafías de Miguel Rodríguez-Acosta y tres poemas de Antonio Gala), *Testimonio de invierno* (1990), *Rimas de Santa Fe* (1990, con serigrafías de María Teresa Martín-Vivaldi), *Poemas de Granada* (1991), *El viaje* (1991), *Silvestra de sextinas* (1992), *Las ruinas del aura* (1992, con grabados de Juan Carlos Ramos), *Baeza para mirar* (1992, con poemas de Ángel González y Antonio Checa y fotografías de Francisco Fernández), *Miradas sobre el agua* (1993), *Ciudades de provincia* (1994), *La florida del ángel* (1996), *Raso milena y perla* (1996), *La presencia lejana* (1997, con dibujos de María Teresa Martín-Vivaldi), *Alma región luciente* (con prólogo de José Antonio Muñoz Rojas y dibujos de María Teresa Martín-Vivaldi) y *Otro clamor del alma* (1998). Su obra se ha traducido al inglés (*Winter Testimony-Testimonio de invierno*, 1997) y al italiano (*Rapsodio andaluza*, 1994). La poesía de Antonio Carvajal ha sido estudiada, entre otros, por Chicharro (1994), Díaz de Castro (1997), Lanz (1994), López (1989), Miró (1982) y Prat (1982). Como investigador, Antonio Carvajal es hoy uno de los mejores especialistas en métrica española, como demostró en su Tesis Doctoral sobre las teorías métricas de Miguel Agustín Príncipe (Carvajal 1995).

¹⁸ Sí lo incluye, en cambio, Enrique Martín Pardo en su antología de 1970 (*Nueva poesía española*) y en la reedición de 1990 titulada *Antología consolidada*. Como afirma García Martín (1992: 105), el primer libro de Carvajal, *Tigres en el jardín* (1968), no es menos “culturalista y esteticista” que el de Pedro Gimferrer, *Arde el mar* (1966), o el de Guillermo Carnero, *Dibujo de la muerte* (1967).

Antonio Carvajal es dueño de un léxico y un estilo propios inconfundibles (una rareza, aunque esto se diga de muchos); entre sus versos bellísimos (cuajados, no de citas, sí de transparencias poéticas que se procuran, al modo clásico, por obligación y por simpatía) no se confunde el autor, que no es ni pastichista ni neo, con sus autores: Góngora, Mandelstam, Soto de Rojas, Virgilio, Valéry, Espinosa, Byron, Camoens, Herrera, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Unamuno, Lorca, Porcel, Aleixandre, Darío, Quevedo, Heredia, San Juan de la Cruz, Moreno Villa, Manrique, Vallejo, Garcilaso..., y todos (y otros muchos) están presentes (y complacidos de estarlo) entre versos que no les ocultan ni los exhiben. (Prat, *apud* Espada 1997: 107).

Il miglior fabbro, dijo de Carvajal el desaparecido Prat. “Quizá de la poesía sea yo el mejor obrero”, pero “antes que poeta, y antes que profesor/ de vanidades, soy [...] un triste peregrino que busca su alegría”, escribe en *Miradas sobre el agua*. Una poesía que necesita, para llegar a ser tal, el apacible reposo, “próximo a lo que el mundo llama felicidad” (*Un capricho celeste*). Vitalismo, optimismo, deseo sincero de ser compartida esa “manzana/ que en vuestras bocas suene a fresco fruto” (*Raso milena y perla*). Pero la poesía no está ahí a la espera del ‘genio’, no es gratuita: “los poemas se hacen”, “es un bien que se trabaja, gema/ — me opuse-que me exige precisa orfebrería/ para su exacto engaste” (*Un capricho celeste*). Es curioso que el elogio más repetido de la crítica, el de la perfección formal de sus versos, haya servido en muchos casos para contraponer la frialdad de una rica orfebrería con la ausencia de corazón, de emoción... Quienes así opinan, no han comprendido que si alguna constante se encuentra en la poesía de Carvajal es su preocupación, su profundo apego por la vida y por quienes le rodean (saber “que sé vivir y tengo compañeros”, dice en *Siesta en el mirador*).

El caso de Aníbal Núñez resulta aquí especial, pues, como ya dije, es el único fallecido de los antologados y, también porque es el único que no ha sido publicado en *Looming*. De su obra, reunida

ya como *Poesía completa*¹⁹, se pueden destacar aquellos rasgos con los que se ha caracterizado la poesía española postmoderna y que encontramos en los poemas seleccionados por Carvajal: el culturalismo en «Vista del jardín de Villa Médicis (Velázquez)», «Liliput», «Ruinas de Diderot», «Filacteria» o «Sepulcro de Ícaro»; o la metapoesía en «Consuelo de la escritura» o en «Arte poética». Algunos poemas que componen *Taller del hechicero* (1979) se construyen de forma epigramática, cercanos al aforismo:

Que me traigan el humo dijo Ciro
y le trajeron todas sus victorias.
(«Pebetero»)

Llegados a este punto hemos tomado
— se suman otras voces —
la decisión de naufragar.
(«Himno del desolado»)

«Ruinas de Diderot» es un ejemplo de las “piezas de auténtica maestría y conocimiento” escritas por Núñez en este libro (Lupiáñez 1980: 98):

Propietario indolente, ¿qué trastorno
cuando hago mío el encanto que tú ignoras?
¿Qué fue de aquel retazo

¹⁹ Publicada en dos volúmenes por Hiperión, en 1995 y 1996. La edición de Fernando R. De la Flor y Esteban Pujals recoge, además, prólogos a algunos de sus libros (escritos por diversos autores) y reflexiones teóricas de Núñez sobre poesía. Su primer libro de poesía es *29 poemas* (1967), al que siguen *Fábulas domésticas* (1972), *Naturaleza no recuperable* (1976, bajo el seudónimo de Mario Casas), *Taller del hechicero* (1979), *Cuarzo* (1981), *Trino en estanque* (1982), *Alzado de la ruina* (1983), *Estampas de ultramar* (1986), *Clave de los tres reinos* (1986), *Cristal de Lorena* (1987), *Definición de savia* (1991), *Casa sin terminar* (1991), *Primavera soluble* (1992), *Memoria de la casa sin mención al tesoro ni a su leyenda antigua* (1992), *Figura en un paisaje* (1993) y *Elegía* (1994). Sobre la poesía de Aníbal Núñez han escrito, entre otros, Casado (1997), Flor y Pujals (1995), Lupiáñez (1980), Valente (1994), Varios Autores (1987).

de cielo que apercibo entre la bóveda
hundida y los escombros del estanco?

El polvo de tu mármol ya lo sabe.

El deseo — cuando no la obsesión — de ordenar la historia literaria de acuerdo con un concepto de ‘generación’ más que discutible, lleva a establecer clasificaciones sorprendentes. Así, mientras que José Luis García Martín sitúa a Jesús Munárriz en la “segunda oleada de la generación de 1970” y a Carvajal lo incluye en el apartado dedicado a los “Poetas coetáneos al margen de la primera estética generacional”, Jenaro Talens es situado entre los poetas de la “primera promoción”, en la “trayectoria de los novísimos después de 1975” (García Martín 1992: 112, 104 y 98)²⁰. No creo que ninguno de los tres poetas esté de acuerdo con

²⁰ Talens ha publicado los siguientes libros de poesía: *En el umbral del hombre* (1964), *Los ámbitos* (1965), *Víspera de la destrucción* (1970), *Una perenne aurora* (1970), *Ritual para un artificio* (1971), *El vuelo excede el ala* (1973), *El cuerpo fragmentario* (1978), *Otra escena/ Profanación(es)* (1980), *Proximidad del silencio* (1981), *Purgatori* (1983), *Secuencias* (1983), *Tabula Rasa* (1985), *La mirada extranjera* (1985), *Cinco maneras de acabar agosto* (1986), *Monólogo de Peter Pan* (1988), *El sueño del origen y la muerte* (1988), *Desde esta biografía se ven pájaros* (1989), *Cenizas de sentido. Poesía reunida 1962–1975* (1989), *El largo aprendizaje* (1991), *Orfeo filmado en el campo de batalla* (1994), *De qué color son las princesas* (1995, con fotografías de Pilar Moreno), *Retrato de poeta en Nueva Granada* (1996) y *Viaje al fin del invierno* (1997). Su obra se ha traducido al inglés (*Five ways to finish August*, 1988; *Looking in/looking out*, 1989; *Embers of meaning. Selected poems*, 1991; *What is the color of a Princess*, 1998), italiano (*La locanda del tempo perso*, 1990; *Orfeo ripreso sul campo di battaglia*, 1996), francés (*Moins qu'une image*, 1992; *Monologues*, 1996) y portugués (*Eutopia*, 1992). Jenaro Talens, catedrático de Teoría de la Literatura en la Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, además de traductor de numerosos poetas (Hölderlin, Beckett, Hesse, Rilke, Brecht, Novalis, etc.), es autor de numerosos trabajos de investigación teórica y de crítica literaria, así como sobre cine. Acerca de su obra poética han escrito, por ejemplo, Bermúdez (1993), Izquierdo (1985), Jara (1990), Partzsch (1998), Persin (1997), Saldaña (1995), Siles (1986) o Simón (1981).

el lugar que se le asigna. ¿En qué sentido Carvajal se encuentra “al margen de la primera estética generacional”? Pero, ¿acaso no afirma el propio García Martín que *Tigres en el jardín* no es menos “culturalista y esteticista” que los primeros libros de Gimferrer o Carnero, como acabo de recordar? ¿Por qué la obra de Talens la hace surgir “después de 1975”? ¿Dónde situamos entonces los seis libros de poesía que publica entre 1964 y 1973?

Si en Diego Jesús Jiménez, que comienza a publicar sus primeros libros en los 60, destaca la huella de Pedro Salinas²¹, en Talens está presente la de Luis Cernuda, desde sus primeros libros de poesía pero también desde sus primeras investigaciones — su tesis doctoral (*Introducción a la lectura de Cernuda*, Universidad de Granada, 1971) y el ensayo basado en ésta, *El espacio y las máscaras. Introducción a la lectura de Cernuda* (Barcelona, Anagrama, 1975). La relación de los poetas que escriben después de 1939 con la poesía del 27 no sólo resulta, como dice Falcó, “típicamente edípica” — pues “se les ha venerado como verdaderos portadores de la ‘vanguardia’” pero “sólo excepcionalmente se ha sabido escapar de esa misma tradición” (Falcó 1994, 35) —, sino que ha servido, en los años 60 y 70, para justificar una determinada opción estética. El mismo Talens ha recordado que, hacia 1968, “en plena eclosión de la que luego sería llamada ‘estética novísima’ [...], una forma de descalificación estética era llamar a un poeta ‘cernudiano’”, mientras al poeta sevillano se le oponían los nombres de Rubén Darío, Aleixandre o García Lorca. Pocos años después, se asiste una reivindicación de Cernuda que, realmente, no supone “un cambio de planteamiento global”, sino la constatación de la existencia de dos lecturas opuestas del autor de *La realidad y el deseo* y, en general, de dos concepciones diferentes del hecho poético: una que se centra en el escritor y concibe la poesía como comunicación y otra que tiene como referente fundamental la escritura y entiende la poesía como conocimiento, que cuestiona la idea del poema “como relato más o menos

²¹ Explícita en tres de las cuatro secciones que componen «Júcar», recogido en la antología de Carvajal, puede seguirse en toda su obra: *Ámbitos de entonces* (1963), *La ciudad* (1965), *Coro de ánimas* (1968), *Itinerario para náufragos* (1996, accésit VI Premio Gil de Biedma).

explícito de una experiencia vivida y un carácter supuestamente directo en la expresión de ese relato” (Talens 1989: 15–17).

Desde esa concepción del poema como conocimiento es desde donde habla la poesía de Talens. Él mismo acaba de escribirlo en «Algo que no es una poética»: “Escribo cuando el desasosiego no puede ser controlado por la razón y desconozco lo que ocurre, y con la única finalidad de descubrirlo” (Talens 1998: 274). Pero ya lo hizo en un poema de *Tabula rasa* (1985): “Yo sólo escribo este/ poema/ no con la ingenua pretensión de expresar lo que siento/ (nunca sé lo que siento) sino para que poco a poco sus/ palabras/ puedan iluminar el hueco donde estoy (quiero decir,/ quién soy)/ en el lejano abismo de otros ojos/ verdes como la noche y su serenidad”.

En el prólogo a *Cenizas de sentido* (1989), Talens se muestra contrario a aquellas interpretaciones críticas que, como las de García Martín, “contraponen al ‘enrarecimiento y abstracción’ de buena parte de su poesía la escritura ‘más realista y vivencial’ de *Tabula rasa* y las obras siguientes” (García Martín 1992: 103). El propio García Martín escribe que la poesía de Talens, inicialmente cercana a los poetas de los 50, se va dirigiendo hacia una tendencia metapoética que llega a interesar “más a los semiólogos y a los teóricos de la literatura que a los meros lectores de poesía”. No es de la misma opinión José Olivio Jiménez (1985: 47), para quien obras como *Proximidad del silencio* (1981) y *Secuencias* (1983) forman parte de lo mejor de este autor en el periodo que estudia (1975–1985).

La producción poética de Antonio Piedra y de Francisco Castaño entra de lleno en la poesía de los 80. El primero²² es creador de la jaiquilla, un género nuevo, que, como dice Carvajal, es “pariente del haiku oriental — en concreto, el de tradición malaya — y de la seguidilla y la soleá española”. Las jaiquillas, formadas por tres versos, han sido definidas por José Jiménez Lozano como el “trípode esencial para mirar el mundo y el trasmundo al que la poesía siempre se refiere”, como una “leve y limpia ventanita de

²² Antonio Piedra ha publicado *Del rigor al desatino* (1986), *Calindario profano* (1990) y *La moneda de Caronte* (1995).

tres vidrios a la que el lector se asoma para ver" (Jiménez Lozano 1995: 12). Veamos, pues, unos pocos ejemplares:

Delicadamente
rasga el anhelo
todos los sentidos.

Te vas
y quédase la tierra
con un vacío de entraña.

No somos nadie,
y tú, nada de nada,
rima de un ápice.

Con qué fría arritmia
de guillotina y frac
Bush y su orden cantan.

El misil de Occidente
lanza al vencido
a la sura abismal de un dátil.

En cuanto a Francisco Castaño, García Martín (1992) lo identifica con la 'tendencia tradicionalista' de la poesía española de los ochenta. Lo compara con Carvajal por el dominio técnico de la métrica clásica, presente ya en su primer libro²³. De su producción poética destaca *Fragmentos de un discurso enamorado* (1990), en el que, junto a la tradición poética del lenguaje amoroso — no sólo española, desde Garcilaso o Bécquer, hasta algunos poetas del 27, y, sobre todo, Gil de Biedma, Ángel González y José Ángel Valente, sino también de Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Emily Dickinson o T. S. Eliot —, se encuentra un concepto de amor que, como advierte Celia Fernández (1992), "se construye sobre estos dos ejes: el amor como proceso en el que el tiempo actúa, y el amor como discurso enamorado, como palabra, incluso,

²³ *Breve esplendor de mal distinta lumbre* (1985), al que siguen estos otros títulos: *El decorado y la naturaleza* (1987), *Fragmentos de un discurso enamorado* (1990), *Siete maneras de mirar a un mirlo* (1990) y *Libro de las maldades* (1992).

si se quiere, como retórica". En el libro se distinguen tres partes: la del encuentro con la persona amada, la de su ausencia y una tercera en la que "recupera el símbolo de la luz". Para C. Fernández, "los mejores poemas son aquellos en los que se intenta captar los matices casi imperceptibles de la luz en las ramas de un árbol tras la lluvia o en el lento avance del crepúsculo, y que se asimilan a las sutiles variaciones de la pupila femenina". Entre los poemas seleccionados por Carvajal, se encuentra este, que puede servir como ejemplo:

Tras una lluvia tenue,
Las ramas reducidas a su estricta
Desnudez invernal,
En el súbito rayo de un vago sol tardío,
Se han perlado de luz.

Han florecido sus irisaciones
Como brotes precoces de una frágil
Primavera imprevista
Que el lento devanarse de las nubes
Convierte en un estío apenas perceptible
En tránsito a un otoño prematuro
Mientras crece la luz.

Así viven a un tiempo en tu pupila,
O en el árbol
O en el nombre del árbol,
Imagen que limita la ventana
Desde esta habitación donde me miras,
Las estaciones dúctiles a tus cambios de luz.
(«En febrero la luz viste medias de seda»)

Estos siete poetas poseen notas comunes, pero la selección no resulta *monocroma*. Por el contrario, uno de los méritos del antólogo ha sido ofrecer una variada muestra de poemas en los que se pueden apreciar la mayoría de los rasgos que la crítica identifica con la poesía española de las últimas décadas: la marginación de la que habla Bousoño (1983), la metapoesía o el culturalismo con los que se ha caracterizado a la generación poética de 1970 (Talens 1981); el humor, la emoción, el uso del lenguaje coloquial y la

recuperación de la métrica clásica en la poesía de los 80 (García Martín 1992: 131), a los que se añaden, en la poesía de los 90, rasgos como el rechazo “de los experimentos vanguardistas” y la “convivencia de diversas tradiciones” (Siles 1991).

A partir de 1970 se suceden “tantos movimientos poéticos como antologías y viceversa”²⁴: se habla de ‘poetas figurativos’, de ‘poetas de la palabra’ o de ‘poetas del silencio’, de poetas ‘neo-barrocos’, ‘venecianos’, ‘culturalistas’ o ‘neosurrealistas’. De entre esa interminable lista, la crítica (y también algunos poetas) ha fomentado una pretendida tensión — vivida de un modo especial precisamente en Granada — entre dos grupos de poetas: los de la poesía conocida como ‘la otra sentimentalidad’ o ‘de la

²⁴ Por citar sólo algunas de esas antologías, se ha de tener presente la de José Batlló, *Poetas españoles postcontemporáneos* (1974), que añade a los nombres recogidos por Castellet, los de Lázaro Santana (1940), José Elías (1941), Ángel Fierro (1941), Enrique Morón (1942), Antonio Carvajal (1943), Jesús Munárriz (1940), José Luis Giménez Frontín (1943), José Miguel Ullán (1944) y Jenaro Talens (1946). De 1979 es *Joven poesía española* (seleccionada por Concepción G. Moral y Rosa María Pereda). Y, en los años siguientes, se publican otras, como *Las voces y los ecos* (1980), de J. L. García Martín; *Florilegium. Poesía española última* (1982), de Elena de Jongh Rossel; *Postnovísimos* (1986), de Luis Antonio de Villena o *La generación de los 80* (1988), de nuevo con J. L. García como antólogo. Entre las últimas publicadas se pueden citar *Poesía española, 10. La nueva poesía: 1975-1992* (1996) o la que ha aparecido mientras reviso este trabajo, que se presenta como ‘democrática’: *El último tercio del siglo (1968-1998). Antología consultada de la poesía española* (1998), preparada por Jesús García Sánchez para el número 400 de la colección “Visor de Poesía”, con prólogo de José-Carlos Mainer (que incluye una amplia bibliografía). Se trata de una selección de 28 poetas realizada a partir de las nominaciones enviadas por — si no he contado mal — 258 personas (“poetas, críticos, profesores, antólogos, lectores, editores...”), y más de 750 páginas de poemas a los que acompañan datos biográficos, bibliografía y breves ‘poéticas’, todo ello realizado, en casi todos los casos, por los propios poeta seleccionados. Tres de ellos están en la antología de Carvajal: Jenaro Talens (265-301), Aníbal Núñez (131-153) y el propio Carvajal (105-129).

experiencia'²⁵ y aquellos que han sido adscritos a la 'poesía figurativa', a la de 'sesgo clásico', a la 'poesía conflictiva'... En mi opinión, esta oposición se ha convertido también, a veces, en "táctica de provocación publicitaria" y no tanto en discusión sobre los postulados y la práctica poética de los considerados como grupos generacionales (del 50, del 70, poetas de la experiencia...). Estos grupos han sido vistos casi siempre como bloques autónomos, homogéneos (y hegemónicos, cuando no 'totalitarios'), y han sido analizados más como el producto de unos nombres que como propuestas de escritura, más "como una cadena temporal de antes a después" que "como una malla donde todas las piezas se articulan en un presente contradictorio pero unitario", por utilizar también para este periodo más próximo las palabras que Talens escribiera pensando en la generación poética de 1970 (Talens 1989: 29).

Los poetas de la antología de Carvajal han sido víctimas, en cierto sentido, de esta oposición, que ha llenado casi todo el espacio crítico y publicitario, al no estar incluidos en ninguna de las dos tendencias. Por eso, la selección del poeta granadino cobra aún más valor: nos regala, en efecto, "una muestra intensa" de su poesía preferida, pero también produce en el lector ávido "de grandes aventuras del espíritu" el deseo de "adentrarse en el maravilloso laberinto de nuestra lírica contemporánea" (Carvajal 1997), a pesar de — o precisamente por — este intrincado panorama que, ante todo, se caracteriza por la diversidad de las propuestas poéticas.

²⁵ El grupo de *poetas de la experiencia* es mayoritariamente granadino: Javier Egea, Álvaro Salvador, Antonio Jiménez Millán, Luis García Montero, Benjamín Prado, Inmaculada Mengíbar y Ángeles Mora suelen ser los citados por la crítica. El grupo se da a conocer a través de dos antologías (de nuevo, la antología como medio de difusión): *La otra sentimentalidad* (1983) y *1917 versos* (1987).

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Texto y contexto de la poesía catalana de fines del siglo XX

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Aunque las urgencias políticas y las fechas recordables casi nunca orientan la brújula de la poesía, parece inevitable que la historia de la literatura busque su periodización con la ayuda de los grandes acontecimientos históricos. En el caso de las letras catalanas, no cabe duda de la importancia de la muerte de Franco en 1975, y valga, pues, ese año como punto de partida para una reflexión sobre el panorama poético catalán del último cuarto de siglo. No es fácil establecer homologías entre el discurso poético y el contexto sociopolítico, entre otras razones por el peso de la tradición, de los géneros y los códigos (de la larga cadena intertextual y archi-textual, en suma).

De todos modos, en mayor o menor grado, con más o menos lentitud, los poetas son eco de la función sociocultural que se les asigna. Así, en varios poetas catalanes que publican a comienzos de la década de los setenta todavía resuena la voluntad de denuncia del régimen dictatorial franquista, y no resulta baladí que los versos de Salvador Espriu fueran citados a menudo por los políticos en favor de una pluralidad tolerante y de un reconocimiento de las distintas culturas españolas. En realidad, la poesía catalana vivía perfectamente en consonancia con las corrientes europeas, y no faltaban partidarios de la poesía *engagée* o comprometida y de la literatura al servicio de las causas sociales y políticas. Además, la poesía catalana llegaba a simbolizar la resistencia cultural y lingüística del pueblo catalán (Pere Quart), mallorquín (Josep Maria Llompart) y valenciano (Vicent Andrés Estellés), por lo que

asumía una representatividad y conseguía un prestigio añadidos a lo estrictamente literario.

Con los años, tal dimensión política, cultural e histórica ha ido perdiendo peso hasta casi desaparecer, y por tanto, desde los años ochenta, la imagen del país ya no se prestigia gracias a sus poetas. Incluso la *nova cançó* (“nueva canción”) —imitación y secuela de Brel, Brassens y la *chanson* francesa— parece hoy un fósil del activismo cultural y del afán popularizador de otros tiempos. En la última literatura catalana, la novela ocupa el lugar preponderante que ocupa en las literaturas occidentales: en palabras de Calafat (1992: 83), “el viaje que ha recorrido la poesía es para muchos el recorrido inverso del que ha realizado la narrativa”; y, por otra parte, la política prefiere atender o cuidar los medios de comunicación, mucho más influyentes.

En los poetas que se dan a conocer a finales de la dictadura franquista o a comienzos de la democracia, nacidos poco antes o después de los años cincuenta, se percibe un cierto cansancio del realismo social cultivado por muchos de sus antecesores. O lo que es lo mismo, observado desde el otro ángulo: en los poetas de la generación del setenta se nota una nueva concepción del discurso poético, que se pretende autónomo y autosuficiente; así lo afirman y documentan los principales testigos de tal cambio (Marco y Pont; y Altaió y Sala-Valldaura). Sin embargo, cabe establecer conexiones con los nuevos aires que se respiran: los “nuevos” poetas hacen compatible esa libertad del signo poético tanto con la libertad política que preconizaban desde la izquierda y con frecuencia desde el independentismo, como con la libertad moral que empezaban a vivir, algo tarde, a raíz del Mayo francés de 1968. (Es la época en que se defiende cultural y políticamente la idea, una y trina, de los Países Catalanes: las Islas Baleares, Cataluña y el País Valenciano.)

La poesía del realismo social, con deseos de cambio político, ocultaba en parte otra corriente muy fructífera de la literatura contemporánea europea, el simbolismo. Sin embargo, la tradición catalana de quienes consideraban la creación poética como una forma de conocimiento y asignaban al verbo valores ontológicos no se había quebrado, y Carles Riba, en primer lugar, y Joan Vin-yoli, después, serán los eslabones de una cadena que ha propor-

cionado grosor reflexivo y profundidad moral a los mejores poetas de la experiencia actuales. Con todo, cabe lamentar cierta anemia intelectual en el corazón de la última poesía catalana, tan propensa a la actitud y los contenidos líricos. Vicenç Llorca (1965) se queja de manera parecida:

El papel de Carles Riba en los últimos treinta años de poesía catalana es triste, injusto y preocupante. La violenta oposición que el realismo histórico procuró sobre el simbolismo no permitió salvar en aquellos momentos la refinada poesía intelectual del único autor capaz de ser comparado, por la potencia conceptual de su mundo poético, con los maestros del postsimbolismo europeo como Eliot o Valéry (Llorca 1991: 52-53).

Con mucho menos peso que en la pintura, la poesía catalana de los últimos años se ha nutrido también del expresionismo alemán: gracias al buen traductor y poeta Feliu Formosa (1934), y hasta la obra de Valerià Pujol (1952; ya fallecido) y Eudald Puig (1948) o, en los últimos años, la de los mallorquines Andreu Vidal (1959-1998) y Arnau Pons, ambos traductores de Paul Celan.

Se quiera o no, a raíz del Mayo del 68 y de los enormes cambios de la España de los setenta, el intento de hacerse cada uno su propio modelo de vivir se tradujo en la poesía escrita durante aquella década y primeros ochenta tanto en los temas y motivos iniciales como en la deliberada busca de singularización del estilo (el idiolecto poético). Así, Biel Mesquida (1947) inaugura a voz en grito la aceptación explícita de la homosexualidad en *El bell país on els homes desitgen els homes*¹ a un cierto hedonismo bisexual se referirá *Varia et memorabilia* (1984; 2ª ed. corregida, 1988), de un escritor más joven, Enric Sòria (1958), más afín al lenguaje de Cavafis. O Maria-Mercè Marçal (1952-1998) conforma una simbología y un lenguaje feminista, que no rehúye otras reivindi-

¹ La distribución de este libro ilustra también los cambios que se operan en diez años: en 1974, su edición ciclostilada, de 200 ejemplares, corrió de mano en mano; en 1985, la edición, sin problemas censoriales, por parte de Llibres de Glauco anduvo por el circuito de las librerías con toda normalidad.

caciones; fue muy citada la “divisa” que abre su *Cau de llunes* (1977):

Al azar agradezco tres dones: haber nacido mujer,
de clase baja y nación oprimida.

Y el turbio azur de ser tres veces rebelde.²

La alta presencia de lo erótico, acorde con los cambios de costumbres y hasta con la edad de los poetas, es otra de las innovaciones temáticas que cabe vincular en mayor o menor grado con la evolución del país y con la influencia del Mayo francés. Por lo demás, los poetas jóvenes a mediados de los setenta empezaban a distinguir lo que con frecuencia se había mezclado o se mezclaba en la poesía comprometida o *engagée* del “realismo histórico” (términos con que Castellet y Molas definían la denominada en castellano “poesía social”)³: según la mayoría de los jóvenes autores, por un lado el poeta como ciudadano debía interesarse por la *res publica*, pero por otro, como poeta, debía escribir buenos versos.

En los años setenta hubo, pues, un rechazo (crítico y frecuentemente en la propia práctica poética) del realismo lingüístico y de la actitud del poeta social. Y ese rechazo mostraba un deseo de vivir, una asunción de la libertad existencial y moral, permitida ya por las grietas del franquismo y por la evolución socioeconómica, pero también ponía de manifiesto esa confianza en el lenguaje poético y su autonomía, sustentada por el prestigio resistencialista que la postguerra había tenido que conceder a nuestra poesía. El poemario que mejor refleja, indirectamente, tal modernidad (hija también de los movimientos *hippies*) y la polifonía alcanzada por el sujeto poético, capaz ya de darnos motivo, reflexión e ironía del tema en el mismo poema, es *Latitud dels cavalls* (1974), de

² “A ‘atzar agraeixo tres dons: haver nascut dona, / de classe baixa i nació oprimida.// I el tèrbol atzur de ser tres voltes rebel.” (M.-M. Marçal, *Cau de llunes*, Barcelona: Proa, 1977, p. 13).

³ Frente a la poesía que se destacaba en esta obra, los poetas de las nuevas generaciones reivindicaron otras voces; durante los últimos quince años, ha destacado la tarea de Editorial Columna al haber publicado la obra de poetas un tanto marginados u olvidados: Tomàs Garcés, Josep-Sebastià Pons, Jordi-Pere Cerdà, Màrius Sampere, ...

Francesc Parcerisas (1944). Y la reivindicación de Vicent Andrés Estellés, con su erotismo popular, o la de Joan Vinyoli, en su curiosa mezcla de hedonismo y escepticismo vital, de realismo y simbolismo, de experiencia y reflexión filosófica, revelan lo mismo: una asunción de la libertad moral.

Es más: la agonía del régimen franquista y la muerte de Franco permitían el descubrimiento de una larguísima cadena, cuyo eslabón primero se encontraba nada menos que en los trovadores; la poesía catalana recuperó de este modo la sextina, el decasílabo con cesura de su siglo de oro (el XV, con Ausiàs March, Roís de Corella y Jordi de Sant Jordi),⁴ o un riquísimo caudal léxico cuya utilización quedaba doblemente justificada: porque el lenguaje poético valía *per se et in se*, y porque una de las funciones sociales del poeta estribaba en poner a andar en toda su fortaleza histórica e incluso dialectal la lengua, adormecida en el diccionario y castellanizada en los registros coloquiales y argóticos de las ciudades de Valencia, Barcelona, etc.

Ese amor a la lengua y a la lengua poética respondía, claro está, a unas necesidades culturales de recuperación del catalán, y la *intelligentsia* y los medios de comunicación — alborozados, al menos en Cataluña, por poder recoger sin tapujos la realidad cultural del país — recibieron con los brazos bastante abiertos la nueva poesía. No cabe olvidar tampoco otro factor coadyuvante, porque, si bien “la poesía catalana — en palabras de Joaquim Molas (1977: 6) — participa de los problemas de la poesía contemporánea”, se singulariza porque sus autores son depositarios “de la lengua, y, por tanto, de la patria”, con el añadido — según creo — de que nuestros autores contemporáneos han querido saltar los vacíos históricos provocados por la decadencia literaria, del XVI al XVIII, y por los obstáculos políticos (verbigracia, la postguerra), y, en consecuencia, han querido quemar etapas para modernizar la literatura catalana y ponerla a la hora de París, de Londres o de Nueva York.

⁴ El verso clásico de las letras catalanas es el decasílabo con acento invariable en la cuarta sílaba y cesura (masculina, femenina o lírica). Al igual que en la métrica francesa, en catalán no se tienen en cuenta las sílabas postónicas del final del verso o del hemistiquio.

En los años ochenta, tal función social del poeta, con lo que supone de aportación espiritual y lingüística a la causa catalana, va a ir desapareciendo, a pesar de que se siga manifestando una denuncia de lo injusto social y existencial en poetas como los valencianos Jaume Pérez Muntaner (1938) y Marc Granell (1953). Hasta cabe encontrar una cierta verificación de lo que aquí se afirma en el hecho de que la elección de idioma, si catalán si castellano, no parece vivirse como un drama, y se asume la lengua propia. Pere Gimferrer, nacido en 1945, dejaba de escribir en español y optaba por el catalán al preferirlo como instrumento lingüístico para la poesía, mientras que razones éticas llevaban a hacer otro tanto a muchos de los autores de la generación de los setenta: Jaume Pont, Josep Piera...

Gracias a esta serie de razones, algunas de las corrientes que atraviesan la última década con logros más interesantes sólo pueden entenderse partiendo de esa libertad moral, de ese planteamiento ético y vital, y de esa confianza, incluso social, en el lenguaje poético. Estoy pensando en los sectores más radicales en la defensa del textualismo, aunque no defiendan necesariamente su valor intrínseco y lo puedan remitir a la ironización de la realidad: Carles H. Mor (1940) y, con menor interés en la experimentación de los lenguajes verbales y sobreentendidos, Enric Casassas (1951), hoy uno de los autores más conocidos y celebrados por la crítica joven y recuperador de muchos recursos rítmicos y fonéticos de la oralidad. Estoy pensando, también, en la provocación neo-dadá, seguramente agotada, de Josep Albertí (1950) y el "Taller Llunàtic"⁵; en la pluridisciplinariedad, el conceptualismo y la descontextualización a partir de los que operaba Joan Brossa (1919-1988), el maestro de la vanguardia literaria catalana y, en su fecundidad, autor asimismo de poemas objeto, de poesía letrista y visual, obras conceptuales, ...; en el uso de lenguajes icónicos y cinéticos, o del sonido, en la "polipoesía"; en el concepto de ventriloquia que permite el "pastiche" y la pluralidad de voces poéticas que sustenta al menos una parte de la obra de Vicenç Altaió (1954); en la reflexión comunicativa que subyace en *Ics* (1983), de

⁵ Su actividad parapoética, desarrollada en Mallorca, buscaba la provocación, también mediante exposiciones, happenings y videos.

Patrick Gifreu (1952)⁶; en el alcance místico a que apunta *Els caçadors salvatges* (1984), de Salvador Jàfer (1954); en la cosmogonía erótica de *El jove* (1987), de un raro nuevamente reivindicado por bastantes poetas jóvenes, Blai Bonet (1926–1997), por su altísima, vertical capacidad de analogía y por su lenguaje; en el cálculo de probabilidades de la lengua como desveladora y creadora de mundos con que investiga Víctor Sunyol (1955), verdadero hito para las letras catalanas por lo que respecta a la reflexión sobre los límites de la comunicación poética y autor, además, de uno de los poemarios que mejor interiorizan el paisaje y la estética de la nada y la ruina: *Esculls al dic sec de la memòria* (1991); o en la mirada paranoica con que objetiva, y ridiculiza, nuestra realidad la *Obra poètica 1959–1983* de Miquel Bauçà (1940). Algo que halla continuidad en la ruptura en poetas de hornadas más recientes, como Susanna Rafart, Albert Roig (1959), Xavier Lloveras (1960), Jordi Ribas, el malogrado Josep Vicent Clar, etcétera.

Relacionado con la búsqueda de referentes culturales propios e históricos, el hedonismo y la reivindicación de nuevos usos y costumbres han provocado lo que llamé “una nueva mediterraneidad en la literatura catalana”. Sería el envés de la mediterraneidad estética, serena y apolínea, que defendiera el *Noucentisme* del primer tercio de siglo, en general, y una novela, *La Ben Plantada*, de Eugeni d'Ors, en particular. Este nuevo concepto estético de mediterraneidad abarcaría bastantes aspectos y considerables logros poéticos: la utilización cavafiana del mundo clásico para explicar el presente, de un libro como *Cants d'Hekatònim de Tifundis* (1982), de Joan Margarit (1938); el empleo de formas árabes para sensualizar debidamente la crónica de un amor, de *Divan* (1982), de Jaume Pont (1947); la maurofilia de cierta poesía y narrativa valenciana; la mirada culta sobre Bizancio de Joan Perucho (1920), en *Itineraris d'Orient* (1985); *Maremar* (1985) de Josep Piera (1947), junto con sus libros de viaje, a la vez como exaltación del placer, la conversación, los cuerpos jóvenes, y como añoranza de una infancia casi perdida, como la Valencia rural; mi libro *Gual de camins* (1985); la tarea de Maria Àngels Anglada (1930); etcétera. O el propio concepto de la vida como viaje, la

⁶ Barcelona, Llibres del Mall, 1983.

Ítaca inalcanzable de nuestra particular odisea, para recordar el poema de Cavafis y la música de Lluís Llach, convertido una vez más el Mediterráneo en “corazón de la Historia” poseedor de “la savia rejuvenecedora”, para emplear los versos de otro fin de siglo, el de Miquel Costa i Llobera.

En la década de los ochenta, que vive esa fructífera continuidad de la experimentación y la radicalidad y que hasta continúa pariendo algunas iniciativas editoriales reivindicadoras de los márgenes de los circuitos y los canales librescos, la función social de la poesía —según dijimos— cambia, y con ella, gradualmente, la práctica poética se decanta hacia un lenguaje más usual, hacia un lirismo también autobiográfico pero menos reivindicativo de la libertad moral que el de la década anterior, y hacia una desideologización que se vehicula tanto por medio del eclecticismo estético como por medio de la ironización del valor, en mayúsculas, de la Poesía. Si tuviera que sintetizarlo en una frase, exagerada pero reveladora: pasamos de citar en las “poéticas” a San Juan de la Cruz a escribir en la estela de la poesía experiencial inglesa, Cavafis, Gil de Biedma (¡más seguido que el propio Cernuda!) o del catalán Gabriel Ferrater, con todas las distancias de calidad entre éstos y sus epígonos. Por comparación con hace quince o veinte años, hoy habría muchos menos poetas catalanes que estarían de acuerdo con el entusiasmo de Antoni Marí (1944), pese a cierto y minoritario cultivo de la llamada “poesía del silencio”:

La palabra poética expande los confines del silencio, abre sus dominios; da a conocer lo que permanece desde el origen y que espera ser desvelado y que de tan cercano es secreto y no permite ninguna mediación. Como la cosa que nombra, la palabra poética es una palabra nunca dicha, ni pronunciada. Es palabra secreta que en un instante refulge, en el centro del silencio y que, en el acto, se cubre confundiéndose entre la inmediatez, en la cotidiana evidencia, donde cada cosa tiene nombre y en su nombre se repliega (Marí 1991: 198).

Al menos cuando leemos la poesía que hoy se escribe, se premia y se ensalza, estamos muy lejos de la concepción taumatúrgica o de

la concepción romántica del poeta. De nuevo podemos justificar este cambio en las expectativas lectoras de la poesía catalana: desde la propia recepción crítica de los libros y desde la función social que se le asigna al poeta actual. Quizá como consecuencia positiva de este acercamiento a temas de la experiencia cotidiana y al lenguaje usual, existe hoy un público que llena cafés y hasta teatros con motivo de lecturas y recitales de poetas. No puede omitirse, por otra parte, la influencia — sobre el canon emergente y en las preferencias lectoras del poder editorial y crítico — de los mandarinatos y capillas que frenan a unos y entronizan a los otros por criterios simple y llanamente nepotistas⁷. Así, se ha generado un debate, más virulento en Cataluña que en Valencia o Mallorca, como puede observarse leyendo el libelo *L'estiu de les paparres o la societat secreta dels poetes* (1992), de Albert Roig, o los artículos de diversos autores que el propio Roig recopila en *El gos del poeta* (1994).

El cambio de la función social del poeta corrobora la evolución eclecticista, esa falta de ideología, esa aceptación del *uso* lingüístico más generalizado, y del lirismo en función más o menos narrativa o más o menos emotiva de la propia experiencia. Intentando explicar los penúltimos años, José-Carlos Mainer observa, para el conjunto de las Españas, que

nuestra capacidad de emoción intelectual y hasta la superioridad de la razón ceden ante lo mínimo y el sentimiento individualizado. [...] Por eso, este tiempo tan dado al nominalismo — a fijar en una palabra desafortunada un concepto mucho más vivo — acuñó aquello de las asignaturas pendientes y estotro del desencanto, fosilizando así mucha decepción, no poca impotencia y una vergüenza por lo no hecho que casi no se atrevería a reconocerse como tal (Mainer 1985: 3 y 4).

⁷ La última antología destinada a tener influjo en el establecimiento del canon de la última poesía catalana se debe a Dolors Oller. Para el lector extranjero, resultará más útil la de Rossi y Gómez Oliver por sus comparaciones con las otras literaturas pensinsulares y, quizás, por estar escrita en italiano.

Hoy, el poeta intenta encontrar un pequeño lugar al sol o la sombra de las nuevas necesidades culturales, y proclama a menudo, muy lejos de la cita de Antoni Marí, su interés por “lo que pasa en la calle”, por el entorno y las costumbres urbanas.

El tema metapoético, obviamente, dista de estar agotado; por ejemplo, ha dado un buen libro como el de Antoni Tàpies-Barba (1956), *Matèria dels astres* (1992), pero es minoritario. Predomina en los poetas catalanes recientes el deseo de presentar su condición de hombres normales (olvidando que sus mismas protestas de normalidad nutren también su anomía cultural y que no son los poetas, sino la sociedad, quien decide acerca de la función que desempeña), y por eso, los poetas recientes suelen explicar sus experiencias diarias con palabras diarias, no levantan la voz, se quejan y extraen consecuencias, cuentan sus desencantos y sus “asignaturas pendientes”, para volver a las observaciones de José-Carlos Mainer. Hasta razones biológicas justifican la relativa abundancia de poemarios que dan melancólica fe del paso del tiempo, “todo pasa”, y son crónica de la madurez del poeta o de la condición crepuscular actual de sus envejecidos entusiasmos. Una especie de automasquismo de tono melancólico o nostálgico parece ser central en la voz de una buena parte de la poesía actual, que difícilmente sonríe, se burla, insulta, grita o llora, como si hubiéramos olvidado los lamentos de Job o las admoniciones proféticas, como si no recordáramos que la poesía admite el grito y el susurro, el versículo y el poema (largo), la sátira, la oda y la endecha, el planto y la *tensó*: ¿se tratará de un contagio de esa discreción comunicativa tan general en nuestras sociedades? Como recuerda un poeta canario,

Ningún lugar para la condolencia, sin embargo, ninguna lamentación entonada sobre la página tabloide de los diarios de grandes tiradas (la prensa en la que Mallarmé vio un “moderno poema épico”) o sobre el cristal líquido de las pantallas de televisión y su derroche de imágenes trivializadas: según ha mostrado Paul de Man, el testimonio de la poesía es, en Hölderlin — y, diríamos, desde él —, el testimonio no de una revelación del ser, sino de una ilusión, esto es, de una tragedia, la tragedia de una imposibilidad

de “establecer” el ser, desalojado o sustituido por el solo deseo (Sánchez Robayna 1991: 8–9).

Como contrapartida, el buen poeta experiencial ausculta los latidos de su yo y de su sociedad, para convertirse sino en minero de transrealidades, al menos en buceador en las galerías más íntimas de la primera persona del singular (y del plural). *Fugit irreparibile tempus*. Y con el tiempo, los ya envejecidos entusiasmos. Se trata de una de las áreas temáticas más cultivadas de la poesía catalana de los ochenta, plenamente adscribible a la poesía de la experiencia. Un tipo de poesía que, según Robert Langbaum,

puede ser entendida como el instrumento de una época que ha de arriesgarse a una literatura sin significado objetivamente verificable, una literatura que gira sobre sí misma, que construye sus propios valores para disolverlos antes de que haya posibilidad de juicio, que los convierte en fenómenos biográficos, en manifestaciones de una vida que como vida se autojustifica (Subirana 1994: 10).

Donde el paso del tiempo y la experiencia propia, convenientemente elaborada, parece haber dejado una más clara huella temática es en *L'edat d'or* (1983), del ya mencionado Francesc Parcerisas. Quizás junto con *Passeig d'aniversari* — el postrer poemario de Joan Vinyoli —, *L'edat d'or* ha sido el libro más elogiado de la pasada década, probablemente porque combina, en medio del camino vital, suficiente vivencia y reflexión, bastante ironía, inteligencia y cultura. Para su particular y generalizable *carpe diem*, bebe de fuentes literarias anglosajonas y griegas, que incorpora a su mundo poético, capaz de saltar — como Vinyoli — de la anécdota a la meditación. Para Antoni Marí, Parcerisas consigue extraer en este libro

estoicamente de la experiencia subjetiva unas verdades de orden universal: la transitoriedad de todas las cosas, la implacabilidad del paso del tiempo, la persistencia del recuerdo, la loca y pasajera alegría, el deseo inalcanzado (Marí 1983: 29).

Dentro de una visión, muy frecuente en las letras catalanas recientes, de la vida marcada ya por la literatura y de la literatura considerada como experiencia vital, las referencias culturales, intratextualizadas, de *L'edat d'or* nos remiten a una de las características de la poesía reciente: el influjo de la poesía en inglés (Auden, S. Spender, Prince, R. Lowell, entre los que Parcerisas cita, pero también T. S. Eliot, Philip Larkin, ...). Es una influencia claramente ostensible en la obra del poeta y editor Àlex Susanna (1957), inicialmente escrita al amparo de la tradición francesa. Otros autores de las hornadas más veteranas de la generación del setenta han poetizado la llegada de la madurez, como Narcís Comadira (1942) y su *En quarentena* (1990), o el encuentro inesperado, finalmente imposible, con el amor, como Joan Margarit, poeta excesivamente prolífico y monótono otras veces, pero convincente en la tristeza sentimental de *Edat roja* (1990). (Sea recordado entre paréntesis que otros autores muy fecundos, como Vicent Andrés Estellés, Joan Brossa y Miquel Martí i Pol han continuado publicando a lo largo de estos últimos años, aunque, con la excepción acaso del primero, no parece que su influencia se haya mantenido en el mismo nivel que la que tuvieron durante los setenta.)

Para dibujar a grandes trazos el panorama poético catalán reciente, sería, con todo, injusto no señalar otras obras de poetas de muy distintas hornadas y estéticas: la década de los ochenta fue abierta por *Mandràgola* (1980), de Josep Maria Llompart (1925–1996), en barroca obsesión por la muerte y con sonetos de gran calidad⁸, y por una recopilación, *Mirall, espai, aparicions: poesia (1970–1980)* (1981), de Pere Gimferrer (1945), que ha vuelto a recuperar su papel capital en las letras catalanas con *Mascarada* (1996). A comienzos de aquella década, Vicenç Altaió nos entregó uno de sus libros más ambiciosos y logrados, *Biathànatos o l'elogi del suïcidi* (1982): radiografía el yo mediante la asunción de voces de poetas suicidas (Artaud, Nerval, Celan, Mayakovski, Dylan Thomas, Benn...), y el lenguaje, en una tensión semántica que se expresa hasta por encabalgamientos conceptuales, recurre a la

⁸ El tema de la muerte ha dado excelentes poemas en dos libros recientes: *Vol de cendres* (1996), de Jaume Pont, y *El germà de Catul i més coses* (1997), de Jordi Cornudella.

derivación, la políptoton, la paranomasia, la enumeración por semejanza fonética, etc. También podría considerarse, el libro de Altaió, como la culminación de una concepción del arte poético como una apuesta a favor de la radicalidad del vivir y del escribir.

Con Gimferrer la poesía incorporaba motivos iniciales de procedencia literaria, plástica y cinematográfica, que están en el origen de propuestas tan interesantes como la de Jordi Domènech (1941) y su *Història de l'arquitectura* (1995). La culturalización de la naturaleza y el proceso inverso, la naturalización de la cultura, explican las bases creativas del pintor y poeta Perejaume (1957) o de *Pas de Coro* (1998), de Joaquim Sala-Sanahuja (1953).

Maria-Mercè Marçal, ya mencionada con ocasión de su contribución en la creación de un lenguaje poético de imaginería y simbología femenina, ha acrecentado su obra con libros clave, reunidos en su obra completa: *Llengua abolida* (1973–1988) (1989). El propio título alude a su principal preocupación ideológica, que sabe transmitir desde un gran dominio de las formas clásicas y populares para, con ello, renovar los contenidos eróticos y amorosos de la poesía catalana.

Sobre una doble base vivencial y cultural, construye Feliu Formosa (1934) sus libros, entre los cuales *Semblança* (1986) y *Per Puck* (1992). Éste, hermosísimo homenaje al teatro; aquél, *Semblança*, al redor de un concepto del amor que se ampara en el idealismo de Pedro Salinas, y que comunica las más profundas sensaciones (desde el placer y la ternura hasta la tristeza y la inquietud) en su constante combate con el tiempo. Màrius Sampere (1928), en fin, ha entregado un libro excepcional por su fuerza y rebeldía religiosa, *Demiúrgia* (1997).

Poetas relativamente jóvenes han añadido ya algunas buenas pinceladas al cuadro de la poesía catalana actual: David Castillo (1961), poeta que trabaja elegíacamente materiales urbanos casi de derribo (derrotas personales e históricas, amistades perdidas) y sabe ensamblarlos con voces de la música americana, así en *Game over* (1998); Isidre Martínez (1964), especialmente con *Himnes* (1990), excelente muestra del cultivo del poema en prosa; Ramon Guillem (1959); Josep Ballester (1961); o, en la línea experiencial, Antoni Puigverd (1954), Ponç Pons (1956), Jordi Larios (1959),

Xulio Ricardo Trigo (1959), ... Contra la opinión sustentada por Calafat, que caracteriza la poesía de los ochenta como muy proclive a escribir poemas breves (1991: 67-69), o al menos como excepción, *Les illes obstinades* (1987) de Xavier Lloveras alienta con un gran dominio del poema largo, especialmente en el que cierra su asombrada busca de la "palabra plural de la belleza". Si Lloveras domina la narratividad del verso y los tonos más dispares, la poesía de Andreu Vidal se ha caracterizado siempre por su expresionismo escéptico, nihilista, al que hay que añadir en la última época el apoyo que busca en la mítica: *Els dies tranquils* (1988) o *L'animal que no existeix* (1993).

Como puede observarse, repasar los poemarios de mayor interés literario nos lleva a constatar lo que ya se ha afirmado: la variedad de tendencias que conviven o coexisten en estos últimos años, tanto si observamos la obra de los más veteranos como de los más jóvenes, aunque con los cambios que ya hemos mencionado a partir de 1984 ó 1985 sobre todo. Para los primeros años, hasta mediada la década de los ochenta, vale la síntesis de Jaume Pont:

Esta operación ha derivado en diversas líneas de escritura: una línea "posnoucentista" de cuño carneriano; un neorromanticismo de ascendente germánico o clásico filtrado por las improntas personalísimas de Carles Riba y Joan Vinyoli; una poesía intimista de discurso narrativo y tono moral, deudora de la lírica anglosajona contemporánea y de Gabriel Ferrater; y, en último término, la reivindicación del enclave vanguardista catalán de entreguerras, con Salvat Papasseit y, primordialmente, J. V. Foix y Joan Brossa, como correlato personal de una visión estética donde predomina el irracionalismo poético de ascendente simbolista y surrealista (Pont 1987: 227).

Refiriéndose a poetas valencianos algo más jóvenes que los que se dieran a conocer en los límites de la eclosión generacional de los setenta (Vicent Alonso, de 1948; Vicent Salvador, de 1951; etc.), Calafat detecta los ya comentados síntomas de la evolución:

no comparten la práctica indiscriminada de la metáfora; en ellos, por tanto, la perspectiva poética ya no

será tan pretenciosa, los poemas largos y la atmósfera surreal irán menguando gradualmente en favor de una mayor contención verbal. [...] En su obra el poema se hace más permeable a la *realidad* inmediata y a las circunstancias vitales del yo poético, entre las cuales tiene un peso considerable la problemática nacional (1991: 32–33).

Hay quien — Julià Guillamon — cree que el género poético de estos últimos lustros se ha convertido en “un florilegio anacrónico”, mediocre reflejo de “una intimidad intrascendente” (1989: 140). La radicalidad de tal juicio no puede casar con una concepción de la poesía, hoy dominante entre los más jóvenes, según la cual el poeta no puede sino seguir la tradición o las tradiciones poéticas anteriores; de ahí que, con cierta trampa silogística, muchos poetas recién llegados infieran la imposibilidad de una vanguardia actual y no sean muy inclinados al manifiesto o a considerar la poesía como un modo de vivir extremo. Ese eclecticismo estético, con tintes confesionalistas en materia temática y un lenguaje de sintaxis y léxico nada transgresores, con que podríamos intentar resumir el grueso del pelotón poético actual, mereció una antología muy temprana: *Ser de segle. Antologia dels nou poetes catalans* (1989), de David Castillo. Dicha antología atestigua ya ciertos cambios de mediados de los ochenta, cambios que resultan comparables con los de la poesía castellana, según el análisis para ésta de Juan José Lanz: también en catalán aparece el poema histórico (recordemos els *Cants d'Hekatonim de Tifundis*, de Joan Margarit),

ya sea como un modo de distanciar y objetivar las distintas obsesiones personales, ya como un modo de intensificarlas y embellecerlas (Lanz 1994: 4–5).

También en catalán el influjo de Jaime Gil de Biedma y de la generación del medio siglo permiten la “expresión del yo a través de un personaje histórico interpuesto” (ib. 5), como se observa en los límites de la polifonía estilística en *Biathànatos o l'elogi del suïcidi*, de Altaió, o en el muy imitado poemario de Parcerisas, *L'edat d'or*, piedra angular de la transitada poesía de la experiencia, en que el sujeto poético ironiza, reflexiona o moraliza a

partir de las vivencias de un autor que, en apariencia, sólo aporta los motivos autobiográficos del poema.

La evolución de algunos poetas de la generación de los setenta y la incorporación de bastantes autores más jóvenes a lo largo de los ochenta llevan, tanto en las letras catalanas como en las castellanas,

a un proceso de exaltación de cuantos elementos apelen al hombre, no ya desde una perspectiva predominantemente estética, sino desde vertientes cordiales o vitales (Sánchez Zamarreño 1989: 59).

De ahí, para Sánchez Zamarreño, una cierta “despreocupación” por el matiz (en el aspecto rítmico, también), la “irrupción de prosaísmos”, o la revalorización del patetismo, la temporalidad y la intrahistoria (ib. 60), con la consecuente revalorización, para ciertos sectores, de Martí i Pol, Vicent Andrés Estellés o del lenguaje cotidiano. Desde la escasa atalaya de 1989, con alguna dureza sobre la valía de obras tan incipientes, el propio antólogo de *Ser de segle*, David Castillo procura hallar las coordenadas generales para terminar reconociendo la naturaleza variopinta de tantos autores en ciernes y limitarse a una síntesis poco comprometida de lo que han supuesto los paisajes poéticos más recientes:

Huir de la catalogación, de la eterna tentación de encuadrar que mantienen muchos críticos y comentaristas, parece ser el único acuerdo entre los nuevos poetas aparecidos. Quizás la interpretación de un cierto realismo intimista es, en la actualidad, el único criterio unificador, especialmente entre muchos de los autores valencianos (Castillo 1989: 20).⁹

Acaso en los últimos años, el debate entre las distintas concepciones y prácticas del género poético haya permitido una mayor capacidad para convivir o, al menos, para coexistir por parte de autores muy distintos y, por tanto, muy distinguibles.

⁹ La pluralidad de la poesía valenciana actual es constatada por Carbó. Para una visión general de la literatura catalana reciente, remito a Cònsul.

Como ocurre tantas veces, precisamente en las explicaciones de un escritor de las últimas hornadas, el ya mencionado Enric Sòria, encuentro la mejor exposición de la teoría y la práctica de muchos de nuestros poetas catalanes actuales. Sean sus palabras preliminares a *Varia et memorabilia* las de salida casi a este imposible intento de poner cascabeles críticos al gato de la poesía catalana última:

Pretendía captar y expresar la poesía, belleza y magia o como ustedes quieran decirlo, que hay detrás de lo que llamamos realidad. Pensaba que la lírica, que es un curioso avatar del antiguo conjuro, conserva aún fuerza suficiente como para exhumar todo lo que se esconde bajo la rutina o, aún más, bajo la retórica: aquellos matices, tan huidizos, que quizás la voz baja, la precisión y, si conviene, la crudeza podrían convocar y que son, a fin de cuentas, los que hacen que la vida tenga alguna gracia.

Pretendía devolver a las palabras más gastadas por el uso su cualidad de materia del verso, y sigo pensando que no hay, en el más vasto diccionario, una sola palabra que no pueda ser instrumento del poema. Una manipulación acertada, un buen oído o una correcta afinación de medios y objetivos pueden recuperar para la poesía hasta las más ensuciadas por el abuso cotidiano (entre nosotros, sin embargo, el verdadero abuso ha sido confundir demasiado la palabra poética con el exotismo libresco o la mera ininteligibilidad). Quería también escribir en un catalán no demasiado alejado del que he escuchado, vivo, al menos en algunos labios ancianos — cuya riqueza y música siguen maravillándome —, ni del catalán que hablo, con que pienso y sueño (Sòria 1988: 9–10).

Esta larga cita muestra, en su eclecticismo y su opción, el lugar más transitado de la última poesía catalana, incluso por lo que tiene de miedo a lo libresco, a la retórica o al artificio. Bienvenida sea esta frecuentada plaza al sol de la poesía, pero, por qué he de ocultarlo, añoro en algunas ocasiones las sombras de Tiresias, el

poeta ciego que fue clarividente, lúcido y visionario, porque fue hombre y fue mujer.

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**End-of-the-Millennium Poetry:
Discourses and Resources
(with Notes on the Poetry of Jaan Kaplinski
and Hando Runnel)**

JÜRI TALVET

By the end of our century, the notion of "postmodernism" has become an encyclopedic commonplace (cf. McGowan 1994: 584–587). There is a great number of studies on the subject, whereas these themselves have been recapitulated and summarized in numerous metacritical texts (e.g. Grande Rosales 1997: 181–193, Luna Borge 1991, Mayhew 1994, see the chapter "Postmodernism, Culturalism, Kitch"). Without necessarily taking up the vast task of going back to critical prototexts, one can point out the general features mostly attributed to postmodern art and literature. These are: cultural plurality, multiplicity, heterogeneity, hybridization, eclecticism, camp attitudes and fragmentation (as opposed to integrity, "great narratives", "foundational truths", historical tradition, "purity of art", academic culture, etc.), a certain tendency to blend with mass culture or at least to integrate elements of mass culture and kitch, the obvious lack of clear ethical intentions, a wide use of irony, parody, pastiche, collage (which brings in an accentuated intertextuality), metaliterature, the aesthetics of the neobaroque, an openness to the hitherto marginal discourses, (feminism, post-colonialism, sexual minorities, heterodoxia in general). To this, the rapid advances of the electronic media have added their fin-de-siècle technical shades: computer imitations rivalling original hand-made works of art, "virtual publications" of articles and poems on "home pages", infinite possibilities to blend and mix visual images, literary texts, sounds, etc.

However, as soon as we go to literary works themselves, and try to adapt the above-mentioned categories to major works of art and literature of our postmodern age, to poems, as is our case, we notice immediately that the theoretical pattern at least in part fails to meet the goal. Especially the work of some of the most important poets does not obey the rules of the postmodern theory. And, on the contrary, those poems that manifestly follow the pattern of postmodern definitions, fail to impress us. They mostly lack something essential on our "horizon of expectations".

This "our" is, no doubt, quite relative in its meaning. The horizon varies from generation to generation, from a social group to another, from a literary critic to a common reader, from a young rebellious postmodern devotee to a sceptical "realist". However, it is likely that some of the most mature poetic texts are accepted unanimously. I do not think Seamus Heaney, Frank O'Hara, Robert Creeley, John Ashbery, Allen Ginsberg or Wisława Szymborska, for instance, ever designed their poems as specifically postmodern. Nonetheless, I suppose they would not be missing in any anthology of contemporary (that is, predominantly postmodern) Irish, American or Polish poetry, edited in the 1980s and 1990s, while their postmodern features, if not discovered by older critics, are attributed to them *a posteriori* by the postmoderns. (Cf. *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* 1986, *The Vintage Book of Contemporary World Poetry* 1996, *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry* 1990, *Postmodern American Poetry. A Norton Anthology* 1994).

What to do, then, with poets whose work cannot be submitted to a clearcut postmodern description, but who, nevertheless, figure as major contributors to the poetic renovation of the 1970s and 1980s in the national (and maybe also international) perspective? In the Estonian case, I am thinking above all of Hando Runnel and Jaan Kaplinski, who have been poetically active since the liberalizing break of the 1960s and have some of their most mature books published in the first half of the 1980s. Are they postmoderns without postmodernism? In the case of Spanish poetry, it has recently been questioned whether the poets represented in the epoch-making anthology of Castellet (1970) and often identified with the beginning of postmodernism in Spanish poetry (Gim-

fer, Carnero, Panero, and others) really correspond to postmodern parameters (cf. Saldaña 1997: 14). On the other hand, in several anthologies of and critical studies on US postmodern poetry (cf. *Postmodern American Poetry. A Norton Anthology* 1994, Brown 1994, Mazzaro 1980) authors like O'Hara, Ashbery, Ginsberg, Creeley, Merrill and — even more surprisingly, Elisabeth Bishop — are included, despite the fact that a good part of the apex of their work falls into the end of 1950s, that is the time characterized by the French philosopher Lyotard as the end of Europe's postwar reconstruction and the early days of postmodern deconstruction (Brown 1994: 1).

Furthermore, if the theoretic construction of a paradigm is productive above all in a contrastive binary opposition to other existing paradigms — as the Tartu semiotician Yuri Lotman has postulated throughout his structuralist phase —, one is tempted to ask if such an opposition to postmodern poetry has ever existed at all? Where are the brilliant exponents of (post)realistic poetry that postmodern poets (and poetics) should oppose? In contrast with fictional prose, great poetry in all times seems to have neglected the principles of realistic poetics, or at least the theory of realism largely drawn from the 19th-century novel never seems to have fitted the leading patterns of the poetic evolution. Should we exclude, then, poetry as something entirely transtemporal, eternal, from the aesthetics of postmodernism?

One more factor should be considered approaching our end-of-the-millennium poetry. In fact, all the definitions of postmodernism we know until the present day are made from "inside" the postmodern age. They are self-definitions. Until the postmodern age is incomplete, one really cannot aspire to any definite theory. A view from "outside", from a proper historical distance, is missing. Conservative voices from the past are scarcely relevant enough, as they represent only one side of the opposition. Besides, they are uttered by the living whose point of view inevitably is contaminated with the surrounding postmodern realities, no matter whether they like them or not. They themselves are "half-postmodern". The other pole — what is to come — is still invisible. Or will perhaps the postmodern age, from now on, be eternal?

It probably would be so, if we were to accept what the American poet Charles Wright has written about the poetic essence:

If the true purpose and result of poetry is a contemplation of the divine and its attendant mysteries, as I believe it is, then content is a constant and a given; only the proper subject matter, and the innovative presentation of the subject matter, becomes, then, a concern. (*Written in Water, Written in Stone* 1996: 29).

I do not believe the great majority of postmodernists would sign this sympathetically elevated assertion. On the contrary, one of the main claims of postmodernists is just to deny any divinity, any holistic attitudes, any complete system or paradigm. The signs of time and place, even in poetry, thus, cannot be avoided. Both the subject matter and the means of expression are, indeed, so closely tied to the purpose that the latter, however "divine", not only bears temporal footprints, but is often a direct reflection of a certain socio-cultural situation. The denial of historic paradigms and systems forms a canon of an a-historical denial — a system that ontologically or aesthetically can only be the product of a historical system.

In the same way, any claim of a radically new language is destined to be always relative in its value. Firstly, because its point of departure is the "old language" — the latter practically engenders the former. And secondly, because a natural language, representing itself a historical tradition — however deformed or "deconstructed" — always remains the deepest basis of any poetic renovation. Thus I find especially tautological the attempt to characterize, in the recent US poetry, the formal and visual play with the language as "language poetry". Doesn't any poetry rely on a language? Isn't any poetry a language itself?

The same concerns the idea of "desemiotization", put forward by Lotman and other scholars. Can any desemiotization be conceived beyond the framework of the semiosis or the re-semiotization, the replacing of one paradigm of signs with another?

One of the conclusion of the above said could be that especially those aesthetic systems which claim to be the most thoroughbred or virginally new, in essence form a closed paradigm, with a ten-

dency to paralyze its dynamics — inner openness and movement, which, without any doubt, should be the premise and core of any movement or phenomenon labelled as “modern” or “postmodern”. The best poetry, in my view, is always somewhat “contaminated”, leaving an “opening” to something yet not known. Perhaps the first symptom of (post)modernity in a work of art is the confusion it generally produces in the receiver, shattering his “horizon of expectations”. Once the trend has been established and the coincidence of self-definitions builds up a more or less solid canon, there is no more room for the vibration of the horizon; on the contrary, the horizon itself disappears, surprise becomes a routine incapable of producing any authentic surprises.

My impression of reading, for instance, what is generally viewed as Spanish postmodern poetry, is that much of the “culturalist” and personalistic poetry produced after the renovating breakthrough in Pere Gimferrer’s *Arde el mar* (1966), has been conceived from a postmodern theoretic “center” which, as above said, really does not exist as yet — because postmodernism itself is not “ready”. The imitation of Angloamerican poetic patterns, which in the beginning could stir a movement in the poetic tradition, has faded rapidly into a repetitive cliché. This phenomenon has been noticed by several postmodern critics, as for instance, Alfredo Saldaña who distinguishes between 1) a passive, a-critical postmodernism, and 2) a critical, renovating postmodernism. (Saldaña 1997: 5).

In the same line with the postmodern claim of an art beyond paradigms is the belief of some of postmodern critics and writers that the traditional language of criticism is not really sufficient to describe postmodern practices of art and literature. I remember one of the Spanish postmodern poets claiming that by means of a scientific (i.e. supposedly structuralist) description it would be hopeless to interpret the work of the *novísimos*; maybe only a critical poem — i.e. criticism in images, a metatext melting into the analyzed text — would do for that purpose. Likewise, some of postmodern critics have indulged in employing an intentionally fragmentary, eclectic and chaotic language, apparently devoid of any systematic approach or clarity, to describe postmodern poetry (cf. the book by Andrews 1996).

In all such cases as the above mentioned, the radicalism tends to be shallow. The unsystematic accent in criticism forms a system in its own right. With all its anti-traditionalism, it employs the existing language and its grammatical system providing links with other critical texts, even the most traditional.

Similarly with all preceding historical types of culture, post-modernism is not anything given everywhere simultaneously. In some socio-cultural regions phenomena, not exactly coinciding with postmodern parameters, have fulfilled the function of post-modernism. Thus, in the case of Spanish poetry, Alfredo Saldaña is right in demonstrating that (as the result, in part, of political developments) much of the claimed postmodern breakthrough of the second half of the 1960s, spotted by Castellet's anthology, was really not much more than the introduction into the Spanish language of the Anglo-American Poundian-Eliotian line of poetry, historically belonging to the period between the two world wars. (Saldaña 1997: 14). Approximately coinciding in time — in the 1960s — US poetry, on the contrary, began to grow tired of the culturalist poetry of the poet-professors of the 1950s (Roethke, Lowell), seeking, to oppose and overcome it, a more primitive and personal expression (Ginsberg, Bly, Snyder, Wright, Ashbery). However, due to the immense authority of the earlier modernist background of the Poundian-Eliotian line, the opposition was apparently too mild, to escape from another wave of culturalist poetry in the 1970s and 80s. Even though the editor and the introducer of the anthology *American Poetry since 1970: Up Late*, Andrei Codrescu claims that the younger generation of poets, and especially its neoromantic wing (where he includes Gray, Clark and himself) rebels against academical patterns, the other wing, that of the "language poets" (Silliman, Bernstein) seems to undermine it from the very beginning, as a culturalist-intellectualist formal play is once again made the dominant feature. (See Codrescu's introduction, Codrescu 1987).

In Estonian poetry, by another contrast and due to a completely different socio-cultural background, the renovation in the 1960s started with introduction of modernist patterns of expressionism (in the line with the left-wing German poets Becher and Brecht), seeking to allude to the possibility of "a socialism with a human

face" and cautiously rejecting the Stalinist terror and totalitarianism — at the time when a more open criticism was still a taboo. This wave of renovation introduced free verse (Kross, Kaalep, Alliksaar, Kaplinski, Rummo and others), though at the same time, due to the potent background of the symbolist-romantic tradition, regular meters and stanzas never disappeared. Thus, a parallel line of poetry developed, shaping analogous mental attitudes in more traditional forms (Runnel, Luik, and, in the 1970s, Viiding/Üdi). A considerable part of the new poetry (as for instance, the work of the emigré poet Ivar Ivask) has oscillated between classical meters and free rhythms, whereas the latter (as was Ivask's case) could be permeated by post-symbolist (rather than expressionist) encodings.

Especially after reading postmodern US poetry, one is struck by discovering in the British poetry of the 1980s and even of the 1990s an abundance of traditional meters and narrative techniques. (Cf. *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* 1985). The above said should prove once more that the attempts (as those made by formal structuralist science) to derive significations from merely formal signifiers are never quite successful. Though, one must admit, even a purely formal signifier may often convey allusions to the philosophical or ideological direction of the poetic discourse.

As I have tried to show in some of my previous writings (cf. Talvet 1996), a literary discourse is always, at the same time, a philosophical and ideological discourse. The more a poet accentuates his lack of philosophical or political intentions, the less he is likely to succeed in eluding philosophical and ideological contents. I have also come to the conclusion that in case of major poets a coherency of the philosophical-aesthetic discourse is a constant feature. A variety of such discourses can be observed within any type of culture, postmodernism being no exception. It is but natural that attempts have been made by criticism to outline poetic typologies of our postmodern age. Thus, to characterize different directions in the (first phase of) the postmodern Catalan poetry, V. Altaió and J. M. Sala-Valldaura employ the following categories: A — realism (civil realism, existential realism, narrative realism, intensive realism, hyperrealism), B — rhetoricism (clas-

sical rhetoricism, neopopularist rhetoricism, magic rhetoricism, C — sign poetry (transformationalism, textualism). (Cf. Altaió, Sala-Valldaura 1979: 57–82). If the poetry of the *novísimos* of the 1970s has merited such qualifications as culturalism (new manne-rism), camp sensibility, new surrealism and metapoetry, for that of the *postnovísimos*, starting from the 1980s such terms as “neoro-mantic and sentimental intimism”, “epic symbolism”, “metaphy-sical conceptualism”, and “baroque hedonism”, to mention only a few, have been employed (cf. García Ortega 1987: 5–7). In a more or less formalist spirit, J. M. Conte attempts to establish the following categories for a section of US postmodern poetry: 1) the infinite serial form (Duncan, Creeley), 2) the finite serial form (Spicer, Zuckovsky), 3) a predetermined form (Ashbery, Zuckovs-ky) and 4) a generative device (Mathews, Bronk, Creeley) (Conte 1991).

Needless to say, most of these definitions testify once more to how complicated it is to define the poetic essence. The much abused term of “realism”, as well as other notions borrowed from the lexicology of the nineteenth century, can hardly hope to ex-haust the historic change brought about in poetry by postmoder-nism. On the other hand, the employment of exclusively formalist terms, like “infiniteness of the form” can only lead to infinite disputes beyond the historic dimension of postmodernism.

The analysis is especially complicated, because the object is “obscure”. By the time Boileau wrote his authoritative *L'Art poé-tique* (1674), French academics had for nearly four decades been busy purifying the new neo-classical art and literature from ambi-guities. On the contrary, Baltasar Gracián's task, facing the obscu-rities of baroque literature, a few decades earlier, very much remind us of the dilemmas of the critical thought in the post-modern age. Gracián (who, to be sure, was never fully understood by modernist minds like Borges or Paz) not only undertook in his *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* (1642–1648) the truly heroic task of describing the essence of conceptual and baroque writing. What he really did was an attempt to illuminate, by his famous principle of *agudeza*, poetic creation in general. He analyzed both ancient and modern poems, showing how by means of *agudeza* the genuine poetic effect is achieved. The basic aim of *agudeza* is to create

philosophically ingenious correspondences between the extremes, the objects and notions that seemingly have little in common.

Inspired, to some extent, by the aesthetics of Gracián, I would like to introduce here the notions of the **transmodern** and the **poetic shift**. The transmodern corresponds to the poetry of the postmodern age (roughly, of the last 30–40 years) carrying the signs of openness and dynamics — in opposition of poetry deriving from (or being in accord with) the concept of postmodernism as something definite, i.e. provided with a fixed (aesthetic-perceptual) centre. The transmodern is poetry that has led to postmodern expression, as well as poetry that would mark the transition from postmodernism to another type of culture, not known as yet.

The poetic shift (very much like Gracián's *agudeza*) is the dynamic principle in a transmodern poem. Its recurrence and coincidence provide us with signs (terms) by which we can characterize the work of a postmodern poet, as a whole, and establish a certain typology (paradigm) that could embrace the fundamental poetic discourses postmodern poetry has produced by our days. One of the prerequisites of such an analysis — which inevitably must be comparative and historical, as well as semiotic — would be to try to remain as close as possible to the given poetic text, to avoid imposing on the latter a philosophical-theoretical discourse that would turn the poetic text into a kind of an auxiliary example, denying it its discursive poetical-philosophic autonomy. Poetry (and literary creation, on the whole) must be granted more autonomy (than it has enjoyed in recent decades) in the function of a primary discourse on (or a description of) reality.

To provide a few tentative (and by far not exhaustive) examples of how such an approach could work, I have chosen the poetry written by Jaan Kaplinski (b. in 1941) and Hando Runnel (b. in 1938) — two leading poets whose work has enjoyed unanimous acceptance in Estonia since the start of the poetic renovation of the 1960s.

Kaplinski the universalist and the internationalist has often been seen as a radical antipode of the nationalist and patriotic Runnel. As independent and stubborn intellectual minds, they likewise had to feel the constant menace of the Soviet censorship

hanging over their work. Kaplinski's philosophical essays, carrying a strong Taoist and oriental colouring, appeared first in Sweden and Finland, and only in 1996 in Estonia itself (*See ja teine* — 'This and Other', Tartu). Even though Runnel managed to publish in some of his books an almost openly grinning satire against the occupying Soviet regime, the censors retaliated immediately by forbidding the publication of reviews or commentaries on these.

Whereas Kaplinski is well versed both in Occidental and Oriental languages and has since Estonia's regained independence (1991) travelled world-wide, Runnel knows few languages — beside his native Estonian, Russian (the state language taught obligatorily at schools during the post-war Soviet years), and some German. He has scarcely crossed the Estonian borders. This to some extent explains why Kaplinski has seen four of his poetry books published in English, abroad,¹ whereas Runnel is almost unknown outside Estonia's borders. To counterbalance this, several of Runnel's poems have had the widest possible resonance in the ethnic Estonian society. Having been set to music by some of talented Estonian composers (Tormis, Rannap), they have been sung by choirs at Estonia's most important national festivals — the song festivals bringing together choirs from all parts of Estonia —, while one of these poems, "The Land Must Be Filled with Children" became during the years immediately preceding the political independence a part of the national-patriotic upheaval and euphoria, and is virtually known to nearly every Estonian.

Prior to this article, I have tried to show the poetic shift and inner dynamics in Kaplinski's and Runnel's poetry in essays accompanying a small selection of translated poems of both poets, published in the *Estonian Literary Review* ("The Transcendence of Jaan Kaplinski's Poetry", *ELM*, 6, 1998, "Hando Runnel, or Grin and Grief", *ELM*, 7, 1998; both selections of poems have been translated by myself and H. L. Hix). I would define the discourse

¹ These are: *The Same See in Us All* (Portland 1985, London 1990), *The Wandering Border* (Port Townsend 1988, London 1992), *Through the Forest* (London 1996), and *I am the Spring in Tartu* (Vancouver 1991; this book contains poems written by the author originally in English).

in Kaplinski's poetry as that of a **biocentric individualism**, while the discourse in Runnel's poetry could be characterized as an **ethnocentric collectivism**. In my opinion, the essence of these discourses are revealed in Kaplinski's book *Õhtu toob tagasi kõik* ('Evening Returns Everything', Tallinn, 1985) and Runnel's *Punaste õhtute purpur* ('The Purple of Red Evenings', Tallinn, 1982). Understandably a periphery, at times overlapping and coinciding, remains between these two discourses. Biocentricity and ethnocentricity do not exclude each other, while individualism, in certain historical situations, can become a close ally of collectivism. Here we speak of dominants.

Both book titles contain the word "evening" (*õhtu*) which, to some extent at least, hints at a poetic reflection from a ripe age, as well as at the approaching end of a life-span. *Õhtu* in the title of Kaplinski's book, however, is in the singular (alluding to an individual fate), while Runnel uses it in the plural, thus assuming a supra-individual, or collective reality. Whereas Kaplinski's title carries a lyrical-elegiac tonality, and is prophetically declarative, Runnel's "red" (*punane*), in its strongly accentuated colouring, immediately introduces some share of ambiguity. If the reader thinks, for instance, of the holiest of all Soviet colours, he may wonder if the title does not conceal a good doze of irony directed against a concrete political-historical system.

Kaplinski has written rhymed poetry, too, but the major part of his poetry books, including *Õhtu toob tagasi kõik*, shows an almost exclusive use of unrhymed free verse. (It is also a factor that has favoured the rendering of Kaplinski's poetry into other languages; on the contrary, it would be an extremely complicated task to translate Runnel's predominantly rhymed poetry.) Kaplinski's most recent poetry has manifested a tendency to mix with prose; the movement from the poetic verticality to the prosaic horizontality is, in fact, in accordance with his philosophy, equalizing poetic activity with any process or biological function occurring in the living world.

The treatment of the "other" may provide one of the basic keys to the poetic shift in the work of both poets. In the poem "I Saw Yunchiro to Tallinn", Kaplinski describes how he travels with a Japanese guest from his home-town Tartu to Tallinn, the capital of

Estonia, and how entering a major hotel of the capital, "Viru", a Russian usher (to be sure, employed by the KGB for watching both foreigners and their local hosts) asks him to show his passport. The poem concludes with the description of his return trip, by bus, to Tartu, and the poet falling asleep. The Japanese Yunichiro in the poem is a perfect "other" for the Soviet authorities. Like all foreign visitors he was suspected and watched by the KGB (in fact, Tartu was considered a "closed city", where till the beginning of the 1980s foreigners could not stay overnight; this explains why Yunichiro does not stay in Tartu but has to go to Tallinn for the night).

On the contrary, Yunichiro is not at all an "other" for the Estonian poet, but somebody with whom a profound mutual understanding is reached, even though they do not speak each other's languages. (They converse in English, as a mediating third language). "(...) Sometimes we grew silent; I think, in truth/ we were of such like mind/ that speaking became superfluous. (...) There is an inner language of common feeling and philosophy uniting them. When the poet asks if the Japanese word "satori" means "understanding" and Yunichiro answers "no, that word conveys solemnity", there is a significant hint at the insufficiency of the Western civilization, and a shift from it to the Oriental way of thinking, meaning an openness to nature and life's spiritualized mystery. Kaplinski, indeed, has been a radical critic of the Western Christian civilization, blaming it both for abusive rationalism and anthropocentric alienation from nature.

From the bus window the poet observes the Estonian countryside. Immediately after the fragment of conversation, containing "distant" ("other") words, like *satori*, the poet introduces Estonian proper names (*Pedja*, *Käriveri*) of small localities, something absolutely "own", nearest to Estonia. Nature provides understanding between the "distant" and the "near", the "other" really does not exist, but is as "own" as the small Pedja river or the tiny locality of Käriveri. Then immediately follows another shift to a different "other", that of the KGB employed guards at the hotel who, judging by their function should be Estonia's "own" people, but really are nothing more than alienated "others", hated and despised by the local Estonians. There is a fine irony in the poet's

answer ("I said next time I would"), when the hotel guard asks him to show his passport. The hotel lobby, thus, becomes a border-zone, hinting at the deep alienation — unnumbered invisible borders and barriers of suspicion and ambiguities — separating people from people and the power structures from people under the recent Soviet regime.

At the end of the poem there is one more shift — from the short political interlude to lyrical evocation. Once more the poet observes Estonian nature from the bus window ("On my left the full moon/ shone between clouds, and in its glimmer the spruces/ stood, as if they were joyous, joyous."). The final lines ("How the bottoms of the Emajõgi looked/ in the moonlight I don't know, since I was sleeping"), however, do not exclude a shade of humour. The poet, thus, avoids becoming excessively pathetic.

Typical features of Kaplinski's most recent poetry can be found in the poem "In the Morning the Sun Shone — We Took the Rugs". The poet slowly describes something extremely prosy and commonplace — as in this case working with his wife in the garden, weeding couch grass, digging and planting. There is a great concretion of the image, as all plants have their names — Kaplinski worked during some years at the Tallinn Botanical Gardens and has a wonderful knowledge of plants and trees. The more effective is the final symbolic shift in the poem from the commonplace, the concrete roots of plants to the roots of existence. The symbol is formed by the triple "roots" concluding the poem. These anguishing "roots" penetrate from the conscious to the unconscious — they are something Kaplinski has incessantly yearned for throughout his poetry and philosophy.

In the newly independent Estonia, Kaplinski went for some years into politics — was elected even an MP. Though he soon returned to his writer's job, he has been extremely active as a newspaper columnist, criticizing from the standpoint of a left-wing radical the new capitalist developments, the right-wing nationalism and a blind adoration of the West in Estonia. The poem "Again Someone Somewhere Is Speaking" does not deal specifically with political issues — it could not at the time of its publication —, but its image reflects quite eloquently Kaplinski's defying individualism. He flatly rejects in this poem any attempts to classify

hims according to any poetic generation, either that of the 70s or the 80s. In fact, Kaplinski defies any rationally schematic definition, any attempt to divide, separate, abstract: (...) But I don't like sadism or masochism;/ I don't consider the old wiser than the young/ or the young wiser than the old; (...). Then, the poem makes again a fine shift from the "near" to the "distant", as the poet declares that "my ancestor, too, was Utnapishtim/ who lives on Dilmun island" and that "my brother is the northwest wind in the branches of the willow; my sister is the sunlight edging a white cloud". However, again the poet avoids becoming too pathetic, as immediately after he — introducing a humorous and untranslatable pun — admits that he is nothing more than "a blind stone frog in an empty room". Thus the poet's essence cannot be reached by anybody, he does not belong to any identifiable framework or limited pattern. He rejects all social prejudices and traditional divisions. Or, as Thomas Salumets has shown, Kaplinski comes quite near to the pattern of "freedom's children" who, characteristically of our globalizing postmodern age, defy all social structures and psychological attitudes alienating man from nature. (Salumets 1998). The poem's final lines, evoking the poet's childhood, show still a new shift to lyrical tonality.

To describe the poetic shifts in Hando Runnel's poems, I have to go back to the middle of the 1970s, when the early existentially shaded discourse (compassion for the sad and suffering) began to be camouflaged by a sarcastic and ambiguous irony. From that time on Runnel also increasingly started to introduce intertextual and idiomatic playfulness — another stumbling block in rendering his poetry into other languages. Thus, the small poem "Homeland, Homeland" from the collection *Mõru ja mööduja* ('The Bitter and the Passerby', Tallinn 1976) begins with the repetitive key sign "homeland" (the first line of the poem echoes the title), attuning the reader to the patriotic mood. (In fact, the original *isamaa* — fatherland, or the land of the fathers — does so even more, as in the minds of the Estonians during the Soviet occupation it to a certain extent came to counterbalance *kodumaa* (homeland), the term mostly used in the Soviet patriotic songs to denote the vast empire — the supposed idyllic home of all Soviet people). The second line ("when I die") suggests a continuation of the high

patriotic tonality — as the combination of “fatherland” and “death” is a commonplace in the earlier sentimental-patriotic lyrics and well-known songs (to be sure, modelled in the rhythm of German poetry, even metrically, as the Estonian metrics, since the national “awakening” in the nineteenth century, has followed the patterns of the German syllabic-accentual verse). However, the latter is dissonantly contradicted by the rhyme couple and the rhythm which really recall a popular mocking song. It is the beginning of an ambiguous shift continued in the following verses (“a parish will be poorer,/ a farm emptier”) — the reader probably is not very sure if to take these lines seriously (in the vein of true patriotic feeling) or as a kind of a(n) (auto)parody, imitating the (alien) speech, full of hypocritical self-pity, of a false patriot. The following line couple (“Homeland, homeland,/ it is beautiful to live here,”) is an almost direct intertext borrowed from a well-known sentimental-patriotic song. It may once more confuse the reader, as it could mean sliding back in the patriotic mood. The final two lines (“where everyone knows everyone,/ everyone curses everyone”) at last resolve the puzzle, revealing the poet’s basically sarcastic grin at the realities of his “fatherland” under the Soviet rule.

“Sick of Everything”, of the same collection *Mõru ja mööduja*, carrying the initial repetition of the title through the first two stanzas, at first introduces discontent with some banal everyday troubles (“sick of potholes”) and with the poet himself, almost humorously (“sick of the hair on your own head”), then in the second stanza shifts to the socio-political domain (“sick of industry, sick of boats and rafts,/ sick of cars, sick of nuclear power,/ sick of the whistle blowing of peace and friendship”/ sick of foolishness, sick of the advice of the wise”), mocking some of the main official slogans of the Soviet regime, debunking its holy appearances. In the third stanza the poet opens himself up for a brief lyrical confession (“but a shudder, the smell of flowers — these you still appreciate”), to shift immediately back to a grin at himself (“though you cannot tell why you lick your lips here”). The final and concluding stanza is left for a shift to a general existential reflection, with the poet oscillating somewhere between pessimism and a stoical admittance of reality:

Once life surprised you, you sought a meaning for life,
 but as your life fades, the thought also fades,
 emerges and fades, no meaning remains,
 what one discovers, for another disappears.

In *Punaste õhtute purpur* there are several poems which can explain the rage of the Soviet censors (both with the poet and themselves) after the book was published. Runnel openly grins at the censorship itself in the poem "Propusk and Bumaga". The Russian words used in the title were, in fact, the basic cues of the Soviet-Russian totalitarian bureaucracy. To an Estonian, they at once recalled the alienated power structures of the occupier. These could be mocked at in private, but their omnipotence could never be ignored. The highly comic effect in this poem by Runnel is achieved by returning to the "alien speech" (a shift to the intimacy of the occupier), that of the Propusk ('Permission', i.e. the Censor) who complains of his risky and ungrateful job. Kissing between males — characteristic of Russians and completely alien to Estonians — creates an especially comic effect for the Estonian reader of the poem.

PROPUSK AND BUMAGA

parted company,
 there they embraced,
 puckered their lips,
 there they kissed,
 wept, whispered,
 farewell, brother,
 paper of papers,
 let me look at you again,
 you may become important,
 power and influence to you,
 worry-but-shame to me.

The other allegoric personage of the poem, Bumaga ('Paper'), may embody the official party ideology ("paper of papers"), but the poet may as well have hidden in the image an ironic allusion to a

dissenting message, like his own book. The latter, once it had "passed through" and been published, was likely to arouse a major scandal in the power corridors and bring shame to the censor.

The book is immersed in ironies and grinning. This however does not at all exclude shifts to an elevated tonality, like in the impressive cycle "A Beautiful Land" concluding the book. Its best-known single poem, "The Land Must Be Filled with Children", with its title/initial line repeated throughout the text, in the beginning reminds one of a biblical prophecy. Although Runnel never declares it, the "land", besides being the world in the biblical sense, for an Estonian reader at once becomes identical with Estonia — a tiny country whose population has never in the history been superior to one and a half million. Its biological existence has been constantly threatened by foreign invasions; thus the question of the ethnic survival has been one of the main worries since Estonia for the first time became an independent country after the First World War. For Runnel — here points of contact can be discovered with Kaplinski's poetry —, culture is inseparable from its physical-biological basis, although, as he calls the land to be filled "with children/ and songs and children", the biological growth in itself is never sufficient. Culture's role is to activate it, or, to use Yuri Lotman's terms, create a "total" semiosphere, where the biosphere and the anthroposphere are active in a constant and mutually fertilizing interchange. Whereas Kaplinski's accent is laid on ecology and the integrity of nature as a whole, Runnel, by his patriotic ethnocentrism, stresses the human ecology — the defense of the human species and the world in its rich ethnocultural multiplicity against leveling processes, like the economic globalization. The roots of Runnel's discourse are in existentialism, though the individualistic impulses of the latter, characteristic of the Western existentialism, become neutralized. From the start the focus is not so much on the human individual as the human collective.

The final part of this poem is also full of significance. The repetition "Beautiful, beautiful is the land/ beautiful is the land/ I love" concluding nine poems of the cycle, marks a shift from the prophetic omniscience to an intimate confession. It is the human love that, in the final account, makes a land beautiful, though, it

must be admitted also, there is no land, no reality that would not contain beauty and love, willing to respond, if ever noticed and called.

I have tried to outline two poetic discourses, which along with their openness and inner dynamics reveal a steady perceptual-philosophical tendency. Others remain to be described. My main wish is that the critical and analytical discourse itself would not remain closed to the interior openness of poetic discourses in their vast and often contradicting plurality. Then we may be sure that our end-of-the-millennium, despite all postmodern scepticism, still leaves behind a bold transmodern poetic heritage, to be shared among the modernities that follow.

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Latvian Postmodern Poetry: Signs of Time

AUSMA CIMDIŅA

This time is an automatic door, it shouldn't be
touched

Klāvs Elsbergs

Time is one of the most important dimensions of life and literature, even though contemporary interpretations of art have left this principle of classification in the background. It should be mentioned that G. E. Lessing, when dealing with issues of morphology of art placed literature among the arts of time, in contrast with the arts of space (for example, visual arts and architecture) creating their images from material substances and being static. Contemporary interpretations of literature have been concerned with the materiality and spatiality of the text, but that does not erase the classical perception of literature's special ties with time — literature as the most striking embodiment of the spirit of time, as a dynamic art, its subject being action in time. Thus discussions about time in literature in many ways turn into discussions about literature' nature itself.

Time is one of the most important structures used by literary critics for the interpretation and systematization of the literary process. It comprises the notions of linear, cyclic, historical, subjective, psychological, biological time, defining periods in the development of national literature within the framework of wider literary processes. Following the historic principles of dividing Latvian literature into periods (defining critical socio-historical events as turning points in the development of literature), we can say that the turn of the 1980s and 1990s brought new times into

our literature. This period is justly characterized as a period of transition and change in all spheres of life, including literature. What is the essence and the perspective of these changes? What has happened and is still happening with us during these last ten years? Has literature seen any changes at all, maybe we ourselves have changed and have become able to look at literature in a novel way and to see in it what has not been seen and noticed previously? This has also been the time of the post-modern apocalypse or awareness in Latvian literature. It coincides with the time of crisis in poetry. What is the basis for this statement? In the process of consolidation of the nation and also cultural life, poetry has always been of special importance for Latvians. During the period of the Soviet totalitarian regime and the ideological censorship, poetry for Latvians, starting from the 1960s and the 1970s, was something more than mere poetry. Even though it could use only the language of hints, subtexts and evasions, poetry, being a freethinker, tended to be history and sociology, demography, ecology and religion, at the same time. People perceived the poet as a prophet and a witness of the truth, therefore poetry had a wide response in the society and was indeed very influential and popular. Latvians, being a relatively small nation — two million people —, in a few days after publication bought the whole copy run (up to 35 thousand copies) of poetry collections, turning them into a commodity in short supply. The nominees for the prestigious Nobel Prize have been chosen from among poets — Imants Ziedonis and Vizma Belševica have shared this honour. Considering the relations between poetry and politics, one should not dismiss the fact that Latvian Popular Front was organized by the Latvian Writers' Union, and its leader was the future ambassador of Latvia to Russia, the poet Jānis Peters.

Elements testifying to the awareness of post-modern poetics and worldview can be found already in the Latvian poetry of the 60s. It could be seen in the increased use of free verse, the enlargement of lexical means of poetry (especially by introducing the so called profane layers of vocabulary), as well as in a creative opening and dismantling of traditional genres. The most radical expression of this is to be found in the book of poetry in prose, *Epiphanies* (1974), by Imants Ziedonis:

Body is the name of a genre. Oh, body, which is the genre you inhabit? Are you a play, a poem or a novel? [...] My body is a poem. My body is a tragedy and a comedy at the same time. The tongue talks about everything it should have kept silent about, but my heart takes offence, grinding its teeth. [...] My wife is being played aloud. She is like a boat, like a bobbin, like a lobe. My daughters are like triolets, my sons like crowns of sonnets. And they will love girls, exquisite as *terzinas*, sturdy as epic songs. And I say it again: body is not only a body. Body is the name of a genre.

In the 1970s Latvian poetry witnesses also of an intonation and motive that is very typical of postmodernity — the epistemological insecurity. It was voiced quite openly in the works of Klāvs Elsbergs, a tragically deceased poet. We can say without exaggeration that solidarity and humanism of Latvian postmodern poetry concentrated around his texts. The awareness of time is like a red thread (borrowing this metaphor from the seventeenth-century English navy) that flows through the end-of-the-century Latvian modern poetry. Elsbergs (who was also a translator of French poets — Apollinaire and others) became a representative of the generation of postmodern poets, as he in his poetry collection *Joy amongst Grief* (1986) confessed:

all I can offer to you
is naked and emptied
nothing*

Not only young poets, but also the poets of the older generation responded to this offer, to this fragile, unbalanced world awareness.

Talking about the distinctive features of Latvian postmodern poetry, one should bear in mind that Latvian poetry is a new phenomenon in the world literary universe. Even though the first samples of Latvian secular poetry appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century, treatises on the history of Latvian literature

* This and other poetry samples have been translated by Ingūna Beķere.

usually state that the beginning of Latvian national poetry goes back to 1856 when a student of Tartu University and a polyglot, Juris Alunāns, published in Tartu a verse collection, *Little Songs*. That was the time when Europe and the world were about to enjoy Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857); yet Latvian individual (professional) poetry, on the contrary, only took its first steps. It should be stressed that Latvian poetry today lives a full life — as to its ideas, emotions and forms of expressions. In my opinion, it is far riper than its criticism and interpretations. In the preface to his *Little Songs*, Juris Alunāns emphasized that the aim of his work was to show “the beauty and strength of the Latvian language”. A whole generation of national-romantic poets followed his call. They set the tone in Latvian literature up to the 1890s, when Veidenbaums, Aspazija and Poruks brought currents of modernism into Latvian literature.

From the beginning of the 1990s Latvian literature has seen a number of pioneering prose works. The most original and striking among them, unsurpassed, is *Dukts* by Aivars Ozoliņš (published for the first time in the 1990 in literary monthly *Karogs*). Their task, even *mission* has been to change the ideas about literature, its essence, its origin and functions in the contemporary world. This generation has been extremely interested in the dynamics of relationship and zones of contact between author-text-reader-reality. The strength and weakness of such texts is that they can be reduced to the environment that produced them — language, literature and literary circles; they are not bothered by problems of social reality (unless we consider the relationship between language (textuality) and real-life reality a social problem). *Dukts* begins with a mark of punctuation — a comma, not a word of the truth, but a mark of punctuation before the word.

In 1997, during the opening of the traditional Poetry day festival, Uldis Bērziņš's speech (published in the leading Latvian daily newspaper *Diena*) was merciless but life-asserting:

What is the word that we, poets, mutter and stutter to our audience and our readers? We are not gods, our word is not the word of the truth, most probably it is the word of doubt — about ourselves, about others...

there is something else apart from truth and wisdom.
Is it higher? Lower? It is other. It is poetry.

At the same time quite a number of writers and readers (especially representatives of the older generation), speaking about social functions of literature would agree with Miervaldis Birze who, interviewed on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, said, that "a writer of a small nation should be to a certain extent biased towards his nation. His duty is not to be a "pure" artist, but to work on behalf of his nation." Comparing these two ways of thinking, it becomes quite clear that the understanding about what exactly is meant by "acting on behalf of the nation" has changed significantly. Probably Birze did not think that a writer of a small nation should close his mind to the postmodern reality and write only on social issues and during turning periods in history drop his pen and take up a bayonet.

We have been informed in Latvia (see *Karogs* 1997, 9) that Estonian literary critics are trying to identify changes that have taken place during the last decade, and, for example, Tiit Hennoste is offering the following periods of classification of contemporary Estonian literature: 1986–1990, a break in poetry, a collapse of the previous cultural paradigm; 1991–1995 — a period of chaos and elimination of "white areas"; 1995–1996 — the beginning of stabilization and establishing of a new hierarchy. According to Hennoste, one of the peculiarities of the new cultural paradigm is the fact that at the end of the 1980es modernism enters Estonian literature for the fourth time. I have not encountered a publication attempting to create a new division into periods of contemporary Latvian literature, but I have the feeling that the succession of the poetic processes would be very similar in Latvia. And yet these statements are very general (they are not dealing with concrete texts), they probably reflect periods of critical thought, attempts to approach *new* literature, not literature itself.

Claims of time and literature are mutual — literature is asked to embody the spirit of time, to be an artistic testimony of time, mirror time, etc., but time (contemporaries) are asked to accept and recognize literature as its ally. Experience shows that those writers and works that were not accepted by their contemporaries, even

being really superb, as to the quality are covered by the dust of the ages and it is very difficult or even impossible for the coming generations to bring them back to life. Considering tendencies in contemporary Latvian poetry and literature in general, Rein Veidemann's statement concerning the new developments in contemporary Estonian literature seems to be quite symptomatic: "It is strange that Estonian poetry has not hailed the coming of the new times, as Estonian literature usually has done during historical turning points in the past" (*Karogs*, 1996, 1). Veidemann concludes: "None of the literary forms or genres has coherently responded to these great changes". This generalization again seems to be very apt and there is a temptation to apply it to Latvian literature as well. At the same time it needs a clarification. What does it mean for literature to provide a coherent response to time? Does that mean that we should hail the coming of the changes and the "new era"? K. Skujenieks reacts to this question, concluding with a calm and good-natured irony: "the poet and the state are of different worlds. They are not necessarily antagonistic: it is as simple as that — each of them has got cares of its own." (*Karogs*, 1997, 7).

There is another very important aspect in this statement by Veidemann: "as it has been (hailing the coming of the new times) recorded in the history of literature." Knowing that theoretical (maybe, literary-historical) thinking is rather inert, as compared with the spontaneity of the creative thought, it seems that one of the anxieties of contemporary poetry and its claims derives from the inadequacy of literary history in recording it, as it underestimates the suggestive power of the relationship between time and literature. S. Hawking, a theoretician and historian of time (*A Brief History of Time*, 1988) stresses that there are two existing theories describing the Universe; one — suited for large-scale structures (theory of relativity), and the other — suited to very small scales, not observable with the naked eye (quantum mechanics), but these two theories are incompatible, they both cannot be true at the same time. Talking about the initial stage of recent Latvian poetry, the ideologically-biased critics have accused it of marginality and attempts to avoid essential issues. On my part, I feel that theory, in this case, is incompatible with many concrete texts, created and published during the period.

The category "modern" (contemporary) exists in literature, though it is not present as an unmediated reference to topical events. Not all the texts published in Latvia today and yesterday are modern. One of the outstanding thinkers of the second half of the twentieth century, Susan Sontag, has stated that "to be modern means to inherit the problems of modern civilisation. To be modern means to choose between understanding and not understanding". The understanding of "modernity" by Sontag is very close to the way Michel Foucault has characterized an intellectual: He (an intellectual) is constantly on the move, he does not know where he will arrive and what he will think tomorrow, he is too careful (sensitive) in his relationships with the present.

Poetry among other arts reacts instantaneously, it is the first to welcome signs of time and even to voice premonitions. Care, sensitiveness towards the present is one of the features of contemporary Latvian literature, especially of poetry. (I would like to mention it briefly, and again — I have not even started the grand narrative on time in contemporary Latvian literature.) Which of the several "present tenses" should I choose, since each one of us might be given another or a different present? Juris Kronbergs, a poet living in Stockholm, having chosen the plural form for the title of his poetry collection, *Present tenses* (1990), says that in contrast to daily newspapers there are many "unofficial present tenses". In contrast to national awakening, poetry is not a formal event. The sensitivity of the relationship between time (the present) and literature can be most acutely felt in the works of Latvian poets-translators — Uldis Bērziņš, Juris Kronbergs, Edvīns Raups, Guntars Godiņš, Pēteris Brūvers, Māris Čaklais, Leons Briedis, and others. In their works the concepts of *word* and *time* keep reappearing — in the titles of poetry collections and poems, in poems themselves, revealing the spatial and temporal infinity of word and time. For example, Uldis Bērziņš writes:

I know very well that truthfully the word
As a sign on infinity.
It's the truth,
The merciless
[..]
But only in words, not in time.

Those Latvian poets who are open to the present, differentiate in their work between the concept of time and history. Even though the *persona* of Bērziņš' poetry states "not history, but myself, on my own", his poetry reflects the way history breaks into the lives of an individual and of a nation, shows history as a rupture in the peaceful flow of time, a taking over of time, a reminder of the great mysteries of history:

we have overtaken the history,
a very short distance (the darkness of it!),
we have overtaken the history.

Richness of time, the layers of different historical times and present events can be seen very vividly in the joint collection of two poets, Uldis Bērziņš and Juris Kronbergs, *Time* (1994). *Time* is not only a pretext for meditative reading, but also up to now the only worthy history of Latvia of the years 1989–1992. It is a risky and tricky period in our history. The poets fulfill their poetic-political mission by inserting into their text decades and centuries, speaking about threshold situations not only in the history of Latvia, but in the history of the European nations. *Time* was created between Riga and Stockholm, providing striking details, projecting events of the Latvian history and the way these have been reflected in the minds of a poet, an individual, the whole nation. Kronbergs and Bērziņš, with a certain degree of pathos, ask people to be in this time and to assess their relationship with time:

Remember this time!
Mention this time!
We have no more time like this,
no more like us.

Latvian poetry is very much engaged with the relationships between the word and time, aware that poetry has lost its strength to unite the nation in the name of truth and that today a good poet might be synonymous with an "unpopular" one. Thus L. Briedis asks in his book *Unripe Freedom* (1995):

You
 are my nation
 you are a tombstone
 over me
 do you feel pain?
 am I your pain?

It is significant that the new time in Latvian literature has presented itself as a phenomenon of residue, remains — as (post)-modern, (post)soviet, (post)colonial, and other terms of post(times) hardly give grounds for optimism. The majority of poetic texts, touching upon the new Latvian reality, offer no pages of light. One of the most influential poetry critics, I. Čaklā, gave the following characterization of contemporary Latvian poetry: "Poetry reveals a rather grim perception of life, in various ways — starting with the tragic awareness of the life-cycle and social reality, and ending with a metaphysical grimness as the condition of human existence. We could even say that there is a certain regularity — the younger the poet, the more universal this tragic awareness."

With regard to such issues as the writer and the word, the freedom of language and the art of language, the power of literature to influence and change the social reality, Latvian literature has come to a completely opposite understanding of the situation, if we compare it to the rise of national literature in the nineteenth century, when Alunāns with his *Little Songs* (translations and adaptations of German, Russian, Czech and other poetry) wanted to show that "Latvian language is so powerful and nice". The witness of the third national awakening, our contemporary Latvian poet Guntars Godiņš (1992), writes:

The words won't save anyone
 From drowning in the words.
 I am drowning in these words.
 [..]
 The spring will come soon
 And river banks will overflow
 The repulsiveness of it —
 There'll be only words,
 Words, words, words, all around us.

It thus “cancels” Alunāns’ metaphor of the beautiful spring. Latvian contemporary poetry has marginalized itself and refuses to think in the framework and terms of the power discourse. Poetry asks questions, but nobody, including poetry itself, can offer answers to them.

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Classical Tradition in the Postmodern Age in Lithuanian Poetry

DONATA MITAITĖ

In one of his poems Joseph Brodsky says: "I am infected by routine classicism, but you, my friend, are infected by sarcasm" (Brodsky 1992: 113). Brodsky's own case demonstrates that these two "infections" (classicism and sarcasm) are not necessarily incompatible. But what concerns me here are those Lithuanian poets who still admit the productivity of classical poetics in our age of postmodernism.

Henrikas Radauskas, who died in 1970 as an exile in the USA, is perhaps the first Lithuanian poet, whom literary criticism granted the label of modern neo-classicism. By the way, he is also the first Lithuanian poet, who can be rightfully called an urban poet, as are the rest of those I intend to speak about further on. Radauskas who felt affinity, besides Paul Verlaine, Stephane Mallarme, Rainer Maria Rilke, Stefan George, also with Russian akmeist poets, expressed the same "longing for world culture" (Height 1991: 292); he stood quite apart from his contemporaries in Lithuanian poetry, producing poems which were precise in form and contained carefully reduced lyrical manifestation of the speaker; the voice in his poems belongs to comic or tragic masks (laundresses, cooks, drunkards, spinsters, gods, the figures of Apollo and Desdemona, and so on). "History smells of a dead-house", announced Radauskas (1980: 135), proclaiming his rejection of the role of the national leader, which had been ascribed to the poet. "I do not grant the World my trust, I do believe the Tale" (Radauskas 1980: 33), he says, though rather often instead of a happy ending his poems imply a terrifying tale. Alongside with a

playful attitude, the horror of existence is also concealed behind his precise lines, which frequently bear marks of irony.

Tomas Venclova (b. 1937) is the oldest and also the most outstanding among these modern Lithuanian poets, who carry on the tradition of Russian akmeist (that of Mandelstam and Akhmatova) and Radauskas. His poems avoid improvisation and the undisciplined flow of heterogeneous images, so characteristic of contemporary poetry. Delicate work with the word and the classical precision of form make him congenial with Radauskas. The poet confesses: "At the present moment I feel preoccupied by complicated strophic patterns. Such patterns have been used by Auden, Philip Larkin and many among English and American poets /.../ I feel them also helpful in the construction of the semantic level of a poem." (*Poezija...* 1996: 5). Poetry of Venclova is much more socially orientated than that of Radauskas, and J. Brodsky characterized it as "the form of resistance to reality" (Brodsky 1997). Venclova feels rather suspicious about "escapism" in all its manifestations and therefore a good deal of Lithuanian poetry of the Soviet period deserves his criticism, even that part of it which does not show any direct affinity with socialism: "Poets are trying to find their refuge from historical reality in a peaceful and silent existence, as it is lived by grass or perceived by a country booby, they retreat into the domain of biology and pantheism, which nevertheless present nothing more than a mere illusion of escape from the time and death. Such attitude looks quite understandable, having in mind, above all, the complicated historical situation. Nevertheless, it takes the line of least resistance. And as a rule, history has no mercy even upon those who have put their trust in it" (Venclova 1991: 324). For quite a long period the poet remained in opposition to totalitarianism, which we can call, paraphrasing the title *Winter Dialogue*, given to the selection of his poetry, a totalitarian winter. Being acquainted with the cultural context of the world more intimately than many in Lithuania, Venclova launches serious charges against postmodernism. This is his account of ethical relativism: "Relativism in ethics is a rather comfortable position, since it satisfies a natural human need to seek self-justification. This is the reason why postmodernism, so fashionable in Western culture, finds a fertile soil in our post-

communist society. But at the same time it presents a considerable danger and can yield historical results, which would not be pleasing to any living soul" (*Tomo...* 1997: 14). Venclova defines his poems as "stimulating human consciousness, instead of comforting it" (*ib.*).

As early as in his first volume of poetry *Kalbos ženklas* ('The Sign of Language', 1972 Venclova speaks about classicism, calling it "a joyful and solemn teaching" (Venclova 1972: 5). From the very beginning this solemnity is present in his poems, with their exact rhythmic pattern, suppressed emotionality and concentration on significant themes (such as language, art, exile and death). The book *Tankėjanti šviesa* ('Thickening Light', 1990) reveals a strong tendency to increase the prosaic quality in the poem, which becomes particularly evident in the most recent book *Reginys iš alėjos* ('The View from the Alley', 1998). The historical narrative is granted more sharpness of outline, the line grows longer and reduces solemnity of diction. But historical background of Venclova's poetry has nothing to do with the realm of tales. Instead, it refers to the last battle-field of the post-war national resistance (as in the poem "The soldier of landing forces"), to a fragment of world history (as in the cycle "Notes from China") or even includes some personal reminiscences. Venclova's attitude to the world grants nobody peaceful comfort or consolation; it belongs rather to the tradition which, according to Brodsky's note on W. H. Auden, "in retreat from the personal gives a diagnosis of life" (Sergeyev 1997: 454).

Venclova's "diagnosis" of the contemporary world, speaking in Brodsky's terms, is presented in the poem "Tu, felix Austria" (Venclova 1999: 123–128). It was written at the time of the Bosnian conflict; we are given the chance to look at the world from Vienna, the city "uninclined to distinguish the petty / from the things that matter". The context of the poem has cynical overtones — "Bella gerant alii, tu, felix Austria, nube" ("Those others are destined to fight, you, blessed Austria, celebrate weddings"), the ancient motto of the Austrian empire. "Į tą pasienio stotį, kur ugnis — / erdvės sesuo, kur Kristui arba Mozei / atsikerta kalašnikovų Morzė, / jau neina traukinys" (The train / no longer enters the terminal / where fire and space are fraternal, / where machine

guns, speaking in Morse, / answer Moses and Christ / in snapping retorts.) “Blessed Austria” keeps itself safe and sound: “others, not we, // will perish there.” But the death appears as a universal presence, which in the poem (as perhaps in the contemporary world as well) is deprived of the halo of peace and solemnity:

Mirtis

šalia. Ji kuičias kambario narve,
išbraukia bloknote eilinę datą,
paskui pažvelgia veidrodin — ir mato
tave

(Death is at hand. / She rides around in the cage of the room, / crosses out the next calendar date, / then looks in the mirror and meets / you face to face.) It looks like such a death, reduced to the lodger in the everyday world, riding “around in the cage of the room”, is not the source of uneasiness or fear, but rather a mere inevitability, which resides in your own body and looks at the mirror through your own eyes. After the ironic opening (“joyful” teaching of classicism with its lessons of irony and ironic self-reflection seems to be increasingly active in Venclova):

Šiame mieste,
kuriam apkarto gelbėti žmoniją;
kur šitiek neurastenikų pagijo,
kabinete
gličius spanus
per jėgą išpažinusių ant sofos,

(In this city, weary / of saving humankind, where many cures / have been imposed upon the many nerves / of those who tell their sticky / dreams through shortened breath, / timed to the hour, softened / by sofas in the office) the poem finally leads to stoic apprehension of the personal mission one is allotted to:

Sizifui dera
/.../
išgauti esmę iš nuskirto mito
ir veltui laukti Viešpaties trimito
aštriam lyg deimantas šlaite

(Sisyphus is needed here // ... to unearth the root of the foretold myth, / and await, without hope, / the trumpets of the Lord / on the diamond — sharp slope.) It reminds one of the interview, in which Venclova has also confessed feeling congenial to Camus, his honest perspective of life, his conscious and stoic effort to offer resistance to the plague without any hysterical fuss (*Tomo...* 1997: 14).

Awareness of distance, so typical of Venclova's poetry, presents still another essential side of his analytic attitude; quite remarkably, it is the figure of the "observer", which has been assigned the role of the subject in one of his most recent poems (Venclova 1999: 187). The feeling of distance comprises a variety of perspectives; it can be the encounter with a perished historical epoch or the past of an individual life; with an alien and different country; with a person from more or less distant history, whose fate, for some reason, seems to be important for the poet (among those we find Ovid, who is instructive to Venclova both as an exiled poet and as representative of the ancient world and its poetry, in particular). Yet Venclova never allows the sense of distance to reach the sublime; even China with its "surrounding presence of the Other" leads to the final "awareness of the eternal Universe, which grants no happiness / while leaves you bound by duty of compassion" (Venclova 1999: 153).

The line about "joyful and solemn" classicism, to which we have referred above, belongs to the poem "Lines on Memory". Memory and language are two essential corner-stones in Venclova's poetry. A thirst for eternity enters the human life along with the inevitable invasion of the past. And eternity, as the poem "Resurrection" (Venclova 1999: 144–146) suggests, is nothing other but memory; or at least memory grants the hope for the eternal. The poem reveals a reciprocal movement between two counterparts of existence — life and death. The power of resurrection is ascribed to memory and language; the tree, which has perished in death — on "another continent with its demolished garden" — returns to life once more; this second life, though short (and giving evidence of a particularly intimate relation between language and existence — "it is still there, until my voice continues") is extremely intense: "embraced from crown to stem in its illumination /

as lightning pierces heaven". The bodies of those two, embraced in love and evoking the memory of the tree, also undergo a metamorphosis, as if turning into tombstone monuments; or, rather, the reverse is equally possible: "the Remembering God" brings to life two tombstone figures to give them the moment of enlightenment of "almost impossible" happiness, similar to the illumination of the tree, after which they are doomed to return to their fossilized existence, "in the narrow coffin, in the motel room". The tree and the human being are endowed with an equally ephemeral existence, but the poem suggests that memory — either human or divine — provides the possibility to resist non-existence.

“First of your duties, though looking rather difficult, is to love the language” (Venclova 1999: 177) — declares Venclova in the opening line of “The Commentary”, presenting his *ars poetica*. Aidas Marčėnas (b. 1960), a poet of the younger generation, tells in his “Ars poetica”:

Pasaulis baigias, todėl
reikia rašyti eilėraščius
/.../

nes galas,
jei Dievas numirs anksčiau nei kalba,
ir kalba numirs anksčiau nei pasaulis.

(The world is coming to an end, therefore / one has to write poems /.../ for it will be the end, / if God precedes in death the language / and if the language precedes in death the world.) Everything is so fragile and doomed to death, that the only possible resistance one can offer is the stoicism of a creative effort. Venclova and Marčėnas are congenial, sharing the same self-obligation.

Speaking about his mentors and teachers of poetry, Marčėnas indicates two names, hardly imaginable together: Venclova, with his classical precision, and Geda, with his surrealism and an aptitude for a constant renovation. However, the refined and elegant poetry of Marčėnas's first books (*Šulinys* — 'The Well', 1988; *Angelas* — 'The Angel', 1991) shows a more natural affinity to Radauskas, who has been mentioned earlier. Marčėnas is not inclined to violate conventional versification, but rather seeks the perfection of inherited patterns; his poems have good melodic

qualities and show poetic craftsmanship. After publishing his second book, Marčėnas was awarded by his fascinated reviewers the reputation of a classical author; however, without any delay he declared that he had no desire "to spend the rest of his life in the process of fossilization, gradually turning, as if in Radauskas's poems, into an Apollo figure — cold and singing" (*Angelo...* 1992: 18). And indeed, rather soon his texts, graceful and bearing casual ironic overtones, were joined by poems of a different kind. The "poetics" of the dream or vision provides essential features of this peculiar poetic strategy: lengthy sentences, frequently including parenthetical elements; intonations of the spoken language, alternating with a solemn and special tone; the combination of heterogeneous and unexpected images, which have no relation to reality:

Vėjas ir šviesa! Keli ankstyvi maldininkai
 į saulėtus mano regėjimus žengia nedrąsiai,
 tarytum svečiai nešini dovanom
 nelaukti ateina siauru keliuku,
 sukaupiti ir pamaldūs tarp nokstančių sodų,
 su pulkais skriejančių vyturių, drugių ir šešėlių
 žingsniuoja link mano namų,
 kur veidrodžio gilioje amalgamoje
 tarp saulėtų nokstančių dulkių rytui giedant hosaną
 tamsiuose požemių urvuose,
 dar nematomos reginčio akiai,
 nematydamos niekad sapnų
 miega sočios nutukusios Žiurkės
 (Marčėnas 1993: 22–23)

(Wind and light. Few early pilgrims / enter my sunlit visions; here they are, / timid visitors with their gifts on a narrow path; / here they approach, with skylarks, butterflies, shadows / devout and submerged into their meditation / my house among ripening gardens; my house / with its morning hosanna submerged / among ripening dust in the depth of the mirror / my house with its underground kingdom / and those Rats, yet invisible / submerged in their sleep without dreams / fat and satisfied.)

This aspect of Marčėnas's talent makes him congenial to the postmodernist poetry of the young generation, though loyalty to

the ethical and aesthetic hierarchy sets him apart from it. In one of his interviewes Marčėnas expresses his disagreement with the aesthetic (and perhaps also, the ethic) program of younger authors, best expressedly by Valdas Gedgaudas and by Liutauras Leščinskis in the poem "Program": "I'll fuck everything / I'll fuck you / I'll fuck myself / I'll fuck one lady / I'll fuck another lady / I'll fuck the third lady / and after I'll sit down on a window-sill / and cry". "It sounds quite convincing," — Marčėnas remarks — "but I do not hear anyone crying on a window-sill after having fucked our ethnic culture, I do not feel any genuine sorrow. And if I did — I would forgive any excesses"; and a bit further, having in mind "fucking" of religion: "Quite a painful way leads one to these things, which teaches you humility and makes you more authentic" (*Kartos...* 1995: 90). Marčėnas himself reveals a yearning for God, when he writes: "The world of the unfaithful is full of terror / at the heart of the heart it has no throne for God" (Marčėnas 1993: 36).

It would be inadequate to think of Marčėnas in terms of moralizing poetry; nevertheless, the ethical aspect remains rather essential to him; Marčėnas does not avoid frequent and direct expressions of his attitude. One of those we find in the poem "Resurrection of Maironis" from his recent book *Vargšas Jorikas* ('Poor Yorick', 1998). Maironis is the most eminent figure of Lithuanian poetry of the late nineteenth — the early twentieth century, the period of the national revival. The reality of the newly born (1918) Lithuanian state turned out to be rather incompatible with its earlier noble vision, and the poet expressed his indignation and disappointment in some satirical poems. The poem "Resurrection of Maironis" evokes a sarcastic panorama of our own reality in contemporary Lithuania. The main poetic signs of his recent book are still Radauskas (in spite of "Murder of Radauskas", declared by Marčėnas in one of the titles, the deceased shows an unusual habit of frequent resurrection) and Venclova. Nevertheless, while thinking about their importance to Marčėnas and trying to locate him in the context of Lithuanian poetry, the very title of the book also seems to be rather symbolic: "Poor Yorick". From the opening poem of the collection to its last page Marčėnas sustains his devotion to this man of various talents, borrows his mask of

jester, who, being the voice of truth, at the same time plays the fool for the audience. Emotional excesses of the style are nonetheless reduced by an ironic interplay between the phrase “art of poetry” and “lie of poetry” on the neighbouring page [in Lithuanian it is just a single sound that makes the difference between the words “art” (menas) and “lie” (melas)]. Ironic prosaism replaces the sentimental cliché, allowing Marčėnas to escape excessive lyricism:

žydi užupy obelys baltos
nupenėti šeši katinai
mano angele negi aš kaltas
kad kadaise tenai gyvenai

(Marčėnas 1998: 19)

(across the river, white apple-trees / and six fatty cats, oh tell me, angel / is there my sin in the simple fact / you have once lived there.)

The casual overtones of a retro-style are noticeable in the melody of quatrains, characteristic of Kęstutis Navakas (b. 1964), a poet of Marčėnas's generation, who looks for his poetic authorities in European poetry and the German tradition, in particular. People, nature and the whole world are granted an aesthetic quality in his poems:

tos vaiduokliškos tulpės prisimena laiškus rašytus
atsisukus į šviesą kurią užgesinom seniai
jos nuvyto tamsoj ir tamsa pasiliko jų šyduos
kai ant popieriaus vyto netekę jėgų sakiniai

(Navakas 1996: 84)

(those ghostly tulips keep the memory of letters sometimes written / facing light which we extinguished long ago / the faded in the dark and in their veils the darkness still remained / while in the paper sentences were fading, exhausted.) Sometimes this aesthetic quality seems forced and operatic: “I was longing for halls, which have echoed sounds of rapiers / held by adventurous heroes — ages ago they found their peace in the soil” (Navakas 1996: 74). The poet feels free to wander through different layers of culture, in his poems there is room for Columbus, Kleist, Dante, Mahler, and

many others. As in the case of Venclova and Marčėnas, poetry for Navakas does not mean the emotional flow of personal confession. Rather, it is the play which reveals the melody of a single line or strophe and the most striking combinations of the historical time and geographical space — as if trying to redeem the past time or simply indulging in the beauty of the world. But his play slightly recalls an elegy, as the poet does not feel free to play the fool and to have a good laugh at everything and everyone. Genuine attitudes of this aesthete, who seems to be preoccupied with play, are revealed in a line from one of his poems, to be repeated elsewhere with a slight variation: “In deserted Kaunas, which is abandoned by Truikys and Grušas” (Navakas 1996: 114) (the former is a famous artist, who died recently, and the latter, a playwright, both represent the tradition of the Lithuanian intelligentsia). Here Navakas expresses his longing for an authentic creative personality. And, without any doubt, he belongs to those who feel a longing for world culture.

Thus the recent Lithuanian poetry surrealist, minimalist, post-modern and other trends coexist with another tendency aimed at preserving classical harmony. Even though it is represented by our best-known poets, I do not think it has any hope of becoming prevalent. Being asked about what place in Lithuanian poetry belongs to the tradition of Radauskas, represented by his own poetry, Venclova said: “The tradition of Radauskas /.../ is that of uniqueness and loneliness”: and added: “The one who pursues tradition, is not lonely any more” (*Poezijos...* 1994: 311).

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Crossing the Sea: Tomas Tranströmer and Jaan Kaplinski

ENE-REET SOOVIK

In this paper I shall attempt to reflect upon two issues: the more general problem of the position of poetry in this day and age we call postmodern, and, within this framework, the more particular theme of the sea and crossing it as an image in, as well as a metaphor for, the poetry of Tomas Tranströmer and Jaan Kaplinski.

I'd like to start with a question that is likely to have served as a starting point for most of the participants in this Conference: how does poetry fare in a postmodern world? Theorizing of this world seems to give a strong preeminence to narrative modes, evident, for instance, in discussion of the loss of faith in grand narratives or in approximation to one another of the various narratives of history and imaginative literature, fact and fiction. Seminal works on postmodernism that do concentrate specifically on imaginative literature tend to be dedicated to narrative fiction — it is Linda Hutcheon and Brian McHale in particular whom I bear in mind. Although Hutcheon, for instance, admits that postmodernism is not related to just one form in actual aesthetic practice, and therefore poetry is not in principle banned from the postmodern scene, she nevertheless suggests that it is the *novel* (alongside with architecture) that appears to be the postmodern genre most discussed lately and thus serves as a preferential forum for discussion of the cultural enterprise (Hutcheon 1988: 38).

And it is these critics many scholars of poetry draw on when formulating their own views on the postmodern; e.g Neil Corcoran in his Longman survey of English poetry since 1940 admits his debt to the above-mentioned as well as the standard works by

Jameson, Lyotard, et al. (Corcoran 1993: 204) Indeed, if a glimpse at the canon of high modernism which in this paper is understood as emerging primarily from the Anglo-American cultural sphere, reveals the poets Eliot and Pound as its high priests, it is authors of narrative fiction — John Barth and John Fowles, to name random examples from either coast of the Atlantic, that serve as paradigmatic Postmodernists. The American Language poets deserve more attention, most notably from Jameson (Jameson 1997: 37–39), but in general poetry in its own right does not seem to figure on the forefront of the theorized postmodern scene.

The described paradigm appears to serve as a measuring stock and basis for drawing comparisons also on the coasts of the Baltic. To give an example from Sweden: in his discussion of poetry by the contemporary poet Bruno K. Öijer, the critic Clemens Altgård draws parallels with the American novelist William Burroughs, labelled as a postmodern novelist by the crestomatic Hutcheon; from the camp of the poets, however, the British Robert Graves, hardly a postmodern author by any account, is evoked — not to mention Ezra Pound. (Altgård 1993: 38–39). The Estonian critic Tiit Hennoste in his recent polemical attempt to rearrange the Estonian literary canon with respect to modernism argues that the concept of the postmodern can with ease be applied to architecture as well as art. However, in Hennoste's opinion it is difficult to adjust the notion to literature, as it is virtually not used in connection with poetry, little used as regards drama, but has still found application as concerns the novel. (Hennoste 1996: 142). Accordingly, from this perspective it could be concluded that poetry does not exactly thrive in the postmodern element, at least if the share of theorizing critical attention it has received is compared to that allotted to the problems of narrative. This assumption seems to be confirmed by the words of Ivar Ivask, the late editor of *World Literature Today*, who posed the question, "What are the chances in this age of media hype for a quiet voice of personal integrity, an understated lyric poet writing in Swedish without an abundant production, political rhetoric, or experimental fireworks, to reach a worldwide audience?" (Ivask 1990: 549).

This enquiry comes from the United States, the country that Neil Corcoran regards as the centre of emanation of the post-

modern model "read as the cultural arm, as it were, of contemporary post-industrial, multinational capitalism" (Corcoran 1993: 201), and it represents the poet writing in Swedish, who in this case happens to be Tomas Tranströmer, as someone from the margins struggling to get a hearing likely to be denied to him both on the grounds of his adopted genre as well as a linguistic barrier. Indeed, Tranströmer is well aware of the latter, dedicating his Neustadt address in the same issue of the magazine to his translators all over the world and saying "... we must believe in poetry translation if we want to believe in world literature." (Tranströmer 1990: 553) Tranströmer's reception in the States is by no means unaware of the fact that the Swedish original has been filtered through translators' prism, as corroborated by the American critic Robert Hass's reading of Tranströmer. Hass comments on the poem "Track" as follows, "In the translation there is — or I imagine there is — a secondary drama of watching the poem discipline Robert Bly's [i.e the translator's] hunger for excited states of mind. The middle stanzas are a kind of war between the Whitmanic possibilities of the long, enjambed line and Tranströmer's quiet precision. The result is a very strong poem in English." (Hass 1987: 73).

Thus, it is not only Tranströmer himself who, as testified by his translator Robert Bly, (Bly 1990: 571) values his poems not so much as artefacts but rather as meeting places; Tranströmer (or any other poet for that matter) in translation emerges a priori as a meeting-place of different languages, cultures, traditions; and is bound to acquire new connotations in the new cultural context. Another example from Hass — an extract from *Baltics* in Samuel Charter's rendering "And peace can come drop by drop, perhaps at night/when we don't know anything," automatically becomes linked in the critic's mind with Yeats's "The Lake Isle of Innisfree": "And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow" (Hass 1987: 76), thus including it in the Anglo-American tradition. Even if the translators comment upon Tranströmer's Swedishness, the specific local realia together with the Nordic experience relevant to grasping the poems' atmosphere, the stark Poundian images that lead to Eliotic intersections of time and timelessness, locate Tranströmer's poetry quite comfortably in the

Western poetical canon of the 20th century, the core of which resides in Modernism. And even on the home front, Lasse Söderberg remarks that he has always paid less attention to the national and more to the international in Tranströmer's poetry, the latter element becoming manifest in the connection to the modernistic tradition with its insistence on clarity of image (Söderberg 1990: 573).

However, Tranströmer has been translated into languages other than those central to the Modern tradition. His poetry has crossed the Baltic Sea, piloted by Jaan Kaplinski as the translator; it is also worth noticing that Kaplinski has been instrumental to crowning Tranströmer's international fame, successfully championing him to the Neustadt Prize in 1990. The Estonian translator does not unrestrictedly turn to the Modernist Greats, or an isolated Swedish tradition, to locate Tranströmer. In Kaplinski's preface to the Estonian selection, French surrealists are mentioned as the forerunners of Tranströmer and his generation, and these, if we understand modernism from an Anglocentric point of view, rather form an avant-garde movement, differentiated from the Modernist mainstream. In his article on Tranströmer for *World Literature Today*, Kaplinski writes, "Perhaps the most important difference between Tranströmer and many other modernist poets is his emphasis on the human dimension, or suffering, loneliness, and the threat from hostile forces both outside and inside us." (Kaplinski 1990: 602). He proceeds to explicate the difference: "He is both a modernist and a traditionalist. He is a traditionalist, valuing modern individualism less than group solidarity, hard work, and veneration of the dead ancestors." (Ib.) It may remain uncertain whether traditionalism really is such a far cry from the modernists of the tradition and the individual talent or Leavisite moralism's yearning for bygone rural ideals — but what seems to be important here is that modernism is not the sole framework against which Tranströmer's poetry is measured. In Estonia it is not possible to assimilate him smoothly by a tradition that facilitates ironing out his peculiarities, rather, he is viewed from a distance, nearly identified with European Modernism, but not quite.

In addition, there is a common core to Tranströmer and Estonian poetry not shared by audiences on more Southern latitudes: the so-called "Nordic" elements need not strike the Estonian

translator/ reader as puzzling. E.g, *barvinterdagar* from the lines "Det finns barvinterdagar da havet är släkt / med bergstrakter..." (Tranströmer 1990a: 12) offered by Söderberg as a sample "expression so permeated with Nordic experience as to be almost untranslatable", (Söderberg 1990: 574) does not claim any marked attention as a notion on the shared latitudes, although we must admit that Tranströmer's "unbelievably dense compound" (ib.) indeed has been rendered by a whole clause. There are also poems included in the Estonian selection of Tranströmer's poetry (published in 1989) that must have been perceived from a different angle here than in the West. The poem with the English title "To Friends behind a Frontier" (R. Fulton), in other versions also "To Friends across a Border" (M. Swenson and L. Sjöberg; R. Lesser), originally published in 1973, is the most obvious case. In Robin Fulton's rendering, the poem reads as follows.

To Friends behind a Frontier

I wrote so meagerly to you. But what I couldn't write
swelled and swelled like an old-fashioned airship
and drifted at last through the night sky.

The letter is now at the censor's. He lights his lamp.
In the glare my words fly up like monkeys on a grille;
rattle till, become still, and bare their teeth.

Read between the line. We'll meet in 200 years
when the microphones in the hotel's walls are forgotten
and can at last sleep, become trilobites.

The poem, when published in a seething Estonia that was about to regain its independence in 1991, could be included in an interpretative tradition, trained to read between the lines for decades, the way Tranströmer's poetry was assimilated in the Western world because of its form and devices.

The poem invites the question of the source of the voice. From where is it speaking? It could be assumed that the author of the letter is writing from within a confined country in the grips of strong censorship. However, also letters coming to a totalitarian country had better not be too open and, as we know, the empirical

author of the lines resides on the other side of the border. Thus, it is difficult to determine with absolute certainty which way the letter moves, what the conditions of the I-figure are, a certain ambiguity is bound to remain. What makes it especially ambivalent in the Estonian context is the recognition that the end of the poem could have been written by Kaplinski himself. For instance, the Estonian translation differs from the three English versions as it does not use a broader functional equivalent, such as “embedded fossils”, “fossil molluscs”, “trilobites” for “ortoceratiter”; Kaplinski’s rendering “mikrofonid hotelliseintes on ununenud ja saavad viimaks magada, muutuda ortotseratiitideks.” Tranströmer parallels Kaplinski’s own fondness of images of extinguished, fossilized species: he would revive “the mesembryanthemums in their stony sleep” (Kaplinski 1985: 12) or observe traces of leaves or bark in Silesian coal: “Always a book, a black book in a foreign language / from which I understand only some single worlds: / *Cordaites*, *Bennetites*, *Sigillaria*, *Sigillaria*...” (Kaplinski 1987: 25).

Thus the space of Tranströmer’s poem’s Estonian version is open to negotiation, it could express the point of view of either the East or the West — or of both simultaneously, both the poet and the translator elements inherent to its texture. The impossibility of an exact localization of it recalls Kaplinski’s poem that introduces his second verse collection in English *The Wandering Border*:

The East-West border is always wandering,
sometimes eastward, sometimes west,
and we do not know exactly where it is just now:
in Gaugamela, in the Urals, or maybe in ourselves,
so that one ear, one eye, one nostril, one hand, one foot,
one lung and one testicle or one ovary
is on the one side, another on the other side. Only the heart,
only the heart is always on one side:
if we are looking northward, in the West;
if we are looking southward, in the East;
and the mouth doesn’t know on behalf of which or both
it has to speak.”

(Kaplinski 1987: 9)

Kaplinski's poem also serves as a metaphoric description of the conditions of a translator whose task consists in transmission operations across borders and frontiers. The relativity of the vantage point concerning East and West becomes glaringly obvious in connection with the translation of Tranströmer's probably best-known poem "Baltics": the Swedish Östersjöar — East Seas — find their equivalent in the Estonian Läänemered — West Seas, the reflecting sea provides mirror images for the shores facing each other across it, and constitutes an area for translated communication.

In mapping the Tranströmer-Kaplinski relationship the sea functions as the site and setting for navigation in the literal sense, which, if we refer to empirical reality is not without dangers even on the route across the Baltic, as well as a metaphor for the verbal and contextual space of the poems, on the one hand allowing for the processes of transference to take place, on the other hand, containing inhibiting possibilities of untranslatability. The translator fulfils the role of Tranströmer's pilot serving international crews: "Talking in misspelled English, understanding and misunderstanding, but very little conscious lying. How well did they get to know each other?" (Tranströmer in Hass 1987: 79). A poem need not necessarily come to life in a foreign rendering like the jellyfish in *Baltics* "if you take them out of the water all of their shape disappears, as when an indescribable truth is lifted out of the silence and formulated into a lifeless mass, yes, they're untranslatable, they have to stay in their element" (Tranströmer in Hass 1987: 87). The sea is a multilingual space where no language has priority — in an early poem Kaplinski declares that by the water, the wind speaks in no particular language. (Kaplinski 1986: 26) At the same time, the sea can also serve as a metaphor for non-language, silence. Beside Tranströmer's simile about jellyfish and water, truth and silence, we have Kaplinski's experience of a dusty roadside where, "I leaped into the silence, and there was no land, no surface to step on. The silence closed over my head. — Silence, the inland sea — what else could I name for you?" (Kaplinski 1987: 10).

The Stockholm Archipelago with its labyrinthine mixture of islets and water, the sea as the setting and the surrounding element, at times experienced from beneath the surface, constitutes the site in which much of Tranströmer's poetry moves. Kaplinski's original poetry, though, has not evoked the sea or the seaside as a setting very often — until recently his space has been inland, his water is the river. Kaplinski has preferred to use the sea purely metaphorically — be it for silence or, as he writes in the poem, probably best known outside Estonia "The same / sea/ in us all/ red /dark/ warm" (Kaplinski 1985: 46); it may also stand for a transition area between being and non-being; a human being is "a little lit match from God's matchbox/sea wind soon blew out/ somewhere between California and Estonia/somewhere between East and West/between somewhere and nowhere" (Kaplinski 1987: 62); it is the primeaval source of all life from which our ancestors have hatched, the thin line between the sea and the shore binds people's souls to the bodies (Kaplinski 1986: 83). But the immediate presence of the sea is scarce, its existence is only witnessed by the wind from the sea, acting as an agent of forces that change human lives, bringing promises from faraway places, disturbing people going home over the dark Toome Hill in the inland of Tartu with scents from Southern islands. Reaching and maybe crossing the sea, transgressing ever wandering, negotiable borders is a desire lit by the patchy information borne by the wind over the distance and, once, through the grate of censorship.

"I am burning with the same urge to reach the Atlantic, /to reach the borders always vanishing and breaking/ in front of the black horses who again and again/ race out from memories and steppes/ smelling the west wind that brings from somewhere very far/ the odor of the sea and rain" (Kaplinski 1987: 31).

The cartographical images of the sea, particularly one cut off from the ocean by the Scandinavian peninsula, and the river, such as the Emajõgi that flows from the West to the East in the first place, but finally, via Lake Peipsi, ends up in the Gulf of Finland, a part of the Baltic, can be appropriated to visualize the position of Tranströmer and Kaplinski in relation to the Atlantic of the Modernist-

dominated canon of the West. Tranströmer belongs to a marginal, yet acknowledged area of the salt-water system. Kaplinski's access to it has been hindered, he is more isolated, although driven by an urge to reach the Atlantic. Both authors list Eliot among their poetical forbears, Kaplinski has translated him as well. A modification of Söderberg's statement about Tranströmer's universality, suggesting that international modernism outweighs the national element in his poems, can also be applied in Kaplinski's case. It has been claimed that this accounts for his more ready translatability in comparison with some other Estonian poets of comparable merit and fame at home. In a couple of cases, some of the restrictingly local features, such as toponyms and names of newspapers, have been replaced with generic words in the English translation, thus magnifying the universal dimension of his oeuvre.

However, it is not to be forgotten that the poetic system of water bodies under consideration forms but a part of the wide waters of the global, multi-faceted body of postmodern writing, in which the space between Europe and America need not necessarily remain the organizing centre around which a hierarchical structure can be arranged. The presence of poets writing in minor languages in the awareness of world-wide audiences is a precondition for the period in which they write to qualify as postmodern, even if they, in the way of a paradox, rather adhere to the modernist paradigm.

The poet Ciaran Carson has said that in order for a map to work, "it has to use shorthand, or symbols, or metaphor, and in this it resembles poetry" (Carson in Kerrigan 1998: 3). In the way of conclusion, after a sketchy mapping of the partly overlapping seas of the Baltic, of translation and of world poetry; in other words, space in literature and literature in space, I'd like to refer to an article by the Cambridge scholar John Kerrigan which argues that literary geography is one of the truly postmodern methods of literary analysis. Recalling Fredric Jameson's words that in an era of global immediacy our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages are dominated by categories of space, Kerrigan writes, "... the unravelling of grand narratives and the spread of relativism associated with postmodernism do seem to witness to a sea-change, and it is symptomatic that the postmodernist challenge has been met by a late flowering of spatial analysis." (Kerrigan

1998: 3) So I suppose that the rather bleak picture painted at the beginning of the paper that depicted poetry as out-shadowed by narrative texts and ousted to the margins of postmodernist discussion need not hold, if we focus on poetic space that also promises to be poetry's place under the sun of postmodernist theory.

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Gothic Elements in Mare Kandre's *Deliria*

MATTIAS FYHR

In this article I want to show how Gothic elements are used in Mare Kandre's *Deliria* (1992).¹ I will also compare this book with some postmodern literature.

Mare Kandre is a Swedish writer of prose and poetry. She was born in 1962 in Sweden. The surname "Kandre" is Estonian. Mare's mother escaped from Estonia to Sweden in 1944. Mare Kandre has published eight books since her first one in 1984, and several of these have been translated into other languages. Her books are written in a language between prose and poetry and several of them contain Gothic elements. Here I will discuss one of Kandre's most poetic works, *Deliria*, and focus on the view expressed in it. The view is that poetry helps us to see the world in a deeper sense. Thereby poetry makes it possible for us to live a better life and to create a better world. However, when we really see the world, we also see things we fear, in ourselves and in the world. Then we run the risk of experiencing the world as Gothic.

Looking at the world in this deep sense means for instance seeing that the world is made of structures of circles, multi-layers and repetition. These structures are also used in Gothic, for example in Gothic literature, but then they are not shown as positive. Instead they are used to create the terrible atmosphere of decay, doom and unsolvability that is typical of Gothic. In *Deliria* these structures are not always used to create a Gothic atmosphere. Instead they may be often shown as something positive.

¹ All translations of Kandre's poems in this paper, from Swedish to English, are by M. Fyhr.

Deliria wants us to become free from a destructive view of the world that can be called postmodern because it is a world where everything tends to lack meaning and depth, a world where important things become background. Postmodernism is a term that may mean many different, and also positive, things. Here I choose only to focus on a negative aspect of it. And it has to be said that Kandre herself never mentions the term postmodernism in her work.

What then, is Gothic? Gothic is a mode. It is a way of forming different cultural products. It originated from the literary Gothic which is often said to have been created in 1764 with the novel *The Castle of Otranto. A Gothic Story*, by the English writer Horace Walpole. The term Gothic had since long been connected with the early tribes called Goths and with Gothic architecture. Now, in the 18th century, it came roughly to mean medieval, and medieval meant roughly all time before the Enlightenment, that is, before the 18th century. Gothic literature may be called a revolt against the Enlightenment's focus on reason and intellect and its repression of feeling and imagination. After Walpole's novel, Gothic literature was extremely popular for about fifty years, and thereby created a Gothic mode which shows itself in literature and in other genres, and which lives on even today, both in the form of works that are Gothic at heart, and works that contain Gothic elements.

What is characteristic of Gothic?

During the twentieth century numerous studies of Gothic have been published. Several critics have shown that Gothic is not basically characterized by stage props like castles, secret passages and other elements with which it is often associated. Instead Gothic is characterized by more hidden properties. I will now shortly mention the results of three of these researchers — Robert D. Hume, David Punter and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.

Robert D. Hume compared Gothic literature to Romantic literature in the essay "Gothic Versus Romanticism: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel" (1969). Hume showed that Gothic and Romantic literature have important similarities as well as differences. Both react against everyday reality and conventional religious explanations of reality, but while Romanticism is a product of a faith

in a higher order, Gothic is a gloomy exploration of the limitations of man. While Romanticism looks for happiness and safety in a higher beauty, Gothic is stuck in the temporal and can only find absurdities and ambiguities.

David Punter described the Gothic tradition from the 18th century until today in *The Literature of Terror* (1980). In the new version of this study (1996), Punter also shortly discussed Gothic elements in now living authors like Bret Easton Ellis and Neil Gaiman.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick showed, in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1980), that Gothic often uses "thematic conventions" which appear in different ways in a Gothic work. One Gothic thematic convention is "live burial" which might show itself for example in the environment, for instance when someone is imprisoned in a dungeon. It might also show itself in the action, for instance when someone is buried alive. Apart from this it can show itself in the language when some important fact is "buried" "under" the language and appear indirectly by distorting the language. This is just one example of a thematic convention and just some examples of how such a convention might show itself.

This result builds on my empirical studies of contemporary Swedish literature with Gothic elements and Gothic literary works from the 18th century onwards.² Results of previous research have in comparison shown to match parts of the results of my study, but without presenting the view of Gothic that I have presented and used in my research. My definition of Gothic is:

Gothic is characterized by an atmosphere of decay, doom and unsolvability. (Fyhr 1998)³

The atmosphere shows itself in different ways. In this paper I will only discuss it very briefly. Decay may for example show itself in the form of ruins or dissolving morals. Doom might for instance appear in characters who in some way challenge the natural order of things and thereby bring destruction on themselves. By unsolva-

² The Swedish writers I study are Alexander Ahndoril, Magnus Dahlström, Inger Edelfeldt, Per Hagman, Mare Kandre, Carina Rydberg and Nikanor Teratologen (pseudonym for Niclas Lundkvist).

³ This definition is slightly changed from the one in Fyhr 1998.

bility I mean briefly a sense that something important has gone bad that can never really be made right again.

One way to create the typically Gothic sense of unsolvability is by depicting a world which resembles an infinite, terrible labyrinth. This can be done for example by depictions of labyrinthine environments, such as subterranean passages, the insides of castles, dark woods or city environments. These environments are often made like Chinese boxes, in which one room contains another room etc, or they are made of strange geometries, circles, repetition, multi-layers and the like, which make them seem unfathomable and claustrophobic as well as endless. Sometimes the feeling that one is in a labyrinth is not created with the help of the environment but by the main character behaving as if he or she is in a labyrinth. Then the actions of the main character become repetitive and wandering. The character may for example walk in circles. Sometimes the labyrinthine feeling is created by help of the language in the work. This is the case when the language is fragmented, irrational, meaningless, structured like a tale in a tale etc. Yet another example of how the labyrinthine feeling might be created is when the Gothic work contains references to the reality of the reader. We all know the kind of story that tells of someone who is reading a story while a murderer sneaks up from behind. At this time we, the real readers, get an impulse ourselves to look over the shoulder, even though we know we are reading fiction. This is one example of how the Gothic work can pretend to depict the world of the reader. Another example of this is when the Gothic work mentions real places in the world of the reader, for example real city names.

In Kandres works, the world is depicted as a labyrinth in two ways — as a wonderful labyrinth and as a Gothic labyrinth. One example of the former is that in *Deliria* the dead are said to be present — they lay in layer upon layer inside every human being. Such a description could easily become Gothic, but it is here instead shown as something positive. The same is true of several depictions of repetition, for example: “I repeat myself [...] like mankind repeats themselves/in their [...] children./Like the rain repeats itself [---] Like the grass [...] Like death repeats its/corpses” (p. 112f), as well as for structures in the form of Chinese boxes, for example: “below the warm stalls,/yet a city, new rooms” (p. 130). Here we

also find positive circular structures, for example in the form of a menstrual cycle (p. 24) and a picture of how children are born "in a mad circle, /eternally,/ from depths/we do not see" (p. 139). But sometimes *Deliria* uses these structures to create a Gothic atmosphere. This happens when terrible aspects of the world or of a person's mind are shown together with the structures. One example of how the circle is used in this way is the passage about the woman in *Deliria* who walks in a circle around a pond, in an infertile world: "And the woman looks so sad where she walks in a circle/over the ground around the pond as if she with her own/faint bodyheat wants to make the earth grow" (p. 164). The circle makes the movement seem hopeless, endless and connected with a sense of imprisonment. By this the typically Gothic sense of unsolvability is created. In the surrounding text a feeling of decay and doom is created which, together with the repeated movement of the woman, creates the Gothic atmosphere, for example: "Strange weather today. /It looks so desolate [---] And the milk has gone sour as if time is standing still,/in the cradle the child is screaming itself bloody after the mother" (p. 165).

The same two-foldness in *Deliria* shows in the depiction of language. In Gothic the irrational language is a source of distress. Language becomes fragmented, irrational and unreadable, and this is connected to terrible feelings. In Gothic works the language itself becomes an unwanted labyrinth. But in *Deliria* these kinds of seemingly meaningless structures in the language are often positive. They exist in poetry. Kandre writes that poetry repeats words in an irrational way and shows us strange meanings which make us ask good questions about what the words mean, and because of this we see the world in new, deeper ways: "What 'summerwater', 'twilight field', 'jam scraped/from the walls of the crypt' [...] such things do not happen, /have no meaning, it/means nothing at all and/cannot even happen!//Or?" (p. 20). But language, for example poetry, might also become Gothic. An example is the poem about a poet whose poem imprisons him and shows him terrifying visions connected with his life. This text also uses the structure of Chinese boxes because the poet who is depicted in this poem is himself in a poem in this poem. In this text we also find Gothic stage props like a terrible castle:

From having been tame and mild
 the poem suddenly sprang from
 the unconscious
 and devoured,
 like a hideous monster,
 with flesh and bone,
 voluptuously,
 its own creator,
 the poet himself,
 who ran howling in its
 winding sentences.

And these were like long passages.

Like desolate corridors in an uninhabited
 old castle,

a desolate castle high up on a mountain
 in an unknown time. [---]

Weakly, indistinctly,
 he still heard
 voices, shouts and laughter
 behind the
 damp walls
 and ran on,
 crying,
 felt all the closed doors,
 opened one and there found
 himself as a child
 in a room painted black,
 screamed,
 opened another
 and there saw
 his mother, dead,
 and whining he got himself
 further
 through his hellish

creation [...]

and he screamed, cried and mumbled
 but no one heard him and
 he was never seen again.

(p. 125ff)

The same two-foldness shows in the way *Deliria* mentions real problems or places in the world of the reader. It is a strange picture, but not a Gothic one, when Kandre writes about dead people who play corona in the town of Keila (p. 69). The reference to the sect who committed suicide in the djungle in Jonestown, however, is an example of a terrible real event that contributes to the Gothic feelings in *Deliria* (p. 88). Seeing the world in a deeper sense means seeing the two sides of the world, both the wonderful and the things that we might find terrible, or Gothic.

Seeing the world more truly, like *Deliria* recommends, can be called an antidote to the meaninglessness and blindness that characterizes the world in some postmodern works. One postmodern example is a poem from 1996 by the Swedish novelist Per Hagman (b. 1968), in which he writes sentences like "*We are all one beat away from becoming elevatormusic*", "no faces to recognize: just very lonely/glowing eyes which rots in all this blur.." (Hagman 1996: 13, 11). Another example of this is William Gibson's (b. 1948) cyberpunk-novel *Neuromancer* (1984). At the beginning of this novel the polluted sky is depicted, not as a problem, but as background. This can be seen as a typically bland postmodern description of a negative side of the world. The polluted sky is here even compared with television, which makes the sky as real, or unreal, as television. The sentence reads: "The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel." (Gibson 1986: 9).⁴

In *Deliria*, Kandre criticizes what I would call a postmodern world. Here we are told that man is not really made for the world in which we live today. For instance, in older times we dressed and washed our dead and dressed them in beautiful clothes, and we watched them lying in their coffins. Today our dead disappear, leaving hardly anything but ashes. Another problem is that today we are bombarded with more pictures than we are made to handle. It is true, it says in *Deliria*, that our houses are warm today, our walls hold tight, we own a lot of things and we are clean etc. But in reality we are: "people with souls tuned to the darkness of

⁴ I owe this view of the beginning of Gibson's novel as being post-modern to Giblett 1996.

another/time,/just come out of wooden houses with the bitter-black taste of smoke in the noses" (p. 33).

Kandre writes that we have become blind to important things in the world. Poetry is a way of making us aware of them. The pictures, riddles and mysteries of poetry can touch and change us and make us return to an earlier way of life. In *Deliria* the speaker turns to other poets and says that it is:

[...] our duty to provide mankind with pictures from which they can return to their former life [...].

To fabricate pictures, riddles, winding mysteries with which their increasing presumptuousness towards the plants and the animals may be crushed [...] (p. 19).

According to *Deliria* this can be done by means of poetry. By reading and writing poetry we can right our wrongs, see the mystery of the world, and even get directions to things that cannot be described with words, like in the poem which begins: "It cannot be read from any book because pages and/paper cannot hold for such matters" (p. 138).

With the help of poetry we can connect ourselves to ourselves, to the world, to other people and to the dead that lived before us:

[...] I wrote about myself and
found in her
my equal,
you,
and I wrote about the living but
found there,
to my surprise,
all the dead that ever lived [...]
soul upon soul upon soul upon
soul [...]
(p. 155f)

Deliria ends by depicting a night in an evil time, but also by saying that there might exist a way out for people who have strength enough to really see the world, which means seeing also the terrible sides of it: "The way of which one spoke can be hard to

find [...] but will probably show itself anyway, in the end, for the one who has strength enough to see."

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**Gunnar Ekelöf, a Modernist Yuppie in 1990?
Thoughts on Gunnar Ekelöf's *Skrifter*
(1991–1993) and Magnus William-Olsson's
till (1989)**

PETER TALME

The huge importance of the modernist Gunnar Ekelöf (1907–1968) for Swedish poetry is widely acknowledged, although very little research has been carried out into his influence on the last few decades. My intention with this article is to try to describe something about our “postmodern” age from my research into different aspects of the way in which Gunnar Ekelöf was perceived around 1990, two decades after his death. The solitary observations understandably only justify an attempt to generalize; the two chosen examples (a minor part of the material is presented here) are not of course sufficient to make further claims of validity.

My first example deals with some poems from 1989 of the young Swedish poet Magnus William-Olsson. The second one is connected to the reception of the critical edition of Ekelöf published in 1991–93.¹

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With the publication of his first collections of poems at the end of the 1980s, the young Swedish writer Magnus William-Olsson,

¹ This article is a slightly modified version of a paper read at the 2nd International Conference of the EACL, Tartu, 4th–7th October 1998. I have recently published an article concerning the reception of the critical edition (Talmé 1998).

born in 1960, secured a fairly strong position for himself.² I should like to call attention here to his suite "Six Apostrophes" ("Sex apostrofer"; William-Olsson 1989A: 9–16) from a particular point of view. The suite comes from his second collection of poems entitled *to (till)*, and is addressed to the mythological Hermione, daughter of Helen of Troy and Menelaus. The admirer in the poem is Telemachus, Odysseus' son; we are able to draw this conclusion by comparing the poem with William-Olssons radio play *Hermione, my sister*, performed the same year (William-Olsson 1989B). The concrete, outer framework derives from Greek mythology: Book IV of the *Odyssey* describes the arrival of the young Telemachus in Sparta while searching for his father, and his encounter with the young and beautiful Hermione, about to be wed. However, this frame story is not apparent in the poems, where Hermione primarily has another function than being a young female.

A quotation from Gunnar Ekelöf introduces William-Olsson's collection of poems: "I thus consider the world from top to bottom as feminine. It is ovum-carrying, procreating female, /sic!/ everything from stone axes to atomic bombs. We are, to the extent we are fertilized, ejected from this remarkable process. While she retains her round, holy geometric form" (William-Olsson 1989A: 5).³ The quotation stands as a motto for the entire collection of poems but was previously published only together with the suite. In the presentation of the suite, it was said that the quotation belonged to the apostrophes (William-Olsson 1988). Thus, William-Olsson's song of praise to Hermione makes explicit reference to the imagined world of Ekelöf in which human beings are regarded as minor elements of the body of a larger, often feminine creature.⁴

² William-Olsson 1987 & 1989A. Already by 1990, these two collections of poems resulted William-Olsson being placed as one of the poets "on Parnassus" in a Swedish history of literature (*Den Svenska Litteraturen VI*. 1990: 286).

³ "Jag betraktar alltså världen som från ovan till nedan feminin. Det är äggbärande, alstrande hona, alltifrån stenyxor till atombomber. Vi, i den mån vi är befruktade, stöts ut ur detta märkliga skeende. Men hon behåller sin runda, heligt geometriska form."

⁴ On this aspect of Ekelöf's poetry, see Ekner 1967: 77ff.

The Six Apostrophes radiate a mysterious obscurity, inaccessible but fascinating in their fervent worship of the feminine nature. There is, as I interpret them, a kind of dialectical movement, from and to this power centre bearing Hermione's name. The motive of life and disappearance turns in a form of circular movement: Hermione, the origin (apostrophe 1) — foetal existence (2) — birth (3) — isolation from Hermione (4) — mortality (5) — return to Hermione (6).

Let us dwell for a moment on the second poem, the foetal existence. The foetus is one of Gunnar Ekelöf's most central themes (Ekner 1967: *passim*). For instance in his poem "July night" ("En julinatt"; Ekelöf 1945: 30f) a foetus is depicted realistically with anatomic words. William-Olsson reflects this realistic account of the embryonic foetus in his description of the world surrounding the foetus; very direct similarities in the concrete details can be found here.⁵

Furthermore, William-Olsson's Apostrophes contain a sense of forlornness and isolation, the experience of absence; Telemachus longs to return to Hermione, the mother, the first beginning. This is all a reflection of Ekelöf's world, where the spirit of community ceases at the moment of birth; afterwards comes solitude and a strong desire to return, so much so that in Ekelöf's poem the ego cries out: "Let me keep my world,/ my prenatal world!/ Give me back my world!" (Ekelöf 1945: 31).⁶ Compare this outcry with William-Olssons second Apostrophe, the foetal existence, and its heartfelt wish: "keep me enclosed"! (William-Olsson 1989B: 12.)⁷

According to Reidar Ekner, a great authority on Ekelöf, the Ekelöf poem "July Night" contains a macrocosmic-microcosmic concept: "a fusion of two mothers, the cosmic and the worldly /.../.

⁵ E.g. Ekelöf 1945: 30 ("en benstomme i vardande/.../ punkter markerande belägenheten för/ knäskålar, höftskålar, armleder/ senfästen /.../"), and William-Olsson 1989A: 12 ("en virvel tid, en tromb, i höftens skål./ En strand av tarmbensvingar, höftben, korsben./ blygdben /.../").

⁶ "Låt mig behålla min värld,/ min prenatala värld!/ Ge mig tillbaka min värld!"

⁷ "/.../ behåll mig innesluten".

In July Night the universe is given human shape as a cosmic mother" (Ekner 1967: 77,78).⁸ It is a reasonable supposition that William-Olsson has both read his Ekelöf as well as Reidar Ekner's comments⁹ on "July Night", and has thereby been influenced to incorporate both the abstract idea, the vision of the world as a cosmic mother, and the concrete details, the anatomical words; Ekelöf's poetical universe thus resounds in William-Olsson's poems from 1989. Furthermore, William-Olsson has certainly also read Anders Olsson's well-known thesis on Ekelöf in which Olsson points out the role of the Apostrophes in Ekelöf's work: "it /the Apostrophe/ is almost without exception directed towards a female party with mystical significance. The Apostrophe /.../ is one of the most important ways in which Ekelöf provides the mystical experience lyrical presence."¹⁰

I will return to William-Olsson.

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The critical edition published in 1991–93 contained a large proportion of Gunnar Ekelöf's production. The edition was based on the author's final intentions, a classical principle of publishing critical editions, although applied in this case in an extreme manner¹¹ and containing a great many latter-day alterations to published poems. In several cases drastic changes were made to the collections of poems — as Ekelöf's admirers knew them — which resulted in intense debate over the edition.

⁸ "/.../ en fusion av två mödrar, den kosmiska och den jordiska /.../. I En julinatt har Alltet fått mänsklig gestalt som en kosmisk moder".

⁹ Besides writing poetry William-Olsson is a well-known critic and literary debater. He studied the history of literature at university and has certainly come across and read the most important works on Ekelöf.

¹⁰ Olsson 1983; on Ekelöf's use of the apostrophe: pp. 260–277; the quotation p. 260 ("den är nästan undantagslöst riktad till en kvinnlig part med mystisk innebörd. Apostrofen /.../ är ett av Ekelöfs viktigaste sätt att ge den mystiska erfarenheten lyrisk närvaro."). I have chosen to show this one aspect of Ekelöf's influence on William-Olsson; also the poetical method used in the Six Apostrophes indicates that William-Olsson was influenced by Ekelöf's modernism.

¹¹ See e.g. Landgren 1998: 21.

Without doubt, the edition received considerable attention throughout the country. As new volumes were published most national and local newspapers contained voluminous reviews. There was also considerable discussion about the edition and the principles underlying its publication. This attention indicates the significance that Ekelöf's poetry held for the critics at the beginning of the 1990s, not only as canonized literature but above all as something still very much alive and of great importance.

The critics were unanimous in paying tribute to Ekelöf's outstanding and unique position in Swedish poetry. But in the midst of the praise another tendency could also be seen in some of the reviews. While underlining his monumental production, some reviews also employed a lighter, more easy-going way of commenting on Ekelöf.

An example of this can be seen in a review which discusses an important theme of Ekelöf, that of the virgin. The critic mentions the use of the theme in the so called Diwan-poems; in the view of the critic, these poems are indisputably a part of world literature. However, the review begins by commenting on the monumental poet in a somewhat disrespectful manner: "In any way it's just about 'mom', the Diwan-poetry/..." (Larsson 1991).¹² (The theme is often related to Ekelöf's childhood and a complicated relation to his mother.) The review was entitled: "The virgin — everybody's 'mom' and nobody's" (ib.).¹³

Another example of a title with an easy-going approach is the one in which Ekelöf is called a yuppie: "The yuppie who became our greatest modernist poet" (Palmqvist 1991).¹⁴ ("Yuppie" refers to the time prior to his début, when the young Ekelöf interested himself in his wealth and the stock-market before the Kreuger-empire collapsed.) A third review showed a picture of Ekelöf together with one of — Marilyn Monroe. (Who is consequently discussed in the article; Nilson 1992.)

¹² "På sätt och vis handlar den bara om morsan, Diwandiktningen /...".

¹³ "Jungfrun — allas morsa och ingens".

¹⁴ "Yuppien som blev vår störste modernistpoet".

The reception of the critical edition thus showed Ekelöf's monumentality while, interestingly enough, some of the reviews at the same time showed a less than awesome attitude to him.

*

It may well be possible to draw some conclusions from these two examples, that of Magnus William-Olsson's poetry and the reaction of the critics to the edition.

Modernism still has considerable importance in our age. We have seen that the young poet Magnus William-Olsson is clearly influenced by Gunnar Ekelöf, as analyses of his poems reveal. Although his work is perhaps not typical of the 1980s and 1990s, William-Olsson is a fairly important young poet in Sweden and indicates that there are clear tendencies which keep the modernistic heritage alive. We have also seen that the modernistic heritage very much concerns Swedish cultural society, even to the extent of leading to intense debate. This was apparent from the reception of the critical edition which clearly showed the importance critics attach to Ekelöf, not only in literary history but because his poetry actively engages them even now, while young poets, thus, keep it alive in their way of using it. One result of these investigations would seem to be that the meaning of the "postmodern age" is somewhat problematized.

Take what you need, and acknowledge it? Ekelöf's historical influence on other poets is of course well-known. The interesting point is that it is still so strong in young poets at the end of the 1980s. William-Olsson's explicit acknowledgement of his debt to Gunnar Ekelöf is another interesting aspect. There are many examples of this, I mention only one. Magnus William-Olsson's collection of essays *Livets skrift* contains a striking example of Ekelöf's importance to him at the time when he was working on the *Apostrophes*. He wrote in the introduction to the essays: "Gunnar Ekelöf's presence in my life is so pronounced that my three year old son speaks of him familiarly as Uncle Gunnak and talks as if he were a close member of the family" (William-Olsson

1992: 9).¹⁵ This can be seen in contrast to the more common attitude at the start of an author's career when strong, important influences of others are denied, at least in part. Has it become so legitimate to use the way of writing used by earlier poets that perhaps our traditional claims for originality, inherited from Romanticism, are (in practice) no longer acknowledged as fully valid? In a manner of speaking, you take what you need — and acknowledge it. Then perhaps the feeling of belatedness is not that troublesome; perhaps the later poet does not find the influence from forerunners too paralysing.¹⁶ A parallel can be drawn here with the reception of the critical edition. Ekelöf is clearly a monumental poet of huge importance to the critics, but at the same time some of them allow themselves an easier approach, and, for instance, call him a yuppie; perhaps a way of avoiding becoming overwhelmed by the monumental.

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¹⁵ “Gunnar Ekelöfs närvaro i mitt liv är så markant att min nu snart treåriga son familjärt kallar honom farbror Gunnak /sic!/ och talar om honom som en nära släkting.” The title *Livets skrift* is also the title of one of the essays, which discusses the poetry of Ekelöf (“Livets skrift. Om Gunnar Ekelöfs Dikt”; William-Olsson 1992: 111–134).

¹⁶ Some of the notions used here of course go back to Harold Bloom. See e.g. Bloom 1973 & 1975.

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Some Time Models in Estonian Traditional, Modern and Postmodern Poetry

ARNE MERILAI

1. Poems and Time

What is a poem? Any poem, be it either lyrical, like the sonnet, or epic, like the ballad, is always a narrative of some kind. It tells us about an occurred event, internal or external, dramatic or whatever. It claims that things in some situation were so-and-so, that they had certain preconditions and corresponding consequences. Whatever the story is about, its defining metaphysical theme is always time.

I would like to emphasize that I consider the appearance of time as the metaphysical base of the narration, i.e. in a very general sense of the word, and thus overlook the narratological problems of depicting it. The plot of the story can contain pro- or analepsises (looking forward or backward), it can be elliptic or resuming (accelerative), scenic or descriptive in style (one-to-one or retarding). The presentation of the story can be singulative, repetative or iterative (single, repeating or concentrating presentation of an event). What I bear in mind is that a poem, whatever its narratological structure, always expresses time by presenting an event with its prologue and epilogue. But what kind of time?

It may present the mythological circular or cyclic time, as was probably the case in our ancient folklore. It may present the feeling of unbounded eternity, which is characteristic of religions — we should mention Christian mystics Ernst Enno and Uku Masing here as Estonian modern symbolists. The time background of Jaan Kaplinski's postmodern poetry, influenced by budism, seems to be extraordinarily interesting, too. In the following lines, however, I

shall deal with is the innovative case of Artur Alliksaar, as it reveals ultra-modern (and I guess, also postmodern), relative or multidimensional time.¹

¹ **Artur Alliksaar**, for some Estonian critics, one of the greatest poets of all times, was born on April 15, 1923, in Tartu, the Republic of Estonia, as the son of a railwayman. In 1941–1942 he studied law at Tartu University where was mobilized into the German army. After the war he earned his livelihood as a railway official, but was made a criminal by the Soviet authorities because of a deficit. He spent several years in the labour camps in Russia. After 1957 he lived in Tartu and devoted himself mainly to literary activities. He was very poor and persecuted, nevertheless intellectually independent and widely imitated by the younger generation (Aleksander Suuman, Henn-Kaarel Hellat, Paul-Eerik Rummo, Andres Ehin, Mati Unt, Viivi Luik, Jaan Kaplinski, et al.). His best friend was physicist Madis Kõiv, today a well-known Estonian philosopher and playwright. Alliksaar translated German and Russian poetry (R. M. Rilke, S. Jessenin), did odd jobs. He died of cancer in Tartu on August 12, 1966.

Shortly before his death he managed to publish a parabolic play *The Nameless Island* (*Nimetu saar*, 1966), which started the innovation of Estonian drama of the 1960s. Three posthumous selections, compiled by his young follower P.-E. Rummo, contain the poems Alliksaar left in manuscript: *Nonexistence Could as Well Remain Non-existent* (*Olematus võiks ju ka olemata olla*, 1968) and *Poetry* (*Luule*, 1976), also *A Small Book of Verse* (*Väike luuleraamat*, 1984). Two years ago, *The Sun Squanderer* (*Päikesepillaja*, 1997), his collected poems, was eventually published.

The literary critic Endel Nirk writes:

An author with an exceptional destiny was Artur Alliksaar /---/. Despite his being middle-aged, Alliksaar became one of the forerunners of the younger generation of poets. Having started by writing verse more or less in the traditional style, he soon developed his own individual manner of improvisation dominated by the poetic logic of associative ideas and sounds. This verse was occasionally fantastic in the way it played on words, sometimes frenzied as to its moods and images, at times devoutly reverent and then ironical, in some places aphoristically precise, volcanically exuberant elsewhere. It was in this way that the poet succeeded in producing a multi-dimensional and dynamic picture of the world, a feeling of everything being

Nevertheless, these cases are marginal in the poetry as a whole, because usually poems present time which remains beyond the concepts noted above — the linear moving of time. The latter is certainly the most widespread system of time — the vectorial string of the past-present-future (H-P-F). That is, the trivial linear time which runs from the past to the future through the present. Telling a story, be it about either physical or mental actuality or possibility, a poem explicates the linear movement of time. An ordinary poem as a rule is a story “pasted” on the linear flux of time.

As ballads are stories *par excellence*, it would be elucidative to take a closer look at them. The ballad as a synthetic form presenting the linear time can in principle explain how the Scandinavian, Germanic and Baltic ballads made their way into the old animistic Estonian folklore of the late Middle Ages. Of course, the ballad met some resistance on the part of the mythological and parallelistic time conceptions, as it tried to assimilate their elements or leave them out altogether. One can hypothetically show how linear time adapts itself to Estonian folklore, how it becomes prevalent there and how it is later naturally assimilated into the Estonian literature of the 19th century (Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald, Lydia Koidula, Jaan Bergmann, Jakob Tamm, et al.), and is then manifest in some recent trends of modern and postmodern Estonian poetry (mainly by religious or mythopoetic poets like Ernst Enno, Uku Masing and Bernard Kangro, and especially by Artur Alliksaar, in the first case, but also by Jaan Kaplinski, Doris

in a state of change and flux. In the final stage of his life and when terminally ill, Alliksaar sought a new synthesis in a more disciplined form. At the same time he strove to move on from meditative verse to the reflection of intuitive sensations and he introduced certain surrealistic elements into his rendering of elegiac resignation and the tragedy of destruction (Nirk 1987: 333).

Alliksaar is a distinguished representative of philosophic free verse, although he has written excellent traditional poetry, too. His paradoxical conversational multilayered linguistic poetry with its extremely rich imagery provides a versatile object of analysis for language philosophy, especially for the kind which applies logic (q.v. Merilai 1998, 1997, 1996, 1995).

Kareva, Kauksi Ülle, et al., in authors who try to break loose from the glue of linear time.

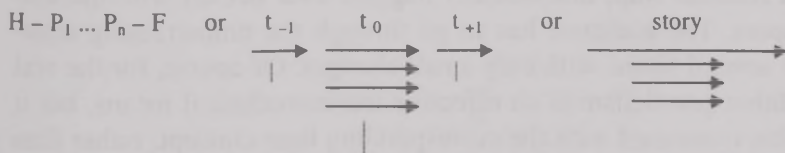
Although the ballad as a presenter of time is not universal, the ballad system of time is overwhelmingly dominant in the Estonian poetic mentality. However, within the boundaries of that common conception, different historical or logical models can appear. I have been trying to provide a hypothetical classification of Estonian folk and literary ballads from this point of view.

2. Time Models

Let us now observe briefly the following time models in the Estonian tradition. Naturally, these are not rigid, it is always possible to replace them by a more precise time logic system, like the one presented by Graeme Forbes in 1985 or others. Nevertheless, I find the following illustrations sufficiently transparent. The five divisions listed first depict ordinary ballads — both traditional folk ballads and early literary ballads, as well as modern ones. The second group or the sixth class represents only the postmodern relics or remnants of ballads by some outstanding postmodern Estonian poets, in particular, Alliksaar. As a matter of fact, this is certainly not the case in the contemporary Estonian poetry as a whole: the practice of a neat linearity is still quite common in it.

I. LINEAR TIME SYSTEM

2.1. Parallel Time System



The peculiarity of this type is that the presentation of an event may sometimes incline toward parallelism. One and the same event can

be presented again in a slightly changed form without any overt development of time. In our days one is liable to interpret this case simply as a repetition, but then the ancient cognition of time, to which the parallelism seems to be pointing, would get lost. Obviously, the parallelism suggests that the consecutive different moments of an event can be perceived as if existing parallelly in time ($T_1 = T_2 = \dots = T_n$ and probably not $T_1 < T_2 < \dots < T_n$, where T is a time moment or a set of moments). Still, in spite of the ancient tendency toward parallelism, the mainstream of Estonian oldest quantitative trochaic ballads is linear, i.e., moving from the past to the future, with a more thorough observation of the present. This linearity could hardly have been the time background of the pre-ballad era. Estonians must have acquired the linear time model via other, foreign, patterns.

In old Estonian traditional alliterative poetry parallelism is the basic poetical principle on the level of a detail, a motif or a scene. Parallelism that reaches the expression of time is much more hypothetical. Not every researcher may agree with this suggestion, and would rather classify these stories as belonging to Model III. I myself tend to think that the repeated haggling scenes between the bridegroom and the dead in the ballad *Grave Girl* express rather psychical simultaneity than follow one another in time. Neither does the concept of gradation always include the idea of a sequence in time — it can express simultaneity as well.

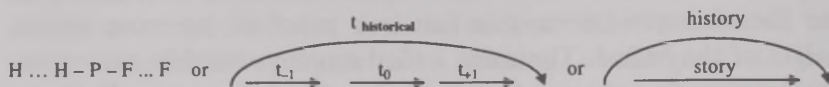
The most illustrative example is *Husbandslayer* in which the episode of the flight of the woman into the forest and her repeated requests for help from the pig, the well, the birch and the aspen refer not so much to a sequence of the events in time as to simultaneity. The same applies to the ballads *Skydaughter*, *Bean and Pea* and especially to *Ransomed Girl* where the girl, taken by force to a Russian ship, dramatically haggles over herself with the kidnappers. The audience has to go through the embarrassing situation several times, with only small changes. Of course, for the oral tradition parallelism is an effective mnemotechnical means, but it is also connected with the corresponding time concept, rather than excluding it. At the same time it is plausible that these songs express just the conflict between the two historical notions of time in a period when the parallelistic model was regressing and the

linear model was progressing. For example, the ballad *Mareta's Child* refers to Jesus in its deus ex machina solution. Considering the Estonian conditions, this fact is a proof of the more recent origin of the ballad. The same ballad employs notably more successive time than the previous examples, that is, it is more linear in time despite its parallelism. (For Estonian folk songs with translations see Kurrik 1985.)

Today's reader can naturally dispute it. Parallelism as an archaic feature undoubtedly hindered the fast linear motion of time, but the latter (as supposedly a feature of the free market mentality), in fact, was delayed in Estonia's reality because of the Baltic-German feudal order which lasted almost until the beginning of the 20th century. It can still be presumed that in the second half of the 19th century when the collecting of Estonian folk tradition started, the informants themselves already tried to interpret parallelism consecutively. In spite of the centuries-long resistance, time parallelism (like any other kind of parallelism) tends to be eliminated from the ballad as naturally unsuitable for it. Surely, time parallelism is notably missing from the more recent end-rhymed traditional ballad. At the same, it has been excellently imitated in later artistic poetry (e.g., the collection by Villem Grünthal-Ridala *The Blue Herd*, 1930, and others).

It is interesting to note that parallelism does not necessarily appear in the representation of the present only. There is a version of the ballad *Husbandslayer*, in which the end part, which makes a reference to the future, is also represented in a double form. At first, the female protagonist drowns and then she is surprisingly burnt as well. Thus, the model $H_1 \dots H_n - P_1 \dots P_n - F_1 \dots F_n$ is also possible, as parallelism can obviously appear in the representation of the past, too.

2.2. Historical Time System



Maybe with the exception of some (ballad) legends about Jesus and Mary, Estonian folklore evidently did not use this model. Nevertheless, the system of historical time is sufficiently represented in Estonian modern literature, or even in earlier literature. The best-known dramatic and romantic ballads of our poetry represent the system, in which the presentation of a particular event gets its meaning from the more general time horizon suggesting a fatal inevitability. The single event under discussion is only a tiny particle on the background of the higher historical game which often can be a supernatural one.

Ballads like those were written by Jakob Tamm and Jaan Bergmann at the end of the 19th century. In the 20th century this type is represented by Henrik Visnapuu (the collection *Mother of Winds*, 1942), Karl Eduard Sööt (*Crescent's Blade*, 1937), Betti Alver, Kersti Merilaas and some other poets. Also, the peak of Estonian literary ballads, the collection *Eclipse of Happiness* by Marie Under, belongs to this model. (For translations of her ballads see Under 1949, 1955, 1963, 1970.) Earlier, I have published the following thoughts concerning that collection:

In the 1920s ballad production becomes more active /---/. /---/ A general lyroepic situation arises /---/. The years 1926–1931 (1927–1930) are especially productive. As a certain parallel the dramatic conflicts in the society during the Great Depression can be noticed, from which much of collision flowed into literature. /---/

M. Under's *Eclipse of Happiness* (1929) is the masterpiece of Estonian poetry /---/. /---/ R. M. Rilke's concept of *Weltinnenraum* /---/ obtains in Under's poems the form of a circle, its symbol being a ring or a round lake. The integral whole is formed of two sides, the man and the woman, who can find

their fertility on passing through a death-containing (psychic) space. If one of them sins against love on their way, satanic powers will spoil the whole — a material sin will follow the mental one. In the opposite case happiness can be gained, although with reservations. The man and the woman both sin equally five times, this does not happen only in the Bible-based *Mandrakes*. The lyric poem *Swamp Song* symbolizes the death-containing (mental) morass as a clue to the whole conception. The basic scheme of a Gothic cathedral is formed: side-naves and prop-arches as its body, portal and main aisle, pulpit (position of the author), altar and belfry:

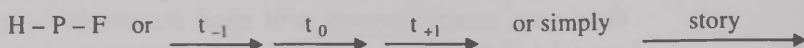
Mandrakes

<i>Young Lady of Porkuni</i>	<i>Leather Merchant Pontus</i>
<i>Child Killer</i>	<i>Hobgoblin</i>
<i>Whirlwind</i>	<i>Sea Cows</i>
<i>Exchanged Child</i>	<i>White Bird</i>
<i>The Birth of Naissaar Island</i>	<i>A Travelling Lake</i>
<i>Swamp Song</i>	

Just as in Gothic architecture, Under's stories reflect in their details one another and the integral whole. It seems that through M. Under's *Eclipse of Happiness* the Gothic ballad has reached its historical closure, the absolute comprehension of its essence (i.e. the dramatic conflict between the lyric and the epic as a cathedral surging up to altitudes). /---/ With this collection of ballads her talent achieves perfection (Merilai 1991: 138–139).

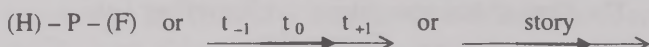
An equivalent to Under's poems of the period are the fatal erotic short stories by the Finnish-Estonian writer Aino Kallas who called her tales "ballads in prose" — all of them present the same model of time.

2.3. *In medias res* Time System



It could be stated that this model represents the ballad in its most typical way. It is the presentation of a story in the most exact sense of the word, the original expression of the flow of time. Many different examples of it can be found in Estonian literature. In folklore, the most definite example is the syllabic-accentual end-rhymed country dance ballad or market song. However, the ballad, pursuing an even more dynamic presentation of the (maybe sensational) story, can abandon even that model as can be seen from the following example.

2.4. *In maxime medias res* Time System



a) Time system of the nucleus of the story

In Estonian folk and literary poetry some ballads have an extremely concentrated content and form, for example, *Killevere-Kullevere* and some others in the collection of poems *Bird Song* by Henrik Adamson (1937). The most fascinating example that seems puzzling is *A Lake in Virgin Forest* by Karl Eduard Sööt in his collection *Home* (1921). The length of the poem is uncommonly short for a ballad, containing only 8 verses divided into 2 stanzas. In spite of this, the story has all features of a lyric-epical and mystical ballad, close to Heine's *Lorelei*. I have characterized these examples once as "dramatic ballad fragments". Adamson and Sööt are very "folksy" in those stories; but one can find similar condensed fragments in folklore, too.

b) Time system of the emotional background of the story

The system of *in maxime medias res* can be noticed in the poems that represent the story quite fragmentarily in an extremely con-

centrated way, but in which the poetic attention is directed not so much at the dramatical nucleus of the story than at the lyrical emotional background of it, accentuating the mystical atmosphere of the ballad. Such are, for example, the ballads of symbolist vision by early modernist Ernst Enno in the collection *Grey Songs* (1910). However, there is a layer of old lyrical folk poems belonging to the subclass, too. The Estonian exile writer in Sweden Bernard Kangro is one of the later authors in this category (q.v. Kangro 1951), especially with his early collections like *Drying-Kiln*.

The *in maxime medias res* system is an obscure area of transition between the ballad and the common lyric. The ballad is as if dispersed into its more primitive components: either into the presentation of the epic story in a minimalistic form or into the expression of the emotion or lyric story caused by external events. Elsewhere, I have characterized these versions as follows:

A remarkable ballad wave appears in 1937 and in the following years. /---/

B. Kangro's poetry is close to that of H. Adamson, but at the same time intellectually opposite to it. The traditional ballad he experimented with in the collection *Old Houses* remained alien to him. He makes the genre more lyric, stresses the unity of opposites instead of their antagonism, and as a result the plot becomes more fragmentary and dramatism is replaced by a dreamlike condition (*Drying — Kiln*, 1939). As a matter of fact, this is ballad-like poetry with obvious distinctive marks of the ballad: mythopoetry, an urge for more ancient mind-strata than those of the medieval man /---/. /---/ Kangro's theme is that of the whirlwind of the soul in the grip of external forces, as it happens in all the most expressive Estonian ballads (Merilai 1991: 140).

In the model of Enno, Sööt, Adamson and Kangro psychological time is preferred to real time, whereas in the classical case of Under both times are equal.

2.5. (Free Verse) Secondary Time System

(H, P, F)_{only as a background} or t_{-1}, t_0, t_{+1} _{only as a background} \rightarrow or \rightarrow story

This system seems to work when the purpose is not so much to express the content of the ballad as such, but just to compose a prestigious form. It imitates some previous models, but does not concentrate on expressing time itself. The purposes of a system like this are literary, formative. The writer just strives for the artistry. The attention is centered on the manner of presentation, the literary allusions and the "genre memory" problems, but not necessarily on the metaphysical basis. The expressing of time may be "forgotten", but as a matter of fact it can never be totally missing, as the world and the stories in it are temporal. In that case, it is as if the ballads were not genuine, but rather poems about ballads. The ballads of this class are more genre reflexive than time reflexive.

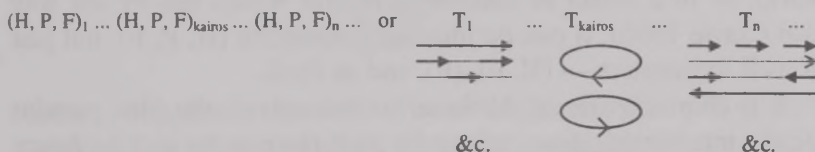
The secondary time system appears rather late in Estonian poetry, although the elements of it can be noticed at the end of the 1930s already. It is obvious that there is no evidence of this type in folklore. The "timeless" system was typical of the 1960s, when the ballads were often written in *vers libre*. The form was the purpose then, the rest being of less importance — the choice was not made to express metaphysical time. Here time was only an unavoidable background feature. This type of poetry is represented by Ain Kaalep, Arno Vihailemm, Jaan Kross, P.-E. Rummo, J. Kaplinski, Mats Traat, A. Suuman, Lehte Hainsalu and recently by the young poetess Kauksi Ülle, who writes in a south-eastern Estonian dialect, in the Võru language, closely akin to the famous Setu dialect.

This system has elevated the ballad to the level of cultural refinement, but not every writer was able to meet its requirements. So the ballad can easily become its own parody or a pastiche expressing only non-cultural non-history instead of time. The ballad can turn into a tasteless imitation or kitsch, expressing the mentality of historical completion and timelessness. The physical time is rendered as too important, the metaphysical side is ignored. Unable to find a way out, the kitsch writers accept a misleading mentality. However, this might be a step forward, as compared

with the cabaret style of Bertolt Brecht. In this system the ballad loses its metaphysical independence and turns into a tool for literary games. The poetic role of the ballad becomes replaceable, *salva veritate*, by that of the sonnet, or any other form — the ballad loses its identity. This system stands near to the end of the modernist era, presumably coinciding at the same time with one of the starting-points of the following postmodernism.

II. SYSTEM OF INDEPENDENT TIME UNITS

2.6. Time Icons System (Mainly in Artur Alliksaar)



Not all Estonian poetry (nor folklore) is synthetic; thus, it is not totally balladic either. Different time segments can (though, need not) form a unified linear string, remaining analytically independent. An example is the conversational aphoristic unrhymed free verse poetry written by “language poet” Artur Alliksaar in the 1960s. His manner is rather similar to that of Walt Whitman, although the latter’s narration would tend toward syntheticism. While in synthetic poetry the deictic² orientation acts are committed on the level of the discourse as a whole, in poetry of the analytic (surrealist) kind the orientation acts are committed separately on every utterance level. So the time deixis of the utterances that follow one another, can be inconsistent instead of being in accordance. In the situation where each utterance can code a different context, the expressing of linear time on the level of discourse

² “Deictic”, “deixis” — from Greek *deiktikos* (‘apt for pointing with the finger’) — is used in linguistics to refer to the functions of personal or demonstrative pronouns, of tense and of a variety of other grammatical and lexical features which relate utterances to the spatial-temporal coordinates of the act of utterance.

may turn out to be problematic. Different utterances can express different times which may be incoherent. This is not a proper basis for the ballad.

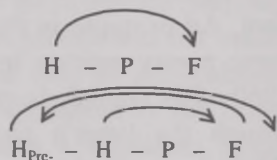
The time deixis of the text as a whole resembles rather a plural conglomerate of separate time icons or sets, defined by different utterances. The ballad, on the contrary, tends to present only a single icon of time. It is possible to play various games and create paradoxical time situations, using the time deixis and implications with it. An icon can represent the common time sequence like in ballads, but also the movement from the future to the past (F, P, H). But how? Because, if not in actuality or even in psychological reality, time can move backwards at least in the narrow contexts of poems — either in linguistic reality, in some possible fictional world, or in a realm of make-believe (for which see by the way also Currie 1990). It can be internally complete (H, P, F), but just as well incomplete — (H, F), (P), and so forth.

It is characteristic of Alliksaar to concentrate the time paradoxically into ecstatic time, where the past, the present and the future fuse, lose their identity, and make up an ecstatic time of the supratemporal ($H = P = F$). So, for example, a fictional character of one of his poems typically asks:

Where did you say your grandfather would be born?

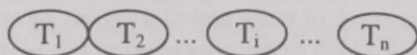
Oh, in Buenos Aires!

We'll get there by the end of the Second Ice Age.



As a rule, Alliksaar then replaces the solipsist first person singular me-origo as his poetic persona with the extremely inspirational we-origo, a kind of Pickwick-Club or argonauts of intellectual aristocracy characterized by a notably high level of mental co-operation.

In Alliksaar, the analytic time moments can form tiles or parquets. Symbolically this could be described as follows: $T_i \cap T_j = \emptyset$ in which $i, j = 1...n$; graphically as follows:



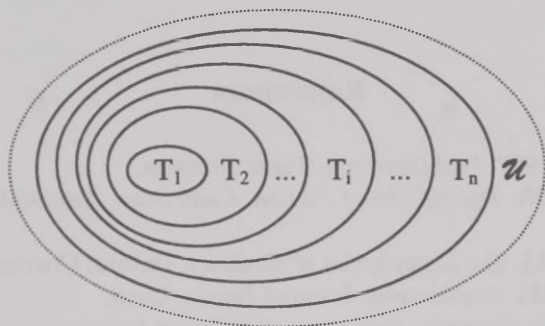
The moments can also make cascades in which the intersections of the time sets are not empty: $(\exists i)T_i \cap T_{i+1} \neq \emptyset$, where $i = 1 \dots n - 1$. Graphically:



Time icons can be localized (quasi)parallelistically against the background of one-to-one correspondence, but the accessibility relation between time icons need not exist. The parallelistic equality condition of time moments is not unavoidable either. This can be presented by the model of a pack of cards:



Finally, Alliksaar is also fond of time containers. There $T_1 \subseteq T_2 \subseteq \dots \subseteq T_i \subseteq \dots \subseteq T_n \subseteq \mathcal{U}$ (where \mathcal{U} is the time universe), or graphically:



3. Conclusion

To sum up, reading poems like those of Alliksaar's analytically, time as the basis of the text does not move linearly. It is plural, multi-directed, embedded in different possible worlds. Alliksaar has also written ordinary synthetic poetry, e.g. "Lemon Ballad" for children, which belongs to the fifth system. But the ballad as a fa-

vourite traditional and modernist genre does not function in the sixth system, although some balladic remains or even parodic reflections in the boundaries of some single time icon can appear here and there in those texts:

Somebody reads a ballad.
 It's slightly peculiar.
 My grandfather had a monkey and its name was Adam.
 Instead of the Fall, Eve sold apples in the summer garden.
 She was put in a house of correction because of deficit.
 Well, why did she have such a sweet tooth!
 She was in no private garden indeed!
 Don't ask a sky-high price.

Even if you wanted those poems with their sophisticated, mixed time structures to be ballads, they could never be that because of their non-linear flux of time. Even if the ballad as a poetic form has become, to a certain extent, anachronistic, the final disappearance of the ballad time seems impossible *in spirit*. People tend to love their grannies, the ballad can be a neat postmodern form, too.

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Appendix

ARTUR ALLIKSAAR (1923–1966)

WHERE TO,
WHERE TO,
UGH!!!

Time-tables.

Hail-tables.

Gain-tables.

Are the trains still going to hurry to the parties of strikingly struggling joys?!

Breath-nets.

Heat-nets.

Death-nets.

Are the shins still going to spray the blue sparks of spring?!

Hopes are going to turn to rags.

It doesn't matter — we'll sew them up with the thread of dreams stolen from the bushels of midnight.

The charm is going to grow thinner.

It doesn't matter — it can't vanish anywhere from the tight tin cup of our tribulations.

Yet the spell is really going to fade!

With more tension and greater gulps let us drink then its dusky brightness!

The soul is worn to holes like a prehistoric engine.

Never mind — we will race forward in a canoe carved out of the trunk of the future-tree.

You, wind, are a very frolicsome insect indeed!

For ever with us, chasers of captivations, for ever with us, trackers of transfigurations.

Never falling behind.

Look, how many pretend to be dumb!

Look, how respectably they make fools of themselves!

Look, how benightedness is boasted about!

Look, how many take muck for marmalade!

You can understand everything because you can jumble up things, in order to put them in proper order.

A fly is walking on the time-table and believes it is in Bergen and Berlin and Baku.

There is no moment when no one feels killed.

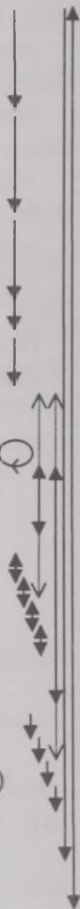
There is no moment when no one reaches out for an embrace.

There is no moment when no one is on the road.

Go ahead, go ahead, go ahead wrapped in the clouds of the dandelion-fluffs of your wish-dreams!

The branching out of fingers and toes, of thoughts and memories has neither beginning nor end.

(Trans. by A. M. & Ene-Reet Soovik.)



Estonian Alternative Poetry in Changing Canon

SIRJE OLESK, KERSTI UNT

In the formative process of the Estonian postmodernist literature there is a marginal movement that was in its time rather powerful, especially in respect of its extensive social context. This movement — the movement of alternative publications — can now perhaps be called the last stronghold of modernism and at the same time the first, although tentative and searching, ground for postmodernism. The more so because postmodernism can be viewed as deconstruction or reconstruction of the modernist conceptions (Ray 1991). Modernism which doubtless used and prepared aspects of art now utilized by postmodern authors is at the same time antagonistic to its successor and responsible for its birth. The line of antagonism in Estonian poetry is supposed to run between the sacredness of the modernist conception and the playfulness of the postmodernist one (Hennoste 1996). The change comes somewhat later than that of the breakthrough in the Western art but the difference in time with the Western process is actually short (about a decade). It could be said that national underground opposition took the outside form of the Western (leftist) protest wave of the same period although it was not a leftist movement itself. Socialist economy together with Soviet ideology, which was, by and large, a kind of mixture of 18–19th-century conceptions of art, retarded the natural course of development slightly retarded anyway in respect to the Western cultural model because its national awakening took place as late as the last third of the 19th century.

Estonian literature between 1940–1991 is a period dependent on outside non-literary factors more than any national literature

developing in a democratic society. It is formed of three parts not always connected very closely: 1) literature issued at home in legal publications, 2) literature published abroad by exiled authors, 3) literature issued in alternative publications. (Olesk 1998).

Alternative poetry forms a part of alternative literature (including both poetry and prose) of officially unknown young authors and also some known authors of more radical views during more or less two decades — the 1960s and the 1970s. (Sarv 1987). The wider background of such activities was the much longer story of resistance to the soviets. It seems reasonable, however, to sum up the essence of the process.

Despite repressions, deliberate assassinations, Siberian exile, and the general atmosphere of fear, including a total violent remodeling of culture, armed resistance in Estonia continued till about 1950 and was then more or less subdued. Most of the society adapted itself reasonably to the new regime, while an active resistance continued mainly among schoolchildren, young people who formed their own organizations of which between 1955–1962 several were active. These groups were mostly not even treated very severely by the Soviet authorities: they were reprimanded, frightened and dispersed, except some of them that because of their able leaders became dangerous to the system and were sent to prison camps. There they continued self-education (alternative in its aspirations as regards to the education offered at schools) and after returning home, continued their activities. This general background was of course not directly responsible for the later alternative publishing but founded a kind of tradition at schools. Examples of the kind known from literary history can neither be denied here, especially those of Russian literary history taught very thoroughly at schools, having a stress on resistance and revolutionary ideology and providing examples of secret publishing as a means of resistance. The aim was different, though the means were similar. A number of the figures of political resistance were also personally connected with the publishers of alternative issues (as they were called), while one of them (Jaan Isotamm) became also a leading author (Niitsoo 1997: 13–98).

By the 1960s life in Estonia became as normal as it could become under these circumstances, the first shock of occupation was

over and people returned from their previous existence on the brink of survival to more material interests. This and the general political liberalization that had begun in the second half of the fifties formed a kind of a semi-positive atmosphere in the sixties characterized by the stabilization of material life and also by a flow of information (although somewhat chaotic) from the outside world. It also meant the weakening of censorship, opening up of art to new (also western) forms. This in its turn brought about a partial acceptance of the regime, a naive hope that the new regime and its ideology might become acceptable or even prove themselves right in the course of time. With stabilization the society changed from a society of an almost open conflict into a society of hypocrisy. Marxism which was in the 1960s also popular in the West was the official philosophy of the Soviet state and was taught at schools in a very strict form. In the 1960s two kinds of disputes with the official ideology started: one was supported by the younger generation trying to find ways of reformed treatment of the orthodox Marxist truths and reform the society by penetrating its institutions from the inside; the other, comprising mostly still younger people, totally rejected the ideology that they nevertheless knew well, trying to replace it with some other teaching or perhaps even with several different teachings. Actually anything was better than the official ideology. Such efforts often grew into the so-called inside emigration, the denial of the environment, even the denial of themselves (*Marm* 1968: 23):

We
 cannot be blamed
 for being born.
 This century
 was not
 our own choice.
 We have not
 chosen
 our own names.
 Did anybody
 ask us
 to be here?

We inherited
 the ideals
 of our fathers.
 We bear the burden
 of their
 great deeds.

(Trans. by K. Unt)

The unifying basis was the preservation of the national values of their pre-occupation state (pre-war Estonia) and the fight for the right to read, think and write freely, without the outside or inside censorship.

In the history of Estonian poetry this period was marked by new names and new forms. Publishing actually remained within the official frame during most of the decade. However, poetry was freed from directly socialist and true-to-the-new-state restrictions, returning in the general lines to its pre-war model of neo-symbolist kind expression, highly professional and mostly strict about form. Parallel attempts were made of using new forms besides strictly metrical ones, following the examples of the western, pre-war Estonian, and exile poets. Poetry was read widely, while that of the young authors publishing legally was met by a unanimous acceptance. The poet was regarded as the conscience of the nation.

The end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s became the central period of alternative publishing. By that time the first completely Soviet young generation had reached high school, had experienced the hypocrisy both of social and of ideological kind, and quite a number of them simply rejected everything: the teaching, the official literary hierarchy, the official opportunities of publication which soon became more restricted and censored again, and also the official forms of behaviour and clothing, even partly the family-centered way of life, sexual restrictions, etc. Besides, the seriousness of the most part of the officially published poetry had become stale and became by and by substituted with simpler verse often fit to be sung with the accompaniment of folk or rock music (Hennoste 1996, Kaplinski 1997). Prose that by that time had found new and more coherent means of expression than the open socialist realism of the 1950s, was by several authors held as a more appropriate genre for expressing a writer's ideas.

A number of principles characteristic to the pre-war poetic generation and the young generation of the Sixties remained also characteristic to the so-called alternative generation. Its representatives, consciously or unconsciously, set themselves high idealistic aims. Artur Alliksaar, a renowned author, idealized and read widely in manuscript by the younger generation, has written lines which were used as the motto for one of the alternative collections, *Marm* (Alliksaar 1968: 10):

I am a ship whose haven is on land
yet unknown and unrisen from the sea.

(Trans. by K. Unt)

Time was also ripe for seeking new sources of poetry. Among a number of variable attempts three ideological groups could be pointed out:

1. Idealization of the ancient (and greatly mythical) fenno-ugric world of the pre-"awakening" time. It holds that the mainly European-driven cultural development, begun with the "awakening", meant a loss of the original Estonian model. The idealization of rural and ancient fenno-ugric form of life brought about in the late 1970s the movement of several poets out of towns, to the countryside.
2. Alternative beat and hippie ideology and attitudes, supported by a parallel phenomena in art and music and having the widest context of a general change of clothing manner, social and sexual behaviour, etc. Those features might be said to have been almost synchronic to what was happening in the societies of the European model. They were also parallel to the change of attitude in Soviet Russia where it may be presumed that the changes were restricted to important cities but did not influence the whole of the big country.
3. Surrealist poetry following the example of exiled poets, surrealist painting, surrealist feeling, and other 20th-century forms of poetry.

The alternative issues were hand made (photocopies from films, type-written texts, etc.), issued in small numbers, and illustrated by young artists of alternative mind who at the time were also seeking

new forms and new models. All in all, during slightly more than a decade (1968–1982) the total number of significant alternative publications might be said to have been about 20, including some that did not contain a single line of poetry but only essays. The contents were variable as has already been said: while in the first half of the 1970s an attempt to form some more clearly definable poetic ideal could be traced, then in the second half of the decade the attempt weakens and is lost; editors and poets are scattered in different directions — the Soviet army, work, even a kind of an exile in Russia, every one having a story of his own. Later publications carry on the tradition but become more and more directly involved in politics and fight against the Soviet regime.

Geographically, Tartu with its university — a meeting place for young people — remains central for the whole period, although several publications also appeared in Tallinn, especially at the beginning of the alternative period. The need for alternative publishing that in some form might even have continued later than the active period mentioned, was cut with the end of the Soviet state, the end of censorship that perceptibly weakened towards the second half of the 1980s.

This is also the period where we find most of the few articles written about alternative publishing and fight for democratic freedom and civil rights (Sarv 1987, Beier 1989), and when by and by a part of the poets who had participated in the alternative movement and obtained through it a legendary image, came into the open with their first poetry collections. Some of them have to date published several collections.

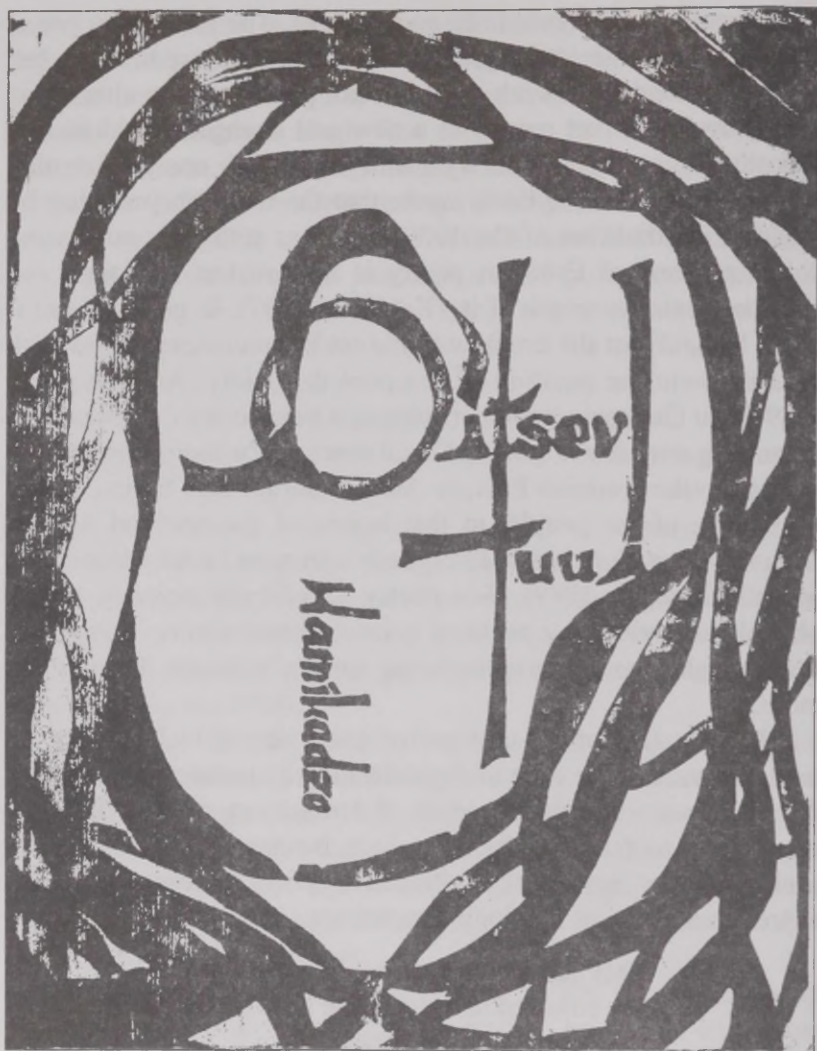
In officially published literature the 1970s was a decade of prose when several former poets turned to prose and new prose authors started to publish. Two leading poets of the decade were Hando Runnel and Jüri Üdi (Juhan Viiding), both close to the circles of alternative publishers. With the growing of a general displeasure with the regime, a part of their poetry, especially that of Runnel, becomes really a song; those songs are performed at vast gatherings of young people called folk festivals. Words of poems were also used as texts for rock music.

Several critics (Krull 1998) have pointed out that from Üdi / Viiding's poems, with their playful usage of language, most of the

present young (postmodernist) poets derive. The alternative poets, together with those of the generation who were close to them, but never published their work or would not publish in the alternative issues, however, met now with a new and changed world and an almost ready canon of literary history. In 1983, one of Estonian leading poets Jaan Kaplinski wrote that the tradition (meaning by tradition the tradition of the 1930s that was ruthlessly cut by the Soviet powers) of Estonian poetry is the greatest weakness and also the greatest strength of it. (Kaplinski 1997). In general lines it might be said that the break with the tradition coincided also with the change in the position of the poet in society. As early as in 1989 Tõnu Õnnepalu wrote, criticizing a new poetry cassette: "The Estonian poetry is ready now. Could erect a monument somewhere to Him, to the Estonian Poet, to that different, noble figure, to that conscience of the people, to that bearer of the spiritual banner. Because He is done with. Everybody can now be as noble as he wants" (Õnnepalu 1989). New poetry is expressly language-based, playful and written by poets of quite different nature. Poetry has lost its high aims, its mission, being simply literature, and nothing more.

Thus the fate of the alternative poets seems to be sad, even tragic because at the time of their ripening as poets or writers they did not have, and what is more, did not even want to have an opportunity to publish officially. Jaan Isotamm, one of the most prolific authors among the alternative poets whose work also expresses a clear-cut ideology, has written (*Marm* 1968: 32):

My songs aren't meant to be published
in coloured hermaphrodite booklets
nor in the stale impotent
literary magazines
my songs are
an ejaculation of fresh sperm
a direct and immediate copulation
into a ready accepting womb.
(Trans. by K. Unt)



The cover illustration of one of the underground poetry collections, *Õitsev tuul* ('Florescent Wind') and (next page) a poem from it by Peep Ilmet.

Peegli ees.

Käes pyss, vöö! puss ta toetund seinä.
On õlul juuksed voogavad.
Näib silmist kirge hoogavat.
Näib silmist meeletumat leina.

Pyss vestab sumbest suvedõhtust
kui veele pardid lendavad.
Seal katkeb sõda endaga,
kus ise hangid täidet kõhtu.

On vestul vikingite sära,
kel kaasaks oli VABADUS.
Ei nende laevu tabatud.
Nad kõikjalt purjetasid ära.

On juustel kauneid katejälgi
sest õrnalt raevund armuõöst,
mil taevani viis kiresööst
neid kustutama iidseid nälgi.

See kirk neis silmis elujänu
kõik veinid, myrgid ammutab.
Mis pehkine, selle lammutab
ning raskust kandes laulab tänu.

Ei leina neid, kes aja kutsel
kord mahalasse langesid,
vaid nyydseid laibahangesid,
kes kõngend - syda alles tuksel.

See mees vist esivanemate vari,
kes eksleb meie ajastul.
Mis otsib siit see isik hull?
Me juba ammu joondund kari.

Peep Ilmet

The role of alternative publications should not be estimated from the standpoint of only poetry or building a canon. Above all, those publications served as a catalyst for a considerably wider public than those connected directly with their publishing or reading. The context of them was even more extensive, as several officially accepted (though not always acceptable) poets (Üdi, Kaplinski, Kaalep, Ehin, Runnel) participated as authors and certainly functioned as their reading public. The publications formed also an axis of social and university life both in Tartu and Tallinn. They contained new ideas, made people know each other, facilitated book exchange (especially from abroad, in other languages), etc. The

period is known for a new rise in the knowledge (both quantitative and qualitative) of European languages which also brought about a wider possibility to read. It was a book-centered world.

As these rare publications have since the first expectations of a new independence been mostly collected and are now kept at the Estonian Literary Museum, the texts themselves, with a few exceptions, are not lost for the future. The full picture of the society, however, is a problem of memory, as nobody could document it in those times. Some initial attempts of documentation were made in the second half of the 1970s; these had to be interrupted, because of the harshened censorship, until the end of the 1980s. Owing to its exceptionally wide social context and to the fact that a certain highly qualified part of the present-day poetry is closely connected with it, in the new writing about the Estonian literary canon alternative literature has been rightly considered as a small and peculiar but legitimate part of the history of Estonian poetry.

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**“...dichterisch wohnet der Mensch...”:
Upon Self-forgetfulness**

REET SOOL

Since we are in the middle of things historical, both in the literal and literary sense — in this beautiful cathedral at this conference, and, especially “since our knowledge is historical”, as Elizabeth Bishop gracefully put it (Bishop 1994: 66) — I would like to move further back in time, to the supposedly ‘innocent’ pre-postmodern age, from which the quotation in the title of my paper comes. It is a double borrowing, a legitimate postmodern practice, and the result of the haunting nature of Hölderlin’s famous phrase that inspired Heidegger whose views on poetry as presented in *...Poetically Man Dwells...* in the English version I shall attempt to limn. In order to avoid ambiguity, I shall not *dwell* upon this subject, proceeding to the reading of a poem by Elizabeth Bishop, aided, this time, by Seamus Heaney’s lectures as published in *The Government of the Tongue* (1988) and *The Redress of Poetry* (1995).

The fateful phrase comes from a late poem of Hölderlin, *In lieblicher Bläue...*, translated as *In lovely blueness...* in two English renderings (by Michael Hamburger in Fynsk 1993: 255–259 and by Albert Hofstadter in Heidegger 1975a: 213–229), used here as sources of citation. This is a prose poem that has reached us by a roundabout route and whose origin, therefore, has sometimes been questioned — never by Heidegger, of course. It is dated after the onset of what is usually termed Hölderlin’s ‘madness’, or, more reverentially, after he was granted the protection of his gods. In English it reads: “...poetically man dwells on this earth” and this seems to imply any human being at any time, indeed “every man and all the time”, as Heidegger suggests (ib. 213), while

"dwelling" has to be understood essentially, in terms of human existence, not as "merely one form of human behaviour alongside many others" (ib. 214–215). But our daily dwelling is full of toil and anxiety, "made insecure by the hunt for gain and success, bewitched by the entertainment and recreation industry" (ib. 213), and there is clearly no room for anything else, least of all, the poetic. This is as evident at the turn of the millennium, and probably more so than it was in the 1950s when Heidegger formulated these ideas (in a lecture held on October 6th, 1951, and in printed form in 1954). In these circumstances, "poetry is either rejected as a frivolous mooning and vaporizing into the unknown, and a flight into dreamland", a kind of moody brooding, we might say, or it is "counted as a part of literature" (ib.), assessed by what Heidegger calls "literature industry" (ib. 214) according to the standards it has set. The latter, as we know, are regularly updated like any other fashion standards, allowing poetry to be judged as living up to or falling short of them. The contemporary mass media are ideally suited for this purpose. "In such a setting poetry cannot appear otherwise than as literature" (ib.), in which mode it is also studied and taught at school and in the academe, and it would be hard or downright impossible to think of it as forming the basis of human existence. (The English word *appear* is interesting in this connection, especially when meaning *seeming*).

Yet, when understood essentially (and I have simplified grossly), the phrase "poetically man dwells" says "that poetry first causes dwelling to be dwelling. Poetry is what really lets us dwell" (ib. 215). It does so through poetic creation which is a kind of building, making — in Greek, *poiesis*. Man can arrive at the nature of dwelling and poetry through language, but only when he respects language's own nature. Man, according to Heidegger, is not the master and shaper of language. It is the language that speaks ("die Sprache spricht" — Heidegger 1985: 30), not man. "Man first speaks when, and only when, he responds to language by listening to its appeal. /.../ ... the responding in which man authentically listens to the appeal of language is that which speaks in the element of poetry. The more poetic a poet is — the freer (that is, the more open and ready for the unforeseen) his saying /.../" (Heidegger 1975a: 216). Importantly, man dwells poetically

"on this earth", with poetry not flying and hovering above, but making man belong to the earth, bringing him into dwelling. "Full of merit" (Heidegger 1975a: 216–218) — "Voll Verdienst" ("Full of acquirements" in Fynsk 1993: 255) — toiling on this earth, man is allowed to look up in the sky toward divinities. "The upward glance spans the between of sky and earth. This between is measured out for the dwelling of man" (Heidegger 1975a: 220). Man spans the dimension by measuring himself against the heavenly ("Man measures himself against the godhead", as Hölderlin says — ib. 221), his dwelling depends on this upward-looking measure-taking of the dimension, in which both sky and earth belong. This taking of measure is what is poetic in dwelling. Poetry, as Heidegger interprets Hölderlin, is a measuring, a very special measuring, by which man receives the breadth of his being — as a mortal on this earth beneath the sky that for him is the manifestation of the unknown and unknowable, the godhead. Poetry and dwelling belong together, each calling for the other.

Thus, "poetically man dwells", as stated by Hölderlin at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and interpreted by Heidegger in the middle of the twentieth. The fifties belong to what is conventionally classified as the postmodern era, ushered in by World War II. Heidegger was of the opinion that man lived altogether unpoetically then but that did not prove Hölderlin wrong: "For dwelling can be unpoetic only because it is in essence poetic. For the man to be blind, he must remain a being by nature endowed with sight" (ib. 228). At the very end of the nineties, entrapped in this technical-technological world of ours, our plight is about the same: the life we lead seems anything but poetic, but it is unpoetic only in relation to the poetic, to something that our dwelling is endowed with. It is the tragedy of our lot that we can be aware of our condition only through an absence, and a most essential one. "That we dwell unpoetically, and in what way, we can in any case learn only if we know the poetic" (ib.). Hence the necessity to be heedful of the poetic, to take it seriously, today as ever.

But the postmodern age (as if all ages were not *post-*) is not prone to take anything seriously, its prevailing tone being self-reflexive irony. (Ironically, we could hear some closeness in the words *postmodern* and *post-mortem*, the latter being carried out

upon the dead body of modernism.) The very word itself, *post-modern*, is evocative of the paradox that lies at its heart: *after* (*post*) the *contemporary* (*modern*). How can something be after the contemporary of which we think as having it right now and, moreover, of having had it since World War II? Though used attributively to delineate an age, *postmodern* should not be regarded as a term of periodization here but, rather, as a challenging way of thinking about time, as something that "challenges us to see the present in the past, the future in the present, the present in a kind of no-time" (Bennett and Royle 1995: 178; cf. Eliot's "perception, not only of the pastness of its past, but of its presence" in Eliot 1988: 72 and Hutcheon's theorizing of the concept of "the presence of the past" in Hutcheon 1988: 4). It is the age of the post-modern or, simply, of postmodernism, with all of its classified destabilizations: undecidability, discontinuity, disruption, dissemination, decentering, antitotalization, the a-rational, the crumbling of grand narratives, pastiche and parody. How is (world) poetry faring in the postmodern age, especially the kind of poetry that measures out the breadth of human being, the kind that Heidegger delineated?

This brings me to the second part of my title: self-forgetfulness (a not entirely happy find) which does not suggest that the self is not altogether a proper subject for poetry (though when dominant it might become a limitation) but does imply that it is a prerequisite of hearing (or letting) the language speak. Seamus Heaney in his T. S. Eliot memorial lectures has spoken about "the government of the tongue" as a dispensation in which "the tongue (representing both a poet's personal gift of utterance and the common resources of language itself) has been granted the right to govern" (Heaney 1988: 92). Heaney quotes the Polish poet Anna Swir writing of a poet becoming "an antenna capturing the voices of the world, a medium expressing his own subconscious and the collective subconscious" (ib. 93), neglecting Swir's indiscriminate characterization of the poet as an expressive agent of the subconscious and as somebody "capturing the voices of the world". He views the latter as an echo of the ancient Greek notion of the gods speaking through the voice of the poet, a long tradition that in modified forms has reached the postmodern era.

To exemplify my point concerning self-forgetfulness, I chose a poem by Elizabeth Bishop whose work is not very well known in Estonia. Neither are the circumstances of her life, and cannot, therefore, come between her and her work. My plan at first was to choose a poem in Estonian, but that would have necessitated a translation, which, as we know, is an interpretation in its own right and would have blurred things further. "At the Fishhouses" comes from Bishop's second collection, *A Cold Spring* (1955), and it opens with a conjunction ("although") that introduces a concession about the weather: "Although it is a cold evening," (Bishop 1994: 62). The straightforward plainness of the opening line matches the serenity of both the title of this poem and that of the whole collection: a cold evening at the fishhouses in a cold spring, a peaceful scene by the sea (whose presence, as yet, is indicated only by the title), and no human being(s) in sight — likewise, as yet. The very openness of the first line is, actually, disarming — anything (and, equally, nothing) might come to pass from this point on, "although it is a cold evening". It being an evening, the sun is about to set, and one is inclined to think (either because of the romantic cliché or for reasons of geography — significantly, *Geography III* is the title of Bishop's 1976 collection of poetry) that it will sink into the sea, although (again) it needn't. This is the time and place of two essential breaking points: the evening twilight at which light fades into darkness, and the seashore at which land and water meet. Importantly, we read in the epigraph of *Geography III*, an 1884 geography textbook, a fascinating catechetical couplet: "*Of what is the Earth's surface composed?/ Land and water*" (ib. 157), and a few lines above another one: "*What is the Earth? The planet or body on which we live*" (ib.). This, in turn, reminds us of Hölderlin's "...poetically man dwells on this earth". He does so as an old man — "an old man sits netting" (ib. 64) — in the third line of the poem, toiling away at his net, "although it is a cold evening". Hölderlin writes: "May, when life is all hardship, may a man look up and say: /.../ (Fynsk 1993: 255; cf. the other rendering: "May, if life is sheer toil, a man/ Lift his eyes and say: /.../ in Heidegger 1975: 219). There is a man, then, an old one, "down by one of the fishhouses" (Bishop 1994: 64) at where day and night meet in evening and land and

water in the shore. The sky is above him and he is netting although (this time the word is unsaid in the poem, yet implied) he can barely see the net: "his net, in the gloaming almost invisible,/ a dark purple-brown,/ and his shuttle worn and polished" (ib.). What matters here is the gloaming, the net, and the tool — a shuttle. The gloaming above and around the man makes the net almost invisible, thus making it (presumably) hard to handle, while at the same time lending it sublime beauty — "a dark purple-brown" (purple being the distinguishing colour of emperors and cardinals, but also the hue of royal and ecclesiastical mourning; its origin, however, derives from the sea — a dye obtained from a purple fish). The fact that the old man (and his eyesight might not be too good either) can hardly see the net does not matter much, since he has been netting most of his life (that is full of toil) and could do it blindfolded. His shuttle, "worn and polished", bespeaks the same: this simple tool is worn but polished (smooth and shiny), thus ennobled (sic) and dignified by a long life of simple hard work. The detailed and level-toned account of the fishhouses ("The five fishhouses have steeply peaked roofs/ and narrow, cleated gangplanks slant up/ to storerooms in the gables/ for the wheelbarrows to be pushed up and down on", *ibid.*: 64) and the various things that belong to them (benches, lobster pots, masts, fish tubs, wheelbarrows, a capstan) might seem mere description at first reading (although Barthes tells us there is no such thing — v. Barthes 1990: 16). As Seamus Heaney has said of Elizabeth Bishop: "Things as they are seem to be even more themselves once she has written them" (Heaney 1995: 168). This is a significant observation. We should pay special attention to the "once she has written them" part of it. It is spectacular that Heaney uses the construction "written them", that is, written the *things*, not *about* things. Writing things makes them (seem) even more themselves. Taking a step further, we could say that things are being named here (the net, shuttle, benches, etc.), and resort to Heidegger's important question: "What is this naming? Does it merely deck out the imaginable familiar objects and events /.../ with words of a language? No. This naming does not hand out titles, it does not apply terms, but it calls into the word" (Heidegger 1975b: 198). In such naming, things are called into existence. Man dwells upon

this earth through simple everyday things that join mortals to the earth, beneath the sky, which is the manifestation of the godhead. Earth, sky, mortals and divinities — the fourfold according to Heidegger (v. Heidegger 1975c: 150 ff.), is the world in which mortals are by dwelling, dwelling *poetically*. Poetry is really what lets us dwell through poetic creation, which is a kind of building, the naming that calls things into being, thus making them "even more themselves", once they are written down by a poet who has responded to language.

In the light of what has been said about the fourfold, the sky and the various aspects of light acquire a pronounced relevance in this poem. The *gloaming* of line four is evening twilight, deriving from Old English *glomung*, meaning *dusk*, but also associated with *gloss* and *glow*. "All is silver: the heavy surface of the sea,/ swelling slowly as if considering spilling over,/ is opaque, but the silver of the benches,/ the lobster pots, and masts, scattered/ among the wild jagged rocks,/ is of an apparent translucence /.../" (Bishop 1994: 64). Although "all is silver", the silver itself is of different kinds: the silver of the surface of the sea is the reflection of the sky and where shallow, possibly of the bottom, that is, the earth. The surface of the sea is opaque, not allowing light to pass through, while the silver of the benches, lobster pots and masts is "of an apparent translucence", allowing light to pass through but not transparent. This silver comes both from the sky and the sea, there being herring scales everywhere: "The big fish tubs are completely lined/ with layers of beautiful herring scales/ and the wheelbarrows are similarly plastered/ with creamy iridescent coats of mail,/ with small iridescent flies crawling on them" (ib.). The iridescence or change of colour (of those of the rainbow) is caused by the light as it falls from the sky from different directions. It is the sky that casts all that beauty, changing and changed, upon the things and creatures (usually not thought of as beautiful) on this earth, but also upon man. The man, too, has some of the silver on him: "...sequins on his vest and on his thumb" (ib. 65) (although sequins were originally *gold* mints). He talks about "the decline in the population/ and of codfish and herring/ while he waits for a herring boat to come in" (ib. 64–65) — common topics in a fishing village, especially among the old. The dead must have been

mentioned ("the decline in the population"), thus recalling the mortality of man. Importantly, the word *mortal* appears a few lines further on. According to Heidegger, "To die means to be capable of death as death. Only man dies. The animal perishes. It has death neither ahead of itself nor behind it. Death is the shrine of Nothing, /.../ (Heidegger 1975d: 178).

The tone of the poem grows more tense as it reaches a turning point, a pivot, prepared by the repetition of monosyllabic "down and down" (Bishop 1994: 65), "spilling over" like the sea of the beginning of the poem has been considering doing. The powerful incantation of "Cold dark deep and absolutely clear,/ element bearable to no mortal,/ to fish and to seals... /.../" (ib.) calls us into the realm of death and man's mortality (a profound parallel could be found in Rilke's eighth Duino elegy, the concept of the Open, "das Offene", into which the natural world only has access, being "Free from death", v. Rilke 1989: 193–197). Unlike the creatures of the sea, to whom what is opaque to man is clear and transparent, man is mortal in the sense of his awareness of death, his knowledge of the "cold dark deep", but not "clear". The element of the sea is unbearable to him, but not his mortality. He dwells on this earth as a mortal, doing this poetically, as Hölderlin once put it, and as Bishop's poetry is confirming. The sea that has been seen "over and over, the same sea, the same,/ slightly, indifferently swinging above the stones,/ icily free above the stones,/ above the stones and then the world" (ib.) is likened to knowledge which, in its own turn, is "dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free, /.../ (ib. 66), and capable of burning like fire. What was "opaque" once is "absolutely clear" now. The sea, the sea of knowledge, the knowledge of death, swings indifferently "above the stones and then the world", lending iridescent beauty to everything. But as the sea reflects the light of the sky (and the earth when shallow), and the sky is the manifestation of the divine, towards which the mortals lift their eyes — "May, when life is all hardship, may a man look up and say: I too would like to resemble these?" (Hölderlin in Fynsk 1993: 255) — poetry as building and measure-taking gives breadth to human being. The answer to Hölderlin's question is: "Yes. As long as kindness which is pure, remains in his heart not unhappily a man may compare himself with the

divinity" (ib.), or "...man/ Not unhappily measures himself/ Against the Godhead..." (Heidegger 1975a: 228). Although "our knowledge is historical, flowing and flown" (Bishop 1994: 66), and therefore limited, poetry grants a measure to our dwelling even in what some of us like to think is the 'timelessness' of the post-modern age.

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Poésie impersonnelle de Jacques Réda

AI KURODA

Introduction

Jacques Réda (1929) est un poète contemporain qui occupe une position particulière dans la poésie française. Au sein d'une tendance littéraire assez dominante prenant la poésie comme champs de transformation et d'expérimentation du langage, son style ne vise pas à cette sorte de «révolution» littéraire. Bien qu'il soit rédacteur en chef de N.R.F (Nouvelle Revue Française), fameuse revue de premier plan de la littérature et qui offrait un champs de débats en France depuis l'époque de Gide, il est difficile de trouver dans ses critiques ou dans ses essais sur la poésie le vocabulaire de la théorie littéraire avec l'intention d'arriver à une explication universelle. Il semble que Réda refuse à la fois classer son style dans une histoire littéraire et d'y d'être classé. Il ne serait pas inutile de se référer à la phrase ingénieuse de Michel Maulpoix au premier rang des chercheurs de Réda: «Laissons donc le poète (Réda) traverser à son rythme les banlieues de la modernité» (Maulpoix 1986: 9).

Loin des expérimentations comme de mouvements littéraires, ou d'une course au raffinement culturel, Réda s'adonne à l'errance dans la ville. Sa méthode indispensable de poète est le déplacement et le contact direct permanent avec les lieux mêmes. Un être anonyme et solitaire qui traverse une ville et les références concrètes à tel ou tel lieu caractérisent sa poésie. Décrire des paysages reflétant tantôt l'intérieur du voyageur et apparaissant tantôt comme événement révélateur, est le centre des occupations de ce poète.

Errance de Réda

«Toujours voyageant à travers *le grand désert d'hommes*, ...» (Baudelaire 1976: 691). C'est une petite phrase de Baudelaire qui se trouve dans le chapitre IV intitulé «La modernité¹» dans «Le peintre de la vie moderne». Cette oeuvre en forme d'hommage à un peintre² comprend l'idée de la beauté moderne distincte du classicisme. Dans la tradition esthétique, dominait la notion de beauté absolue et éternelle en se fondant sur des critères de l'antiquité. La signification de cette formulation de la «modernité» consiste dans la déclaration d'éléments opposés à la notion de beauté traditionnelle profondément enracinée. La phrase citée est l'une des qualifications de ce peintre comme incarnation de la modernité. Quand nous lisons les oeuvres de Réda, cette phrase nous paraît arriver comme un écho. C'est Baudelaire qui a découvert la poésie de la ville, image de la vie moderne dont le point culminant est son poème en prose «Spleen de Paris». Il ne serait pas déplacé de suggérer une ligne invisible qui lie Réda, poète contemporain parisien, à Baudelaire dans la mesure où l'errance dans la ville est une inspiration indispensable pour ces deux poètes.

Mais la signification de flânerie n'est pas identique pour les deux. Pour Baudelaire, la présence humaine dans la ville est très forte. En effet, il a formulé la phrase «jouir de la foule» comme art de poète. Autour de Baudelaire, il existe des bourgeois et des pauvres aliénés par la vague de la commercialisation et de l'industrialisation du XIX^e siècle. La foule est un nouveau phénomène lié à la concentration de la population et à la misère urbaine. Il y a toujours une tension très forte entre le poète maudit et les foules regardées avec un sentiment mêlé d'amour et de mépris. En

¹ L'apparition de mot «modernité» n'est pas si ancien. C'est en 1823 selon la description du *Nouveau Petit Robert* ce mot devient une sorte de clef dans le domaine de la critique littéraire et de l'art dans la dernière moitié du XIX^e siècle. Baudelaire est un des rares critiques qui utilise ce mot pour nommer la qualité de l'art avec une conscience méthodique.

² Le nom de ce peintre n'est évoqué par l'abréviation de M. G dans cet essai, mais il est évident qu'il s'agit de M. Constantin Guys.

somme, son errance urbaine est destinée à l'observation de la foule avec un regard extrêmement intense et à la recherche d'une conscience hautement méthodique. La description suivante d'une dame lisant le journal pourrait se superposer à celle de Baudelaire qui «lit» la ville: «je l'épiais longtemps pendant qu'elle cherchait dans les gazettes, avec des actifs, jadis brûlés par les larmes, des nouvelles d'un intérêt puissant et personnel.³»

D'autre part, dans l'errance de Réda la présence humaine est plutôt réservée. Du moins, la volonté observée chez Baudelaire de se confronter à la tragédie humaine de la grande ville moderne n'est pas celle de Réda. Il écrit:

Peu d'importe où je vais, j'ignore la raison
De ce persévérant désir d'aller en solitaire
Dans le cercle toujours nouveau de l'horizon
(Réda 1990: 9)

Cela se trouve dans la première page du poème qui fonctionne comme prologue du livre *Sens de la marche*, difficile à classer parmi tel ou tel genre, à cause de sa composition en plusieurs formes comme les vers, la lettre, et l'essai ou le poème en prose. Parmi les treize textes qui portent un titre, seuls le premier et le dernier texte ne se rapportant pas sur des lieux concrets. Il serait possible de considérer que le paragraphe mentionné ci-dessus est une sorte de manifestation comportementale permanente de Réda.

Ce qui est suggéré ici est l'absence d'un but particulier et d'un lieu privilégié pour l'errance. Il est tout à fait éloigné, bien sûr, du tourisme. De plus, il est étranger à la volonté par exemple, de broser le tableau de la vie moderne comme Baudelaire a dit dans son texte qui fonctionne comme prologue de *Spleen de Paris*. La seule chose présente et réelle est «le désir d'aller en solitaire». En fait, le déplacement est l'une des modalités cruciales de son existence. Il dit:

Le désespoir n'existe pas pour un homme qui
marche, à condition vraiment qu'il marche, et ne se

³ *Spleen de Paris*, «Les veuves».

retourne pas sans arrêt pour discutailler avec l'autre, s'apitoyer, se faire valoir.⁴

C'est une expression étrange sur un ton d'affirmation de la vie par l'intermédiaire d'une double négation. Il n'indique pas ce que le marcheur devrait faire mais simplement suggérer l'écart des choses trop connexes à l'appartenance humaine. Il ne demande pas d'entre dans un drame psychologique et sentimental de citadins. On y trouve aussi un contraste avec Baudelaire lequel, en sa qualité de poète éprouve d'«adopter» «toute les profession, toutes les joies et toutes les misères que la circonstance lui présente»⁵. La description de choses trop humaines, intenses, et tragiques n'est pas la part de Réda. Ce ton d'indifférence à l'égard au «humain» pour se garder des histoires émouvantes et larmoyantes marque Réda comme un poète contemporain.

L'explication de la différence entre Baudelaire et Réda, poètes inspirés par l'errance dans la ville de Paris, n'est pas facile. Toutefois, la différence fondamentale de leur tempérament ainsi que celle de la condition sociale et historique, devait être une des explications. Rappelons que dans l'histoire littéraire, notamment dans le domaine du roman, florissait, la description de la misère d'un âge. A cette époque là, la misère était assez visible sur le corps même des hommes. Il est naturel que les yeux de Baudelaire soient attirés par l'aspect théâtral de personnages déshérités et déçus dans la ville.

A la différence de Baudelaire, descripteur de scènes propres au nouveaux modes de vie de consommation (café, bec de gaz etc.) du XIXème siècle, Réda y est plutôt indifférent. Il est plus sensible à des détails, témoins du temps jadis. Il a l'air de s'amuser du temps qui revient et circule. Libéré d'une sorte d'obsession du temps irréversible ou de la notion du développement de l'histoire, Réda tente de décrire le passage d'un temps intime et nuancé.

Des expressions dans une phrase que nous avons cité, comme «la même et toujours une autre» (Réda 1977: 202), et «Dans le

⁴ *Les ruines de Paris*, p14.

⁵ *Le Spleen de Paris*, «Les foules».

cercle toujours nouveau de l'horizon» (Réda 1990: 9) trahissent sa propension à trouver une infinie diversité dans un univers limité.

Il ne faut pas oublier que l'errance de Réda est une décentralisation des valeurs figées et en même temps une modalité pour s'éloigner de l'égocentrisme. Réda écrit:

Il arrive qu'à force de marcher, mais sans en faire nécessairement une ascèse sportive, juste en déambulant, on perde peu à peu le sentiment de son identité propre. (Réda 1998: 11).

Comme dit Jean-Claude Pinson dans son article «Poète de la circulation lyrique» (Pinson 1994: 125–133), il n'y a, dans la poésie de Réda, nulle trace d'un fantasme de réduction du monde à un moi immobile qui en serait le centre. Le sujet comme centre se meut relativement aux lieux. L'errance engendre un sentiment de perte d'identité. Le mouvement déambulatoire réclame une vision horizontale. Son errance peut être considérée aussi comme une sorte de défi envers l'esthétique ou le conformisme de la profondeur.

Aux banlieues

Le mouvement qui caractérise la poésie de Réda est l'écart du centre de la ville. C'est-à-dire «ex-centrique». Il serait vain de chercher dans ses poèmes une image stéréotypée de Paris telle que le centre culturel du monde. Réda ne mentionne pas les héritages précieux qu'habituellement on respecte à l'unanimité. Ce qui est qualifié déjà n'attire pas son regard. Si les monuments historiques et culturels sont évoqués, c'est presque toujours avec un regard qui détourne de la signification imposée par leur historicité. Il en va de même, quand il voyage dans les villes «touristiques» à l'étranger. Réda écrit dans son poème intitulé «Rome secret» en évoquant la «petite mésaventure romaine»:

Cette histoire, si c'en est une, n'a pas de signification particulière. Tantôt elle peut me faire apparaître comme un parfait idiot, tantôt comme le héros d'une quête symbolique. (Réda 1984: 85)

L'histoire visible par les monuments est souvent liée au triomphe et à la gloire. Réda est indifférent à cette sorte de valeur. Le centre ville comme musée historique n'est pas le domaine de la poésie rédienne. Il dit ironiquement: «ce que moi j'appelais le centre depuis qu'on m'avait expulsé du mien» (Réda 1975: 151). Ce qui l'attire, c'est plutôt quelque chose d'insignifiant ou quelque chose de trop humble sans éclat pour les yeux dominés par l'hierarchie historique et culturelle. Au fur et mesure qu'il passe d'un style premier hautement lyrique où le déplacement du sujet qui parle est moins évident à l'appropriation d'une forme d'errance étroitement liée à tel ou tel lieu concret, les banlieues parisiennes acquièrent une présence forte. Son mépris pour les images historiques en majuscule et son tropisme pour les banlieues sont l'avvers et l'envers de la même médaille.

La première apparition du sujet de la banlieue en tant que sujet se trouve déjà dans son premier livre qui s'intitule *Amen*. Il écrit dans «Les personnages dans la banlieue» en forme de l'appel aux banlieusard:

Et vous êtes poussés vers la périphérie,
Vers les dépotoirs, les-autoroutes, les orties;
Vous n'existez plus qu'à l'état de débris ou fumée.
Cependant vous marchez,
Donnant la main à vos enfant hallucinés
Sous le ciel vaste, et vous n'avancez pas:
Vous piétinez sans fin devant le mur de l'étendue
Où les boîtes, les mots cassés, les maisons vous rejoignent,
(Réda 1988: 24)

En arrière-plan de ce poème, il existe une réalité sociale de l'exploitation industrielle. Cette banlieue dont il parle subit une double rejet. L'écart du centre ville avantageux, accommodant n'apporte pas de l'acquisition de la nature agréable pour ces banlieusards. Réda regarde à la fois la misère et la volonté de vivre du banlieusard. Mais il est impossible de nier que la simplicité de son expression nous paraisse risquer de figer la distance entre celui qui parle et ces banlieusards.

Il est possible de dire que c'est en écrivant *Les Ruines de Paris* que Réda a éprouvé véritablement la «banlieue» comme source

inépuisable de sa poésie. Ce livre en forme de recueil des poèmes en prose a une structure bien établie. La première partie adopte un mouvement centrifuge (du centre de Paris aux périphériques) et la deuxième commence par le départ de la Gare d'Austerlitz. Cette structure est la preuve d'une volonté de construire son univers poétique dans une étendue géographique avec le désir d'écarter du centre culturel et historique pour s'attacher à un domaine inconnu et sous-qualifié. *Les Ruines de Paris* commence ainsi.

Vers six heures, l'hivers, volontiers je descends
l'avenue à gauche, par le jardin, et je me cogne à des
chaises, à de petits buissons, parce qu'un ciel incom-
préhensible comme l'amour qui s'approche aspire
tous mes yeux. (Réda 1977: 9)

Cet exorde résume le climat littéraire de Réda. D'abord, l'heure de départ est celle quand la présence humaine est cachée et la solitude du promeneur se distingue. Deuxièmement, on peut trouver ici, une combinaison entre le prosaïsme et l'infinité ou le lointain que symbolise le ciel. Mais le plus saisissant dans ce paragraphe peut-être l'expression «le ciel incompréhensible comme l'amour s'approche et aspire mes yeux». Il existe ici une sorte d'animisme sauvage et l'appel du lointain et de l'infini. Mais, en fait ce qui se passe dans cette oeuvre n'est pas un voyage vers un lointain géographique. Ce sont les nuances extrêmement riches de chaque quartier et la sensibilité même qui pénètre les moindres fluctuations d'un lointain-proche qui comptent.

Ce promeneur, qui sort de chez lui, arrive à la place de la Concorde comme s'il voulait seulement y visiter pour bien mesurer la distance entre les périphériques et ce lieu à grande valeur historique.

Tant bien que mal enfin j'atteins la place de la Concorde. L'espace devient tout à coup maritime. (Ib. 10)

C'est vrai que cette place nous donne une perspective presque panoramique. Mais nous sommes obligés de reconnaître sa sensibilité particulière à trouver une métaphore naturelle à travers l'épaisseur de la culture et de l'histoire. Réda insère dans ce livre, un petit épisode contemplatif du buste de Paul Valéry mêlé de respect et

d'intimité et de dissimulation. En saluant légèrement ce poète, une quintessence de la poésie moderne, il part à la rencontre des banlieues sans gloire.

Comme comparaison, nous nous référerons à Baudelaire. Quand il veut partir quelque part, il y a les deux directions des grandes lignes. La première est d'«épouser les foules» en empruntant son expression, en vue de regarder des vies de parisiens en s'écarquillant. La deuxième tend à l'aspiration romantique mêlée si souvent d'exotisme et d'orientalisme. Dans la poésie de Réda, on trouve rarement cette sorte d'intention dévorante pour les objets perçus. Les banlieues fréquentées par Réda sont celles qui refusent le sentiment coloré du promeneur. Pas d'objet d'adoration, ni d'objet de commisération. La poésie de Réda nous paraît demander des explications par l'intermédiaire de la forme négative. Si nous nous sommes référés à plusieurs reprises à la comparaison avec la poésie de Baudelaire, c'est, d'une part, afin de mettre en relief le mouvement de la poésie de l'époque «postmoderne» et, d'autre part, à cause de la neutralité et de l'absence de constance formelle qui n'essaie pas d'instaurer de hiérarchie de valeurs humaines dans un sens tout à fait banal.

S'il est permis de présenter une formule un peu rude, elle s'appliquerait à la disposition des banlieues, dans un sens géographique, à se superposer à son tropisme envers les banlieues de la poésie moderne.

À la fin de ce chapitre nous voulons montrer un autre point de vue de Réda sur la banlieue comme sujet de la poésie. Réda raconte ainsi son choix de vers réguliers pour *Hors les murs* qui est consacré entièrement aux banlieues parisiennes:

Il me semble après si j'ai fait des vers régulière,
c'était moins par contraste que par adéquation, parce
que la banlieue c'est aussi le lieu de la convention, de
la parodie. Partout il y a un effort pour ressembler à
quelque chose. (*Le Monde*, 11. II 1983)

Cette tristesse des banlieues qui veulent ressembler à quelque chose, peut être celle apportée par le centre de la ville ou par la campagne. Réda a osé faire incarner par le vers régulier (en fait pas on y perçoit un peu d'irrégularité) l'essence tragi-comique de

la banlieue. Ce style est une observation excellente. La banlieue comme sujet devient presque quelque chose de personnifié chez Réda. Il est curieux de constater qu'il s'interdit des descriptions sentimentales pour chaque scène de banlieue mais qu'il éprouve curieusement une sorte d'attachement pour elle pareil à une personne.

Paysage indifférent et passage au impersonnel

Nous avons discuté sur la poésie de Réda qui s'oriente vers une marginalité de la signification. Mais c'est toujours par la répétition de la négation de telle ou telle chose qui n'appartient pas à celle de Réda. Il est temps de mettre en exergue son noyau d'expression et nous voulons ébaucher quelques points typiques et basiques de sa poésie.

D'abord, discutons de la signification de l'abondance de nom du lieu dans sa poésie. C'est évident qu'il est sensible à une sorte de *Genius loci*. On pourrait conclure que l'abondance de nom du lieu soit son résultat. Mais cela ne nous paraît pas une explication inclusive. Parce que d'un point de vue tout à fait logique, on pourrait supposer l'écriture de l'errance sans références de nom propre du lieu. A la manière dont Réda titre chaque poème, sa tendance à centraliser son nom de lieu est manifeste. Etant donné que le plupart de ces noms de lieu sont peu connus sauf pour les habitants de la région d'Île-de-France, il est naturel de poser une question simple: «A quoi sert -elle cette passion du nom de lieu?»

Il est possible de supposer que Réda connaisse parallèlement le pouvoir d'errer d'un quartier à l'autre, aussi que l'incantation du «signifiant» même des noms de lieu. Comme on le sait, c'est Proust qui a développé la réflexion fondées sur des métaphores extrêmement riches sur le charme de nom propre⁶. Roland Barthes discute dans son article intitulé «Proust et les noms» (Barthes 1994: 1368–1376) des fonctions du «Nom propre» et de sa force génératrice dans la littérature proustienne. Il dit que «le Nom

⁶ A la recherche de temps perdu, Tome II, Paris, Gallimard, 1988, troisième partie, «Noms de pays: le nom».

propre s'offre à une catalyse d'une richesse infinie» (ib. 1372) et il va jusqu'à dire qu'«il est possible de dire que, poétiquement, toute la *Recherche* est sortie de quelques noms» (ib.).

Le nom propre, c'est celui qui ne vise qu'un référent. Il a une fonction d'essentialisation. La méthode de Réda d'introduire des noms de lieu se dirige vers l'unicité de chaque lieu. Etant donné que la plupart des quartiers qu'il décrit n'a pas été traitée dans le monde littéraire, l'acte de leur consacrer des mots s'assimile à leur nomination. Les quartiers banlieusards qui se reflètent sur les yeux banals comme des semblable sans particularité à remarquer, reviennent alors à la vie avec les détails de l'existence dans les poèmes de Réda. Il extrait l'univers poétique des lieux considérés morne et neutre sans signification particulière. C'est un travail qui demande l'amour du détail qui ne formerait pas le grand cercle de rapport des choses.

Réda ne s'achemine pas au noyau même des sentiments humains. C'est un parallèle avec son attitude qui ne se dirige pas vers ce qu'on appelle le «centre culturel», le «trésor historique», «charme exotique» au telle ou telle catégorie morale ou émotionnelle. Son choix fréquent des banlieues, originellement en suspens, s'accorde bien à sa neutralité et à son impartialité. La présence forte des paysages banlieusards dans sa poésie est l'un des résultats de son détachement du domaine sentimental et des jeux de finesse. Dans le premier poème dans *Hors les murs* en se référant à la différence entre «foutu» et «triste», il écrit:

Car la tristesse projette une ombre arbitraire sur le monde, tandis que l'état foutu perçoit impartialement, bien que sans grand profit, son ordre et ses couleurs. (Réda 1982: 9)

C'est l'expression de sa sensibilité paradoxale: à la condition qu'aucune intervention pour l'objet du regard n'est utile, le paysage apparaît pleinement. Ce qui compte est la suggestion du risque de l'émotion d'entraver la vision de ce qu'il est. Son intérêt réside en l'appropriation d'une perception qui ne soit contaminée par aucune idée reçue et aucuns système narcissique du dynamisme sentimental. Il écrit ainsi dans *Les ruines de Paris*, en regardant le balayeur noir travaillant avec une diligence exemplaire:

Mon travail est de voir, de décrire, et de balayer en somme sans excès de zèle mais avec conscience, comme ce collègue Noire. (Réda 1977: 33)

On peut y constater sa manière de refuser toute émotion et de vouloir contacter une réalité terre à terre. C'est l'expression de sa conscience très humble de poète. Selon l'article de Jean-Pierre Martin «Territoires du désaccord» (Martin 1994: 105–116), Queneau, lui aussi, était fasciné par la vocation du balayeur. Les deux partagent l'intérêt à la trivialité de la vie quotidienne et le refus de la méthode romantique.

Le fait que Réda prenne les lieux comme les véritables héros de sa poésie provient de sa réserve pour les choses personnelles. Les lieux sont les origines et les matrices des personnes. Ils conservent les traits des hommes, qui sont devenus impersonnels par l'accumulations d'actes innombrables. La citation suivant nous montre bien la raison de sa prédilection pour les lieux, avec le point de vue concernant l'éthique sur des choses personnelle et impersonnelles:

Ce que nous appelons la grandeur et la beauté n'appartient en propre à personne. Les créateurs sont les passeurs de l'anonyme. (Réda 1980: 125)

En lisant ce passage, on s'aperçoit que le climat de la littérature de Réda diffère du courant général de la littérature qui se fonde sur la croyance en l'originalité, en la particularité, et en l'unicité de l'individu. Il serait possible de penser que Réda tente d'écrire l'existence humaine par l'intermédiaire des paysages qui sont l'impersonnels:

Le monde présente un encombrement de constructions aléatoire, de ruines et de carrefours, où se vérifie notre finitude, notre incapacité à suivre un chemin exact et la condition. (Réda 1977)

Ici, se dessine dans une grande ligne sur le ton de l'audace le paysage comme résultats des activités et des natures des hommes. En parallèle avec le détail de chaque lieu, cette sorte de l'abstraction sur l'existence humaine constitue l'essence de poésie de Réda. Cette force de vision va jusqu'à nous faire sentir la dimension

mythologique. Le paragraphe suivant décrit un paysage du de Saint-Denis, banlieue nord de Paris. Il est un des meilleurs exemples de sa force de vision mythologique:

Il règne ici la paix qui succède aux profonds cataclysmes, quand leur souvenir même est perdu, et que le ciel de nouveau préhistorique pâture avec une lenteur innocent l'ampleur en fin de compte extatique du dégât. (Ib. 121)

Cette région se caractérise souvent par la destruction de la nature, par des constructions d'autoroute et d'usines et par la pauvreté des habitants dont la plupart sont immigrés. Réda, en ne se servant pas du vocabulaire sociologique, décrit le paysage sur un ton affirmatif sans manquer d'insinuer le sinistre de ce lieu. Il atteint une sorte de sérénité devant ce lieu déshérité. Il y a le ciel qui est au-delà du temps mesuré par le rythme humain. Curieusement, le ciel de la nature indifférent aux hommes prend parfois une expression animée et souvent même une expression personnifiée. Réda trouve quelque chose de personnel dans ce ciel couvrant la vie terrestre. Il nous semble que le caractère très pudique de Réda envers les choses émotives se retient de se diriger directement vers les choses humaines et retrouve une compensation émotionnelle en regardant la ville ou le ciel comme un personnage.

L'abondance de la description des expressions du ciel et de celles de l'étendu de l'espace, autre caractéristique dans la poésie de Réda, nous rappelle une phrase de l'impression de la vie d'une ville à quarante kilomètres de Paris notée par une femme vient de provinciale venue s'y installer. Elle figure dans la préface du *Journal de dehors* (Paris: Gallimard, p. 7), oeuvre en forme de recueil des notes sur les petites scènes de banlieues avec une indication de l'année: «L'impression continuelle de flotter entre ciel et terre, dans *No man's land*».

Réda lui-même est habitant du XVème arrondissement de Paris, qui est l'intérieur de la ville administrative mais hors les anciennes enceintes. Il n'est pas à exactement parler habitant de la banlieue, mais il ne serait pas inutile de remarquer que la présence très forte du ciel et de la terre dans la poésie de Réda ne viennent pas simple-

ment d'errance sans but particulier, mais montre l'accord avec l'image permanente d'une banlieusarde.

Son errance d'un quartier à un autre ressemble parfois à un pèlerinage mais sans Dieu. Réda écrit:

Ce qui m'attend toujours au bout reste proche de la déception, mais cette déception m'exalte, me simplifie, me transforme comme religieusement en pure attente du rien. (Réda 1977: 125)

Ici, se résume le caractère profondément caché sous une apparente accumulation de détails quotidiens et son indifférence aux choses émotionnelles. On constate que Réda a intitulé le premier vers dans *Les Ruines de Paris*, «Le pied furtif de l'hérétique». Il se peut qu' à la quête du Dieu, succède la quête spatiale.

Ainsi sommes-nous tentés de mesurer le temps passé, quand on songe à la différence entre la poésie de Baudelaire et celle de Réda. Nous n'épuiserons pas la liste de leur différences, mais nous nous contenterons de l'évocation de traits rédiens comme un cas de la poésie de l'époque de «postmoderne».

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History as Poetry: Geoffrey Hill's England

PILVI RAJAMÄE

Poetry as salutation; taste
of Pentecost's ashen feast. Blue wounds.
The tongue's atrocities. Poetry
Unearths from among the speechless dead

Lazarus mystified, common man
Of death.

(History as Poetry)

Geoffrey Hill established his reputation as a poet in the 1970s. It was a gloomy decade in Britain. Decline in industry had brought along a nationwide depression and interminable strike action. Raging inflation, the result of the Arab oil embargo, and rationing of some goods, not known since the war years, and the general loss of prestige and standing of the country, no longer a world power, undermined people's morale. The country "appeared to be disintegrating both politically and economically" (Spittles 1995: 31).

Besides, Britain had become a violent place to live in. The Fifties which saw the publication of Hill's first collection of poems, also witnessed rock'n'roll riots, mass demonstrations over the humiliation of the Suez affair, the nuclear disarmament campaign and the first race riots in Britain. The Sixties added student unrest and anti-Vietnam War demonstrations. Street violence was on the rise and there was serious talk about city barricades, guerrilla tactics and of seizing public buildings. The Seventies brought picket-line violence between strikers and police. The mood of disillusion and hopelessness was widespread. Hill's view of history is strongly coloured by his keen awareness of the habitual violence

accompanying human experience and the futility of it. His England is a place of violence and death.

To anyone familiar with T. S. Eliot's work, Hill's affinities with him are obvious and today they are a critical commonplace. Hill's classicism, his style, his concerns, even his landscapes bear a stamp of his master. Not only are their waste lands remarkably similar, with their toppling towers, empty chapels and senseless armies butchering each other in the name of God. Likewise, their concepts of history bear a striking resemblance. When Hill moves freely between the past and the present, like when he combines his boyhood memories of World War II in the English Midlands and the known facts of the reign of the 8th-century King Offa in the same region in *Mercian Hymns*, one is inevitably reminded of Eliot's *Little Gidding* and the "intersection of the timeless moment" that is "England and nowhere. Never and always." (Eliot 1971: 49–59).

Both are religious poets and presume the coming of the Day of Judgement. The dead, meanwhile awaiting resurrection, are with us. The "unknown, remembered gate" (ib.) between us and them only seemingly separates us and our superiority over the dead is illusory. Our mortality binds us to them and their fate becomes ours. When Hill writes in "Quaint Mazes":

And, after all, it is to them we return.
Their triumph is to rise and be our hosts

he is echoing *Little Gidding's*

We die with the dying:
See, they depart and we go with them.
We are born with the dead:
See, they return, and bring us with them.

For understanding our own condition we need to know what has happened to those gone before. Hill:

Knowing the dead, and how some are disposed:
Subdued under rubble, water, in sand graves,
In clenched cinders not yielding their abused
Bodies and bonds to those whom war's chance saves
Without the law: we grasp, roughly, the song.
("Two Formal Elegies", 1)

Considering the "outnumbering dead", the "husks of what was", once, "rich seed" ("Merlin"), poetry becomes a "salutation" to the "common man of death" ("History as Poetry") for a poet who has "heard the dead speak" ("Of Commerce and Society", 4). A poem is an act of remembrance. In Eliot's words (*Little Gidding*):

Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
Every poem an epitaph. And any action
Is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat
Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start.

Death appears in Hill's poetry as the Great Leveller. An interminable Dance of Death takes us all, the common man and hero. Through burial all become one:

Arthur, Elaine, Mordred; they are all gone
Among the rafted galleries of bone.
By the long barrows of Logres they are made one,
And over their city stands the pinnacled corn.
("Merlin")

Logres is the romance-historical name for England. Elaine was the embodiment of purity and selflessness and Mordred the paragon of evil in the court of the legendary British hero of romance, King Arthur of the Round Table.

Death also frequently appears in the guise of the sea. The "undiscerning sea" ("Drake's Drum") takes all sorts, irrespective of rank:

seaman

And king's son also
Who, by gross error lost,
Drift, now in salt crushed
Polyp- and mackerel-fleshed
Tides between coast and coast,
Submerge or half appear.
("The White Ship")

The gross error referred to is the error of judgement on the part of Prince William, Henry I's son. In 1120, eager to party far into the

night, he gave the crew of his ship some caskets of wine for them to join in the general merriment. When the White Ship sailed later that night, the drunken crew steered the ship onto rocks in the English Channel and three hundred lives were lost, including the Prince's.

Death/the sea levels out all differences, appeases all hurts:

Each day the tide withdraws; chills us; pastes
The sand with dead gulls, oranges, dead men.
Uttering love, that outlasts and outwastes
Time's attrition, exiles appear again,
But faintly altered in eyes and skin.

Into what understanding all have grown!

What paradises and watering-places,
What hurts appeased by the sea's handsomeness!
("Wreaths")

In death warring parties are united. Death for "the ritual king", "fat Caritas", "in honorem Trinitatis" ("Funeral Music", 1, 2), "under the sanction of the English name" ("The Short History of British India", 1) pales into insignificance in the face of eternity. The scene in the extract below is that of the Battle of Towton, 1461, during the Wars of the Roses, a terrible slaughter of men in order to depose a lawful king. For Hill this battle is all battles and the outcome is always the same:

At noon

As the armies met, each mirrored the other,
Neither was outshone. So they flashed and vanished
And all that survived them was the stark ground
Of this pain.

("Funeral Music", 7)

Senseless violence is not limited to such sites of carnage. Violence is everywhere, it is the perennial human condition. Whether it is the 15th-century England of the Wars of the Roses, the 8th-century kingdom of Mercia or the 20th-century Midlands, the "true governance of England" will ever be "the gaunt warrior-gospel" (*Mercian*

Hymns, V). Violent schoolboy pranks today and the tyrannical rule of a king in the Dark Ages have an inescapable similarity. Violence surfaces in unexpected places. Even a peaceful suburb can be described in battle terms, the names of houses redolent with the glory of past battles:

Coiled entrenched England: brickwork and paintwork
 Stalwart above hacked marl. The clashing primary
 Colours — "Ethandune", "Catraeth", "Maldon", "Pen-
 gwern". Steel against yew and privet.

(*Mercian Hymns*, XX)

Everywhere a landscape of violence is revealed. Should a passing comet illuminate the land at any given moment of time, the picture revealed would always be the same — England in agony under the burden of war:

Once

Every five hundred years a comet's
 Over-riding stillness might reveal men
 In such array, livid and featureless
 With England crouched beastwise beneath it all.

("Funeral Music", 3)

The dead refuse to be silenced. Though after battles

The wilderness revives

Deceives with sweetness harshness

("Two Formal Elegies", 1)

and

Grass resurrects to mask, to strangle

Words glossed in stone

("The Distant Fury of Battle")

the dead refuse to be brushed aside. Every leader has to reckon with their experience:

But the dead maintain their ground —
 That there's no getting round —

Who in places vitally rest,
 Named, anonymous, who test
 Alike the endurance of yews
 Laurels, moonshine, stone, all tissues;
 With whom, under licence and duress,
 There are pacts made, if not peace.
 Union with the stone-wearing dead
 Claims the born leader
 ("The Distant Fury of Battle")

The illustrious dead lie in their tombs, secure in their knowledge that their struggles were just. Yet this security is an illusion. All actions have to be accounted for when the Day of Judgement dawns and the graves give up their dead. The Plantagenet kings of the requiem below "for whom the possessed sea littered, on both shores/ruinous arms", had possessions on both sides of the English Channel. Their lives were one long struggle with their unruly vassals and the French king. Despite some remarkable military feats in the Hundred Years War, they ultimately lost all their possessions in France, save one coastal town, and very soon afterwards, in a series of dynastic disputes, known as the Wars of the Roses, also their crown.

At home, under carved chantries, set in trust,
 With well-dressed alabaster and proved spurs
 They lie; they lie; secure in the decay
 Of blood, blood-marks, crowns hacked and coveted,
 Before the scouring-fires of trial-day
 Alight on men; before sleeked groin, gored head,
 Budge through the clay and gravel, and the sea
 Across daubed rock evacuates its dead.
 ("Requiem for the Plantagenet Kings")

"Weightless magnificence upholds the past" ("Idylls of the King"). Worldly glory is transitory. Past triumphs matter little. In the 20th century Britain has lost her empire. The former jewel in the British imperial crown, India, where brilliant careers and huge fortunes were made, has dwindled to a curiosity shop "selling mangola, sitars, lucky charms" ("A Short History of British India",

III). The once glorious names of Anglo-Indian bureaucrats and propagandists of aggressive expansion — “Malcolm and Frere, Colebrooke and Elphinstone” (ib.) have suffered a fate similar to that of the Mughal emperors they replaced. Both have fallen into oblivion:

Names rise like outcrops on the rich terrain,
like carapaces of the Mughal tombs
lop-sided in the rice-fields, boarded up
near railway crossings and small aerodromes.
(Ib.)

Side by side with the militant England “attuned to the clear theme of justice and order” (“A Short History of British India”, III), “fantasies of true destiny that kills” (“A Short History of British India”, I), now weakened, exists another, spiritual England, which, borrowing from Coleridge, Hill calls Platonic. This England appears unruffled by the upheavals of history. She seems to lead a life of her own:

Platonic England, house of solitudes,
rests in its laurels and its injured stone,
replete with complex fortunes that are gone,
beset by dynasties of moods and clouds.

It stands as though at ease with its own world,
the mannerly extortions, languid praise,
all that devotion long since bought and sold,

the rooms of cedar and soft-thudding baize,
tremulous boudoirs where the crystals kissed
in cabinets of amethyst and frost.
(“The Laurel Axe”)

Even in the darkest of times this spirituality has been present. The brutality of English life has always been mitigated by religion. In the Middle Ages England was internationally famous for her religious art, especially her needlework decoration of church vestments known as *Opus Anglicanum*. “It was among the most sumptuous and delicate needlework ever made. The surviving ecclesias-

tical vestments of this kind display small figures or religious scenes, comparable in style with East Anglian manuscript illumination, framed by foliated scrolls or in geometrical or architectural compartments; these designs are worked in coloured silks in fine regular split stitch, generally on backgrounds of couched gold thread." (Osborne 1986: 597–8) Through such works the transcendental reality manifests itself in this world:

In tapestries, in dreams, they gathered, as it was enacted, the return, the re-entry of transcendence into this sublunary world. *Opus Anglicanum*, their stringent mystery riddled by needles: the silver veining, the gold leaf, voluted grape-vine, master-works of treacherous thread.

(*Mercian Hymns*, XXIII)

Such artefacts remind men, even in our present age of "disfigured shrines" ("The Herefordshire Carol") of the ideal to be aspired to. The saint in a church window, seemingly insubstantial and brittle, radiates indestructible power:

Created purely from glass the saint stands,
Exposing his gifted quite empty hands
Like a conjurer about to begin,
A righteous man begging of righteous men.

In the sun lily-and-gold-coloured,
Filtering the cruder light, he has endured,
A feature for our regard; and will keep;
Of wordly purity the stained archetype.

("In Piam Memoriam")

Amid violence and destruction the light of the ultimate truth shines bright and clear:

Touched by the cry of the iconoclast,
how the rose-window blossoms with the sun!

("The Herefordshire Carol")

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Timur Kibirov's Poetry in the Official Culture

MARINA GRISHAKOVA

Timur Kibirov was born in 1955: his childhood was marked by the political "thaw" of the 1960s, his youth coincides with the stagnation time and his maturity begins with the fall of the empire. First published in the Latvian newspaper *Atmoda*, his verses were officially criticized in Moscow's central newspaper *Pravda* in 1989. In 1991 Kibirov joined the Moscow vanguard (conceptual) circle publishing his poetry in the literary almanac *Personal file N*. Its authors were unified by the common feeling of the engagement and the inflation of language and the impossibility of the traditional poetics in the contemporary situation. According to their manifesto, a poet, instead of working out his own individual language, is supposed rather to let strange languages speak to each other by means of an "alienated" author. The usage of ideological, mass-culture and colloquial (argot) clichés, paraphrases, texts-centos are the most remarkable traits of the Moscow conceptual poetry. These verses have a great purifying effect: they reveal the Soviet "subconscious" (Grois 1993).

However, Kibirov's poetry is notable for its strong lyrical intonation that outlines his personal attitude and is formally expressed in song metrics and trisyllabics. Despite the reputation of an ironist whose verses undermine the canons of the official culture, Kibirov defines his own attitude as conservative and the aim of his poetry as conservation. It reveals the huge distorted world where usual everyday things and neutral words are interwoven with political signs. This living human environment was suppressed first by the official Soviet ideology, then by the external radicalism of the

perestroika and the revolution of the 1990s which failed in practice, as it was performed mostly by the people of the official culture (Stalin's monument has been rebuilt into that of Pushkin ("Christmas Song of the Tenant")), but preserves Stalin's moustaches and riding-breeches). For an average man these events meant first of all the destruction of his usual life environment.

An intellectual who had been always opposed to the official culture found himself in an empty space full of unknown powers after the fall of the empire. The environment that was awful, but nevertheless human, antropomorphous, pierced with human meanings, disappeared. It turned out that human values and Soviet horrors were interconnected. Were they all illusory? It is not the task of poetry to answer the questions. Kibirov's "conservation" means just the full exposition of the "subconscious" without reflection and transfiguration. "Spontaneity" and "sincerity" are important constructive principles. Reflection and transfiguration would mean further suppression and social neurosis in the form of a new ideology. That is why Kibirov rejects both the revolutionary radicalism and "spiritualism" of the intelligentsia. A Russian intellectual always wants "to be a Spaniard"; he does not live in Russia, but in some imaginary dimension, he just tolerates his life, because he has not invented it and therefore cannot be responsible for it.

Kibirov's texts describe all material and spiritual strata of the Soviet life, its vocabulary: the perfume "Red Moscow", cigarettes "Belomor" (associated with the notorious Stalin's camp), public canteens, chlorinated open-air toilets, Maeterlinck and a dancing-party in a kolkhoz club, prison soup, a young pioneer's tie, Picasso, Herbert Wells, Sacco and Vanzetti, dogs-cosmonauts Belka and Strelka, Reagan, Rasputin and "Modern Talking"; Lotman, Losev and Lévi-Strauss, Kremlin red stars and sausages in the Yeliseyev's shop, the famous dissident Andrei Sakharov and Salamander shoes, etc., etc. Green England, Mozart's Vienna, the landscapes of mythological Greece are the contrasting visions which emphasize the heavy material reality of Russia. A "Soviet detail" is especially striking when inserted into the context of an archaic literary stylistics ("Elegy" in *Variations*) as an anachronism.

Kibirov has a special talent for balancing between the optimistic, straightforward and simple Soviet "romanticism", literary

romanticism (deceitful harmony — and awful forces of chaos) and an individual human existence lost and devaluated. In “The Forest School” (1986) Kibirov uses the ballad metre introduced into the Russian poetry by V. Zhukovsky’s translations of the romantic English ballads (Kibirov, Falkovskij 1997). Kibirov’s poem includes the whole Soviet demonology: mysterious Erlikönig of taiga, the wood-goblin (disguised Lenin) and the drunken ghost of communism. The names of the Soviet institutions imply the meanings of “fear” (Gosstrah — State Insurance, literally — “state fear”) and “evil” (Sobes — Social Security — “co-demon”). Even the “Red Cross” in this context means “blood” and “death” and is a substitute for Jesus’ Cross absent in the pagan world. The Soviet life is a fantastic and horrible “forest school”, a school for abnormal children, where “oligophrenes beat schizophrenics”.

“Russian song (Prologue)” is another example of Kibirov’s balancing art. The lyrical hero is leaving England (“Ja bereg pokidai tumannyi Albiona...”) and foreseeing the view of the native land. The description balances between two languages (Prosh’ai Britaniya... My native land, welcome!) and between two “proto-descriptions”. The enumeration (“apteki, magaziny mody...”) is well-known to a Russian reader: it is Tatyana’s arrival to Moscow (Pushkin’s “Evgeni Onegin”). But the other possible pretext is Byron’s “Don Juan”: Don Juan returning to England from Russia.

Don Juan now saw Albion’s earliest beauties... (Canto X, 69)

Through coaches, drays, choked turnpikes, and a whirl

Of wheels, and roar of voices and confusion;

Here taverns wooing to a pint of “purl”,

There mails fast flying off like a delusion;

There barber’s blocks with periwigs in curl

In windows; here the lamplighter’s infusion

Slowly distilled into the glimmering glass... (Canto XI, 22)

(Byron 1986: 457, 471).

The ambivalence of reading reflects the oscillation of hero’s feelings between “my love” Britain and “my wife” Russia.

The cycle “Latrines” balances between a slow epic description of these necessary private places and mythological acts happening

there, sometimes solemn and sad, sometimes quick and casual, on the one side, — and the semantics of an octave stanza, on the other. An octave borrowed from Byron's poetry was in 19th century Russian poetry connected with light jocular verses. The poet names his predecessors interested in the physiological aspect of life (Aristophanes, Rabelais, Swift). But the very idea of "Latrines" descends probably from the following description in Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, memory*: "The toilets were separate from the bathrooms, and the oldest among them was a rather sumptuous but gloomy affair with some fine panelwork and a tasseled rope of red velvet, which, when pulled, produced a beautifully modulated, discreetly muffled gurgle and gulp. From that corner of the house, one could see Hesperus and hear the nightingales, and it was there that, later, I used to compose my youthful verse, dedicated to unembraced beauties /.../ I appeal to parents: never, never say: "Hurry up", to a child" (Nabokov 1968: 67–68). Nabokov's name is repeatedly mentioned in Kibirov's verses and in the poetry of the Moscow circle: Nabokov is probably so attractive to them as the author who managed to hide himself perfectly behind the style protecting his personal privacy. In Kibirov's "Latrines" privacy is always interrupted.

A toilet is nevertheless one of the most human non-ideological places in the Soviet landscape. An anecdote from the life of the famous 18th-century poet Derzhavin serves as an epigraph. The old poet arrived at the Lyceum where young poets, children of Russian nobility (Pushkin included) were preparing to meet him with their own verses and to receive his blessing. Young poet Delvig approached him in excitement. "Tell me, where a latrine is?" — was the first question of Derzhavin. An old man appeared instead of the famous "general" of Russian poetry. The epigraph gives the key for the stylistical games of the whole text.

Kibirov's verses of the 1990s are increasingly sentimental and didactic and present an apology of private life and its material details (through Derzhavin to Horace): the poetology of woman's body, child's growth and charm, domestic habits with pseudo-classical back-cloth (shepherds, cicadas and Horatian garden with cucumbers). Finally this conservative and "archaistic" position which was initially just an anti-romantic play and always on the

verge of allusions and quotations, risks becoming too serious and turn into a manifesto. It revives the traditional nostalgia of a Russian intellectual and is connected with “imperial values” (Derzhavin as a poet of the Empire). That is why the intention of Kibirov’s last verse collections (*Intimate lyrics*; *Paraphrase*) is not convincing: despite its carnivalesque entourage (a playful voyage through Russian literature in *Paraphrase*) the voice of the lyrical hero is too insistent and sometimes too didactic — it is a voice of nostalgia, now outdated and deprived of its object. But *Paraphrase* is a “ready-made” object — it includes mostly the verses of previous years and marks probably the border or the end of a style.

Perceived as the end of art:

I can write this shit,
I can read this shit,
tol’ko chto-to neohota,
golova tresh’it!

Golova tresh’it,
i voobsh’e toshnit...
Poe’tique, philosophique...
I fuck all this shit!

(“Macaronic Review of the Verse Collection”,
Kibirov 1998: 41)

T. Kibirov’s poetry was a bright social message of the 1980s; at present, the very status of a social message has become questionable.

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