

LUCIAN BLAGA AND IOANA EM. PETRESCU: FROM ONTOLOGICAL 'MUTATIONS' TO POETIC 'MUTATIONS'

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Abstract The present paper aims to demonstrate the fact that between Lucian Blaga's philosophical system and Ioana Em. Petrescu's critical system, there are links of ideas. The main idea that achieves the unity of thought between these two systems is that the changes that occur at the cultural, respectively literary level, are preceded by changes that occur at the ontological level. Blaga's philosophical theory is exemplarily demonstrated by Ioana Em. Petrescu's critical writings as *Eminescu și mutațiile poeziei românești* and *Eminescu. Modele cosmologice și viziune poetică*.

Keywords Lucian Blaga, Ioana Em. Petrescu, link, ontological mutations, poetic mutations.

1. Introduction

It may seem strange, at least at first, and especially to a non-specialist reader, the closeness between Ioana Em. Petrescu, a remarkable personality of Romanian literary history and criticism, and Lucian Blaga, one of the most important Romanian poets and philosophers. However, for a reader familiar with their writings, the closeness stated in title is entirely natural. Moreover, from a certain perspective, it is even necessary. It is necessary to illustrate how ideas circulate, how literature communicates with related fields and how the poetics can easily be connected with philosophy, epistemology and ontology.

The research of Ioana Em. Petrescu's critical work and Blaga's philosophical work led us to discover the spiritual affinity between the two, an affinity regarding the art of deducing concepts, the seduction of demonstrations, the quality of argumentation, intuition, the appetite for explanation and the sense of analogies.

The premise of the present theoretical approach is: between Blaga's philosophical writings and Ioana Em. Petrescu's literary criticism and history, bridges can be drawn. Blaga's theory

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26424/philobib.2024.29.2.08>.

regarding the emergence of the phenomenon of culture through the occurrence of an 'ontological mutation' in the world is exemplified, for instance, in Ioana Em. Petrescu's work – *Eminescu și mutațiile poeziei românești*.

By connecting Blaga's philosophical thought and Ioana Em. Petrescu's critical thought, we aimed to build a demonstration starting from the idea that a 'new way of being' requires a new type of poetics.

2. From ontological 'mutations' to poetic 'mutations'

In Ioana Em. Petrescu's critical system the ontological motif is a central one. The critical arguments are mainly built around it. In *Eminescu. Modele cosmologice și viziune poetică*, the idea of a 'cosmological model' essentially refers to the type of relationship that can be established between the human being and the Universe. Thus, the cosmological model generically named by the author 'Platonic' designates an autarchic world, in which the feeling of harmony, co-participation and unity hovers. In such a world, whose law is musical harmony or "music of the spheres," whose movement "is the dance or rhythmic rotation of the stars," whose "first mover is the divine intellect" and whose "celestial engines are the angelic intelligences, governing as souls of the heavenly bodies the movement through which the worlds adore the divine intellect," "the human being cannot feel alien, because it knows itself to be consubstantial with the Great Being of the World."¹ At the opposite pole, the Kantian cosmological model designates a world of mechanics, in which the feeling of rupture dominates, a rupture that attracts the throwing and the abandonment of the human being on Earth.

The ontological vein is also found in *Eminescu și mutațiile poeziei românești*. The present work itself follows the way in which Ioana Em. Petrescu exposes the inner evolution of Romanian poetry by referring to the changes that occur at the ontological level. The critic brings poetics closer to ontology, and the course of the exegetical act always proceeds from the ontological mutations to the poetic ones.

In *Configurații* is highlighted the importance of placing "the being's feeling towards the world" at the center of any discussion about the cultural style of an era.² About the connection between poetry and philosophy, in the same literary theory work, Ioana Em. Petrescu states that "when the 'word games' of poetry have their roots in a new sense of existence, in an effort to reauthenticate the relationships between humanity and the Universe,

¹ Ioana Em. Petrescu, *Eminescu. Modele cosmologice și viziune poetică* (Editura Minerva, 1978), 11-12. Original text: "muzica sferelor"; "[...] e dansul sau rotirea ritmică a astrilor"; "[...] prim mobil este intelectul divin"; "[...] motoare celeste sînt inteligențele angelice, guvernînd ca suflete ale corpurilor cerești mișcarea prin care lumile adoră intelectul divin"; "ființa umană nu se poate simți străină, pentru că ea se știe consubstanțială cu marea ființă a Lumii" (my translation).

² Ioana Em. Petrescu, *Configurații* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Casa Cărții de Știință, 2015), 205.

they prepare [...] the future concepts of philosophy [...].”³ For Ioana Em. Petrescu, the relationship human being - universe, understood in an ontological sense, becomes a trigger not only for poetic mutations, but also for the emergence of new philosophical concepts. In the chapter “Literatura și modelele cosmologice,” theorizing on Blaga’s ‘abyssal categories,’ who believes that they can be placed at the foundation of all cultural creations “regardless of whether they are of an artistic, philosophical or scientific nature,” Ioana Em. Petrescu considers the philosopher’s statement hazardous, since precisely the nature of the feeling “that connects the being (individual – of the creator – or suprapersonal – of an era) to the world in which it is accepted to exist” seems to her to be “one of the defining factors for cultural creation of an era.”⁴

In the critical work *Studii despre Ion Budai-Deleanu*, there is “a geometric hypothesis of the human being, of its relations with the world and with the others.”⁵ The ontological vision and the aesthetic option form, at Ioana Em. Petrescu, a cause-effect relationship. The aesthetic option is always understood and interpreted as an effect of a certain ontological vision. This fact is confirmed, for example, in the chapter “Eposul eroic și eposul comic,” where Tasso’s choice to reconcile in *Ierusalimul liberat* the Aristotelian poetics with the subject of the chivalric poem represents for the author more than a simple aesthetic option. According to Ioana Em. Petrescu, the writer’s return to Aristotelianism actually translates his ontological vision, Jerusalem being “the center of the world,” “the center of the Universe” and “point of human interference with the Absolute.”⁶

The ontological vein also runs through the work *Ion Barbu și poetica postmodernismului*. For Ioana Em. Petrescu, Barbu’s lyricism has an ontological nature. His poetry represents a “hopeful gateway to the mystery of Being.”⁷ The ontological motif, which has an overwhelming importance in Ioana Em. Petrescu’s critical act, also occupies a privileged place in Lucian Blaga’s philosophy.

To discuss the birth of culture in terms of “man’s alleged dissatisfaction with the immediate” or in terms of “the need to escape at all costs from its entanglements and nothingness”⁸ is, for Blaga, wrong. Firstly, because he does not give human dissatisfaction with

³ Ibid., 30. Original text: “atunci când ‘jocurile de cuvinte’ ale poeziei își au rădăcina într-un nou sentiment de existență, într-un efort de reautenticare a raporturilor umanitate-univers, ele pregătesc [...] viitoarele concepte ale filosofiei [...]” (my translation).

⁴ Ibid., 202-203.

⁵ Adrian Tudurachi, “Exerciții de înstrăinare,” in Ioana Em. Petrescu, *Studii despre Ion Budai Deleanu* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Casa Cărții de Știință, 2011), 17.

⁶ Ioana Em. Petrescu, *Studii despre Ion Budai-Deleanu*, 47.

⁷ Ioana Em. Petrescu, *Ion Barbu și poetica postmodernismului* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Casa Cărții de Știință, 2006), 184. Original text: “[...] ‘sperată poartă’ spre misterul Fiiinței” (my translation).

⁸ Lucian Blaga, *Geneza metaforei și sensul culturii* (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 1994), 167. Original text: “[...] pretinsa nemulțumire a omului cu imediatul,” “[...] necesitate de a evada cu orice preț din urzile și nimicniciile acestuia” (my translation).

the immediate the importance of a fact that is “capable of such creative explosions,”⁹ secondly, because the poet places culture above any form of refuge from the immediate. Moreover, Blaga believes that to describe the process of the genesis of culture, a strictly biological interpretation is not enough. In “Critica unei concepții biologice despre cultură” from *Trilogia cosmologică*, Lucian Blaga states that “to deduce culture in all its manifestations from a process of compensating the biological inadequacy of man in relation to nature means to simplify the situation beyond any permissible limits.”¹⁰ Denying the theory of the emergence of culture as a form of refuge from the immediate, the philosopher claims that the immediate acquires meaning in human life only when it seeks to transcend itself, more precisely, when it is placed in relation to a “beyond” which means being in “mystery.” And yet, in Blaga's philosophical conception, being in a “horizon of mystery” is not enough. This way of living requires something more, it requires “a destiny endowed with a permanent appetite,” a destiny that feeds on “the need to try a ‘revelation’ of the mystery.”¹¹

The dissatisfaction with the immediate, solved by the search for a “beyond” and “the mystery” that surrounds it, to which it is added “the need” and “the appetite” for the revelation of the mystery, here lies the nucleus that triggers the emergence of culture, according to Blaga's theory. Only in these terms, the definition of culture acquires a “smell of roots plucked from the most secret loam of human existence.”¹² Ceasing to be “an epiphenomenon,” it becomes even “the fulfillment of human being.”¹³ This transition from a biological existence towards an existence lived “under vaults with transcendent resonances”¹⁴ finds its counterpart in the concept of “ontological mutation” from Blaga's philosophical work. Without this type of mutation, human genius would have served humanity for nothing over the years. In order to become a culture creator, a change in the way of being is needed. Culture wears, therefore, according to Blaga's definition, the metaphor of a body which inhabits the beats of a certain way of existence. A kind of being in mystery and for revelation. The path to revelation is the creation and man's destiny is above all a creative one. The thirst for “creation” is a thirst from which you cannot escape, because it is of “original, irreducible nature.”¹⁵ In Blaga's philosophical system, the ontological interpretation is the only one capable of positioning culture where it rightfully belongs.

⁹ Lucian Blaga, *Geneza metaforei și sensul culturii*, 167.

¹⁰ Lucian Blaga, *Trilogia cosmologică* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1988), 306. Original text: “a deduce cultura în toate manifestările ei dintr-un proces de compensare a inadapării biologice a omului în raport cu natura, înseamnă a simplifica situația dincolo de orice limite îngăduite” (my translation).

¹¹ Lucian Blaga, *Geneza metaforei și sensul culturii*, 169. Original text: “[...] un destin înzestrat cu un permanent apetit,” “[...] nevoia de a încerca o ‘revelare’ a misterului” (my translation).

¹² *Ibid.*, 169. Original text: “[...] miros de rădăcini smulse din huma cea mai secretă a existenței umane” (my translation).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 172., Original text: “sub bolți cu rezonanțe transcendente” (my translation).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

The ontological motif was mentioned at the beginning as a link between Blaga's writings and those of Ioana Em. Petrescu. The concept of "mutation" has a similar function. Echoes of Blaga's theory regarding ontological mutations as triggering factors of the cultural phenomenon can be found in *Eminescu și mutațiile poeziei românești*. Cannot Ioana Petrescu's work be understood as an applied response to the Romanian philosopher's theory? It is a practical application of Blaga's theory because of an ontological nature are also the mutations through which the process of the inner evolution of Romanian poetry is described. According to Ioana Em. Petrescu, the fundamental change brought by Ion Barbu's and Nichita Stănescu's poetry in relation to Eminescu's poetry is essentially a change that takes place at the level of the relationship human being – Universe. The type of poetics changes only as a result of a structural modification at the level of the aforementioned relationship. This is why Arghezi's poetry, although "with a substantially renewed language [...], with a universe open to infernal visions or the grotesque" is placed by Ioana Em. Petrescu in the lineage of Eminescu's poetry, which makes Arghezi's lyricism "the great reply given to Eminescianism from within it."¹⁶ In other words, Tudor Arghezi's poetry, in relation to Eminescu's poetry, brings changes at the level of technique and not at the level of poetics.

A similar process occurs in the case of Blaga's lyricism, which the critic places, alongside that of Tudor Arghezi, close to Eminescu's poetry. These three poetics are related through the concept of "visionary metaphorism," with metaphor becoming "the only way to 'compensate' for the deficiencies of abstract thinking and to establish a different cognitive path."¹⁷ It is the way in which the rupture between subject and object, which is established by the gaze, tries to be overcome. The blindness of Sarmis, which brings with it the idea of transforming "sight" into "vision," represents the gnoseological path established in Romanian lyricism by Eminescu's poetry, a path followed, according to Ioana Em. Petrescu, by both Arghezi's and Blaga's poetry. If the universe of Vasile Alecsandri's creation is described by the author as being "voluptuously dominated by sight," Eminescu's lyricism is dominated by the "inner eye," a phrase placed at the beginning of the chapter dedicated to his poetry. If the external eye, which ensures the "sight," is associated with "the fertile rupture between subject and object, a rupture correlated with the emergence of a rational gnoseological path," the inner eye, "passed through death," is the one which, "establishing a visionary universe," represents "an attempt to overcome the rupture between self and the World, a way of restoring the lost totality that encompassed, at once, both the human being and the Universe."¹⁸ Following a close research of the poetry, Ioana Em. Petrescu associates the

¹⁶ Ioana Em. Petrescu, *Eminescu și mutațiile poeziei românești* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1989), 105-106. Original text: "cu un limbaj substanțial înnoit [...], cu un univers deschis viziunilor infernale sau grotescului," "marea replică dată eminescianismului din chiar interiorul lui" (my translation).

¹⁷ Ibid., 90. Original text: "metaforism vizionar," "calea unică de 'compensare' a deficiențelor gândirii abstracte și de instituire a unui alt traseu cognitiv" (my translation).

¹⁸ Ibid., 83. Original text: "o încercare de a depăși ruptura dintre eu și lume, o cale de refacere a totalității pierdute ce încorporează, deopotrivă, ființa umană și universul" (my translation).

visionary universe, characteristic of Eminescu's lyricism, with the tendency to metaphorize the poetic language. The metaphor, therefore, unlike "ornamental or plasticizing figures," which "aestheticize the subject-object rupture" and rely on "a fully logically articulated language," violates the category of logic and "testifies to the nostalgia of another cognitive path [...], in which the Totality is privileged over isolated entities."¹⁹ Thus, through visionary metaphorism, Eminescu's, Arghezi's and Blaga's poetry attempts to restore harmony in the subject-object relationship, which had been affected by the "external eye," through "the sight" that separates. When Sarmis acquires "the vision," what is revealed to him is, in fact, "the eternal light of the stars, the unanimous, luminescent substance of a world still undivided into transient, potentially fratricidal forms."²⁰ Therefore, the vision recovers the "state of totality" that had been lost through the separating sight. In relation to the "standard of poeticity" established by Eminescu's poetry as a result of the installation of vision instead of sight, only Ion Barbu and Nichita Stănescu will bring structural changes, being "poets practicing other ways of overcoming the subject-object rupture instituted by sight and, through it, by abstract thinking."²¹

The chapter dedicated to Ion Barbu's poetry is entitled 'Ochia'²² and continues the line of argument from the previous chapters by pointing again toward the idea of "sight." For Ion Barbu, the external gaze (sight) is powerless when it comes to achieving a complete and total understanding of the world. The eye can only serve a superficial kind of knowledge, therefore, Ion Barbu proposes a type of knowledge that is not claimed from a contemplative act, but from a participatory one. True, originating knowledge, according to Barbu's conception, is participation to the point of merging. The opacity in which the world surrounds itself "can only be penetrated by the gaze of the one who descends into the depths, 'drunk with adherence'."²³ This explains, in the author's view, the "frenetic Dionysian dominance" of the early Barbian poetry, which is "a poetry of orgiastic fusion with the rhythms of universal life."²⁴ Participatory knowledge cancels the distance between "me" and "the world," specific to the Barbian poetry being what Ioana Em. Petrescu called – the process of de-anthropomorphization of the lyrical subject. The individual merges into the Great Whole. The world created by Ion Barbu is one in which the emphasis no longer falls on the subject that fades through dematerialization, but on the idea of process, of becoming. In this world, "the

¹⁹ Ibid., 83. Original text: "mărturisește nostalgia unui alt traseu cognitiv [...], în care totalitatea este privilegiată în raport cu entitățile izolate" (my translation).

²⁰ Ibid., 19. Original text: "lumina eternă a astrilor, substanța unanimă, luminescentă, a unei lumi încă nedespăcată în forme tranzitorii, potențial fratricide" (my translation).

²¹ Ibid., 91. Original text: "etalonul de poeticitate", "poetii exersînd alte modalități de depășire a rupturii subiect-obiect instituită de privire și, prin ea, de gîndirea abstractă" (my translation).

²² "Ochian" is a poetic term used by Barbu, referring to a specific type of sight.

²³ Ioana Em. Petrescu, *Eminescu și mutațiile poeziei românești*, 128. Original text: "[...] se lasă străbătută doar de privirea celui care coboară în adîncuri, 'beat de aderare'" (my translation).

²⁴ Ibid., 128. Original text: "dominanta frenetic dionisiacă," "o poezie a contopirii orgiastice cu ritmurile vieții universale" (my translation).

meaning belongs to the process, not to the precarious, unstable entities that give it form.”²⁵ If Eminescu, Arghezi and Blaga tried to overcome the rupture between the subject and the world, which the sight had instituted, through visionary metaphorism, Barbu proposes overcoming this rupture through an act of participatory knowledge. The chapter dedicated to Nichita Stănescu's poetry is entitled, following the same line of the sight-vision dialectic, “Ochiul cu dinți” (“The eye with teeth”). This is an association that, in the first instance, causes confusion. The juxtaposition, according to Hegel's classification mentioned by Ioana Em. Petrescu, between a theoretical sense, considered superior - the sense of sight - and a practical sense, considered inferior - the sense of taste - prefigures the change that Nichita Stănescu's poetics would bring in relation to Eminescu's. The eye with teeth no longer contemplates, the eye with teeth devours. Through devouring, the distance between the one who looks and the one who is looked at is abolished. Incorporation replaces distancing. The new ontological vision proposed by Nichita Stănescu's poetry “reactivates the privileges of taste over sight.”²⁶ In the author's critical perspective, hunger leads to an act of ‘destruction’ of the individual, who will be reintegrated, assimilated by “the organic totality from which the ‘rupture’ of birth had torn him.”²⁷ Overcome through the process of incorporation, the destruction caused by hunger loses its negative connotation. That which is crushed and consumed attains a new, vast, universal life. The new ontic law proposed by Nichita Stănescu's poetry is, therefore, one of devouring, a process understood as a transition, through the sacrifice of the individual, toward the “organic totality” from the beginning.

All the examples developed in the previous lines, examples that concerned the poetics of Eminescu, Arghezi, Blaga, Barbu and Nichita Stănescu, have the role of participating in strengthening the statement according to which Ioana Em. Petrescu's work – *Eminescu și mutațiile poeziei românești* – can be understood as an implementation and exemplification of Blaga's theory on the birth of culture through the occurrence of ontological mutations in the world. In *Trilogia cosmologică*, Lucian Blaga emphasized, “once again,” that “ontological modes, with their horizons, represent the most significant architectural articulations of the world.”²⁸

On a smaller scale, since it explores a single poetic territory (Eminescu's poetry), the work *Eminescu. Modele cosmologice și viziune poetică* can also be seen as an illustration of Blaga's philosophical conception. Ioana Em. Petrescu proposes a model for reading Eminescu's poetry starting from the concept of ‘cosmological model,’ which defines the type of relationship that is established between the human being and the Universe, more precisely, in Blaga's terms, a certain ‘way of being.’ As changes occur in the ‘way of being,’ these will also be felt at the level of the poetry itself. Anchored in its beginnings in a Platonic cosmological model, characterized

²⁵ Ibid., 140. Original text: “‘sensul’ e al procesului, nu al entităților precare, nestatornice, care-i dau trup” (my translation).

²⁶ Ibid., 17. Original text: “reactivează privilegiile gustului față de văz” (my translation).

²⁷ Ibid., 161. Original text: “totalitatea organică din care l-a smuls ‘ruptura’ nașterii” (my translation).

²⁸ Lucian Blaga, *Trilogia cosmologică*, 102. Original text: “modurile ontologice, cu orizonturile lor, reprezintă articulațiile arhitectonice cele mai de seamă ale lumii” (my translation).

by the sense of harmony, Eminescu's poetry is dominated by motifs such as "divine thought," "song," "dance" and "light (as the substance of the world)."²⁹ Afterwards, the 'way of being' specific to the Platonic universe disappears and thought is left with no other task than to discover "the absurdity of existence,"³⁰ the void,³¹ the nothingness, the emptiness. The new 'way of being' is associated with the image of the demon, "whose rebellion is directly proportional to the agonizing nostalgia for the lost paradise."³² Thrown and abandoned on Earth, the human being tries to save itself by building "compensatory universes," such as poetry, action or love. The last period of Eminescu's creation is anchored in a 'way of being' specific to the Kantian cosmological model. Characterized by mechanicity, this universe describes "a plurality of worlds that perpetually emerge and perish," worlds that "have lost the Pythagorean music of the spheres and have sunk into a frozen silence."³³ The representative character of this period of creation is Caesar, "condemned to the absolute solitude of the God and to the destiny of the Creator of worlds."³⁴ All these changes manifested at the thematic level of Eminescu's poetry stem from 'new ways of being,' defined by Ioana Em. Petrescu through the concept of 'cosmological model.'

3. Conclusion

Following what was previously demonstrated, we consider that the attempt to bring together these two remarkable personalities of Romanian culture, Lucian Blaga and Ioana Em. Petrescu, was a prolific one. This research allowed us to observe the connections of ideas that can emerge between a philosophical system and a critical one. The idea that unites these two systems is that according to which the manifestations and changes in the field of culture are preceded by changes that occur at the ontological level. Strictly referring to the literary field, 'poetic mutations' find their source in 'ontological mutations.' In other words, a new 'way of being' demands a new type of poetics. Practically, the trajectory of literature will always move from ontological mutations to poetic mutations, a fact exemplarily demonstrated by Ioana Em. Petrescu in *Eminescu și mutațiile poeziei românești* and *Eminescu. Modele cosmologice și viziune poetică*.

²⁹ Ioana Em. Petrescu, *Eminescu. Modele cosmologice și viziune poetică*, 17.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

³¹ For Pompiliu Crăciunescu, the concept of "void" is of particular importance in interpreting Eminescu's poetry. He argued that the poem *Luceafărul* marks "the beginning of the journey into pure void." Pompiliu Crăciunescu, *Eminescu. Paradisul infernal și transcsmologia* (Iași: Editura Junimea, 2018), 128.

³² Ioana Em. Petrescu, *Eminescu. Modele cosmologice și viziune poetică*, 18.

³³ *Ibid.*, 18. Original text: "o pluralitate de lumi ce izvorăsc și mor perpetuu," "și-au pierdut pitagoreica muzică a sferelor și s-au confundat într-o tăcere înghețată" (my translation).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 19. Original text: "condamnat la singurătatea absolută a zeului și la destinul creatorului de lumi" (my translation).