

A10



Web contents

Something is still present and isn't, of what's gone

A bilingual anthology of avant-garde
and avant-garde inspired Rumanian poetry

edited and translated by
Victor Pambuccian





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Indice

7	<i>Editor's Introduction</i>
10	<i>Preambul</i>
11	<i>Preamble</i>
34	Tristan Tzara
64	B. Fundoianu
78	Ilarie Voronca
98	Geo Bogza
102	M. Blecher
110	Gherasim Luca
124	Gellu Naum
142	Geo Dumitrescu
152	Paul Celan
156	Ion Caraion
174	Nora Iuga
196	Nichita Stănescu
202	George Almosnino
224	Constantin Abăluță
238	Vintilă Ivănceanu
258	Daniel Turcea
266	Mariana Marin
285	<i>Short Biographies of the Poets</i>

Editor's Introduction (A geometer's apology)

Victor Pambuccian

Although a newcomer on the world stage, having set foot on it in the 1880s with the publication of the major poems of Mihail Eminescu (1850–1889), poetry both in the Rumanian language and by poets from Rumania was in the very first line of combat in the literary revolution referred to as the avant-garde. That combat involved three generations of poets, and lasted long after the time it was allotted in Western Europe had come and gone. The first wave consisted of the co-founder of the Dada movement, Tristan Tzara (1896–1963), Urmuz (1883–1923), B. Fundoianu (1898–1944), Ilarie Voronca (1903–1946), Geo Bogza (1908–1993), Max Blecher (1909–1938), Eugène Ionesco (1909–1994), and several others. Given the emigration and change of language of most of them, this first wave did not leave an immediate mark on Rumanian poetry. Tzara, Fundoianu, Voronca, and Ionesco ended up in Paris and changed their language of expression very early in their literary lives. Urmuz and Voronca committed suicide, Blecher died of Pott's disease, while Bogza and several others switched to a style of writing dear to the leaders of occupied Rumania after 1945, amounting to various forms of agitprop and socialist realism. The second wave appears with the onset of surrealism, and to it belong Gherasim Luca (1913–1994), Gellu Naum (1915–2001), Constant Tonegaru (1919–1952),

Paul Celan (1920–1970), Geo Dumitrescu (1920–2004), Ion Caraion (1923–1986), and several others. The fate of this second wave was sealed by the Soviet occupation of Rumania that lead to a silencing of any independent literary style. Luca emigrated in 1950, and lived in Paris thereafter, after a short stop in Israel, putting an end to his days like Celan, by throwing himself in the Seine, since “there is no more place for poets in this world.” Tonegaru and Caraion were imprisoned and mistreated in Communist prisons, the former dying from a wound inflicted during his detention. Naum was silenced as a poet between 1947 and 1968, Dumitrescu had to change his style to suit the powers that be, Celan left Rumania in 1947 and wrote only in German afterwards. The third wave rediscovers the avant-garde and finds that it either fits very well the reality of theater of the absurd offered by Communist Rumania, or else that it provides an ideal escape from that reality. In the poems of this third wave one can read both distant echoes and an entirely new aesthetic. To it belong squarely the poets who gathered around the *onirism* name, indicating a dream-influenced poetry, such as Nora Iuga (1931–), George Almosnino (1936–1994), Vintilă Ivănceanu (1940–2008), and Daniel Turcea (1945–1979). One can hear the echoes of surrealism in some of the poems of Nichita Stănescu (1933–1983) and references to it can be found in the work of Constantin Abăluță (1938–) and Mariana Marin (1956–2003).

The choice of poets and poems is a highly subjective one, the main criterion being provided by the answer to the question regarding the impression the poem makes on me at the time of its reading. Does it resonate with me, do I rediscover myself in a part of it? Does it live today as a self-standing unit, outside of its time and place, outside of theories of literature, national significance, and the like? Can

I inhabit the poem to translate it into English? By trade a geometer wearing logic-colored glasses, my interest in poetry goes back to my high school years, when I wrote very few poems in German, the trickle of which has continued over the ensuing decades at a rate of some two per decade, followed later by the equally rare English language poem.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to Stefan Zweig, for his suggestion that one should take up translation to allow one's own language to flow and free up one's own creativity, to Susan Harris of *Words Without Borders* for having been the first to accept my poetry translations, to Marjorie Perloff for suggesting I contact the *International Poetry Review* for my translation of Fundoianu's *Hertza*, to Mark Smith-Soto for having asked me to be the guest editor of a special issue of the *International Poetry Review* dedicated to poetry from Rumania, to CJ Evans of *Two Lines*, for having accepted my translations of poems by Constantin Abăluță and George Almosnino, to Kathryn Nuernberger of *Pleiades*, for having accepted my translations of the poems of Vintilă Ivănceanu, to the National Endowment for the Arts for having supported this project, and to Mădălina Lascu for having provided me, over the years, originals of the poems translated in this anthology, for her expert advice in numerous matters, as well as her survey of the avant-garde, old and new, which she herewith shares with us.

It must be also mentioned that this anthology would not have been possible without the gracious permissions to translate given by Constantin Abăluță, Marta Caraion, Isabelle Diu and Librairie Corti, Heidi Dumreicher, Nora Iuga, Oana Lungescu and Sebastien Reichmann, Simona Rușanu and Lucia Turcea, Lucian Vasilescu, the late Christophe Tzara, Nicolae Tzone, and without the excellent collaboration with Aracne editrice's editor-in-chief Mario Scagnetti.

Preambul

Mădălina Lascu

Ne aflăm în fața unui volum inedit și surprinzător. În primul rînd, chiar dacă autorul mărturisește că selecția sa este subiectivă și alătură poeți ai avangardei istorice românești de poeți contemporani români, puțin cunoscuți chiar la ei în țară, precum Vintilă Ivănceanu, George Almosnino, Daniel Turcea, rezultatul este uimitor, prin coerența fluxului poetic și afinitățile dintre diferitele scriituri poetice.

În al doilea rînd, tocmai recurgerea la versurile timpurii (Tristan Tzara), versuri considerate adesea drept poeme imature, de tinerețe, mai puțin izbutite și, din punct de vedere stilistic, tributare unor curente literare depășite sau recurgerea la versurile scrise în perioada românească ale unor poeți importanți din această antologie (B. Fundoianu, Gherasim Luca, Paul Celan), conferă întregii antologii un aer de autenticitate și de originalitate.

În al treilea rînd, „osatura” asigurată de poezii avangardei istorice, deja cunoscuți în lume, constituie un suport adecvat de susținere a poezilor contemporani, care, cu ajutorul unei alte limbi și unor împrejurări mai favorabile, ar fi putut dobîndi, unii dintre ei, o recunoaștere similară, cel puțin în poezia europeană.

A te naște într-o țară mică, cu o limbă fără circulație internațională, nu este niciodată o binecuvîntare pentru nici un scriitor din lumea aceasta. Uneori însă, se întîmplă și

Preamble

Mădălina Lascu

This is a truly novel and quite astonishing volume. First of all, even if its author tries to persuade us that his selection is highly subjective, for he has brought together poets belonging to the historical avant-garde and contemporary Rumanian poets less familiar to the Rumanian readership, like Vintilă Ivănceanu, George Almosnino, and Daniel Turcea, the final result is astonishing by the consistency of its poetic flow and by the affinities of the various poetic discourses.

Second, both his choice of the early poems of Tristan Tzara, generally rated as immature and less polished, stylistically owing too much to outdated literary trends, and the selection of some poems written by important poets written during their Rumanian period, such as B. Fundoianu, Gherasim Luca, and Paul Celan, lends an air of authenticity and originality to the anthology.

Third, the “backbone” formed by the poets belonging to the historical avant-garde, already world famous, creates an adequate framework for sustaining the contemporary poets, of which some, had they written in a different language and under more auspicious circumstances, could have enjoyed a similar acclaim, at least in the European cultural context.

To be born in a small country, whose national language is not spoken outside of its frontiers, is not much of a bless-

miracole, adevărate miracole, pe care nimeni, oricît s-ar strădui, nu le poate explica.

Un asemenea miracol este, în cultura română, minuscula grupare a avangardiștilor, care a reușit să întoarcă nu numai cursul culturii române (în mod paradoxal, această profundă schimbare n-a fost recunoscută decît multe decenii de la înfăptuirea ei, în anii 1960), dar care s-a aflat în centrul schimbării paradigmei culturii europene, contribuind, în mod direct, la nașterea dadaismului și suprarealismului.

Cînd se vorbește despre avangardă, prima caracteristică care i se atribuie este spiritul ei de frondă, fronda fiind, prin excelență, un atribut al adolescenței și al primei tinereți. Astfel, povestea avangardei române începe de la ideea a trei adolescenți liceeni de a publica, în toamna anului 1912, o revistă influențată de cel mai în vogă curent la vremea aceea, în România, simbolismul. Revista *Simbolul* (4 numere, octombrie–decembrie 1912) a introdus însă și informații despre recente manifestări cubiste de la Paris, volumul *Du Cubisme* de Albert Gleizes și Jean Metzinger (1912) fiind prezentat în paginile sale. Cei trei publiciști erau S. Samyro (Samuel Rosenstock, viitorul Tristan Tzara), Ion Eugen Iovanaki (viitorul Ion Vinea) și Marcel Iancu (care era și finanțatorul revistei). Elevi de liceu, proveniți din familii înstărite, cei trei primiseră o educație riguroasă în familie, dar și în școlile private și publice din țară. Pe lîngă literatură clasică, limbi străine, ei studiaseră muzică și pictură (fiind, toți trei, înzestrați în toate aceste direcții).

În fapt, una dintre particularitățile avangardei românești a fost, cu mici excepții, caracterul alogen al protagoniștilor (evrei, greci, maghiari, germani, ucrainieni sau combinații între aceștia), care le-a adus numeroase neplăceri atît în societatea românească, cît și în țările de adopție, precum

ing for any writer of this world. Sometimes, however, miracles happen, genuine miracles, which cannot be explained by anyone, no matter how hard one tries.

In Rumanian culture, such a miracle was brought about by the tiny group of avant-garde artists and writers, who did not only succeed in turning around Rumanian culture (paradoxically, this tremendous change was only acknowledged long after it had taken place, in the 1960s), but also stood at the center of the shift within the European paradigm, contributing directly to the birth of Dada and Surrealism.

Whenever the issue of the avant-garde is approached, critics refer to its rebellious mood, that defining attribute of adolescence and first youth. Unsurprisingly the story of the Rumanian avant-garde begins with three high school students, who decide to publish, in the fall of 1912, a magazine influenced by the most fashionable trend of the day: symbolism. Their magazine, *Simbolul* (*The Symbol*) (4 issues, from October to December 1912), also informed their readers about recent Cubist events in Paris, such as about Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger's volume, *Du "Cubisme"* (1912). The three editors were S. Samyro (Samuel Rosenstock, the future Tristan Tzara), Ion Eugen Iovanaki (the future Ion Vinea) and Marcel Janco (who also financed the magazine). The three high school students had enjoyed a rigorous education both within their well-off families and in private or public schools. In addition to classical literature, they had studied modern languages, music and painting (all of them were gifted in these areas).

With very few exceptions, an essential feature shared by the major figures of the Rumanian avant-garde was their foreignness (they were Jews, Greeks, Hungarians, Germans, Ukrainians or mixtures of these), causing them countless troubles in both the Rumanian setting and in the

și adânci tulburări ale ego-ului propriu. Mai ales evreii au cunoscut cele mai crunte nedreptăți și umiliri, pe care le vom analiza la momentul potrivit.

După plecarea lui Marcel Iancu, în octombrie 1915, la studii în Elveția, la Politehnica din Zürich, ceilalți doi prieteni rămași la București, Tristan Tzara și Ion Vinea, au scos o nouă revistă, la fel de efemeră (două numere), numită *Chemarea*. Pe lângă eleganța sa estetică, această publicație a avut meritul de a fi consacrat forma definitivă a pseudonimelor celor doi scriitori, I[on] Vinea și Tristan Tzara, dar și de a fi găzduit, în paginile sale, imaginea căluțului de lemn care avea să dea, câteva luni mai târziu, denumirea celui mai provocator curent avangardist, dadaismul.

Dadaismul s-a născut la Zürich, în februarie 1916, într-un grup de scriitori și artiști germano-româno-francezo-elvețieni, reuniți din pură întâmplare, pentru scurtă vreme (2 ani), deveniți apoi celebri, fiecare în felul său; Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara, Marcel Iancu, Emmy Hennings, Jean Arp, Sophie Taeuber au creat atunci cea mai viabilă și mai prolifică mișcare avangardistă, capabilă și după 100 de ani să incite curiozitatea cercetătorilor și a tinerilor artiști.

Arderile la mare intensitate, din cadrul acestui curent artistic, se datorau și puternicelor, tulburătoarelor frământări lăuntrice ale protagoniștilor săi, care aveau, adesea, mistuitoare probleme identitare; Hugo Ball, german cu o conștiință integră, părăsise Germania, fiind, pe nedrept, considerat trădător și a ales să trăiască, pînă la sfîrșitul vieții, în Elveția; Tristan Tzara și Marcel Iancu, ca evrei români, nu aveau cetățenia patriei natale și, ca posesori ai unui pașaport românesc, aveau restricții pe care ceilalți europeni nu le cunoșteau (nu puteau călători fără viză în anumite state europene, nu au putut obține viza americană în anii prigoanei naziste etc.); nici alsacianul Hans Arp

countries in which they chose to live, as well as deeply disturbing their sense of self. The Jews, in particular, suffered the most atrocious grievances and humiliations, which we will refer to in due course.

After Marcel Janco left the country in October 1915 to attend the ETH in Zurich, the other two friends, Tristan Tzara and Ion Vinea, who remained in Bucharest, published a new short-lived magazine, *Chemarea* (*The Call*). In addition to its aesthetically pleasing production, the magazine established not only the final form of their pen names, I[on] Vinea and Tristan Tzara, but also published in its pages the image of the wooden horse, the icon which will lend its name, some months later, to the most provocative avant-garde movement, the Dada.

Dada was born in Zurich, in February 1916, to a group of German-Rumanian-French-Swiss artists and writers who had met haphazardly for a short while (2 years) and who later became famous in their own right. Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco, Emmy Hennings, Jean Arp, Sophie Taeuber created the most viable and prolific avant-garde movement, which, 100 years later, still elicits the curiosity of scholars and young artists alike.

The passionate combustion of those committed to this artistic creed were caused in good part by the intense inner turmoil of the artists themselves who experienced agonizing identity conflicts. Hugo Ball, a German of conscience, who had left Germany after having been accused of treason, chose to live in Switzerland for the rest of his life. Tristan Tzara and Marcel Janco, were Rumanian Jews, without being citizens of their native country, and, as carriers of a Rumanian passport, were constrained by restrictions to which no other European citizens were subjected (they had to apply for visas, for instance, if they wanted to travel in