

ABSTRACT

PATTERNS OF CREATIVITY IN TUDOR ARGHEZI'S CUVINTE POTRIVITE

By

Michael Howard Impey

The aim of this study is to establish the principal spiritual movement of Cuvinte potrivite (1927), Tudor Arghezi's first and most important poetic cycle, by considering it as a separate entity and by explicating a number of key poems, which unaccountably have been overlooked or inadequately expounded by Arghezian exegetes. Post-war Romanian critics, for example, have tended to stress historiographical or thematic elements, often to the detriment of the organic unity of individual poems or poetic cycles.

Nevertheless, a spiritual movement can be discerned. It has been described by Pompiliu Constantinescu as ". . . an integration of the ego in the cosmic order."¹ In his examination of what he terms the pre-structure of Arghezi's verse, Constantinescu distinguishes two principal elements: Man's "inescapable bipolarity" and "mystical naturism." Constantinescu claims that the conflicting tendencies exhibited by the poet-protagonist

towards good and evil are nullified in the very extremes of the struggle, and that "pacification" occurs when the individual spirit is reabsorbed into the cosmic rhythm of nature.

It would, however, be a grave miscalculation to assume--as Constantinescu does--that a symbiosis of conflicting forces occurs in Cuvinte potrivite, despite the fact that the cycle concludes with the ecstatic vision of a reborn nature. Mystical or pantheistic elements are present only in potential, and there is certainly no suggestion in Testament, the dedicatory poem to the cycle, that mystical naturism provides "the purifying center" which the poet seeks. The only possible escape--capable of textual support--from the ontological labyrinth, in which man is hopelessly lost, lies through the mediating and visionary power of poetry.

As the title of this study indicates, Arghezi explores from every conceivable angle the multifarious nature of poetic creativity. In chapters I and II, some of the poetic masks (the master-craftsman and the magician) the poet assumes in his self-appointed task as a vates are discussed. In chapters III and IV, the unconscious aspects of the creative impulse which lies at the very center of man's being are probed, and in particular the baffling manifestation of poetry as an ambivalent female companion.

Chapters V and VI also form a unit and are

concerned with the violent oscillations of the human ego between spirit and matter. Chapter V presents a series of apocalyptic visions, in which the poetic voice willingly concurs in the total destruction of the natural world. Tentatively, it is concluded that this apparently nihilistic urge can only be explained as a desire to restore life to a state of primal flux as the first stage to its eventual reinvigoration, a pattern which can be traced in several of the poems discussed in chapter VI.

In the final chapter, the three patterns of renewal which seem most representative of Arghezi's poetic vision in Cuvinte potrivite are singled out. All of them are linked directly or indirectly to the individual act of poetic creation. The plenitude which results from individual participation in seasonal renewal (pattern I) must be shared with others for true benefaction to accrue. This is accomplished (pattern II) by "Poetry as Communion," the growth-in-understanding and fellowship which occurs when succeeding generations sip at the Fount of Life, in other words, at poetry prefigured as a chalice (pattern III) containing the taina (the secret of existence). It is only by initiating its readers into the mysteries of life that poetry can offer mankind the chance of wholeness and restoration to harmony.

¹Tudor Arghezi (Bucharest: Fundația pentru literatură și artă "Regele Carol II," 1940), p. 241.

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where disinterest in Romanian studies is matched by a dearth of research material. But more than this I owe to Mr. Sterescu the conviction that the glories of the printed word are not easily erased. Among the many others who helped me to adapt to a different way of life and come to know a gracious and lively people, I wish to single out Lucian and Sorina Leahu. Not only did they extend to me more acts of kindness, in sickness and in health, than was my due, but by their sensitivity to literature they showed that links between the Sciences and the Humanities can and should be forged. My friends Matei Călinescu and Petru Popescu, poets and critics, who were instrumental in introducing me to a lively artistic world, offered encouragement and, most important of all, an ironic perspective of critical trends over the past forty years.

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INTRODUCTION

Romanian Literature up to 1904

To anyone unfamiliar with the history of Romania, it may seem scarcely credible that Romanian literature, at least in the aesthetic sense, is usually held to date from 1821, the year in which native Romanian princes were once again appointed by the Turkish Porte, after more than a century of inefficient and corrupt rule by Phanariot overlords. The dominant role played by the Greek language in political, religious and cultural affairs during this period (1716-1821) largely stifled a promising vein of chronicles and early attempts at poetry written in the vernacular in the seventeenth century. With native rulers once more exercising power and in response to a more favorable political situation in Eastern Europe, a rising tide of national consciousness sought in literature a ready vehicle for the promulgation of new ideas and old aspirations--to drive the Turks back into the Black Sea and secure Romania's position as a haven of Latin culture in the midst of the Slavic hordes. Of incalculable value in developing this national consciousness were the literary journals--arising out of literary associations or societies--which I. Eliade Rădulescu (Curierul

românesc, April 1829) and Gheorghe Asachi (Albina românească, June 1829) set up in Tara Românească and Moldavia respectively.

The next impetus came principally from Vasile Alecsandri who, on his return to Romania after studies in Paris, was appointed one of the three directors of the Jassy theater and proceeded to build up almost from scratch a native dramatic tradition, at first by translating and adapting French burlesques and later on by writing numerous comedies and historical dramas. By publishing collections of folk-ballads in 1852 and 1853, Alecsandri was largely responsible for stimulating interest in the rich oral tradition which, despite countless invasions and foreign occupations, had subsisted at the village level in rural Romania and which now served as a matrix for the greatest of all the Romanian lyric poets, Mihai Eminescu.

Born in 1850, Eminescu studied law and philosophy at the Universities of Vienna and Berlin and, on returning to Jassy in 1874, took a post as librarian. Although he wrote a melodic line which owed much to the rhythmic cadence of popular poetry, Eminescu in many ways was the typical inadaptat (alienated figure) of late Romantic literature, and his poetry, both structurally and thematically, is reminiscent at times of the poetry of Lenau, Leopardi and--for its resignation and negation--of Alfred de Vigny. The special fascination of Eminescu's verse,

however, seems to lie in its subtle blend of Schopenhaurian pessimism--Eminescu, it must be added, knew Sanskrit and was deeply read in Vedic mysticism--and a vision of nature as a total metaphysical entity, a nature whose common symbols--woods, seas, rivers and mountains--are manifestations of the inner spirit of the poet. That the elusive and suggestive music of Eminescu's mature lyrics owes much to popular mythology is confirmed by G. Călinescu in his monumental Istoria literaturii române,¹ the relevant chapter of which is significantly entitled "Mihai Eminescu, poetul național" (Mihai Eminescu, national poet). Besides illustrating the peasant mentality embodied in the text, Călinescu takes pains to show that many of the themes and images found in Eminescu's verse could have been borrowed just as easily from Romanian chroniclers such as Dimitrie Cantemir as from foreign poets of his own day and age.²

Eminescu was supported in his studies abroad by the members of the literary circle Junimea and in particular by one of the founding members Titu Maiorescu, a philosopher, pedagogue and orator of German education. The tremendous influence exercised by the Society's

¹Istoria literaturii române dela origini pînă la prezent (Bucharest: Fundația regală pentru literatură și artă, 1941).

²The Biblical theme of l'infausta vanità, the essential illusoriness and fickleness of human existence, is but one of many such echoes.

literary journal Convorbiri literare (1867) and later on by the nationalist-populist review Semănătorul (1901)-- whose literary contacts with the rest of Europe were largely confined to Heine and a number of minor German Romantics--as well as the markedly xenophobic and anti-semitic trends to the national spirit, unhappily often encouraged by the junimiști and present in the prose writings of both Eminescu and Maiorescu, which gained ground during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, seem to have precluded first-hand acquaintance with the many varied literary developments in France during the same period, except amongst a small and at first not particularly influential circle of enlightened litterati. Indeed, as Călinescu has observed, Baudelaire, Verlaine, the Parnassian and Symbolist poets did not become known in Romania until almost half a century after their appearance. "Maiorescu, even though he carried on his activities well into the first decade of the twentieth century," Călinescu continues, "never once mentioned Sainte-Beuve, Faguet, Jules Lemaitre; Alecsandri, Eminescu, both of whom died on the threshold of the year 1890, had not heard of Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Anatole France, Barrès."³

Despite violent reactions in Semănătorul at the slightest attempt to introduce French literature onto the Romanian literary scene, a number of minor periodicals--

³Ibid., p. 605.

of which Linia dreaptă, under the aesthetic direction of Tudor Arghezi, was one--slowly began the task of winning an audience for the more serious aspects of French culture in the first decade of the twentieth century. But many years before the philologist Ovid Densusianu or the critic D. Caracostea committed themselves to print in support of France, the poet and theoretician Alexandru Macedonski--who became something of a cause célèbre in his own lifetime on account of his attacks on Maiorescu and his tactless epigram aimed at Eminescu, suffering at the time from the mental breakdown which led to his death--had propounded a series of aesthetic viewpoints markedly anti-junimist in character. These ranged from advocacy of "social poetry" to a poetry of absolute values, assertively paralogical and based on those qualities of divine absurdity which Macedonski purported to find in Dante's Commedia, from dandyism and Pre-Raphaelite posturings to admiration of the obscure theory of "verbal instrumentalism" postulated by Rene Ghil in his Traité du verbe (1886). Above all, Macedonski prided himself on being the father of Romanian symbolism, quite apart from representing himself as the rejected, misunderstood poetic genius of his time. These delusions of grandeur were reflected in the ceremonial proceedings of the literary salon which he organized for his devoted followers and over which he seems to have presided with regal pomp. Nevertheless, Macedonski remains an influential figure

for his time and, as well as initiating the Symbolist movement in Romanian literature, the chief exponents of which were to be George Bacovia and Ion Minulescu, and all subsequent 'modernist' trends with a prime interest in technical differentiation, he gave generous assistance to some of the more promising young poets who attended his salon in the late nineties, amongst whom the brightest star was undoubtedly Tudor Arghezi.

The Life and Works of Tudor Arghezi: A Brief Bio-bibliography

Born in 1880 in Bucharest of peasant stock--his parents were originally from the Gorj district of Oltenia--Tudor Arghezi⁴ grew up in the picturesque atmosphere of old Bucharest, about which he was to reminisce so captivately in prose works such as Cu bastonul prin București (With a Walking-stick through Bucharest). Details of his early life are sparse,⁵ but it is clear that following a disagreement with his father he left home at

⁴His real name was Ion N. Theodorescu. He first adopted his pen name when submitting poetry to Viața nouă, spelling it then Ion Th. Argheyzi. Later on he confessed that this pseudonym was suggested by the old name of the river Argeș (Argesis), an interesting choice in view of the significant role water imagery plays in his poetry.

⁵We would, however, like to call our readers' attention to the extremely useful "Bio-bibliographic Table" prepared for a special number of Romanian Review, XXII, 3 (1968), 99-102, by G. Pienescu, and to the biographical summaries Emil Manu included in his Prolegomene argheziene (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură, 1968).

the tender age of eleven and fended for himself, though probably with the assistance of an aunt and other relatives. That his relations with his father were permanently soured throughout his youth is illustrated by the grieving tone of the poem Tatălui meu (To my Father) with which he made his literary début in 1896 in Macedonski's journal Liga ortodoxă.

Arghezi continued to publish in Liga ortodoxă and was hailed by Macedonski for his audacity in breaking with the banal imagery and conventional versification of his time. Arghezi eventually broke with the circle of enthusiasts who frequented Macedonski's salon and later on repudiated the instrumentalist techniques and the specious imitation of foreign models he had been exposed to at these meetings.⁶

In 1899, after "a year of mystical isolation" spent working as a laboratory assistant in a sugar factory at Chitila, near Bucharest, Arghezi suddenly became a monk, spending the year of his noviciate at Cernica Monas-

⁶"Just about all the sounds [of new poetic models] reach Bucharest crooked and indecent, so that even the occasional prank from Paris--as a result of the desire of a number of refractory spirits to institute a school--have acquired here the proportions of vast conceptions, based on numbers and affectation. Extremely unsymbolic men, quite lacking in the talents with which the Parisian writers are plentifully endowed . . . they fabricated sonorous equivoques and poetic nausea as rich in feeling as a wad of felt. And so as not to verge on the ridiculous, they even went so far as to call themselves 'instrumentalist-symbolists'." "Vers și poezie," in Linia dreaptă, no. 2 (May 1, 1904).

tery before serving as deacon in the Metropolitan Church in Bucharest and teaching comparative religion at the Cadet School. The motives for his "withdrawal from life" are explained in the Archdeacon Joseph's Memoires ("Amin-tirile Ierodiaconului Iosif"), the first five parts of which were published in Națiunea in 1923, as an almost subconscious decision, a decision that exercised a hypnotic power over him, like "a strange command." In later years, revolted by what in retrospect seemed a "sensation of predestination," the poet tried to explain away the mystical element by claiming that he took holy orders partly to earn a living and partly out of a desire "to learn to write mysteriously."

It is supposed that during these years as a deacon, Arghezi wrote the rough draft of his future book Icoane de lemn (Wooden Icons), as well as a number of poems from the Agate negre (Black Agates) and Cuvinte potrivite (Fitting Words) cycles.⁷ The reading and writing that he did late into the night apparently made his fellow monks suspect that he was consorting with the Devil, and Father Joseph was several times summoned peremptorily to the Metropolitan's Office to account for his activities. The walls of his cell at this time were covered, according to N.D. Cocea, with pages from the social review l'Assi-

⁷Recent research has also brought to light a prose-poem D'un crépuscule à l'autre which was published in the Parisian periodical Anthologie, revue et critique internationale, I, 11 (November 1903).

ette au Beurre, and works by the revolutionary French poets of his time were piled high on his table.⁸ Arghezi re-entered the Romanian literary scene in 1904, collaborating clandestinely--for fear of ecclesiastical disapproval--with his friend V. Demetrius on a new review Linia dreaptă, where he published several of the poems which form the basis of our study of Cuvinte potrivite, together with his poetic manifesto Vers și poezie⁹ which, in addition to bearing lively testimony to his readings from contemporary French poetry (although without naming anyone directly), also attempted, as Șerban Cioculescu has noted, ". . . to isolate the notion of 'pure poetry' . . . some twenty years before the celebrated debates, instigated by the Abbé Bremond, . . ." ¹⁰

Before the end of the year, however, Arghezi had obtained leave of absence in order to pursue theological studies in Switzerland, at a Cordelier monastery in Fribourg. Following an attempt to convert him to Catholicism, Arghezi seems to have taken the opportunity to sever all formal religious ties, and it is also in this period that his first wife bore him a child. Eventually settling in Geneva (1906), he became an apprentice at a Free Trade

⁸Cited by Dumitru Micu in his monograph Tudor Arghezi (Bucharest: Meridiane Publishing House, 1965), pp. 7-8.

⁹Linia dreaptă, No. 2 (May 1, 1904).

¹⁰Introducere în poezia lui Tudor Arghezi Bucharest: Fundația Regele Mihai I, 1946), p. 18.

School--where he fashioned "gold teeth, rings and watch lids"--and made frequent trips to Paris by motorcycle, where he supported himself by humping produce in the market-halls and selling newspapers at street-corners in Montmartre.

Arghezi's third literary début occurred in February 1910, when, without the poet's permission, his friend N.D. Cocea published in the socialist review Viața socială a number of poems from a manuscript left in his care, including Rugă de seară. In December of the same year, the poet himself returned to Romania in order to clarify his military status. In the years before the First World War, Arghezi worked as an editor and published theater and book reviews, political commentaries, medalions of noted personalities, lampoons and polemical articles in a wide range of daily newspapers and socio-literary periodicals. Although he published relatively little poetry, a number of poems appeared (1911) in the prestigious Jassy journal Viața românească. His editorship of the daily newspaper Seara (March 21, 1913 to October 18, 1914), in which he vehemently opposed the Romano-Bulgarian War of 1913, and the violent diatribes directed at the warmongering of various financial interests as well as the pacifist opinions he consistently maintained in his own review Cronica (February 1915-April 1916) earned him many enemies. After the war he was convicted by a military court for having collaborated on the pro-German

occupation newspaper Gazeta Bucureștilor and for other so-called treasonable activities and imprisoned for more than two years (1918-19) at Văcărești.

Released through the good offices of the savant Nicolae Iorga--later to be one of his most uncompromising critics--Arghezi continued his dual career of journalist and poet; his polemics, of a rare verve and pungency, gradually giving way to a more intensive poetic output. But it was not until the appearance of his first volume of collected poems Cuvinte potrivite (1927) that his name came to the notice of the Romanian literary public at large. Arghezi, who until then had been disregarded by most 'established' critics, found himself the center of controversy: his verbal immoderacy and ruthless materialization of imagery bringing charges of facility and obscurity.

His great rival, Ion Barbu, greeted Cuvinte potrivite in these uncomplimentary terms:-

We are in the banal presence of a poet without a message, alienated from Ideas; . . . Journalists have acclaimed the publishing of Arghezi's volume as a literary event comparable to the unique appearance of Eminescu [who was] above all a man of thought and concentrated study. . . . Uncover the printed letter of these verses [Barbu then quotes from Între două nopți] with a venerable content of ecclesiastical origin. You will find (sketched out in dregs) a dully machined idea: grotesque and banal as a bicycle.¹¹

¹¹Ideea europeană, IX, 205 (November 1927), pp. 2-3. The final quip is a reference to one of Arghezi's passions at the turn of the century.

Up to a point, of course, Barbu was right; his lofty intellect could only see the impropriety of extreme verbal condensation and a peasant earthiness blended with the spicy argot of the mahală in a poetry which reflects a strong sense of ancestral continuity and identification with the peasant and the soil, the torment of a soul in search of the absolute, and apocalyptic visions of a putrescent world.

February of 1929 saw the appearance of Bilete de papagal,¹² a daily broadsheet--"the smallest sheet ever printed from Gutenberg to this day,"--in which Arghezi brought to perfection what amounted to a new literary genre, his tablete (tablets). In Bilete de papagal Arghezi published prose and poetry by outstanding young writers such as Eugen Ionescu, Geo Bogza, and one of the first numbers (no. 16, February 19, 1928) was dedicated to the brilliant but tragic figure of Urmuz, whose surrealist prose Arghezi had first published in 1922, when he was editor of Cugetul românesc. Another venture which made heavy claims on his time during this period (1929-32) was the construction of his house and garden at Mărțișor, near the Bucharest abattoir, where he settled perma-

¹²Bilete de papagal has been translated as "Parrot Predictions," and while this translation is not literal it does explain what inspired Arghezi to give his minuscule paper this particular format. Organ grinders in Romania as elsewhere were often accompanied by a parrot which would tell customers their fortune by pulling a prediction out of a box with its beak.

nently with his wife Paraschiva (married in 1916) and his two children Mitzura (born 1925) and Baruțu (born 1926). It has been noted more than once that the increased stability a happy marriage brought, together with the challenge of providing amusing reading for his two children, accounts for the sense of plenitude which fills much of his poetry written in the thirties and for the fable-like settings of his books for children, beginning with Cartea cu jucării (1931).

In 1930 Arghezi published the novels¹³ Icoane de lemn (Wooden Icons) and Poarta neagră (The Black Gate), based respectively on reminiscences of his monastic and prison experiences. The volume of poems Flori de mucia-gai (Mildew Flowers), published in 1930, was also the product of his imprisonment. In this work he broke entirely fresh ground in Romanian literature, depicting with rare sympathy the depraved elements of the prison underworld. This lyrical approach to the seamier side of life, which together with his pamphlets Bilete de papagal brought grave charges of obscenity, has been compared by the critic G. Călinescu to similar currents found in the work of Salvatore di Giacomo and García Lorca. Tablete din Țara de Kutu (Tablets from Kutu Land), a satirical

¹³For want of a suitable generic term, we have followed the author and most of his critics in calling Icoane de lemn (really a collection of anti-clerical lampoons) and Poarta neagră (a series of lyrical reminiscences) 'novels.' The same will apply to the other prose-poems called novels.

novel of Swiftian dimensions published in 1933, was followed by other novels rich in lexicological innovation: Ochii Maicii Domnului (The Blessed Virgin's Eyes, 1934), Cimitirul Buna-Vestire (The Annunciation Cemetery, 1936) and Lina (1942), as well as by further collections of poetry: Cărticica de seară (1935)¹⁴ and Hore (1939). Arghezi reveals here yet another direction to his poetry by affirming the value of family life and reflecting the vision of a Pantheist in his childlike obsession with the wonders of creation. It is a microscopic world, where his touch is that of a miniaturist.

In 1938-39 a serious illness confined him to his bed for almost a year, and the cruel hand of fate which came so close to cutting short more than a decade of peaceful serenity casts a pessimistic shadow over a number of poems written in 1940. This pessimistic attitude is also reflected in a series of poems treating the horrors of war, of a war that steadily encroached on Romanian territory in 1943 and 1944. Arghezi continued to publish in the war period, mainly poetry and tablete in the periodical Revista Fundațiilor Regale and in the daily newspapers Dimineața and Vremea, but in April 1943 he began to publish articles of a more openly political nature in

¹⁴Later to be called Versuri de seară in the three definitive editions of his poetry, published in 1936, 1939 and 1943 respectively, as well as in all post-war editions of his poetry, including the 1959 edition we use in our study.

Informația zilei, including the lampoon Baron! which, transparently aimed at baron Manfred von Killinger, the Nazi ambassador to Bucharest, earned the writer several months detention in a concentration camp at Tîrgu-Jiu, the capital of the Gorj district, ironically Arghezi's ancestral homeland.

Immediately after the war, Arghezi continued to publish, bringing out the fourth and last series of Bilete de papagal (December 1944-February 1945)¹⁵ and the volume Manual de morală practică (1946), a collection of tablete dealing with human relationships in a manner reminiscent of Bertrand Russell's popular treatises. In 1946 he won the National Poetry Prize for the first time, and in the following year he brought out the volume Una sută una poeme, which included practically all the poems he had written since 1939. A period of silence (1947-54) bears witness to his uncertainty and misgivings during the Stalinist period in Romania, and the poet mainly restricted himself to translations from the Russian and French (Krylov: Fables; Gogol: Dead Souls; Anatole France: In the Prime of Life), as well as work on translations of Rabelais (left unfinished) and of Bertholt Brecht's play Mutter Courage.

In 1954 another book for children Prisaca (Bee-Garden) appeared, and this was followed by two major

¹⁵ A selection from all four series of Bilete de papagal appeared under the same title in 1946.

poetic cycles 1907--Peizaje (1955), a satirical expose of the conditions in Romania which led up to the peasant rising of the same year, and Cîntare omului (1956), a lyrical evocation of the sociogonic theme. In 1957 Arghezi was awarded the State Prize for Poetry and elected as deputy to the National Assembly. Another book for children Cartea mea frumoasă (My Beautiful Book) appeared in 1958, and this was followed in 1959 by a limited edition of almost his entire poetic creation. Feted by the Academy of the Romanian People's Republic on the occasion of his eightieth birthday (1960), Arghezi continued to publish extensively. In the years before his death, he brought out a series of small volumes of poetry: Frunze (1961), Poeme noi (1963), Cadente (1964), Silabe (1965), Ritmuri (1966), and Noaptea (1967), together with a number of anthologies of prose writings. In his last years, Arghezi had also been engaged on the final revision of his complete works which, under the title of Scrieri, started to appear in 1962 and of which to date about twenty-five volumes of the projected sixty-one have appeared. Only slightly less than one year after the death of his wife, Tudor Arghezi passed into the world of shadows (July 14, 1967) and after being given national obsequies was buried in the courtyard of his house at Mărțișor.

We have thought it proper to include a fairly substantial bio-bibliography in our introduction, because unhappily Arghezi's poetry and prose is almost totally unknown in the English-speaking world, although his poetry

has won wide recognition elsewhere in Western Europe through an excellent series of translations.¹⁶ It may be that this lamentable state of affairs is partly due to the traditional metrical arrangements of his poetry,¹⁷ since the rhymes and rhythms of verse written in a Romance language are notoriously difficult to render in modern English, especially in view of the fact that modernist trends on poetry on both sides of the Atlantic have generally favored vers libre. This neglect of poets--playwrights and novelists fare much better--from 'minor' countries is also due, we believe, to a complacency bordering on contempt that countries as powerful as Great Britain once was and the United States is habitually display towards literatures uninfluenced by their own or of peripheral interest to the study of large-scale ideological movements. Appreciation of Arghezi's poetry, and of Romanian literature in general, is perhaps most profound in France, although it must be admitted that all too often it is studied there more as an appendage of the cultural

¹⁶Arghezi has been translated into French by André Marcel, into German by Alfred M. Sperger, into Italian by Salvatore Quasimodo, and into Spanish by Rafael Alberti.

¹⁷In his poetic manifesto Vers și poezie, Arghezi was quite receptive to the use of 'free verse,' and indeed several of the poems from Agate negre exhibit metrical experimentation along these lines. Elsewhere, Flori de mucigai and the cycle Sapte cîntece cu gura-nchisă (included in Versuri II) gain considerably from the use of free verse, but the experience is not crucial and Arghezi wrote an apologia in verse for his limited use of this meter--in Iată sufletul lui Walt Whitman (Revista Fundațiilor Regale, September 1936).

glories of France than as an entity in its own right. We offer, then, this study as a small token of the recognition which is long due to Tudor Arghezi, as indeed it is to his contemporaries Ion Barbu and Lucian Blaga.

Critical Considerations

There has been over the years a number of excellent studies of Arghezi's poetry. The first of these, a slim volume by G. Călinescu,¹⁸ rejects the claim, frequently made by the poet's more intemperate admirers, that as a poet Arghezi is the equal of Mihai Eminescu. Although his study is restricted to only a few poems, Calinescu succeeds in revealing certain structural movements--such as the process of osmosis between the spiritual and the material--which have been generally accepted by later exegetes. His remarks on Flori de mucigai, Arghezi's second volume of verse, are also invaluable--though questionable from our own point of view--because he affirms that "the authentic Arghezian poetry, freed of every foreign echo, begins with this cycle," at the same time as pointing out that, for its dialectal features as well as for its special blend of the grotesque and the poignant, Flori de mucigai shares many affinities with Salvatore di Giacomo's plaintive love-lyrics.

Pompiliu Constantinescu, on the other hand, char-

¹⁸Tudor Arghezi: studiu critic (Jassy: "Jurnalul literar," 1939).

acterizes his study as "an attempt to reconstitute a spiritual biography, through a succession of interior cycles."¹⁹ Much of what Constantinescu has to say on Arghezi's religious viewpoint and on the cyclical nature of his cosmic vision seems to us to be of value today, but we have been obliged to caution our readers from time to time against his rather dogmatic distinctions, especially when he assumes that, having been born and educated as an Orthodox, Arghezi would necessarily reflect the view of Constantinople in his poetry. Constantinescu's critical method is also open to question: starting from an analysis of Arghezi's two lyrical novels which deal with a birth-death-resurrection pattern, Ochii Maicii Domnului and Cimitirul Buna-Vestire, he then selects those poems which seem to confirm or bear on this pattern. Constantinescu's study is the most original and creative that has so far appeared, but its very selectivity frequently places individual poems out of context and as a result sometimes does a grave injustice to the total poetic vision of the various cycles.

Without doubt the most useful of the studies which have appeared, before or after the war, is Șerban Cioculescu's Introduction to Arghezi's poetry²⁰ which starts by attempting to clarify the question of the poet's

¹⁹Tudor Arghezi (Bucharest: Fundația pentru literatură și artă "Regele Carol II," 1940).

²⁰Introducere în poezia lui Tudor Arghezi, p. 8.

so-called obscurity and then considers his poetry according to theme. Perhaps the most useful sections in Cioculescu's book are his analyses of "the symbols of interior life" where, with rare linguistic acumen and a lively sense of partisanship, he shows how the syntactical oddities of Arghezi's richly metaphorical language are consonant with Verlaine's advice to "wring the neck of eloquence." His studies of the poet's major symbols--Memory, Time, Space, Faith, Dream, Light etc.--are scholarly, punctuated by important critical insights, but sometimes suffer from a rather superficial treatment, as do the later chapters on such thematic elements as Arghezi's "Traditional Element," "Religious Sentiment," "Ethos," and "Erotica." Cioculescu is at his best when he allows himself space to take an entire poem and explicate it as a total construct.

Of the post-war critics, Ovidiu Crohmălniceanu's monograph²¹ is especially valuable to student and specialist alike, because it is the first historiographic survey of Arghezi's work, as well as being the first serious study written on his poetry from a Marxist viewpoint. Crohmălniceanu's documentation is impeccable; he is fair in his evaluations and does not allow his own a priori assumptions to interfere too much with the 'story' of Arghezi's poetic evolution as revealed in his writings.

²¹Tudor Arghezi (Bucharest: Editura de stat pentru literatură și artă, 1960).

If we were to make any criticism at all, it would be to ask how such a scientific method assists the reader in his understanding of Arghezi's poetry. Without doubt we have been spared a great deal of tedious research in the Academy Library, but lost somewhere in the morass of detail is Arghezi's poetry as it affects the reader: concise, sensorial, richly metaphorical, suave, dramatic, and more often than not contradictory and ambiguous. Crohmalniceanu, we feel, helps the reader to stumble around but rarely through the poetry.

Other major studies of Arghezi's work include monographs by Dumitru Micu²² and Tudor Vianu,²³ the latter a fine study of Cîntare omului from a comparative literature viewpoint. In recent years the more extrinsic aspects of Arghezi's art have been explored; one particularly fruitful example of this new approach is Domitian Cesereanu's study of Arghezi's borrowings from and reworkings of Romanian folklore,²⁴ a book we have found very useful for our examination of the poem Blesteme (Curses). Lastly, two very profound arti-

²²Tudor Arghezi (Bucharest: Meridiane Publishing House, 1965). We have used the English translation of Micu's book, because for reasons we have never been able to fathom it appeared before the Romanian edition.

²³Arghezi, poet al omului-Cîntare omului în cadrul literaturii comparate (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură, 1964).

²⁴Arghezi și folclorul (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură, 1966).

cles²⁵ on selected poems largely from Versuri de seară have been published by Sorin Alexandrescu, who has made intelligent use of the techniques of structural linguistics to resolve a number of metaphorical transpositions that had long baffled even the most attentive reader.

Our own study is restricted to Cuvinte potrivite, Arghezi's first and, we believe, crucial poetic cycle, which was published in 1927, when the poet was already forty-seven years old. Few other poets have of their own volition waited so long to receive the critical acclaim that was their due; even fewer have gone on to new triumphs at so late an age. Not surprisingly, critics have paid more attention to Cuvinte potrivite than they have to Arghezi's other poetic cycles, if only because much of the controversy associated with his poetry was centered around the one hundred and three poems originally published in this first volume.²⁶ Several poems, however, have unaccountably been overlooked or inadequately expounded; among the poems falling into this category,

²⁵"Simbol și simbolizare. Observații asupra unor procedee poetice argheziene," Studii de poetică și stilistică (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură, 1966), pp. 318-69, and analyses of two poems Între două nopți and Un cântec published in Analize literare și stilistice, co-authors Sorin Alexandrescu and Ion Rotaru (Bucharest: Editura didactică și pedagogică, 1967), pp. 94-104.

²⁶A further sixteen poems, now known under the title of Alte cuvinte potrivite were added in the "Fischer"-Galați edition of 1934, Cuvinte potrivite și . . . încrucișate și poezii.

Potirul mistic (The Mystical Chalice), Inscripție pe un pahar (Inscription on a Glass), Vînt de toamnă (Autumn Breeze) have received very superficial treatment. This neglect may have been due partly to the relative obscurity of the symbolic systems encountered in these poems, and partly to the fact that none of the three poems fits easily into any of the thematic or imagistic divisions of Arghezi's poetry previously established by his critics. It is a serious loss and one not easily remedied in the light of current critical trends in Romania.²⁷ Although these poems may not be technically the most perfect or original, they are, we believe, the profoundest expression of Arghezi's poetic vision, and merit a serious re-evaluation.

For our own part, we have devoted the concluding chapter of this study to preparing the ground for such a re-evaluation. Our purpose is not to appraise but simply to understand and to share that understanding

²⁷While many of the younger Romanian critics are responsive to the best research done in the West and frequently exhibit a thoroughly independent frame of mind as far as ideological questions are concerned, they have, for the most part, hesitated to arouse the ire of more authoritarian or dogmatic circles by refuting previously-held positions. This is a far more serious problem than might at first appear, because by conceding certain 'fixed positions' to the remnants of the Old Guard, the more progressive spirits may have succeeded in building up considerable resentment to writers such as Arghezi who have long featured prominently in school textbooks.

with our readers. The approach we employ in explicating these three poems, and indeed in all the poems we have interpreted, is commonly known as a 'close reading' or 'depth analysis.' With the significant exception of Sorin Alexandrescu, this approach has generally not found favor with Arghezian exegetes; their work has tended to stress historiographical or thematic elements, often to the detriment of the organic unity of individual poems. As examples of the extent to which the total import of individual poems can be subverted by critical methodologies which fail to take into account their organic unity, we wish to cite Stihuri (Verses) and Cîntare (Song). Most of Arghezi's critics have recognized the pre-eminence of the mysterious lady who appears in each of these poems, and have associated her with a poetic ideal of womanhood, but it does not seem to have occurred to them that these poems can also be read as explorations of the principle of artistic creativity. And yet, as we hope to show in chapter III, closer attention to the structural details of Stihuri and, above all, to the marked progression which this poem displays, would have revealed that the lady does not function as an instrument of individual salvation but plays a vital role in the universal redemption of mankind through the poetic process.

Although depth analyses of the type we have just indicated inevitably concentrate critical attention on

the original, intrinsic aspects of a given poem, it should not be assumed that vital correspondences between one poem and another can be ignored. Indeed, an individual poem which is part of a whole can never be completely understood unless its filiations with other poems are explored and its position in an evolutionary process established. As far as Cuvinte potrivite is concerned, a number of factors which otherwise might be of great help in tracing the evolution or the general 'movement' of Arghezi's poetic vision are absent: no precise chronology, for example, can be established for approximately half of the poems published in this cycle, and any connections with biographical events is often obscure in the extreme. Thus Arghezi's monastic experiences, as Șerban Cioculescu asserts, are only directly reflected in the poetry he published after the First World War, some sixteen years after his break with the church! Structurally and imagistically, however, a spiritual movement can be discerned; it has been described by Pompiliu Constantinescu as "an integration of the ego in the cosmic order, a subjective accord with that order."²⁸ In his examination of what he terms the pre-structure of Arghezi's verse, Constantinescu

²⁸Tudor Arghezi, p. 241. For our resume of Constantinescu's basic position, outlined in this and the following paragraph, we draw on the critic's own conclusions in the final chapter of his book.

distinguishes two principal elements: man's inescapable bipolarity--he is compared to a world rotating on its axis, revealing as it turns both patches of light and darkness--and a mystical naturism, according to which the natural world which man inherited was uncontaminated by sin and is, therefore, an absolute principle of uninterrupted creativity.

In reducing Arghezi's poetry to the ardent search for a unique and coherent spiritual principle, furthermore, Constantinescu claims that the conflicting tendencies exhibited by the poet-protagonist towards good and evil--a longing to regain divine status as opposed to demonic revolt against the authority of God--are nullified in the very extremes of the struggle, and that pacification (the word that Constantinescu uses) occurs when the individual spirit is reabsorbed into the cosmic rhythm of nature. In such a pacification or reabsorption, the material presence of God in all things is accepted and the poet recognizes himself as the principle of divine will.

Even though we do not have any serious reservations with regard to this critical viewpoint, it should be noted that the "organic mysticism" Constantinescu claims to be present in such poems as Belșug (Abundance), published in 1915, Duhovnicească (Confessional), published in 1922, and the cycle of Psalmi (1923-27) only acquires a truly pantheistic character in the volume

Versuri de seară (1935), and thus lies outside the immediate scope of this study. Indeed, it would be a grave miscalculation to assume that a symbiosis of conflicting forces occurs in Cuvinte potrivite, despite the fact that the cycle concludes with the ecstatic vision of a reborn nature. Mystical or pantheistic elements are present only as potential, and there is certainly no suggestion in Testament, the crucial opening poem to the cycle, that mystical naturism provides the "purifying center" which the poet seeks.

It is true, on the other hand, that we do not give formal consideration to a number of poems written in the mid-twenties, dealing with sickness, birth and death, and in which these facts of everyday existence are implicitly dehumanized and acquire mythic proportions as mysteries unfathomable by the rational mind. In De-a v-ați ascuns . . . (Hide-and-Seek), for example, the father-protagonist presents the journey of death to his children in fable-like terms as a game which everybody plays and which, drawn out over succeeding cycles of growth, marriage and birth, causes only minimal pain to the bereft. Buna-Vestire (The Annunciation) offers a desecularized view of a 'religious' visitation: the dramatization of pregnancy and impending birth attains a state of hallucinatory fervor, in which inexplicably and quite irrationally the girl's body becomes a synecdoche for the creative renewal of all nature. But these

organic mysteries remain unsolved, just as the mystery of God's presence in the Psalmi is never resolved to the poet's satisfaction. The only possible escape, that we believe can be supported by the text, from the ontological labyrinth, in which man is hopelessly lost, lies through the mediating and visionary power of poetry.

It seems evident to us that Arghezi recognizes at a very early stage that poetry is not a Science or a Philosophy, and that the only problems that poetry can explore satisfactorily are poetic ones: that is to say, those problems--necessarily related to the artist's private vision of the world--which exist and have meaning on a special plane of reality, neither mundane nor supramundane, but floating unrestrictedly outside of Time and Space. Our study is entitled "Patterns of Creativity in . . . Cuvinte potrivite," because, as we hope our analyses will show, Arghezi explores from almost every conceivable angle the multifarious nature of human creativity, a task many of the leading poets of our own century set for themselves, and we only need to cite the names of Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Claudel, Valéry and Rene Char; Dylan Thomas, Rilke and Montale--who approached the problem of creativity from their own point of view, in their own manner and with conclusions as surprising and as diverse as human imagination allows--to indicate the extensiveness of this

world-wide preoccupation.

In our opening chapter, we attempt to assess the significance of Testament as a dedicatory poem to Cuvinte potrivite, as well as its relationship to succeeding poetic cycles. In this poem, the poet assumes the collective mask of his long-suffering ancestors and points the way to the coming rejuvenation; he brings to his self-appointed task the perseverance of the craftsman and the extrasensory powers of a vates. In the second chapter, we present a number of poems in which, for one reason or another, the creative task the poet has undertaken does not come to fruition. Chapters III and IV probe the unconscious aspects of the creative impulse which lies at the very center of man's being, and in particular the baffling manifestation of Poetry as an ambivalent female companion, existing both inside and outside his consciousness. In Chapter V we try to grapple with the problem of a series of apocalyptic visions, in which the poetic voice willingly concurs in the total destruction of life as we know it. We have tentatively concluded that this apparently nihilistic urge can only be explained as a desire to return to the beginnings, to restore life to that state of primal flux as the first stage to its eventual reinvigoration and restoration.

The violent oscillations of the human ego between sin and elevation, between matter and spirit--to which we briefly alluded in our discussion of Pompiliu Constantinescu's critical position--form the subject matter of chapter VI. In his quest for certainty and equilibrium, the poet fails to induce God to reveal his presence directly (Psalmi) and consequently is unwilling to shoulder the impossible burden which Christ left for man. The transcendental path to absolute knowledge is thus closed by the perversity of man's relations with his Maker. Instead, the promise of renewal seems to be offered by self-knowledge and self-discipline, by a return to man's primal condition as a necessary prelude to the act of recreation; but it is only a promise and not a certainty, since as Arghezi indicates in the conclusion to Psalmul de taină the hour is late indeed for such a revival.

In the final chapter, we single out the three patterns of renewal or reintegration--all of them linked directly or indirectly to the individual act of poetic creation--which seem to us most representative of Arghezi's poetic vision in Cuvinte potrivite. In Vînt de toamnă, the immanent presence of God as the Prime Creator and the signs of seasonal renewal implicit in the autumnal decay coalesce in the figure of the Child of Futurity, an archetype of innocence or of edenic bliss which acts as a goad on the creative instincts of the poet. The

plenitude which results from individual participation in universal renewal (pattern I) must, however, be shared with man's fellow beings in order that a true benefaction accrue. This is accomplished (pattern II) in Inscriptie pe un pahar by "Poetry as Communion," the growth-in-understanding and fellowship which occurs when successive generations sip at the Fount of Life. Poetry prefigured as a drinking-receptacle (Pattern III) is also an important aspect of the "Metamorphoses of the Chalice." As an emblematic representation of the Mystical Center, embodying the principle of Love Divine, the chalice in Potirul mistic contains a mysterious substance, which is none other than the taină (the arcanum or secret of existence) that acted as a catalyst on the poet's creative instincts in Stihuri. At least as far as Cuvinte potrivite is concerned, it is only by transmitting this taină and by initiating its readers into the mysteries of life that Poetry can offer mankind the chance of wholeness and restoration to harmony.

CHAPTER I

THE TESTIMONY OF ANCESTRAL CONSCIOUSNESS

For an understanding of the spirit which animates Arghezi's poetic creation, a profound acquaintance with the essence of the poet, as reflected in his verses, seems called for. Written in 1927, long after the majority of poems in the cycle, as an apologia for Cuvinte potrivite, Testament tilts Arghezi's universe alarmingly on its axis.

Romanian critics, chief among whom are Ovidiu Crohmălniceanu and Dumitru Micu, assume this poem to be a kind of revolutionary program, so they have linked it to a series of poems published before the First World War, which generally reflect both nostalgia for peasant culture and a desire to overthrow the existing order. We prefer to believe, however, that critical examination of the intrinsic elements of Testament and other poems overtly revolutionary in character will reveal a far greater degree of ideological inconsistency than is at first apparent. In assessing verses such as these, for

instance, from Rugă de seară, critics may have been misled by the enthusiasm with which they were greeted in socialist and anarchistic circles:-

O! dă-mi puterea să scufund
O lume vagă, lîncezîndă.
Şi să ţîşnească-apoi din fund,
O alta limpede şi blîndă.

Oh! Give me the power to submerge
A vague and stagnant world.
And cause another, limpid and mild,
To spring forth from the very depths.

Publishing these verses in Viaţa socială, a review openly sympathetic to a socialist viewpoint, in 1910, N.D.

Cocrea hailed Arghezi as "the most revolutionary poet of . . . [his] time." (Nos. 11-12, December 1910, p. 266.)

It is perhaps in the context of this declaration of principles--which seeks to ally the revolutionary spirit in art with that in socialism--that Crohmălniceanu can claim that:"Even if it has not stamped itself on his whole consciousness, the contact with the socialist movement constitutes for Arghezi a crucial moment in his ideological development before the freeing of the country from Fascism."¹

Interpreted in this way, Testament may occupy a place of honor in the literary history of the rise of socialism in Romania, although the 'revolution' the poet seems to be advocating is, as we hope to indicate, primarily linguistic and artistic in scope. Nevertheless,

¹Tudor Arghezi, p. 34. Crohmălniceanu is referring to Arghezi's involvement in socialist and anarchist in Bucharest and Geneva.

the same stanza from Rugă de seară cited above, not considered separately but in the framework of the entire context of the poem, casts suspicion on the exhaustive research undertaken to establish Arghezi as a progressive in socio-political affairs, and makes it clear that the artist-protagonist is no pragmatist in the field of revolutionary reform but an idealist lost in dreams of an atemporal existence, of eventual reabsorption into the cosmos. Rather than allow his individuality to merge with the collective will of his forefathers, he desires extinction as a time-bound human, bound to the materiality of the earth.

Precisely this willingness to merge the individual with the collective will would appear, at first sight, to be one of the fundamental characteristics of Arghezi's prefatory poem. Seen in this light, Testament may prove to be a partial apostasy of those idealistic principles which, in our view, inform the profoundest of the poems in Cuvinte potrivite,² the father who hands on to his son "Rodul durerii de vecii întregi" ("The fruit of suffering of whole ages past") being a convert to a more vitalistic creed.

Another way of explaining the shift away from the idealistic dreams embodied in Rugă de seară towards a more pragmatic and less idealistic viewpoint might be

²Muntele Măslinilor, Inscriptie pe un pahar, Vinomi tot tu, Potirul mistic, Zăpadă, amongst others.

to describe Testament as a moment of self-definition, a moment when the mature poet contemplates and evaluates the extraordinary powers he has acquired as the voice of his people.

Arghezi presents himself, Demostene Botez noted in a review of Cuvinte potrivite, as ". . . one of the chosen, an instrument through which perhaps speak--contrary to his wishes and without his knowledge--those elements of life which as yet we do not know, about which we can scarcely guess."³ Much the same might be said of other poets of this century, but by alluding to the strange power of the human unconscious to influence the creative process Botez indirectly drew his readers' attention to one of the most original and fascinating aspects of Arghezi's verse: a sense of ancestral or collective continuity which seemingly transcends the individual experience. In exploring the creative spirit that mysteriously seizes the artist, Tudor Arghezi adopted a bewildering variety of poetic viewpoints, constantly expanding his horizons, in the hope no doubt that once the missing part had been found the rest of the puzzle would fall into place. That at times Arghezi saw himself as the prophet or oracle of his people, an instrument through which long-hidden forces of life could come into play, is strikingly confirmed by Testa-

³Demostene Botez, "Cuvinte potrivite," Adevărul literar și artistic, No. 370 (1928), 1-2.

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ment. The poem takes the form of a document addressed by the poet to his son and to be read after his death:-

Nu-ți voi lăsa drept bunuri, după moarte,
Decît un nume adunat pe-o carte.
Înseara răzvrătită care vine
De la străbunii mei pînă la tine,
Prin rîpi și gropi adînci,
Suite de bătrînii mei pe brînci,
Și care, tînăr, să le urci te-așteaptă,
Cartea mea-i, fiule, o treaptă.

Așează-o cu credință căpătîi.
Ea e hrisovul vostru cel dintîi,
Al robilor cu saricile, pline
De osemintele vărsate-n mine.

I'll not leave you anything of value
On my death other than a name printed on a book.
In the rebellious evening that comes down
From my forefathers to you
Over cliffs and through hollows deep,
Up which my ancestors climbed on all fours,
And which, young man, now wait for you to climb,
My book, my son, is a step on the way.

Set it in good faith at the head of the bed,
It's your charter and the first
Of the sheepskin-clad serfs, full
Of the bones poured into me.

From the very beginning the poet's vision outstrips human perceptibility: standing at the crossroads of time, he embraces alike past, present and future "Îți voi lăsa" (future of intention)--"seara răzvrătită care vine / De la străbunii mei" (past become present) "pînă la tine" . . . "să le urci" (future).

The unknown factors in human existence--perhaps most strongly suggested in the ambivalent final line--extend in two directions, not one alone, because man's psyche is not only a repository of past and present, but also of future experience in potential, that intima-

tion of spiritual fulfillment which Gwendolyn Bays has chosen to call the superconscious.⁴

Yet the force of the visionary mode, the investing of the poet-persona with the attributes of a prophet, a voyant who "both past, present and future sees," is immediately diminished by the suggestion of depersonalization ("Nu-ți voi lăsa decît un nume pe o carte").⁵ This may be an oblique reference to the dangers of aesthetic withdrawal encountered by Mallarmé in his concept of absence, a dilemma which, as we shall see in the following chapter, Arghezi faces up to more speci-

⁴The Orphic Vision (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), pp. 7-8. "A realm of contingency and potential spiritual fulfillment, the superconscious may be said to contain the future as an acorn contains an oak. This realm of 'ecstasy' . . . is the region of mystic vision which must be distinguished from the visions of the nocturnal seers." Since Arghezi does not explain the extraordinary state of consciousness which he attains in Testament, we prefer not to distinguish at this point between the 'mystical' and the 'nocturnal' elements in his poetry. Suffice it to say that Testament on the poetic level is the expression of a conscious mind. Man's descent into the abyss of the unconscious, reflected in Nerval's image of a staircase leading down into hell, is here replaced by a series of steps leading upwards to the light. Baudelaire's metaphor of the mind as an immense palimpsest--the uncoded record of total human experience--becomes a document or charter (hrisov is not necessarily a parchment manuscript) in which the amorphous elements of ancestral consciousness are collected together, interpreted and transmitted as an act of revelation.

⁵Depersonalization must be understood in the sense of a fictional surrender of identity, a device whereby Arghezi accentuates the collective spirit that pervades the poem through a weakening of the individual role.

cally in Vraciul; but it is more likely that the depersonalization of the individual act of creation prepares the ground for the collective role the poetic voice assumes in the fourth stanza. The sole testimony, therefore, to the role of the poet in interpreting and transmitting the collective experience of his forefathers will be his name, un nume, seemingly just one of many, on the title-page of his book. Considering the importance placed upon Testament by numerous critics as an ars poetica of socio-political inspiration, this devaluation of the individual act of creation contrasts strangely with the emphasis given to the spirit of creativity in a number of major poems from Cuvinte potrivite, amongst which Stihuri, Cîntare, Jignire etc.

Paradoxically, this suggestion of depersonalization or devaluation of individual creativity heightens the role of spiritual guide or father that the poet also assumes: his book is a step along the road his descendants will travel, as they continue the task, first undertaken by their forbears of climbing "over cliffs and through hollows deep" towards the peaks of human aspiration. Just as Dante the universal pilgrim was first supported in his uncertain steps towards Paradise by the poetic wisdom of Virgil, and later offered his own Commedia as an exemplar for the restoration of universal harmony, so it is the poet's book and not the poet himself which is destined to lead mankind out of the slough of ignorance.

The appearance of the poet's forefathers on the face of the earth--representing in the words of George Călinescu ". . . a fundamental aspect of the world, eternal and enormous germination"⁶--suggests a ritual re-enactment of the emergence into sunlight of pre-human/amphibians, crawling, slithering their way up from the bowels of the earth, which Mircea Eliade describes in a chapter from his book Myths, Dreams and Mysteries. It is unlikely that Arghezi ever came across any of the sources mentioned by Eliade: his forays outside of non Judeo-Christian tradition are largely intuitive.⁷ The cosmic dimensions of these six lines clearly indicate a world vision that goes far beyond ". . . a profession of belief closely approximating that of the 'sower' or 'populist' movements . . . ,"⁸ or of ". . . an entire revolutionary program in literature, . . ."⁹ in which Arghezi has been characterized poetul plugului, the poet of the plough.

⁶Tudor Arghezi, studiu critic, p. 14.

⁷In later chapters dealing with certain aspects of the Arghezian cosmos, we shall attempt to show that his poetical insights often transcend the historical limitations of orthodox Christian belief and reflect, unwittingly perhaps, twentieth-century interests in the totality of human experience, a totality which--needless to say--includes widely differing racial and cultural structures.

⁸Serban Cioculescu, Introducere în poezia lui Tudor Arghezi, p. 79.

⁹Ovidiu S. Crohmălniceanu, Tudor Arghezi, p. 154.

It is true that a revolutionary note is sounded in the phrase seară răzvrătită, the rebellious evening that is the son's heritage of centuries of struggle. But, if the phrase is understood only in a socio-political context, it is not altogether clear why the rebellion should be confined to the evening, unless, that is, the poet wished to suggest that peasant uprisings were fomented in the communal act of sharing experiences after a hard day in the fields. Bearing in mind, however, the decisive influence of Biblical sources on Arghezi's poetry, especially in the twenties, it seems more likely that "răzvrătită" refers to the very first acts of rebellion against divinity by Lucifer and Adam, both of whom defied the will of God at 'even-tide.'¹⁰ In stressing, therefore, the action of uncon-

¹⁰ As far as the reference to Lucifer is concerned, we are indebted to an article by J.E. Shaw, "And the evening and the morning were one day" (Modern Philology, XVIII, 11, March 1921, 113-34), a discussion of Paradiso, XXVII, 136-38, in which Shaw--drawing heavily on St. Augustine's De Civitate Dei (especially Book XI) and on St. Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica (I, Qu. LXVII, Art. IV and VI, and LXVIII, Art. VI in particular)--observes that Lucifer fell, i.e., rebelled in the evening, because when God said "Let there be light" (indicating the actualization of spiritual beings--angels-hitherto in a potential state), Lucifer (and the minority of angels which followed him) refused to contemplate all things in God, that is to say, refused to wait to acquire "morning knowledge" and persisted in contemplating his own beauty, which is to say, "evening knowledge." Shaw goes on to point out that, according to Dante's interpretation of Sts. Augustine and Thomas, Lucifer fell twenty seconds after his creation (Paradiso XXIX), and ". . . then it happened that the 'evening' knowledge of the rebellious angels became darkened, and turned to 'night' 'And God

scious forces on the conscious mind of the poet, Testament presents man in a cosmic as well as a historical setting.

It would follow, therefore, that the book which the poet leaves in his will to the future members of the human race, in the person of his son, acquires the symbolic proportions of a step taken towards the attainment of perfection, towards the re-establishment of harmony in the universe. To this end the poet merely functions as a mediator between divinity and man, in the hope that at some not too distant time the latter will recover the former state of grace lost with Adam.

Lest there be any confusion about the poet's role in Testament, we wish to emphasize that his book is a step on the path to consciousness of the collective self. Just as the poet-persona has allowed his person-

divided the light from the darkness' (that is the good from the bad angels). 'And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.'" Obviously, therefore, evening or night as a temporal consideration only came into being with the fall of Lucifer, thereby creating the first link in a never-ending chain of revolt. After the fall of Lucifer and the rebellious angels, the next 'person' to fall was Adam who fell, according to Dante, six hours after his creation (Paradiso, XXVI). It matters little whether we fix the time of Adam's fall in mid or late afternoon, or as we prefer to believe with the lengthening shadows of twilight, the significant point to remember is that his fall involved the choice of "evening knowledge" over "morning knowledge." To the extent that all sin arises from love of self, the celestial and human paradigms established by Lucifer and Adam at the Dawn of Creation provide a pattern of corruption for all future generations.

ality to merge with the collective spirit, so in his turn the son becomes a figure of universal proportions. The father adjures his son to place the book at the head of the bed, because it is hrisovul vostru cel dintîi, that is to say, the first charter of an oppressed people, of which the son is but one member. The poet speaks as the father of his people; the book is not intended as a moral guide for his son alone.

Two apparently ethnic details in the third stanza emphasize the autochthonous character of the Romanian people. Aside from the sheepskin cloaks which Transylvanian shepherds use to this day in winter-time, and which can be seen depicted on Trajan's Column¹¹ in Rome, the custom of heaping with almost religious care the family's most treasured possessions at the head of the bed immediately strikes the visitor when he is invited inside the immaculately-kept peasant houses where tradition is still observed. Thus--within the context of the poem--the first written record of a people's patrimony joins the pile of richly-embroidered vestments as a reminder of the past¹² and an inspiration for the

¹¹Erected in commemoration of the Emperor Trajan's conquests of the Dacians in 101-2 and 105-6 A.D. It is widely held that the Romanian peoples are directly descended from the Roman colonists who integrated with the indigenous population.

¹²The reader who lacks a close acquaintance with Romanian culture should bear in mind that there is a link between the treasury of ceremonial vestments and

future.

The suggestion of the hidden forces of ancestral or collective consciousness ("pline/De osemintele vărsate-n mine")¹³--the poet is only aware of their presence in the most skeletal form because the sensation of bones poured into the self precedes individual consciousness--is confirmed by a dramatic change in poetic voice in the following stanza:-

Ca să schimbăm, acum, înflia oară,
Sapa-n condei și brazda-n călimară,
Bătrînii-au adunat, printre plăvani,
Sudoarea muncii sutelor de ani.

So that we may now for the first time change
Hoe into pen and ink-pot for the furrow,
Our ancestors have gathered, amongst the cattle,
The sweat of hundreds of years of toil.

the sad history of the Romanian peasantry, especially in Transylvania. The most poignant expression of a troubled past is found in the use of traditional colors: black signifying bereavement and red the price in blood paid for unsuccessful uprisings.

¹³A similar awareness, occurring at a subconscious level, of the individual and collective elements which coexist in the human psyche, would also be true of other modern poets, such as Cesare Pavese. In an interesting article on Pavese's poetry, "The Concept of Time and Language in the Poetry of Cesare Pavese" (Italian Quarterly, VIII, 30, 1964, 14-34), Giose Rimaneli observes that the poet like the primitive individual seems to exist as a function of the community. The inner meaning to the life of the individual has a communal character. "By way of the individual," Rimaneli continues, "the objective unconscious, that is the psychic patrimony of the tribe, was handed down from generation to generation. Vestiges of communal experiences exist in the sub-stratum of the psyche, which Jung calls the collective unconscious. [These vestiges may find expression] . . . in art in the form of archetypes, i.e. images that repeat primordial situations" (page 19).

By integrating the individual and ancestral spirit in the collective voice of this first person plural (what before was only hinted at, now is made explicit), the poet clearly sees his book as a new type of literature, a literature which draws its inspiration from "sudoarea muncii sutelor de ani." The suggestion in these four lines of class struggle or social militancy--so eagerly taken up by Arghezi's post-war critics--is little more than fortuitous in our opinion. In any case, it is not the suggestion of a political program, if indeed there be one, which interests us, so much as the sudden disclosure of what we believe to be the pivotal idea of this poem, the affirmation of certain artistic principles that largely supersede earlier preoccupations with the nature of poetic inspiration.

In Testament the pendulum has swung away from the extremes of spiritual absolutism characteristic of the earlier poems in Cuvinte potrivite to an identification with the commonplace activities of human existence, such as the daily labor in the fields. This slowing down in the violent oscillation between "the twin poles of desire," the desire to attain a state of spiritual perfection and the desire to reduce order to chaos, to bring about the destruction of the world, seen by many of Arghezi's more perceptive critics as one of the

fundamental aspects in Cuvinte potrivite,¹⁴ points the way to a more objective view of reality in Flori de mucigai as well as to the humility and abnegation of self in Versuri de seară.

With the collective nature of his poetry firmly established, another change in poetic voice occurs: the poet speaks in the first person of his role in transforming the ancestral consciousness of his forefathers into words. His role seems essentially that of a master-craftsman, who fashions "cuvinte potrivite" from the primitive speech patterns of herdsmen:-

Din graiul lor cu-ndemuri pentru vite
Eu am ivit cuvinte potrivite
Și leagăne urmașilor stăpîni.
Și, frămîntate mii de săptămîni,
Le-am prefăcut în visuri și-n icoane.
Făcui din zdrențe muguri și coroane.
Veninul strîns l-am preschîmbat în miere,
Lăsînd întreaga dulcea lui puterea.
Am luat ocară, și torcînd ușure
Am pus-o cînd să-mbie cînd să-njure.

From the tongue they used to call the herds
I've culled aptly-fashioned words
And cradles for our sons, future masters all.

¹⁴Despite considerable debate, most critics recognize the dualistic nature of Arghezi's poetry. For Serban Cioculescu, man is the fallen angel of Baudelaire's vision, ". . . either a tabernacle of all virtues, or a drain, into which all ignominies run" (Introducere în poezia lui Tudor Arghezi, p. 74). Vladimir Streinu, on the other hand, in a vigorous rebuttal of the homo duplex distinction made by Cioculescu, claims that almost any poet writing in the wake of Baudelaire can be made to illustrate an intrinsic dualism and that such a distinction does nothing to establish what his (Arghezi's) individual contribution may have been (Pagini de critică literară, Bucharest: Fundația "Regele Carol II," 1938, p. 23). Without seeking to answer Streinu's criticisms in detail, we shall attempt in chapter VI to indicate that

And kneaded for thousands of weeks on end
 I've changed them into dreams and images.
 From rags I made buds and crowns.
 The gathered venom I've changed into honey,
 Leaving intact its sweet potency.
 I took the insult and, lightly spinning it
 around,
 Set it to sing, sometimes to invite, sometimes
 to repel.

The meaning of the key word potrivite is equivocal: there is both a suggestion of physical composition, where words dovetail into a given design, and a suggestion of moral rectitude, that which is proper and fitting in a particular situation. But closer examination of the context establishes beyond all doubt that the phrase cuvinte potrivite is tied syntactically to urmaşilor stăpîni, the poet conjuring up words fitting to future masters not yet born. The tone is prophetic; the poet's task is to bring about a linguistic renewal and so assist mankind along the path leading to universal regeneration.

This process of linguistic renewal is conducted at a markedly tactile level. It was not for nothing that Basil Munteanu called Arghezi ". . . the poet of tactile, brutal and naked perception."¹⁵ A constant feature of Arghezi's poetry is the importance attributed

Arghezi's treatment of man's inherent dualism owes more to Pascal's probing of the human condition than it does to Baudelaire's, and that the poet himself suggests a number of ways in which man may resolve his historical dilemma.

¹⁵Storia della letteratura romana moderna (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1947), p. 323: "Egli è, prima di tutto, il poeta della percezione tattile, bruta e nuda."

to the physical handling of words: words being pounded, kneaded, squeezed, shaped--frământate--just like the clay in a potter's hands or the rough-hewn blocks of stone that the sculptor slowly transforms. Arghezi was fond of comparing, as we shall see in the following chapter, the materialization of imagery he achieved in poetry to the techniques of sculpture or the plastic arts. Rather than a return to the quasi-Parnassian position he took as a young man--"Verse is the geometric crystallization of poetry";¹⁶. . . this interest in the physical properties of the arts can be traced back to his experiences as a stone-mason's assistant (1891-6) and as a jeweler's apprentice during his years in Geneva (1906-10). Moreover, it is significant that, shortly after Cuvinte potrivite was published, Arghezi started to build with his own hands the lovely house and garden at Mărțișor, which was to become just as much of a landmark in Romanian literature as *Yasnaia Poliana* was in Russian. No mean portraitist and illustrator in his own right, Arghezi was also to take later on the necessary examinations to become a master-printer. It is not, therefore, an intellectual prise de position but a fundamental character trait which led him to see a piece of work through to the very finish, and to handle and appraise it as though it were an exquisitely-carved

¹⁶"Vers și poezie," Linia dreaptă, No. 2 (May 1, 1904).

fleur-de-lis from a medieval church.

Arghezi's role in reforming the poetic language of his country has been analyzed in depth by Șerban Cioculescu, Tudor Vianu, and more recently by Sorin Alexandrescu. Cioculescu, for example, has documented most impressively numerous cases of syntactical dislocations and inversions which subtly affect the total import of the poem, as well as a whole host of lexicological innovations, drawing particular attention to Arghezi's careful restoration of words of archaic and popular usage. Perhaps of more immediate concern to us are the pages he dedicates to the poem Ex Libris, where he brings to light a reciprocal process of materialization and volitization of imagery.¹⁷ Such a process, where an interchange of syntactical function leads to a reversal in the notional values of sky and earth, supports G. Călinescu's view of Arghezi's poetry as a ". . . metamorphosis, an osmosis between the spiritual and the material, . . ."¹⁸ and incidentally underlines the inadequacy of a critical viewpoint that sees Testament merely as an instrument of punishment and revenge.

The verses cited above, moreover, are the conse-

¹⁷ Introducere în poezia lui Tudor Arghezi, pp. 33-34.

¹⁸ Tudor Arghezi, studiu critic, p. 21.

quence of an ars poetica which paradoxically reverses the normal chronology of the act of creation: from cuvinte potrivite the poet fashions dreams and images (visuri și icoane). The laboriously acquired mastery of words thus precedes the act of literary conception implied in dreams and images. "The 'expressive activity' whereby impressions are 'formed and elaborated' and made amenable to intuition, . . . the process of elementary symbol making; . . ." in the words of Susanne Langer,¹⁹ is apparently closer to the surface of the artist's consciousness than is this molding or kneading of words.

With his openly-expressed hostility to all forms of intellectualism, Arghezi was ill-disposed to any attempt to establish a rigid conceptual framework for a work of art, as is evident in his reply to Ion Barbu's review of Cuvinte potrivite, in which he fails to appreciate the serious 'philosophical' questions which underlie his opponent's trenchant observations. Nevertheless, as poet and thinker, he returned again and again to the problem of artistic creation, without ever being able to give a satisfactory explanation for the mysterious principle of fecundity with which his mind grappled. No Romanian writer of this century has committed to paper his thoughts on art with such regu-

¹⁹Feeling and Form (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 376.

larity as Tudor Arghezi. It is not our intention to rehearse here his speculations in discursive form, but to share his insights as a working poet. Even if all the ambiguities of Testament cannot be resolved, and especially of this difficult third stanza, where Arghezi is the interpreter of the suffering of the Romanian peasantry just as Alfred de Vigny was in L'Esprit pur of the noble spirit of the knight-errant who fought in the name of France, it does seem clear that the expressive activity involved in articulating the seminal idea is not necessarily the same as the process of linguistic assimilation and sublimation implied in the pounding and kneading of words. As an individual artist in his own right, Arghezi obviously acquired his poetic vocabulary over many years of technical experiment, in which the experience of one poem would inevitably condition, positively or not, the next, despite his claim to start each day afresh.²⁰ Yet, something more is being hinted at here, far surpassing the conventional exertions of the homo faber, plying chisel and file to the raw materials of his consciousness.

²⁰ Consider the following declaration of spontaneity in art from "Rugăciunea lui Cocó," Bilete de papagal, No. 116 (June 22, 1928), pp. 1-2: "Never have I given thought on the evening before to what I'm going to write the following day, and every day, for thirty years on end, I've taken away my hand from my heart and my mind and pressed it on a sheet of white paper, in the dark, like a stamp of blood."

Once again we feel this linguistic activity occurs in the meeting, at a pre-conceptual level, of the slow-burning wrath ("Zace mînia bunilor mei") of ancestral consciousness with the spirit of individual creativity. Cesare Pavese seemed to be referring to precisely this level of subconscious activity, when he wrote that ". . . the fundamental basis of poetry may be a subconscious awareness of the importance of those bonds of sympathy, those biological vagaries, that are already alive in embryo, in the poet's imagination before the poem is begun."²¹ With Arghezi, poetry is concerned with the transformation of mythic experience--the collective experience of an entire community or society--into the individual and creative experience of dream. The medium whereby this transformation is effected is of course language; the point at which the language of mythic experience is assimilated by the human consciousness would seem to mark the termination of this pre-conceptual activity. The language ("graiul lor cundenmuri pentru vite") handed down from one generation to another embodies the myths central to the consciousness of all mankind.

Recent research in structural linguistics²²

²¹The Burning Brand, a translation of Il mestiere di vivere by A.E. Murch (New York: Walker & Company, 1961), p. 27.

²²Our speculations at this point, and in the remainder of the paragraph, were prompted by a fascinating article by John Davy, "The Chomsky Revolution,"

indicates that, if the mystery involved in the intelligible growth of language could be resolved, the key to the understanding of the human consciousness would lie within our grasp. Language is "a mirror of consciousness." The "universal grammar," which seems to be operating at the very center of our language-learning ability, is, Noam Chomsky claims, an inborn and not environmental quality. Because it is inherited, the inner structure of the mind transcends individual experience and points the way to collective or ancestral consciousness. Moreover, this inner structure of the mind may be more apparent in the language of illiterates, such as the peasants from whose stock Arghezi sprang, in much the same manner as the language of children embodies a number of fundamental relationships not patterned after adult speech, a childish lingo which is an expression of grammar.²³

Following on from Arghezi's subconscious awareness of language as communal experience, the forming of visuri și icoane (dreams and images) marks a preliminary stage in a private and individual assessment of these vestigial structures of the collective unconscious. Principles of selection and rejection operate: "biolo-

published in the Observer (London), August 10, 1969, p. 22.

²³Since Davy in his article cited above on "The Chomsky Revolution" does not cite his sources--the article being intended for the general reader--we in turn have not tried to distinguish between Davy's comments and those of the writers on whom he draws for his material.

gical vagaries" and "bonds of sympathy" become subject to the controlling force of the individual mind. Literature is man-made and every stage in its development involves an act of human conception and subsequent articulate expression of that conception. When the poet-persona claims to have made "buds and crowns" from "rags" and to have changed into honey the poison laboriously gathered, without reducing its sweet potency, the self-sufficiency, the organic unity of the work of art is being stressed. Critics such as Crohmălniceanu seem to maintain that a re-evaluation of verbal beauty naturally accompanies a social transformation in which the previously-established hierarchy of values is turned upside-down. We do not necessarily agree. The real point at issue, we feel, is whether this change in aesthetic values is imposed from without--as a result of evolutionary pressures--or whether it occurs within the individual creative mind, as part of that process of artistic transformation which, though it may well seem to respond directly to the outside world, is primarily concerned with a tradition of virtual, non-actual experience. There is a curious paradox involved here: the immediate subject matter of poetry is poetry itself, because any poem is of its very nature an extension of other poetic frames of reference, that is to say, of that poetic tradition which is the heritage of every poet. And every poem written is also the reflection of a changing

world, because that state of flux is in turn mirrored in the artist's individual consciousness.

Ovidiu Crohmălniceanu adheres to the idea of artistic change from without: "The poet of the plough first of all concentrates here [in the third stanza of Testament] an entire literary program, revolutionary in spirit, which forces the idea of tradition back to its material sources. That art which he masters . . . is the final, sublimated result of human effort carried on from one generation to another by his [the artist's] parents, simple peasants engaged in driving herds of cattle. . . ." ²⁴ In a sublimated form, then, if we understand Crohmălniceanu correctly, art is the end result of a long and arduous historical process: art, as it were, is the final arbiter and passes down the verdict of time on human performance in the past, and the artist pari passu performs the faithful task of the chronicler. But poetry, we believe, is not the end result of historical processes; rather, it is a parallel process which occasionally converges with isolated moments in history through the consciousness of the artist. The point at which filthy rags become living buds and crowns occurs within the mind of the artist, at the moment of creation. Although the most commonplace or scabrous objects can acquire verbal

²⁴Tudor Arghezi, p. 154.

beauty through a meditative distillation, they are far removed from their original context in real life. To the extent that the images and symbols formed from these objects are points of reference within the private world of the poet and are only made public insofar as he chooses, we agree with Herbert Read that: "Poetry is properly speaking a transcendental quality--a sudden transformation which words assume under a particular influence--and we can no more define this quality than we can define a state of grace."²⁵

Nevertheless, a poet does respond to the exigencies of his time--he would hardly be human if he did not--and the "particular influence" to which Read refers may very well derive from or coincide with a crucial moment in history. The point at issue is the note of causality which Crohmălniceanu injects into his analysis of Testament, not the coincidence or convergence between the private and the public to which Arghezi may be alluding when he writes:-

Am luat cenușa morților din vatră
 Și am făcut-o Dumnezeu de piatră,
 Hotar înalt, cu două lumi pe poale,
 Păzind în piscul datoriei tale.

I've gathered up the ashes of the dead
 From the hearth and made a God of stone,
 A high boundary, with two worlds at its feet,
 Watching over the summit of your duty.

²⁵"The Nature of Poetry," Collected Essays in Literary Criticism (London: Faber, 1938), p. 41.

As a challenge to prejudice, a goad to conscience, Arghezi's poetry constantly brings the reader into a state of communion, a sharing of experience. Only in this light can his boastful assertion to have created a God of stone--with the obvious suggestion of a pagan idol keeping a malevolent eye on propitiatory procedures--be sympathetically received. If the stone God represents the guardian spirit of Arghezi's poetry, it also spans time, linking "two worlds," the world of the past ("the ashes of the dead"), and the world of the future (the duties of the universal son) in a fictional present of perdurable form.

The penultimate stanza is, in most respects, a repetition and intensification of the imagery encountered in the key third stanza:-

Durerea noastră surdă și amară
 O grămadă pe-o singură vioară,
 Pe care ascultînd-o a jucat
 Stăpînul, ca un țap înjunghiat.
 Din bube, mușgaiuri și noroi
 Iscat-am frumuseți și prețuri noi.
 Biciul răbdat se-ntoarce în cuvinte
 Și izbăvește-ncet pedepsitor
 Odrasla vie-a crimei tuturor.
 E-ndreptățirea ramurei obscure
 Ieșită la lumină din pădure
 Și dînd în vîrf, ca un ciorchin de negi,
 Rodul durerii de vecii întregi.

Our deaf and bitter pain
 I've heaped on the strings of one lone violin,
 To which, when he heard it,
 The master capered like a stuck goat.
 From boils, mildew and dirt
 I've brought forth new beauties and values.
 The whip, long-endured, returns as words
 And redeems, slowly punishing,
 The living offspring of everybody's crime.

It is the straightening of the obscure branch,
 Come out into the light from the wood
 And bearing at its tip, like a cluster of warts,
 The fruit of suffering of whole ages past.

Instead of the exhaustive work of kneading and fashioning words, the poet is now to accumulate, to amass the collective sufferings of his people on one single instrument, the poem. At a certain point, then--however deeply the poet feels and shares the bitterness of his ancestors--the controlling mind of the artist intervenes. The process of meditative distillation, which we have referred to before, is of course implicit, but the specific image that Arghezi employs--the pain is heaped (collected and reformulated) on the four strings of a violin--seems to suggest the techniques of transposition. The closest analogy would be that of a composer who, in adapting an orchestral suite for solo piano, is forced to restrict, reduce and make the music more concise in order to conform to the limited range of the instrument.

This typically Arghezian obsession with the techniques of transposition from one medium to another, however, at once gives way to a note of pride in the poet's own active imagination. The "new beauties and values" that the poet claims to have evoked from "boils, mildew and dirt" suggests, on the one hand, a sense of creative accomplishment and, on the other, a firm confidence in the judgment of posterity. The harsh materializations and verbal immoderacies that these new

beauties and values sometimes contain are evidently designed to make the reader flinch, as at the lash of a whip. Although, in Arghezi's poetic figure, "the whip, long-endured, returns as words," the poem--the artistic expression of these words--is not an act of retribution--a violent Nemesis visited on the heads of the descendants of the former ruling classes who caused so much misery and torment in their time--but an act of collective redemption (Și izbăvește-ncet pedepsitor). In it and through it, the sons of the innocent as well as of the guilty ("The living offspring of everybody's crime") are purged of their common crime. Failure to appreciate the theological soundness of Arghezi's position and to see that the crimes of the gentry are merely one historical manifestation of the original sin of Adam, for which all mankind must shoulder the responsibility, possibly led Crohmălniceanu (Tudor Arghezi, p. 155) to belittle the work of pre-war exegetes who laid stress on the spirit of Christian forgiveness with which Testament concludes. In this process of purgation and redemption, "the living offspring"--whom Arghezi compares to the branches of a tree, blighted and misshapen after centuries of improper growth--will be brought forth into the light (presumably out of the 'wood' of sin and ignorance) and made whole once more.

The verses "Din bube, mucegaiuri și noroi / Iscat-am frumuseți și prețuri noi" (From boils, mildew and

dirt / I've brought forth new beauties and values) apparently parallel one of the precepts of Baudelaire's aesthetics, namely that "De la laideur et de la sottise il [le poète] fera naître un nouveau genre d'enchante-ments."²⁶ But Baudelaire is directing our attention to an ideal beauty outside of reality, by the dissolution of living forces, a process not unlike Pater's "quickened, multiplied consciousness," whereas Arghezi is giving expression to a living reality: the reality of the human mind with all those primeval instincts and archetypal patterns that defy formulation in arbitrary terms. For both writers, Art ultimately provides the means of imposing some semblance of order on the chaos of the mind. Baudelaire starts with the concrete object only to open up amazing perspectives and invite secret new intuitions, each impression of the visible world striking up a 'correspondence' within the heart and mind of the poet, Arghezi, on the other hand, juggles the analogical possibilities of words rather than allowing his mind to expand visually; through a process of distillation he finally arrives at the natural image, which is the 'objective correlative' of his interior vision.

It is by now a commonplace in Arghezian criticism that the so-called estetica urîtului (aesthetics

²⁶L'Art romantique (Geneva: Éditions d'art Albert Skira, 1945), p. 350.

of ugliness) advocated in these lines is only partially a retrospective justification for the verbal immoderacy and brutal materialization of imagery in poems such as Blesteme and Triumful that aroused frenetic opposition amongst the academic critics.²⁷

The final stanza provides some ironic reflections on the self-appointed task of redemption assumed in the first part of the poem:-

Întinsă leneșă pe canapea
Domnița suferă în cartea mea.
Șlova de foc și slova făurită
Împărechiate-n carte se mărită,
Ca fierul cald îmbrățișat în clește.
Robul a scris-o, Domnul o citește,
Făr-a cunoaște că-n adîncul ei
Zace mînia bunilor mei.

Indolently stretched out on the sofa,
The princess suffers in my book.
Letters of fire and letters forged
Coupled in my book here are married,
Like the hot iron in the pincers clenched.
What the serf wrote, the prince now reads,
Without knowing that in its depths
Lies the wrath of my forefathers.

Considerable ambiguity prevails: in the second verse the preposition in not only suggests that the Princess suffers as an element in the total consciousness of the past--she too it must be remembered is "the living off-

²⁷In repudiating grave charges of obscenity, originating from Nicolae Iorga and his acolytes, Șerban Ciolescu was quick to point out that of those poems included in Cuvinte potrivite on its publication in 1927 only a few--amongst which he names Blesteme, Prințul Triumful and one of the Psalms--reflect the unpremeditated virulence of Arghezi's polemical writings in the political arena over the previous thirty years (Introducere în poezia lui Tudor Arghezi, p. 41).

spring of everybody's crime" (Osdrala vie-a crimei tuturor)--but she also suffers from without, by reading about the tribulations visited on the heads of the poor and unfortunate by her ancestors. Deprived of their vigor and lust for power, the modern daughter of the ruling classes perhaps reads the book merely to gratify a sense of latent masochism: she suffers, but in surroundings of luxury her experience is not actual but fictive. Similarly, her father, the last of a line,²⁸ fails to associate the sublimated expression of suffering he reads in the book with the accumulated anger of ancestral consciousness. Arghezi seems to suggest, therefore, that the virulence of the venom so carefully preserved in honeyed words may pass over the head of the party addressed.

If Testament proclaims, as Crohmălniceanu has insisted, ". . . a new modality of social militancy in poetry," (Tudor Arghezi, p. 155), it is singularly unsuccessful in its appointed task. Indeed, for art to succeed as propaganda, the artist must inevitably compromise a number of aesthetic principles: the need for

²⁸It is not clear why Arghezi distinguishes so carefully between the male (Domnul) and female (Domnița) descendants of the ruling class, unless it is to reinforce the irony of his own failure to communicate "the wrath of [his] forefathers" to his aristocratic readers. Writing in 1927, Arghezi could hardly have foreseen that the overthrow of the old order after the Second World War would produce a generation of critics absolutely

blatant emotional appeal in a discursive language of wide acceptance takes precedence over a symbolic language which establishes a series of correspondencies or analogies beyond the immediate grasp of any one mind. With this final sombre image of failure in communication, of man's inability to comprehend a situation of universal significance, the Arghezian aerolite fails to achieve orbit, fails to penetrate the world of his contemporaries, and is left to wander eternally in space. As so often with Arghezi the trajectory of the poem neither achieves a satisfactory resolution nor comes full circle; the poem closes on a moment of ambiguity. And this is as it should be, in our opinion, since Testament is only a step along the way to universal regeneration; it is not the harbinger of an impending Millenium and political expediency provides no redress for its inadequacies in this respect.

At first sight, it might be argued that the concluding stanza of Testament is seriously flawed, not only because Arghezi fails to differentiate sufficiently between the reactions of the princess and the prince, but also because he juxtaposes the problem of the poem's receptivity with a further statement on the

certain in their own minds that the ambiguities in Testament had been eliminated by the establishment of a People's Democracy, insofar as there were no longer any aristocrats around to misinterpret the poem's socio-political significance.

creative process. On one level, the coupling of the letters of fire with the forged letters probably refers to the element of spontaneity in any act of poetic creation and to the discipline necessary in expressing the seminal idea in symbolic terms accessible to the attentive reader, and is thus somewhat anticlimactic at this point. But, on another level, ". . . the principle of joining together tradition with innovation in art so as to unite the crude, direct expression ("slova de foc") with one which has been refined, elaborated, through a highly-developed literary technique ("slova făurită"), . . ." ²⁹ also resumes the idea of the merging of the individual and collective consciousness, because there operates at a subconscious level, as we have tried to indicate, bonds of sympathy and biological vagaries that demand to be explored in art.

In conclusion, two points concerning the relationship of Testament with Arghezi's other poems, need to be made. Firstly, the warts and mildew brought to light in Testament will appear as new values in subsequent poetic cycles, above all in Flori de mucigai. On the whole they are not characteristic of Cuvinte potrivite. Only in one very limited sense then is this a retrospective justification: in that the majority of the poems published in Flori de mucigai had already

²⁹Ovidiu Crohmălniceanu, Tudor Arghezi, p. 155.

appeared in periodicals by 1927. Since it is accepted by almost all of Arghezi's exegetes that Testament was not written until shortly before the publication of Cuvinte potrivite in 1927, we can affirm with a clear conscience that Testament stands not so much as an apologia for Arghezi's first published cycle of poems as for his entire opus.

In other words, this dedicatory poem looks into the future from the experience of the past. To limit the poetic insights and programmatic assumptions to the past, to those poems published in Cuvinte potrivite, would constitute a radical rejection of literary values, rather than the partial act of apostasy suggested earlier, since it would imply that Arghezi wished to denigrate the lofty ideals his poet-magician espouses in Vraciul, a poem we shall consider in the following chapter, as well as repudiate the large number of poems written before the First World War which explore the more esoteric aspects of the act of poetic creation.

Secondly, the text of the crucial third stanza, where "venom is turned to honey" and "insults made to invite or repel," clearly vindicates the alteration of harsh and gentle moods that Tudor Vianu observed in his short monograph on Arghezi's poetry.³⁰ To cite the verbal excesses of Blesteme, without recalling the atmos-

³⁰Tudor Arghezi, pp. 49-51.

phere of child-like innocence, the delicacy and whimsicality of poems such as Cîntec de adormit Mițura cînd era mică, the exquisite sensuality of Morgenstimmung or the playful duoșie of De-a v-ați ascuns, would do grave injustice indeed to the range and profundity of Arghezi's world.

CHAPTER II

MODES OF CREATIVITY: FAILURES AND SUCCESS

The partial failure in communication alluded to obliquely in the final stanza of Testament raises fundamental problems concerning the poet's function and the nature of the poetic medium. While feeling the need to stress the autonomy of poetry and so preserve the integrity of a vocation capable of offering fresh perspectives on life, Arghezi as a creative artist was constantly faced with the problem of drawing a line between referential and non-referential experience. He had to decide, in short, when a rigorously-maintained literary organicism might become self-defeating, because his readers would be unable to bridge intuitively the gap between his and their world view.¹

At times the distance between these levels of experience would become so great--witness Arghezi's attitude to the senseless killing in the First World

¹It is a problem that Murray Krieger has explored persuasively in The New Apologists for Poetry (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1956). See especially the introductory section where he works towards a poetics that would justify retrospectively his analysis of Donne's The Canonization.

War--that the poet withdrew into his ivory tower and refused to allow his creative energies to be dissipated in a futile attempt to communicate with an uncomprehending public. Such a refusal is the dominant idea of Vraciul (The Magician), where the poet imagines himself to be a demiurge,² armed with immense powers to control human destiny. The creative impulse in this poem, it should be noted, originates within the being of the poet; he does not claim to be divinely inspired, nor is he the oracle for the collective consciousness of the Romanian masses, as might be inferred from a reading of Testament. In an attempt to explain the mysterious spirit of creativity that operates through his mind, Arghezi boldly lays claim to powers far exceeding those of normal men, and takes an uncompromising stand on the issue of the ontological gap which exists between his state of omniscience and the dull understanding of mankind.

The poem opens on a note of supreme confidence; the voice of the poet-magus catalogues the seemingly endless creative forces at his command:-

Am un bazar de zări și firmamente
De cioburi noi de lună și planete.
Aștri defuncți atîrnă de păreți,
Împărecheați cu zeci de instrumente,

²By demiurge we wish to suggest a creator who fashions and shapes pre-existent matter rather than the original creator, the Great Artificer, who produced out of nothing.

I have a bazaar of horizons and firmaments
 Of new fragments from the moon and stars.
 Defunct stars hang from my walls,
 Coupled with tens of instruments,

The apparent reference to the Pythagorean tradition, according to which 'the harmony of the spheres' depends on the magic power of number--number is ". . . a Unity of many mixed elements and an agreement between disagreeing elements (Philolaus, Fragment 10)"; . . .³ may help to explain the signs of decay and fragmentation evident in the artist's workshop. At some stage in the evolution of the universe, it would seem, the close relationship between musical notes, numbers and the orbits of the planets (which is a major tenet of Pythagoreanism) was disrupted and disunity occurred. The evidence of this disunity lies in the redundant and fragmented cosmic bodies which are scattered around the workshop. The planetary system of which the Earth is a part is not yet extinct, but it is clearly dying: the image of the new fragments (further signs of decay) that have fallen from the Moon and the planets is possibly suggested by the shape the Moon takes during its phases.

It is significant that the stars which hang from the magician's walls are "coupled with tens of instruments," presumably musical instruments. The stars may be defunct--a word which does not necessarily

³Cited in Ernst Cassirer's The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume 2: Mythical Thought (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1955), p. 151.

suggest complete extinction so much as failure to function--but the means for their restoration lie close at hand, in the very instruments with which they are coupled. When people have lost their faith and God fails to make his presence known, as we shall see in the cycle of Psalmi, only Art offers mankind a means of redemption. It is only necessary for the poet's hand to touch the strings of these instruments--Arghezi often spoke of his poetic talents in terms of playing the violin--for the stars to resume their roles as beacons in the sky and for harmony to be restored to the entire universe. But it is a gesture, as we learn in the succeeding stanzas, that the poet-magician refuses to make.

In addition to his collection of cosmic bodies, the magician has at his disposal a vast repository of artistic treasures and historical bric-à-brac, perhaps the dead weight of tradition (second stanza). This obsession with the minute things of everyday existence is continued in the following two stanzas; it emphasizes the pose of defiant isolation which reaches its climax in the concluding section of the poem, where the poet claims, despite his omnipresence as a force both within and above human existence, to be unmoved by the joys and tribulations of life on earth. In his ability to use "balances, scales and measures . . . and fine sieves," the poet once more presents himself as a master-crafts-

man (compare Testament); but with a difference, since his resources are not limited to the manual skills of an artificer: with his bunch of magic keys no door remains closed to him and with a set of precision tools no secret of nature remains undisclosed. Logically developed--not a procedure Arghezi would have viewed with much favor--a poetry so finely sifted and so accurately measured would bar all imprecision and ambiguity. Such a claim, then, is pure poetic conceit; but recognition of this in no way detracts from the total impression of super-human, incredible powers at work.

Poetry, or more explicitly the creative impulse in potential, is a magical art; it can "anoint popes, usurpers and kings" at will. Drawing on the deepest reserves of human experience, Arghezi reminds us, the formal expression of this creative impulse in verse can embrace whole eras stretching back to the primal moment. In Arghezi's poetic figure, these stand condensed in flagons, presumably waiting to be uncorked, rather like Proust's memories sealed off in separate jars, which bring us, when they are released, ". . . un air nouveau, précisément parce que c'est un air qu'on a respiré autrefois, cet air plus pur que les poètes ont vainement essayé de faire régner dans le Paradis et qui ne pourrait donner cette sensation profonde de renouvellement que s'il avait été respiré déjà, car les vrais paradis

sont les paradis qu'on a perdus."⁴ The idea of the concentration of the poetic image adds yet another dimension to the function of the poet: he is now an alchemist, transforming, distilling and sublimating matter.

These concerns for the mechanics of artistic creation, however, suddenly give way to a boastful declaration of almost limitless powers. The poet-magician presents his art as a force of cataclysmic proportions, which may occasion a terrifying response in the natural world, such as occurred on the death of Christ:-

Un semn, și tîmpla cerului se-apeacă.
Un semn, și uraganul s-a trezit.
Un semn, și neamuri noi s-au zămislit!
Dar semnul mîna mea nu vrea să-l facă!

One sign, and the catapetasma of Heaven crumbles,
One sign, and the hurricane is roused.
One sign, and new races are created!
But that sign my hand disdains to make!

The refusal of the demiurge to redeem mankind is continued in the following two stanzas. A remedy for "barely-felt pains," poetry is the elixir so earnestly sought by the "frail world [that] all around is born and dies." Just as in the first of these stanzas the solace of immortality is lost to man by default, presumably because he is ignorant of the existence of such a panacea, so in the second the poet-magician withholds the redemp-

⁴Marcel Proust, A la recherche du temps perdu, Vol. VIII: Le temps retrouvé (Paris: Gallimard, 1927), ch. 3, 13.

tion that would accompany his creation of a second Adam (prefigured in the neamuri noi s-au zămislit cited above), since mankind has as yet not made formal recognition of his immense creative powers:-

Pe șesul negru cu lumini de ceară
Pot frământa din tină și scuipat
Un nou Adam, gigantic și nerăzbunat.
Aștept, îngenuncheată, plebea să mi-l ceară.

On the black plain with waxen lights
I can knead from slime and spittle
A new Adam, gigantic and unavenged.
I wait for the kneeling plebs to beg me for him.

Adam would be created anew in conditions that suggest the end of the world, the resumption of primal chaos: the only light by which the Demiurge can see to work (once again the image of kneading that we met in Testament) emanates from candles or tapers, such as those habitually lit for a Requiem or a burial service. Before the new world can be created, the old world must be destroyed; thus the elements have returned to the state of inertia and materiality that preceded the act of separation in Genesis.

No less obscure than this hint of primal confusion are the epithets used to qualify the new Adam: gigantic and unavenged. Why, we might ask, should this new Adam display qualities infinitely superior to those given to Original Man by God Himself? Can it be that the Demiurge is mounting an indirect challenge to God's authority by creating an Adam capable once more of rebelling against Divine Will, but on a hitherto

undreamed of scale? The answer would seem to be that at certain moments Arghezi feels his creative powers as a poet to be so vast and unlimited that his persona can properly aspire to better the Divine Order.

But mankind is woefully unprepared for an exercise of such munificence, and all the poet's contempt is summed up in the word plebea, a contempt which has all the force of Horace's disdainful remark: Odi profanum vulgus, et arceo! This superbly arrogant gesture represents one extreme in Arghezi's creative egocentricity. Powers as vast as these will be approached elsewhere with due humility, and more often than not ascribed to the influence of the Prime Mover of all things.⁵

The penultimate stanza introduces a favorite theme in Arghezi's prose writings: the need for the artist to preserve the inviolability and purity of his creation.⁶ Art is a vocation, a spiritual mission; having witnessed the devaluation of the Gospel story in the world at large (this we suggest is the meaning of "the living God" sold at knockdown prices in the market-square), the artist declines to sell his soul to the

⁵ An aspect commented on below with reference to Heruvic and Psalm I.

⁶ Examples are too numerous to cite, but the dignified tone maintained in "Cum se scrie românește" (Cugetul românesc, No. 1, January-February 1922, pp. 99-104) is representative.

highest bidder, since his one concern is to maintain his integrity as a creative force:-

Eu mă fălesc că nu vînd ca atîția
Tezaurile mele: Nici nu știu
Dacă pe piață Dumnezeu cel viu
S-a ieftenit mai mult decît tărîtea.

I pride myself that unlike so many I do not
sell
My treasures: Nor do I know
Whether in the market-square the living God
Has become cheaper than husks of corn.

In a hostile but important review of Cuvinte potrivite,⁷ Ion Barbu, the Romanian poet and mathematician, defined the creative process as un act clar de narcisism (a clear act of narcissism), by which he meant an indwelling of the creative spirit, the restriction of poetry to an ideal world of essences,⁸ a world he found singularly lacking in Arghezi's poetry up to 1927. To follow such a poetic ideal--which owes a great deal to Mallarmé's theory of absence (the perfection which is never actually present, the silence which is more musical than any song)--the writer must sever all connections with the cruder manifestations of life and with-

⁷"Poetica domnului Arghezi," Ideea europeană (November 1, 1927), pp. 2-3.

⁸Failure, however, to represent pure ideas even by evoking the least contaminated of material contingencies may give rise to a sense of artistic sterility. In the premonition of disruption, of loss of innocence, which pervades Barbu's own poem Oul dogmatic (The Dogmatic Egg), there is a parallel to the anguished esotericism of Mallarmé, whose sterile Herodiade, in a clear act of narcissism once more, preserves her icy beauty for her own eyes alone and disdains all contact with the outside world.

draw to his ivory tower. It was characteristic of Arghezi to recognize at quite an early stage that the denial of feeling and Christian fellowship resulting from this pernicious form of aesthetic withdrawal led to artistic impotency.⁹ In Vraciul, however, the poet-magician is unable to choose between the febrile, teeming world below and the inviolate seclusion his place in the heavens brings:-

Mormint închis la zgomotul de-afară,
Contemplan-a cârțiților bucurie
Lingându-și puii cu idolatrie,
Băloși, sub steaua mea polară.

Like a grave closed to outside noise
I behold the joy of the mole
Licking its young with idolatry,
Slobbering, under my pole-star.

Whereas in Barbu's Oul dogmatic (The Dogmatic Egg), the poet creates only to regret bitterly,¹⁰ Arghezi's magician, in a moment of recidivism, allows the creative moment to pass, because he despises men

⁹Witness the cycles Versuri de seară (1935) and Hore (1939), where the sense of reintegration with a nature blessed by the presence of God develops a theme that is present in Cuvinte potrivite as early as 1915 (Belșug). This sense of oneness and universal fellowship apparently parallels Arghezi's real-life interest in husbandry and home-building in the late twenties, as well as the maturity that fatherhood and a happy marriage brought.

¹⁰In Oul dogmatic, the egg symbolizes pure potentiality and is only marred by its yolk, in which Barbu recognizes the moment of conception, the beginning of registered time and mortal existence. It might be noted that here too there is a note of Horatian contempt similar to the moment in Vraciul for the seething mass of dull humanity (Om șters, uituc: Dull, forgetful man).

who, failing to resist the blind instinct of reproduction, can lavish such idolatrous care on their young, quite oblivious to the impermanence of the relationship.¹¹

Especially noteworthy in this final stanza is the basic opposition between man, dull-witted and a prey to brute instinct, and the ethereal, spiritual world of the poet, exemplified in the concrete symbols of the common mole and the Pole-Star. The latter is a frequent symbol in Arghezi's poetry for the ideal world of human aspiration.¹² The mole, on the other hand, is one of the lowliest beings in the animal hierarchy, since it is a creature which mainly lives underground, and is therefore deprived of the light of the Sun and the Stars. The suggestion seems to be that just as the mole, naturally blind, is deficient in its intellectual faculties--because obviously these rely to a considerable extent on visual powers--so man walks the face of the

¹¹In the treatment of the disparity that exists between man's susceptibility to purely instinctual drives and the poet's omniscience, Vraciul resumes the principal theme of Mihai Eminescu's Luceafărul (properly speaking the Morning Star, but Eminescu seems to have confused it with Hesperus), where Lucifer finally refuses to exchange the immortality which is his by right as a celestial body for the transitoriness of Cătălina's love, after having been witness to a similar scene of human passion. Compare also Vino-mi tot tu (Come to me again) which is clearly a reworking of Luceafărul.

¹²Compare Inscripție pe o casă de țară (Inscription on a country-house), Heruvic (Hymnal), Rugă de vecernie (Prayer at Vespers), as well as Vino-mi tot tu cited above.

earth blind to the potentiality of being.

Man is blind, but even in his blindness he is a creator. For the poet, the mole-human's act of procreation, however subterranean, instinctual and inferior it may be, remains an act of creation. Interpreted as an essential life-force, it gives both meaning and joy to existence.

The opposition between the magician's contemplative, philosophical vision and the active vision of the mole-human in this concluding stanza is nothing more than the opposition between solitary, negative sterility, a form of death (mormint închis) and positive, vital creation. By contrasting the joy the mole experiences in licking its newly-born young (băloși may also refer to the mucus with which mammals are covered at birth) with the magician's defiant isolation, it would seem that Arghezi attaches less importance to contemplative impotency than he does to an imperfect creation--in this case poetry--but one palpitating with life.¹³

In the surprising volte-face with which Vraciul concludes, therefore, poetic creation is viewed as an act of parturition, just as it is in Jignire (Offense).

¹³In this respect, Arghezi's attitude corresponds, on a philosophical plane, to Nietzsche's affirmation of creative energy, as opposed to the Nihilism of contemporary philosophy (see the section on "The Metaphysical Need" in The Will to Power, The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Vol. 15, New York: Macmillan, n.d.).

But here the severe labor-pains experienced in giving birth to a carefully-nurtured embryo, followed by the solicitude and vigilance exercised as a parent, inevitably leads to a sense of loss and separation:-

Și c-am voit să simtă și să umble
 Și să se-ndoaie-n pipăitul meu,
 De chinul dulce dat de Dumnezeu,
 Care-a trecut prin mine și te umple.

Femeie scumpă și ispită moale!
 Povară-acum, când, vie, te-am pierdut,
 De ce te zămislii atunci din lut
 Și nu-ți lăsaai pământul pentru oale?

And for wishing her to feel and walk
 And bend beneath my touch,
 At the sweet torment given by God,
 Which passed through me and now fills you.

Dearest woman and temptress sweet!
 A burden now that, alive, I've lost you,
 Why then did I fashion you from clay
 And leave not your earth for pots?

The natural offense felt by the loving parent when its child, now grown up, seeks his own independence, is presented ironically in the last stanza. The creative process involves both agony--a God-given torment beyond the comprehension of its recipient--and sacrifice, since in the modification of primordial energy that accompanies creation the creator literally parts with a portion of himself.

The increase in emotive tension evident in the inter-play of time-levels (recognition of the God-given 'life-force,' once the preserve of the poet, that now animates the statue is indicated in the sudden switch into the present tense (și te umple) from a series of

present perfects, denoting volition in the past and loss in the present], in the oxymoron (chinul dulce) which combines the warring elements in the creative act (understood as agon), and in the rapturous prayer addressed to the Created Being (which captures something of the sexual fervor of Biblical mysticism),¹⁴ culminates in anti-climactic irresolution. Insofar as the lament for past foolhardiness is cast negatively in the form of a rhetorical question, the poem is open-ended and there is no satisfactory emotional release; but the emphatic use of two past historics also suggests finality and acceptance. It is possible that Arghezi wished to indicate that, although the mystery of the creative process is unfathomable, art itself is a continuing process and the artist, never-daunted, must resume his search for meaning.

The sense of exaltation and lassitude--whether it be physical, as in sexual union, or spiritual, as in a work of literature--is one that naturally follows any act of creation. The child that emerges is rarely complete in all its details, it is at an early stage of

¹⁴The line Femeie scumpă și ispită moale (Dearest woman and temptress sweet) suggests an image of womanhood strangely reminiscent of the Jungian anima, both as a ". . . solace for all the bitterness of life" and as ". . . the seductress who draws him [man] into life . . ." in all its frightful paradoxes and ambivalences. See Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self, Vol. 9, Part II of The Collected Works of C.G. Jung (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959), p. 13.

development; all its creator's care is called for if its full potential is to be realized. It is a task that Arghezi the poet performed with zeal and devotion; a comparison of the various definitive editions of his verse alone reveals a life-long pursuit of perfection: a word changed here, a comma added there, the occasional verse excised or entirely restructured.

As life-giver and parental guardian, the poet in Jignire is also a figure of bi-sexuality, since, especially at the moment of conception, the masculine and feminine principles achieve a satisfactory union within his being. Testament we saw to be the coupling of letters of fire with letters forged in steel, the marriage of imagination and expressive activity. But "letters of fire" could equally refer to divine inspiration, or the active, masculine principle, which enters and possesses the body of the mind, the otherwise passive feminine principle ("letters forged in steel"). The satisfaction that wholeness brings, whether in the Pauline sense of the marriage of divided spirits or in the integration of opposites which supplied the primal creative force in primitive Greek culture,¹⁵ is unhappily short-lived, and the poet relapses once more into a state of numbness and inertia to await the moment of renewal. This period of creative quiescence corres-

¹⁵ Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), pp. 138-40.

ponds to the role played by winter in the seasonal cycle, and is one of the themes developed in Vînt de toamnă, which we shall consider in the final chapter.

Sustaining Arghezi through nearly seventy years of creative activity, years which undoubtedly had known many failures and periods of uncertainty, would seem to have been his view of art as a vocation. In an important manifesto, published in 1922, Arghezi drew the attention of young writers to the fact that "Art without suffering does not exist. . . ." Horrified by the low level of contemporary writing--which he blamed amongst other things on the progressive industrialization of printing--he exalted "the prophetic and monastic concept of literature."¹⁶ Șerban Cioculescu sums up this attitude very well when, on the basis of this manifesto and Vers și poezie,¹⁷ he affirms the existence of ". . . Arghezi's artistic mysticism, which formulates a 'prophetic and monastic' conception of literature; prophetic, in the sense of dynamic, seething, revolutionary writing; monastic, in the sense of a Benedictine patience, of slow flowering and learned scrupulosity."¹⁸

¹⁶"Cum se scrie românește" (How Romanian is and should be written), Cugetul românesc (Jan-Feb. 1922), p. 104.

¹⁷Published in two parts in Linia dreaptă, No. 2 (May 1, 1904) and No. 3 (May 15, 1904).

¹⁸Introducere în poezia lui Tudor Arghezi, p. 182.

Just as Testament stands as the canon for Arghezi's prophetic writing, so the obsessively sacerdotal world of the illuminator attains its apogee in Mitra lui Grigore (Grigore's Miter). Laboriously descriptive, anecdotal--a rare quality in Arghezi despite the serious accusations levelled at him by Ion Barbu--it may truly be said of this poem that ". . . the spinning [of the poetic idea] into verses of value, represents to no little extent, a job of work, a serious apprenticeship [an exercise of] patience."¹⁹ It might also be recalled with some profit that Arghezi's interest in craftsmanship, things done with the hand and not the mind, was readily evident even in his youth, whether it was a matter of the scientific bent he developed while working as a technical assistant in a sugar factory or his receptivity to the care some stonemason had lavished on a house or church in Bucharest. More than once he testified that the decoration and embellishment of the chapel acted as a powerful stimulus to his Christian faith when serving his novitiate at Cernica Monastery or acting as Deacon at the Metropolitan Cathedral in Bucharest.²⁰

In a typically whimsical interview with Ion

¹⁹"Vers și poezie," Linia dreaptă No. 2 (May 1, 1904).

²⁰"Amintirile Ierodiaconului Iosif, III: Arderea Mănăstirii Cernica," Națiunea (April 22, 1923).

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Biberi published after the Second World War, Arghezi, drawing on his experiences as an apprentice in Geneva at the turn of the century, compared the mechanics and dedication of a writer's craft to that of a jeweler:-

Now I've become a writer and the fact does not exactly please me, as far as occupations go. Indeed, I don't draw much of a distinction between the job of a jeweler and that of a man of letters. Perhaps it's the same thing. I've always liked something well-organized, harmonious; I've enjoyed working with concentrated materials, with gold which is incorruptible, and with diamonds, each of which is a synthesis, in other words with materials conterminous to the stars and the moon. They are outwardly small, but possess all the dimensions and frozen depths expected of eternity. I don't like, for example, to work across the grain or in the manner of an executioner. The word is not something indecent.²¹

Admittedly, in reminiscences as self-indulgent as these, not everything should be accepted as serious. It is curious, none the less, that Arghezi should have seen it fitting to combine a poetics of concentration and decantation with a desire to maintain organic harmony, not "to work across the grain," since it was in the nature of European poetry after the turn of the century--especially during the time that Arghezi was plying the engraver's trade--to separate words from their natural, everyday, human context, and to profit from their potential for hyperbole. Reflecting on the nature of poetry written towards the end of the nineteenth and in the

²¹In an interview published by Ion Biberi in an anthology entitled Lumea de mline (Bucharest: Editura Forum, 1945), p. 41.

first two decades of this century, Arghezi summed it up, approvingly as it turns out, as ". . . the super-concentrated exploitation of sensibility."²² Despite his obvious sympathies, openly expressed in this and in other poetic manifestoes, for the best in modern poetry, any attempt to identify closely Arghezi's poetry with a single trend in European literature is, we believe, almost certainly doomed to failure. While freely allowing that his poetry does not exhibit the more esoteric forms of abstractionism evident in a number of so-called Symbolist poets (Mallarmé and Barbu are examples already cited), we are little disposed to accept Eugen Lovinescu's designation of Arghezian aesthetics as anti-symbolist,²³ purely on the basis of a few remarks made by Arghezi in Vers și poezie, some eighteen years before the publication of Cuvinte potrivite, which appear to attach considerable value to the plastic quality of words. Plastic qualities there are in abundance in Arghezi's poetry, as we have taken pains to point out in relation

²²"Literatura nouă" (The New Literature), Cugetul românesc, Nr. 4 (May, 1922), pp. 321-23.

²³Istoria literaturii române contemporane: III Evoluția poeziei lirice (Bucharest: Editura "Ancora," 1927), p. 342. Lovinescu's observation in its proper context is as follows: ". . . we will give proof of the anti-symbolist qualities of Arghezi's poetry: while symbolist aesthetics, at whose base is suggestion and not plastic knowledge, has a natural tendency towards abstraction, which impels it towards the spiritualization of matter, Arghezi's aesthetics proceed inversely through materialization."

to his pre-conceptual kneading (Testament) of words and to the special bond of sympathy he feels for the techniques of sculpture, ceramics or jewelry; but these complement rather than displace the system of interior symbols that can be traced throughout Arghezi's opus.²⁴

Arghezi's predilection for things which, though outwardly small, are capable of infinite expansion--quite frankly stated in his interview with Ion Biberi--is most entertainingly indulged in the cycle Versuri de seară, in the introductory poem of which (Cuvînt) he offers a new poetic creed that embraces the dainty, wholly delightful and bizarre world of microcosms:-

Din slove am ales micile
 Și din înțelesuri furnicile.
 Am voit să umplu celule
 Cu suflete de molecule.

From letters I've chosen the smallest
 And from meanings the ants.
 I wanted to fill the cells
 With souls of molecules.²⁵

Beneath the poet's readiness to identify himself with and draw inspiration from the natural order, there are still indications of some mysterious force at work:-

Nimicul nepipăit să-l caut vrui,
 Acela care trăsare
 Nici nu știi de unde și cum.

The unfelt nothingness I wanted to seek,

²⁴Witness the system of symbols revealed by Șerban Cioculescu in the second chapter of his Introducere.

²⁵Cuvînt (Word--also in the sense of foreword).

That which started up
You know not whence nor how.

It is a world of microscopic proportions--"Micșorata, subțiată și nepipăita viață" (The dwarfed, diluted and unfelt life)--that the poet wishes to pass, attached to a thread, through the eye of a needle right into his reader's hand. Metaphorically, the thread is the intricate weave of words, lovingly embroidered, which opens up to the intuition of the reader the heightened understanding of the poet, heightened because his magnified vision can probe beneath the surface of life just as a microscope discloses the wonder of diminutive organic activity.

Arghezi suggests, then, that the role of poetry is to reveal that part of life which remains ineffable, mysterious and beyond the power of ordinary human comprehension. In this molecular world, picked out with such delicacy of detail by the precision tools of the miniaturist, we can trace the steps Arghezi took to substitute the contempt he had expressed so forcefully in Vraciul with the peace and companionship of life in a lower key. It is a world whose values are not to be judged in absolute terms but by a plea for:- "Nițică nevinovăție, nițică depărtare" (A bit of guiltlessness, a bit of remoteness).

In another poem from Versuri de seară, Un cântec (A Song), Arghezi once more draws on the world of the

craftsman to suggest the meticulous preparation of his poetry, developing the comparison between the cloth woven on a loom and the mental activity that produces a poem which we met briefly in Cuvînt. A major statement on the creative process, this poem has been superbly analyzed by Sorin Alexandrescu;²⁶ it is mentioned now merely to reinforce my claim for the consistency with which Arghezi uses analogues from other fields of creative experience to suggest the enormity and diversity of his own experience.

By this tendency to reflect his own creative impulses in another medium, Arghezi seems to ally himself with a number of major poets--Baudelaire and Mallarmé in the last half of the nineteenth century, Rilke, Apollinaire and Valéry in the first decades of the twentieth--who were much influenced by other art forms and who often saw their efforts in the literary field leading to the unity of all the arts. But in fact it is difficult to speak of an 'alliance,' even in the broadest sense of the word, since most of Arghezi's metaphors appear to recall the jeweler-sculptor motifs of Gautier and Leconte de Lisle rather than the arts of movement--music and dance especially--with which Rilke and Apollinaire, for example, tended to compare their poetry. Lacking the conceptual involvement of a

²⁶ Analize literare și stilistice, pp. 104-11.

Mallarmé or a Valéry, Arghezi's participation in this current of ideas is instinctive and often diffidently exploited. In one respect, however, he is an original; unlike many of his contemporaries (Mallarmé is an obvious exception) his acquaintanceship with other art forms was real and first-hand. Examples in his work are almost legion of poems allied to the engraver's art--we have only to recall the cycles of Inscriptions and Epitaphs--or treating that of the sculptor or weaver. But the affinities that existed between these other forms--all of them it should be noted basically manual in application--and his own poetry were real to Arghezi, because he had worked as a stonemason's assistant chiseling inscriptions on tombstones, he had served a term as a jeweler's apprentice in Geneva and he continued to work with his hands as well as his mind until his very last years.

Jignire, the poem which provided the original point of departure for these considerations of the more practical aspects of Arghezian poetics, is one one of the poems which best exemplify his sense of the instinctual, elemental interrelationships of poetry and sculpture. Rejecting the rough granite blocks that would attract the sculptor's eye, the poet looks to the wild, untouched earth of the forest of his native Romania²⁷ for raw material from

²⁷ It should be noted that Arghezi uses rumînesc and not romînesc to identify the autochthonous character of the potter's earth. This archaic variant, beloved of the chroniclers, emphasizes the continuity of ancestral values encountered in Testament, as well as the pristine condition of the soil.

which to shape his fecioară, his Virgin Idea:-

Neprețuind granitul, o, fecioară!
Din care-aș fi putut să ți-l cioplesc,
Am căutat în lutul rumînesc
Trupul tău zvelt și cu miros de ceară.

Am luat pămînt sălbatic din pădure
Și-am frămîntat cu mîină de olar,
În parte, fiecare mădular,
Al finței tale mici, de cremene ușure.

Not placing much value on the granite, Oh,
virgin maid!
From which I could have carved you,
I sought in Romanian clay
Your svelte and wax-smelling body.

I took wild earth from the wood
And kneaded it with potter's hand,
In part, each limb,
Of your tiny being, of light flint.

Arghezi shares with Constantin Brîncuși a sense of solidarity and familiarity with the humble peasant-potter or clay-modeller. The Romanian folk-tradition is as rich and alive as ever. Arghezi is associating his poetry with a process that seemingly eliminates the conceptual aspect, with an art that is instinctive and spontaneous, even seasonal²⁸ as we shall see in Vînt de toamnă. That he knew, as we know, that spontaneity in art is illusory, that all art involves an act of conception, matters very little. Of peasant stock himself, Arghezi could easily find suitable analogues in primitive folk-art for a process that utterly defies rational

²⁸ Peasant art is of course a largely seasonal occupation; the native wood-carvers who were so influential on the work of Brîncuși would become wood-cutters once more, as soon as the weather permitted.

exposition.

In decorating his clay fecioară--a veritable Flora, symbolic of a return to life, of May-festivals, Arghezi takes as his models vervain, rose-leaves and new grass:-

Zmălțându-ți ochii, luai tipar verbina,
Drept pleoape, foi adânci de trandafiri,
Pentru sprințene firele subțiri
De iarbă nouă ce-a-nțepat lumina.

Enamelling in your eyes, I took as model vervain,
As eyelids, dark leaves of bush-rose,
For eyebrows thin fibres
Of new grass that has stung the light.

The word "tipar"--here translated as model, though its root meaning, pattern, press or mold, relates to the typographical process--is one that Arghezi has made especially his own. In Jignire, nature serves as a model, but the plant-forms selected by the poet, like the clay taken from the earth, are pristine, untouched by man since their creation.²⁹ Elsewhere, Arghezi often seems to insist on quasi-Platonic forms or patterns with which to represent the resistance of art to time. The statue in Înviere (Resurrection), slowly buried beneath the weight of countless autumns, retains intact the ideals of "love, youth or faith" that its maker gave it, until the moment of its resurrection, of its rediscovery in

²⁹ In the sense that the new leaves that bud and the new grass that grows up through the old in spring-time are repetitions of the paradigmatic act of creation that took place in illo tempore.

history:-

Nemuritoare-n cripta lor obscură,
Tiparele statuii s-au păstrat.

Eternal in their obscure crypt,
The statue's patterns are preserved.

The same idea of eternal values is, in Muntele Măslinilor (The Mount of Olives), contrasted to the frailty and caducity of mankind. In place of its strictly Christian associations, the mountain is seen "As a sign of everlasting power / For that incurable life of ours."

The third and fourth stanzas of Jignire are the occasion for Arghezi's version of the Pygmalion myth:-

Luai pildă pentru trunchi de la urcioare
Și dacă-n sîni și sold a-ntîrziat
Mîna-mi aprinsă, eu sînt vinovat
Ca n-am oprit statuia-n cingătoare

Și c-am voit să simtă și să umble
Și să se-ndoaie-n pipăitul meu,
De chinul dulce dat de Dumnezeu,
Care-a trecut prin mine și te umple.

I took my model for the trunk from pitchers
And if over breasts and haunch my burning
Hand dallied, I am guilty of not
Cutting the statue short at the waist

And for wishing her to feel and walk
And bend beneath my touch,
At the sweet torment given by God,
Which passed through me and now fills you.

Pygmalion, we may remember, was a Cyprian sculptor utterly dedicated to his art, contemptuous of the immodest behavior of the women of his island, who none the less was a fervent devotee of the cult of Aphrodite. It happened that Pygmalion created a statue of a beautiful

woman, with which he fell passionately in love; one day, as he vainly clasped her to his bosom, the statue suddenly responded to his caresses, miraculously brought to life at the intervention of Aphrodite. Arghezi interprets the legend according to the Christian view of life: his Pygmalion is guilt-ridden because he has allowed a callipygian Galatea to come into the world and obsess him with her sensual beauty. There is a sense of divine gifts being used for improper ends; instead of the bliss accorded Pygmalion, the Arghezian poet-sculptor is condemned to suffer the pangs of separation and alienation, and regret deeply the fruitless dissipation of his creative energies.

That art is a gift from God, not a human attribute but an absolute reality, is the central idea of Heruvic (Hymnal). Only here the perspective is entirely different: instead of guilt, elation; instead of insufficiency, fulfillment. The poet-persona feels himself imbued with the divine spirit; man is once more cast in the image of God. In the presence of the divine spirit, passed on by the Creator to his created image, all nature responds as if in expectation of the Christological mystery:-

Tot ceasul îmi aduce un dar și-o jertfă nouă,
De vreme ce lumina primește să-mi lumine.
Cîmpia scoate-n brazde bijuterii de rouă
Și pomii pun coroane și nimburi pentru mine.

Every hour brings me a gift and a new sacrifice,
Ever since the light consented to illumine me.

The field displays in its furrows dewy jewels
And fruit-trees deck themselves with crowns
and haloes for me.

In the words of the Orthodox liturgy: "All Nature sighs, awaiting the Resurrection." For the Eastern Orthodox, as Mircea Eliade has noted in a section on "Cosmic Christianity," ". . . 'Nature' is not the World of sin, but the work of God."³⁰

A number of Arghezian exegetes have shown that, whereas Baudelaire's world vision relies heavily on the dogma of Western Catholicism, Arghezi's cosmic outlook is profoundly infused with the spirit of Orthodoxy. Baudelaire's mysticism, according to Pompiliu Constantinescu, has a horror of human nature and takes refuge in a sort of liturgical ecstasy; Arghezi, on the other hand, accepts passion as an aspect of the mysticism of life. Nature for Arghezi is not, therefore, corrupt as it is for Western mystics; spirit and matter are one and the same thing, grace (har) operating as a creative universal principle in the most modest phenomena of life.³¹

³⁰Myth and Reality (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 172. We are deeply indebted to Mircea Eliade's observations in the section on "Cosmic Christianity" for all our remarks concerning the participation of nature in Christ's Resurrection.

³¹See especially the chapters on the "Consubstantiality of Creation" and "The Vision of Hell" in Pompiliu Constantinescu's Tudor Arghezi, from which much of the above material is drawn. We find it necessary to caution our readers against the rigidity of

Any reading of the complex and ambiguous second stanza must be tentative. In an aquatic world, the figure of him who constantly fills the canvas of life with the thread of shade and the needle of spark reaches an accord or equilibrium with the shroud-like waters of the lake. We seem to be witnessing the repetition of the primal act of creation. God the Creator, the Cosmocrator or the Creative Spirit, whichever it be, both gives and takes life away. By infusing the light of the sun into inert matter, life is created; but such life is mortal and can only be perpetuated cyclically by a process of birth and death.

Nevertheless, beyond the immediacy of this cosmic equilibrium lies the power and potential of the creative act itself, which undergoes a transformation in this poem to become the artistic act in man. God passed on to man the power to repeat the primal act of creation, either by acting out ritually the cosmogonic myth, as still happens in primitive societies,³² or by

Constantinescu's dogmatic distinctions, since he fails to take into account the fact that both Baudelaire and Pascal seem to have been major literary influences in the development of Arghezi's poetic thought. Moreover, the doctrinal differences between Western Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy do not always appear to be clear in Arghezi's mind. Arghezi, in any case, tends to eschew dogma, attaching more value to Christian feeling.

³²Mircea Eliade gives some examples in the section "Divine Models of Rituals," from chapter 1 of his Cosmos and History--The Myth of the Eternal Return (New York: Harper and Row, 1959).

transposing this creative force onto a literary or artistic plane. In a sense this re-possessing of divine afflatus involves the concentration of the macrocosm in the microcosm:-

Îmi crește-n suflet iarăși o strună de vioară
 Dar cîntecul în mine tînjind să se deștepte,
 Sfios și șovăielnic și-acum ca-ntîia oară,
 Răsună-n depărtare, mai sus și mai afară,
 Ca-ntr-o vecie albă cu stîlpi și turle drepte.

Once again a violin string grows in my soul
 And song longs to awake in me,
 Shy and undecided and now like the first time,
 It resounds in the distance, higher up and
 further outside,
 As in a white eternity with pillars and straight
 steeples.

The song that longs to awake in the poet's being would be the moment of exaltation when man first raised his voice in praise, paying tribute to the mystery of the Creator's presence.³³ Moreover, in his first, truly religious act, man would naturally feel shy and uncertain of himself. Returning to concentrate itself within the inner being of man, this primal song manifests itself with the efficacy of an epiphany: it is a moment not open to rational explanation, since it breaks right across man's historical situation. And, having been experienced from within, it can now be experienced as a cosmic reality. With the momentary

³³ Compare a similar moment of poetic inspiration in Psalm I: "Orișicum lăuta știe să grăiască, / De-o apăș, cu arcul, de-o ciupesc de coarde. / O neliniștită patimă cerească / Brațul mi-l zvîcnește, sufletul mi-l arde." (The lute can speak in any event, / Whether I press it with my bow, whether I pluck its strings. / An uneasy heavenly passion / Makes my arm twitch, my soul burn).

break in relative values which an epiphany brings, the poet turns in on himself and approaches the center of his universe, only to find it expand irresistibly outwards and upwards into infinity: the song "resounds in the distance, higher up and further outside, / As in a white eternity with pillars and straight steeples."

The architectural associations with an Orthodox church are obvious: Romanian ecclesiastical design often follows the Byzantine mode of numerous fluted or furled columns and twisted minaret-like towers pointing up to the heavens. When man first constructed a temple or other sacred building in honor of his God, he was really repeating the primal creative act by attempting to represent eternity, extra-temporal and extra-spatial existence, in architectural terms. In defining early architecture as "religious space," Susanne Langer observes that "The temple really made their [primitive peoples'] greater world of space-nature, the abode of gods and ghosts. The heavenly bodies could be seen to rise and set in the frame it defined [Langer illustrates this point with a photograph of Stonehenge]; and as it presented this space to popular thought it unified earth and heaven, men and gods."³⁴

Within the church, which is cosmic environment

³⁴ Feeling and Form, pp. 97-8. Compare also Mircea Eliade's Cosmos and History, pp. 6-17.

made visible, all abuse of divine privilege can be resisted: part of the building is separated from the rest, the inner sanctum in which man may enter into direct communion with God is ruled over by His high priests. The other point which Langer makes in the passage cited above is that a temple is an axis mundi, the meeting place of heaven, earth and hell.³⁵ Just as Dante's Commedia has often been compared to a great Gothic cathedral, in which the experience of the three cosmic regions, in short the entire universe, is brought together under one roof, so any work of literature that acts as a bridge between Earth and the Otherworld repeats an archetypal pattern that starts in Christian experience with Genesis.

With the coming of darkness, the poet feels himself to be "altoit cu visuri, ca un ocean cu stele" (grafted with dreams, like an ocean with stars), that is to say, he feels instilled within him dreams of paradise. Man is above all altoit, ingrafted or implanted; the concretization of a spiritual occurrence emphasizes the violence that the creative principle does to the human mind, and perhaps is intended to remind us that man has eaten of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, consequently seeing things as God might see them:-

³⁵ See especially Mircea Eliade's Cosmos and History, p. 12.

Și, seara, învelindu-și grădinile cu crep,
 Sînt altoit cu visuri, ca un ocean cu stele.
 Nu știu culesul lumii de unde să-l încep,
 Din cîte flori de aur mi-ajung pînă-n zăbrele.

And, in the evening, as the gardens wrap them-
 selves in crepe,
 I am grafted with dreams, like an ocean with
 stars.
 I know not how to begin the harvest of the
 world,
 From a sea of golden flowers that reaches up
 to my lattice.

The image of horticultural activity (altoit) is continued in the final two lines of this stanza: the golden flowers that the poet is to reap can be understood as a metaphor for the dreams of the preceding line, the harvest of the world suggests the growing knowledge of cosmic mystery. The lattice or iron bars which separate the poet from the field of flowers is a recurrent motif in Arghezi's poetry for the barriers the conscious mind of man erects against the incursions of the human unconscious, whether they take on hostile form, like the mysterious companion in Cîntare, or whether--as here--they are intrinsically productive. But in his present state of revelation the poet is once more an integrated being; the golden flowers of his dreams can be allowed to flow effortlessly into his conscious mind, there to grow and acquire symbolic form as words, just as the hundred irises do in Mallarmé's Prose pour Des Esseintes.

The moment of epiphany, the possession of divine powers is prolonged into the final stanza; the movement of the poem finally discloses the figure of the poet-

seer, standing transfixed, awaiting only the final
benediction of the holy spirit:-

Împrejmuit cu noaptea, aştept ca o făclie,
Înfăşurată-n iederi şi-n frunze de leandru
Şi încă neaprinsă, la ora mea târzie,
În vîrf să mi se lase o stea din polincandru.

Surrounded by night, I wait like a torch,
Wrapped in ivy and leaves of oleander
And still unlit, at my late hour,
For a star to descend from the candelabra upon
my head.

The poet is now a torch, though as yet unlit, clad in
ivy and oleander leaves, like the bridegroom on the day
of his wedding in Romanian folk customs. Therefore, he
is about to be consecrated; he awaits the consummation
that follows a mystical union with the sacral spirit.

Again and again, in his prose writings on the
creative process, Arghezi spoke of being seized with
divine fervor. With a long tradition in literature
stretching as far back as Plato, it might be argued
that there was little new or surprising in such a claim.
What is new and above all rewarding in Arghezi's poetry
is the multifoliate structure that grew out of this
creative intuition; in his elaboration of the mystery
of creation, Arghezi has moved from a moment of steri-
lity in Vraciul, where contact with the forces of life
was temporarily broken, to the agony of loss and separa-
tion in Jignire, which could not be fully appeased as
long as the poet expected some reward for his labors,
not yet being truly God-like, and finally has reached

a state of joyous expectancy. But the torch remains unlit and the hour is late in Heruvic. Completion will only come when the individual merges with the universal, as it does in Vînt de toamnă, or when the poet willingly surrenders his creative prerogatives--by depicting the poetic process as one over which he has only partial control--and searches for a suitable emblem or symbol, such as the goblet in Inscripție pe un pahar, which will express the eucharistic or participatory nature of poetry.

Let Arghezi add his own postscript to such deliberations, through the prayer offered up by Coco the parrot, one of his principal literary masks:-

The hour of my writing is the hour of my liturgizing. Just as when, by breaking the bread, the ieromonah knows that his liturgical lance has passed at that moment into God's flank, so I believe that the dotting of the letter in my notebook calls into play letters amplified in great secrets, that feel and collaborate.³⁶

³⁶"Rugăciunea lui Cocó," Bilete de papagal, Series I, No. 116 (Friday, June 22, 1928).

CHAPTER III

EROTICA AS CREATIVE ACTIVITY

Among the many poems in Cuvinte potrivite that critics have readily assumed to be Arghegian variations on the theme of romantic love,¹ there are two--Stihuri (Verses) and Cîntare (Song)--in which the conventional erotic elements merely provide a mask for an exploration of the principle of creativity which lies at the very core of Arghezi's poetic vision. By giving special

¹Șerban Cioculescu, for example, notes that even when Baudelaire's influence was still strong on Arghezi--he cites Litanii, a poem from the Agate negre cycle, where the macabre elements dominate the erotic experience--a number of other poems appeared (Sfîrșitul toamnei, Doliu and Drum de iarnă) which are noteworthy for their rare fragility and purity and confirm a tendency to spiritualize, at least in Cuvinte potrivite the experience of love. Cioculescu also points out that Psalmul de taină--a poem written during the same period (1900-04)--may be accorded a more intimate, biographic character, on account of the impetuosity of its sentiment.

Aside from Stihuri--which he regards as an ethical code to erotic experience--Cioculescu expresses surprise at the note of inhibition which pervades poems such as Cîntare and Adolescență (first published as one piece in Viața socială, I, 5-6, 1910 and then as separate poems--Melancolie and Creion--in Cuvinte potrivite) and relates a number of poems, amongst which Tîrziu de toamnă and the already cited Sfîrșitul toamnei, to the theme of melancholy as it occurred in the poetry of Lamartine, Musset and Hugo (Introducere în poezia lui Tudor Arghezi, pp. 120-30).

emphasis to certain passages and disregarding others, both these poems can be read as straightforward love poetry; in both the person addressed is a woman, who may be understood as the ideal love of the poet's heart. But closer attention to detail and above all to the progression of each poem will reveal, we believe, that the poet's relations with his lady are explored primarily from the point of view of the creative disposition which brought them together rather than in the light of a sentimental attraction.

This creative disposition should not be thought of simply as sexual instinct, the urge to procreate, but as a far higher form of expression; it is the power to reintegrate the conflicting elements of the human psyche through the redemptive process of poetry. In order to understand the redemptive nature of Arghezi's poetry, it is essential to remember that the interpenetration of creativity and eroticism which occurs in both Stihuri and Cîntare has its origins in the Biblical account of the Creation and of Adam's expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

Created by God in His own image, man is a prototype of his Maker and is subject to the same creative impulses. At the dawn of creation, moreover, the first man was a fully-integrated being, both male and female (Gen. I: 27). In the beginning Adam lived by himself, but then ". . . the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make him a help meet for

him." (Gen. 2: 18), and God created Eve out of the rib of Adam. And yet even then Adam was happy, because there was no division between him and Eve, or between them and God. By succumbing to the blandishments of Eve and eating of the forbidden fruit, Adam irretrievably lost all the privileges which were his by right in the Garden of Eden, and he became a divided being: divided from Eve just as much as from God.

If we read Genesis correctly, the dire punishment inflicted by God on Adam and Eve for their disobedience included not only the curse of mortality but also of mutual antagonism. In one sense, the sexual act appeared to offer the chance for reintegration, since this act is paradigmatic of the original act of creation, in that male and female unit to produce offspring in the image of God. But all too often the passions (i.e. creative impulses) aroused in the act of procreation were selfish rather than selfless, in other words Eros (love for self) replaced Agape (love for God).²

To initiate the real process of reintegration (or of Christian redemption, since Arghezi clearly draws much of his inspiration in Cuvinte potrivite from New Testament sources), an act of self-sacrifice is necessary. The divine models for this are God's willing-

²Not surprisingly, therefore, the first fruits of their union, Cain and Abel, were not only mortal but also deeply antagonistic beings; so that one day, in a fit of anger, Cain slew his brother.

ness to share (at the appropriate time) His knowledge of Good and Evil with Adam and Eve, and Christ's Passion on the Cross, because he sacrificed his earthly body that mankind might be freed from the stain of Adam's sin.

The only occasion offered to man--and then only to the elect--to repeat the primal act of creation at the same time as he makes an act of self-sacrifice, would seem for Arghezi to be through the creative act of poetry. Love of God, however, presupposes love of one's neighbor (witness Christ's Two Commandments to man). In other words, before spiritual unity (return to the Mystic Center, Oneness with God) can be attained, the breach in man's psyche must somehow be repaired. Male consciousness must first be reconciled with its antagonistic female counterpart, the partly hostile, partly seductive unconscious projection, which we shall identify at various stages of our discussion of Stihuri³ with Lady Poetry, because she is the personification of the creative spirit in man, or with the Jungian anima, the poetic values of which merit in turn a few preliminary considerations.

Since the inception of time, man has increasingly relied on his rational faculties in debating ontological

³In Cîntare, which we propose to treat formally in the next chapter, this antagonistic female counterpart will be identified with the personification of Song.

questions of great moment--only poets or mystics have on occasions tried to re-establish contact with their origins. In looking deeply into his self, man may perceive exceedingly violent animalistic traits or elements of abnormal sexuality that are totally abhorrent to him, because they repudiate the conscious image he has formed of his own ego. At the same time, there are friendlier, perhaps more recognizable elements in his unconscious; these might possibly be referred to as elements of the poet's personal unconscious (his long-lost childhood experiences), whereas the darker, more satanic aspects come from an even deeper region of the unconscious, from what C.G. Jung has termed the "collective unconscious."

Indeed, an analysis of certain sections of Stihuri from a Jungian viewpoint may occasion some surprising conclusions. We have already mentioned that the female figure, identifiable as Poetry or the Creative Spirit in man, not only appears as a separate personality but also may be considered as an unwilling projection of the poet's unconscious. It is true that Stihuri is not directly concerned with the poet's ego; on the whole his personality lies outside the poem and at no point does he speak in the first person. The impression of conscious re-ordering of experience, as we have tried to indicate before, is very strong; moreover, the redemptive process which is poetry is not

designed for the benefit of any one single person but for all mankind. None the less, aesthetic control seems to weaken most and the poetic voice quickens and becomes most alive when the female figure is directly confronted.

We have already had occasion to remark on the dualistic aspects of Arghezi's artistic representation of ideal womanhood in a footnote to our discussion of Jignire, where the statue to which the poet has given life is not only a vital compensation for private sorrows but also the great deceiver, forever offering more than she intends to give. Jung maintains that certain features of the human unconscious offer extremely stubborn resistance to conscious control, because they arise from projections which are not normally recognizable to the unscientific eye. In the case of the male child, the most persistent projection is the mother-image, or what Jung commonly calls the anima; and this

. . . projection can only be dissolved when the son sees that in the realm of his psyche there is an image not only of the mother but of the daughter, the sister, the beloved, the heavenly goddess, and the chthonic Baubo. Every mother and every beloved is forced to become the carrier and embodiment of this omnipresent and ageless image, which corresponds to the deepest reality in a man.⁴

Jung goes on to point out that: "Whenever she [the Anima] appears, in dreams, visions, and fantasies, she takes on personified form, thus demonstrating that the

⁴C.G. Jung, Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self, pp. 12-13.

factor she embodies possesses all the outstanding characteristics of a feminine being. She is not an invention of the unconscious."⁵

Some of the similarities between Jung's portrayal of the anima and the Arghezian evocation of the feminine spirit of Poetry are indeed striking: both 'projections' take on personified form when they appear in dreams; both are embodiments of an omnipresent and ageless image of womanhood; both afford compensation for the loss of basic instinctual drives and yet maintain the perplexing ambivalence of the enchantress. Perhaps the essential difference is that poetry derives all its known values from the assimilation of the female Eros by the male Logos, whereas, in the male psyche, if the anima is allowed to go unrecognized, his personality will be devoured and his grasp on reality will gradually slip away, in other words Eros will have assimilated Logos.

To a certain extent, Arghezi identifies himself with his Muse--Jung, incidentally, conceded that an artist is often more successful than others in integrating his anima--and this is perhaps most apparent in the penultimate line of the poem, where semantic usage in Romanian allows a reciprocal factor to the phrase iubireata (translated "your love") which is not possible in

⁵Ibid., pp. 13-14.

English. Elsewhere, Arghezi covers relatively new ground, as far as his own poetry is concerned, in suggesting that his relationship with Lady Poetry is illicit, barred by natural law. In Cîntare, for example, mindful perhaps that permanence brings a loss in the independence so necessary to the creative mind, he keeps his Lady at arm's length, an attitude concentrated in the memorable phrase "Bethrothed for ever, wife never." In his chapter on Arghezian erotica, Șerban Cioculescu evinces surprise that an inhibitory factor should intervene when love between the woman and the poet seemed destined to achieve complete fulfillment ". . . through multiple correspondences, both bodily and spiritual, . . ." The most satisfactory explanation he can offer is that this ". . . inhibition arises from an inner interdiction, that of the virile subject who wishes to preserve the ideal image of the female, uncorrupted by the contingencies of life."⁶

We prefer to believe, however, that a critical viewpoint which restricts the erotic aspects of Arghezi's art to the narrow framework of a sexual relationship fails to account for the poet's continuing bafflement. Problems of identification do not arise if the mysterious Lady is viewed as a projection of the unconscious, the female side to the male consciousness. Certainly, as

⁶Introducere în poezia lui Tudor, Arghezi, p. 123.

far as Cuvinte potrivite is concerned, all attempts to achieve perfect understanding in the sphere of male-female relations seem doomed to failure. In another poem from the same cycle, Morgenstimmung, Arghezi imaginatively suggests the gulf that separates the man and the woman:-

Eu veneam de sus, tu veneai de jos.
Tu soseai din vieți, eu veneam din morți.

I came from above, you from below.
You arrived from the living, I came from the dead.

Thus the union of earth and heaven,⁷ represented by the divine model of marriage, is firmly resisted. In later cycles, particularly in Versuri de seară, all the implications of cosmic creation through human marriage are eagerly accepted, and the union of man and woman takes place in a bucolic vision of a transcendent nature. In Stihuri, however, union occurs only through the act of poetic creation.

The progression of Stihuri make it quite clear that artistic (i.e. conscious) control is maintained throughout: The union of Logos and Eros produces a fully-integrated being, as witnessed by the final line (ca sufletul din rugă să iasă-ntinerit). It is not our purpose to make extravagant claims on behalf of

⁷For a strikingly similar expression of this hierogamy in Vedic literature, see Mircea Eliade's Cosmos and History, p. 23, where the following quotation from the Upanishads appears: "I am Heaven," says the husband, "thou art Earth."

Arghezi's psychological insights, though we would like to emphasize that at the time of writing this poem (1908), he could hardly have heard of Jung or known anything of the empirical investigations undertaken by Freud's other pupils which led to such brilliant results in the mid-thirties. Arghezi's approach to the problem of the unconscious, the unknown both inside and outside the self, is intuitive; it is the poetic way. He inherited a cultural climate that had anticipated modern psychological knowledge: the poetry of Baudelaire and Rimbaud, as we have tried to indicate, and later of Laforgue, Mallarmé and a number of minor symbolist poets, had tapped, often with outstanding success, the deepest reservoir of poetic inspiration, the twilight empire of the mind, the human unconscious.

Considering the perplexing nature of the female counterpart to male consciousness--man only becomes aware of her presence gradually and intuitively--it is hardly surprising that the opening to Stihuri is oblique and ambiguous:-

N-ar fi mai scumpă vremea sleindu-se-n tăcere
 Decît bătută-n clopot de glas fără durere?
 Nu-i mai de preț arama, ce încă nencercată
 Așteaptă-n fundul lumii să fie căutată?
 În visul ce ne-nalță uniți, deasupra noastră,
 De ce nu s-ar deschide doar calea lui albastră,
 De ce n-am simți numai ce nu se poate ști
 Și gîndurile noastre mereu le-am obîrși?
 Înmormîntează-ți graiul oprit, sub sărutare,
 Și lasă-ți singur trupul, cu albele-i tipare,
 Învăluit de umbră, el singur să murmure,
 Ușure ca o frunză, adînc ca o pădure.
 Să viețuiască singur în haosul de forță

Ce te trimite nouă prăpastie și tortură.
 De ce n-ai fi voluta topită, de tamie,
 Și singură mireasma, din tine să ramfie?
 Drept pildă ia vecia ce-și mină-n mări uscatul
 Și tănuiește-n raze potecile și leatul.
 Și fii-ne iubită în rostul tău sublim
 Și fii-ne mai scumpă prin cele ce nu știm.

Would time not be more precious by freezing into
 silence
 Than beaten on a bell of painless chimes?
 Is copper not more valuable that as yet untested
 Waits at the world's end to be sought?
 In the dream that raises us united, above our-
 selves,
 Why wouldn't its blue path alone be disclosed?
 Why wouldn't we just feel what can't be known
 And constantly cause our thoughts to flow?
 Bury your forbidden speech, beneath kissing,
 And leave alone your body, with its white print,
 Enveloped in shade, it alone to murmur,
 Soft as a leaf, deep as a forest.
 May it live alone in the chaos of force
 Which sends you to us as precipice and torch.
 Why wouldn't you be the molten scroll, of incense,
 And merely the fragrance of you remain?
 As a model take eternity that drives the dry
 land into the sea
 And conceals in its rays the paths and the
 contingent.
 And be beloved to us in your sublime utterance
 And be the dearest amongst those we do not know.

Perhaps more than in any other of Arghezi's poems there is a tendency towards grammatical involution and a system of symbols not fully accessible to the reader. By grammatical involution we mean the effect of stilted and uncertain expression--such as might be found, for instance, in the writings of early chroniclers who lacked a proper literary vehicle for their observations on complex social issues--which Arghezi renders by the use of clumsy and elaborate negative conditionals. Since, from a strictly semantical viewpoint, the present

tense would be more natural in Romanian, it seems likely that Arghezi uses these negative conditionals in order to warn his readers that much of what follows will be difficult to grasp.

The first four lines, comprising two unanswered questions, appear to justify a poetics of virtual powers. The basic idea seems to be that if the poet--or his counterpart, universal man--cannot speak stirred by suffering, it would be far better for him to maintain a discreet silence. Axiomatic to Arghezi's concept of art, as we have already seen in connection with Jignire, is the idea of suffering; the poet or artist makes a sacrifice of himself in order to propagate the idea within him. An initiate into the great mysteries of life, the poet's role is to purify and distill human experience, to rescue the spirit of man from the narrow constraints of a chronologically regulated existence ("a bell of painless chimes") and restore him to a state of atemporality, of primal bliss. Only four years before he composed Stihuri, Arghezi wrote that: "Poetry ever floats towards the past, towards the unknown, stimulated by something real and known. It exists within you, and without you, like love; a moment, a perspective of ideas or of nature, puts you in communication with everything similar you have felt."⁸

⁸"Vers și poezie," Linia dreaptă, No 2. (May 1, 1904).

As a force that purifies baser emotions, Arghezi believes, Art involves forbearance and at times a self-denial worthy of the anchorite, and also deals with materials uncontaminated by human hand, materials which retain their pristine condition, like copper lying undug in the ground. He makes no attempt at this stage to reconcile what might seem the inherent contradiction between a poetics of eternal ideas (where the "real" seemingly is a memory of perfection attained by the First Man) and a system of analogical germination, a mind-expanding force, which activates a weave of fleeting correspondences buried deep within the intuitive faculties. Like Eugenio Montale, Arghezi is always close to the essential, a thin veil, a thread barely separating him from the definitive quid.⁹ In order to express this withdrawal into the self, this probing towards the still center of individual experience, Arghezi's imagery becomes increasingly compact, or to use a term that would have met with his and Montale's approval, ossified. But poetry is, we must always remember, a two-way process: in one direction, ossification, "a freezing into silence," in the other, a sudden detonation, and a violent eruption of images (Blesteme, a poem we shall discuss later on, is a particularly fine example of the latter) in which the absence of logical or oratorical

⁹Viz. Montale's remarks in "Intenzioni," La Rassegna d'Italia, Vol. I, Series 1, 1947, p. 86.

transitions can often be startling.

Poetry, then, is a process that "puts you in communication with everything similar you have [ever] felt." In Stihuri Arghezi attempts to share with his readers something of the taină (the mystery) of poetry, and above all something of the creative spirit which he felt was embedded in man. In the passage from Vers și poezie cited above, Arghezi compares this inspirational force to love; in Stihuri the poetic spirit becomes the objectified tu, a female figure both wondrous and harmful, and thus intrinsically baffling to the poet. In the preamble to the next reflection (lines 5-8) we learn that vis (dream) is instrumental in bringing the poet and the personified spirit of poetry together, since it provides access to a spiritual world unknown to man in his rational state, and raises him up above his present, menial condition. Once again, Arghezi employs a negative conditional--only slightly less cumbersome in Romanian than it is in English--to give an artistic illusion of insufficiency, as though he were trying to unravel the tangled skein of human contraries with a handspike. Somewhat rhetorically, he asks why man should resort to his rational faculties in an attempt to see the invisible, know the unknown, when the "blue path" (calea albastră) of dream alone can act

as a bridge between the spiritual and material worlds.¹⁰

The plaintive interrogative which follows:

"Why wouldn't [don't] we just feel what can't be known /
And [don't we] constantly cause our thoughts to flow,"
brings us face to face with an epistemological problem
of great importance to Arghezi. The limitations imposed
on certain aspects of mental activity, such as the
composing of poetry or music, by a rigidly codified
system of concepts leads him to plead the case for feel-
ing, in Susanne Langer's sense of the term. According
to Langer:-

Feeling is a dynamic pattern of tremendous complexity. Its whole relation to life, the fact that all sorts of processes may culminate in feeling with or without regard to each other, and that vital activity goes on at all levels continuously, make mental phenomena the most protean subject matter in the world.¹¹

By asking himself why man does not merely feel what cannot be known (known in the sense of apprehension with the conscious use of reasoning), Arghezi is advocating a poetry of dynamic and rhythmic structures, in which mental phenomena--whether they be impressions,

¹⁰In the 'definitive' editions of 1936, 1939 and 1943, as well as in the final arrangement of his poems in *Scrieri* (*Cuvinte potrivite* appears in Volume I, 1962), Arghezi uses pleoapă (eyelid) instead of calea, thereby making dream the active agent. The outward form of dream in this variation is the eyelid which the poet imagines opening ever wider as consciousness decreases; the inner form is the visionary power--acquired by the poet as one of the elect few--to see with the spiritual eye.

¹¹Susanne K. Langer, Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), I, 67.

emotions, dreams or even obscure organic processes--are held and presented for contemplation through images.¹² Arghezi would surely have agreed with Langer when she says: "It is . . . what we feel, and everything that can be felt, that is important."¹³

It is something of a paradox, none the less, that Arghezi casts his plea for feeling in a syntactical construct of essentially propositional character. Closer examination, however, of these two interrogatives, as well as of the entire opening section of the poem, confirms the tendency to dislocation and involution: the tortured attempt to break with precisely those thought patterns which deaden the immediacy of sensory perceptions, obstruct the interflow of conscious and unconscious elements, and impede the retention (in the child) or the restoration (in the adult) of the self as a totality.

Arghezi, we believe, is not advocating an art based on the spurious spontaneity of automatic writing,¹⁴

¹²Mind, pp. 64-7.

¹³Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁴Arghezi had certain contacts with Romanian Surrealism in its formative years--he himself published in the review Integral and often accepted for publication in his own broadsheet Bilete de papagal articles or poems written by writers associated with the Surrealist movement. Nevertheless, he never proclaimed publicly his adherence to any of the manifestoes published in the twenties and thirties and was so incensed by a cubist portrait of himself done by H. Maxy that he

nor is he returning to a state of sentimental effusiveness, such as that eagerly embraced by a whole host of minor Romantics during the nineteenth century. As the development of Stihuri makes clear, Arghezi views art, and especially poetry, as a fusion of the conscious and the unconscious. Without the former, the more "poetic" pre-conceptual activities could never acquire symbolic expression, that condition of permanence whereby feeling becomes form.

After the obliqueness of the opening questions in Stihuri (ll. 1-4), the poetic voice identifies itself (ll. 5-8), through the use of us and our, with all those susceptible to the power of dream; this process of personalization is continued in lines 9-14. Only now do we learn that the poet is calling upon a mysterious third party, whose identity is never formally disclosed, to "bury . . . [her] forbidden speech beneath kissing." While it is true that the person addressed is a female--this becomes clear in the penultimate line of the first stanza, where iubită (beloved) is feminine in gender--the total context of the poem makes it quite certain that the mysterious lady is no ordinary woman of the world. Indeed, the succeeding image informs the reader

repudiated it in scathing terms ("Ce trebuie să știe un tânăr la 45 ani," Integral, I, 5 (1925).

that she is a phantasma whose body lives alone amongst the chaos of primordial forces and that it is these forces which send her to us--to poet and reader alike-- "as precipice and torch."

As we have already indicated, we believe Stihuri to be an invocation to the poetic spirit in man, that creative potential deep within the ivory well of his being that lies waiting to be tapped; yet there is an element of contradiction to this poetic insight, since Arghezi evidently imagines Poetry to be a separate entity, with a life of its own, existing both within and without the individual mind. By admonishing his Lady "to bury . . . [her] forbidden speech, beneath kissing," the poet is developing the plea for intuitive expression in poetry that he made in the first two lines. Speech--in the conventional sense of human discourse as an exchange of ideas--is as incongruous to the ritualistic act of kissing, as it is in love-making, since it is a poor vehicle to convey an experience which, if only for a moment, allows man a glimpse of a world larger and profounder than his own. "Kissing" (sărutare), then, would be the moment of union between

the poet and his Muse, the vibrant expansion of artistic consciousness known as inspiration.

Conceptual activity at such a moment is repressed, and the primitive emotions of the "body, with its white print," are called into play. A sigh not a concept--instinctual experience is the fountain-head of poetry: it is the rustle of leaves and the silence of the forest, the secret murmurings of the heart. "Enveloped in shade," since it can only be intuited, it is felt as an obscure presence, deep within the unconscious, far from the light of reason.¹⁵

The analogy between erotic and creative activity is continued in the image of the body's "white print," which retains its luminosity, even though it is "enveloped in shade," because Arghezi wishes to maintain the connection with literary composition. On the sexual level, the shock of nudity helps man to forget the limitations of his orderly rational world and plunge back into the realm of purely instinctual drives. On the creative level, the print may be white because the purity of the blank page is thereby preserved and not covered with black letters as required in prosaic expression. In this case, Arghezi may be suggesting

¹⁵Associated with the female principle of the earth, as opposed to the male power of the sun, the forest has been found by psychologists to be a suggestive symbol for the unconscious. (See Cirlot, p. 107.)

that his readers need to probe beyond the surface meaning (the discursive value of the printed words on the page) in order to understand his poetry. Paul Claudel gave powerful expression to a similar insight in his Ode to the Muses: "O mon âme! le poème n'est point fait de ces lettres que je plante comme des clous, mais avec le blanc qui reste sur le papier."¹⁶ Alternatively, tipare might refer to the molds or patterns in a printing press, which preserve their original potentiality, since the first copies of the poet's book have not yet been run off the machine. The tipar is of course one of Arghezi's favorite symbols (compare the poems Jignire and Învierre which we discussed in chapter two); an example of literary polysemy, it combines the essentials of poetry at its most mechanistic at the same time as indicating powerful archetypes of the human unconscious.

The following two lines make it clear that Arghezi considers poetry to be a spiritual manifestation capable of reconciling contraries. He prays that the body of poetry--perhaps the stultified corpus of tradition that acts as a curb on imaginative activity--be allowed to live alone in a state of primal

¹⁶Les Muses, Cinq Grandes Odes (Paris: Gallimard, 1936), p. 16.

chaos (haosul de forță), presumably since regeneration occurs with reabsorption into the fluid state that preceded the original act of creation. Significantly, poetry now reinvigorated is returned to man as a precipice and as a torch; it is both a reminder of the Original Fall and the bearer of divine light.

The word that we have translated as "precipice," prăpastie, also means "abyss" in Romanian. An abyss--the word comes from the Greek abyssos, "without bottom"--naturally conjurs up visions of primeval depths, deep fissures in the surface of the earth which give access to a chaotic, molten condition. The juxtaposition of prăpastie with tortă--both of which stand in apposition to personified Poetry--makes it clear that Arghezi is using "abyss" in a metaphorical sense, to suggest the darker reaches of the human mind, the unconscious. In many respects, this image--which portends a series of invocations in the following stanza where poetry is associated with water and muddy blacknesses--corresponds to the hallucinatory experience of le gouffre, the sensation of plunging into an abyss of darkness or water, which Baudelaire recorded in Les Paradis artificiels, Nerval in Aurélia and Rimbaud in Une Saison en enfer. By exploring such uncharted waters, poets such as Baudelaire and Rimbaud--both of whom seem to have been of considerable influence on Arghezi in his formative years--expected to achieve transcendence, but on gaining

entry into the realm of immanent consciousness merely found themselves contemplating a more accentuated form of individuality. In the words of Gwendolyn Bays, "... the experience is one of selfhood and duality. It is Narcissus gazing at himself in the pool."¹⁷

It must be pointed out that as far as Stihuri is concerned, there is an important shift in perspective: it is poetry, not the poet, that is to renew itself in the primal waters of the human unconscious. The poetry of both Baudelaire and Rimbaud is essentially evocative; it purports to recapture in symbolic terms something of the hallucinatory journey undertaken by the poet. The overall tone of Stihuri, on the other hand, is invocatory; in a series of impassioned imperatives beginning towards the conclusion of the first stanza, the poet summons up the spirit of creativity that for him exists in potential, and at the same time cautiously lifts up a corner of the curtain that separates us from the great mystery (the taină of poetry). In a sense, the movement of Stihuri is as much towards the future as it is rooted in the past, and this becomes clearer as the poem progresses. There is recognition that in an amorphous condition this seductive apparition, whom we have chosen to call Lady Poetry, is capable of

¹⁷The Orphic Vision, p. 26. For our remarks in this paragraph, we are particularly indebted to chapter two of Bays's study.

doing irreparable harm to the unwary; yet, provided the warring elements of the conscious and unconscious are successfully reconciled--and the final stanza demonstrates that such a reconciliation is possible through the act of creation--poetry is felt to be of immense benefit to mankind, a force for redemption.

Just as in the symbol of the precipice are concentrated all the hazards of the unknown that must be faced if art is not to wither away at the stem, so its twin, the torch, alludes to a state of increased awareness, an intimation of transcendence, the realization by the poet of the Maker's exultation in its created being.

In the succeeding gradation of images, Arghezi once more lays claim to a poetics of pure essences: the concrete disappears and the absolute or ideal remains. Poetry is likened to a mysterious lady whose presence can only be ascertained by the perfume she leaves behind her.¹⁸ The progressive vaporization of the image is of special interest: Lady Poetry is compared first of all to a volută (a scroll or volute), that is to say a solid object of stone or metal but one whose form already suggests fluidity of movement, an attempt to escape

¹⁸To suggest the vague, imprecise and intangible qualities of Poetry, Arghezi (like Baudelaire, whose olfactory sense was highly developed) often resorts to metaphors involving perfume. Compare Morgenstimmung, where the song of the mysterious lady fills "the whole building [of the poet's soul]. . . like a sonorous lavender."

materiality,¹⁹ a phase which is in turn intensified by the addition of the adjective topită (molten). We then learn that the scroll is not really an architectural ornamentation, but a curling, melting fragment of incense in the thurible, which is transformed into smoke as it burns. It can hardly escape our notice that this series of transformations parallels one of the principal movements in the poem: a creative process that strives after a richly connotative, fluid and suggestive language through progressive dematerialization of imagery.

By separating words from the environmental factors that condition their use in real life and placing them in a context of virtual experience²⁰--clearly no common sense usage could account for the juxtaposition here of the two key metaphors volută-mireasmă--the poet raises them to the world of pure essences, vaguely Platonic in character, and at the same time presents

¹⁹ A propos the spiral form of the volute, compare the "Endless Column" that Constantin Brîncuși had erected in Tîrgu-Jiu in 1937, where the illusion of an infinite succession of volutes rising up into the sky betrays a similar desire to escape materiality.

²⁰ Following Langer, we understood "virtual experience," to be that element in literature that distinguishes it from our actual experience of life. "The poet's business is to create the appearance of 'experience,' the semblance of events lived and felt, and to organize them so they constitute a purely and completely experienced reality, a piece of virtual life." (Feeling and Form, p. 212).

them in an image-cluster that ultimately dissolves and concentrates to disclose one single kernel of meaning, vivid, concrete, and vibrant in emotional value. The reader, presumably, is invited to share this experience, but, like the poet, he can scarcely arrive at the core of meaning without first freeing his mind of conceptual prejudices and surrendering to the "lure of feeling."²¹ It may seem paradoxical to insist on this two-way process, dematerialization-rematerialization, in a poem such as Stihuri where the primary impulse is one of etherealization, but several key images in the succeeding two stanzas are of unusual concreteness and do not support the critical viewpoint that dates the vigor and verbal ruggedness in Arghezi's poetry from 1916, with the appearance of Belsug.²²

Poetry, then, in the fictive context established in this poem, is likened to a mysterious lady whose presence can, or rather should, only be ascertained by the senses, from the fragrance she dispels. By way of illustration, Arghezi implores poetry to take eternity as its model, since eternity drives the dry land into the sea. A regression of the creative principle appears

²¹The phrase was first borrowed (from A.N. Whitehead) by Susanne Langer, see Feeling and Form, p. 397.

²²Șerban Cioculescu, Introducere în poezia lui Tudor Arghezi, p. 85.

to be called for,²³ as a result of which the material world will be forced to recover its liquid, insubstantial condition. This regressive process, moreover, is already implicit in the appeal made to poetry, or the creative potential in man, to dwell in primordial chaos, to return to the state of formlessness that precedes periodic regeneration. In our analysis of Vînt de toamnă, we shall develop at length the similarities that exist between the act of individual creation and the symbolic repetition of the creation that determines the very rhythm of our lives. Mircea Eliade has pointed out that: "The very close connection between the ideas of Creation through water (aquatic cosmogony, deluge that periodically regenerates historical life, rain), birth, and resurrection are confirmed by this saying from the Talmud: 'God hath three keys, of rain, of birth, of rising from the dead.'"²⁴ On the occasion of each poem, poetry is summoned from her aquatic realm, the realm of atemporality and aspatiality not normally accessible to the human mind.

The dominant constellar pattern in the line: "And [eternity] conceals in its rays the paths and the contingent" relies for its poetic effect on a concaten-

²³ According to Genesis, it will be remembered, God divided the waters from the land.

²⁴ Cosmos and History, p. 63.

ation of imagery that binds it to other important sections of the poem. The verb a tăinui (tăinuește), though by no means unknown in ordinary speech, is derived from taină, the root meaning of which is a secret or mystery--that which is beyond the comprehension of the human mind-- and which by extension acquires religious significance in such ecclesiastical usage as "Cina cea de taină" (The Last Supper) or "sfintele taine" (The Seven Sacraments). Man chose mortality of his own free will, and eternity is the active agent preventing him from penetrating the mysteries of Time and Space: all the awesome majesty of this sacred edict is evoked in Arghezi's verbal form. But taină, we are to learn in the next stanza, is precisely the mysterious power of poetry that the poet strives to preserve on memory's branch. In retrospect, therefore, the act of poetic creation presupposes the absorption of individual into universal time;²⁵ even as the poet gazes into the multiplicity of the self, he achieves Oneness and Unity. Were the appeal here to be affirmative, it would capture the language of the true mystic; instead, the conscious element in Arghezi is too strong, and Stihuri

²⁵The sense of temporality is continued in the archaic word leatul (translated here as "the contingent"), beloved of the Romanian chroniclers and possibly introduced by Arghezi into the Romanian poetic lexicon to suggest the immensity which is Time Eternal. See Șerban Cioculescu's comments on this usage (Introducere, p. 31).

is merely a hypothesis of mystical understanding. At the very center of this image-cluster stands the flaming wheel of the Sun, from whose center an infinite number of spokes (raze) start out and return.²⁶ Just so, poetry will be compared in the next stanza to "The trail across the country's hand as yet unblazed / And which perhaps to heaven leads or perhaps homeward wends."

The veiled suggestion of secretiveness in Eternity's concealment of its mystery is perhaps a reminder of a female's guile in her dealings with the male of the species. In any event, for the first time in the poem the voice of the poet bursts out with all the passion of a lover, imploring his recalcitrant lady not to deprive him of her sublime speech (rostul tău sublim). Poetry, however beloved she may be, is an unknown factor in human existence; she can be felt, like other phantasmata of the unconscious, but she can never be reduced to the rigid categories of conceptual thought.

Continuing to trace some of the quasi-feminine properties of the poetic spirit, the second stanza concludes with an image-cluster of great expressive value in which poetry is associated with the Tree of Life:-

²⁶The motif of the flaming wheel of the Sun finds splendid expression in Muntele Măslinilor, where the track of its golden spokes in the mud is evidence of the hope embodied in the symbolic value of the Arghezian Mount of Olives.

Aprinde-ți două umbre de fiecă lumină,
 Fii nouă deopotrivă și soră și straină.
 Fii ca o apă pură, în care se ascund
 Nămolurile negre cu pietrele la fund.
 Fii cîntecul viorii ce doarme nerostit,
 Smaraldul care încă pe mîini n-a strălucit,
 Poteca-n palma țării, ce nu e încă trasă
 Și poate duce-n ceruri sau poate-ntoarce-acasă.
 Fii arborele încă nemistuit cenușă,
 Ce ne arată vîrsta minunilor la ușă.
 Și dacă taina-n tine ar fi și fără preț,
 Deși pustiu bordeiul nu-ndeamnă pe drumet
 Din depărtări, și-acesta, gonit de rătăcire,
 Nu-și pune pe o creangă bordeiu-n suvenir?

Kindle for yourself two shadows for every light,
 For us may you be equally sister and stranger.
 Be like a pure water, in which lie hid
 Muddy backnesses with stones at the bottom.
 Be the song of the violin that sleeps unplayed,
 The emerald that till now on hands has never
 shone,
 The trail across the country's hand as yet
 unblazed
 And which perhaps to heaven leads or perhaps
 homeward wends.
 Be the tree not yet consumed in ash,
 That shows the age of marvels at the door.
 And if the mystery in you be worthless,
 Would not all the same the lonely hut call to
 the passer-by
 From afar, and would not he, pursued by restless-
 ness,
 Store up the hut on memory's branch?

Poetry, as we have already seen in the bipolar images of the precipice and the torch, has both radiant and darker aspects. The inherent duality of those unconscious forces that magnetize our creative instincts is forcibly restated in the opening invocations to this stanza. The poet-person is addressing the spirit of Poetry as though it were a woman with captivating spiritual and corporeal attributes. The first line can only be explained in the context of the second: The

shadows that are to be kindled in the light of conscious activity (that is to say, given symbolic expression) refer to the two halves of a seemingly unintegrated personality, which Arghezi instinctively identifies as sister and foreigner.

That poetic activity at the pre-conceptual level draws its inspiration from the untapped resources of the unconscious receives striking confirmation in the succeeding image, where Lady Poetry is compared to ". . . pure water, in which lie hid / Muddy blacknesses with stones at the bottom." Once again the mood is not affirmative, but invocatory; it is the conscious mind of the poet speaking, seeking to recall the moment of multiplied consciousness. Water, "This 'fluid body' is interpreted by modern psychology as a symbol of the unconscious, that is, of the non-formal, dynamic, motivating, female side of the personality."²⁷ Furthermore, in Arghezi's poetic figure, water is pure, thereby implying transparency; and transparency suggests a mode of communication between the surface and the bottom of the abyss, between the upper limits of the conscious and the lowest depths of the unconscious. Shielding the stones at the bottom of the abyss from surface-consciousness are muddy blacknesses, hostile elements not penetrable by male consciousness in an

²⁷Cirlot, p. 345.

unintegrated state. Since stones--born out of the cohesion of volatile elements--are especially resistant to decay and change, they symbolize when whole unity and strength, reconciliation with the self.²⁸ Nor should we forget the significance of the philosopher's stone in alchemy, where ". . . it represents the 'conjunction' of opposites, or the integration of the conscious self with the feminine or unconscious side. . . ." ²⁹ In all probability, Arghezi's knowledge of alchemical theory was as vague as his conceptual understanding of the psyche; nevertheless, he does seem to regard the watery unconscious as a purificatory agent, immersion in which would overcome the division within the self. At the very core of his poetic insight into the meaning of life, the Hermaphroditic myth offers the chance for wholeness once more, the restoration of paradisiacal bliss.

The three images which follow are variations on the theme of virtual powers developed in the first stanza, only that what formerly was nebulous and indefinite now begins to take shape. Poetry is to be "the song of the violin that sleeps unplayed"; an indication no doubt of Arghezi's claim for originality, but also growing evidence of the true quality of the mysterious

²⁸Cirlot, p. 299.

²⁹Ibid. , p. 300.

Lady's appeal. The poetic vagueness of "murmuring" has become the more recognizable and more conscious sound of the violin.³⁰ Moreover, the copper (arama) of the second line now reappears as "the emerald that on hands has never shone," suggested in part by the similarity of the sounds in "rama"--"mara." Arghezi turns to good account here his juvenile experiments with "instrumentalist" techniques in the cycle Agate negre (Black Agates).³¹

Symbols of inert cosmic energy, both copper and emerald lie hidden in a subterranean world unknown to the conscious mind. Even so, there are subtle differences at play: in its solidified form, copper, which is often associated through alchemical correspondences with the planet Venus, and by Jung with the libido,

³⁰Arghezi often compares his poetry to the music of the violin, which he seems to consider as a meeting point of conscious and unconscious forces. The playing of the violin is without question a technique that requires long years of concentrated practice, but then so does the writing of poetry. On the other hand, in Romania especially, with its long tradition of lăutari, native, usually nowadays, Gypsy minstrels who play by ear and inherit a vast oracular repertoire, there is always the suggestion of Devil-dealing, occult practices, and other kinds of artistic sorcery.

³¹Poems from the Agate negre cycle were first published in Linia dreaptă in 1904, a year which marks, according to Ovidiu Crohmălniceanu, Arghezi's second literary debut (after a number of years spent as a monk and deacon). Only two of these, no. 32 (Sfîrșitul toamnei) and no. 41 (Gravură), were included in Cuvinte potrivite, although two more, no. 3 (Litanii) and no. 21 (no title) appeared in the addenda to the 1959 edition, together with no. 37 (hitherto unpublished), apparently against the poet's better judgment.

seems to occupy a lower level in the mineral hierarchy than precious stones such as emeralds. All jewels symbolize superior knowledge, especially when hidden from the vulgar gaze: "Gems hidden in caves refer to the intuitive knowledge harboured in the unconscious."³²

Although Arghezi does not say so explicitly, it may be presumed that an emerald which has not yet shone on human hand is in an uncut, pristine state, buried somewhere below the surface of the earth. The emerald, moreover, does not belong to a mysterious Princess; it is the Princess, that Lady-Poetry, the Arghezian personification of unconscious forces which we have chosen to compare to the Jungian anima. The color of the emerald, green, is also a color associated with water, and thus with death; but in almost any organization of color-symbolism, whether it be alchemical, Christian, or Jungian, green(also the color of Venus and Nature) stands as a transitional color, a bridge between life and death, between this world and the next.

Much of the heightened poetic effect of Stihuri arises because Arghezi limits himself initially to a series of basic images that are capable of almost infinite extension in any direction. Separate features from one image-cluster often share affinities with others

³²Cirlot, p. 155.

from a different image-cluster, thus gradually creating a vast network of interrelated patterns that may profitably be termed an image-constellation or constellar pattern. Already we have met a number of key groupings of images, as for example those associated with a mineral world of inert cosmic energy (pietrele-aramă-smaraldul--and volută in an architectural sense), or with the journey into the self undertaken by the poet (calea-poteca or potecile) that will attract at the end of the second stanza a further series of associated metaphors (such as fundul lumii, signifying the ultimate destination of the drumet, the wandering poet gonit de rătăcire, pursued by restlessness), as well as that connected with sound, the voice of poetry. As far as sound is concerned, antithetical elements are involved: thus the voice of the conscious mind (clopot de glas), not yet purified by suffering, must first be stilled (graiul oprit), so that the murmur of eternity can be heard. This process of sonic reduction and concentration is followed by amplification and expansion; the murmur of eternity, almost immediately exalted as the "sublime utterance" of the female figure, is later identified with "the song of the violin that sleeps unplayed," and finally acquires full orchestration at the hand of Lady Poetry, who makes of it "a beginning with every finger on the string."

At this stage in the progression of the poem,

Arghezi introduces two more image-clusters that considerably aid our understanding of the nature of the unconscious activity he is invoking, and the role he, as poet, is to play. Lady Poetry is to be "the tree not yet consumed in ash, / That shows the age of marvels at the door," and "the lonely hut" which calls to the passer-by. It seems likely that, as far as the unconsumed tree is concerned, Arghezi had in mind the Biblical tree in the Garden of Eden, although there is no way of knowing whether he is referring specifically to the Tree of Life or to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Possibly the former, since only this tree--uncorrupted by the hand of man and therefore eternal--can show "the age of marvels at the door."³³ In similar manner to the Biblical bush which burns with flames but remains quite intact (we refer to the episode from Exodus--3:2-3--where the angel of the Lord appears to Moses), "the tree not yet consumed in ash" may indicate the presence of God (who creates miracles) wrapped in mystery (taina).

Taina, however, is also the sacramental mystery of poetry; it is the nuclear element in this poem as in all poems, because it presumes a center of energy in

³³Also because there is a tradition to the effect that the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil began to wither away and die, after Adam and Eve had wrongfully eaten of its fruit.

existence before the creation of our universe. Precisely for this reason poetry can not be a marketable product so far as ordinary men are concerned. The line "And if the mystery in you be worthless" echoes a theme we explored in Vraciul, where the poet spurned the idea that his poetry should be sold "like the living God" at knock-down prices in the market place. Mankind, refractory to the last, indignantly rebuffs the gentlest of advances on the part of the unconscious--here understood as the redemptive form it takes in poetry--without realizing that it is turning a potential ally into an implacable foe, such is the dual nature of the compensatory factor, be it anima or animus.

Despite his presumed rejection by a complacent society (a society which rejects his art also rejects him), never the less, the poet continues to treasure the taină communicated to him by his Lady. The poet is here a figure of alienation, the traveller or passer-by, "pursued by restlessness,"³⁴ who is called to by the lonely hut. This is the only time in Stihuri that Arghezi allows his persona to function in the poetic action, and only then, we suggest, because he can achieve a 'double-take,' by contrapuntally setting off one image-cluster

³⁴The reference to the Adamic archetype is clearer in the original Romanian, since gonit in its etymological derivation means 'chased away' or 'hounded out,' while rătăcire signifies 'going astray' (from the flock) or 'wandering.'

against another. The second image-cluster introduced in this section of the poem (the first being the Cosmic Tree) is centered around the house, evidently a further symbol of the unconscious, or of the feminine aspect of the universe.³⁵

Arghezi's immediate concretization of the image of a house contains a wealth of suggestion: properly speaking a bordei is a ". . . rudimentary dwelling-place, half dug out of the earth and covered with earth, straw or reeds."³⁶ Whereas only the foundations of the normal house lie beneath the surface, the Oltenian earth-dwelling (bordeie are found principally in steppe-lands, where greater protection against the icy blast of winter is required) functions as a unit almost entirely below and in the earth, since the upper structure is usually reserved for storage of implements and livestock. The image of the bordei stands at another crossroads of cognate polarities, because it not only offers temporary shelter to the wanderer within the warm privacy of its clay walls, but like an Earth-Mother it also invites man to descend into its earthen womb and re-establish contacts with the most elemental

³⁵The structure of the house, like that of the tree, easily lends itself in dreams to a representation of different layers of the psyche. See Cirlot, p. 146.

³⁶Dictionarul Limbii Române Moderne (Bucharest: The Publishing House of the Romanian People's Republic, 1958), p. 89.

forms of existence.

The loneliness of the hut, moreover, (pustiu suggests the desolation of the desert) is a further indication that the unconscious forces have been abandoned by mankind: few people, indeed, dare tread so close. Thus, two image-clusters (the house and the journey) converge, meet and separate: man is restless, he is pursued and pursuing, ever following the path that he believes will lead him back to happiness. On the way, he may come across the lonely hut and yet not recognize it as the object of his search. But, instinctively, he knows that it is important to him, and instead of casting it out of his mind, he stores it up on memory's branch (Ńsi pune pe o creangă bordeiu-n suvenire).

Once again two image-clusters dissect each other, this time in the image of the branch, which is a synecdoche for the cosmic tree and at the same time a referent for the staff with which the weary traveller supports on his shoulder the burden of memory. His crutch, both literally and figuratively, is a branch from that tree "that shows the age of marvels at the door" of the house. Not only, therefore, do two important image-clusters intersect (journey and tree), but the close proximity of a third (house) produces a triangular relationship. The structural significance of triangularity is further developed in the succeeding stanza--in the ternary symbolism of the pirostrii--and

in the final stanza, where the interdependence of the three principals--Poetry, Dream and Poet--points the way out of the binary situation (the mutual antagonism of male and female), and to eventual unity through the creative process.

The poet's attention in the third stanza is occupied once more with dream; it is as though the role of memory (first broached in the preceding stanza) were too limited for the momentous task of re-integration. The stanza is built around a series of confidential imperatives--no fewer than six in the space of eight lines. Quite clearly, the poet must be feeling a new-found confidence, arising perhaps from the growth in intuitive knowledge which the second stanza occasioned, in his ability to harness the seemingly unlimited powers of the unconscious:-

Priveghe dară visul din noi să-l împătrești.
 Fă-i început de coardă din fiecare dești.
 Fă-i pirostriei ivoriul fierbinte-al unui trup
 Cu amintiri de marmori și cu miros de stup.
 Nutrește-ni-l cu ce e în tine întărire,
 Cetate de altare, izvor de omenire!
 Dă-i lapte de ești mamă, dă-i sînge, curtezană,
 Și inima-n curvie ți-o fă de Cosînzeană.

Take care then to make our dream grow fourfold.
 Make of it a beginning with every finger on the
 string.
 Make as its trivet the body's burning ivory
 With memories of marble and with bee-hive
 smells.
 Nourish it with all the strength within you,
 Citadel of altars, source of human life!
 Give it milk, if you're a mother, blood, if a
 courtesan,
 And make your whorish heart like Cosînzeana's.

Lady Poetry, the creative potential of the unconscious, is given the task of making mankind's dreams grow fourfold. The suggestion of the quaternary here is probably fortuitous--in which case the poet is merely pleading for an intensification and magnification of dream as man's only contact with the spiritual plane. But we cannot altogether exclude the possibility--especially in view of the following lines--that the passage from intuitive to conceptual thought implicit in the act of literary creation is being hinted at. Plato it was who connected (according to Cirlot, p. 256) the quaternary with the realization of the idea, the acquisition of solid form by what had remained hitherto a vague premonition, a fleeting sensation. Jung too has associated the symbolism of the quaternary with the fourfold functions of the psyche: sensing, intuiting, feeling and thinking.³⁷ The psyche would not therefore be functioning normally should any one or more of these four functions remain inactive.

Even so, apart from contributing to the functional completeness of the psyche, it is still not entirely clear what role dream plays in the meeting of Eros and Logos. Because apprehension of a process that takes place at the pre-conceptual level is incapable of formulation in discursive terms, Arghezi

³⁷Cirlot, pp. 256-258.

introduces two situations, both oblique and concrete at the same time, in which dream is the true center of activity.

In the first, Lady Poetry is asked "to make of it [dream] a beginning with every finger on the string." Remembering that coardă (string) forms part of the image-cluster centered around 'sound,' and that Lady Poetry herself has been compared to "the song of the violin that sleeps unplayed," it may be inferred that dream provides the occasion for a harmonic entelechy, where what previously existed only in potential now acquires a specific form through dream or perhaps in the mind of the 'dreamer,' the poet lost in reverie. In dream, then, a beginning is made; the poetic Idea is born.

For the second situation, Arghezi explores the multi-significance of pirostrie, a word of neo-Greek origin, which can refer either to a trivet, over which water may be boiled, or to the crowns (cununi) worn by the bride and bridegroom at the wedding ceremony in the Orthodox Church. Lady Poetry is instructed to make as dream's pirostrii (trivet-crowns) "the burning ivory of the body." According to the dictates of common sense, the meaning here is that dream catches fire when touched by the heat of the body, in other words, dream acquires a life of its own through the medium of poetry. And even if we were to assume that pirostrii (which after

all is a plural form) refers to the crowns used in the wedding ceremony, the general meaning would not differ greatly. The phrase 'fă-i pirostrii' would then signify 'dă cunună,' (marry) and the whole line might read "marry dream with the animal heat of life," give it material form so that it may feel and sing, and communicate directly with mankind. Nevertheless, this explication does not seem to exploit fully the subtle weave of correspondences. For one thing, in the second reading of pirostrii, it is "the burning ivory of the body" itself which is placed on the heads of dream as a symbol of sacred unity.

The first step that must be taken in order to achieve in any way a satisfactory understanding of this complex line is to consider the interrelationships that exist between the three imagistic nuclei--the trivet/crown, the ivory of the body, and the body's warmth--and the greater concatenation of image-clusters around which the poem is organized. The blinding whiteness of ivory, we believe, refers back to the "white print" of the beloved's body in the first stanza, and thus indicates a state of purity or virtuality. On the other hand, the adjective fierbinte (burning)--which is linked syntactically both to the ivory (ivoriul) and to the image of a body (unui trup), that given to dream--indicates a contrary state, that of animality, characteristic of the human body. Both aspects--pure spirit and animal

passion--are synthesized in the 'body' which Poetry gives to Dream. This synthesis, moreover, is given qualitative extension in the metaphors "With memories of marble and with bee-hive smells," where marble recalls the ivory of the body (presumably as a Platonic Form) and bee-hive smells conjure up an active, calorific existence.³⁸

Lady Poetry, therefore, remains the prime-mover; only she has the power to give dream substantial form and make of it an instrument of man's salvation. As a mother-figure,³⁹ capable of nourishing dream, she is hailed as a "Citadel of altars," a "source of human life!" These images become somewhat less opaque in the light of the final act of creative union resumed in the last

³⁸ Although in general critics find Stihuri to be characteristic of Arghezi's more youthful poetry, with its tendencies towards the vague, the imprecise and the ethereal (remembering, however, the contrary tendency already noted in this chapter towards the concrete and the material), it is noteworthy that many of the principal motifs appear in later cycles. Thus the first line from Ingenuncheare (Subjugation), a poem from Versuri de seară,--"Tu miroși ca marmura și apa din fântână" (You smell like the marble and the water from the spring)--echoes in elliptical form the line from Stihuri: "With memories of marble and with bee-hive smells." In Ingenuncheare, moreover, the motifs of marble and water are articulated, possibly suggesting in syntactical form prior experience. Examples of literary synaesthesia (as in this line) are also common in the poetry that Arghezi wrote before the First World War.

³⁹ In the following line, Arghezi hypothesizes that Poetry may be a mother. The word he uses--mumă--of archaic flavor, suggests a being of considerable antiquity, an Earth-Mother, a figure of awesome ambivalence.

stanza. Poetry here is conceived not as a symbolic abstraction--words written down on paper--but as a creative instinct which binds man to his origins. Poetry is a "Citadel of altars," the all-enveloping womb of the feminine principle in which countless successions of poets have officiated, uniting potentiality (Eros) with actuality (Logos).

The dualistic aspect to Arghezi's mysterious Lady which we met in the first two stanzas--where she is prăpastie and tortă, soră and străină--now undergoes yet another transformation. Not being able to decide whether Lady Poetry is a figure of maternal purity, "a source of human life," or the perverted being of a courtesan, but recognizing the profound fecundity of both for human imagination, the poet begs each in turn to make a sacrifice of their most precious possessions, milk and blood, the primordial fluids, the very essence of life. By making such a sacrifice, moreover, Poetry will purify itself, or, in Arghezi's remarkable poetic figure, "make its whorish heart like Cosînzeana's." The implication seems to be that through her inability to resist her inherent womanly promiscuity, Poetry has on occasions debased her creative energies, by selling herself to the highest bidder. Obliquely in the opening lines of Stihuri and elsewhere in more open manner (Vraciul), Arghezi has attributed a number of unworthy practices to his fellow artists, but here it is Poetry

itself that he credits with a lack of moral restraint.

Cosînzeana, it must be explained, is the name of a golden-haired fairy in Romanian folk-legend, a mythical representation of purity. But through its etymological derivation,⁴⁰ her name is also associated with St. John the Baptist's Day or, as we would usually know it, Midsummer's Day, as well as with the plant, known in English as Our Lady's bedstraw (Gallium verum), which blooms at that time. This plant has flowers of a yellowy-golden hue, not unlike the hair of the fairy, a fact that leads a certain degree of plausibility to the theory that, with the image of Cosînzeana, the intricate system of color-symbolism exploited (perhaps unconsciously) by Arghezi in Stihuri reaches its culmination. In the ascending scale of colors black-white-red-gold, the golden locks of Cosînzeana, who is also the beloved of Făt-Frumos (Prince Charming), possibly conveys a state of glory, a moment of transcendence achieved in and through poetry.

While freely conceding that there is practically no evidence of serious study on Arghezi's part in any of the great color systems--alchemical, heraldic or liturgical--that would warrant their direct application

⁴⁰The name is derived from the Latin sanctus dies Johannis, St. John's Day, and is used (chiefly in the plural) to refer to the Christian festival which takes place on that day.

to Stihuri,⁴¹ the predominance of images with definite color-values, as well as a tendency towards esotericism in Stihuri (when compared with poems written during his maturity), provides sufficient grounds for attempting to construct a tentative schema of color-values. There can, however, be no question of symmetry in an arrangement that lacks a conceptual basis; a priori systemization, it need hardly be added, goes right against the grain of Arghezi's art. Examination of the text will reveal, we believe, a dynamic, alternating dualism (between black and white, black and red) finally resolved in the golden halo of Cosînzeana's hair. There is a transition from relatively inert states--the unconscious and conscious--to a moment of spiritual illumination, that is, the superconscious, represented by three planes of existence: subterranean, terrestrial and celestial.

The lowest plane--from which images of increasing translucency emanate--is that of a subterranean world, the dark caverns of the mind, the human unconscious, personified here by a mysterious Lady, whom we have at

⁴¹Ovidiu Crohmălniceanu has, however, pointed out (in his chapter on Agate negre) that Alexandru Macedonski--in whose circle Arghezi cautiously moved at the time of his initial literary debut (in Liga ortodoxă in 1896)--displayed keen interest in the color-symbolism of precious stones and was in part responsible for the influence of the more esoteric aspects of French Symbolism in Romania at the end of the nineteenth century.

various stages of our examination identified as a mother-image, a projection of the Unconscious, the Jungian anima, or as an Earth-Mother with seemingly contrary tendencies, maternal and violent, or more consistently as Creative Potential, otherwise called Lady Poetry because it assumes female form and characteristics both as a mental phantasma and as a pre-existent force similar to the Platonic Idea. Our Lady is first of all asked to allow her body to exist in the chaos of forces, a shadowy, formless, fluid world. The meaning seems clear: Poetry must return to its fluid beginnings, at "the bottom of the World," in order to be born anew, before she is sent forth to mankind as an abyss and as a torch. The dominant color is black, characteristic of prime matter, the Earth; but the objects at first associated with this color are fluid, dynamic (woods, chaos, muddy blacknesses etc.); and they only return to inert form (ash--a neutral gray) when the other colors forming the Arghezian axis--white and red--have themselves become increasingly fluid and volatile.

The antithesis of black and white is present even at this germinal stage in "the white letters" of our Lady's body; which in turn are later recalled by "the burning ivory of a body" and by "the memories of marble." The initial coloration suggests a crystalline form: unreleased creative energy "frozen into silence" as one stage in the alternating process of illumination

and obfuscation, patterned after the appearance and disappearance of the sun. The images associated with whiteness, however, progressively lose their marmoreal character and gain true fluidity; thus, after two intermediate stages--"pure water" and "source of human life"--water, the universal substance,⁴² acquires human qualities by its identification with the mother's milk.

The Romanian word for source, izvor, usually means a spring, the outlet of a subterranean river (whence arises its association with the watery principle of the unconscious); but it may also be used to indicate a source of light and heat. And when it is remembered that Lady Poetry appears to man as an abyss and a torch, this polivalent factor may help to extricate us from an embarrassing profusion of reds and yellows. For, while it is true that in the nether regions the flames of a torch would provide light of a kind, it should also not be forgotten that the fieriest of brands pales to insignificance in the light of the Sun. It seems more likely, therefore, that the poetic function of the torch is calorific, and that it is linked to the redness of blood, the fluid agent which in turn keeps the body at its designated temperature.

⁴²As the principal metabolic agent in corporeal existence, water is the preserver of life; and by its connection with Urwasser, it comes to ". . . symbolize the universal congress of potentialities, the fons et origo, which precedes all form and all creation." (CirIot, p. 345).

The color red is clearly symbolic here of a life-giving principle (which it shares with the whiteness of milk), whether its primary association be with fire or with blood. But because blood may be spilt orgiastically, and fire can torment the flesh in an auto-da-fé ("Citadel of Altars"), a sacrificial aspect may also be involved. Sublimation occurs only through suffering! By sacrificing her own flesh and body, so that Dream may in turn supply abundant nourishment for human imagination, Lady Poetry herself undergoes a unique transformation, making her heart like the heart of Cosinzeana.

On the purely physiological level, the heart is the center of all bodily functions; but, since all centers are symbols of eternity, the heart is also a cosmic emblem of the greatest significance. "For the alchemists," Cirlot has noted, "the heart was the image of the sun within man, just as gold was the image of the sun on earth. . . ." ⁴³ But there is also a venerable tradition whereby the workings of the heart are associated with love or passion. In the figure of Cosinzeana, therefore, an important core of meaning is established: in her, passion becomes Love, time becomes Timelessness, division becomes Unity.

Arghezi has provided his readers with a number of

⁴³Cirlot, p. 136.

signposts that point the way to this moment of ecstasy: the clearest of these is concentrated in "the rays" (of the Sun) in which eternity "conceals. . . . the paths and the contingent;" but at the very outset there is a reminder of the sun's untarnished glory in "the copper . . . that as yet untested / Waits at the world's end to be sought." The pirostrii too are solar symbols, whether they be the golden crowns used in the Wedding-liturgy, or the blackened trivet on which inert matter (black) changes into gray ash (passive) and white smoke (active) through the action of red flame.⁴⁴ In Cosînzeana; whose golden hair or corolla directly reflects the rays of the sun, there is purity of spirit achieved through sacrifice.⁴⁵ By name she is linked to St. John the Baptist, and thus to the process of purification or sublimation.⁴⁶ Traditionally, Ileană Cosînzeana, to give her her full name, is connected with the wonderful power of dream, because on the eve of Midsummer's Day she dreams of the handsome prince she

⁴⁴The crown, because it is emblematic of the burning disk of the sun; the trivet, because its three legs ". . . correspond to the three solar 'movements'--the rising, the zenith, and the setting. . . ." (Cirlot, pp. 44 and 333 respectively).

⁴⁵Compare the lore surrounding Cinderella's sense of inferiority, whose counterpart in Romanian folk-tales she is.

⁴⁶On the island of Puerto Rico, the patron saint of which is St. John the Baptist, it is customary for young girls to reaffirm their purity by baptism on June 24.

is destined to marry, so that the phrase "noptile Cosînzenei (Nights of Cosînzeana) has become proverbial in Romania. Moreover, the legends that recount the story of their union speak of animals suddenly being endowed with the gift of speech, and other miraculous occurrences, which are manifest signs of a renovatio, of the restoration of primal harmony. By his invocation to Lady Poetry to make her heart like Cosînzeana's, the poet is entertaining a hypothesis of immeasurable value to the human race, namely, that through poetry plenitude will be restored, the zenith attained.

And only by extending to man, in the final stanza, the plenitude already experienced by Poetry and Dream, can the third panel of the great triptych representing the return to unity from multiplicity be restored to its rightful place:-

Priveghe însă visul, stăpîn peste durată,
Să nu se depărteze de oameni niciodată.
Şi cînd ne ții puterea pe brațul ce ne leagă,
Simțind sub sărutare culcată lumea-ntreagă,
Iubirea ta să fie asemeni unui rit,
Ca sufletul din rugă să iasă-ntinerit.

Watch over dream, master of duration, none the
less,
Lest it ever abandon man.
And when you preserve for us that strength over
the arm that binds us,
And we feel beneath the kissing the whole world
lodged within us,
Let your love be like a rite,
So that the soul from prayer may emerge
rejuvenated.

For man, dream--"the master of duration"--is the only window to a world of spiritual values; but both dream

and man rely on the power of poetry to bind them together. A personification of doubtful sex (possibly an androgyne), Dream is depicted here holding the poet, or universal man, in his arms. Not unnaturally, their embrace is sealed by "kissing" (not one kiss but many, a repeated act of cosmic significance) which, in our view, occasions a spiritual rather than a sexual climax, although the language of sexuality is appropriate for a union that takes place on the level of feeling.

But really this union involves three persons, not two, because Poetry herself is an active participant, bearing down with all her "strength" on the arm that binds the others. In this complex interlocking of different planes of reality, Arghezi employs with great suggestivity the symbolism of the ternary, according to which the union of any two persons inevitably implies the appearance of a third, as happens in the family, the fundamental unit of completion in human life. According to Cirlot, ". . . three has the power to resolve the conflict posed by dualism; it is also the harmonic resolution of the impact of unity upon duality."⁴⁷ It is a figure of perfect equilibrium, since from the union of man and dream, or of man and Creative Potential through dream, an infinite number of individual poems (Stihuri) are born, each of which in

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 318.

turn exerts its proper influence on the conscious mind of the poet. Absolute reciprocity is necessary, since each of the constituent elements (passivity-activity and their latent outcome) is dependent on the other for its maturation.

That Poetry is an active participant in a triangular affair of the heart is made clear in the penultimate line of the poem. But what is not clear, at least in the English translation, is the reciprocal nature of the possessive adjective in the combination "your love," which may mean either your love for us or our love for you. Similarly, the gerund "sintind" (translated as "we feel") can be related both to the subject of the verb "preserve," namely, you, Poetry, and to the indirect object "for us," once more with the aim of concentrating three persons or forces into one. The verbal form feeling, moreover, emphasizes the intuitive nature of this experience, which merges three time-levels (past, present, and future) into one: the eternal. The act of union, the sharing of 'consciousness' occasions total recall; suddenly, in one privileged moment, an epiphany of exceptional radiance, there is a billowing-out of 'consciousness,' an expansion into infinity, the effortless embracing of the universe in its totality ("the whole world lodged within us"), followed by a return to the center. It is the macrocosm concentrated in the microcosm.

Reciprocal love, which is true love, selfless and yet self-satisfying, is to be expressed ritually; but a rite requires the officiation of a high priest, clearly in this case the poet who gives outward expression to inner meaning. Stihuri is precisely the expression of such an experience--occurring here once in time but with the potential for infinite repetition, since Poetry is a "Citadel of altars," and may be possessed by any who follow the path of intuitive knowledge, feeling. If we were to paraphrase the message of the Gospels, it would be to say: "Believe and seek not rational truth." With Arghezi, it merely would be necessary to substitute for believe the key word feel, in order to enter into communion with him; but that is not to differentiate between faith and feeling, which ultimately are one and the same, as the final line reveals.

The structural arrangement of Stihuri (four stanzas of decreasing length, composed of twenty, fourteen, eight, and six lines respectively) seems to indicate both a narrowing and deepening of experience, rather like the return flow of a series of concentric circles, ever tending towards the primal point, the seminal idea. In relation to this experience, the poet is both on the outside and on the inside. He it is who has indulged in a series of apostrophes, invocations to the poetic spirit in man; but the motivation

directing these invocations was never entirely clear: at one moment, the poetic voice would speak in wonder, another moment with passion, another moment banteringly or with diffidence. The final line settles the quandary, because for the first time we are told the poet has been praying (din rugă), and the pattern of prayer is precisely that of resolution and irresolution. Moreover, we also learn that the experience of Stihuri has been entirely spiritual: not only for the poet himself but for all who have shared in the experience--the articulated form sufletul (the soul) makes that quite evident.

And finally, the joining together in an act of faith, the prayer that harmony shall be restored, carries with it the reward already offered to Poetry, Dream and the Poet himself, for ". . . all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Mt. 21:22). Through the process of purification offered by poetry, man shall re-emerge in his pristine condition, reborn and renewed.

CHAPTER IV

THE BELOVED: CREATIVE DISPOSITION OR MUTUAL ANTAGONISM

We have attempted to show in Stihuri that certain striking parallels between Jung's concept of the anima and the Arghezian phantasma, a female figure of ambivalent character, can greatly aid our understanding of Arghezi's perception of poesis as an unconscious creative disposition seeking expression through the male mind. Unconscious activity, however, is not always directly related to the spirit of creativity in Arghezi's verse. In Descîntec (Counter-Charms), for example, we never know whether the steps which approach and retreat behind the locked door that gives access to the human unconscious are those of the poet's beloved. Although the padlock (lacăt) trembles as if being kissed,¹ when the eye of male consciousness attempts to peer into the darkened room (încăpere) of the unconscious, the door does not spring open, since apparently the key (of

¹"Lacătul simte și tresare/Cu bezna mea, ca de o sărutare." Sărutare (kissing) of course is the moment of creative union in Stihuri.

poetry) is missing--leaving the poet to plead somewhat plaintively that his star should descend to unlock the door.

In other poems, on the other hand, the relation of unconscious activity to poetry is more obvious, especially when the presence of a woman is felt, as in these much admired stanzas from Morgenstimmung (Morning-feeling):-

Tu ți-ai strecurat cîntecul în mine
Într-o dup-amiază, cînd
Fereastra sufletului zăvorîtă bine
Se deschisese-n vînt,
Fără să știu că te aud cîntînd.

Cîntecul tău a umplut clădirea toată,
Sertarele, cutiile, covoarele,
Ca o lavandă sonoră. Iată,
Au sărit zăvoarele
Și minăstirea mi-a rămas descuiată.

You filtered your song into me
One afternoon, when
The window of my soul well and truly barred
Flew open in the wind,
Without my knowing that I hear you singing.

Your song has filled the whole building,
The drawers, boxes, rugs,
Like a sonorous lavender. Look,
The bars have come loose
And the monastery lies open to me.

Seemingly, at a time when the poet is exclusively occupied with metaphysical questions and all entrances to his spiritual world (symbolized by the monastery) have been barred, only song, the song of a mysterious woman, has the power to burst open the bars and flood his whole being with delight. And this woman, as we learn in the final stanza, is the terrestrial counterpart to the

poet's spiritual aspirations: her origins are in the depths of the earth, his in heaven.²

The collapse of the poet's watertight spiritual world, which her presence occasions, acquires cosmic proportions in the penultimate stanza of Morgenstimmung. Just as the woman's song is like a storm to the poet's senses,³ so the change in his feelings is represented by sudden atmospheric upheaval:-

Cu tunetul se prăbușiră și norii
În încăperea universului închis.
Vijelia aduse cocorii,
Albinele, frunzele . . . Mi-s
Șubrede bîrnele, ca foile florii.

With thundrous roar the clouds too cave in,
Into the room of the closed universe.
The hurricane brought the cranes,
Bees, leaves . . . My beams
Are flimsy, like flower-petals.

Driven helter-skelter before the violence of the hurricane, the "cranes, bees and leaves"--all of them symbols in their own way of the poet's private world--become images of instability.

Buffeted from within rather than from without, the poet feels the whole structure of his being weakening. Wrenched loose from his place in a world of absolute ideas and spiritual constants, he becomes subject to

²"Eu veneam de sus, tu veneai de jos. / Tu soseai din vieți, eu veneam din morți." See page 109 for further remarks on this significant statement.

³Suggested in the second and third stanzas by the sensual materialization of her presence: first as song, then as sound impregnated with fragrance in the synaesthetic image ("sonorous lavender"), then as touch--the song "enters and undermines" the poet, and finally

uncontrollable motion, to sudden fragmentation and dissolution. "Why did you sing?"--he cries in the final stanza--"Why did I hear you? / You've become one with me vaporously--/ Inseparable--beneath the skies."

Delightful though this mysterious lady may be, she represents a constant menace to the unity of the poet's person. Unless her charms can be resisted and a measure of conscious control restored (the true synthesis of Eros and Logos that we witnessed in Stihuri), total psychic catastrophe will ensue: the recipient of these flattering attentions will find himself devoured by a principle of tenacious rapacity.

Hostility of such a total nature is less evident in Cîntare (Song)--a poem enjoying something of the equilibrium that characterized Stihuri--perhaps because the act of creation is an accomplished fact. Song is here personified as a female companion, accompanying the poet in his travels through life, offering him refreshment at every turn. Initially, however, she too is felt to be a danger to the poet's peace of mind, and the poem opens with the image of the 'hero' in abject retreat from the field of battle:-

M-am apărat zadarnic și mă strecur din luptă
În umbra lunii albe, cu lancea naltă ruptă.
Pusei pământ și ape, zăgaze între noi,
Și sîntem, pretutîndeni, alături, amîndoi.
Te întîlnesc pe toată poteca-n așteptare,

as a total entity ("your whole being, nearby").

Neconținuta mută a mea însoțitoare.

In vain did I defend myself and now I'm slinking
away from the fight
In the shade of the white moon, with my tall
spear shattered.
I put earth and water, as dikes between us,
And we are, everywhere, alongside each other.
I meet you waiting at every turn along the
track,
Silent incessant companion of mine.

The poet is a man born with certain privileges, but also
with certain obligations not imposed on other beings.

It is his task to give expression to Song, that intima-
tion of divinity which constantly haunts him.⁴ The
poet can never completely resist responding to the
voice that whispers in his ear, but it is in his nature
--as a proud and independent spirit--at least to try to
resist.

Arghezi symbolized this resistance in two ways.
First, in the image of the warrior with the broken spear.
Forced to do battle, the poet-protagonist found the
struggle hopeless ("in vain"), presumably because his

⁴Man's first words, a number of major Christian
writers have averred (for example Dante in his De Vulgari
Eloquentia, I, iv) was praise of God. Cîntare (Song),
which can also be translated as "Hymn," is precisely
this intimation of divine reality. For Arghezi, Song
is both a force within the poet's mind (amorphous crea-
tive potential) and an entity in its own right exist-
ing outside the poet's mind, the collective weight of
tradition perhaps.

spear⁵--a weapon fashioned from terrestrial materials (a wooden shaft tipped with crude iron)--proved of little avail against the omnipresence and the omnipotence of a spiritual being. The struggle, moreover, took place at night, a time of day clearly disadvantageous to male consciousness, which relies on the light of the Sun for its vigor. In the second image, the poet speaks of having erected physical barriers, such as dams or dikes (zăgaze), between his self and Song, in a fruitless attempt to withstand the assault of his senses. The metaphorical use of zăgaze is particularly felicitous, since a dike or dam normally serves to keep back vast quantities of water that would otherwise do serious damage to low-lying areas. As an amorphous, formless substance, water might be thought a suitable analogue for the ubiquitous substance of Song--let alone a powerful symbol for the human unconscious, as we have seen in Stihuri. For Arghezi's evocation of the spirit of Song, however, even water is too dense and impermeable a mass to serve as an appropriate analogue: indeed, water itself forms part of the barrier the poet has erected ("I put earth and water, as dikes between us"). Instead, Song is the "silent incessant companion" who

⁵Although there is no indication as to what form the battle took, nor at what point the lance got broken, it would not do to overlook the sexual symbolism implicit in this struggle between antagonistic forces (male and female) and especially in the breaking of the vertical spear.

never leaves the poet's side as he progresses through the journey of life.

In Stihuri, it may be remembered, the path or tracks (poteca-potecile respectively) formed part of the image-cluster centered around the journey into exile man has been making since the Fall of Adam. As man fell further and further into sin, the distance which, metaphorically speaking, lay between him and his goal, correspondingly increased. The direct road which would have taken him back to his point of departure, a state of pristine bliss, lay hidden in the rays of eternity, so that "The trail [poteca] across the country's hand . . . which perhaps to heaven leads or perhaps homeward wends " was ". . . as yet unblazed." Stihuri moves from hypothesis to earnest invocation: at the conclusion of the poem there is conviction that the creative act of poetry will bring about a renewal of the human spirit, but nothing has as yet been accomplished.

What remains mere potential in Stihuri, however, is already realization and fulfillment in Cîntare, and once again, the sequence of tenses provides the best clue. While the time level is more or less constant in Stihuri (all the verbal forms which state or affirm are in the present), in Cîntare the tense fluctuates between the present perfect and the present, indicating a succession of achievements in the past which are

currently being achieved again. The only exception occurs in the third line ("Pusei pământ și ape . . .") where the use of the preterite emphasizes the fact that the time when the poet was immune to incursions from the unconscious is long past. Now only token resistance is offered, and the shamefaced retreat of the poet bears something of the stigma of continual sexual violation. Although there is not a single adverb of time to indicate repeated action, the combination of the verb to meet and the present tense in the fifth line is evidence enough that habitual action is involved. The poet meets his lady "waiting at every turn along the track"; and each meeting is the occasion for further realization and fulfillment.

The very fact, however, that the lady is waiting for him shows that he has not strayed from the right road; on the purely topographical level, her function is almost that of a set of signposts, pointing the way to the desired end. The next line--in which she is described as the poet's companion--adds some weight to this reading, especially if it is remembered that însoțitoare is also the Romanian word for a female guide. But she is evidently not the sort of guide that harasses defenseless tourists over the loudspeaker system of a state charabanc; instead, she remains silent (mută), as though her function were clearly understood by both parties and formal expression at this stage served no

real purpose.

At certain points along the road the poet and his lady come across natural springs or wells and halt to refresh themselves:-

Pe la fîntîni iei unda pe palme și mi-o dai,
Iscată dintre pietre și timpuri, fără grai.
Ți-ai desfăcut cămașa și-ntrebi cu sîinii-n mînă
De vreau s-astîmpăr setea din ei sau din fîntînă.
Ai dus la țurțur gura cu gura mea plecată,
Voind să bei cu mine scînteia lui deodată.

At the wells you wet your palms with water and
give me some,
Water that sprang up amongst stones and times,
without sound.
You've undone your blouse and ask with breasts
in hand
Whether I wish to quench my thirst from them
or from the well.
You've sought the icicle bending your mouth
down with mine,
Wishing to drink its sparkle at the same time
as me.

The regularity with which the couple come across these wells (fîntîni) may remind the reader of hot dusty roads stretching out across Romanian plains, whose relief is broken here and there by a long well-arm raised invitingly to the sky. And certainly, the comradely spirit with which the lady offers to bathe her companion's face--a far cry from the hostility she displayed in the opening section--underlines the impression of growth-in-understanding, of acceptance of a common mission.

But the water which she draws from innumerable wells or scoops up in her hands is holy water: it is the water (unda is the form with the definite article)

"that sprang up amongst stones and times, without sound."

In short, it is primordial water, ". . . the fons et origo, which precedes all form and all creation."

(Cirlot, p. 345.) Even though total immersion is not involved, the ablutions performed by the couple assuredly symbolize the act of purification required of novitiates about to be introduced to a great mystery. As far as Song is concerned, the journey to the fountain and the wetting of her palms parallels the return of Lady Poetry's body to the chaos of force in Stihuri: a return which prepares her for the time when she is sent out to mankind "as precipice and torch."

In perhaps the profoundest gesture that we are likely to meet in Arghezi's poetry, the poet's companion, Song, offers him a choice between slaking his thirst from the well-water or from her breasts which, unbuttoning her dress, she takes between her hands. It is a gesture--"the primordial gesture" Șerban Cioculescu has called it (Introducere, p. 122)--which appeared first in Psalmul de taină (Mystery Psalm), where the poet's beloved frees her breasts halfway out of her dress "so that the fire of the mouth may kiss them, / Covered by hands attentively." One of the most enduring memories in man is the childhood experience of sucking at his mother's breasts, and in Arghezi's poetic figure the care and attention with which the hands cover the breast conveys precisely the baby's need for security and

protection. In Cîntare, on the other hand, the female companion who offers the poet nourishment resembles at first sight the mother of all mothers, the Great Mother--an archetype of the human unconscious--rather than the personal mother of the poet's childhood.

But to identify this maternal figure strictly as the Earth Mother perhaps only confuses the issue, since it would make little sense for the poet's companion to offer him a choice of sustenance if she herself were an embodiment of all the matriarchal values in man. The poet's "silent, incessant companion," we feel, is more properly a personification of Song: she may seem to be a combination of the mater natura and the mater spiritualis, but only because these provide suitable analogues for the poet's representation of her essential ambivalence. Song, that is to say, poetry in potential, is an irresistible force; as a continual source of nourishment for the human imagination, she is both inside and outside of us. It is clear, however, from the following image that she is not a self-perpetuating principle.

The poet may have declined his Lady's offer; there is no way of knowing. The poetic context merely establishes that the poet and his Lady bend down together to drink from the turțur. Another of Arghezi's polyvalent images, the turțur probably refers to the icy freshness of spring-water; in which case, as the couple

stoop down, a moment of stasis, almost an epiphany occurs, because the jet of water suddenly and momentarily assumes a crystalline form.⁶ This moment of stasis lasts only so long as it takes the poet and his lady to drink simultaneously the sparkle, the quintessence, of the water. Alternatively, turțur might refer to the open pipe through which water runs at a water source, and by extension, although this usage is restricted to Transylvania, to the trough at which cattle drink. In the first case, turțur would refer directly to the steady flow of water, in the second to an artifact that channels the water in a particular direction, and in the last case to the particular trait cattle often exhibit in lowering their heads together in order to drink.

The sacramental aspect to this moment of sharing--somewhat akin to communicants drinking from the same chalice--supports the view, we believe, that these opening twelve lines are centered around the ritualistic act of poetic creation. In Arghezi's bold imagery, the poet is at first an unwilling lover who experiences outrage (castration-complex the Freudian literati would call it) at being subject to continual ravishment. Paradoxically, however, Song becomes more desirable to the poet to the extent that she acquires a corporeal

⁶ Compare Inscripție pe un pahar (discussed in our final chapter).

existence of increasing intensity and, it should be added, visibility. Vaguely hostile as seducer, more reassuring as guide or companion, she is full of consideration in her role as mother, but only as a co-communicant does she become one with the poet. Whereas, in Stihuri, the poet called upon Lady Poetry, despite her ambivalent features, to bring about their union through the mode of dream, in Cîntare she is depicted as the active agent who restores the poet to his pristine condition by leading him directly to the Fount of Life.

The dualistic nature of Song, which we alluded to before, both as an intimation of divinity and as a creative impulse lodged deep within the psyche, seems to be confirmed in the following four lines (13-16):-

Amestecată-n totul, ca umbra și ca gîndul,
Te poartă-n ea lumina și te-a crescut pămîntul.
În fiecare sunet tăcerea ta se-aude,
În vijelii, în rugă, în pas și-n alăute.

Blended into everything, like shade and like
thought,
Light carries you within her and the earth has
raised you.
In every sound your silence is heard,
In thunderstorms, in prayer, in steps and in
violins.

In these four lines the universal presence of Song is confirmed: she is, in Arghezi's fusion of opposites, "blended into everything," a quality which reaches its widest diffusion with the decline of conscious activity (at eventide) and yet provides sharp and welcome relief

at high noon, when the clarity of masculine thought is at its zenith. Moreover, she is at one and the same time enveloped in divine light and a daughter of the earth, antipodal images which recall a similar contraposition in these lines from Vînt de toamnă: "Cold, fragile, new, original, / Light leads mankind in her skirts." Even when light is principally a spiritual force, as it is here, Arghezi is unable to resist a primeval urge to represent it as a maternal figure, as an Earth Mother or Demeter perhaps.

No less ambivalent than light in its manifestation on Earth, in its inarticulated form, Song may appear to be an integral part of the poet's self as well as an ambulatory projection, with an existence in its own right. A passage from Arghezi's youthful poetic manifesto, Vers și poezie, reveals that this phenomenological duality--called by Valéry in a somewhat similar context ". . . un incident extérieur ou intérieur"⁷--had already stamped itself on the poet's consciousness by 1904: "But Poetry, before being measured by its verbal unity, exists as a sort of irresolute god, as an ideal vapor, that makes a place for itself amongst thoughts, pains and joys, enveloping and blending them. Sometimes it appears to be an element that can stand on

⁷"Poésie et pensée abstraite," Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1957), I, 1338.

its own feet and wander alone without being coupled with an amorphous soul. United with a developed, creative being, it determines the dictum: the gift of poetry."⁸

This outside-inside relationship between Song and the poet's consciousness is even reflected in the sonorities by which its presence is known. Each of these sonorities is 'audible' in the physical world as much as in the psychical world, but the sounds we hear--crashes of thunder, murmur of prayer, echoing footsteps and the strumming of lutes--are mere approximations of a greater reality that is intuited directly through the inner ear of the mind. All these four sonorities reflect in some degree the osmotic principle first noted by G. Călinescu, to which we have already drawn attention. Except that the interpretation between the spiritual and the material, between heaven and earth, is here extended to the unconscious and the conscious. Thunder shatters the frail barriers of the conscious mind (Morgenstimmung); approaching footsteps behind the barred door of the unconscious suggest at least the possibility of re-establishing communications (Descîntec); the playing of the violin occasions the direct intervention of heavenly forces (Psalm I); even prayer is mysteriously aphonic, and the voice of the lovely psalmist cries out in wonder: "My prayer is wordless/ And my

⁸Linia dreaptă, No. 2 (May 1, 1904).

song, Oh Lord, is voiceless" (Psalm IV).

But these intimations of divinity only suggest one aspect of Song, and in the final four lines her human aspect is reinstated:-

Ce sufăr mi se pare că-ți este de durere,
De față-n tot ce naște, de față-n tot ce piere,
Apropiată mie și totuși depărtată,
Logodnică de-a pururi, soție niciodată.

What I suffer seems to me to cause you pain,
Present in all that is born, in all that perishes,
Close beside me and yet far away,
Betrothed for ever, wife never.

Once Song has been given poetic form, it follows that the poet's private sufferings are reflected in it, though always at one remove. Yet the fictive relationship that Arghezi establishes in Cîntare is no abstract formula; it is a flesh and blood affair, full of transports of delight that cannot last. The poet's apparent unwillingness to surrender his freedom of action (through marriage) can no doubt be explained in terms of artistic pride, a desire to maintain a state of self-sufficiency, but more likely, in view of the total context of the poem, it arises from the awareness that Song is a force far greater than can exist in any one poet, that she is a being only possessed momentarily during the act of literary creation.

The impossibility of possessing this phantasma of creative activity for any length of time occasions a far different response in Psalmul de taină (Mystery

Psalm).⁹ The psalm is mysterious (taină suggesting an arcanum, a sacramental mystery)¹⁰ because the Lady--whom we designate as the spirit of Love--is a force whose presence can be felt but whose nature can never be fully grasped or understood:-

O, tu aceea de-altădată,
ce te-ai pierdut din drumul lumii!
Care mi-ai pus pe suflet fruntea
și-ai luat într-însul locul mumii,
Femeie răspîdită-n mine
ca o mireasmă-ntr-o pădure,
Scrisă-n visare ca o slovă,
înfiptă-n trunchiul meu: săcure.
Tu ce mi-ai prins de cîntec viața
cu brațe strînse de grumaji
și m-ai pornit ca să mi-o caut
la tine-n palme și-n obraji.

Oh, you from another time,
Who've gone astray along the way of the world!
Who've placed your brow on my soul
And have taken my mother's place,
Woman diffused in me
Like a fragrance in a wood,
Written in dream like a letter,

⁹There is an interesting structural correspondence between the cycle of Psalmi (discussed in chapter VI) and Psalmul de taină. In the former, the lonely psalmist debates the existence of God and, like a doubting Thomas, demands visible proof of His presence; in the latter, the poet reviews the power and nature of his mysterious beloved, and ends by cursing her for her lack of faith.

¹⁰The difference between Psalmul de taină, where the sacramental mystery--induced by the spirit of Love--fails to bring about the individual salvation of the poet (witness the final stanza) and a poem such as Potirul mistic (discussed in the final chapter), where it does, is in all essentials the difference between selfish love (Eros) and selfless love (Agape). As long as Arghezi's ". . . haughty individualism, his demonia. . ." (Cioculescu, Introducere, p. 130) drives him to demand and not to give or share, he will remain an unintegrated and despairing being.

Entrenched in my trunk: an axe.
 You who've caught my life of song
 With arms tight around my neck
 And sent me forth to look for it in your palms
 and cheeks.

In many respects, the female figure which Arghezi evokes in this first stanza is a clarification and an extension of the ambivalent Lady we met in Stihuri, although she is presented as a vital force--deeply entrenched in the physical being of the poet--rather than as a hypothesis of the unconscious. As though to stress her archetypal significance, the poet addresses her as a creature "from another time," from a former life. By establishing different time levels, Arghezi may be alluding to the principle of metempsychosis, according to which the soul passes at death into another body. It is more likely, however, that the woman is a paradigmatic counterpart to the male of the species rather than an actual reincarnation of the First Woman. First known by man in the form and person of Eve, she has now "gone astray along the way of the world." The use of the present perfect tense is indication enough that Arghezi views the present-day division between man and woman as a repetition of the original loss of unity in the Garden of Eden.

And yet the woman remains aceea, that one from another time, as if to emphasize that Eve is the prototype of man's companion in misfortune. As an aspect of that harmony which bound man to God and man to man,

woman no longer accompanies man in his fallen condition. Instead, she has become a divisive force, since in illo tempore she was instrumental in perverting man's love for God. According to Arghezi's poetic figure, by placing her brow on the soul of man, she has taken his mother's place. The word Arghezi uses for mother, mumă, of unusually archaic flavor, has the function of insisting that each subsequent replacement of a mother's affection is patterned after the primordial transgression. Although Adam never had a mother, being created directly by God, the implication surely is that Eve took His place by diverting Adam's attention to herself.¹¹ In the natural course of events, moreover, fallen man tends to replace love for his mother with love for another woman, thereby ensuring the continuation of the human race. The figure of the beloved in Arghezi's poetry, as we have already seen in our analysis of Stihuri and Cîntare, is extraordinarily complex; the inherent ambiguities of this phenomenon are such that Arghezi returned to it again and again in an attempt to grasp its total meaning. Suffice it to say once again that this enigmatic figure seems potentially both harmful and beneficial: she is at one and the same time the

¹¹It would be inadvisable to take the word mother too literally; rather it is used here to symbolize everything that functions as a mother. In his specifically procreative functions, God would clearly fall into such a category.

image of paradisiacal bliss, the harmony man once enjoyed as a total being living in the sight of God, and the beguiling temptress whose offer of profane love man all too eagerly accepted.

Man in his fallen condition is likened to a tree or to a forest of trees (lines 5-8). The metaphors by which the poet gives expression to the presence of the woman cover a veritable gamut of human perception: from the immaterial--she is diffused within his being "like a fragrance in a wood"--to the concrete image of the axe embedded in the trunk of his tree. The intangibility and yet all-pervasiveness of perfume is a typically Arghezian metaphor, as we have already seen in Morgenstimmung and Stihuri, for those intuitive movements of the human spirit not readily accessible to rational explanation, such as the barely imperceptible incursions of the unconscious. The tangible presence, on the other hand, could hardly be more painful or more warlike; presumably it completes the picture in Cîntare of the defeated poet-protagonist retreating from the field of battle with broken lance. A blow of such severity, with an axe, moreover, would normally be a death wound. And so it is here for, by tempting Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit, Eve was condemning both man and woman to inevitable mortality, as well as to perpetual division and alienation. The trunk of the poet is also a synecdoche for the Tree of Life and as such it

embraces the whole history of mankind from the Fall of Adam. The death blow dealt to Adam is thus repeated throughout the succeeding generations, each man discovering his wound to be unique and universal at the same time. The other metaphor indicating the woman's presence ("Written in me like a letter") is strongly reminiscent of Stihuri, because it is only through the medium of dream that she acquires symbolic form. It would be idle to speculate on its exact nature. The total context of Psalmul de taină demonstrates, we believe, that the poet's perspective has shifted from poesis to man's existential condition. Even if we were to assume that the mystery of the beloved's nature and origin is contained in one letter ("o slovă"), all attempts to crack the cypher are doomed to failure, since Arghezi has failed to provide us with the key. Unwilling, at this stage, to divert our attention to the creative process that underlies the meaning of this poem, he sums up in one compact image the visionary nature of his experience.

In the concluding lines of the first stanza a more specific accusation is levelled against the woman. Her concupiscence has deprived man of that "life of song" --presumably that former life of paradisiacal harmony so profoundly suggested by Dante in the music of the spheres--by ensnaring him with a bait of sensual pleasures. Clearly the techniques she adopts in her work

of enticement are those of the passionate lover; "With arms tight around . . . [his] neck," she induces man to seek fulfillment in the ephemeral beauty of her body. Taking into consideration the poem's early date of composition (1904), as well as ". . . the eloquence of . . . [its] pathos and the impetuosity of feeling, . . ." Șerban Cioculescu was tempted to accord it ". . . a more intimate biographic character than [Arghezi's] other love poems. . . ." "Psalmul de taină," he continues, "seems to us to be a poem based on real life rather than imaginary experiences, although its artistry is of the highest order, by reason of the abundance of metaphors and the sustained tone of exultation."¹² If Cioculescu is right--and we have no reason to question the judgment of a fine critic and a close friend of the poet--this biographical element may help to explain the sudden desire for union through marriage which is the point of departure for the second stanza:-

Pe care te-am purtat brățară
la mîna casnică-a gîndirii.
Cu care am năzuit alături
să leagăn pruncul omenirii.
Pur trandafir, bătut în cuie
de diamant, pe crucea mea
Și care-n fiecă mișcare
pierzi cu-o petală cîte-o stea.
Cămin al dorurilor mele,
fîntîna setii-nvierșunate.
Pămînt făgăduit de ceruri
cu turme, umbră și bucate.

¹² Introducere în poezia lui Tudor, Arghezi, pp. 120-1.

You, whom I've worn as a bracelet
 On the homely hand of thought.
 Alongside whom I aspired
 To rock the child of mankind.
 Pure rose, beaten in nails
 Of diamond, on my cross
 And who lose with every movement
 Along with a petal a star or two.
 Hearth of my desires,
 Fount of frenzied thirst.
 Earth pledged by the heavens
 With flocks, shade and crops.

By analogy with other Arghezian symbols, the bracelet here serves the same function as a wedding-ring:¹³ it augurs oneness and continuity of purpose. But why should the poet's innamorata adopt the domestic mask of marital bliss? Her love, in this case, would be neither pure, selfless (Agape), nor a passion grounded solely in sexual instinct and individual egotism (Eros). It would be a union blessed by the Church, because according to Christian dogma the institution of holy marriage acts as a curb on unhealthy instincts, redirecting them to the common task of propagation. The answer can only be that this is a hypothetical consummation: it exists only as potential in the thoughts of the poet. Evidently, the woman is impervious to the poet's advances, declining to accept the social responsibilities she would incur as wife and mother, because her supramundane origins afford little protection against contamination from human contact.

¹³ Compare Pia, a poem treated in the following chapter.

Just what shape this contamination takes is revealed in the striking image-cluster which follows. The inflexible purity of the woman's love--the rose is clearly a symbol here of spiritual love--has been beaten in diamond nails (also symbolic of purity) onto the poet's cross. The nails which are driven into the wood of the cross seem to serve the same function as the axe embedded in the tree-trunk: they cause agonizing pain in man. As a terrible inversion of the Tree of Life, the cross stands for a world-axis; it is moreover a conjunction of opposites because the vertical stake provides Christian man with his only known ladder to Heaven and spiritual perfection, whereas the horizontal cross-piece is a reminder of man's materiality, his ties to the world of phenomena. As an emblem which lies at the very root of human existence, it offers man the chance of renewal through suffering or of slow death through equivocation.

In the specific context which Arghezi establishes, however, the stress is not so much upon man's suffering body as on the effect that contact with this body has on Love. It is essential to bear in mind the intricacy of Arghezi's graphic representation of this conjunction, according to which no less than three emblems are superimposed: Love or the essence of the woman is nailed onto the cross in the shape of a rose, which in turn invites a further analogy between two symbols of spiritual

perfection (the rose and the star). With each movement ("fiece mişcare") on the cross the rose loses a petal, and with each petal a star or two. By being affixed to a body in a fallen condition--racked by sin--pure love itself becomes subject to death, and in the process of withering away (falling petals) loses its former purity, symbolized by the star. What seems of particular significance is that by contamination Love becomes an ambivalent principle, and in a sense this passage from purity to imperfection resumes the total structure of the poem. Love, in an untarnished state, is the principle of universal harmony--"l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle"--but with man's disobedience of the sacred interdiction it was deflected from its natural path and became self-centered and self-seeking.

Arghezi's view of love, on the other hand, is conditioned less by moral scruples than it is by the ambivalence of love's immediate association in the human mind with a female figure. With all the fervor and rapture of the poetic voice of the Song of Songs, Arghezi proclaims his lover to be the fount of his frenzied thirst, the hearth of his desires.¹⁴ The promise of love in his beloved is tantamount to the proverbial land of milk and honey--replete with flocks, shade for rest and

¹⁴ Compare these verses from the Song of Solomon (4: 15): "a fountain of gardens, / a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon."

protection, and crops: in short, that earthly paradise lost to man in the Fall. But we should not let the exalted tone deceive us; the moment of rapture soon passes. Instead of leading him to a land of plenitude, the poet feels his lady dragging him down into the depths of the sea of troubles:-

Tu care mi-ai schimbat cărarea
 și mi-ai făcut-o val de mare,
 De-mi duce bolta-nsingurată
 dintr-o vîltoare-ntr-o vîltoare
 Și țărmi-mi cresc în jur cît noaptea,
 pe cît talazul mi se-ntinde,
 Și ai lăsat să rătăcească
 undele mele suferinde;
 Unde ți-s mîinile să-ntoarcă
 în aer căile luminii?
 Unde sînt degetele tale
 să-mi caute-n cununa spinii?
 Și șoldul tău culcat în iarbă,
 pe care plantele-l cuprind
 Și ascultă-n sînul tău suspinul
 iubirii, cucerit murind?

You who've changed my path
 And made a sea-wave of it for me,
 In that it leads my secluded canopy
 From one whirlpool to another
 And around me the shores grow as much as night
 does,
 As much as the breaker stretches out to me,
 And you've allowed to wander
 My suffering waves;
 Where are those hands of yours to turn back
 Through the air the tracks of light?
 Where are your fingers
 To seek in my crown the thorns?
 And your hip bedded down in the grass,
 Embraced by the plants,
 Does it hear in your breast the sigh
 Of love, dying conquered?

The first eight lines form a syntactical unit, leading up to the series of questions posed in the remainder of the stanza. "Love," in its feminine manifestation, is

addressed as a harmful agent since it has altered man's path on earth, by diverting him from the true Good.¹⁵ Of particular note is the recurrent motif of wandering, going astray. In the invocation which opens the first stanza, we are told that the woman's exile is self-imposed; it was, we believe, the natural outcome of her willful disobedience. Significantly, this opening invocation is repeated at the start of the penultimate stanza, where we also learn that she is roaming the world without purpose. And this loss of purpose is also reflected in the man whom she has turned into a wave and left to the mercy of the raging seas.

As a metaphor to suggest the stormy passions of life, the relentless cruelty of the sea is common enough in Western literature, and we have found occasion elsewhere to comment on its distinguished precursor, Petrarch's sonnet Passa la nave mia colma d'oblio (Canzoniere CLXXXIX). The dominant image is one of helplessness and dissipation. First a wave, man is led from one whirlpool to another (clearly symbolic of the death portended in the previous stanza), while all

¹⁵In his disquisition on Charity in Paradiso XXVI, Dante is firm in his conviction that God is the beginning and the end of all impulses of love: "Lo ben che fa contenta questa corte, / Alfa ed O è di quanta scrittura / mi legge Amore o lievemente o forte." Since Love tends to the good, and the highest good is God himself, it follows that love for self is merely a perversion of that perfect love.

around the shores recede with the coming of night (inducing spiritual blindness and complete disorientation), then his wave is enveloped in the roar of the breaker (resulting in disintegration), finally leaving him dispersed throughout innumerable waves, with only his suffering as a cohesive factor.

The poet-protagonist in Psalmul de taină is a pathetically passive and irresolute character compared to the Promethean stature of the courageous foreigner in Fiara mării.¹⁶ Both are far from home, from the privileged status they enjoyed in the Garden of Eden, but the latter is supremely self-reliant--since it is in the nature of man to seek answers here and now--while the former is merely subservient to the doubtful influence of his lady. The contempt Dante displayed in the vestibule of Hell towards the neutral angels and the inactive of spirit perhaps provides a literary parallel for the violence with which the poet frees himself from the deceptive allurements of passionate love at the conclusion of Psalmul de taină.

It is clear that the ceaseless wandering and

¹⁶See in particular the note of awe at man's resolution on which the poem concludes: "Departa foarte, frate, de sine-ți și de casă, / Gonind întreg oceanul, străin, din val în val. / Unde se duce singur, urzit în marea deasă?" (Far off indeed, brother, from yourself and from home, / Chasing the whole ocean, a foreigner, from wave to wave. / Where goes he all alone, woven in the dense sea?).

the dissipation of spirit which Love has induced in man causes extreme suffering. The anguish evident in the verse "unde mele suferinde" is at once echoed in the interrogatives "unde . . . unde . . ." (an example of polysemy, since unde is also the articulated form of unde: waves). Where, the poet asks in his distress, are those hands of Love that can turn back "Through the air the tracks of light," that is to say, restore the contacts between the spiritual and material worlds, between God and man? Where, he continues, intensifying the function of the woman's hands, are those fingers "to seek in . . . [his] crown the thorns?" Ever the poet of tactile perception, Arghezi makes a plea for tangible proof of Love's existence, just as in his fifth Psalm he implored God to send "a young angel or two" as a "sign of his remoteness." The image of the crown of thorns, of course, accentuates an impressive Christ-figure (compare Nehotărire), according to which man in his present life retraces the paradigmatic journey chosen by Christ, so that our entire life on earth becomes a Via Crucis.

This reference to the martyrdom that Love continually demands of man during his natural life is contrasted in the concluding lines of this stanza to the desiderata of lust. This frolicsome scene affords Arghezi the opportunity to probe the ephemerality of sensual love, whose moment of rapture is followed by instant exhaustion.

And yet the following stanza, which continues the alternation of ". . . sacred and profane representations"

(Cioculescu, Introducere, p. 121), returns to the idea of love as a divine benefactor:-

Tu ce-nfiori pe șesuri plopilor
cînd treci, din creștet la picioare,
Și prinzi de tot ce te-ntîlnește
O plasă caldă de răcoare.
Tu ce scrutezi, scoțîndu-ți sîinii
pe jumătate din veștimente
Ca să-i sărute focul gurii,
cuprinși de mîini cu luare-aminte,
Pustia vremii, străbătută
de șoimi de scrum și de nisip,
Căroră vîntul le-mprumută
o-nfățișare fără chip;

You who across the plains make the poplars
tremble
When you pass, from tip to toe,
And fasten to all you meet
A warm net of freshness.
You who observe closely, freeing your breasts
Halfway out of your dress
So that the fire of the mouth may kiss them,
Covered by hands attentively,
The wilderness of time, roamed over
By hawks of ash and sand,
To whom the wind lends
An appearance without shape;

For, as she crosses the plain, her presence alone suffices to make the poplars tremble. That this sudden agitation ("from tip to toe") is a sign of universal reintegration is at once confirmed by the image of the net the lady draws around her as she passes. Concretely, the net might refer to the intertwining that takes place when the undergrowth and foliage she has disturbed trails after her, catching in turn other brambles and young shoots. More figuratively, and surely this is the sense

of the oxymoron ("warm net of freshness")¹⁷ her passage through the coppice brings completion. As befits a daughter of the Sun and Earth, she contains within her being the principal life-giving elements: heat and water.

The subsequent image of the woman who, in a primordial gesture, unbuttons her dress and offers her breasts, to appease the thirst of man unslaked since Adamic childhood, has already been discussed in connection with a similar moment in Cîntare. But her gesture is not only restricted to a mother's instinctive response, it has also a cerebral aspect: the manner with which she scrutinizes the world around, as though assessing its true validity. In sharp contrast to the renewed fecundity which she herself has generated, we see through her eyes "The wilderness of time, roamed over by hawks of ash and sand." This wilderness can only be the barren state to which mankind has been reduced since Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden--vreame here meaning an entire epoch, by analogy with such ecclesiastical usage as vreamea de apoi, the life hereafter. The symbolic meaning of the hawks, we believe, is particular to Arghezi; it can hardly symbolize victory over concupiscence, as it does in the cloister at Silos,¹⁸

¹⁷The oxymoron is one of Arghezi's favorite figures of speech; compare the "warm shade" in which the spider spins its velvet rope (Tu nu ești frumoșețea).

¹⁸See Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 134.

since the hawks themselves are of ash and sand, and their features are barely recognizable in the desert wind.¹⁹

It is more likely that the hawks are symbolic of mankind's pride and covetousness, the vanitas vanitatis of Ecclesiastes. It is even possible that Arghezi--a voracious reader of the Bible in his youth as in his old age--was thinking of these very lines: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. / Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity." (Eccl. 12: 7-8.)

The repetition of the opening invocation at the beginning of the penultimate stanza reinforces the impression of the void in human life that the absence of Love has brought:-

Tu te-ai pierdut din drumul lumii
ca o săgeată fără țintă
Și frumusețea ta făcută
pare-a fi fost ca să mă mintă.
Dar fiindcă n-ai putut răpune
destinul ce-ți pîndi făptura
Și n-ai știut a-i scoate-n cale
și-a-l prăvăli de moarte, ura;

You've gone astray from the way of the world
Like a targetless arrow
And your beauty seems made
To have lied to me.
But since you couldn't overcome
The destiny that stalks your person
And you didn't know how to oppose it with hate
And cast it to its death;

¹⁹The image must surely have been prompted by the fickleness of the desert wind which unnervingly can whip up loose sand to form incredible shapes.

Implicit in the idea of Love's misdirected purpose is that where it strikes home pain and suffering are inevitable, since it arouses aspirations that can never be fulfilled in this world. Thus the ambiguity of Love's subterfuge: in her pure form, she can unite all mankind (man and woman alike) in the Godhead; in her perverted form, she causes man to fall away from God, since an act of self-love is tantamount to the desire to be equal with God. Not surprisingly, therefore, Love's outward beauty, her made-up look, is viewed by the poet-persona as a lie or deceit on a grand scale.

In the human world, Love exists merely as a surface attraction. In its weakened, aimless state, it is not strong enough to resist the destiny which lies in wait at every turn. We should remember that Love is personified as a woman, and Arghezi seems unable to separate the two, as though he believed that Eve--the female prototype--were the incarnation of the choice between good and evil. Capable of arousing in man the memory of lost paradise, but incapable of helping man resist death, his ultimate destiny, Love the great allurer and deceiver provokes the poet's unforgiving curse:--

Ridică-ți din pământ urechea,
În ora nopții când te chem,
Ca să auzi, o! neuitată,
neiertătorul meu blestem.

Raise up your ear from the ground,
In the hour of night when I call to you,

So as to hear, o never-to-be-forgotten one,
My unforgiving curse.

Despite her lack of faith, however, Love is too powerful a force to be ignored. In certain aspects she can be compared to mâyâ, the spinner of false dreams in the world of phenomena. But Love is also never-to-be-forgotten; even in her degraded form, she is a reminder of the true happiness man knew in the sight of God. Just as the blasphemies hurled against God in Dante's bolge are prompted by final recognition of His might, so the bitter curse the poet raises "in the hour of the night" is motivated by a similar sense of loss and deprivation.

CHAPTER V

HOMO DUPLEX; THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL

There are in man, Baudelaire has taught us, two simultaneous postulations, one towards God, the other towards Satan.¹ Arghezi, as we shall see in the next chapter, dedicated an entire cycle of Psalmi to a long and vain quest for purity and peace in the Godhead. No less unavailing, if we are to judge by the creative impotency of the magician in Vraciul, are those tendencies to etherealization which isolate the poet from the common herd of men and accentuate the egoism and vain-glory that separated him from God in the first place. Man's other inherent postulation, towards Satan, is reflected in a number of poems from Cuvinte potrivite (Triumful, Blesteme, Rugă de vecernie etc.) which deal with human bestiality, with cruelty to self and to others. These poems arise partly out of the horror of

¹"Il y a dans tout homme, à toute heure, deux postulations simultanées, l'une vers Dieu, l'autre vers Satan." (Mon coeur mis à nu, in Oeuvres complètes, ed. by Y.G. le Dantec, Paris: Gallimard, 1951, p. 1203.)

the First World War--which Arghezi castigated (witness his articles in Cronica) for the abandonment of all ethical standards in the pursuit of territorial and material gain--and partly from the degrading experience of his imprisonment at Văcărești, the direct consequence of his opposition to that war. Not surprisingly, therefore, his presentation of the struggle between the forces of good and evil appears to offer little hope for the future. But if these poems are viewed as acts of purgation--both private and public--they will be seen to pave the way to the promise of reintegration (which we discuss in chapter VI) and at least the temporary restoration of harmony through the act of poetic creation, which forms the nucleus of our concluding chapter.

By far and away the most nihilistic of this series of satanic poems is Triumful (The Triumph), the seminal idea of which--the triumph of the will for evil--is starkly set out in the very first line of the poem: "Își împlini voința cumplitul crunt efort" (Will achieved its terrible cruel effort). In a sense everything that follows is an amplification of this first line. As a vision of the triumph of evil over good, it is retrospective; thus, unlike Psalmul de taină--where the promise that Love brings is a necessary part of the dialectic--no hope whatsoever is offered of a way out. The last four lines return to the question of voință (will), but with a sense of inevitability, switching non-committedly

into the third person. These four lines resume what went before, just as the whole poem is the development of the emphatic opening affirmation:-

- Își împlini voința cumplitul crunt efort.
 Neturburat de bine și rău, privești destinul
 Și nu te mustră gândul că tu ești asasinul
 Viteazului din munte, întins, învins și mort.
 5 Osînda findu-ți dată de-a crește îndoit,
 Făcuși din tine două puteri adînci de ură,
 Și luași în luptă partea mîndrită, cu căldură,
 A celuia ce astăzi însemni c-a biruit.
 Năvala,-ntîi, fu-nceată, tîrzie, într-adins.
 10 Dar zi cu zi mai crude și mai necruțătoare,
 Oștirile cu coifuri, pe căi cotropitoare,
 Pămîntul de pedeapsă l-au rupt și l-au cuprins.
 Striviși în șapte zile ce-î zămislit în șapte.
 Nu mai adie vîntul în parcuri, parfumat.
 15 De țîțele femeii, rămase fără lapte,
 Prunci orbi și muți, schelete și sluți ai
 spinzurat.
 Albinele, din bozii, aduc la stupi otravă,
 Izvoarele-năcrite-s și strugurii scămoși.
 Ca să-ți ajungă ploaia, pune-n văzduh zăbavă
 20 Și norii-n chiagul serii curg vineți și băloși.
 Nici o vioară nu mai pricepe să mai sune,
 Chiar stelele, sfînțite și pure la-nceput
 Au putrezit în bolta visărilor străbune
 Și zările, mîncate de mucegaiuri, put.
 25 A năzuit un clopot să sune liturghia
 Și bronzul lui, ca scrumul, din turn s-a risipit.
 Într-un avînt vremelnic voi și ciocîrlia
 Cu aripile smulse să urce-n răsărit.
 Poate-n genunchi mai cauți tîrzia îndreptare
 30 Și ceri smerit hodină la cerul tău pustiu.
 E de prisos. Genunchiul de stei lipit ți-l țiiu
 Și biciul greu de plumburi și noduri, pe spinare.
 E de prisos. Izbînda, de veci s-a ciștigat.
 Curata voie bună și sfînta bucurie
 35 Din lanțul de robie nu pot să mai învie
 Și să atingă cerul bătut și-njunghiat.
 Voința nu se teme de-acum de-o înviere--
 Și ca să nu mai cerce să fie fericit,
 A luat în clește insul întreg și l-a stîrpit,
 Cu dreptul ce i-l dete sîlbatica putere.

Will achieved its terrible cruel effort.
 Undisturbed by good or evil, you consider destiny
 And the thought gives you no qualms that you're
 the assassin
 Of the hero from the mountain, stretched out,

- vanquished, dead.
- 5 Sentence being passed upon you to grow up doubled,
You made of yourself two deep forces of hate,
And you supported in battle the vaunted part,
ardently,
Of the victor whom today you represent.
The onslaught, slow at first, was later deliberate.
- 10 And day in day out more cruel and unsparing,
Armies with helmets, on marauding raids,
The earth in punishment they tore apart and seized.
You crushed in seven days what is built in seven.
No longer does the wind blow its fragrance
across the parks.
- 15 From the paps of women, left without milk,
Babes deaf and dumb, bags of bones and deformed,
have you hung.
Bees, from dwarf elders, bear poison to the
hives,
Springs go sour and grapes fibrous all.
So that the rain may reach you, cause the skies
to dawdle
- 20 And the clouds in eventide rennet to drivel
leaden-blue.
Not a violin knows any longer how to play,
Even the stars, hallowed and pure in the beginn-
ing,
Have decayed in the vault of ancestral reveries
And the horizons, eaten up with mildew, stink.
- 25 A bell has striven to sound the Liturgy
And its bronze, like ashes, in the tower has
crumbled away.
In a transitory upsurge, the skylark tried
With its torn wings to soar up to the east.
Perhaps on your knees you again seek late
guidance
- 30 And meekly beg your deserted heaven for rest.
It's of no avail. I hold your knee glued to
the rocks
And the heavy whip of leaden knots across your
shoulders.
It's of no avail. The victory has been won
since the beginning of time.
Pure desire for good and holy joy
- 35 From the chain of serfdom cannot rise again
And reach the whipped and stabbed heaven.
Will knows no fear of a resurrection now--
And lest the individual should seek happiness
once more,
It has crushed his being with a vice-like grip,
By the right the Savage Power gave it.

It is at once obvious that the different time-levels

operating throughout Triumful provide valuable clues to its general meaning. The movement of the poem is contained within two past definites--implini and dete--as though to indicate that what takes place in the present can only be understood in the light of some awesome past event.

The person addressed as tu, however, operates both in the present and in the distant past. Consequently, it is reasonable to surmise that he was in some way involved in this prior event. We first learn that this person, presumably universal man, is able to contemplate without the slightest twinge of conscience the heinous crime of murder he committed at some unspecified time. In the phrase "Undisturbed by good or evil," there is perhaps a suggestion of will (voință) removed from its moral context, the strength of purpose Nietzsche apotheosized in his Superman. Despite the traditional association of the mountain with the idea of spiritual elevation (Cirlot, p. 210), the identity of his victim, "the hero from the mountain," is only disclosed in the verses which follow.

The chronological order of events is especially perplexing. At first sight, the punishment (osînda) given to man ought to be the judicial outcome of the crime of murder, but this does not prove to be the case since, reading on, we find that the verbal form "findu-ți dată" is linked syntactically to the two past

definites făcuși and luași. The ambivalence of the penalty prescribed--"to grow up doubled"--arises from the multiple meaning of the adjective îndoit, especially when associated with the verb crește (to increase or to grow). Its most likely meaning, as is suggested in our translation of the original Romanian, is to grow up in a double form, that is to say, in divided form, possibly male and female. The crime for which this penalty was duly prescribed could only have been the original sin of Adam and Eve, as a result of which man became a divided being and was forced to multiply (crește) himself in sorrow. Îndoit, moreover, also carries the sense of bent double and of uncertainty, conditions of body and mind in which man found himself after his expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

But there is nothing in the text to support the view that Arghezi is alluding directly to a sexual division, to the enmity God put between man and woman. Instead, the voice of the omniscient narrator merely observes that man made of himself "two deep forces of hate" and "supported in battle the vaunted part . . . / Of the victor whom today" he represents. It becomes clear that the two antagonistic forces created in the human psyche at the Fall are the will for evil and the desire for good, although as we have already seen in Psalmul de taină such a categorization does not necessarily preclude a male-female parallel. It is significant

that Arghezi makes a semantic distinction between these opposing forces, reserving voință (line 1) for will for evil and voie (line 34) for desire or predisposition for good. That both should be forces of hate may not be entirely consonant with orthodox Christian dogma, according to which Evil has no de jure existence. Satan is not the cause but a deviation, as can be seen from the limited mechanical functions that Dante allows Lucifer in the icy pit of Hell. Such theological considerations are, happily, far from Arghezi's mind, and this figure of mutual animosity merely serves to heighten the divisive nature of man's fallen condition. In the ensuing struggle, man sided with the eventual victor, the satanic manifestation whom over the centuries he came to represent. At least for some time after the Fall, in Arghezi's version of Genesis, the struggle was real, and the desire for good continued to contend for man's soul. But the issue when it came--perhaps in the slaying of Abel by his brother Cain or its equivalent--was decisive, and the shining knight who carried the banner of Good ("the hero from the mountain") lies "vanquished, dead."

In the succeeding block of images (lines 9-12), the struggle between good and evil, previously seen as personal to man, acquires the scope of collective experience. Ever since the first, deliberate, almost gangrenous spread of evil, the pace of violence and destruction

has quickened. The vision of countless invading armies rampaging over the countryside seems to resume the whole history of those warring factions that made Romania one of the principal cockpits in Europe. The Sin of Adam, moreover, involved not only his descendents but also the whole natural world--which Arghezi depicts as being torn apart and occupied by way of punishment. It is a curious position for an Orthodox believer to take: just as his recognition of evil as a separate force verges on the heresy of Manicheism, so here his extension of the corrupting influence of sin to the natural world follows the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. These dogmatic discrepancies (and there are others) place a serious question mark against Pompiliu Constantinescu's attempt to view Arghezi's poetry in a strictly Eastern Orthodox framework.

The opening line to the following block of images strikingly juxtaposes two different time levels. The past definite striviși indicates the destructive force of Original Man's defiance of God's word rather than the rebellion of Lucifer and the Black Angels, since the context established by the reference to the "seven days" is clearly that of Genesis. The present tense, on the other hand, ("is built") evokes the picture of a cyclic process of creation and destruction that will continue until the Final Reckoning. Man's cruelty to self and others, therefore, acquires a paradigmatic

function; man is seen not so much as the unwilling beneficiary of a lamentable heritage but as an active and pitiless participant in its continuation.

In the central section of the poem, the Arghezian vision of life after the Fall takes on Apocalyptic proportions. Indeed, only now can we speak of visionary experience, because the three quatrains (lines 2-13) which precede these stupendous fifteen lines (14-28) are largely narrative in function. The opening quatrains, and the balancing three quatrains (29-40) which follow the Revelation, are evidently designed to focus the reader's attention on a unique experience. This much, at least, is clear from the shift in metrical schema from abba in the frame to abab in the core of the poem. The technique of switching from one metrical schema to another is somewhat reminiscent of the total flash-back in cinematography, where the audience is privileged to witness momentous events from the past as if they were actually taking place in the present, while at the same time judging these events in the light of historically verifiable evidence introduced by the author into the frame. With Arghezi, however, the scenes suddenly viewed in close-up are not limited to the past but are actually present in the world of today. It is as if dispensation had been granted for us to see the harsh realities not of this epoch, or of any other, but of the quintessence of all epochs

known to man.

Presenting such a quintessence, Arghezi does not give us a richly-embroidered tapestry, his approach is not the mythopoetic; instead, he isolates certain perennial features of everyday human life and shows them in a state of advanced putrefaction.² Without exception the aspects of the human condition he isolates also appear as significant motifs throughout Cuvinte potrivite, as well as in many of his other poetic cycles. It is fitting, therefore, that the first indication of decomposition is the absence of fragrancy, because in countless poems³ smell or perfume (especially when associated with incense) provides a suitable analogue for the presence of phantasmata, both spiritual and of the unconscious. The source of the fragrance, moreover, that the wind carries through parks (important for the conventional mise en scène of Arghezi's version of Symbolist melancholy) would primarily be flowers and shrubs, the favorite haunts of bees. Absence of fragrance, then, suggests that the nectar of the flowers

²Even in his ambitious treatment of the socio-gonic theme Cîntare omului (Hymn to Mankind), Arghezi eschews the customary clichés of historical manuals in favor of the most elementary achievements made by primitive man, standing upright, walking etc., which remain, nevertheless, as the brightest beacons in the story of man's evolution from ape to Lord of the Earth and Skies.

³Amongst those we discuss are Inscripție pe o casă de țară, Morgenstimmung, Stihuri.

on which the bees feed is itself subject to contamination, and this is confirmed two lines further on, when we learn that the bees have borne poison to the hives. Thus one key image-cluster--on which Arghezi relies so much to express a state of mind hovering between potentiality and fulfillment--suffers progressive debilitation as part of a general regressive process.

The regressive process--a return to the formlessness that precedes the new cycle of creation--is also characterized by appalling brutality. How else can we describe the extraordinary image of babes--here apparently born crippled and deformed--strangled in the flaccid sack of their mother's milkless breasts? It is a moment to incite simultaneous horror and compassion, comparable only to the scene of Count Ugolino gnawing at the marrow of his tormentor's skull (Inferno, XXXII, 125-129)! It is a denial of the sources of life themselves; a curse directed against man's own origins. Considering the special significance Arghezi attaches in his poetry to babes as symbols of future regeneration (Vînt de toamnă) and to mothers as representations of the Great Mother present in every man, this dramatic reversal of vital principles throws a particularly ironic light on to the title of the poem, since a triumph (or the alternative form Arghezi uses victory-"îzbîndă") usually indicates a positive rather than a negative outcome. At first sight it is as if only one aspect of a

Hegelian dialectic were in evidence, the antithetic and synthetic aspects of which would have to be sought in other poems of Apocalyptic spirit from Cuvinte potrivite.

In Rugă de vecernie (Vesper Prayer), for instance, the poet-persona is unable to withstand the pain and distress of his interior conflict (between the forces of good and evil) and, in the hope that a succession of hostilities will bring a period of respite, he is the first to give the order: "Light the pyre / That the saint in ashes beneath my eyes shall perish . . . !" ⁴ The Ego seeks a way out by eliminating the weaker of the warring factions; the instinct for self-preservation ultimately triumphs. This again is the thesis--although the note of personal commitment is far stronger than in Triumful--the antithesis is only revealed in the concluding stanzas of the poem, when the poet realizes that the universal acclaim which greets his sacrifice of the Christ in himself is a sign of the new Millenium:-

And within me mankind claps its hands
aroused

Like a hoard of peaceloving and cheery assassins
That prepare the justice of the coming light;
Some whirl axes, others deflower lilies,
With souls in darkness and fingers in the
light. ⁵

⁴"Aprinde-ți rugul / Ca sfântul în cenușă subț ochii mei să piară. . . ."

⁵"Și-n mine bate-n palme, mișcată, omenirea / Ca un norod de pacinici și veseli asasini / Ce pregătesc dreptatea luminii viitoare, / Unii-nvîrtesc săcurea, ceilalți desfoaie crini, / Cu sufletele-n beznă și degetele-n soare."

The concluding lines reveal that the poem is cast in the form of a prayer (thus its title). Arghezi's invocations to deities more often than not suggest secular preoccupations. Yet closer examination of Rugă de vecernie shows that here this is really not so. Confronted by the mystery of his existence (as a creature of light and darkness), man must reject the trite formulas or ecclesiastical conventions of a constant worldview, for an understanding of the deeper, heretical impulses of his total being. Within him, the poet feels the call of "heroes, hangmen, serfs and apostles" (penultimate stanza); there is an undiscovered vein of purity and strength, buried deep beneath the mire of centuries (compare Testament) wanting to arise. The inherent contradiction of the choice facing man (that in the tide of destruction which will sweep the old world away the innocent shall suffer along with the guilty) is resolved poetically in the poet's final prayer: "With me, O Lord, will all mankind expire? Give me peace and patience that I may seek and sing its praises."⁶

But in fact all the dialectical elements are already present in Triumful, in the key line: "You crushed in seven days what is built in seven." Although we do not know what preceded the Arghezian vision of

⁶"Cu mine omenirea, Părinte, se va stinge?
Dă-mi pacea și răbdarea s-o caut și s-o cînt."

destruction anymore than we know what will follow, one thing seems certain, that in destruction lie the seeds of rebirth, that the return to chaos marks the inception of a new era. This pattern of cyclical creativity lies at the very core of his poetic vision, at least as far Cuvinte potrivite is concerned; it is present in nature--now seen as corrupt, now seen as transcendental reality--it is present in man--who is precisely a synthesis of these conflicting forces--it is present in poetry, which continually returns ad fontes so as to emerge once more reborn and revitalized.

The scene of natural disintegration would hardly be complete without the disruption of the water supply and the failure of a new vintage; but it cannot escape our notice that in Arghezi's poetry wells (izvoare) and grapes (struguri) are primarily instruments of spiritual sustenance. It is not, therefore, the exterior world so much as the inner psychical world which is subject to decay. And this is confirmed by the final images of this Apocalyptic vision: the bells which turn to dust (lest the office of the Liturgy itself should bring about a renovatio); the skylark (like the swallow and the crane another of Arghezi's 'holy birds') which fails to rise, because of torn wings, to greet the coming light of the dawn; the stars (constant reminders of spiritual perfection) which become subject to historical process; and even the violin, the most transparent

emblem of poetic prowess, experiences impotency.

It is into this frightening picture that the poet himself steps and, as though to hasten the return to chaos, commands the will for evil in man to cause rain to fall. It will presumably be a torrential rain, sufficient to return all remaining material forms to a liquid condition and thus complete the cycle of destruction. Arghezi expresses the inhumanity of this climactic moment in a series of remarkable concretizations. So that the rain may flow, universal man is advised to "cause the skies to dawdle," but our translation does little justice to the forcefulness of Arghezi's metaphor, which translated literally means "to place a delay in the atmosphere." It is as though some unseen hand were to stretch out across the sky and make the clouds, which accompany the dying sun, gather for one final horrendous cataclysm, the visible signs of which are the "eventide rennet" (the Romanian word chiagul indicates coagulation) and the ominous leaden drivel which seems to seep from a cavernous mouth.

And yet when this prophetic vision fades away, the lonely figure of universal man is disclosed, on his knees, praying for "late guidance" from his "deserted heaven." It is a surprising volte-face, telling for its momentary reinstatement of human decency. That the believer is praying to a Christian God--and not to a cosmic Divinity (cerul means sky as well as heaven)--

becomes clear in the reference to "the whipped and stabbed heaven" six lines further on. Heaven of course is the resting-place of Christ after his violent abuse at the hands of man. Now, man in turn is being led to his own Calvary, and along the way is being scourged with the whip of sin. Yet, the time for repentance has gone; "It's of no avail," the all-seeing, all-knowing poetic voice cries, "the victory has been won since the beginning of time." And the final, ruthless image is of the will for evil crushing the individual being ("insul") with the powers granted it by Satan ("sălbatica putere").

It is a sombre picture and the sense of finality cannot be overlooked, but two aspects are worthy of note. The first is that, despite the enormity of his sins (the thong of the whip is made of "leaden knots") and the savagery of the evil forces opposing him, universal man preserves his desire for happiness (restoration to the One Good) until the very moment of his death. And secondly, the "triumph" of Beelzebub--ending in the total destruction of life as we know it--over the desire for salvation in man can only be part of some greater design on the part of the Almighty. No sinner who earnestly repents, according to Dante, will merit eternal damnation; oftentimes (Purgatorio is full of such examples) to die with the name of Mary or Jesus on their lips is enough to send souls to the mouth of

the Tiber, there to await the Heavenly Boatman. Triumful, therefore, must be measured alongside poems such as Rugă de vecernie (Vesper Hymn) where the impulse is avowedly millenarian and alongside all the poems in Versuri de seară, where cosmic reintegration occurs.

With one exception the poetic voice maintains complete impartiality. It is as though Arghezi were adopting as a poetic mask the omniscience of God Himself. Instead of identifying himself with the luckless, demented human figure, he takes it upon himself to hold up the mirror of truth, thereby revealing the world as it is, or will be, on the day of its destruction. In the concluding section of the poem, moreover, his is the voice which forces man's knee to the ground. Active participation in the work of the Devil (the punishment of sin), however, by no means implies a challenge to God's authority. Rather, as the behavior of Dante the pilgrim in his meeting with Filippo Argenti (Inferno VIII, 31-63) reminds us, Heaven rejoices in man's recognition of vileness. Even so, in the final count, the reason (let alone the manner) for the poet's intervention remains inscrutable, for it is not the wrathful but the repentent sinner who is here being prevented from reaching "the whipped and stabbed heaven."

In Blesteme (Curses), the poet also assumes the role of vates and the poem acquires the character of prophetic utterance. After the initial mise en scène,

which we shall discuss separately, there follows a series of curses or imprecations of a vehemence almost unparalleled in Western literature. As far as Blesteme is concerned, the world Arghezi lives in is dark, satanic, grounded in popular superstition, as opposed to the ethereal heights Mallarmé sought after. A poem rivalling Ion Barbu's conjuration of infernal spirits Domnișoara Hus,⁷ Blesteme is the indigenous Romanian parallel to the demonic symbolism of nineteenth-century French poetry.

In Western Literature, the incantatory aspect of poetry--clearly discernible in any socio-anthropological investigation of the origin of artistic expression--has been of considerable influence on symbolist poetry in the second half of the nineteenth century. There the poet, in his role as a magician, charms his readers with the mellifluous, rhythmical qualities of his verse. Although such a prise de position is necessarily oversimplified, we maintain that poetry as incantation is predominantly pleasure-giving, stimulating to the senses and beneficial as a spiritual and intellectual restorative. It aims at raising man above his menial condition, establishing on the intuitive level a form of communication between two worlds: the terrestrial and the supramundane.

⁷ In Domnișoara Hus (Miss Hus), Barbu's epiphanized

Rarely, however, has the diabolic aspect of poetry as incantation been explored so uncompromisingly as in Blesteme, a poem almost wholly cast in an imprecatory mood, quite unrelieved by pity or pathos. In this century, in the English-speaking world on both sides of the Atlantic, the art of cursing--in the sense of invoking the Powers of Evil against persons known or unknown--has fallen into sad disuse, though surveys and articles have revealed a surprising number of witches' covens, and the occasional celebration of a Black Mass still disturbs the diocesan backwaters of England.⁸ In Romania, on the other hand, in common with most Balkan countries and much of the Mediterranean basin, the curse is still a highly effective weapon in the hand of the practised, and a rich vein in Romanian folk literature bears witness to its profound penetration into the national psychology.

The latest of a number of folklore specialists

vision of a Turkish prostitute becomes the occasion for a wild, magic chant, the superficially descriptive elements being distorted and disoriented in a vortex of capering images, until finally all connection with normality is sundered in a scene recalling the conjuration of infernal spirits--called by G. Călinescu the most disturbing passage in Romanian poetry since Bolintineanu's Mihnea și Baba.

⁸Of special interest, not least for its immaculate scholarship, is an article by Robert Graves, "Witches in 1964," published in the Virginia Quarterly, XL, 4 (Autumn 1964), 550-59.

to explore the peculiar manifestation of the curse in the poetry of Arghezi, Domițian Cesereanu, maintains that the poet succeeds in sublimating the original function of his folkloric models.⁹ Enlarging his focus to include from successive cycles poems which reflect a magical or ritualistic principle, Cesereanu argues that Arghezi's poetry in no way preserves the original, magical intention of a spell or curse, and singles out the poem Făcătură (Love Charm), where the mystery and efficacy of the magic formula is replaced by a realistic and homely ritual, full of practical advice and homespun humor (Arghezi și folclorul, pp. 33-5).

Summing up the significance of Arghezi's experiments in the field of popular verse--which he refers to as an "artistic analogy with folklore"--Cesereanu indicates that: "As a man of his century, the poet particularly insisted on the realistic character of folklore, assimilating it into a poetry which, in our own day and age, tended to become 'a great epistemological problem' [borrowing a phrase from Academician Mihai Ralea], a special, artistic form of knowledge." (Arghezi și folclorul, p. 61). The problem with such an attitude is that it judges Arghezi's early poetry retrospectively, picking out details and tendencies which appear to confirm the

⁹ Arghezi și folclorul (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură, 1966), p. 28.

prescribed evolutionary path. While in no way wishing to belittle the importance of the many, easily verifiable folkloristic elements in Arghezi's poetry as a whole, and the pithy, gnomic flavor of his observations, we cannot altogether agree with Cesereanu when, at an earlier point in his study, he remarks that:-

Over a fairly long period, before the appearance of the volume which marked his debut, Arghezi went through a number of artistic experiences quite foreign to his structure, being seduced, in turn, by instrumentalist symbolism, Parnassianism (in the direction of the cult for precious stones and noble metals), Baudelairism (for its posturing and Satanic invective) and even by post-Eminescianism [for his mechanical imitation of a number of Eminescu's cosmic symbols]. All these experiences are either superseded or else filtered in an original way into Cuvinte potrivite, in which, by means of poems such as Blesteme and Buna-Vestire, Arghezi draws near for the first time to the matrix of popular poetry, whose sources, from now on, he will use constantly and with ever greater frequency. (Arghezi și folclorul, pp. 29-30.)

The implication seems to be that, in the course of his poetic evolution, Arghezi gradually purged himself of elements foreign to the national spirit, finally revealing the truly autochthonous nature of his poetry. We cannot agree with such a view which, to our mind, partly owes its origin to the desire to raise Arghezi to an exalted place in the Pantheon of Romanian poets at a time when symbolist poetry was held in grave disfavor and only the revolutionary aspects of poets such as Baudelaire were stressed. But of more concern to us at this point is the injustice done to the quality of the poetic vision in Blesteme; it is significant that Cesereanu

pays practically no attention to the key opening stanza, which provides at one and the same time the frame and the motivation for the series of violent imprecations that follows:-

Prin undele holdei și cîmpi de cucută,
Fugarii-au ajuns în pustie
La ceasul cînd luna-n zăbrănice, mută,
Intra ca un taur cu cornu-n stihie,
Și gîndul meu gîndul acestora-l știe:

În împărăție de beznă și lut să se facă
Grădina bogată și-ograda săracă.
Cetatea să cadă-n nămol,
Păzită de spini și de gol.
Usca-s-ar izvoarele toate și marea,
Și stinge-s-ar soarele ca lumînarea.
Topească-se zarea ca scrumul.
Funingini, cenușă, s-acopere drumul,
Să nu mai dea ploaie, și vîntul
Să zacă-mbrîncit cu pămîntul.

Through rippling cornfields and hemlock pastures,
The fugitives have entered the wasteland
At the hour when the moon, silent, veiled in
black,
Emerges like a bull with horns thrust skywards,
And my thoughts the thoughts of these do know:

Let the rich garden and the poor yard
Become an empire of darkness and clay.
Let the citadel fall down in the mud,
Guarded by thorns and emptiness.
Would the sea and all the springs dry up,
And the sun be snuffed out like a candle,
May the light melt like ashes.
May soot and ash cover the road,
May it never rain, and let the wind
With the earth be thrown sprawling.

The first stanza undoubtedly provides the key to the total import of the poem, because the poet-persona clearly identifies himself with the fugitives. In fact, he may go further than this; in some mysterious manner, which is never explained, his consciousness seems to merge

with theirs. The second stanza, slightly over half of which is given above, appears to represent the curse of the two fugitives, that much at least is indicated by the colon at the end of the first stanza. In this stanza the voice is impersonal and collective, merely willing the total destruction of the universe. In the third stanza, the accumulation of imprecations continues, but on two occasions (lines 32 and 43) the curses are directed against an unspecified number of people, designated by the second person plural form voi or its grammatical equivalent.

Compared to most other poems in Cuvinte potrivite, Blesteme is a poem of inordinate length and to quote it in full would take up too much space, but it is at least worth the trouble to establish the exact context of these two imprecations. To do this, it is necessary to point out that the previous stanza (the second) is remarkably similar to the central vision in Triumful. The gradual decay in the natural world is conveyed by imagery which could quite easily be transposed to the earlier poem, although the mode of communication is exhortative in Blesteme, not visionary. The "springs dry up," "the light" (zarea literally means the horizon) melts "like ashes" (compare "And the horizons, eaten up with mildew, stink.") and "over the strings of violins and guitars / Let spiders stretch their voiceless string" (compare the weaker image "Not a violin knows any longer

how to play"). Other imprecations, often of startling concreteness, have no counterparts in Triumful: the slightly vulgar image of the wind thrown sprawling with the earth, for example, is typical of the anthropomorphism by which Arghezi conveys a reversion of natural impulses. The contrary tendency, on the other hand, of human beings and vegetable life to acquire material form, is common to both poems. The image of spiders stilling the voice of universal harmony (symbolized by the violin) with their cobwebs is only one of a group of images which evoke the atmosphere of the Sleeping Beauty's castle, prior to the arrival of Prince Charming.

In the third stanza, however, a slowing-down in the pace of disintegration is evident. "Let life . . . not cease for a moment," the poetic voice chants, "Let the torment slowly begin / To make the heavy air smart, like vînegar." Temporal considerations then follow: day is to be maimed, in Arghezi's splendid metaphor, "like a boat with cracked ribs," and so that time may "delay in swallowing up the hour" the second will last "like a gigantic wave" of immeasurable proportions. The colon following this momentary suspension of time (compare "pune zăbavă" in Triumful) indicates the change in perspective which occurs when human beings are cursed directly: "On the cutting wire of eternity may you be unravelled, / In cuds and frayed ends." For in choosing this image

of the disintegration of human life when temporality comes into conflict with eternity--whose thread it should be noted is of steel and impenetrable--Arghezi was probably prompted by memories of the First World War; certainly "cuds and frayed ends" suggest the horror of bloody guts and mangled flesh strung across barbed-wire fences.

From this point on, the imagery takes on a decidedly antiphysiological character, being directed--in images which suggest torture by thirst--at depriving man of the one element, water, necessary for the continuation of life. Once again, the characteristic motifs found in Triumful are given wider development: where before it was merely the springs which ran dry, now it is the water on the plains which shrinks, leaving man no choice but to sip at murky swamps befouled by the blood of horses' hooves. The second imprecation hurled against the unknown persons conjures up a punishment of Apocalyptic ferocity: "Let the heavens fall, storms of pellets / Chase you across the fields with star-like whips." Certain of the details--the chase across the fields in this imprecation and the unpleasant end met on the barbed-wire of eternity in the preceding one--suggest that these unknown persons are none other than the fugitives of the first stanza. And yet it seems almost inconceivable that they should join in a collective imprecation against themselves; it is after all

their voice which initiates the series of blesteme. Another possibility would seem to be that at some point in the text--there is however no textual evidence of such a break--the poet-persona assumes total responsibility for the collective malediction. Yet another possibility, and one that becomes increasingly plausible when in the following verses the malediction is extended to mankind at large, is that the fugitives wish to impose their unjust punishment--with poetic justice--on those who oppress them. By calling upon the forces of darkness to engulf the world, therefore, the fugitives are not so much seeking an end to their own natural existence, as revenge through total, indiscriminate destruction, and the poet is the interceptor and transmitter of their wishes.

The stanza ends with a nightmarish configuration worthy of Goya's Caprichos 42: indeed his caption "The Sleep of Reason produces monsters" seems to be echoed in Arghezi's verses: "To those seeking rest, let the earth reply by stinging, snakes appearing when sleep begins." To a certain extent this return to a subconscious, primeval world of terror prepares the way for another paralogical transition, for the unnerving change in poetic voice at the beginning of the final stanza:-

Pe tine, cadavru spoit cu unsoare,
Te blestem să te-mpuți pe picioare.
Să-ți crească măduva, bogată și largă,

Umflată-n sofale, mutată pe targă.

And you, corpse anointed with grease
I damn you to stink on your feet.
May your marrow grow rich and thick,
Swollen up on sofas, transferred to a stretcher.

All pretense of impersonality goes by the board; the poet abandons the poetic mask afforded him by his telepathic understanding of the fugitives' thoughts in order to heap execration onto the heads of first universal man and then universal woman. It is the difference between a general and an individual excommunication. There can be no room for misunderstanding in this, the poet's final warning to the human race. Almost inevitably, woman, the frailer of the species--Arghezi's sarcasm is quite open--comes off much the worse:-

Iar ție, jivină gingaș gînditoare,
Să-ți fie șezutul cuprins de zăvoare.
Ficatul un cui să-ți frămînte.
Urechea să ție și nasul să-ți cînte.
Să-ți crape măselele-n gură
Și dinții cu detunătură.
Să-ți pută sărutul, oftatul să-ți pută,
Mormînt cu mocirla stătută.

And as for you, creature of frail thought,
May your backside be set in iron bars.
May your liver torment you like a nail.
May your ear shriek and your nose sing.
May your molars crack in your mouth
And your teeth go off with a bang.
May your kisses and sighs stink to high heaven,
A grave like foul-smelling swamp waters.

The imprecations continue in a similar vein for a further ten lines, imagistically always bordering on the absurd but phonetically, with a preponderance of harsh or nasal sounds, preparing the way for the final unpleasant image

of the cancrous navel which, since the woman gave birth, bleeds beneath her girdle.

The stanza ends with the threat of dire revenge --addressed specifically to the woman but in general terms to all mankind--uttered by "crooked heads," "sneering, grinding and unavenged," dragging like cannonballs from her ankles. The prophecy they utter: "Măceluri, osîndă, păcate . . ." (Slaughterings, punishment, sins) has presumably not yet been fulfilled--at least not in its entirety--for the ellipsis suggests continuation of the idea into the future. The ghoulish mask the poet adopts for the remarkable climax of Blesteme is reminiscent of the malevolent figure of the Aztec god Huitzilopotli in Carducci's poem Miramar (Odi barbare XXII). The inescapable impression is of the uplifted hand of a fearful Nemesis, ready to strike the sacrificial blow.

In order to underline the poetic control Arghezi exercises in Blesteme, it is necessary to return to the opening stanza and consider some of its ambiguities. First amongst these are the topographical details: the fugitives reach the wasteland (or desert, it should be noted) "Through rippling [literally, through waves] cornfields and hemlock pastures." Metaphorically, then, they pass through a region already showing signs of dissolution and sterility--of a return to the liquid principle and disruption of the organic cycle of the soil, since

the hemlock is a weed as poisonous to other growth as it is to a man in his cups. In this sense the process of universal disintegration--which contextually will be activated by the cavalcade of imprecations--is already under way by the time the fugitives reach the desert.

Their entry into the wasteland or desert possibly signifies a lapsing into unconsciousness (note that hemlock is also used medicinally as a sedative), into a state, at all events, where individual thought becomes collective, thereby enabling the poet to act as a transmitter by means of thought-transference. If, however, we are to understand this passage on a symbolic as well as on a purely psychical level, we should remember that a desert is a place of blinding heat in the daytime and cold barrenness at night, a ". . . most propitious place for divine revelation, . . . the 'realm of abstraction' located outside the sphere of existence, . . . susceptible only to things transcendent." (Cirlot, p. 76.) The flight of the fugitives to a place of extreme aridity (signifying spiritual purity) as opposed to a world of moisture and dampness (signifying fecundity but also moral corruption) is a necessary prelude to the malediction which will follow fearless contemplation of the depths to which the natural world has sunk. The model for the prophetic experience may well be Deuteronomy, which records the ordeal the Israelites suffered in the wilderness, prior to being admitted

to the Land of Canaan, and the laws Moses gave his children following the commandment of God.

Most of the concluding section of Deuteronomy (chapters 27-32) is taken up by the curses Moses rained down on the heads of his people at Mount Ebal. We would like to quote, albeit haphazardly, just a few of "the consequences of disobedience" as these may strike a familiar ring after a reading of Arghezi's Blesteme: ". . . thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof [28:30]. . . . The Lord shall smitethee in the knees, and in the legs, with a sore botch that cannot be healed, from the sole of thy foot unto the top of thy head [28:35]. . . . and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee [28:48]. . . . The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground . . . , her eye shall be evil [28:56]. . . ." Furthermore, the imprecatory mode, which is impersonal in the first series of curses, becomes personal in the last, and the character of the invective become more direct and heated when Moses speaks in the first person, just as it does in Blesteme.¹

¹Although it is clear that Arghezi relied primarily on Biblical and native folklore sources in developing his imprecatory mode, there are several striking similarities--in particular the concentration on diseases and the physical disintegration of the body--between the series of individual blesteme (directed against the luckless man and woman in the second half of the poem) and the "incantational satire" of the

Perhaps the real key to an understanding of Blesteme, however, is the obscure astrological reference which fixes the time of the fugitives' entry into the desert. They arrive, in Arghezi's complicated poetic figure, "At the hour when the moon, silent, veiled in black, / Emerges like a bull with horns thrust skywards." We read this to mean that the barely visible crescent of the moon--which has just emerged from eclipse--resembles the uplifted horns of a bull striding across the ring. That this is an allusion to the zodiacal sign of Taurus seems fairly clear, but the problem remains that it is the sun, not the moon, which enters the second sign of the zodiac on or about April 20. Nevertheless, Cirlot maintains that: "There is also a morphological relationship between the bull, on account of its head and horns, and the waxing and waning aspects of the moon, which is further evidence of the bull's symbolic function of invigoration, at least in the sublunary sphere." (A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 313.) Arghezi, therefore, may be seeking to emphasize a coincidence of trajectories, since it will be remembered that the moon completes in one month what takes the sun a year.

The fugitives, then, enter into the desert at

primitive Irish satirists. For a discussion of the efficacy of these primitive satirists' cursing, see Mary Claire Randolph, "The Medical Concept in English Renaissance Satiric Theory: Its Possible Relations and Implications," Studies in Philology, XXXVIII (April, 1941), 125-57.

a portentous moment; even as telepathic communication is established between their consciousness and the prophetic consciousness of the poet, the signs all point to a period of rebirth and regeneration. As a symbol of fecundity and as a common sacrificial victim, the bull combines within itself the possibilities for victory out of disaster, for cosmic renewal out of universal destruction.

We can agree with Cesereanu that Arghezi is a virtuoso of the curse, but we differ in a number of important aspects in our assessment of the function and meaning of his Blesteme. Cesereanu talks vaguely of an excessive radicalism, of an overt anarchism, as though he were afraid that the mere recitation of the poem would actually bring about the scenes of devastation, in short, that the poem still retains its magical potency, a quality he has emphatically denied earlier on. The truth, we believe, is that the poet does make use of the art of cursing as an "artistic analogue," but for his own ends. We see little evidence that Blesteme is a conscious reflection of the socio-historical conditions prevailing in twentieth-century Romania; instead, we see the immediate and only real context to be a poetic one. If we were to speak in terms of polarities, Blesteme would stand at the farthest point away from those poems presenting a vision of "transcendental reality," to borrow a phrase from Ovidiu Crohmălniceanu;

but the one without the other would be inconceivable, since Blesteme, like a limited number of other poems in Cuvinte potrivite, sets in motion the destruction of one fictive world in order that a new, poetic world may take its place.

CHAPTER VI

RESTORATION OF THE SELF; PROMISE OF REINTEGRATION

Most of Arghezi's critics¹ have commented on the crisis of conscience which seems most clearly discernible in the poems he wrote during the mid-twenties, especially in the cycle of Psalmi, nine of which appear in Cuvinte potrivite proper and a tenth in Alte Cuvinte potrivite.² It is a crisis epitomized in the opening three stanzas of Psalm VIII:-

Pribeag în șes, în munte și pe ape,
Nu știu să fug din marele ocol.
Pe cât nainte locul mi-e mai gol
Pe-atât hotarul lui mi-i mai aproape.

¹Șerban Cioculescu in his chapter "Sentimentul religios" (Introducere în poezia lui Tudor Arghezi), Pompiliu Constantinescu in three chapters--"Între tăgadă și abdicare," "Egotism demonic," and "Mărturie de seară"--from his study Tudor Arghezi, and Ovidiu Crohmălniceanu in the chapter "Poetul 'creдинței și tăgădei'" from his monograph Tudor Arghezi.

²"Their chronological placing is as follows: they appeared between the years 1923 . . . and 1927; the majority of them date from the years of the poet's collaboration on the periodicals Lumea and Adevărul literar (1925-1926), when the poet composed some of the most significant pieces in Cuvinte potrivite." (Cioculescu, Introducere, p. 106.) Another Psalm (XI) was published in Una sută una poeme and dated 1941: a further one in Luceafărul (II, nr. 3, 1959); and two more in short poetic cycles published by Arghezi in his

Piscul sfîrșește-n punctul unde-ncepe.
 Marea mă-nchide, lutul m-a oprit.
 Am alergat și-n drum m-am răzvrătit
 Și n-am scăpat din zarea mării stepe.

Sînt prins din patru laturi deodată
 Și-oricît m-aș măguli biruitor,
 Cunosc ce răni și-anume unde dor
 Și suferința mea necăutată.

A wanderer over plain and mountain, and across
 the seas,
 I know not how to escape from the great circuit.
 The more deserted the place ahead of me
 The closer to me is its boundary.

The summit ends at the point it began.
 The sea shuts me in, the mud halts me.
 I ran and on the way I rebelled
 But I didn't cross the great steppe's horizon.

I am enclosed at one and the same time by
 four sides
 And however much I triumphantly deceive myself,
 I know what wounds I have and where they hurt
 And my unsought suffering.

The sense of spatial constriction is almost overbearing;
 the universe becomes a gigantic prison, whose walls
 close in the more the prisoner tries to escape. "The
 knowledge of enclosure in space is," as Șerban Cioculescu
 observes, "another sign of suffering, since it arouses
 the sentiment of an interior freedom which aspires after
 the unlimited."³

This desire for freedom is not here directed
 against social limitations but against constrictions of
 a metaphysical nature. The ambiguity of some of the

last years, no. XIII in Silabe (1965) and no. XIV in
Noaptea (1967).

³Introducere, p. 110.

details in this stanza, however, leads us to question the nature of these metaphysical constrictions, which we would expect to be influenced by Orthodox teaching. Clearly the "four sides" which enclose the poet-protagonist may refer either to the walls of a prison or more likely, in view of the preceding stanza, to the horizons of the natural world (designated by the four points of the compass) which man inhabited after the Fall. Prison walls or the universe as experienced by man, it is one and the same thing; man knows (because he has already been there) that there is something beyond these confines and desires to enter this 'new' world. But the constrictions are not physical, they are spiritual; man is unable to escape from "the great circuit" because there is something in his condition which divides him against himself. In a Christian context, such an obstacle can only be the accumulated weight of sin, which Arghezi refers to here as his wounds. But if his wounds are the sins he has committed of his own volition, what can his "unsought suffering" refer to other than the 'original guilt' which Adam transmitted to his descendants. Theologically, it is a curious position for a man trained in the Orthodox priesthood to take. In his cogent study of the Orthodox Church, Timothy Ware points out that "Men (so Orthodoxy teaches) automatically inherit Adam's corruption and mortality, but not his guilt: they are only guilty in so far as

by their own free choice they imitate Adam."⁴ We are not interested, however, in exposing heresies or inconsistencies in Arghezi's thought so much as insisting on the expressive values these bring to his poetry. There is much in Arghezi's poetry which is foreign to the spirit of Orthodoxy--the terrifying apocalyptic visions of Blesteme and Triumful for example--and much that is in complete harmony with it, witness the state of theosis or deification attained by the poet-protagonist in Heruvic. It should occasion no surprise, at least as far as Quvinte potrivite is concerned, that the state of division which impedes the poet from escaping from his present constrictions draws its inspiration from the Augustinian tradition, and in particular from Pascal's interpretation of this tradition, rather than from the doctrines of the Orthodox Church. We believe that Arghezi--an avid reader of Pascal in his youth--structured his poem around the Pascalian distinction of man's two opposite natures; soul and body, and that a similar dualistic structure provides the basis for most of the Psalmi, as well as for Nehotărire, a poem which confirms Pascal's observation that man is neither angel nor brute but displays tendencies in both these directions.

Faced with the dilemma which this deep rift in

⁴The Orthodox Church (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), p.229.

human nature brings, man either withdraws into his self or sets out boldly to challenge the restrictive authority. It is interesting that the image of the four walls of a prison cell provides the focal point for both movements: interior withdrawal and exterior escape. Pompliu Constantinescu has noted that ". . . the poet's withdrawal into a monastery is equivalent to a flight from the self, a pause for recollection, in order to come to an understanding of the divergent tendencies of his spirit, . . ." ⁵ But, since the poet has presumably failed to find there the answer to his questions (on the nature of human existence and man's relationship with God), these four walls--which at one time served to sever all contacts with the chaotic world outside (compare Vraciul)--now become symbolic of the far greater restraint placed on his freedom of action, the restraint God placed on man by sending him forth into a divided world and depriving him of the divine company he enjoyed in the Garden of Eden.

Unable, therefore, to resign himself to a life of monastic humility, the poet--with a truly Faustian impetuosity--gives free reign to his contrary impulses:-

Mă scald în gheață și mă culc pe stei,
Unde dă bezna eu frământ scînteii,
Unde-i tăcere scutur cătușa,
Dobor cu lanțurile ușa.
Cînd mă găsesc în pisc

⁵ Tudor Arghezi, p. 57.

Primejdia o caut și o isc,
Mi-aleg poteca strîmtă ca să trec,
Ducînd în cîrcă muntele întreg.

I bathe in ice and I rest on rocks,
Wherever darkness appears I strike sparks,
Where there's silence I shake my manacle,
I break down the door with my chain.
Whenever I'm on the mountain peak
Danger I seek and provoke,
I choose the narrow ledge wherever I climb,
Bearing the whole mountain piggy-back.

(Psalm II)

The poet's avowed need to live dangerously, surmounting almost impossible obstacles, probably owes something to Nietzsche's conception of the Superman, especially in his claim to seek out the most perilous paths. At the same time, the fortitude and self-abnegation of the hermit are evoked, and the spartan conditions which the poet chooses for his natural habitat proclaim his disgust for "la dolce vita" led by lesser men. And the revolutionary zeal with which the poet breaks down the bolted door almost inevitably recalls the defiant figure of Prometheus. All three manifestations of man's proud, independent spirit, however, fade into insignificance before the act of revenge of "the outlaw of the skies," stalking the Lord God with his deadly bow:-

Cercasem eu, cu arcul meu
Să te răstorn pe tine, Dumnezeu!
Tîlhar de ceruri, îmi făcuî solia
Să-ți jefuiesc cu vulturii tăria.

Dar eu rîvnind în taină la bunurile toate,
Ți-am auzit cuvîntul, zicînd că nu se poate.

I had sought, with my bow,
To overturn you, Lord God!

Outlaw of the skies, I made it my task
To plunder your firmament along with the
vultures.

But even while in secret I coveted all your
domains
I heard your voice, saying that this is not
allowed.

Pompiliu Constantinescu has spoken of the poet, ". . . caught in flagrant transgression of the evangelic spirit . . . struck as if by lightning summoned by divine command,"⁶ but we find a more apposite parallel to be that of Adam, who hears the voice of the Lord in the still of an edenic evening.

The principal theme of Arghezi's Psalmi is the search for visible proof of God's existence: "Vreau să te pipăi și să urlu: 'Este!'" (I want to feel you and to shout: 'It's really Him!')."⁷ Or else the poet laments the fact that, whereas in a purer, more primitive age, God made his presence known and even spoke to his prophets (the Arghezian version of the Romantic myth of the 'golden age'), nowadays--at a time when Christianity has weakened and the lust for power and glory has reached unprecedented heights--God no longer reveals himself to the devout. Instead, in order to form an idea of God's appearance, present-day man has to rely on the eye-witness accounts of saints and prophets, who almost invariably depict him as a

⁶Pompiliu Constantinescu, Tudor Arghezi, p. 61.

⁷Psalm VI.

querulous old man, with staff and full beard. Indications abound in the seventh Psalm that Arghezi conceives God as a Hebraic divinity, male and wrathful, who only appears to curse mankind for its lack of faith.

The relative absence of God and his harshness when he does appear have led a number of Arghezi's critics, chief amongst whom is Pompiliu Constantinescu, to question the propriety of Arghezi's nomenclature and to point out that the Royal Psalms of David ring out with exaltation and praise of God. While readily conceding that these critics have a valid point, we would like to suggest that the dialectic resumed in the verse "For belief or for denial, / I seek you steadfastly and without purpose,"⁸ has its origin in the cry of anguish with which the Twenty-second Psalm begins: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? / Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? / O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; / and in the night season, and am not silent." A note of exultancy, moreover, is not altogether absent, even if the style is rather that of the Song of Songs: "O Lord, my fount and my songs! / My hope and my toil!"⁹ More often, however, direct revelation of God's presence

⁸"Pentru credință sau pentru tăgadă, / Te caut dîrz și fără de folos (Psalm VI).

⁹"Doamne, izvorul meu și cîntecele mele! / Nădejdea mea și truda mea!" (Psalm VII)

occurs in Versuri de seară; but "Even when the sentiment of doubt predominates," as Șerban Cioculescu is quick to point out, "the need for belief is affirmed impetuously, as an indirect recognition of God, according to Pascal's consoling words: 'Tu ne me chercherais pas si tu ne me possédais.'"¹⁰

The presence of God is most directly felt in the awesome power He can wield over mortal man. In Arghezi's splendid ninth Psalm, for example, the humbling of the proud man is clearly structured after Ecclesiastes. After a first section, which details the slow accumulation of earthly riches, we witness the terrible punishment the Lord imposes on his inattentive servant; a punishment which recalls in numerous details the central apocalyptic vision in Triumful or the cursing of the man and woman in Blesteme. On several occasions, the poet begs God to send him a sign that He really does exist, but only in this Psalm can his prayer be said to have been answered.

One poem which closes with such a prayer is Arghezi's third Psalm, perhaps his most eloquent statement on man's inherent ambiguity. The poem opens with a dramatic statement of man's fallen condition:-

Tare sînt singur, Doamne, și pieziș!
Copac pribeag uitat în cîmpie,
Cu fruct amar și cu frunziș

¹⁰ Introducere în poezia lui Tudor Arghezi, p. 112.

Țepos și aspru-n îndîrjire vie.

Greatly am I alone, Lord, and awry!
Fugitive tree forgotten on low land,
With bitter fruit and with foliage
Thorny and harsh in living recalcitrance.

The first thing we note is that the tree is awry, that is to say, its growth is stunted because it was sown on stony ground and lacked room for its proper development. But the tree is also a man, and so, metaphorically, crooked growth may indicate moral deviation. The nature of this deviation is suggested by the epithet pribeag, for man and tree together could only be fugitives from one place: the Garden of Eden. The tree, moreover, is set on low-lying ground, because mountains and high places are symbolic in Arghezi's poetry of spiritual elevation. Continuing the analogy, man too lives on the plain, because he is bound to material values, but stands out as a landmark--in solitary grandeur--in recognition of his august origins. The fruit of the tree is bitter because it lacks proper nourishment and because without sunlight no fruit will ripen naturally; the fruit of man is bitter because he has cut himself off from God (often represented by the Sun) and because his offspring are in turn doomed to wither away and die, as a result of the divine interdict imposed on Adam in the Garden of Eden. And just as the bark and foliage of the tree is rough and spiky--as it so often is in areas where the water supply is inadequate--so man's outer carapace

betrays the unmistakable sign of separation from the True Good and the increasing bitterness which the passing years bring.

But man knows he is alone and, since he is so conscious of his great loss, he constantly invokes the attention of "little pieces of daintiness," the visitation of sparrows and martins and other songsters, thereby taking the few positive steps towards reintegration that are open to him. Consciousness that his present condition is lamentable presupposes recollection of his pre-fallen state, and for this reason the series of negative statements carries a positive ring:-

Nu am nectare roze de dulceată,
Nici chiar aroma primei argurizi,
Și prins adînc între vecii și ceață,
Nu-mi stau pe coajă moile omizi.

I don't have rosy nectars of dulceata,
Nor even the aroma of the first green fruit,
And deeply caught between eternity and the
mist,
Soft caterpillars will not stay on my bark.

Consciousness of the beauty that once was ("the aroma of the first green fruit"--our italics) would alone separate man from lowlier, soul-less forms of life. Man is neither mere materiality nor pure spirituality; in Arghezi's authentic phrase, he is "deeply caught between eternity and the mist [of time]:" suspended, that is, between eternity and relativity. Few writers have expressed so well as here the Pascalian nobility

of consciousness.¹¹ Șerban Cioculescu has acutely observed that this ". . . sentiment of cosmic solitude, . . . is the psychology of the accursed poet, taken from the history of French symbolism, and seen on a religious plane." (Introducere, pp. 108-9). But it is axiomatic to the Christian faith that, even when man is at his most feeble and feels most totally abandoned, succour is in fact close at hand:-

Nalt candelabru, strajă de hotare,
 Stelele vin și se aprind pe rînd
 În ramurile-ntinse pe altare--
 Și te slujesc; dar, Doamne, pînă cînd?

Tall candelabrum, sentinel of boundaries,
 The stars come and light themselves one by one
 On the branches stretched out over altars--
 And I serve you; but, O Lord, for how long?

The idea of human consciousness keeping watch at the boundary of two worlds also occurs in Testament and, although the "God of stone" Arghezi creates there is more the guardian spirit of his poetry than--as here--an agonizing representation of man's twofold nature, it is once again this sense of omniscience, this knowledge of the event before and after it happens which gives him a special air of grandeur.

This latest of a series of transformations--from the hieroglyphic of the human body caught in an

¹¹ Compare, for example, these lines from Pascal's Pensées [chap. III, 255 (165)]: "La grandeur de l'homme est grande en ce qu'il se connaît misérable. Un arbre ne se connaît misérable."

attitude of prayer¹² to the Cosmic Tree and now to the candelabrum, a Hebraic emblem of divine light--allows the reader to catch a glimpse of the spiritual reality of man, just as in Paradiso Dante indicates the greater blessedness of the souls the pilgrim meets by the degree to which they have shed their corporeal existence. But there is an even deeper reality to Arghezi's configuration; because candles are only lit on a candelabrum at a moment of mystical significance, such as during Mass or Benediction in the Catholic Church. Certainly, the fact that the stars light themselves on the branches of the tree may indicate divine intervention, however distant and indirect; but it is more likely that the ritual act of sacrifice being celebrated is the life-long agony suffered by universal man. The candelabrum, The Cosmic Tree and the suffering body of men are briefly united in the central emblem for Christian salvation, the Cross on which Christ himself died that man may live.¹³

Consciousness, however, is not total; not being

¹²The shape of a tree seen from a distance or in silhouette against a flat background is emblematic of a human figure at rest or in a pensive mood.

¹³In his synoptic survey of literature, Northrop Frye makes a similar series of identifications: "The tree of life may also be a burning tree, the unconsumed burning bush of Moses, the candelstick of Jewish ritual, or the 'rosy cross' of later occultism." (Anatomy of Criticism, New York: Atheneum, 1969, p. 146.)

in a state of grace, the poet-protagonist remains unsatisfied with the "holy lights" which appear on his 'branches' and asks God to send him, as a palpable sign of His power, "a young angel or two." It is interesting to compare this Psalm with an earlier poem, Pia.¹⁴ where man's fallen condition is also prefigured as a tree. In fact, the trajectory of these two poems is remarkably similar, except that, while the poet's solitude and bitterness is explicit in the Psalm, it is only implicit in Pia. Taking the form of a dialogue with the soul, the point of departure in Pia is the nostalgia for spiritual perfection aroused by a moment of divine emanation:-

Ce poți avea, sufletul meu,
Cînd soarele ne pune-n ramuri iară
Ori inel de foc, ori o brățară,
Cu mîna caldă a lui Dumnezeu?

What can be the matter with you, soul of mine,
When the sun on our branches places once again
Either a ring of fire or a bracelet,
With the warm hand of God?

The concrete image is the halo of light thrown by the sun around the branches of a tree, a phenomenon

¹⁴The meaning of the title is enigmatic. Bearing in mind late Latin usage, Pia may refer to a number of holy manifestations (in which case it would be the neuter plural form of the Latin substantive), that is, the attributes of divine power (as seen in nature for example). Pia, however, is also the second person singular form of the imperative of the verb "pio" and thus could mean 1) reconcile or appease by sacrifice (propitiate); or 2) honor with religious rites (celebrate); or 3) purify with sacred rites. It can be argued that all these aspects are present in the poem and that, therefore, Arghezi's exploitation of multiple meaning is most apposite.

which could only occur--if then--at noon when the sun is directly overhead. Figuratively, however, the soul is inside the tree and its perception of this phenomenon is tactile rather than visual. The reverse is true, of course, of Psalm III, since only by looking at the tree from a certain angle could a passer-by associate the stars peeping through the branches with the candles lit on a candelabrum. Fire, especially that of the sun, is obviously a restorative principle that enables man to transcend, if only momentarily, his mortal state. Moreover, fire associated with circularity--symbolic of perfection--clearly carries a religious significance: of marriage or of communion.

That the state of mind of the protagonist is subconscious or partly conscious in Pia--whereas in the Psalm it is more fully conscious--is underlined by the stanza which follows this moment of divine rapture:-

Și cînd făptura ne primește-ntreagă,
Ca un altar ce-n haos s-a deschis,
Și dinainte floarea ni se pleacă,
Să-i sărutăm petalele de vis?

And when all nature receives us
Like a sanctuary that in chaos has appeared,
And before us the flower bends down
Are we to kiss its petals of dream?

Făptura here means more than man's natural habitat: it is the sum total of all things in time and space, acting under divine influence. Following the appearance of the sanctuary--the unveiling of the holy of holies as at the moment of Revelation--man walks once more in a rein-

tegrated universe, where in gracious welcome the flowers seem to bow in his direction. They seek in turn a loving salute, because reintegration depends on continual reciprocity; but the poet is haunted by doubts and asks for advice rather than follow his instincts. The tenor of his question suggests that these "petals" exist only in the imagination ("dream").

In a further metaphorical transposition, the imaginative nature of this experience is seen to be an aspect of the divine plan for the universe:-

Ești întristat de-acest adînc tablou,
Unde la fiecare clipă am simțit
Că ne atinge pensula din nou,
A umbrei mari ce-n el ne-a zugrăvit?

Are you saddened by this profound painting,
Where at every moment we have felt
Touch us anew the brush
Of the great shadow that painted us in it?

The natural world is viewed as a gigantic painting, which God is forced to touch up at intervals when the paint cracks or the canvas is damaged. It is His hand that the tree-protagonist feels restoring luminosity with his brush. The hand that holds the brush, moreover, is linked syntactically to "the warm hand of God" (first stanza) by the adverbial constructions iară and din nou, which in turn suggest that cyclical renewal is dependent on the periodic intervention of God. Since the light which emanates from the sun is the most usual manifestation of divine power, it follows that the umbră mare is not merely a conventional

circumlocution for God but an indication of His immensity. It is an immensity which cannot be grasped by man, because it encompasses everything, but which is observable in certain phenomena (sunlight, the stars, the wind and rain etc.) that play a key role in the perpetuation of life.

And yet man does not seem heartened by this divine manifestation; presumably he is saddened (note that the element of tristesse in this interrogative repeats the mood of the opening question to the poem) because he is aware, at least intuitively, of his subservience, of the limitations imposed upon him with the Fall of Adam. And, having once known happiness, it is in his nature to yearn for restoration to plenitude, a yearning which is reflected in the penultimate stanza in some of Arghezi's loveliest imagery:-

Dar dorurile toate adunate,
Pe unda-n fund a cerului străjar,
Pe care noaptea trec întunecate,
Luntrile, lin, cu prora de cleștar?

But what of the desires all gathered
On the wave high in the sentinel sky,
Along which softly pass at night
Darkened boats with crystalline prow?

Not really a parenthesis, despite the verbal elipsis, this stanza is rather a lyrical contraposition, prompted by the ambiguity of the poet's melancholy in the previous stanza. Night being perforce the time when man dreams of spiritual elevation, all the poet's aspirations are reflected in the scudding clouds which catch the silvery

light of the moon as they race across the sky.

In the final stanza the tree is seen as an objective reality and the sense of identification between subject and object (poet-protagonist and his psychical prefiguration) which prevailed in the opening stanzas is absent:-

Copacu-ntreg trăsare și se-ndoaie
Cu toate rădăcinile deodată.
O picatură slobodă de ploaie
Pe-o frunză a căzut, înveninată.

The entire tree quivers and stoops low
With all its roots as of one accord.
A drop of rain set free
On a leaf has fallen, envenomed.

The effect of the syntactical dislocation--înveninată here could qualify either picatură or frunză--is to intensify the ambiguity which is already present in the word's meaning. From a semantical viewpoint, înveninată could mean 1) "poisoned," a carrier or container of poison; and 2) "envenomed," that is to say, full of amărăciune (bitterness). We presume, however, that the immediate referent is the rain-drop, and that this rain-drop has fallen from the cloud of desires gathered up in the skies. Although it is not clear whether the rain-drop is poisonous to the tree (assuming rain to be a spiritual phenomenon 'harmful' to material beings) or whether the rain-drop itself is poisoned or embittered by coming into contact with the tree, the meeting of the two worlds evidently is a traumatic experience.

Viewed in the total context of the poem, moreover, the final impression seems to be one of increased uncertainty. The inescapable conclusion that arises from a confrontation of Pia and "Tare sint singur" (Psalm III) is that metaphysical suffering becomes most poignant when man's expectations are suddenly raised and an impelling need for spiritual perfection takes hold of the totality of his being. The conflict which then rages reveals the truth of Pascal's observation: ". . . c'est être malheureux que de vouloir et ne pouvoir."¹⁵

A parallel situation develops in Nehotărîre (Irresolution) when the rational side of man struggles unceasingly against the harsh demands made on his being by his innate spiritual tendencies. The point of departure to this poem may be Christ's hesitation in the Garden of Gethsemene, together with those other moments recorded in the Gospels when flesh rebelled against spirit. The poem opens with the poet-protagonist apparently resigned to sacrificing the integrity of his material being:-

Îmi voi ucide timpul și visurile, deci,
Cîrpi-voi pe-ntuneric mantaua vieții mele.
Drept mulțumire ști-voi că cerurile reci
Vor strecura prin găuri lumina unei stele.

I'll kill my time and dreams, then,
I'll mend in the dark the cloak of my life.
As thanks I know that the icy skies
Will filter through the holes the light of a
star.

¹⁵Pensées, 11, 1, 367 (73).

The time the poet is renouncing here can only refer to his mortal life, and his dreams can only be the fond illusions that he like all other men has woven out of the brief fabric of life on earth. Thus Nehotărire opens on a very unusual note as far as Cuvinte potrivite is concerned: regret for giving up what one has rather than regret for being unable to recover what one once had. The poet's reluctance to undergo death of the body displays precisely those human weaknesses that Christ revealed when he prayed: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." (Mt. 26: 39)

The form of death suffered is suggested by the image of the cloak of life which needs patching up. The cloak might perhaps be conceived of as the carapace of the self or the outward limits of consciousness. Symbolically, a cloak is, as Cirlot has pointed out, ". . . on the one hand, the sign of superior dignity, and, on the other, of a veil cutting off a person from the world. . . ." ¹⁶ Apparently, at this moment of crisis the fabric has been weakened--whether through sin or advancing old age it is impossible to tell--and the holes have appeared. To repair the outer framework of his existence, man would surely do his patching in the light of the sun,

¹⁶A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 47.

since reason dictates that only then could he see what he was doing. Instead, renouncing material and earthly happiness, he apparently chooses to patch his cloak in the darkness, even though he knows full well that he will do an imperfect job. The implication seems to be that a choice had (or rather has) to be made between the finite and infinite, between a life-form of complete materiality and one which offered the chance of eternal bliss. The former is the coward's way, the way of the neutral angels; the latter is the way of Christian courage, and is rewarded by the penetration of spiritual light from the icy heavens--icy compared to the febrile and stagnating warmth of the human condition.

But the poet is not resolute; he wavers and asks whether he should allow the substitution of a spiritual for a material existence, since this would leave him, as we shall learn later on, an easy prey for more rapacious and ruthless spirits:-

Să las s-o umple cerul cu vastul lui tazăur?
Înveșmîntat domnește, să trec cu giulgiul rupt;
Pe coate cu luceferi, spoit pe piept cu aur
Și tatuat cu fulger, să nu-nving? să nu lupt?

Shall I allow the sky to fill my cloak with its
vast treasure?
Clad in lordly fashion, shall I pass by with
torn shroud;
On my elbows with lucifers, gilded on my breast
with gold
And tattooed with lightning, shall I not conquer?
Not fight?

Doubt arises in the first place because of the darker, demoniacal side to his nature. Dressed as a lord, why

should man now abase himself by passing in a torn shroud? In a telling metaphorical transposition, the poet-protagonist, who in the first stanza wore the cloak of life, now assumes--or would do if he were convinced--an entirely different mantle, a torn shroud such as that worn by Christ after his bodily death. Thus the choice before him has been narrowed down either to surrender to satanic impulses¹⁷ or to assumption of the terrible burden of self-sacrifice that Christ endured. Should he assume Christ's mantle, moreover, a man would be obliged to offer no resistance (other possibly than the power of words) to the hostile forces threatening him. Is then man to disobey, the poem seems to ask, his fundamental instinct for self-preservation and, by renouncing the human conception of free-will, accept his destiny submissively?

The immediate result of turning the other cheek will be to invite the unwelcome attentions of all manners of evil-minded men:-

Să bat noroiul vremii, cu ochii-nchiși. Hlamida
Să-mi scoată-n drum nerozii, rânjiți, din
cîrciumi, beți.

¹⁷ Luciferi are clearly demons here, not morning-stars; man is "gilded on [his] breast with gold" because gold is symbolic of human avarice as well as being an image of solar light; man is "tattooed with lightning," because he was corrupted by an act of rebellion modelled after Satan's defiance of God. Satan is often associated with lightning, because he is a fallen star.

Ca fluturii, ce rabdă să-i poarte-n praf omida,
Să rabd și eu în mine, povară, două vieți?

Am I to beat the mire of time with closed eyes?
Shall dolts strip me of my mantle on the road,
sneering, tavern-drunk.
Like butterflies, who endure the caterpillar
bearing them through the dust,
Shall I endure within me the burden of two
lives?

The first part of this stanza continues in the spirit of the preceding stanza. The reference to the sneering, drunken/dolts is perhaps based partly on imagery drawn from the parable of the Good Samaritan and partly from the story of Christ's torment on the Via crucis and during the actual Crucifixion, where his robes--it may be remembered--were divided up amongst the drunken, card-playing Roman soldiers. The quality of Christian suffering and acceptance is then resumed surprisingly in the simile of the butterflies and the caterpillar. It is a simile of intensely concrete and at the same time symbolic values: the caterpillar clearly symbolizes dependence on earthly things, while the butterfly, on account of its fragile beauty and its ability to fly at amazingly high altitudes, is indicative of spiritual qualities, an emblem for the human soul (Psyche) amongst the ancients (Cirlot, pp. 33-4).

In the following stanza, the individual momentarily becomes the universal, and the poet speaks with the voice of a Christ-figure:-

Um om, trudit și-acela, îmi va deschide mîne

Mormîntul pomenirii cu mîna-i preacurată,
 Ca să mă frîngă-n soare, schimbat prin moarte-n
 pîine,
 Şi fraţilor din urmă, şoptind să mă împartă.

A man, no less worn out, will open on the
 morrow
 My tomb of commemoration, with his all-immaculate
 hand,
 So as to break me into pieces in the sun, changed
 through death into bread,
 And to my brothers who follow, whispering that
 he'll share me out.

In the Western world, Christ is "our culture hero": we pattern our lives after him in the hope that our prior condition as an imago Dei be fully restored to us. But the exemplary pattern which we adopt--for after all "Christ exemplifies the archetype of the self"¹⁸--makes exceedingly heavy demands on the form our lives take, whether we are conscious of the fact or not. What, however, makes this central stanza of unusual ambiguity is that the other participant, referred to simply as "a man, no less worn out," is also a variant on the Christ symbol, since he too bears the stamp of Christian and human martyrdom. He it is who on the morrow--the clearest indication so far of the pattern of hesitancy established by Christ in the Garden of Gethsemene--will break open the protagonist's tomb "with all his all-immaculate hand." This man can be none other than Christ

¹⁸C.G. Jung, Aion: Research into the Phenomenology of the Self, p. 37. It should, however, be emphasized that the whole of Chapter V, "Christ, A Symbol of the Self," is germane to Arghezi's literary representation of the Christ-figure.

himself if we accept the literal meaning of the text, but bearing in mind the ritual nature of this experience, the all-immaculateness might very well refer to the hand of the celebrant at Divine Liturgy, who consecrates the bread and the wine in the name of Christ, repeating the paradigmatic gesture by which the Redeemer gave himself to his followers.

It is as if Arghezi were concentrating an entire lifetime of Christian commitment into the space of a few days: thus the temporal considerations are not chronological but ritualistic, although the event--the choice which every Christian must make--is dramatically represented as taking place here and now. By making a commitment to follow Christ, Christian man cannot avoid the suffering which precedes his death. Moreover, his death will be commemorated as a pattern for future generations, and his body will be divided up amongst the devout. The form that the Eucharist will take, on the other hand, is in fact an inversion of the miracle of transubstantiation. Instead of a change in substantial form--the turning of the bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Christ--a change takes place in the accidents of man's body, since this becomes the bread used for communion.¹⁹ Consequently, human participation in the

¹⁹ Compare Ignazio Silone's Pane e vino, where after the death of Luigi Murica (in a ritual clearly patterned after the torment of Christ), his parents hand out bread and wine to his friends, repeating the words of consecration used in the Mass.

Eucharistic act seems to acquire cosmic proportions: on death the body of man is pulverized in the light of the Sun and eventually becomes bread by reason of the increase in fertility it brings to the soil, whereas the Last Supper--or its liturgical equivalent--takes place in a secret room. In Arghezi's vision, the eschatological tradition is incorporated in the wider, mythic patterns of cosmic renewal, but the greater degree of pain exhibited arises from religious not cosmic consciousness.

The poet's vision of his death and dismemberment as a sacrificial victim has a hallucinatory character; it evidently has not yet occurred--at least on the individual level--and remains merely a metamorphosis in potential. The alternative, however, is no more appealing: instead of ritualistic fragmentation, man is faced with the prospect of tedium and humiliation:-

Dar ziua care trece și mă rănește-n treacăt,
Îmi umilește cîrja și-mi încovoie crinii,
Și inima urmează s-atîrne ca un lacăt
Cu cheile pierdute, la porțile luminii.

But the day that passes and in its passing
wounds,
Humbles my crutch and bends down my lilies,
So that my heart goes on to hang like a padlock
With lost keys, at the gates of light.

Lodged within a body increasingly subject to the onslaught of time, man's spiritual being is inevitably wounded or contaminated. In Arghezi's poetic figure, mortal existence humbles the poet's crutch--perhaps the support

afforded by the knowledge of his divine origins--as well as making all that is most pure and virtuous within him (symbolized by the "lilies") droop down as if under the weight of mortal sin. Just as it is axiomatic to the series of contraries by which Pascal reveals to man his true nature that self-exaltation, commonly called arrogance, is humbled, so Arghezi's protagonist is most glorified when, as the intended pharmakos, his individuality is being crushed, and most humbled when he attempts to preserve the inviolability of his being.

And precisely because man seeks the remedy for all his ills within himself--at least that is the alternative presented to us in this stanza--the total sum of his investigations will only be the realization that the intercession of some vital agent is necessary for salvation. But then it will be too late and man's heart (symbolic of his love for truth and beauty in God) will hang at the very gates of Paradise--in Arghezi's superb metaphor--"like a padlock / With lost keys." In Descîntec a somewhat similar use of imagery occurs: only in this case the lacăt (padlock) is a locked door separating the unconscious and the conscious, and the poet calls upon the Star of Hope to unlock the door. In Nehotărîre, on the other hand, the padlock symbolizes those protective barriers man has erected to ward off injury and disease, barriers which in the end merely serve to block all chance of spiritual integration.

The final stanza opens with a lament for the bitter lot of man, unable to escape the torment of his thoughts and the inner voice of his conscience, and closes with a paean to the power of Song to triumph over the cares of life and the agony of death:-

De ce nu pot să nu știu, de ce nu pot să n-aud
 În ce stă rostul zilei și prețul de-a ți-o
 trece?
 Deschide-mi-te, suflet, prin șapte ochi de flaut,
 Și cîntecul și viața și moartea să le-nece.
 Why can't I not know, why can't I not hear
 What the sense of day is and the price of eking
 it out?
 Open yourself unto me, soul of mine, through the
 seven eyes of a flute,
 And let song drown both life and death.

The tortuous form of these closing questions is reminiscent of the first stanza of Stihuri, where the poet pleads for the suspension of rational processes of cerebration in favor of intuitive speculation. Given man's innate tendency to contradiction, the only resolution open to him lies through the Arts, and especially through lyric poetry, which creates its own sets of constants, outside of Time and Space, seemingly defying but inwardly obeying both natural and divine law.

Nehotărîre closes on a note of mystical unification: soul and body achieving oneness through the instrument of song. The eyes or holes of the flute are a sublimated form of those other perforations in the fabric of human existence which we have met in this poem: the holes in the protagonist's cloak which would

have allowed his being to be flooded with divine light and the keyhole of the padlock which awaits the magic key. These holes are seven in number, and the irreducibility of this fusion of the ternary and the quaternary, symbolic of the unity of conflicting principles, proclaims the ultimate triumph of that creative instinct present in man since the beginning of time.

The reconciliation offered by Song, however, is not recorded in Poate că este ceasul (Perhaps it's time), a poem which reflects a state of mind halfway between the aridness of Arghezi's metaphysical speculations in the cycle of Psalmi and the ripeness of those poems which present the renewal of mankind in cyclical terms. Faced with the evidence of seasonal decline, the poet asks whether now is not the time to face up to the totality of our past life, before the sorrows and vicissitudes of habitual existence take too great a toll of our mental capabilities:-

Poate că este ceasul, de vreme ce scoboară
Din arbori toată frunza ce-a fost și strălucit,
Să ne privim trecutul în față, liniștit,
Cînd urma lui de umbră începe să ne doară.

Perhaps it's time, since there falls
From the trees all the leafage that has been
and shone,
To look our past in the face, tranquilly,
When its track of shade begins to cause us
pain.

And this facing up to the past must be done tranquilly, with the resignation and passivity of the true contemplative. We have to achieve real detachment from our

immediate cares or burning issues before we can comprehend the meaning of our self in relation to the rest of the universe.

And "without humility and without pride"--since Arghezi's vision encompasses a far wider sweep of mankind's religious instincts than orthodox Christianity or the stereotyped gods of ancient Greece or Rome would allow--the poet exhorts his fellow men to resume their beginnings, regress to their primal being:-

Și, fără umilință și fără de mândrie,
Să ne-amintim în noapte, de noi, din fir în fir,
Și să privim zigzagul, pe stînci, de tibișir,
În care-și puse pasul fragila mărturie.

And, without humility and without pride,
Let us recall ourselves in the night, from
thread to thread,
And witness on the rocks the zigzag of chalk
In which fragile testimony left its trace.

The process the poet advocates is the restoration of the true and one self, by knowing every tiny detail of the facts of our existence; it is the process of "the eternal return," the overcoming of forgetfulness through a cosmic and historiographic anamnesis. It is a technique, as Mircea Eliade points out, somewhat analogous to the yogic exercise of 'going back,' which in this case is achieved not by direct re-establishment of a precosmogonic state, but by a ". . . progressive return to the 'origin' by proceeding backward through Time from the present moment to the 'absolute beginning.'"²⁰

²⁰Myth and Reality, p. 88. We are especially indebted for our remarks in this section to chapters V ("Time can be overcome") and VII ("Mythologies of Memories and Forgetting").

In the key role it plays in freeing man from the ravages of Time, Arghezi's mnemonic mode is all-inclusive: it embraces--to use once more Eliade's categories--both primordial and historical memory. By 'historical' is meant the recollection of the totality of not only one individual life but of a series of lives, and that Arghezi subscribes to the principle of metempsychosis would seem to be amply justified by the phrase "from thread to thread." The fates, it ~~sho~~ould be remembered, spun but one thread for each human life, and the cutting of that thread marked the occasion of death. As far as primordial or cosmogonic memory is concerned, a form of recollection is possible, at least in the context of this poem, because the "fragile testimony" is there for the discerning eye to trace in the chalky zigzag of the rock-face. In fact almost the entire evolution of the earth can be established by studying the serried strata of sedimentary rock, whether it be for the fossils of mollusks or insects, or of the more ponderous amphibian forms from which man evolved. The zigzag veins of chalk, moreover, not only disclose minute fossils but are themselves evidence of the constantly changing structure of our planet.

The third stanza is by far the most obscure; it can best be understood in terms of the ecstatic vision of the poet-seer, once more striving to give symbolic expression to the various stages of an intuitive process

which, in this case, marks a regression ab origine:-

O zi mărunți, o noapte aprinși cu foc de aștri,
Cînd răstigniți, cînd slobozi și mari și-adesea
mici,
Păstori de crizanteme, profeți pentru furnici,
De-asupra-ne vulturii pluteau în cer albaștri.

One day trifling small, one night blazing with
astral light,
Sometimes crucified, sometimes free and great
and often small,
Shepherds of chrysanthemums, prophets for ants,
Above us the eagles float blue in the sky.

The verb to be is omitted, and the varied conditions endured by man are juxtaposed, without any attempt being made to relate one condition to another or to explain them in rational or philosophical terms. The poet-seer knows these conditions and merely names them without concern for their chronology or their causality. But to name them is sufficient, because the incantatory power of the poetry recalls us to that original moment when man first gave name to what he saw and knew.

A whole range of human polarities is touched on in these lines, and yet each moment recollected is unique, it is the moment of visionary communication between the poet and his ancestral past. In the light of the sun, man is known as a mere trifle, ephemerality itself; at night, on the other hand, when human imagination comes into its own, man draws so close to the heavenly bodies that he is lit up with their glowing

fire.²¹ At another moment--which may concentrate entire epochs--man suffered the agonies of crucifixion, a poetic figure perhaps for all the torments and distress to which he has been subject since the beginning of time. But, on other occasions, man could claim to be free, acquiring momentarily some control over his own destiny, some freedom of action in the socio-political sphere. Men have been "shepherds of chrysanthemums," in the sense that they have vainly toiled to raise the flower of decay. Men are and have been "prophets for ants" because the individual existence of one man viewed against the gigantic workings of the cosmos can be effectively likened to the contribution made by one single ant from the myriads of ants scurrying about in the dust of ages.

The poet's musings then reflect upon the battered condition of the human race, compelled to walk in perpetuity the Via Crucis, and upon the sense of cosmic deterioration that the approach of autumn brings. In such circumstances man's collective spirit must be renewed, just as in the cosmos renewal inevitably follows decay and disintegration:-

Și de ni-s rupti genunchii de căile spinoase,
De ce pentru-ntristare să fie tot ce-a fost?
Nu-i toamnă? Să ne facem din noi un adăpost
Și s-adunăm deșertul, la cald, pe lângă case.

²¹ Compare the concluding stanza of Heruvic, where the poet-persona "surrounded by night . . . [waits] like a torch," to be lit with a star from the great candelabrum.

And if our knees be torn by thorny paths,
 Why does everything that's been turned to sadness?
 Is it not autumn? Let's make of ourselves a
 shelter
 And gather the desert near the warmth of homes.

And this collective renewal, the poet pleads, can only
 be brought about through the paradigmatic act of crea-
 tion or re-creation:-

Sa luăm cenușa stinsă pe vechile altare,
 Să-i dăm din nou văpaia și-un fum mai roditor.
 S-o-mprăștiem, sămînță, pe șesul viitor,
 Nădăduind culesul tîrziu, cu întristare.

Let us take the spent ashes from ancient altars,
 And kindle it anew and give it a more fruitful
 smoke.
 The seed let us scatter on future plains,
 Sadly hoping for the late harvest.

It is significant that the inception of a new cosmic
 cycle is marked by the act of kindling "the spent ashes
 from ancient altars," because it suggests that fertility
 decreases when a link in the chain of continuity is
 broken. Men have always relit their fires on the beds
 of old ones, just as birds return to the same nest
 year in and year out. Thus it is only by kindling fire
 on altars that form an unbroken chain ab origine that the
 paradigmatic function of the creative act can be preserved.

The fact that there is more than one altar and
 that all the altars are ancient suggests a pre-Christian,
 sacrificial past, as though Arghezi believed that only
 a new, syncretistic religion could provide "a more fruit-
 ful smoke." And the late harvest, which will result from
 the renewed fertility of the soil, is not only cosmic

but spiritual in implication. It is the seed of hope that will be scattered over the plains, so that future generations may not know the despair and grief which clouds the poet's mind. It is in fact the promise of reintegration which will be fulfilled in the poems Vînt de toamnă and Inscripție pe un pahar through individual and collective participation in the exemplary act of creation.

CHAPTER VII

REINTEGRATION AND RENEWAL

Consummation of Creative Potential

The idea of individual creativity as a repetition of the primordial act of creation, which we have discussed in relation to the second and third stanzas of Heruvic, receives its most complete expression in Vînt de toamnă, where the autumn breeze is the bearer of the poetic voice. The time is autumn because a seasonal cycle is about to be resumed; the movement of the poem is cyclical, culminating in the ritual greeting of the sorcovă, symbolizing rebirth. As so often happens in Arghezi's poetry, we are confronted by a series of imaginal gradations, the true significance of which depends on the successful resolution of the cyclic movement and the close interaction of the various elements:-

E pardosită lumea cu lumină,
Ca o biserică de fum și de rășină,
Și oamenii, de ceruri beți,
Se leagănă-n stihare de profeți.
Rece, fragilă, nouă, virginală,
Lumina duce omenirea-n poală
Și pipăitu-i neted, de atlaz,
Pune gâteli la suflet și grumaz.
Pietrișul roșu, boabe, al grădinii
Îi sînt, bătuți și risipiți, ciorchinii.
Ploate grele se urzesc treptat
În care frunzele s-au îngropat.

Din învierea sufletului, de izvor,
 Beau caprele-amintirilor
 Și-n fluierul de sticlă al cintezii
 Se joacă mîțele cu iezii.
 Deosibești chemarea pruncului în vînt
 Cîntată de o voce din pămînt.
 Născut în mine, pruncul, rămîne-n mine prunc
 Și sorcova luminii în brațe i-o arunc.

The world is paved with light,
 Like a church with smoke and resin,
 And men, drunk with the heavens,
 Stagger in vestments of prophets.
 Cold, fragile, new, virginal,
 Light leads mankind in her skirts
 And her smooth touch, of silk,
 Places adornments on the soul and neck.
 To the light the bunches of grapes, trodden
 and scattered,
 Are the red shingle, berries, of the garden.
 Heavy horse-blankets are gradually woven
 In which leaves lie buried.
 From the resurrection of the soul, from the
 spring,
 Drink the she-goats of memories
 And to the glassy whistling of chaffinches
 Pussy-cats romp with kids.
 You discern the call of the babe in the wind
 Sung by a voice from the earth.
 Born in me, the babe, remains in me as babe
 And the sorcova of light into its arms I throw.

All nature is bathed in the light of the Sun.

Sunlight, as we have seen elsewhere in Arghezi, is the life-giving principle, but in view of the succeeding comparisons it may lend itself to a specifically religious connotation, as it does in Dante, where it stands for the God-head. The whole surface of the universe is paved in light, just like "a church with smoke and resin." Unless the image of smoke issuing forth from candles and thuribles suggests a mere blurring of surface contours, the poet may be alluding to layers of smoke hanging in the air, with light reflected off them, an effect fairly

common in poorly-ventilated churches. Underlying the comparison is also the idea of a church brilliantly lit and magnificently appointed for the Liturgy. Thus, both outside in the world of men and inside the church--once again an architectural representation of religious space, with the suggestion of the macrocosm concentrated in the microcosm--we witness a very special moment: that of universal benediction.

Within this transfigured universe, the reverberations of divine light are so intense that men, drunk with the heavens, stagger about as if dressed in vestments of prophets. It is truly a moment of revelation; the poet invites us to assist in a hierophany of nature, at which he is the chief hierophant. But words such as beți (drunk) and se leagănă (whose root meaning is "to rock," and is thus a signpost to the conclusion of the poem, since it foreshadows the appearance of the babe) are essentially polyvalent; in images of multiple value two planes of reality touch or converge: the revealed or poetic and the literal or natural.

The men become prophets, possessed by the holy spirit, seem to be officiating or at least participating in a religious ceremony: se leagănă not only implies the staggering, stumbling gait of the drunkard, but also the bowing, bending movements at High Mass or its liturgical equivalent in Orthodoxy. But we can go further than this in our efforts to illustrate the Arghezian scheme of

universal analogy, because at the literal level se leagana is not confined to a general sense of movement; it also specifies the rocking motion that accompanies the swinging of censers. In church, during the liturgy, both priests and congregation undergo a transformation similar to that which the poet imagines to be taking place now all over the world. Not only are men drunk in the spiritual sense, however, they also exhibit marked symptoms of physical inebriation. It is autumn, late harvest-time, and the seasonal festivities are presumably in full swing.

The attributes and effects of this light--the immediate cause of a strange inebriation--are defined in lines 5-6. On the poetical level, light is rece (cold) because Divine Illumination does not burn material substances but dazzles the perfect intellect of God that man has falsified. On the natural level, light brings with it the breath of death, because the mellowness of autumn is followed by the icy bleakness of winter. Fragilă, on the other hand, suggests a diaphanous quality in the Aristotelian sense, lacking in material substance, since light is primarily visible on or through other things. Literally, light is fragile because there has been a reduction in energy, the fierce glare of summer having been replaced with the softness of diffused autumnal lighting.

Light is nouă, virginală (new, virginal), because it is the source of spiritual renewal (as in the Biblical

phrase "the light of the Glorious Gospel of Christ"--2 Cor. 4:4), and on the literal level it refers to the exceptionally pure and limpid air found in Romania during the autumn.¹ Moreover, in Arghezi's poetic figure, light bears all mankind in her skirts, as if she were Demeter or the Earth Mother. Light can also be experienced sensorially; its presence is both tangible, although its touch in autumn may be as soft as silk, and intangible, because its presence is often best measured by the effects it produces on other objects. This softer quality to autumnal light, in a way fuller because less intense and more diffused, produces contentment and fulfillment: it places "adornments on the soul and neck." On the revealed or spiritual level, divine light sows in man the seeds of goodness, of the theological virtues, of the promise of a better life to come.

A further gradation introduces the image of grapes, which crushed and scattered at harvest-time resemble, under the influence of light, "the red shingle [like] berries, of the garden." From grapes wine is produced; wine in turn brings relief to mankind as a temporary panacea for

¹Because its continental climate is tempered at this time of the year by mellow breezes from the Black Sea, Romania usually enjoys a long and resplendent autumn. Not surprisingly, the phrase "Toamna este a două primăvară" (Autumn is a second spring) is very common--prompted by the phenomenon of flowers blooming and trees blossoming a second time.

mortal cares, as well as redeeming believers in holy sacrament, by allowing them to partake of the flesh and blood of the living God. Syntactically, the boabe provide the link of known values between grapes and red shingle. People could speak of grape-berries and expect to be understood, but the association with red shingle is less clear. Certainly, the grapes themselves, bathed in the ruddy light of autumn, could be the berries of red shingle. But this would restrict unnecessarily the wider analogical implications of this image, which could anticipate the leaves of the subsequent image, bright-red perhaps, not yet yellowing, or which might refer to some late autumnal crop, such as apples!² These are all possibilities, none of which can be entirely discounted, since what we are dealing with is a concatenation of separate and related images which elsewhere we have referred to as image-clusters.

What is of particular importance in this case, however, is not so much the identification of specific objects in the natural world (alluded to here merely to demonstrate a typically Arghezian process) as the effect produced by the light on any number of substances: a transforming principle is at work, which reduces the

²See Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 269.
 "The Greeks represented the seasons by the figures of four women: . . . Autumn carries bunches of grapes and a basket full of fruit; . . ."

individual characteristics of the objects, makes them resemble one another, in short, prepares the way for oneness and unity. On the other hand, the fact that the grapes are crushed and the empty husks scattered (to be ploughed in with the stubble) also suggests the gradual but inevitable periodic decay of living matter.³ Red, it might be added, is certainly one of the colors most commonly associated with autumn, but it is also a sacrificial color, obviously suggesting the blood that Christ shed for man's restoration to life. The death which follows the decay of material substances automatically implies renewal and rebirth, so Autumn, followed by Winter, looks forward to Spring.

The premonition of periodic decay on the cosmic level, of 'the end of the world,' is amplified by the image of falling leaves, from which a thick carpet is gradually woven on the ground. A carpet, beneath which the leaves find their final resting-ground, become one with the earth, in order to refertilize the soil for the renewed vegetative cycle beginning in Spring. Of note is Arghezi's concretization of the commonplace image of a carpet of leaves; the word he uses, plocate, denotes a

³Autumn is a period of seasonal contraction, a gathering together and a withering away at the extremities, a cleansing, a purging, just as spring heralds an expanding movement: the throwing out of new shoots and buds in myriad display, deliriously uncontrolled, a realization of autumn.

heavy horse-blanket, and its coarse weave suggests to perfection the irregular and haphazard patterning of leaves on the ground.

At this point, a break in the progression of the poem occurs: from images of autumnal decline we pass directly to a springtime setting, where "to the glassy whistling of chaffinches, / Pussy-cats romp with kids." The state of transcendence in man, "the resurrection of the soul" brought about through the influence of divine light, acts as a catalyst on the affective memory, which effortlessly relives the past as if it were actually taking place now. Or to be more precise, the memories that come surging back are relived at the level of poetic experience, the difference between the now of chronological time and the eternal present of artistic consciousness being carefully maintained. Arghezi's way of intimating the special nature of his artistic experience is to associate memory with the figure of nanny-goats which, in leaping from crag to crag, bridging impossible gaps, seem to defy the laws of gravitation which bind mankind to the ground. Affective memory, then, restores the poet momentarily to an extra-temporal, extra-spatial condition, where past, present and future merge into one.

The image of the nanny-goats is extraordinarily fecund, since the association with primitive animal life also presupposes a link with the unconscious areas of the human psyche. As J.E. Cirlot has noted, "Identifying

oneself with animals represents integration of the unconscious and sometimes--like immersion in the primal waters--rejuvenation through bathing in the sources of life itself" (A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 13.) And this is remarkably similar to the situation in Vînt de toamnă: by permitting rudimentary memory-impulses (caprele-amin-tirilor) to refresh themselves (beau) at the fount of life (izvor), the poet's consciousness in its transcendental state billows out momentarily to engulf the totality of human experience. Under the influence of light and through the memory-process the poet regresses to a point of primal bliss, the universal springtime of life.

In the concluding four lines, which are amongst Arghezi's most enigmatic, three different types of renewal or regeneration seem to converge: the telluric or seasonal, the religious (renewal through baptism and purgation in the primal waters, where religion is understood in its root meaning of a linking back), and the poetic. Carried on the wind of autumn, the call of the babe (a traditional symbol of futurity) is heard emanating from the earth. Thus the seeds for universal rebirth lie buried in embryonic form beneath the earth, which itself transcribes their call. On the cosmic level, Mother Earth is the child's protectress, carefully nurturing her seed; on the psychological or religious level--where the child is the product of the coniunctio between

the unconscious and the conscious (Cirlot, p. 43)--Mother Earth provides the protection of instinctual forces because, though the child as a nascent figure of higher consciousness brings relief for present day psychic distress, it (the child) is resisted by those who at a lower level of consciousness have failed to achieve wholeness, their natural entelechy. In order to attain and preserve his full potential, man must follow Christ's example: "Unless ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Mt. 18:3.) Just as nature periodically renews itself after the example of the first cosmogonic model, so man would be advised to return to his origins, regain his childlike simplicity and reassert that equilibrium between his conscious and unconscious which is so necessary for his peace of mind.

In his treatment of the image of the babe, Arghezi gives new significance to an idea that had exercised strong appeal on the minds of Keats, Leopardi, Pascoli and the Plato of Phaedrus, the idea of the poet as the Universal Child. Poetry for G. Pascoli is the cultivation of the primordial and perennial psyche, poetry is ". . . the eternal child, who sees wonder in everything [who sees] everything as though for the first time."⁴ There is a striking similarity between the penultimate

⁴"Il Fanciullino," Pensieri e discorsi (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1907), p. 16.

verse of Vînt de toamnă ("Născut în mine, pruncul, rămfine-n mine prunc") and the passage in Il Fanciullino where Pascoli speaks of the child as an incorruptible element in our psyche:-

But later on we grow up, while he remains as little as before; we kindle a new desire in our eyes, while he keeps fixed there his ancient, serene wonder; we coarsen and harshen our voice, while he continues to make his jingly, bell-like peal heard.⁵

Just as each poet carries within him the universal child, he alone being able to give expression to the purity and potential of the archetype of human regeneration, so, as we learn in the final line, each poem--the product of an individual act of creation--is itself the repetition and re-enactment of the Creation. Drawing once more on the resources of his native folk tradition, Arghezi selects one of his loveliest symbols to give concrete form to the point of convergence for all three levels of creative experience. His sorcovă (a garlanded New Year's Stick) symbolizes periodic regeneration both at a cosmic or agricultural level, because the stick was formerly made up of branches already in bud, thereby invoking the coming of Spring, and at an individual or religious level, because the stick is laid lightly (in present times at least) across the body of relative and neighbor alike, obviously with the intention of a ritual cleansing, a

⁵Pensieri e discorsi, pp. 1-2.

chasing away of devils.

Mircea Eliade has pointed out that ". . . the renovatio effected by the New Year ritual is, basically, a reiteration of the cosmogony. Each New Year begins the Creation over again." (Myth and Reality, p. 41.) Such a maturation process is indeed implicit in the ancient lore of the sorcovă,⁶ but it should also be borne in mind that syntactically sorcova is tied to lumina (the sorcova of light), an image cluster both pagan and Christian in suggestion, and that therefore the renovatio which lies at the very core of the poem operates at the historical as well as the cosmic level, because in our own times human history is generally dated from the birth of Christ. The immediate paradigm in Western tradition (inclusive of Orthodoxy) for the child (whether carefully nurtured beneath the surface of the earth or within the breast of the poet) who shall witness the beginnings of time is the calender renewal of Christ at the end of the old year.⁷

While conceding that in all probability ". . . the intuition of the 'Year' as a cycle is at the bottom of a

⁶C. Rădulescu-Codin, Comorile poporului: literatură, obiceiuri și credințe (Bucharest: Editura Casei Scoalelor, 1930), pp. 88-9.

⁷The twelve days between Christmas and the Epiphany are needless to say ". . . a prefigurement of the twelve months of the year." This is a point made by Mircea Eliade in his Cosmos and History, p. 65.

Cosmos that periodically renews itself," Mircea Eliade concludes that "in the mythico-ritual New Year scenarios . . . [of Jewish cult systems, as Eliade establishes via Eric Voeglin's Order and History, I: Israel and Revolution] another idea, an idea different in origin and structure, is discernible. It is the idea of the 'perfection of beginnings,' the expression of a more intimate and deeper religious experience, nourished by the imaginary memory of a 'Lost Paradise,' of a state of bliss that preceded the present human condition."⁸

In throwing the sorcovă of light into the arms of the babe, the poet is not only repeating the creation of the cosmos on an individual level, by giving symbolic expression to the memory of paradisaical bliss preserved within him in the figure of the universal child, he is also offering mankind the chance of redemption, of rebirth, through participation in the restorative spirit of art. The ritualistic gesture of throwing the sorcovă into the arms of the babe--that is to say, the act of creative will vital to the birth of a poem or of any other work of art--is tied here to a specific moment in time, to New Year's Day, a traditional date for baptism in the early Christian Church. Baptism, of course, marks the occasion when a person is formally admitted to the Christian Church, and customarily takes the form of ceremonial immersion in

⁸Myth and Reality, p. 50.

holy water as a sign that the Sin of Adam has been washed away; but in its fundamental meaning immersion clearly signifies ". . . regeneration through the effect of the transitional powers (implying change, destruction and re-creation) of the 'primordial waters' (the fluid element)."⁹

In the cosmological and eschatological traditions referred to above, a form of death was a necessary prelude to the triumph of regeneration in nature and rebirth in man. On the poetic level too the inference seems to be that the old must die so that the young may live: each poem is the occasion for the rejection of the old order, a return to edenic existence, re-immersion in the primal waters of the cosmos, the abnegation of historical time and the inception of a new era.

The sorcovă of light, therefore, symbolizes a process of rejuvenation that occurs as a result of the poetic act of creation and affects the poet himself radically until mortality takes its toll; until that time (the death of the poet), the poet may grow young again in order to repeat the original act of creation (it is a reciprocal process), and mankind may share in this resistance to time by entering into a state of communion with the poet in his experience of regression, the sort of communion which is so delicately suggested, as we shall

⁹Cirlot, p. 22.

see, in Inscripție pe un pahar.

Poetry as Communion

Just as in Vînt de toamnă a cloak of secrecy surrounds the poet's person--it is not until the last two lines of the poem that the convergence of the individual and the collective acts of creation is made explicit--so the poet's role in Inscripție pe un pahar (Inscription on a glass) is hidden behind a mask of dazzling conception. Taking on the mantle of universality, he imagines himself to be a crystal glass from which succeeding generations have drunk:-

Cristal rotund, pe-o umbră de velur,
Cu inima de-a pururea senină,
M-am născocit din ape de azur,
Am înghețat sub țurțuri de lumină.
Și nencetat, ca pietrele de rouă,
Par a renaște-n locu-mi tot virgin,
Cu-o licărire-n fundul meu mai nouă,
Pe cît mi-i încăputul de puțin.

Round crystal, on a shade of velvet,
With heart everlastingly serene,
I created myself from waters of azure,
I froze beneath icicles of light.
And unceasingly, like pebbles of dew
I seem born in my place quite virgin,
With a sparkle in the depths of my being
As new as my hollow inside holds less.

The round crystal with its "heart everlastingly serene" can be understood both as a material object in its own right and as an emblematic representation of a poetry of multiple values.

A crystal glass is ordinarily round in shape; the essence of lyric poetry contains a circular vision, a

striving for and momentary realization of perfection, confirmed here by the reference to the heart which is-- as the epithet "everlastingly serene" suggests--a center of illumination, a stasis with implications of eternal peace in the dynamic framework of the human body. The glass--in the poet's imagination--rests on a velvet table-cloth. The suggestion of unseemly opulence--the image is somewhat fastidious for Arghezi--seems intended to focus attention on the very special nature of crystal glass. By anticipating later developments in this Inscriptie, we have perhaps lessened the initial ambiguity of Arghezi's key symbol by too readily identifying the "round crystal" with a drinking glass, whereas in its immediate context it might just as well be a crystal-ball, used in the devious practices of necromancy or hydro-mancy. Nothing in the poem, of course, substantiates the slightest connection with specific forms of divination; we have broached the question merely to reinstate the air of mystery with which the poem opens.

In lines 3-4, the poetic voice claims to have formed itself from primal waters, Urwasser ("waters of azure"). In Arghezi's poetic figure, this process of achieving solid form, of crystallization takes place under the impact of "icicles of light." The vital components in the formation of crystal are waters in a liquid or gaseous state and a heat-producing force such as sunlight. On a purely speculative level, these "icicles of

light" could refer to a sudden concentration of light, such as might be found in a cavern which the rays of the sun succeed in penetrating through a narrow aperture in the roof (the shape here would be that of a reversed cone). Or else, we might imagine the formation of crystals on stalactites through a process of evaporation of water with a high lime content.

The following two lines (5-6) introduce a new metaphor: the crystal of the goblet¹⁰ is compared to pebbles of dew ("pietrele de rouă"),¹¹ the hoarfrost which sometimes forms in the morning, and which like dew has a sacral character, alluding to spiritual illumination, since it heralds the coming of the day.¹² And this crystal formation is--or at least it so appears to its poetic voice--self-perpetuating, a characteristic also of the molecular structure of the crystal, which is composed of a constantly-repeating pattern of atoms and molecules. But this apparent pattern of self-perpetuation, self-renewal (only apparent because the interaction of water and sunlight continues to be present) is precisely that

¹⁰The analogy is quite clear: only glass of the most transparent quality (i.e. white and pure) is (or was) used in wine-glasses; thus the glass of the goblet--which imitates crystal by reason of its clarity and sonority--is an easy metaphorical transformation on the poetic level.

¹¹Compare Alecsandri: "Gerul pune streșinilor casei o ghirlandă de cristaluri."

¹²See Cirlot, p. 77.

of poetic creation, whereby the fluid elements of human experience ('ideas' and instincts in pre-conceptual form, or archetypes of the personal and collective unconscious, as we have seen in poems such as Stihuri) take on poetic form through the working of divine fervor.¹³

The same principle of renewal, implicit in the formation of the crystal and emphasized by the adverb "unceasingly," is also applicable to a work of literary creation. There is a constant rebirth (repetition of the primal act of creation), the rising of the phoenix from its ashes, but in a totally virgin form, since a work of art is always unique in itself and at the same time a recreation of what has gone before. And this unique quality, this new, virginal sparkle is best seen in the glass when the amount of liquid contained therein is as little as possible. Tentatively, it might be speculated that the art work, a poem especially, reveals its uniqueness and freshness when the material on which the imagery is based (the poetic content) is pared down, reduced, abstracted as far as possible from its discursive context, in short, made as pure as possible.

A brief rehearsal of some of Arghezi's more crucial

¹³ Represented in spatial terms light corresponds to the vertical arm and pertains to spiritual elevation (God-given consciousness, it is the masculine principle); while water, the primal fluid, a substance (despite the ambiguity of rain from heaven) of horizontal extension, amorphous and ambivalent, corresponds to the female principle of the unconscious.

thoughts on poetics from Vers și poezie may help us to understand why he found the crystal glass to be such an efficacious symbol for the conjunction of spirit and matter: "Verse is a geometric crystallization of poetry. . . . the poetry of verses has an almost divine significance. Poetry synthesized in verses by means of heaven knows what mysterious amalgamation leads you towards a sort of zenith, which you feel to be the right one."¹⁴ In Stihuri and Cîntare, and less directly in a whole host of other poems from Cuvinte potrivite, Arghezi has explored with considerable perspicacity the nature and origins of Poetry; here in Inscripție pe un pahar he is concerned with the state of transparency that the formal component of poetry (verse) occasions. On the symbolic level, the crystal goblet is a container; "To a certain extent it may be seen as a material expression of the surrounds of wrapping around the mystic centre." (Cirlot, p. 114.) With a lid, a goblet becomes a chalice and assumes thereby the greater symbolism of the chalice's connection to the human heart, as indeed we shall witness in Potirul mistic (The Mystical Chalice). Just as when drinking, one perceives the sparkle of perfectly arranged planes at the bottom of the glass growing in intensity and translucency in proportion to the amount of liquid remaining, so by drinking ever deeper from the crystal goblet of Poetry, man penetrates the veil surrounding the great

¹⁴Linia dreaptă. No. 2 (May 1, 1904).

mysteries of life. He experiences, in Arghezi's own words, "a state of absorption" because the more liquid he consumes, the closer to the center does he approach-- a state approximating "divine ravishment." ("Vers și poezie.")

At this point (lines 9-10) an apparent break in the poem occurs. In the first half, the poet has associated his art with a crystalline formation of absolute purity; in the second half, the poetic voice abruptly addresses (a typically Arghezian transition) another person.

Dar n-ai să știi, prin mine ce izvoare
S-au strecurat și câte, liniștit.
Și nu cunoști pe buza mea scînteietoare
Buzele calde câte m-au sorbit.
Ele-s aci-n văzduh, ca niște foi,
Cînd îmi încerci răcoarea nebăută,
Și gura ta, sorbindu-mi stropii noi,
Buzele-n zbor, umbrite, ți-o sărută.

But you aren't to know what and how many
Sources have filtered into me, noiselessly
And you do not know how many warm lips
Have sipped at my sparkling lip.
They're here right now in the air like leaves,
When you try my untasted freshness,
And your mouth, by sipping my new drops,
Lips in flight, shadowy, will kiss.

The person addressed so warmly as you (the Romanian of course uses the intimate second person singular form) is obviously an object of both concrete and symbolic value. On the symbolic level, she (or he) is the reader of the verses transmitted by the poet's mask, the crystal glass; on the concrete level, she it is who is drinking from the goblet, whose lips touch his--the lips of his glass--just as

countless other lips have done in the past. And the glass, as we shall see, is surrounded by the memory of these lips, ever present, floating through the air like so many leaves.

The poetic voice cautions his reader that she isn't to know "what sources and how many/Have quietly filtered through . . . [him]." The sources of springs, the izvoare, which are filtered through the goblet, are more puzzling in their concrete aspect than they are on the figurative level, where they undoubtedly refer to the myriad sources of poetic inspiration.¹⁵ Concretely, however, the "sources" might be understood in the mundane sense of varieties of liquor: a suggestion somewhat reinforced by the thought that all beverages, alcoholic or otherwise, owe their being to the aquatic-mineral hierarchy that exists beneath the surface of the earth, and thus are only several stages removed from the primal waters themselves.

The use of lips as the focal point of the imagery, as the point at which one set of experiences becomes the possession of another, is most apposite. The lip of the crystal glass is its extremity; the first and last

¹⁵We can hardly fail to keep in mind, moreover, the significance of izvor in Stihuri as well-springs of the human unconscious, or in Cintare the even profounder meaning we have attributed to this motif: the primal waters to which only Poetry or Song can lead man, and from which she too takes nourishment at the moment of individual acts of poetic creation.

contact between the liquid contained within the glass and the lips of human beings imbibing the nectar. The pattern is once more concentric; as the level of the liquid in the glass falls, or recedes to disclose the center, so the degree of intoxication, natural or divine, increases with the flow of liquid through the lips of the drinker. An interesting sensorial transposition of the fluid principle is also operating: the crystal is solid matter because its function is to contain the liquid, but the lips of the imbiber--presumably drawn to the glass by the need to slake his or her thirst--become moist in order to drink with full appreciation and inevitably leave in turn a residue of their moistness on the lip or brim of the glass.

It is the moment of transposition and relevance, but also on the poetic plane the moment of utterance, since the meeting and momentary interaction of the lips of the glass and of the person drinking from the glass corresponds to the sonorous realization--through the act of reading aloud or silently within the self--of those words printed on the white page. Without the participation of the reader--an intense participation since the lips are "warm"--these words would remain what they are in objective reality, merely, a series of hieroglyphics. In general terms, literature for Arghezi is a tripartite act: the poet himself (through the medium of dream or at the intervention of personified Song, as we have seen

in Stihuri and Cintare respectively), is instrumental in transcribing into symbolic terms his (which is everybody's) conception of the creative spirit, but without the willing involvement of the reader the passage from sterility (poetry as pure potential or verse viewed as an artifact, never used and never possessed) to life-force would be impossible.

This moment of participation, at once both divine and human since it expresses the confluence of absolute and vital values, is above all a moment of communion. In its deepest meaning, both etymological and ontological, communion is a sharing, a possession in common. Drinking in company with others, on whatever social occasion, is intrinsically a religious experience, even if the form and the spirit may have become increasingly perverted in recent times. In one sense, it is the re-enactment of the moment in illo tempore when man first partook of the liquid refreshment offered him by his Creator. Not only, however, is the physical or formal aspect of the paradigmatic function of drinking preserved, but the spiritual aspect is also insisted on in this poem.¹⁶ In an act of communion, men are led--through sharing a common experience--to recognize their descent from one model, and

¹⁶As has been done with unquestionable appropriateness by Ignazio Silone in his novel Pane e vino (Bread and Wine). Arghezi and Silone both seek to capture something of the 'human' aspect of sacramental relationships such as existed in primitive Christianity.

this recognition in turn induces a sharing of thoughts and emotions. It was such a moment of intimate spiritual relationship that Christ chose for ritualistic expression of faith in divinity.

In the conclusion to Inscripție pe un pahar (lines 13-16), Arghezi confirms that the refreshment he is offering his readers is unique and primordial; his metaphor "untasted freshness" (răcoarea nebăută), found in a number of variants elsewhere in Cuvinte potrivite,¹⁷ suggests a substance that preserves its virtual powers even when exposed to the light or to human warmth. Obviously, no element known to the physical world possesses such miraculous powers, therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the "substance" here is of a spiritual or poetic nature. And it is by sipping these "new drops" of "untasted freshness" that every man who drinks at the Fount of Life, every man who shares by an act of intuition the vital import of the poem, will not only be imbued with divine spirit but also be brought into an awareness of the bonds of brotherhood and the common origin he shares with other men. Our study of Cuvinte potrivite, which with Testament started on a note of ancestral continuance through the medium of poetry, has now come full circle. In the final resort, Arghezi

¹⁷ Compare the Petrarchan fusion of antitheses--"o plasă caldă de răcoare"--in Psalmul de taina.

understands poetry to be a vehicle of communion amongst men; his is a vision of sweeping and awesome proportions, since it embraces the total sum of individual creativity (understood as the re-enactment of the First Act of Creation) and the response this totality evoked in the hearts and minds of men down the ages. The stress is largely on the intuitive experience of men (both as a poet and reader), rather than on purely philosophical or doctrinaire considerations, because ideas which lack the support of sentiment or passion inevitably end in aridity.

Inscriptie pe un pahar is an invitation to men to share in the great mystery of life¹⁸ and to share that experience with their fellows through a brotherly act of love, thereby obeying Christ's commandment: "These things I command you, that ye love one another." At this stage in his career, however, Arghezi does not cast his injunction in the language of Biblical fervor that Serban Cioculescu and Vladimir Streinu, and many others, have particularly noted in the Psalmi.¹⁹ Here he concentrates

¹⁸And also to find rest; the immediate source for the Eucharistic act of literature is Christ's words to his disciples: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest [Mt. 11:28]."

¹⁹Serban Cioculescu, for example (after acknowledging that Vladimir Streinu was the first to draw attention to the preponderance of religious preoccupations in Arghezi's poetry), undertook a statistical survey of the lyric content of the third definitive edition of Arghezi's Versuri (published in 1943) and came to ". . . the surprising conclusion that nearly 60% of his poetry bears the imprint--some times more strongly, sometimes more weakly--

our attention once more on the vagueness and imprecision of the exchange of feeling embodied in the act of kissing.²⁰ All suggestion of sexual activity is kept to a minimum; it is a sharing of experience rather than possessing. By touching with his lips the lip of the crystal glass, the reader intuitively directly the vision of the poem; a vision which is formed of countless other poetic visions, and which has been shared by innumerable readers.

It is, at best, a shadowy vision or totally imaginative experience; the lips that are touched are "in flight," "they are air-borne," "like so many leaves." It is not only the leaves, however, which suggest a dynamics of dematerialization; so many of Arghezi's

of religious problems." He goes on to claim in fact that ". . . Arghezi's poetry, after 1940, gradually introduces to . . . [the Romanian lyric] a new, fundamental note, a new climate, like a far-off echo of the years spent in a monk's cell by the young poet." (Introducere în poezia lui Tudor Arghezi, p. 100.) While we have found no reason to doubt Cioculescu's statistics, at least as far as the poetry Arghezi published up until 1943 is concerned, we would like to point out that the poetry he published in Viața socială in 1910 and 1911 was largely written during his peregrinations through Switzerland and France in the period 1904-1910. The language of the poetry he wrote during this period is more heavily influenced by symbolist techniques, so that the religious element has to be discerned beneath a patina of image-clusters and other inter-related imagistic devices, which form part of a poetic intent striving after total experience. It is, of course, the avowed purpose of this study to reinstate these symbolistic values and to shift critical attention back to a number of key poems written before the First World War.

²⁰Kissing, sărutare, also conveys in Stihuri the tripartite act of individual creation, in which the three participants are Lady Poetry, the poet and Dream.

favorite motifs and images coalesce in these final eight lines--a multiplicity of "sources" that "have quietly filtered [a purifying and etherealizing moment] through me"; the translucency of "sparkling"; the "leaves" floating in the "air" (the creative breath of life); as well as many others already discussed ("untasted freshness", etc.). Yet, in order that the human spirit should be freed, shedding materiality as it rises, a contrary process (lines 1-8) was necessary: the solidification of spiritual substances ("waters of azure," "icicles of light" and "pebbles of dew," all of which are resumed in the emblem of the crystal glass that is their symbolic expression in terms accessible to human thought) provides the unique occasion for the act of communion which is poetry.

Inscriptions

In our analysis of Inscriptie pe un pahar, we have suggested that the crystal glass can be viewed both as a concrete object in reality and as a mask for the poetic voice; but at no point have we explained adequately the meaning of the title. On the concrete level, the inscription cut in the glass is clearly the poem itself, as it stands in the text here. Since, however, on the figurative level, the crystal glass is a mask for the poet, the inscription is not one but all of his poems, and this is confirmed by the general tenor of the poem, which embraces a universal rather than individual perspective.

Even the most casual reader of Cuvinte potrivite, or of any of the definitive editions of Arghezi's poetry that appeared at regular intervals between 1936 and 1959, will have been struck by the large number of poems bearing the title "Inscription" and must have wondered whether they formed an organic unity. Any hypothesis to this effect received certain confirmation when, in volume 3 of the final edition of his collected works, Scrieri, Arghezi formed a new cycle, Inscripții, from the twenty-nine poems bearing that title, hitherto published in other cycles, included three other poems,²¹ and added a dedicatory poem Inscripția inscripțiilor (The Inscription of Inscriptions).

In discussing Testament and Jignire we have had recourse to analogies between Arghezi's rough-hewn poetic technique (especially in the twenties) and the skills of the native sculptor, wrought in marble, terracotta or wood. All suggestions of literary Parnassianism, on the other hand, are absent in his Inscriptions, which apparently owe their initial inspiration to that period in his early youth (1891-1896) when, in order to support himself during the summer vacations, he worked as a stone-mason's apprentice, "polishing up the inscriptions in the

²¹Ex Libris (from Cuvinte potrivite), Ora rece and Ora tîrzie (from Versuri de seară).

graveyard."²² Idle though it may be to speculate on the influence this lugubrious work had on a young and impressionable mind, it does seem clear that the budding poet was suitably impressed by the effect of impersonality such a poetic mask might achieve. A poetic mask which would not only enable him to advise, direct, admonish or plead with his readers, while avoiding the pitfalls of overt commitment, but would also introduce a sense of immemoriality, an indication perhaps of the collective unconscious, into his poetry.

An inscription--especially when it preserves complete anonymity--which is chipped out of stone or scratched on glass or pottery, to some extent does for lyric poetry what a proverb or adage of collective origin accomplishes in the novel or short story. We are thinking specifically of Giovanni Verga's novel I Malavoglia,²³ where the narrative voice never intervenes directly in the text and is barely visible as part of the collective voice of the village, which provides a running commentary, both approving and critical, on the action.²⁴ The speech of the protagonists, moreover, is richly proverbial, so that,

²²"Principii de educație," Lume veche, lume nouă (Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1958), p. 329.

²³The Malavoglia Family is the English translation, however, it is usually rendered as "Under the Medler Tree."

²⁴The device has been termed "the choral effect" (coralità) by the critic Luigi Russo.

especially when they are nonplussed, they resort to the collective wisdom of their forefathers.²⁵ Similarly, in his Inscriptions, by withdrawing behind his cloak of impersonality, Arghezi can claim to stand with his fellow beings, to let his voice ring out with theirs down the ages.

Another poem from the cycle of Inscriptions, Inscripție pe o casă de țară,²⁶ represents an extended version of the inscription which might be placed on a house at its dedication:

Te-am ridicat pe-o coastă cu izvoare
Și-mprejmuindu-ți liniștea cu aștri,
Te las albind prin pomi din depărtare
Cuib fermecat, ca de cocori albaștri.

Din prispa ta vreau să-mi aduc aminte,
Din geamul tău gândi-voi la trecut,
Privind în sus, la păsările sfinte,
Ce-n streășini cuib de-argilă și-au făcut.

I raised you on a slope with springs
And encircling your quietness with stars,
I leave you whitening through the distant
fruit-trees,
Enchanting nest, like that of blue cranes.

From your prispa I wish to recall to mind,
From your window-pane I'll think of the past,
Gazing up, at the holy birds,
That in the eaves have made nests of clay.

The care with which the site of the house is chosen is of special interest. The builder, it might be claimed is merely erecting the house in accordance with

²⁵Such a narrative technique occasions a sense of timelessness as though what went on in the outside world barely touched the lives of these humble fisherfolk.

²⁶Published, like Inscripție pe un pahar, in Viața

geographical features: on the side of a hill, secure from flood-damage, and close to an abundant water supply. Yet, consciously or not, the maker is imitating a celestial model--otherwise there would be no need for construction rites (in this instance the inscription or dedicatory plaque). Since time immemorial man has built his houses on the top or on the slopes of hills, in obedience to divine edicts such as that which Jehovah gave to Moses, or David gave to his son Solomon.²⁷

The actual prototype for the house of a Christian is probably the celestial Jerusalem that God created ". . . before the city was built by the hand of man; . . ."²⁸ Arghezi's peasant cottage, protected by the Heavens and nourished by the well-springs of life, no doubt is a much humbler dwelling, yet it too retains a sacral character. Indeed, the very words of the maker ("encircling your quietness with stars") are indicative of a repetition of the primordial act. Poetic license apart, what builder would dare assume the responsibilities of the First Maker, unless he felt himself to be acting according to divine authority. By his dedicatory plaque, therefore, the builder is acknowledging that in

socială in 1911 and thought by Arghezian exegetes to have been sent to N.D. Cocea, the journal's editor, during the poet's period of residence in Switzerland and France.

²⁷ See Mircea Eliade, Cosmos and History, p. 7.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

transforming chaos into cosmos, according to certain clearly established forms and norms, he is repeating the act of the gods,²⁹ or more properly, since Arghezi is a Christian, of God the Father. And since the Inscription on a country house is also a poem, poetry itself is seen to be an act of re-affirmation, a repetition of the primal act of creation.

The second stanza obviously suggests a retracing of the past, a return to one's origins; in which case Inscriptie pe o casă de țară could be viewed as a stepping-stone (compare Testament) whereby succeeding generations might come to achieve greater understanding of their selves through regression to the primal moment. It is in man's nature to return to his beginnings, just as migratory instinct brings the swallows ("the holy birds") back to the same set of eaves year in year out. The 'spontaneous' use of sfinte, moreover, despite the inherent semantical word-play, provides a suitably non-intellectual allusion to the holiness of all origins, bird's and mankind's alike.

A number of details, which make suggestive use of local color, merit special comment in this poem: the expression păsările sfinte itself is popular usage, whilst the word prispă denotes a raised mound or platform of earth skirting the entire house, and found in any

²⁹Ibid., p. 8.

Romanian region (such as Oltenia, Arghezi's ancestral home) where flooding or mud are a problem in springtime. Not surprisingly, many of Arghezi's critics have insisted on these elements of family or peasant solidarity,³⁰ tying them in with the cult of the plough, and ultimately with class consciousness. But to focus attention on cultural traditions, without indicating the underlying religious spirit seems to us to make a mockery of the complex pattern of belief Arghezi is expressing in such simple and human terms:

Voi îngriji ca-n fiecare seară
Să-ți ardă-n vîrf nestinsa noastră stea,
Pe care voi aprinde-o solitară
Cu sufletul și ruga mea.

Iar pentru prunci și ochii-odihnitori
Ai preacuratei ce ne-nchise drumul,
Vom răspindi prin încăperi parfumul
Care preschimbă inimile-n flori.

Și-ntr-un ungher, vom face din covoare
Un pat adînc cu perini moi,
Dacă Isus, voind să mai scoboare,
Flămînd și gol, va trece pe la noi.

I'll take care that every evening
On your roof-top burns our unextinguished
star,
Which I shall all by itself light up
With all my soul and prayer.

While for babes and the relief-giving eyes
Of the immaculate Virgin who brought our
journey to an end,
We'll fill each room with the fragrance
That transforms hearts into flowers.

And in a corner from rugs will we make

³⁰Typical in this respect is Ov. Crohmălniceanu, Tudor Arghezi, pp. 163-4.

A deep bed, with pillows soft,
Should Jesus, wishing once more to descend,
Starving and naked, call on us.

The ritual act of lighting a single star on the rooftop of the house every night is open to several interpretations; it must, however, be emphasized that the builder of the house, or at least the person who carved the inscription, himself assumes the responsibility of kindling the flame. In view of the Christian inspiration of the following two stanzas, it is likely that the ritual act is at the same time a reaffirmation of Christian faith (the Star of Hope, the Lamp of Faith) and a pledge to ensure the perpetuity of existence through repetition of the primal act of creation.

In the last two stanzas, the house explicitly acquires the function of a sanctuary. The arrival of the babe and of the Virgin Mary, both symbolic of initial purity, calls for a ritual cleansing--corresponding to the purification of the templum with incense--coupled with festive preparations. Similarly, in the same house, a comfortable bed is to be prepared for the second coming of Jesus. It is still the custom in rural regions of Romania to set aside a guest room, held in readiness for an important visitor such as Jesus would be, just as in other primitive Christian communities an extra place at the table is often laid for the unexpected guest.

The fact that people living in agrarian societies in the Balkans should live in the daily expectation of the

Second Coming doubtless attests to the constancy of their faith, but also indicates how marginal has been the influence of Western Christianity, with its severe doctrine of Original Sin and its stern belief in the Last Judgment.³¹ The apparent willingness of peasants to live in cramped quarters, when common sense would dictate the use of the guest room, seems to us evidence of a deep-seated feeling that a house, any house, is the house of God, in which man lives on sufferance. Inscripție pe o casă de țară is one of several poems³² in which Christian eschatology and pagan mythology live side by side without serious tension. For his Marxist critics, Arghezi's poem is representative of the fraternal accord that is possible here on earth; for the reader mindful of the cosmic proportions of his poetry, this Inscription is further proof of an instinctual withdrawal into mythic time, occasioned by a desire to escape the contradictions and divisions of historical existence.

Another poem, not however from the cycle of Inscriptions, which illustrates how much more closely

³¹As Mircea Eliade notes of the pre-Christian religions of Europe: "Yet they represent a religious life and a mythology powerful enough to resist ten centuries of Christianity and countless offensives on the part of ecclesiastical authorities. This religion was cosmic in structure, and we shall see that in the end it was tolerated and assimilated by the Church. In fact, rural Christianity, especially in Southeastern Europe, has a cosmic dimension." (Myth and Reality, p. 106.)

³²Vînt de toamnă is another example.

primitive agrarian societies are tied to cosmic experience than are urban communities, is Întîmpinare. The title--which is untranslatable--refers to the custom formerly prevalent throughout Romania, of going out to meet a guest or stranger on the outskirts of the village. Indeed, in some communities întîmpinarea was a highly-ritualized occasion, and youths, sometimes dressed all in white, would even issue forth, bearing gifts of bread, to meet the traveller on the way. Hospitality, it would seem, whatever form it may take (and even in "advanced," industrialized nations, few of us would dream of meeting our guests otherwise than at the door of our home, that is, on the boundaries of that sacral precinct entrusted to our care), still retains a deeply religious function. Nowadays, of course, only Presidents, Queens, and First Secretaries of the Party, can expect to be granted similar boundary privileges, but in the harmoniously-balanced organism which is, or was, the Romanian village, any visitor may be treated with the deference shown to a worthy prelate.

It matters little that the country which sleeps "at the window of the poet's dream," "whose sown field for the first time blazed forth / To the thuribles of . . . [his] ardent soul," exists outside of space and time, as a memory of edenic bliss lost to man. For the Orthodox believer, nature was not corrupted by the Fall, and thus stands as a constant reminder of primal glory.

The man who lives and works ("by the sweat of his brow") in the midst of this country of blessed origins is no less alienated and separated; but this separation is not a total loss and the promise of the renewal is present in every harvest and in every springtime ploughing. Meantime, poetry will bring a form of alleviation, because in the midst of man's sufferings it can restore to him an awareness of his origins. In Arghezi's final exhortation, patterned after a line from the "Our Father," "Song and dance, / In the world of my spirit find a place! / And daily be the dough / At the kneading of my sufferings with fire!"

The Metamorphoses of the Chalice

In Potirul mistic (The Mystical Chalice), a poem which shares many stylistic affinities with Inscripție pe un pahar, Arghezi develops some of the analogies suggested by the Goblet as an emblem of impenetrable mystery:-

Iată-l cuprins în singura lumină
 Ce-o altoiește cerul pe pământ.
 De liniști mari cărarea lui e plină
 Și pasul lui e tânăr, drept și sfânt,
 Precum ar fi al codrilor de stele
 Când s-ar mișca din loc, și-n mers
 Păstorul alb, ivindu-se-ntre ele,
 Și-ar face drum, păscînd, prin univers.

Behold him contained within the unique light
 That heaven grafts onto the earth.
 Of immense silences his path is full
 And his step is young, right and holy,
 Just as would be that of the white shepherd
 Of the wooded stars when he first moved from
 his place,
 And appearing amongst them on his journey,

Passed on his way, grazing his flocks through
the universe.

The key phrase, which gives the poem its characteristic élan, is the forceful opening imperative Iată-l. The poet-persona, speaking in a moment of interior revelation, indicates îl--which in Romanian can signify both it (the Mystical Chalice) and him (the incarnate presence of Christ). The emphatic placing, moreover, suggests an extraordinary event or sight; it is a moment such as Sir Galahad must have experienced when gazing at the Holy Grail. The chalice is both the instrument of Christ's reincarnation, through transubstantiation, and the manifestation of a mystery in its own right.

In the first vision--Potirul Mistic after all is a series of mystical visions, since the poetic voice remains passive until halfway through the final stanza--the chalice (or the ambiguous it or him) is presented to the reader, bathed in "the unique light / That heaven grafts onto the earth." As a center of irradiation and illumination, light customarily indicates the moment of divine revelation for the Christian, the moment when the Holy Ghost regenerates faith in the unseen. But the concrete metaphor Arghezi uses--the grafting of light--suggests ". . . artificial interference in the realm of natural order. . . ." ³³ By sending His only begotten

³³Cirlot, p. 115. Note that the abnormality of union between material and spiritual bodies is also compared to grafting in Heruvic (penultimate stanza).

Son to dwell amongst us, God did violence not only to the celestial order but also to the natural order of the Universe, unaccustomed as it was to direct contact with a Spiritual Being. Therefore, the grafting of light, of "unique light" (Jesus said: "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."--Jn. 9:5) proclaims the corporeal presence of Christ the Redeemer.

As far as His visibility is concerned, the figure of Christ now filling the canvas could technically be an act of faith on the part of the believer or of an act of imagination on the part of the poet, since according to the doctrine of transubstantiation only the substance of the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ and the accidents remain as before. But everything in the first stanza points to visible form--from the first ecstatic utterance to physical indications of his journey and his gait. Arghezi's Christ-figure, moreover, moves amongst mankind, tending to its needs, just as God, "the white shepherd," moved across the heavenly spheres, giving spiritual nourishment. It is characteristic of Arghezi's primitive Christian beliefs that in order to differentiate between the Father and the Son he resorts to the most elementary Biblical typologies: God the Father, hoary with old age (elsewhere he is depicted as a cruelly vindictive Jehovah), God the Son, gentle, saintlier--more a hero figure than part of an awesome trinity.

The sequence of tenses provides the best clue to the various levels of experience in the poem. In the rapturous evocation of Christ in the first half of the stanza, the use of the present tense conveys a vital and continuing process, entirely visionary in spirit. With the comparison between Christ as He is and God as He was, the past conditional is used to express mythic time. Never actually having witnessed God tending to his flock, the poet can only surmise; he has to rely on the authority of legend and holy script.

The transition to the following stanza is effected by a further change of tense: from hypothesis as to past events (past conditional) to vivid recall of despairing times (a narrative present as opposed to a visionary present). We pass from a world, which knows intimately the presence of Christ, to a world which awaits his coming in ignorance and fear:

L-așteaptă-n zări talazele de fier:
 Nestrăbătuta lor întunecime --
 Ce bat zăgazul limpedelui cer
 Cu spaimă, hotărîre și cruzime.
 E o statuie de-ntuneric sfîntul
 Și ochiul care să-l pătrundă
 Nu l-a născut din lutul lui pămîntul,
 Ca să-l ridice peste el și undă.

On the horizon the iron billows await him--
 Their uncrossed darkness--
 Which pound the dike of the limpid sky
 With terror, resolution and cruelty.
 A statue of darkness is the saint
 And the eye that can penetrate him
 The earth has not given birth to from its
 clay,
 So as to raise him above itself and the wave.

Human life, life on earth after the Fall, is conceived as a senselessly raging sea; a motif of venerable tradition in Western Literature, extending as far back as Petrarch, it occurs constantly in Cuvinte potrivite (compare the third stanza of Psalmul de taină) and has received magnificent expression in Fiara mării (The Sea-Beast), where man, protected only by a flimsy cockle-shell (possibly symbolizing the Christian message), does combat with a mythical sea-monster, of popular Romanian origin. Compared to the "immense silences" (liniști mari) of Christ's passage, and in marked distinction to the final image of quietness, the human world is full of violence and cruelty. In a fallen world, even the breakers show signs of disintegration (the rusting away of iron), and relentlessly batter "the dike of the limpid sky."³⁴

Presumably, the horizon is the dike that separates sky and earth: on calm days it is almost as if someone had etched in a firm line between sea and sky, but when the wind is up and the sea is rough the dike-horizon becomes indistinguishable from the waves. Noteworthy is "the terror, resolution and cruelty" with which human passions oppose the spirit world; owing to his long banishment from the sight of God, man has grown hostile to all

³⁴The dike or dam (zăgazul) is another of Arghezi's favorite metaphors by which he suggests the barriers between the spiritual and material worlds.

matters which are beyond his immediate comprehension. Like a savage who has never known the civilizing institution of religion, he reacts impulsively, according to his basic instinct of self-preservation.

Once the two opposing worlds--the visionary and the actual--have been dramatically juxtaposed, we return (lines 13-16) to the mystery surrounding the chalice. Already a partial transformation has taken place, for the holy one (sfintul)--be he Christ Incarnate or the Chalice itself--is recognized as "a statue of darkness." Let us imagine that in the first stanza, transfixed in wonder, the poet witnesses an accidental as well as substantial anthropomorphosis: the chalice--perhaps at the moment of consecration--visibly acquires human form. Although the person or being produced by this metamorphosis is a god, he is known to be Christ the King, Son of the true God, and as such he is also incarnate. There is no example of Christian iconography known to us in which Christ does not appear incarnate, for to deprive him of human form would be to subvert the very spirit of Christianity.

This first vision--Christ revealed as man through Holy Sacrament--is held as long as possible (the comparison with God the Father and the confrontation with the hostile waves are textual confirmation of this), but inevitably begins to fade. The second close-up of this wondrous spectacle in fact reveals "a statue of darkness"

instead of the righteous youth. The process of reversion from 'human' form is well under way; while the figure of Christ may still be recognizable in the solidifying elements, He is in reality name alone. Moreover, only the skin or husk of the statue remains; inside, all is darkness. This reversed metamorphosis would be complete when the statue was replaced by the chalice--which once again would be a mysterious receptacle, an embodiment of enigma.

But Arghezi never intended that the completion of the metamorphosis should be witnessed by the reader (at least not in the context of this poem), and we have merely supplied what seems to us a plausible explanation for the succeeding transformation, according to which the chalice now appears as an amphora:

Amforă-n jur cu-o antică pictură
 Ce-și amintește-n murmur c-a rămas
 Plinul de umbră pin' la gură,
 Vas tămios, pe-un fost iconostas,
 Du-te, purtată-n soare cu mândrie,
 Până acolo unde-s zori de seară,
 Și varsă-te în bezna cenușie
 Întreagă, liniștită, solitară.

Amphora, with an ancient painting around
 Which remembers in murmurs that it has remained
 Full of shadow up to the brim,
 Vessel smelling of incense, on a former
 iconostasis,
 Get thee gone, carried in the sun with pride,
 To where the dawns of the evening rest,
 And pour yourself into the ashen gloom
 Whole, quiet, solitary.

Arghezi momentarily focuses our attention on a earthenware pitcher, a receptacle which might be considered

the secular equivalent of a chalice, were it not for the fact that at the Wedding at Cana Christ changed into wine the water from six waterpots of stone (Jn. 2:1-11). An amphora, of course, was commonly used in classical times to store almost any foodstuff,³⁵ but in our times has been especially associated with the storage of spices and ointments (often associated with sacramental rites), as well as of wine.³⁶ The significance of this transformation, we believe, is to stress the amphora's antiquity in order to show that its mysterious contents have remained largely undisturbed down the centuries, "that it has remained"--in Arghezi's poetic figure--"Full of shadow up to the brim." Since the Romanian word for "brim," gură, can also be translated as mouth, there is another suggestion here of the inviolability of the Eucharist which innumerable believers have received but never fully comprehended.³⁷

Syntactical dislocation partly accounts for the

³⁵As a visit to the recently excavated Forum at Herculaneum will strikingly confirm. Rows upon rows of amphorae discovered in stores occupied by wine-merchants, spice-traders, grain-distributors, and many others, attest to their wide divulgation as a common unit of storage.

³⁶The current craze for diving operations in the Mediterranean in search of treasure-trove has brought to the surface countless numbers of perfectly sealed amphorae containing exotic spices from the Orient.

³⁷That unintegrated man is severely limited in his efforts to transcend his condition and understand the mystery of the "darkness" that chalice, statue and amphora alike contain is also the meaning of the conclusion to

difficulty in understanding these lines (17-29). It is not altogether clear, for example, whether the "ancient painting . . . Which remembers in murmurs" refers to a frieze encircling the jar (suggesting Grecian or Roman origin) or to murals painted on the walls of a church, presumably depicting the lives of Christ, the Apostles and Saints, in other words, representing an iconographical history of Christinity. If we are to assume that the chalice is surrounded by the walls of a church (in which case the "ancient painting" would be a synecdoche for the entire building), the figures depicted on the walls are 'living' testimony that the taină (the mystery), which still fills the jar right up to the mouth,³⁸ has never been distributed amongst mankind, but has remained 'locked-up' within the institutional structure of the Church. If, on the other hand, the painting is understood as a frieze, the implicit condemnation of the Church as a barrier to spiritual revelation would not apply here, although it can, we believe, be read into the concluding lines of the stanza.

Another metamorphosis or transformation occurs in the following line (L. 20); instead of an amphora we learn that the mysterious object is a "Vessel smelling

the second stanza (lines 14-16).

³⁸Normal syntactical usage, however, would dictate that the "shadow" refer to the "painting" and not to the "amphora," since there is no punctuation after pictură.

of incense" (vas tămfios), a vessel such as a chalice which, at first sight, has been kept within the walls of a church and has constantly "inhaled" the fumes of incense. Of course, it could be equally argued that the vessel contained sweet balms such as the ointment of spikenard used by Mary of Bethany to anoint the feet of Jesus--there being plenty of indications that in Potirul mistic Arghezi wishes to reinstate the primitive spirit of the Christian faith, as opposed to the ceremonial mumbo-jumbo and the pontifical faux-pas he caricatured so entertainingly in Iosif al Ungro-Vlahiei.

With the completion of this latest metamorphosis, the vessel might be expected to function independently of the amphora. And at first this seems to be the case for, suddenly acquiring a presence and a life of its own, the vessel is exhorted (Du-te) to go out into the outside world. But if it is the vas tămfios that the sibylline voice of the poet is commanding, why should the complement (purtată-n soare) be feminine in gender, when its presumed subject is masculine? At times, Arghezi may take liberties with those rules of grammar that seem to him to impede the flow of poetic thought, but hardly to the extent of confusing feminine and masculine forms. Closer attention to the text, however, reveals that a major syntactical dislocation--not easy to spot at a first reading--is responsible for this apparent confusion of genders. Once it has been understood that purtată, as

well as all the epithets in the final line, is the predicate of amforă, which is both subject and object of the entire stanza, it will be seen that the phrase vas tămîios is itself in apposition to amphora. Therefore the process, which we described at the start of the preceding paragraph as another metamorphosis, is in reality merely a metaphorical transposition; yet such is the complexity of Arghezi's poetic structure, that it is the "vas tămîios" which seems to be born proudly into the sun.

Further ambiguity is occasioned by the phrase "on a former iconostasis" (pe-un fost iconostas), which may specify the exact location of the vessel in the church, because it is just possible to imagine a chalice depicted on the altar--screen or even resting on it. But this fails to explain why the iconostasis should be redundant in the visionary world Arghezi is presenting to the reader. The answer must be that, as an ecclesiastical structure which separated the congregation from the mystery of the Eucharist,³⁹ the iconostasis is an undoubted

³⁹In Western Christendom, both Roman Catholic and Lutheran/Anglican, the rood-screen (the equivalent of the iconostasis) merely serves to separate the body of the congregation from the priests celebrating Mass. The nave of the church is the public part, while the chancel is the preserve of God's ministers, since it corresponds in structure to the Tabernacle of Moses, the Holy of Holies, from which the ordinary person was banned by divine ordinance. Of course, in these days of worship in the round, much of this elementary symbolism has been lost--being replaced by forms of worship which smack strangely of Paganism! In the Orthodox Church, however, no such concessions have been made, and the doors leading to the

anachronism--an impediment to faith--in a Christian community founded, if we understand the implications of Inscripție pe un pahar correctly, upon the Universal Brotherhood of Man.

The chalice, it should be noted, is capable of dictating its own actions, as though it still preserved some of the semi-human, semi-divine characteristics it acquired in the first stanza. The poet-persona merely pleads that it be carried to that corner of the human world "where the dawns of evening rest" (unde-s zori de seară), in other words where light contends with darkness, where the war between faith and doubt is still being waged. And there, the poet enjoins, the chalice is to pour itself (once again the active principle operating) "into the ashen gloom, / Whole, quiet, solitary." The combination "ashen gloom" (bezna cenușie), which may in fact be intended as an oxymoron, is frequent in Arghezi, and is used here to suggest a region of the world where the will for good survives amongst ordinary people, even though darkness (darkness of the mind perhaps) is closing in.

The qualities that the chalice brings to its

altar are only opened (or the curtains drawn back) at duly appointed moments in the Liturgy. The theatrical effects achieved are often dramatic--at least to the non-Orthodox eye--but are hardly likely to further the ecumenical (or up-to-date liturgical) spirit that Arghezi seems to be urging in this poem.

missionary task are those long sought by Christian mystics: wholeness, arising from direct communion between God and Man; silence, because the peace of God is perfect silence, unlike the incoherent babbling of the violent at heart; solitude, because withdrawal into the self is the only preparation for true revelation and the only protection against the lure of wordly things. The special emphasis given to these qualities and the partial abdication of conscious control indicate a visionary mode of literature. It is as if the poet has ceased trying to interpret the unfathomable; he is there to transmit by name what he 'knows' and nothing more.

Looked at as a total construct, Potirul mistic could be regarded as Arghezi's reworking of the myth of the Grail, or as the progressive demythicization of one of the most common emblems of the mystic Center. We prefer to believe, however, that Arghezi's way is always the poetic way. The feminine gender of the three final epithets can be logically explained by pointing out that amforă is a vocative, that the entire stanza is an invocation or a command, and we have attempted to do this because an explanation seemed warranted. Yet, in the final count, "Întreagă, liniștită, solitară" do not refer so much to the amphora, and thus to the chalice, as to the liquid which these vessels contain. There can surely be no question about this, for otherwise the final imperative "pour yourself" (varsă-te) would be nonsensical.

It is a reasonable supposition, therefore, that the feminine gender alludes rather to the taină, the mystery which the chalice contains and of which it is, at the same time, an emblem.

We have chosen to conclude our reappraisal of Cuvinte potrivite with an exploration of Potirul mistic, not because it was intended as an epilogue, but because in its final metamorphosis many of the most characteristic elements in Arghezi's first poetic cycle seem to coalesce.⁴⁰ There is a general resemblance between a two-dimensional view of a chalice and the graphic representation of the human heart, perhaps stimulated by the parallel function in Christian symbolism between "The Bleeding Heart" and the blood of the Redeemer which the chalice contains at the moment of consecration. Both are representations of the Mystical Center, and emblematically both signify love as the center of illumination. It is also worth noting that the shape of the amphora--the final metamorphosis which we have witnessed--suggests the figure of a perfectly-formed woman: indeed, as we have already seen, in Jignire the poet exclaims: "I took

⁴⁰There are, needless to say, other paths to reintegration: witness the pantheistic note in the two poems designed as epilogues to Cuvinte potrivite and Alte cuvinte potrivite. As for example in the passage from Post-scriptum where, marvelling at the wonders of nature around him, the poetic voice remarks: "The warm doină of the marshes sings, to your mystical hearing." It is part of the fascination of Arghezi's work that he has explored all these paths.

my example for the trunk from the pitchers" (pitchers being in Romanian urcioare, a somewhat more popular version of amfore). His lovely Galatea is just one more metamorphosis of the ideal woman, "la donna che non si trova," through whom and with whom the poet hoped to find eternal happiness.

Given the enmity which God placed between man and woman (Psalmul de taină), and given the extreme ambivalence with which she manifests her powers (Cîntare), such a quest is apparently doomed to failure. Nevertheless, woman's potential as a unifying element in life--reflected here, in transcendental form, in the symbol of the chalice--will achieve its natural entelechy in the succeeding poetic cycles, especially in Versuri de seară. Whether it be attained through a chthonic or through a mystical union, the ultimate goal of life is love; Potirul mistic, in particular, and Cuvinte potrivite, as a whole, offer man the opportunity to follow Arghezi in his search.

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