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## An “Eucharistic” Ballad to anti-totalitarian Martyrdom – A pastoral Radiography of the Poetry written “behind Bars”

### Abstract

In this study, *An Eucharistic Ballad to Anti-totalitarian Martyrdom*, I attempt to perform a pastoral radiography of the poetry written “behind bars.” On the one hand, this study deals with an academic inventory of the main themes present in the poetry of the intellectuals imprisoned for political reasons. On the other hand, the study examines its relevance for and impact on post-modern public conscience. Values such as the freedom of speech/the



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right to publicly express one's opinion, patriotism/the denunciation of the "shrinking" map of Romania by the Soviet Empire, religious beliefs/the conviction that the public space should not be infested by atheist ideology, etc., for which many of the political prisoners from those times gave their lives, nowadays – once they have been obtained, passed as laws and entered everyday life – have lost their capacity to stir, their impact on the masses, their axiological relevance. The postmodern world is paralyzed by different attitudes: freedom has swerved toward discretionary absolutism, patriotism has melted into indifference to the "nation" or even into contempt for our own ethnic identity (the feeling of shame for being Romanian), the religious belief has reached a point where it is classified as "psychological weakness" to which only emotionally fragile people resort in order to find "emotional support." The reversal/obsolescence of the old values, for which our forefathers shed their blood, indicates a profound axiological crisis in our contemporary world. How will Orthodoxy take corrective action?

## Keywords

*memorial, collective unconscious, local identities, feminism, experiential religiosity, Eucharistic martyrdom*

## 1 Introduction

Postmodernity, a new stage in humanity's history, clearly distinguished from modernity, or more simply put contemporaneity, has been defined along the following coordinates: 1. A post-industrial, informational society; 2. The centralization of the information and communication (the transition from "Gutenberg's revolution" to the televised image

and to that of virtual existence, focused on the computer); 3. The emergence of new types of relationships between men and women (including everything connected to feminism); 4. The tension between all sorts of globalisms and local cultural identities; 5. A new relationship of the person with their inner self (through self-consciousness intermediated by self-(psycho)analysis); 6. The relativization of values and certitudes under the hypnosis of nihilism (the paradoxical approach to history); 7. Experiential religiosity, typically postmodern<sup>1</sup>.

The postmodern world is "paralyzed" by positionings that are quite different from those characteristic of modernity: freedom has veered towards discretionary absolutism, patriotism has melted into indifference to the "nation" or even into contempt for our own ethnic identity (the feeling of shame for being Romanian), the religious belief has reached a point where it is classified as "psychological weakness" to which only emotionally fragile people resort in order to find "emotional support." The reversal/obsolescence of the old values, for which our forebears shed their blood, indicates a profound

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<sup>1</sup> The "global village" is a fast, anarchic, polychromic, interconnected world that affirms uniformization to the detriment of local cultures, promoting the common knowledge of geographically far away cultural and religious spaces by removing them from the anonymous regional and making them legitimate forms of the existing plurality in the cultural heritage. "The global village" uniformizes: the streets, the clothes, the television programs, the music played in discos, the firms, the beverages; they are all the same, undermining and diluting the local identities, which can no longer retain their "pure form." The super-communication through the Internet mediates an inferior problematization, often resulting in a tragic questioning as a consequence of the clash with the other culture, the other religious ethos. We can talk about the phenomenon of "the disinsertion" of man from the immediate reality and the gradual loss of the sense of objective reality. Vasile Vlad, *Nihilismul postmodern și apofatismul creștin. O încercare de dialog/Postmodern Nihilism and Christian Apophatism*, in: „Tabor”, 6/2009 (III), p. 14.

axiological crisis in our contemporary world. How will Orthodoxy take corrective action?

The poetry “from behind bars” has the scream, the yearning, the pathos for values that are worth dying for encoded in its most profound DNA. Decades of imprisonment, most often the best years of youth, sacrificed on the altar of convictions that ought to have been the backbone of posterity’s culture and existence, of today’s people. Yesterday’s heroes died for today’s generations. What paradoxical mutation in the collective unconscious has made today’s young people, the new generations, despise (or at least stop “empathizing” with) the values for which our forebears though it was worth dying?

In our analysis, we will not stop at the first two coordinates of postmodernity (1. Post-industrial, information society<sup>2</sup>; 2. The centralization of information and communication/transition from “Gutenberg’s revolution” to the televised image and that of

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<sup>2</sup> The different cultural context, the communication in ways that are specific to the modern (not postmodern) epoch is obvious in the poetry “from behind bars” when it refers to “letter”, “epistle”: *“Oh mother, I’m writing from Aiud,/From the dungeon with tears and bars/With cold walls, from behind which you cannot hear/How “my dreams” in chains are dying.// The leaden days are passing slower than the years/My life is broken by unwanted burden,/ In my soul the chestnut trees are shedding their leaves/ And a forgotten dream of ... is weeping.// Your stout son, with a chest of brass/ Who used to loiter on the paths/ Today is nothing but a shadow, mother,/ In the dungeon with cold walls.// (...) I’m writing you a letter, and it may be the last./ That “the dance of Salome” is in full swing/ And until dawn another life will end/ For day and night Death is amongst us...”,* (“Letter from Aiud” by Simion Lefter). The sluggish passing of time, the biological aging process between two meetings, “the leaden days” which “pass like years” are other elements indicating the climate specific to the epoch when communication was “slowed down” or rather it was “slow” in relation to communication in postmodernity. *“In the solitude of concrete and iron/the silences from the universe have congregated,/ a sad forehead is looking for another sky/ and time appears to have stopped.”,* (“Expectation” by Petre Strihan). Mihai Buracu’s “October Postcard” falls under the same category. The quoted reference volume is *Poets Behind Bars*, Editura Mănăstirii Petru Vodă, 2010.

the virtual existence, focused on the computer), because they are completely alien to the poetry "behind bars", thus absent. We will say, however, that it is exactly these coordinates that "devour" the time of today's young generations: the Internet, the screens, the virtual. They have the power to superficialize, to undermine the metaphysical depths and the well-articulated thought, to weaken good judgment and critical thinking. That is why the Church's pastoral advice is that any resort to such means be moderated, well balanced and self-controlled. We will continue our analytical journey with the other five criteria.

## 2 New Relationships between Men and Women (included everything connected to Feminism)

What was the image of the woman in the collective unconscious in the world where the poets "behind bars" created, suffered and acted? What was people's relation to "the feminine"? How is this relationship mirrored in the *Prison Poetry*?

In his poem "Memorial", Aurel Drăgan says:

"We sometimes have, from new inmates,  
Some news about mothers and fathers' deaths,  
With the young left somewhere, in a tale,  
With the kin who climb the Golgotha to the top,  
With bereaved wives, faithful Penelopes  
Who stitch stars on the frame of their expectations,  
With our daughters, pale, fragile,  
In the vault of Mislă, withering under the ordeal,  
Solemn like solitary Victories"<sup>3</sup>.

The feminine appears in its bi-millenary traditional form as the delicate, the refined, the embodied fragility, the soft, the transfigured noble. The woman is the embodiment of "settled life", of the dominant emotional, of complete delicacy.

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<sup>3</sup> *Poeți după gratii/Poets Behind Bars*, (Editura Mănăstirea Petru Vodă, 2010), p. 249.

Nowadays the perception of the feminine is quite different: the woman in the public space is masculinized, is aggressive, imposing, displaying intransigent positions, borrowing extensively from the portrait of the man as it exists in the collective unconscious. She wants a social status and a successful professional career, even though they can only be obtained if she abdicates from the requirements of nurturing children, of cultivating affectivity in the younger generation, at the cost of a permanent and mutilating absence from the family “nest.” Once the demand for a professional career has been publicly affirmed, this gives rise to the competition with the man, a competition that reaches alarming dimensions in the world of politics.

Despite all these mutations, the relationship with the feminine present in a woman’s “mother” self cannot undergo such a rapid metamorphosis at the postmodern ideological command. The mother is the epitome of the feminine; this is how Andrei Ciurunga sees this relationship in his poem “Postal order”:

“Mother, receive as a gift  
 these silver coins that sound of ordeal,  
 they may be few, but I paid for them dearly,  
 with all my hungry youth.  
 The warm blood that you gave me  
 I spent it like it was a mere trifle  
 much of it I generously shed  
 under the pick, under the crowbar, under the shovel.

And the remainder now, in peace, I’m sending it to you, to spend  
 it on bread and weep for it at dinner,  
 since for me I only kept a little,  
 enough to last me till I get home”<sup>4</sup>

Luca Dumitrescu says in the poem “Wife”:

“Beloved mother, sister and wife,  
 Earth tilled by my plough towards the sun  
 I felt your sweet thrill  
 Clear and chaste, embracing me”<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 391.

In his poem *We, still here...*, Andrei Ciurunga observes:

"Our children grow as orphans in deserted places  
the wives will wither like hay,  
from mothers irises and hollies grow,  
and we, still here, still thinking of leaving...  
As if we have never been in this world  
Sundays have also forgotten about us,  
our friends get drunk in pubs,  
and we, still here, still behind bars.

Water lilies burn in incense burners during our prayers, girls  
walk under flowering black locust trees,  
old violins grow younger under their strings,  
and we, still here, still on mats".<sup>6</sup>

The prisoners are aware that life goes on, that from certain points of view there is progress, but they continue to be a sacrifice that must be made by the nation... The feminine is associated with flowers, irises and hollies, with raising children; the feminine means delicacy, sensitiveness, devotion, heroic waiting for the wrongly punished and estranged husband. The woman is the symbol of faithfulness, loyalty irrespective of any unjust political "labels".

"Let's pack in our bags everything left to us  
from what we have brought here in our memories:  
first a mother, white and thin,  
and a girl with nightingales in her voice"  
(*"Be ready, soul!"* by Andrei Ciurunga)<sup>7</sup>.

The woman is seen as "an altar" of intense inner feelings, a source of affection, a spring of love. That is why, her striking absence from the man's life as a prisoner is an abdication, an

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<sup>5</sup> "When life's hunger weeps in myself, / You offer me your pure bread / And if I ever feel like blood, / Bubbling with its living force, / You are the heart that gathers it / And gives it on to children." *Poeți după gratii/Poets Behind Bars*, (Editura Mănăstirea Petru Vodă, 2010), p. 391.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 205.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 197.

embarrassing betrayal, an axiological decline, a “Disfigurement”:

“I’m leaving, my love, hiding in my bosom  
the flag torn by bullets and storms  
and watch as your kind hand  
does not beckon me to stay”

(Disfigurement by Andrei Ciurunga)<sup>8</sup>.

The tension between all sorts of globalisms and local cultural identities “*I am not guilty towards my country!*” – says Andrei Ciurunga, as if he delimited himself from some inner reproach, which nobody from the outside could ever make today; according to postmodern perception, he actually did “too much” for his country: long prison time for<sup>9</sup> having spoken in his poems against the communist regime that betrayed our country and displayed a humiliating attitude towards the Empire from the East, who mutilated our country, tormented the people and brought hunger and a half-century delay to Romania.

“I am not guilty towards my country:  
When I descend, in chains, to suffer the hardest punishment,  
raising up my forehead to the heavens, I cry out from the prison:  
- I am not guilty towards my country!

I am not guilty that I’ve loved her light  
pure as it came into my soul  
that her enemies looted her garden  
and that the centurions pierced through her side (...).  
I am not guilty that I angered the jackals  
and that I screamed, my soul in pain  
that I don’t give Ceahlau for all the Urals  
and that I hate the border from the Prut”<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p. 212.

<sup>9</sup> A native from Bessarabia (born in Cahul in 1920), Andrei Ciurunga (Robert Cahuleanu) was a militant journalist first sentenced to 4 years, then to 18 years of hard labor for having distributed his own anticommunist poems. He died in 2004.

<sup>10</sup> *Poezi după gratii/Poets Behind Bars*, p. 176.



He deploras Romania's terrible "integration" into the communist, Soviet, atheist camp, and through his creation he became a true "corporative personality" that deploras the fate of an entire people:

"Behind black walls, enclosed  
like fir trees in the grey forest,  
is our country, eternal, and everything,  
with prison guards and chains all around.  
All the blood that has fed the rye  
has gathered here, from the chronicles to this day,  
and is now burning like fire on the cheek  
when the snakes of humiliation are biting in the country.  
Here is the map of my whole country  
An unseen Caraiman of nostalgia,  
A foaming Nistre, sold to the enemy  
and a Danube of tears and stars.

Here is the mouth that calls the people  
to find a shelter for their rebellion;  
as if the dormant voice from Tebea  
has returned to the Field of Blaj.  
Here is the whole people, like a bunch of grapes  
squashed under the press of time, grape by grape,  
And today the many slaves are boiling  
so that tomorrow the country's wine can flow freely"<sup>11</sup>.

The communist ideology squashed any previous "doctrine" and imposed itself hegemonistically, even creeping into the world of children:

"The ABC has other pictures,  
and Geography has other maps,  
the chronicler tells other Histories,  
and we, still here, still nailed on the cross"  
(We, still here...)"<sup>12</sup>.

A new relationship of the person with their inner self (through self-consciousness intermediated by self-psychoanalysis) can

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<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 179.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 205.

be found here. Where did we start and where are we now? Here is the perception Zahu Pană<sup>13</sup> has of himself in the poem *Ectenia*:

"I am alone, oh Lord, and still carry in my bones disobediences  
from the first sinner,  
and wander under the great open sky:  
can I still hope to a place in paradise? Will the offering from  
Golgotha Mount  
Still reach the far end of the cave?

I am dirt, oh Lord, and crushed sand  
and in each grain a sin,  
which has become a mountain in time, built by termites I am the  
unending crying of the stalactites.  
You, who can soften the rock and abate the blizzard,  
rekindle my fire and reheat my hearth!"<sup>14</sup>.

The mutilating pain caused by the feeling that time has stopped, has frozen in an alienating, cold present, is amplified by a slight confusion (caused by finding out that "outside", in the country, there are also good things happening, that there is progress, which, however, does not improve their situation in prison, does not bring a more permissive attitude to the prisoners):

"Our crude oil is foaming in wells,  
the mountains bring sacks of gold to light  
sweet bread is growing on the yellow fields,  
and we, still here, we, still on mats.  
Kingdoms large like seven countries in one,  
are crumbling down, ashes waiting  
masters of the world have bitten the dust,  
and we, still here, we, still in shackles (...)  
We, still here, with bitter roots,  
as if we were born from acorns and curses,

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<sup>13</sup> Zahu Pană was born in 1921. He attends the National Academy of Commerce of Bucharest, but in 1948, his last college year, is arrested. He served 13 years at Jilava, Ocelele Mari and at the Canal. In 1969, he reenrolls at the Academy of Economic Studies of Bucharest and obtains his degree in 1974. In 1976, he immigrates to the USA.

<sup>14</sup> *Poeți după gratii/Poets Behind Bars*, p. 555.

we, still here, still waiting, / for our dream to come to life and  
beckon us"

(We, still here...)<sup>15</sup>.

We can detect a touch of self-pity, nostalgia caused by the time  
that passes "without us," sadness that the good things are  
"despite" their sacrifice... the awareness that good and evil are  
not clearly delimited on earth, that there is a space where good  
and evil cross paths.

"As if we have never been in this world  
Sundays have also forgotten about us,  
our friends get drunk in pubs,  
and we, still here, still behind bars"

(Andrei Ciurunga, We, still here ...)<sup>16</sup>.

What did the affirmation of their ideals through sacrifice mean  
for many prison "heroes"? Did those around them understand  
their sacrifice? (Or maybe, sometimes, our sacrifice does not  
have the necessary echo? Or, on the contrary, it was  
misunderstood?). Here is an example of feelings that groove the  
soul of the "abandoned hero":

"I am free again. It is only the name  
that resembles the man I was yesterday.  
They took me to the dungeon from some place in the world  
and now I have returned nowhere.

I do not recognize my yard, my house  
behind cobwebs and weeds,  
layers of dust cover my table,  
mildew is growing on books and papers.  
My wife and my mother have not waited for me.  
One was too young, the other one too old.  
They looked each other in the eye for an instant, and left,  
one for life, the other one for ashes.

The few friends I had  
may have forgotten me in all this time

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 206.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

for I have knocked at all the doors,  
but none came out to call me in.

I have returned nowhere. In the citadel, I have  
no house, no dreams, no brothers.  
I am free again. Poor freedom,  
I wish we had died in prison!"

(I have returned nowhere – Andrei Ciurunga)<sup>17</sup>.

This is a new relationship of man with his inner self: misunderstood, betrayed by the loved ones, shunned by old friends, in solitude, he is building a new relationship with his inner self.

"Kiss me, death, with hunger, with the iron,  
With the teeth in handcuffs, with your icy lips.  
I am the last bard  
on his way towards the scaffold  
My heart is tears and blood, my sky  
is mournful as if it were foretelling a funeral service"  
(Testament by Vasile Blănaru)<sup>18</sup>.

The reaction of the postmodern man to this traumatic experience? He has got used to hesitation, precaution, and mistrust as a dominant state. He no longer builds solid bridges on the horizontal for he knows they can be destroyed at any time; but he no longer knows how to build a "road" on the vertical, leading towards the contact with the Absolute. That is why he opts for psychoanalysis as a constant investigation of the past, rummaging through the corridors of the unconscious beyond measure. "*Oh Lord, how will we uproot the indifference from ourselves?*"<sup>19</sup>.

In his poem *The Skull*, Corneliu Deneșan<sup>20</sup> walks the distance towards the essence of wisdom in a flash:

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<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 211.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 371.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 384.

<sup>20</sup> Born in Sibiu in 1922, Corneliu Deneșan graduated from the Commercial High School of Sibiu; he is sentenced to 10 years of hard labor; from 1948, he is "detained for administrative reasons" for 7

"It was a hot summer day,  
At the edge of the hole, yellowish bones  
Thrown out one by one  
And the skulls hit with pickaxes.

The pile grew and grew  
in the ditch at the corner of the prison,  
under the ground, under the incarcerated fate  
The seven have not seen the dawn for ages.

I was looking at the skull I was holding in my hand:  
Where there was the thinking brain  
There was dirt, with small holes made by earthworms  
I scraped at it and it came out slowly.

Whose eyes filled the empty holes  
And so many tears may have coursed down  
on the vanished face, and sensual lips, perhaps  
kissed a bride's forehead?

What disease afflicted him, or maybe the iron?  
And who buried him?  
I watched the sky, with frowning forehead  
And plainly saw the futility.

And I thought for myself that someday too  
I would be found scattered in worthless pieces  
And some unknown man would throw me away, absent-  
mindedly  
And would not ask himself any questions"<sup>21</sup>.

The man who wrote this poem thought the essence – we can say without exaggeration – everything that has been thought on this earth from its creation to this day! He went straight to the essence of thought: displaying an emotional reasoning, he fully merged "the mind" with "the heart" just like in the Hesychastic

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years; when he falls ill with TB in prison, he is moved to Gherla Penitentiary; in 1959 he is arrested again and sentenced to another 7 years for "conspiracy." He is released in 1964.

<sup>21</sup> *Poeți după gratii/Poets Behind Bars*, p. 382.

approach. And he did it not in an elitist manner, expressing himself without reaching the greatest mystical depths, but at a level that is accessible to the average people who have experienced the metaphysical depth of the human being.

### **3 The Relativization of Values and Certitudes under the Hypnosis of Nihilism (the parodical approach to history)**

In his poem *Memorial*, Aurel Dragodan<sup>22</sup> shares with us his devastating emotional state:

“We come out of hidden corners – hideous skeletons  
 With dry skin hanging on the bones,  
 with swollen ankles, with deformed faces  
 And hunger munching in our enormous mouths.  
 Weakness and typhoid shake us with shivers,  
 And consumption walks on unsteady legs  
 Waiving and waiving, in slow-witted cells, handkerchiefs  
 blooming with roses of blood.  
 Aiud, Jilava – feasts of beasts  
 The horrors follow suit: Gherla, Pitești. The Canal breaks us  
 under hard labor and heavy whips. And the hand burns and  
 burns in lead ovens”<sup>23</sup>.

Why did these people suffer so much? – we wonder today; couldn’t they accept to compromise in order to alleviate their

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<sup>22</sup> Constantin Aurel Dragodan, born in Alexandria in 1919, was a student at the Faculty of Law in Bucharest in 1942 when he was arrested and sentenced to 25 years of hard labor. During his long years of imprisonment (22 years), he was sent to many prisons (Jilava, Văcăreshti, Aiud, Alba Iulia, Pitești, Târgu Ocna, Caransebeș). Because of his anticommunist attitude expressed in poems that were written only in his mind (the prisoners were not allowed to read or write) and shared with the other inmates through the Morse code, he was sentenced in 1959, while he was executing his first sentence, to another 25 years of hard labor. After his release in 1964, he earned his degree in Philology and worked as a teacher of French and English in Videle (Teleorman). He died in 2000.

<sup>23</sup> *Poezii după gratii/Poets Behind Bars*, p. 163.

suffering? Wouldn't it have been better if they had made concessions to be released from prison and walk "free" among us? It is true, though, that they would have gone from prison into the "larger camp" that was Romania in those times, an international "satellite" of the colossal camp that was the Soviet Union. The prison was "the cell" of an immense concentration camp, the DNA of a social organism attacked by the cancer of an ideology that proclaimed itself to be "the truth", but in fact, it was an anti-human pathological doctrine, of satanic inspiration. The firm attachment to certain values is impressive; the fact that false values were being imposed in the country would generate a permanent "insomnia" in the prisoners; the love for the confused fellowman who was enjoying "freedom", the awareness that the majority of the population did not realize how harmful the communist-atheist ideology was would cause a consuming inner contraction; the prisoners were a living conscience, impossible to anesthetize:

"We cannot have a rest,  
in our sleep we open a door  
and enter shyly  
our wives with hair of ashes.

The children we left in their cradles, now carry schoolbags –  
poisoned. Our brothers come riding on horses  
and speak of empty granaries.

and we cannot go to sleep, all our bodies are one single, hungry  
wound  
our souls are burning here  
constantly harassed by the punishment.

And we cannot rest ourselves!"<sup>24</sup>.

"The poisoned schoolbags" were the symbol of the macabre ideology spreading its tentacles in the education system at all its levels through political education, axiologically confusing

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<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 242.

children's souls and alienating them from the authentic cultural roots of their own country.

Patriotism, as a legitimate, extended form of love among people, is explicitly present in the poem *My country from beyond the country* by Andrei Ciurunga, in which he states that he has married the country:

“My country from beyond the country,  
with tearful longing eyes,  
I carried you within myself while wondering  
like a flame burning on a treasure.  
Ever since my golden infancy  
I have felt married to you  
but it wanted to have you – and it stole you  
the greedy dragon's appetite.

Cast away in the enemy dungeon  
I moan, bleeding under the red-hot iron,  
and then a piece of sky  
from the evil azure I put as bandage on the wound.

Hunger opens new abyssal depths,  
a tiny loaf of sweet bread  
that rose like me on Bugeac  
comes to fill my body with dreams.

Shivering with cold, in striped clothes,  
today I'm listening to winter's wind  
Our ring-dance has died for ages,  
the cold is biting frozen soles.

But I'm watching for the spring by the side of the road  
to go from house to house and dance  
the great ring-dance under the same flag,  
my country from beyond the country”<sup>25</sup>.

The prison poetry felt the need to use capitalized words, axiologically “succulent” concepts, values seen as worth dying for. It was a universe of firm values, of an axiological verticality of the existence, of the transcendent pulse of everyday life. And

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<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 166.



yet, how many of these values have escaped the "irreversible", contagious contempt of postmodernity? Let us follow the slice of life from the poem *A night of inquiry* by Petre Baicu:

"The copper threw me in prison last night ,  
He hurts my body, my dream is not killed!  
I told the Lord many times in my prayers: Oh Lord, protect my  
open LONGING.  
Tears, as if of pain, are running from the walls,  
The secret police officers' words are arrows.  
Haughty, conceited, they would kill THE COUNTRY,  
They don't know what MAN is. They pry into lives.

They are always asking: What are you thinking about?  
He would like you to serve him betray your country,  
When life will last you just a blinking of the eye  
What destinies, Lord, in these human lives!

The secret police officer must fulfill a schedule,  
He takes off his coat, his body is too fat  
His slaying work has lasted for an hour,  
after hitting with the crowbar, crushed flesh is left behind  
My last though I bequeath to my country"<sup>26</sup>.

#### 4 Experiential Religiosity, typically Postmodern

The experience that is most often evoked in the prison poetry is the complete humiliation, the annihilation of any humanity, the total degradation, the inexpressible pain; all these can be "bridges" towards an effervescent spirituality. The experiences of maximum intensity to which aspires the postmodern man, a victim of convenience and consummism climate, cannot be obtained without previously experiencing the emptiness of meaning, the pain caused by the silence of the cosmos in front of the great existential worries, of the feverish quest for the depths of existence.

"Let's gather all that we've been dealt

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<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 366.

since we have worked like slaves in the dungeon and in fog;  
kicks in the ribs, a punch in the face and scores of slaps in the  
face covered in spit.

Countless curses coming down on  
sharp pains of hunger in the belly  
and in the rain meant to hinder  
my walking through the water, rotting”

(*Be ready, soul!* by Andrei Ciurunga)<sup>27</sup>.

The conviction that the matter can be spiritualized, the certitude that his own body, tormented by torturers, through death will reach another plane of existence, incorruptible and non-degradable, can be noticed towards the end of the poem *Be ready, soul!* By Andrei Ciurunga:

“Open the gate, open it wide, you jailers,  
and let the resurrected body get out  
the body that you savagely crushed under your feet  
and drove with the whip until yesterday”<sup>28</sup>.

Humiliation reaches its paroxysm:

“Look, I have blood in my glass  
my blood that was sucked at night by ghosts,  
and here, in my pocket,  
nails that they have pulled out.

They put me in the yoke, with the iron on my neck,  
and they paid me with wounds and curses,  
With the slaps on the face I gathered on this cheek, I could have  
hurled down a whole country”

(Andrei Ciurunga, *Testimony*)<sup>29</sup>.

“Making an inventory” of the bodily sensations, of the corporal experiences, of the exterior contact with materiality was a compulsory component of life in prison.; the physical trauma had a devastating mental effect:

“Under the striped garments, my body curls

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<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 197.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 199.

for deep in the weakened flesh,  
instead of nerves snakes of cold are coming down,  
instead of bones stalagmites are rising.

The sweat is sticking to my body,  
the hardened shirt is moist on my back.  
In every muscle a knife  
brings news to stabbed life (...)

And the snow falls grey as if on a cemetery  
from which the dead have come out in hoards  
and are now walking five in a row  
carrying the crosses from their tombs on their backs"  
(*Hibernation* by Andrei Ciurunga)<sup>30</sup>.

In the poem *Self-portrait as a young man*, Viorel Gheorghită<sup>31</sup>  
uses concepts that are taken from the field of transcendence:

"A fragment of a Byzantine liturgy;  
In ancient candlesticks, candles;  
gentle eternity in hymns  
Forever giving birth to light.

Detachment from time, and horizons.  
On the empty sky, a forehead lowers,  
unearthly large and serene,  
Towards the altar of other horizons.

And now the body sheds its petals  
So young. So unreal,  
Joining one kiss with another kiss;  
The sublime – pure, the concupiscence – pure,

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<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, p. 202.

<sup>31</sup> Born in Arad County (Gurahonț) in 1922 in a family of peasants, he finishes the Normal School of Arad and then attends the Faculty of Theology of Arad and the Faculty of Philosophy of Cluj; in 1948, he is sentenced to 10 years of hard labor for "conspiracy". He is detained in the prisons of Timișoara, Pitești, Gherla, Baia Sprie, Aiud. When he finishes his sentence, a new trial is opened and this time he is sentenced to 25 years of hard labor. After 16 years of uninterrupted detention, he is released in 1964. He will work as a journalist. He died in 2005.

Still not set at variance by the physical being,  
As it seems it was in the beginning”<sup>32</sup>.

Eucharistic ballad ... Andrei Ciurunga says in his poem  
“Friendship”:

“It’s black and dirty, poured in the bowl,  
a ladle of tasteless broth,  
and the blood that’s boiling like new wine  
when autumns open in our bodies.

The water gathered from the mud is black  
as is the unleavened bread  
and all the dirt is black, carried in our chests by the convoy of  
wheelbarrows (...)

You often broke your bread in half  
and shared it with me at your last supper  
and sometimes you took off your coat  
to cover my naked body with it”<sup>33</sup>.

In his poem *Boldness*, Ion Păunescu-Daia says:

“With my pure soul, to you, my Lord,  
I want to return from the darkness, from the damned hell,  
To absorb power from your pure Grace  
To receive the Eucharist from Your Body”<sup>34</sup>.

In his poem *Prayer*, Eugen Măgirescu<sup>35</sup> uses terms from the  
liturgical space:

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<sup>32</sup> *Poeți după gratii/Poets Behind Bars*, p. 411.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 164.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 320.

<sup>35</sup> In 1948, when he was arrested, he was a Law student in Iași. He refuses “the reeducation without violence” from Suceava and is sent to the Penitentiary of Pitești, where he suffers a treatment that is harsh beyond imagination as he confesses in his memoirs: “I was struck in the head, in the face to be disfigured, thousands of lashes on the soles of my feet, on the back, on the ribs, on the plexus, and further down, tens of times when I lost consciousness, and then again, all over again, for hours and hours, days on end, while the eye behind the peephole would check that the method was applied (...). They crushed my

"I killed again, I saw You on the bread again!  
Remove this boulder, it's so heavy,  
And bear with me until tomorrow,  
For I no longer have control over myself!

(...) And I wouldn't want people to know  
That I have spent the night with You, in secret.  
It would be like stabbing a new liturgy  
In my tumbling down the steep (...).

Maybe tomorrow I will stab Your ribs again  
And I will drive another nail into Your hand,  
But I'll be looking for You, like tonight:  
Can You hear? Don't tell anyone!"<sup>36</sup>.

At the opposite end from the liturgy and the sacraments are the  
satanic rituals meant to enforce the ideological "correction" of  
the prisoners, practiced especially at Pitești:

"Foaming at the mouth with rage like lunatics;  
- Say everything. Curse Christ!  
And betray your grandparents and your forefathers,  
You wasted bastard!"  
(*"Prayer"* by Eugen Măgirescu)<sup>37</sup>.

"A pack of wolves licking the blood from their muzzles;  
I'll scratch you right now, look down!  
Tonight, you'll try on the grave!"  
(The poem *The brother's eyes*)<sup>38</sup>.

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bones, my lungs, my liver. With his boots on, Țurcanu would dance on  
my bones, on my kidneys, something that not even the apocalypse  
could ever conceive". *Poeți după gratii/Poets Behind Bars*, Edit.  
„Mănăstirea Petru Vodă”, 2010, p. 285. We were wondering: where did  
all that unleashing of satanic energies come from? How did man – “the  
image” of God – get so low? And yet, this man, “the grey eminence” of  
his generation at the Faculty of Law, was given a new lease of life by  
God after 16 years of imprisonment: he was released in 1963 and is  
still living.

<sup>36</sup> *Poeți după gratii/Poets Behind Bars*, p. 286.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 288.

„They fell upon them with bats,  
with ropes and iron crowbars,  
The devil cast angry looks at  
His apprentices in the workshop (...).

That night, it looked as if the whole hell  
Rebelled from top to bottom,  
With insults bigger than the idea  
Desecrated the resurrection of Jesus”<sup>39</sup>.

Țurcanu, the unnamed torturer from Eugen Măgirescu’s poems, was also abused in the secret police’s prisons before 1948; he had also been the intellectual leader of the Law students of his generation; thus, we can approach from a psychoanalytic perspective the hatred with which now he tortured someone who was his “symmetric” image; what was it that he did not know? That God is never on the side of torturers, but is always on the side of victims; Christianity asks us to make this conviction a public dogma, a fundamental principle of social doctrine: God is never on the side of torturers, but is always on the side of victims. How quickly and unexpectedly can one pass from one side to the other, from God’s world to Satan’s world!

## 5 Conclusions

At the end, we wonder apotheotically: “What ought we to love?” The country? The nation? Fortune, money, materiality? The economic progress, physical comfort, convenience? The visible, the palpable, the earthly? The bi-millenary Orthodoxy has always taught us to love the values from beyond this world, which are imperishable, eternal, transcendent, hallowing, ennobling. They are hidden behind the word “God” and concepts such as “fellow human being”, “eternal life”, “love”,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, p. 291.

"devotion", "sacrifice", etc. What does postmodernity invite us to do? To enter the immanent through terms such as "money", "prestige", "imposing appearance", "pleasure", "satisfaction", "I", etc. It seems that we will have to breathe the air of a culture that is confused about its values, that is infested with pathogen viruses that cause anxiety, psychic discomfort, decline and death. The Church invites us to exercise caution and good judgment, and thus be able to perceive the essential and the eternal, be willing to work towards hollowing our own life. Then, death will be the beginning of real life; the reading of the poetry written "behind bars" will become an inspiring experience.

There were people who suffered so much! The poetry written behind bars conveys something of their terrifying experience only partially, in a fragmentary and limited way. We wonder, in front of so much suffering and pain: what "prize" will these people be given in heaven as a reward for their suffering? They did not do it for any prize whatsoever, but there must be some reward. The God of justice wants this. Are we worthy enough to join them in Paradise? Won't we feel ashamed of ourselves seeing their treasure of purifying suffering? If their suffering is to be weighed against our postmodern comfort, then the inner energy emanated by their souls in the moments of agony will definitely count to an overwhelming extent. What should we do today so as to join our efforts with theirs and continue them? The pastoral gives the answer to this question in a "contextual" manner.

We will end our analysis with a poem that proclaims prophetically (at its end) the awareness that the suffering endured in prison is not in vain, that the ideals for which they sacrificed their youth will be victorious, even if they seemed completely enslaved, irreversibly eliminated from the public

space, “crucified” in the consciousness of the time; *Psalm 353*, the poem by Petre Strihan<sup>40</sup>:

“God, those who want to overthrow You from the skies  
Broke our bones and chastised our flesh  
Placed heavy shutters at our windows  
So that we cannot see your beautiful creation.

They threw us in dungeons, hungry and naked,  
Bent by disease, eaten by wounds,  
And every day they scrape this garbage  
To see how many of us are left.  
But we, from the bottom of hell, on bended knees,  
We ponder on the deep secrets  
With our souls we walk on laws and nature  
And we get drunk with a drop of immortality.

And, when the gravediggers come in the cemetery,  
We cry out from our graves: We are alive!  
Because here we do not feed on bread  
but on the hope of the days to come.  
And there is a curse on them:  
They have us in their power, and yet they fear us.  
Let them tremble! For we, those from the graves,  
Will walk over them! We will go forward!”<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> University professor, undersecretary of state, condemned to 10 years of prison in 1948 in the same group with philosopher Mircea Vulcănescu.

<sup>41</sup> *Poeți după gratii/Poets Behind Bars*, p. 355.



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