

”Sight” – ”Vision” Binomial or the “Poetic Dwelling” of the World: (Pre)Modern Perspectives in Ioana Em. Petrescu’s Study ”Eminescu and the Mutations of the Romanian Poetry”

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Abstract: The present study attempts to offer ‘a cartography’ of the internal ‘morphology’ of the ”sight” – ”vision” dialectics proposed by Ioana Em. Petrescu in her work, *Eminescu and the Mutations of the Romanian Poetry*. This internal ‘morphology’ is analysed from double perspective: from the perspective of the history of the literary ideas and from the point of view of the history of the pre-modern science.

We believe that Ioana Em. Petrescu’s work found its theoretical and conceptual sources primarily in the (pre)modern philosophy theorized by Aristotle, Plato and Tomas Aquinas whose studies were highly read by the Romanian critic. In other words, it is our endeavor to demonstrate the existence of a semantically ontological superposition between the pre-modern text and that of the Romanian critic.

Our premise is that the *”sight – vision”* axis presented in Ioana Em. Petrescu’s volume underlies in the explanation provided by Aristotle gave to the *sense of sight* (‘*cognition* through intellect’, and *noûs* – ‘the Eye of the Soul’). We therefore believe that even if they belong to two different scientific paradigms, the texts of the two authors generate a dialogue between them. Undoubtedly, Ioana Em. Petrescu’s “theory of sight” initially communicated in an osmotic manner with pre-modern texts; afterwards, the Romanian critic turns her attention to modern concepts of scientificity with a view to sustaining her convictions in the field of literary poetics.

Key Words: sight, vision, pre-modern and modern paradigms, close-reading, objective-correlative, annotation

Motto: “We insist in talking about vision as a cause of philosophy, as: the god invented it and gave it to us because –noticing the aspects of cosmic intelligence- we should apply it at the movement of our own thoughts as they are related...” (Plato, Timaios)

Preliminaries. Theoretical confluences: pre-modern science vs. modern science

Our research aims at revising an internal morphology of the dialectic “see-sight” proposed by Ioana Em. Petrescu in her study, *Eminescu and the Mutation of the Romanian Poetry*, analyzed from a double perspective: one of the history of the literary ideas and the other of the history of the (pre)modern science. My arguments will be proved by a theoretical-conceptual descendance of the Eminescology study that finds its primary sources in pre-modern philosophy (Aristotle, Plato and Toma D’Aquino represent the main Ioana Em. Petrescu’s readings.) In other words, I try to demonstrate an overlapping - at least one of ontological semantics essence - between the pre-modern text and that of the Romanian critic. I am sure that the “see-sight” axis from the critic’s volume originates, in its main aspects, in the explanation given by Aristotle to sight, thing that only makes me think that although the two texts have different time origins they are in a tight relation. There is no doubt that if at a first level Ioana Em. Petrescu’s sight theme communicates with pre-modern texts, the author is heading during her research towards modern scientific concepts in order to support her own literary poetics convictions.

There are two reasons which encouraged me to start this study: on the one hand, a possible reunification of the two paradigms - the pre-modern and the post-modern one with their common and divergent points like they appear customized in *About the Soul* (and not only) and in *Eminescu and the Mutation of the Romanian Poetry* -, on the other hand, relying on my personal notes taken down during a semester in which I conducted a research project in the archive of the “Popovici-Petrescu” book collection held at the ‘Octavian Goga’ County Library from Cluj-Napoca, I try to get close to the

analyzed literary work by detecting some reading methods that dialogically found the ideas of the new literary work. These methods can be traced down through what we could call *close reading* – an attempt to decipher the work of the writer who is ‘investigated’ from both the perspective of our literary ideas and from that of the proposed hermeneutical patterns.

The Binomial “see-sight” or about the “Poetic Dwelling” of the World

Ioana Em. Petrescu’s study, *Eminescu and the Mutation of the Romanian Poetry*, builds a “see-sight” dialectics based on the interpretation of sight as defined by Aristotle. Therefore, I conclude that for both writers sight represents the most evolved form of sensibility and being in the same time the most complex of all the human senses. First of all, theoretically speaking, Ioana Em. Petrescu brings into discussion the original relation between *theory* (with focus on the dissociation made by Aristotle between ‘*theoretical sciences*’, ‘*practical sciences*’ and ‘*poetical sciences*’) and sight, contemplation, show taking into consideration Anton Dumitriu (1986: 382-383): “There are two themes that create the word **θεωρία: Θέα** and **Φορ** (this being the basis that means <<to take care of>>, <<to observe>>, <<to look>>). Starting from this point we will have the following words: **Φορ** that derivates in – to observe, to look; I watch; I see; show; sight; spectator etc. On the other hand the theme **Θέα** means <<sight>>, <<contemplation>>.”

Second of all, Ioana Em. Petrescu tries to explain the privileged statute of the eye in the hierarchy of sense organs making reference to Toma D’Aquino’s *Summa Theologiae* (Ioana Em. Petrescu, 1986: 182, 183): “*the first meaning of the word sight (visio) is that of designating the activity of the sense organ of vision; but because of its importance and significance, the meaning of the word was extended through the use of the speakers referring to any other knowledge by means of other senses and, lately, to knowledge through intellect*” – and to Aristotle’s idea: “*the association of the eye with the intellect comes from Aristotle who, in his **Nicomachean Ethics**, presents the intellect (*νοῦς*) as an eye of the soul, << *Noûs* is for the soul what the eye is for the body.>>*” These ‘discursive formations’ from the pre-modern science characterizing sight - ‘*knowledge through intellect*’, (*noûs*) as the eye of the soul - help the Romanian critic to set her scientific discourse of poeticism in a larger area of research. Sight is for Ioana Em. Petrescu an attribute of cosmos, it has a high value of generalization and articulates the ontological relationship between *myself* and the *world* through an attempt of communication/communion with the cosmic environment, with everything that has to do with transcendence (Ioana Em. Petrescu, 1986: 184): “*the sight is the perfect expression of the relationship between myself and the world.*” At the level of this analogy between **intellect** and **soul**, Ioana Em. Petrescu by ‘sight’ understands an attempt of self-definition of the *creative ego* as compared to ‘*the great being of the world*’ with the essential meaning of the verb ‘to be’: (Alexander Baumgarten, 2002: 45) “*the eye can see, if this may ever be visible, the condition of transcendental possibility of its own generic sight is stated in the principle of each mental action, mainly in what Plato calls <<sky>>*.” The privilege of sight symbolizes a reality that was imagistically established and intended to express the unity of the cosmos in thinking in such a way that the essence of the world could be aware of its consubstantiality with the universe (see ***, 1978 and Ioana Em. Petrescu, 2009), (Ioana Em. Petrescu, 2002: 24) “*only the uncertain geometry of our body, only the rather **hesitating rhythms of our blood** make us capable of understanding **the divine geometry of the astral movements** and to create between the two of them, the clear geometry of the art or of the Idea.*” The idea according to which for Ioana Em. Petrescu synchronizing with the rhythms of the Universe and being in consonance with the cosmic forces means an attempt of reaching the *meaning*, the *meaning of the world* is clear enough. This triggers the **divine nostalgia** and that of **wholeness** mentioned by Aristotle and Toma D’Aquino- great thinkers whose ideas are quoted by the Romanian author (Ioana Em. Petrescu, 1986: 26): “*this is why the movement of the planets is at Aristotle the result of the attraction the divinity has towards the matter, <<the fruit of love>> or that of nostalgia of the matter towards another form. The Aristotelic explanation is also taken over by Christian thinkers: for Toma D’Aquino the <<cosmic engines>> are the angels- forms of intelligence governing each planet and inducing its movement, expression of an <<intellectual desire>>, of the divine nostalgia.*”

The conceptual dialectics ‘see-sight’ - which stays at the basis of the study *Eminescu and the Mutation of the Romanian Poetry* - is a type of knowledge used for decoding the interrelation between the individual and the universe (Saint Augustine, 2000:444): “*of all the senses, the eyes are the main instruments of research.*” Many of Ioana Em. Petrescu’s readings that served as starting point in writing the Eminesciology study are representative in this direction- that of supporting the theory according to which sight is the objectual universal core that controls the condition of the existence in this world. More than that, the notes made on the edges of the book she read or the reading reports are truly revealing in this case. She sees in the radical changes in language and poetic imaginary brought

by Mihai Eminescu, Tudor Arghezi, Lucian Blaga, Ion Barbu and Nichita Stanescu - who are thoroughly analyzed - are a way of understanding man in rapport to universe and universe in rapport man (William Kelly Wright: 1967:25): “*so everything in man, the microcosm, corresponds to something in the macrocosm. Man is to be understood through the universe and the universe through man. All knowledge of the outer world is self-knowledge.*” In conclusion, if the first part of the volume is concerned with the ‘theory of sight’ (in close relation to *eye, taste, mouth*) listing scientific rules of comparatist comprehension from the pre-modern science, the following chapters reorganize the lyrical universe of the reminded poets by means of the axis ‘sight-vision’ from one of the perspectives of the modern science which facilitates expressing some statements of value regarding (Ioana Em.Petrescu, 1986: 186): “*the privileges of taste towards sight, of mouth towards eyes.*”

Regarding the modernist poetic episteme, Ioana Em. Petrescu uses the binomial ‘see-sight’ with the meaning of ‘objective correlative’ - this is the way in which it appears theorized by T.S. Eliot, Anglo-American poet whom she reads avidly - whose axiological significance about poetry will be applied in her studies, too (not only in *Eminescu and the Mutation of the Romanian Poetry* but also in *Configurations* or in *Ion Barbu and the Poetic of Postmodernism*). The meaning of ‘objective correlative’ - briefly defined by N. Frye (1981:29) as “terrifying clairvoyance” - is useful on a first ‘intra-textual’ level for identifying the ‘structural mutations’ regarding thematology, phenomenology, style, poetry and so on, objectified by the lyrical universe of each analyzed writer (for example the *terrifying clairvoyance* of Ion Barbu is under the sign of objective correlative intentionally characterized as ‘big eyed’), while the second ‘extra-textual’ level is a lot broader and goes beyond the ‘form’ of the text – expresses the unity of the cosmos in thinking in such a way that the poetic being realizes its consubstantiality with the universe. In a broader meaning the objective correlative, “terrifying clairvoyance”, similar to the dichotomy ‘sight-vision’ helps our critic in establishing the defining poetic substance of the creating universe for each poet separately, using it in the sense given to ‘the metaphor of interpretation’ by Wolfgang Iser (2001: 280) as revelation, i.e. access to the depths of the text and exploitation of the untold or partially revealed aspects- extracting and clarifying these aspects.

Ioana Em. Petrescu identifies three ‘general patterns of thinking’ (cultural episteme characteristic for the European thinking) that represent the theoretical coordinates regarding the taxonomy of the Romanian poetry evolution (Sanda Cordoş, 1991: 112-113): “1. *The pattern of the Renascentist individualism* (<<Renascentist anthropocentrism>>) that is characteristic for Renaissance and close to our century. This is the pattern in which the existence is centered on the individual, detached subject, outside of the object-world in which the scientific reality is understood as generalization of data supplied by a reality that is perceived empirically and for which the abstract observation, from outside the system is symptomatic and comes from the Newtonian physics that accepts an absolute time and space, and that builds the pattern of the universe having as basis the Euclidian geometry; 2. *The modernist pattern* is built as a reply to the Renascentist pattern and its crisis during the last century. The old subject-object relation is falling apart. The subject becomes - if I was to use Ilya Prigogine’s expression - participating-observer, establishing in this way a sort of participative knowledge that makes this pattern quite similar with the old mysteries and, generally, with the pre-Socratic thinking: the new image of the world is not composed of discrete objects anymore, of distinct individual entities, but of an interrelation like a woven material in which the dynamic relationship is preferred in rapport to entity, the phenomenon being nothing else but a web of relationships; 3. *The postmodernist cultural pattern* develops in parallel with the modernist one starting with the period between the two world wars, tries to regain the place of the individual in the system, this time not as an isolated entity (like that of the Renaissance), but more like a knot in the web of relationships. This pattern is configured through the cosmotic subconscious from Blaga’s philosophy, the archetypal structures that Mircea Eliade decodes in the mythical thinking and in the mechanisms of the contemporary novel, the dynamic **Neo-Pythagoreanism** of Matilda Ghyca and Constantin Noica’s holomers.” Subsequently, in her study, the author applies the three ‘general patterns of knowledge’ of the Romanian poetry through which she analyses the evolution and mutations of the poetic language and that of the concept of poeticism illustrated by Mihai Eminescu, Ion Barbu and Nichita Stanescu’s writings. The above poets enormously innovated in the sense in which we can talk about a poetic of the rupture in which the poetic language and imaginary are irreversibly altered.

Mihai Eminescu or about the role of the ‘intermediary’

Ioana Em. Petrescu is interested in producing a history of the literary poetics seen in its ‘mutation’, ‘rupture’ aspects, while knowledge through sight helps her decode signs of the scientific real defined by the new poetic codes that are in the process of formation, of clotting. Mainly the option, for Mihai Eminescu, Ion Barbu and Nichita Stanescu, is due to the fact that they deeply restructured the

Romanian poetry, each of them imposing a new poetic sensibility. Consequently, they are seen as pioneers: the core of their poetics foresees, after all, larger changes in mentality that happen in the scientific and philosophic fields.

This construction of the evolution of the Romanian poetry seen in synchrony starts from Eminescu and reaches, at the end, at Nichita Stanescu, also inserting transition moments represented by Tudor Arghezi and Lucian Blaga. The most interesting part in the making of the history of our literary ideas and that of the pre-modern science ideas is the motivation of placing our 'national poet' at the very beginning of this critical presentation of the evolution of the Romanian poetry. If one of the first explanations confirms the synchronization of the analyzed poetical-literary phenomenon organization, the second explanation represents, with no doubt, one of the major thesis of the present study. As a conclusion, Ioana Em. Petrescu starts with Eminescu because our 'national poet' represents a literary pattern that is often referred to by post-Eminescian Romanian literature as a type of epistemic claim. Mainly, the contact with the Eminescian poetics for those who followed him is realized through a statement of adopting the Eminescian language emblematic by now, even prototypic: its main function being that of stylistic, configurative, ontological innovation. So, in Aristotle's words (Book II, chapter 7 of *About the Soul*), I strongly believe that Eminescu is seen by Ioana Em. Petrescu as playing the role of the needed intermediary that allows the Romanian poetry to evolve (Aristotle, 2005: 123): "*sight is realized only when something affects the sense organ. But this <<agent>> cannot be just the color one sees: so he/she must be the intermediary in such a way that the very existence of an intermediary becomes necessary.*" In other words, Eminescu - the needed intermediary - sets, according to the theoretician, an epistemic method of claim of an aesthetic 'program' (canonic convention) to which post-modernist literature will certainly appeal. One of Ioana Em. Petrescu's notes supports the idea according to which the poets following Eminescu are to be 'seen' through 'him' (the great pattern) (Jean-Paul Sartre, 1943: 421): "*nous nous résignons à nous voir par les yeux de l'autre*" (we submit to seeing ourselves through the eyes of the other, **o.t.**)

Knowledge through 'sight-vision'. About the mutations of the Romanian poetry

A poetical innovation identified by Ioana Em. Petrescu at Eminescu - and which will definitely mark the becoming/evolution of the Romanian poetry - is the passage from 'sight' to 'vision' or, in other words, the passage from a referential mimetic poetics (in which the poet renders what he/she sees in the environment) to a visionary one (Ioana Em. Petrescu, 2002: 187): "*in the Romanian artistic environment Eminescu's poetry is the place where vision takes the place of sight[...] and defines the marks of a standard concept of <<poeticity>>.*" In fact, Ioana Em. Petrescu wants to emphasize the inspired way in which the poet chooses to process the outer space/environment, Eminescu's imaginary requires a change of meaning, add of meaning in most of the times for common places, reinventing new landscapes, new worlds: (Ioana Em. Petrescu, 2002: 223): "*what Eminescu sees in a landscape is not the sign of reality recorded mimetically but their hidden, noumenal meaning unveiled to the visionary eye.*"

Tudor Arghezi and Lucian Blaga's poetics do not produce any mutation at the level of Romanian poetry; they do not radically change the meaning of the poetic language, that is why they are rather representatives of the so-called 'passage stage', being the connection between the two general patterns of thinking. Being under the influence of the "*Baudelaire's satanic Romanticism through its opaque, visionary-creative sight*" (Arghezi), and "*under a 'high Romanticism' through Rilke respectively, by passing from the motif of the blind eye to that of silence and hush (Blaga)*" (Corin Braga, 2002:106) the two poetical discourses innovate inside the same episteme: the romantic one.

A second moment in the evolution of the Romanian poetry, of important structural mutations, is considered to be Ion Barbu's lyric. To Ioana Em. Petrescu, Ion Barbu is a representative of such a trans-individual and non-anthropomorphic poetics specific to the new 'scientific reality': the *mathematic humanism*. Unlike the traditional analyses that set Ion Barbu among the major modernist poets whose lyric is listed - in an old-fashioned manner - as hermetic, obscure and encoded, Ioana Em. Petrescu gives his work the attribute of a new poetic code situating him nearer to Post-modernism as the poet surpasses the area of the Modernist cultural pattern and prevailing instead a new paradigm. As discussed in *Modernism. Postmodernism. A hypothesis* (Ioana Em. Petrescu, 2003), the two cultural patterns coexist as Postmodernism does not appear like a reaction to Modernism but rather as a sequel. This having been said, Ion Barbu's work (which can be substituted to the 'objective correlative' suggestively perceived as 'big eyed': a distorted, reversed vision of reality) is revealed as an evolution from the Modernism towards Postmodernism through the introduction of **absolute lyricism** - meaning a non-mimetic, non-figurative art and (Ioana Em. Petrescu, 2006: 22): "*poetry that was understood as*

great sensuality [...] always new and numerous as the different faces of creation” - and that of infra-realism that has as art objective “the cosmic chaos” and which defines (Ioana Em. Petrescu, 2006:29) “the initiating component through which the trans-individual does not damage the individual (thing that happened in Modernism) but transcends him/her by integrating him/her, that is offering him/her the function of ‘holomer’ that is assigned by Postmodernism.” Once Ioana Em. Petrescu places Barbu’s work somewhere at the end of Modernism and the beginning of Postmodernism, in an ending-point of crisis, the poetic reality defines itself as a synthesis of new and old, prefiguring the changes of the poetic language and of the semantic figures that the new paradigm (that of Postmodernism) had put in question.

The third moment in the evolution of the Romanian poetry is marked by Nichita Stănescu’s meta-linguistic poetics which defines true structural mutations. Stănescu’s lyric universe is centered on the dialectic ‘sight-devouring, consuming’ understood as a series of paradigmatic poetic changes as: ‘the slit-man’ (broken image of the past), ‘the modern ontological crisis’ (the rupture between conscience and self, subject and object) and others under the syntagm of ‘correlative objective’: ‘the toothed eye.’

Instead of conclusions. Pre-modern science as ‘perpetual return’

Following a development of the Pre-modern science into a modern one with the gnosiological dichotomy ‘of a characteristic *coupe semiotique* (semiotic cut)’ - ‘sight-vision’ - Ioana Em. Petrescu’s study, *Eminescu and the Mutations of the Romanian Poetry*, is constructed as an attempt of rendering *the Universe in the Idea*. This is because by studying the branches of a Pre-modern science and philosophy - starting with Aristotle and up to Romanian neo-modernism (Nichita Stănescu) - it means to follow the way in which the concepts of these sciences and philosophies can become any more productive at the end of the 20th century. As a final remark, I think that Ioana Em. Petrescu’s study makes us aware, just one more time, of the fact that the roots of modern science are in Pre-modern science. In other words, Pre-modern science and philosophy become a productive principle, a grid of perceiving reality in order to form future Modern science and philosophy. This idea makes us consider Ioana Em. Petrescu one of the most important theorizers of the last century (Ioana Em. Petrescu, 1986: 10): “because, placed at the emerging point of conscience in the world, lyric is made through word, meaning through a permanent break of the limits of language, preparing the language for new concepts through which it can express itself regarding the human thinking and universe.”

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