

The Migration of Literary Ideas: The Problem of Romanian Symbolism

Cosmina Andreea Roșu

ABSTRACT: The migration of symbolists' ideas in Romanian literary field during the 1900's occurs mostly due to poets. One of the symbolist poets influenced by the French literature (the core of the Symbolism) and its representatives is Dimitrie Anghel. He manages symbols throughout his entire writings, both in poetry and in prose, as a masterpiece. His vivid imagination and fantasy reinterpret symbols from a specific Romanian point of view. His approach of symbolist ideas emerges from his translations from the French authors but also from his original writings, since he creates a new attempt to penetrate another sequence of the consciousness. Dimitrie Anghel learns the new poetics during his years long staying in France.
KEY WORDS: writing, ideas, prose poem, symbol, fantasy.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the Romanian literature was dominated by Eminescu and his epigones, and there were visible effects of Al. Macedonski's efforts to impose a new poetry when Dimitrie Anghel left to Paris. Nicolae Iorga was trying to initiate a new nationalist movement, and D. Anghel was blamed for leaving and detaching himself from what was happening in the country. But he fought this idea in his texts making ironical remarks about those who were eagerly going away from native land ("Youth" – „Tinereță“, "Looking at a Terrestrial Sphere" – „Privind o sferă terestră“, "The Land" – „Pământul“).

He settled down for several years in Paris, which he called *a literary Babel tower*. His work offers important facts about this

period. To the childhood garden he associates the sometimes serene and sometimes depressing atmosphere of the Parisian parks giving him moments of reverie and deep meditation. (“In Luxemburg” – „În Luxemburg”). He recollects his native land even when he has the chance to see Claude Monet, Camille Pissard or Paul Cezanne, at Seine’s shores. In his work he is influenced by these artists alongside Edouard Manet, Auguste Renoir, Eugene Carriere and Antoine Watteau; he assimilates from them some plastic art techniques, making full use of color and light.

He also used to go to famous literary coffee houses (Cafe Vachette, where Jean Moreas was king; Cafe Voltaire, Lorena, Closerie des Lilas, frequented by Paul Fort, Albert Mockel, Picasso, Utrillo), spent much time with his Romanian friends: Șt. O. Iosif, Sextil Pușcariu, Kimon Loghi, G. Petrașcu, Virgil Cioflec, Iorgu Juvara, Ștefan Popescu ș.a. and he always was the leader of discussions, as Sextil Pușcariu recalls. During that period Rimbaud was still dominating literary society, and Mallarme gathered in his house the cultural figures of the time: Jules Laforgue, Paul Claudel, Rene Ghil, Henri de Regnier, Paul Valery, Gustave Kahn, Andre Gide.

There was an extraordinary crossing of literary ideas and tendencies (especially symbolism and parnassianism) with great impact on D. Anghel’s work. He takes over the identities impressionists made between man and nature as subjects of pictural image, and also the correspondence between poet’s emotions and their manifestations through natural elements. Whereas Jean Moreas, Henri de Regnier, Francis Viele-Griffin were heading towards neclassicism, Dimitrie Anghel was getting closer to parnassians (Theophile Gautier, Leconte de Lisle). Yet he was not receptive to Mallarme’s prosodical and lexical innovations or to Gustave Kahn’s și Jules Laforgue’s theories about blank verse.

In Paris he had the first contact with Albert Samain’s, Paul Claudel’s, Francis Jammes’, Emile Verhaeren’s, Edmond Rostand’s or Maeterlinck’s works and got to know them well since they were acclaimed both by public and critics and extensively draw his attention. Yet all these European influences didn’t make him lose touch with Romanian literary context, and he kept writing for numerous magazines published within his native country’s borders.

In Anghel's poetry the referential space is essential, the perspective evolves towards the identity of Romanian garden as a referent to the full efflorescence in French symbolism. His work represents an attempt to perceive a different consciousness order, a revoluted phase of biography, *une vie anterieure* in Baudelaire's words. He uses anamnesis – interpreted as (self)exclusion of the ego out of existence – manifested through daydream (“Love” – „Dragoste“, “Recollection” – „Amintire“, “Melancholy” – „Melancolie“, “Metamorphosis” – „Metamorfoză“, “Fantasies” – „Fantazii“), sleep or agony (the poet's identification with Narcissus – “Death of Narcissus” – „Moartea Narcisului“, “Fantasies” – „Fantazii“), “Hidden Pain” – „Dureri ascunse“, “In the Storm” – „În furtună“). Anghel learns the new poetic art during his years in France not from Mallarmé – as one would expect – or from Verlaine, but from Samain's lyric manifesto: „Je reve de vers doux et d'intimes rames“, a poem appeared in April 1890 in the literary magazine „Mercure de France“. Anghel imitates to some extent Samain's style in terms of indirect elegiac tone, dimmed remembrance, lack of inner morbidity.

Due to the fact that he stayed a long time in France and knew French language remarkably well (translating the works of many French poets), he doesn't feel the pressure of Romanian language, and doesn't oppose neologism, although it's very hard to introduce neologisms in poems, as Garabet Ibrăileanu noticed. The author doesn't make excessive use of new words, but he masters them every time he has the chance to insert them within text. Throughout his evolution as a poet, Dimitrie Anghel used the neologisms more and more, in an original manner for his era: *ghințiană, danț, evantaliu, machinal, comptoar, estampă, estompă, fantasc, fantoșă, trajectorie, simțimânt* (“Fantasies”), because these words *displayed a stylistic value for people of the time.*¹ Despite using archaisms, there is a balance between old and new forms of words in Dimitrie Anghel's poetic vocabulary. It's a modern language thanks to the simple grammatical structure; the poet creates a text that makes an easy access to a complex message.

Under the French symbolism influence both in his original creations and in his translations, Dimitrie Anghel offers the Romanian poetry the context of universal lyricism. His imaginary

is symbolically represented, in a conventional analogical manner, by reality transfiguration as a result of poet's terror faced with the constraining real world, the actual commonplace. Anghel distinguishes himself in the context of Romanian symbolism by a specific approach towards floral universe. He explained his predilection for the world of flowers in a page of prose in "The Story of the Troubled Ones" („Povestea celor necăjiți"). The poet considers the garden filled with special flowers to be a privileged hideaway space where he can withdraw in the ideal, and he often identifies himself with the floral element turned into an avatar—exclusively interpreted as metamorphosis, without any negative connotation.

Flowers' fragrances awakens his emotional memory and makes him escape into the world of ideas. Very close to nature, he often associates himself with natural elements, usually with the aristocratic spirit of the white lily and, at a certain point, with the oak through an allegory – "The Oak and the Mistletoe" („Stejarul și vâscul"). The oak is the symbol of stability and persistence over time, of power, masculinity and immortality; in ancient times it was dedicated to goddess Hera and the Dryads were oak nymphs. The oak's heavy wood has been compared to incorruptibility. Associated with the potential to live long, it symbolizes power and eternal life.

However, the floral avatar motif is very significant in a text with an intriguing title that seems to predict the message: the poem "Metamorphosis" („Metamorfoză") from the 1909 volume "Fantasies" („Fantazii"), and also in the poem "In the Garden" („În grădină") from the 1905 homonymous volume, Anghel's first volume of poetry. On the other hand, in "Death of Narcissus" („Moartea Narcisului"), the poet ultimately finds his human avatar.

Having a contemplative artistic vision and an emotional serenity, using the floral element, the poet *spreads fragrances* that *produce a languorous musical mood, expressed at the sound level by often long lines, with litanic and recitative inflexions.*² Poetic images are inserted in a frame of solitude and decadence, so that the garden is a privileged hideaway space, where flowers offer companionship, satisfaction and harmony through synesthesia. The floral shapes, colours and perfumes are found at the refined stylistic level in

the personifications, impersonating or metaphorical epithets, and analogies (for instance, "In the Garden").

The poet has his own vision about fantasy, his ability to fantasize implies escaping the daily reality into the inner world of complex figments, hence the contemplative artistic vision. Dimitrie Anghel outlines an alert vigorous and bright style, easy recognisable. In terms of plastic art, his works are an aesthetic delight for the expert eye. He started his literary activity as a poet, but he published here and there a few prose texts that are rather stylistic and inner meaning exercises for his real and significant prose after the year 1910. As a writer he created a special work, displaying distinctive features on the Romanian literary scene in the first years of the twentieth century. Everyone can notice the stylistic and compositional refinement, the exceptional artistic vision.

Dimitrie Anghel's short prose doesn't have a proper narrative structure. The author doesn't use the typical storyline and doesn't show strong conflicts between antithetic characters, arborescent literary plots or dynamic dialogues. In his texts the narration and depiction continuously combine in order to create the atmosphere or to suggest the ambience of past times. Remembrance in the sense of transposing to the world of *ghosts* seems to follow the Proustian pattern but in a symbolist manner in which the colour effects harmoniously blend with the musical ones, the structure and theme are specific to symbolism, the texts are rather lyrical. There is a clear romanticism influence regarding reverie, melancholy and interest for the miserable ones.

Dimitrie Anghel is considered by the critic Șerban Cioculescu *a poet with a romantic moral configuration, due to the need of alternative shelter in an universe of intimate vibrations or stunning garment*,³ a literary predecessor of Tudor Arghezi, another important figure of Romanian literature, in terms of structural affinities and kaleidoscopic vision. Both writers *are equally gifted because of their lexical variations and metaphorical flow*.⁴

Reserved and showing preconceptions, literary critics of the time demanded precise narrative elements and that is why they underestimated D. Anghel's prose; they didn't particularly understand his desire to run from reality to ghostly world. They

compared his writings to Alexandru Macedonski's, noticing the same *tendency to describe indoor and still life* and the same *artificial* vision that *devaluates nature, takes out its traditional pathos*⁵ as the world is depicted in "A Symbolic Dream" („Un vis simbolic“), but also the same *obsession for strange objects*.⁶ Musical virtues of Anghel's prose are obvious in "Ghosts" („Fantome“) and more discrete in other texts in which the confession is made in a low voice, and the methods are hardly subject to analysis through the dreamlike sceneries and the indistinctive olfactive emanations creating a mysterious magic setting, typical for calling up *the ghosts*.

The stylized intellectualist element conveyed by neologism is diminished since in depicting the indoor space the recollection requires emotional not intellectual representation. Another element illustrative for his modern style is the use of analogies by an extensive register of his aesthetic experience. Yet the neologism is widely spread throughout his prose. When describing the furniture he uses new terms which he knew from his travellings (Japanese vases), likewise when naming musical instruments, sometimes with their original form, without a language adaptation of a word who lacks its correspondent into Romanian (*epineta*). Instead he uses synonymy: *fragrances* and *perfumes* for *perceiving the emanations from cosmic nature*,⁷ respectively for cosmetics, proving himself an *artist of dissociation, with a safe choice of the phrase*.⁸ A sign of rich and multiple view, lexical variety seems to be the result of a fine intellectualism in search of diversity for the purpose of suggesting subtle nuances. There are remarkable olfactive images that capture the flowers's fragrances in the garden, endowed with a personal language (for example, the contrast between the strong lily fragrance and the dahlia mild one).

His entire prose scores an alternation of new and old word forms with the special aim of avoiding repetition; the use of neologism is thus a *stylistic sample*.⁹ In "The Falling Stars Picker" („Culegătorul de stele căzătoare“) there is a real but not at all annoying invasion of neologisms. In Anghel's prose *the main function of neological style* is its *handling* in a more certain and natural manner; *the intellectualism never takes the harsh form of pedantry*¹⁰ like in Macedonski's texts, it's only *a means of humor*.¹¹ The author

associates old with modern, mythical with real, sublime with obscene, creating a contrasts system that makes the psychological basis for the the reader's amusement. Tudor Vianu is the only critic to notice the writer's skepticism in *the oscillation between different stylistic registers*¹² as an attempt to save himself through humor, and in the rare ability to *vary the expression of the same thing, some of these expressions coming from the most diverse cultural sources*.¹³ On that account he is given the credit of enriching the expressive means of Romanian literature.

The leit-motif technique, by typical symbolist correspondences, introduces in his prose poems, together with the ornamental fairy-like vision, a peculiar musicality, a certain rhythm given by repetition, inversions, syntactic parallelisms, long phrases, preference for some verbal tenses. Rhythmicity is rendered by sequences made of main sentences with only a few subordinate sentences when the space is depicted through enumeration of decorative elements. For the same purpose he uses extensive syntactic arborescences such as the one called period in "The Story of an Anthill" („Povestea unui muşuroiu"). Şerban Cioculescu marked that *the period structure is oratorical, Ciceronian, in terms of dimension if not of topics*.¹⁴ The phrasal construction is typical, symmetrical, well organized, the verb prevails and appears usually at the beginning of the sentence. Likewise, the adjective or adverb determination is made by placing these parts of speech before the word they depend on—noun or verb, which is not the typical word order in Romanian and thus the poetic transposition makes an impression of mannerism. In portraits, D. Anghel uses the abstract epithet which doesn't individualize but rather dims, in order to confer an emotional touch to remembrance. Musical sounds and passages form a highly expressive metaphorical language. The text is rhythmic but not quite fluid.

The prose poems are merely aesthetic, not all the work of a memorialist. Şerban Cioculescu noted that *there's no sign of symbolism anywhere in Anghel's memoir pages*.¹⁵ Memories cause an artistic emotion that is mostly enhanced outside human being. The core of poetic inspiration is the feeling, and the sufferings are expressively suggested in a lucid ironic bitter way by metaphors. It's

illustrative in this manner the identity between artist's condition and the cuttlefish, in the text "Noah's Ark" („Arca lui Noe“).

Attracted by the mystery and horror register, D. Anghel picked up several of his queer subjects during his staying in France. Consequently, he wrote about a marquis who loves hunting in "A Secret" („O taină“) and about a hunter's suicide in "The Mystery on Navarre Street" („Misterul din strada Navarre“) without clearing up facts in the end. Of great fantastic effect is the text called "Our Daily Bread" („Pâinea noastră cea de toate zilele“). The bizarre is projected in the decorative, lacking a proper narrative structure. The appearance can be easily confused with the essence, and the fantastic is captured in the beautiful combination of colour and light in order to show the miracle of cosmic nature in a pictural not existential way. The aesthetic view of nature is enchanting.

Of rural inspiration and seemingly *just a pastiche of countryside passions*,¹⁶ Anghel's stories stand out through chromatic somptuosity in detriment of storyline which is actually reduced to a simple idea. They sometimes have a subtle burlesque intention ("The Enemy of Mechanization" – „Dușmanul mașinismului“) or are merely the core of an anecdote ("Old Letter" – „Scrisoare veche“), but do not create new myths as one would expect from a fantasist. However, he has written a few original tales ("The Fireflies" – „Licuricii“, "The Thief" – „Hoțul“, "Amfitrita's Suitors" – „Peșitorii Amfitritei“) inspired by folklore and bearing symbolic meaning: the wretched human condition, the solitude, the social misfit. Hence the desire to withdraw in the charming beauty of nature where everything is reduced to rhythm and harmony, to man's relationship with infinity, to the mystical thirst for knowledge and the will of relief through the beauty of particular words. The act of recalling is given magical powers to the extent of resizing and rehabilitating the human condition, because this is ultimately the artist's mission, as Șerban Cioculescu mentions: *Among all our memorialists, none has mastered like D. Anghel the emotional potential of musical origin and the talent of conveying emotions by evoking human shadows and the things they did throughout their lifetime, the natural ambiance*,¹⁷ so that the characteristic note of the writing is *subjectivity, and its corollary lyricism*.¹⁸

His memoirism is highly evocative and sensitive. In the pages he wrote anyone can notice the emotional and chromatic intensity, with a preference for purple and red. The objects of contemplation make real splashes of colour in a pictorial impressionist manner. Mihai Zamfir identifies Anghel's prose with an *object poetry*¹⁹ that brings a new, aestheticized and intellectualized impulse. In his work there is an indistructible connection between prose and poems, more obviously in the portraits (especially mother's portrait), and the author brings forward beautiful legends embedded in a flower's name.

Having a significant contribution to the stylistic development of our prose by the use of neologism, Dimitrie Anghel's work *manifests, at a higher level, the artist's strenuous effort in moulding the formless paste of the language.*²⁰ His prose *proves, when read again, to be a modern one and it allows nowadays an exceeding comprehension of his writings not only as a flowers' poet work but as one who successfully attempts to place the Romanian literature in the European context.*²¹ The contact with new sciences like linguistics, psychoanalysis, sociology or the new philosophical movements is appreciated as a revolution in the way people think, and achieving progress implies a subjective interpretation that is yet based on both artistic taste and critical opinion, as Eugen Simion pointed out talking about the post-war literary criticism.

Fond of French poetry, Anghel has known symbolists' works very well, but he hasn't seemed to be too interested in theories about new poetry, or too sensitive about literary doctrine or symbolist manifesto. He praises writers regardless their aesthetics, and he takes from them the musical intimacy within the line, the cantilena and litanic fluidity, the emotion, the correspondences. He shows a free and diverse inspiration, he uses the symbols and he intellectualises the feelings.

NOTES

¹ S. Golopenția-Eretescu, M. Mancaș, *Studii de istoria limbii române literare* (București: Editura pentru Literatură, 1969), 520.

- ² D. Micu, *Literatura română în secolul al XX-lea* (București: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 2000), 35.
- ³ Ș. Cioculescu, *Dimitrie Anghel* (București: Ed. Publicom, 1945), 105.
- ⁴ Ș. Cioculescu, *op. cit.*, 159.
- ⁵ T. Vianu, *Arta prozatorilor români* (București: Ed. 100+1 Gramar, 2002), 203.
- ⁶ T. Vianu, *loc. cit.*
- ⁷ Ș. Cioculescu, *Dimitrie Anghel*, 108.
- ⁸ Ș. Cioculescu, *loc. cit.*
- ⁹ T. Vianu, *op. cit.*, 205.
- ¹⁰ T. Vianu, *op. cit.*, 204.
- ¹¹ T. Vianu, *op. cit.*, 206.
- ¹² T. Vianu, *op. cit.*, 205.
- ¹³ T. Vianu, *op. cit.*, 207.
- ¹⁴ Ș. Cioculescu, *op. cit.*, 111.
- ¹⁵ Ș. Cioculescu, *op. cit.*, 72.
- ¹⁶ Ș. Cioculescu, *op. cit.*, 118.
- ¹⁷ Ș. Cioculescu, *op. cit.*, 124.
- ¹⁸ Ș. Cioculescu, *op. cit.*, 125.
- ¹⁹ M. Zamfirescu, *Poemul românesc în proză*, (București: Ed. Minerva, 1984), 281.
- ²⁰ Ș. Cioculescu, *op. cit.*, 116.
- ²¹ A. Sasu, *Dicționarul biografic al literaturii române*, vol. I (Pitești: Ed. Paralela 45, 2006), 50.