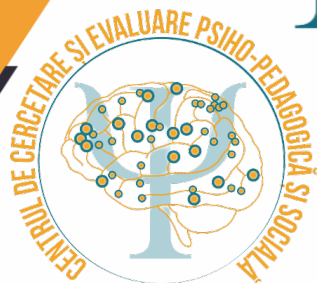




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## **Ethical, ethnic and aesthetic, a unity in diversity, in Cernian poetry**

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**Abstract:** Cerna's poetry is valuable through the osmosis between ethical, ethnic and aesthetic, even if the interest of a particular historical moment is diversely polarized and a mutation of aesthetic values is evident. Of intellectual substance in terms of substance and rhetorical in terms of form, yielding to the influences of the era, Cernian poetry, compared to the poetry of the moment, is concerned with translating the ineffable through words, to suggest states of mind, and somewhat leaves the circuit of poetic concerns contemporary.

**Keywords:** ethical, ethnic, aesthetic, values, rhetorical

Literary critic Eugen Lovinescu is of the opinion that Cerna's poetry can serve as „an example of the mutation of aesthetic values considered in themselves”. „Through the infiltration of the aesthetic through ethical, ethnic, social solidarity, the work of art can gain a value, which it loses along with the variations of the interest of the various polarized historical moment”, is the opinion of the critic (Lovinescu, 1927, p.124).

Even if the abundant Eminescian influence is more than obvious, secondly, the different temperament is noticeable: „Cerna's indisputable optimism is antithetical to Eminescian pessimism” (Cf. Lovinescu, 1927, p. 447).

Eugen Lovinescu's conviction was that the poetry written by Cerna, of intellectual substance as background and rhetoric, in terms of form, did not fulfill „any role in the evolution of our poetic sensibility” (Idem), precisely because of the error of the „new school” of „Convorbiri critice”, according to which ideas could be constituted as criteria for poetic valorization.

The critic from „Sburătorul” believed that ideas, original or not, as simple elements of an intellectual order, turn out to be in appropriate poetry.

Related to the poetry of the moment, concerned with translating the ineffable in to words, suggesting mental states, Cerna's poetry is some what out of the circuit of contemporary poetic



concerns. Moreover, the poet would have declaimed his ideas and feelings through a fundamentally antipoetic rhetoric, whipping his sensibility and lacking expressive originality.

Eugen Lovinescu acknowledges, however, that the proportion of the participation of the purely intellectual element in the composition of poetry is still a matter of discussion (Lovinescu, 1973, p. 440).

So, he was no stranger to newer aesthetic debates and research, but he avoided dealing with the subject, sanctioning the conception lyric, due to the non-removal of the rhetorical and demonstrative element.

In the spirit of his conception, Lovinescu reanalyzes, persifles the laudatory interpretations of M. Dragomirescu and, especially, those of Ion Trivale, regarding Cerna's poems: „Plânsul lui Adam”, „Către pace”, „Dura lex”, Lovinescu certainly know at least the first two pages of Cerna's doctoral thesis, translated by I. Rădulescu Pogoneanu, because he cites the work in the bibliography of his study, „Poezia de concepție : P. Cerna”.

So, he became aware of the poet's arguments in favor of the lyric of ideas, even if only from these preliminary pages, but he did not react.

The „inner revelations” of the poet, Cerna wrote in the introduction of his essay, „his rich, diverse, all-encompassing life, not only of sensitivity, but also of spirituality, materializes, in a word, in a wide exterior” (Cerna, 1974 , p. 110).

This form is not empty, but carries in true poets „a multitude of particular, fine states of mind, which accompany, enrich, and tint the torrent of feeling and thought” (Idem).

It turns out, thus, that Panait Cerna was not a follower of the principle that the purpose of poetry is „to develop general ideas”, as expressed by the critic of „Sburătorului” in a chapter dedicated to Dimitrie Anghel in „The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature”, a chapter in which he makes a parallel between the two poets, but had a clear opinion on the sensitive material with which poetry operates: „The idea as such can never be a suitable object for a poem. She must receive her letter of recommendation for poetry from the hand of fantasy intuitions (...) or from the source of soul emotions with which, intertwined, she grew up together” (Lovinescu, 1973, p. 440).

The poet becomes aware of the limitations of the poetry of ideas, including: didacticism, bombasticism, sterility, emphatic, pompous, artificial, sought-after style, arbitrary and meaningless play of ideas, reduction of the idea to prosaism.

Also, the narrow circle of readers of such a poem must have a certain erudition, a high degree of intelligence, inclination to reflexivity.

Another current of the time, a current that was the bearer of „new poetry”, against the Eminescian current and sowing, was symbolism.

From the symbolist followers, Cerna receives an unfavorable review in „Viața nouă”, a literary magazine that promoted symbolism.

The literary current looked at Romanian poetry like an artistic act that alienated itself from nature and climbed „on a higher step of artistic expression, renewed by the power of a first-rate talent, with the capitalization of some acquisitions of modern French poetry, a certain type of sensibility” ( Râpeanu, 1968, p. XVI).

However, even among the Symbolists, Cerna found supporters, who, „even if they did not harbor the exaggerated feelings of Mihail Dragomirescu, spoke of him with deference” (Idem).

The artistic means by which Cerna expresses the content of his poetic ideas, we could say, are of symbolist influence.



This opinion can be explained, starting from the Cernian vision, according to which a valuable poetic idea becomes more expressive, more highlighted if it is close to the sensibility of the receiver through the concretization of artistic images.

So a total rapprochement is achieved remarkably through the use of symbols.

The poem „In the cave”, published in 1904, is representative of this attitude of the poet. In this text, the idea of resistance is symbolized by the image of stalagmites and stalactites, the tears of the ceiling that built the columns that support it: „From dark-ceilings, / Silent tears always fall, / And seem to increase with difficulty, / From great distant springs” (Cerna, 1968, p. 24).

The author continues the text with „All the same, undried tears / In our souls they dripped, / And from countless storms / Our life trembled, to show the correspondence with human life ” (Idem).

The poet's symbols are distinguished from those of the symbolists. If they created an abstract, individualistic, distrustful poetry, Cerna proposes new, vivid symbols, related to life, to human aspirations, „with meanings full of human significance and capable of evoking artistic emotion” (Râpeanu, 1968, p. XVI) .

"Cerna did not lack ideation; it was perhaps harmful to him" says Pompiliu Constantinescu, so that philosophical poetry presents an optimistic vision of the world, but „the plastic power to clothe ideas in the living garment of imagination is reduced; cold, analytical reflection is not accompanied by the explosion of feeling, which bursts, instinctively, from the turbulent womb of the soul”, continues the literary critic (Constantinescu, 1967, p. 273).

We identify these feelings in Cerna's philosophical poetry, which Paul Zarifopol considers „especially for school people, the highest literary value” (Zarifopol, 1997, p. 200).

The poem of ideas emphasizes even more clearly, Cerna's preference for the dramatization of lyrical reflection.

Adam is the man who endures the punishment of the divinity to redeem the original sin of love at the price of a course of aversion, given to his descendants, Cain and Abel: „You will find the harbor of unconsolation / To forgive those who gave you pain ?/ We did not know, child, that you would pay / With pains our moment of festive spells! ”(Cerna, 1968, p. 15).

Man's aspiration to the high by confronting the energies of nature that limit him is a process that unfolds repetitively, in a predetermined way, and the poet's attempts to disentangle the idea through palpable images turn into annexes of the demonstrative construction of the poetic text.

Thus, by verses of the type „Beneath the lightning rock at the mouth of the sea, / Not a wave should not know the words of perdition; / And only black wings beat the ringing waters, / Only the call of death rises from the storm...” (Cerna, 1968, p. 34), the author illustrates the struggle between the philosopher and the poet who wants to put his optimism at the service of his own creation.

The lyric pact thus becomes a reflection on the self, on the connection between consciousnesses, an interpretation of symbolism, affective states and human values.

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