HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

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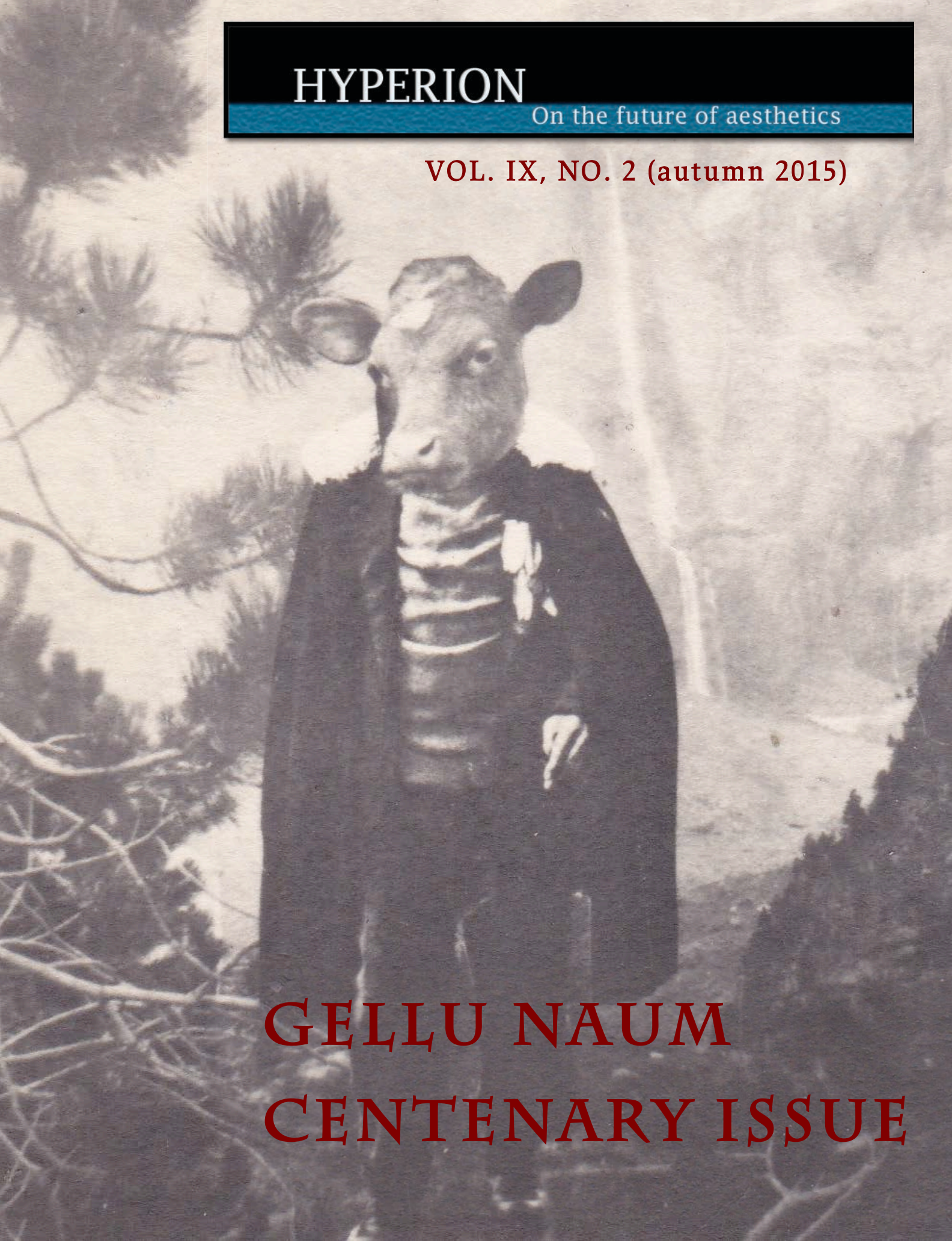

# GELLU NAUM CENTENARY ISSUE

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

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Editors: Rainer J. Hanshe, Erika Mihálycsa
PDF Design: Giuseppe Bertolini
Logo Design: Liliana Orbach
Advertising & Donations: Giovanni Piacenza
(To contact Mr. Piacenza: info@contramundum.net)

Letters to the editors are welcome and should be
e-mailed to: hyperion-future@contramundum.net

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HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

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NOTE: Valery Oisteanu and the editors of HYPERION wish to express their gratitude to the Gellu Naum Estate for granting us permission to publish the translations of The Advantage of the Vertebrae, Describing the Tower, and The Honorary Umbrella, as well as of fragments from *Apolodor's Travels*, together with the Romanian originals.

HYPERION
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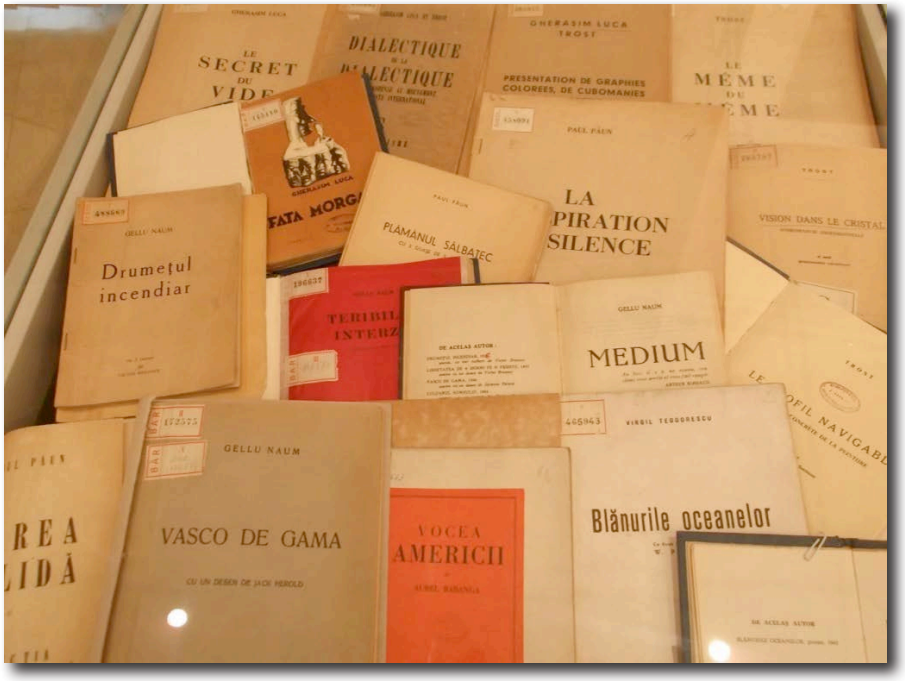
Valery Oisteanu

# Gellu Naum: Surreal-Shaman of Romania




Curator's statement: To commemorate the centenary of Gellu Naum's birth, I asked the editors of *Hyperion* if they would be interested in publishing a special issue on Gellu Naum to underscore Naum's complex character, which is not entirely revealed in his writing, and they welcomed the proposal.

A victim of his own dilemma, a prisoner of his own country and language, a multi-disciplinary writer who indulged in theater, philosophy, poetry and fiction, Naum also tried his hand at collage, blind-drawings, archeology, and occult experiments. How to

summarize such a complex figure? I asked some of my Romanian, French, and American colleagues to contribute essays and poetry to this endeavor — writers such as Ion Pop, Simona Popescu, and Petre Răileanu, who devoted part of their literary lives to writing books and essays about Naum. In the process, I availed myself of some of Naum's English and French translations done by his close friends, Sebastian Reichmann, myself, and others.

This also proved to be a perfect occasion to unearth some of the photographs, video and audio recordings, and memorabilia that PASS (Poets and Artists Surreal Society) accumulated from 1977 until Naum's death in 2001. With this issue then, we intend to underscore Naum's alchemical experiments with words, images, and extreme experiences, often in collaboration with his wife Lyggia.

One of his experiments with sensory deprivation is highlighted in the following quote from *Zenobia*: "After that I was deaf for a while. It was extraordinary, I couldn't hear a thing, I was stopped up with solid earwax, I was like a bottle filled with the pure and free simplicity of my situation, I would point to my ear: 'I am deaf, what do you think about that!' ... The best part is that one day, pop! my earwax cracked and I started to hear again. I could have stopped speaking instead and made myself mute, but that seemed too weird to me, it would have been unfair and then, however mute you are, you still can hear the words, they sneak unhindered through your marrow, so I just minded my own business."[1]

Shamanism for Gellu Naum meant a process — a stated intention to heal himself and others through poetry. But to heal from what? He experienced death at an early age with the loss of his father, Andre Naum, in the First World War. Subsequent travels to Paris and separation from his first wife led to his forced return to his native Romania to serve in the army during the Second World War, in which he again encountered death face to face. This resulted in his worldview changing: From that time on, Naum considered nature to

[1] *Zenobia* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995) 67–68.

be a huge Hermetic book in which all creatures are words. He credited two museums in Paris as influences: the Museum of Dreams and the Museum of Suicide. Following in the footsteps of the French surrealist poets before him — Crevel, Desnos, Éluard — he began to record his dreams in a book, *Medium.* His centenary gives us the perfect occasion to reread and interpret this and other works anew, in a spate of new editions in Romanian, French, German, and English. In his 1936 review of Naum's poetry collection *Incendiary Traveler: Nota Bene*, Romanian-born French playwright Eugène Ionescu said that Naum "is aiming toward a revolutionary poetry socially, culturally, and spiritually. He is integrating and confirming the hooligan mentality of the new generation remarked by Mircea Eliade, indifferent of the extremes to which they are going."[2] At the time, Eliade was a far-right conservative; Naum was clearly leaning toward the left, Surrealism, and the avant-garde.

There are only a handful of surrealists in the world who have invented new strains of the "freedom of imagination virus," and whatever name by which they are known — neo-dada, post-surrealists, Lettrists, Situationists, Pataphysicists, etc. — they constitute a brotherhood of dreamers and they discovered (and continue to discover) each other even in total darkness, in the underground, or in the absolute void.

I often knocked at the door of Gellu and his wife Lyggia's tiny apartments in Bucharest at Galatzi St nr. 68, or at Aviator Petru Cretzu Nr. 64, and sometimes at their wooden gate in the countryside of Comana an hour south of the capital city. One day in 1983 they arrived at my door at 170 Second Avenue. Lyggia with her broad

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[2] In 1935, Mircea Eliade wrote the novel *Huliganii* (Hooligans), a portrait of a family and an entire generation of Romanians in the early 1930s. To David Cave, Eliade seems to "tacitly condone such revisionist behavior [idealistic youths overturning history to begin anew]," for he "depicts only certain youth, notably Petru, as willing to assume full responsibility for their actions. In *Huliganii*, at least, it seems authentic living is unavoidably the domain of the individual; groups are more susceptible to compromise." David Cave, *Mircea Eliade's Vision for a New Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 111.

smile, Gellu with his big magician's eyes and deep voice, smoking a Magritte-like pipe. They were welcomed by my wife Ruth into the landscape of my anti-war sculptures, neo-dada collages, portrait of John Lennon, a copy of Victor Brauner's drawing of Gellu, an interior window garden, and a selection of surrealist art books and jazz music. The first words that I remember Naum saying in my East Village pad were, "Mă simt ca acasă!" — "I feel at home here!" Then the conversation turned to Edgar Cayce, the "sleeping prophet," who every day for over 40 years would lay on a couch and enter a self-induced sleep state, something Naum admired. In the following days I steered him to jazz performances and art shows, occasions for him to meet American writers and artists; besides Romanian, he could speak fluent French, and his deep, calm voice and signature humor captivated those around him.

Naum's poetry performances during this sojourn (which also included a stay in San Francisco) radically changed the scene as such, not just for me but for Ira Cohen, Bill Wolak, Timothy Baum, George-Therese Dickinson, Allen J. Sheinman, Bimbo Rivas, Miguel Algarin, and musician Ljuba Ristic, to name just a few, and for those who laboriously translated and published his poems in literary magazines and anthologies.[3]

Romanian surrealism gave a new boost to the almighty imagination. The surrealists tried to reach its source, where antinomies coexist without excluding one another, because "there is a certain area of the spirit where life and death, reality and imagination, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the higher and the lower cease to be perceived as contradictory."[4] The space where imagination and reality interpenetrate is surreality. The structure of the term seems to denote another world parallel to or above reality. Surreality is a desired realm, but one inherent in reality. But such a meaning has

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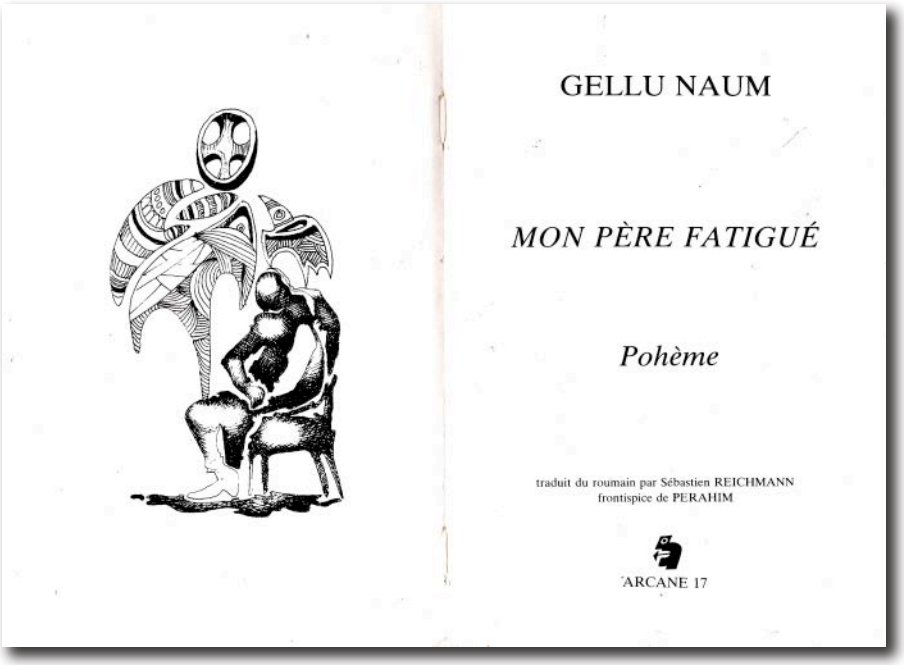
[3] Poetry such as *Dream Helmet* (New Jersey: Somniloquist Press, 1978) 86, 87, 88; *Third Rail* (San Francisco: Third Rail, 1984); *Arsenal* (Chicago: Black Swan, 1973), etc.
[4] André Breton, *Manifestes du Surréalisme* (1962).

nothing whatsoever to do with the surrealist doctrine. One of the bridges between the subjective, with the subconscious, and the objective, is the dream, which acquired the same status as objective reality. "Our life," wrote Naum, "the mean part of our life bearing that name, would perhaps deserve a challenge from dreams refusing to grant it any reality"... According to the theory of Freud, "our innermost hidden desires are released in dreams. To pour dreams into reality by transposing them into poems, will enable poetry to act on reality."[5]




The romantics emphasized the revelatory capacity of dreams while the surrealists focused on the activity of the imaginative consciousness, therefore of men. Human desire, so far suppressed,

[5] *Medium* (Bucharest: Surrealist Press, 1945) 74, quoted in "Surrealism: Contexts and Interpretations" by Valentin F. Mihaescu, *Romanian Review* (Bucharest: Romanian Review Cultural Monthly, 1981) 88.

was now fulfilled in a world where every approach was permitted. This was a delirious reconstruction of reality meant to remove contradiction. "Surrealists claim a conduct in total separation from reality completely outside constructivist utilitarianism,"[6] a conduct which steers in the fountains of dreams the reflected image of a vision devoid of any connection to problems and projection beyond dream and half-wakefulness. For dreams to become potent, they must regain their subversive character and be capable of determining the "total crisis of consciousness" (Breton). "Everything begins in the infinite chalice of dreams."[7]

By means of automatic dictation, Naum attempted to spontaneously exteriorize the unconscious. For him poetry was the realm of absolute freedom in which everything acquires the shape of our desires. In this way, the antinomy between dream and reality disappears. The split between the individual and the world is transferred into poetry, giving life to images by spontaneously and surprisingly joining two seemingly irreconcilable realities. Naum wanted to create a new order to annul these antinomies. Dreams were understood and eulogized as a refuge from a reality that exasperated the surrealists. For Naum, contact with the material world, and interrupted communication with the cosmos, could be achieved only through dreams.

"I have with me the deep sadness of poets who, throughout their lives...have tried hard not to produce literature, and eventually, on leafing through their 100 odd pages, have found that what they wrote was nothing but literature. What a horrible deception!" Naum was against mediocre (i.e. academic) poetry, never accepting any compromise, refusing to surrender. This kind of spirited refusal is summarized in ironic form by the following paragraph taken from *Medium*: "I read my poems with a low voice, extremely low, in deepest silence, especially while a beautiful woman stood near me.

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[6] "Uncle Vinea's Alms," *Unu*, #29 (1930).
[7] Gellu Naum, "Avenue of the Dead," *Unu*, #18 (1929).

This is nowadays the poetical state, and I kept on being a poet, sure that one day at the end of my speech I would burst into the most trivial laughter, into the most terrifying howls and that would be the first poetic gesture I would undoubtedly consider as my own." The poet of the future, he believed, will be able to reach this unconditional freedom only if he starts "by unleashing his desires" in a spiritual form.[8]

The new world that Naum and the Surrealists hoped to create would be the result of a poetic transformation of reality. In fact, there was no direct action involved. Everything takes place at the level of the spirit — a vision of a universe in which well-known laws are useless presides over the entire poetic realm of Naum.

His concern was to theorize the surrealist liberation of the object. The object becomes "mysterious and malevolent" by being placed into unusual relationships, which annul its natural destination and lend it meanings in harmony with the urges of the unconscious. In *The Castle of the Blind* (Surrealist Collection: 1946), Naum made a sustained effort to liberate human expression in all its myriad forms, a total revolution. Naum affirmed that poetry is the science of action, and its lyricism should be recuperated in unexplored zones. This "oneiric movement" focused on infra-reality, an occult romanticism. Naum talked about an exorcism of the language — "We should cretinize the language" (*Critique of Misery*) — and the disturbance of grammar through the practice of the playful instinct that would function in his poems.

* * * * *

Shortly after the end of World War II, poets and writers like Gherasim Luca, Dolfi Trost, Virgil Teodorescu, Saşa Pană, Jules Perahim, Jacques Herold, Lucian Boz, Constantin Nisipeanu, Sesto Pals and others, all active in Romanian Surrealism, were swiftly

[8] *The Forbidden Terrible* (Bucharest, 1945).

banned by the Communist authorities. By 1947, Naum's book of poems, *The White of the Bone* (1946), was rejected by censors, and for the next 20 years he was permitted to write only in the approved "socialist realism" style. Two politically engaged books, "later repudiated" by their author, were *Poem About Our Youth* and *Calm Sun*, both of which were illustrated by Jules Perahim. Unfortunately, the first book ends with these unworthy and unpoetical words: "Lenin Party Communism" (1960–61).

Naum was also permitted to write children's books (*The Books of Apolodor*) and to publish Romanian translations of 30 titles from the French by the likes of Gérard de Nerval, Denis Diderot, Théophile Gautier, Julien Gracq, Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot)*, René Char, Jacques Prévert, Franz Kafka, Victor Hugo, and even Jules Verne. After an intense period in which he worked 12–14 hours a day for 21 years, his doctors declared him physically exhausted and advised him to better pace himself.

In Naum's poem "Beginning and the Center" (alluding perhaps to the structure of a labyrinth) from *Athanor* (1968), there is a character named Platon, the same name he gave to his horse while in combat during World War II, who takes grammar to an extreme. Here Naum broke with the logic of linear narrative, according to Simona Popescu (editor of Naum's complete works, *Polirom*, 2011), and strained standard grammar through an absurd, obscure sieve, channeling verses like a seer. He learned these techniques in dreams, such as one described in *Medium*: "I saw people, blindfolded, whose good faith it is impossible to question, making all sorts of phrases on a board on which alphabet is drawn, the order of which I do not know anything, without difficulty and without help from a spirit."[9] Typical for Naum was engineering a humorous desecration of poetical tradition. He also used alchemical symbols to project his personal

[9] *Medium* in *Gellu Naum* II: Proza, ed. Simona Popescu (Bucharest: Editura Polirom, 2012) 116.

experiences in a furnace (athanor) in which traditional poetical concepts are melted, re-forged, reshaped and reinvented.

*From an ancient gesture burnt four thousand years ago*

Rustle of ashes extinguished memories of fire
over tattoos of limestone
shirts of clear water between sands
vegetal worms going around pebbles
roaring of buckets dropped into wells

"Athanor" (*Athanor*, 1968)

The symbol of the labyrinth appeared in several other poems via multiple entrances and exits. "The bees from the labyrinths are giving me honey." According to Popescu, the metaphor of the labyrinth was a trap for Naum, as in little books that were "dragging me into their labyrinth."

During his lifetime, Naum ironically constructed a philosophy of "pohetry" that opposed academic notions. In his theoretical text, "The Specter of Longevity," written jointly with Virgil Teodorescu, Naum proclaimed that "poetical necessity finds an enemy in poetry as necessity." Among his experimental poems were photographs of his face with words such as "rape," "death," and "freedom" typed on slivers of paper glued to his eyes, cheeks, and chin,[10] while among the text of "Advantages of the Vertebrae" there are images of hats, shoes, and shirts cut out of a fashion catalogue.

"Nigredo" is a poem made out of unrecognizable signs — would-be ideograms or runes invented by Naum — alchemical symbols, astrological signs, hobo marks — transcribed after a dream. Nevertheless, there is a connection to alchemical names of "black

[10] "Autopoem," 1938–40. Photo by Teddy Brauner, Victor Brauner's brother.

matter — originator and destroyer of all" (*Nigredo*), and the hieroglyphs similar to notations above the Philosophical Tree.[11]

Perhaps all these experiments were ironic gestures toward poetry, such as his playfully philosophical "Cadavre Exquis," written jointly with Virgil Teodorescu:

> Through the armor that covers our gaze penetrates a savage cry.
> Passing your hand through your heart, you tear off a fingernail.
> Don't forget to close your eyes before closing your eyelids.[12]

Naum insisted on the meaning of the marvelous and the "miraculous," which he said must inhabit any authentic poetry, and he struggled to sustain the dynamic evolution of surrealism during the very difficult socialist period. "No exact definition of the surrealist marvelous has come to us," notes J.H. Matthews. "The reason is, evidently, that surrealists shared Péret's view of the marvelous as 'heart and nervous system of all poetry,' hence as no more susceptible than surrealist poetry to close analysis."[13] As André Breton wrote in the *Surrealist Manifesto*: "The marvelous is not the same in every period of history: it partakes in some obscure way of a sort of general revelation only the fragments of which come down to us: they are the romantic *ruins*, the modern *mannequin*, or any other symbol capable of affecting the human sensibility for a period of time."

The Romanian post-war surrealists tried to abandon the thorny road of images, instead focusing their attention on other aspects of dreams, namely, verbal automatism as a means of sounding the depths of the subconscious, the recognition of objective chance (as described by André Breton in *Mad Love*) as a means of reconciling the purposes of nature with the purposes of men, and the surrealist

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[11] *Opus Magnum*, in Alexander Roob, *Alchemy & Mysticism* (2001) 306.
[12] "122 Corpses," first published in *Surrealist Collection* (1946).
[13] J.H. Matthews, *The Surrealist Mind* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1991), 92.

object and its possibilities. Seen in the perspective of the linguistic invention, Naum may be likened in structure and composition to Soupault, Reverdy, and Breton, who knew his writing and praised his verse.

Yet Gellu Naum hated labels and being labeled. "I did not seek Surrealism. I did not seek my friends. I met them on the way. And of course, the breakup happened all the same... Surrealism was a circle, maybe the brightest of all circles, and closer to the center of the concentric circles of collective necessity."[14] For him, it was more a poetical condition, a way of life and not only its literary aspect.

As politically imposed censorship loosened after 1967, Naum resumed publishing surrealist poetry, leaving us a unique look at the unconscious mind in more than 40 books, among them *Athanor* (1968), *Poetizați, Poetizați...* (*Poeticize, Poeticize...* (1970)), *Poeme Alese (Selected Poems (1974))*, *Copacul-Animal (The Animal-Tree* (1971)), *Tatăl Meu Obosit* (*My Tired Father*, (1972)), *Descrierea Turnului (Description of the Tower* (1975)), *Partea Cealaltă (The Other Side* (1980)), and *Malul Albastru* (*The Blue Shore*, (1990)). Here is an example from *The Blue Shore*, written partially in the mental-health ward of a hospital, where he was placed, apparently due to a faulty diagnosis:

Top of the Soul

Breast-feed me tree with your cat's breasts

because I fought for you with two military types
one was wearing white silk stockings
the other one was saluting by sticking out his tongue
their heads were fluttering in the wind like a white wedding scarf

and my silent witness was hanging like a plant[15]

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[14] Rémy Laville, *Gellu Naum. Poète roumain au château des aveugles* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1994).
[15] "Vârful sufletului," from *The Blue Shore*. English version by Valery Oisteanu.

Naum's existentialist autobiographical novel *Zenobia* is a dreamlike story recounting an encounter à la *Nadja* with a predestined woman (his wife Lygia).[16] Naum called it "a kind of novel," but more accurately it could be labeled an anti-novel with no clear plot, no character development, and no clear timeline. The author warns us from the beginning: "In some places I will say what I was not supposed to reveal." The opening line is a quotation from a furrier in a Bucharest slum in 1813: "And all those of us who were alive thought we were dead and walked about in a daze" (unnumbered dedication page). Lygia Alexandrescu-Naum, whom he married in 1946, was the inspiration for this novel. An artist and a muse, she also remained a co-conspirator in his artistic adventures for more than 50 years, until the end of his life. According to Penelope Rosemont, Lygia stands as the most influential Romanian female surrealist, who was a companion for Naum's experimentations, such as automatic "blind drawings" and "blind writings" created in total darkness with a blindfold.[17]

In one of the drawings from the "voluntary blindness" series titled "Gellu and Lygia Breaking the Darkness," she is represented with the blindfold and Gellu with his pipe. An (absurd) irony occurred near the end of her life, when she became clinically blind, but could still take care of her aging husband, including cooking at the country house in Comana where she knew her way around the garden filled with flowers and vegetables and the simple country kitchen.

This year on August 1 we celebrated the centenary of Naum's birth, and on September 28th, the 14th anniversary of his death/disappearance: 14 years will have passed without his distinctive voice, his humorous cynicism, his critical eye, and his generous smile.

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[16] Published initially in 1985 in Bucharest and later translated into German (1990), Greek (1992), French (Éditions Maren Sell/Calmann-Levy, 1995), and into English by James Brook and Sasha Vlad (Northwestern University Press, 1995).

[17] *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* (University of Texas Press, 1998) 200.

Thanks to the contributions of poets and artists, and the efforts of the Gellu Naum Foundation, a magazine (*ATHANOR*) is published annually with his memorabilia, letters, and personal photographs. His memorial house in Comana hosts an annual gathering-cum-poetry reading, attended this year by over two-dozen of his closest friends and countryside neighbors. His writings are collected by Polirom Press in 4 volumes, encompassing a vast legacy of poetry, fiction, theater, and essays, edited by his longtime biographer Simona Popescu.

Naum is one of the few surrealists who survived the cultural vandalism of the Stalinist/communism era, though of course not without scars. But when he resurfaced after 20 years of near silence, he did so with an even stronger voice, that of an oracle of poetic wisdom. From 1967 on he created a vortex that revitalized regional Eastern European surrealism in Romania (V. Teodorescu, C. Nisipeanu, Sasha Pana, Jules Perahim, etc.) and in Yugoslavia (he was close friends with Vasco Popa, a Serbian surrealist poet). Naum painted with words as if his *pohems* were mysterious paintings. Only in the process of re-reading them from a distance can we appreciate the layered occult messages in detail, the depths, colors, compositions and his own particular alchemical symbolism. In New York, Naum shared with us his experiments with "psychedelic states" achieved through deprivation of sleep, speech, light and even food. They were but a window into his subconscious realms and perhaps even into the spiritual domain.

In his words "the Alchemist of unacceptable existence," Naum was preparing himself for a state of ghostliness before dying, as expressed with this statement: "We wish to reincarnate without dying beforehand."[18]

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[18] "Fantomas in his Decree," in Naum's posthumous collaboration with the phantom of Maximillien de Robespierre, *Poetizați, Poetizați* (*Poeticize, Poeticize*, Editura Eminescu, Bucharest, 1970).

Although today we read Naum's dreamlike poetry, his irresistibly humorous fiction, his essays with their witty "encyclopedia of mysticism," and his sarcastic verse as a magic theater, we shouldn't forget that his entire work is a surreal theater where he was contentious rather than happy. In a trance of unrestrained sadness, we still hear his steps and his voice on the streets of New York.

## Brief biographical addendum

Gellu Naum was born in Bucharest, Romania, August 1, 1915, the son of romantic poet Andrei Naum (dead in combat WWI at the Battle of Marasesti 1917) and his wife Maria Naum (born Rosa Gluck). In 1933, he began studying philosophy in Bucharest and, in 1938, he left his studies to continue them at the Sorbonne in Paris. While completing his doctoral degree (with a dissertation on the French scholastic philosopher Pierre Abélard, romantic poetry and letters), Naum became the central figure in an expatriate group of Romanian artists and poets who all had avant-garde and dada tendencies.

Earlier in 1935, Naum made an important new friend and mentor. The poet recalled: "One day, as I was walking on Sarindari Street, I came across an exhibition by Victor Brauner. At that time I did not know anything about Brauner, who kept on painting while living in extreme poverty. And I entered that exhibition hall as if destiny attracted me. I found a very nice young man, who asked me if I liked what I saw. And I told him I liked it a lot; that I wanted to write just like he painted. When he asked me what I was writing, I told him I was writing poems. We never parted since."[19]

A year later, Naum published his first book, *Incendiary Traveler* (Bucharest, 1936), and soon a second, *Freedom to Sleep on the*

[19] Anecdote from "Gellu Naum. O biografie" in *Gellu Naum* II Proza, ed. Simona Popescu (Bucharest: Editura Polirom, 2012) 8, and heard repeatedly from Gellu Naum by the author.

*Forehead* (Bucharest, 1937), both of which were accompanied by Brauner's illustrations, who later (in 1938) introduced him to André Breton and the Paris Surrealist group with Benjamin Péret, Remedios Varo, Pierre Mabille, and Roger Gilbert-Lecomte.

While in Paris, Naum befriended yet another Romanian artist, Jacques Herold, who went on to illustrate some 20 books of poetry by Naum, together with his compatriot Romanian surrealist Paul Paun. Meanwhile, Naum's first wife, Mariana (married from 1936–1938), left Paris and Naum's life forever.

When visiting Breton, Naum was invited to publish in the famous surrealist magazine *Minotaure*. To issue 13, he was to contribute an essay on "Demonology of the Object" that included drawings by Brauner. Unfortunately, the project was never realized due to the occupation of Paris during WWII and Breton's departure to New York.

In 1939, while on the Orient Express traveling from Paris to Bucharest, Naum — together with Gherasim Luca, Dolfi Trost, and others — organized a Romanian Surrealist group. Over the next five years in Bucharest that group evolved into a veritable movement with manifestoes, magazines, books, exhibitions and other publications. Their activities did not pass unnoticed and Breton exclaimed at one moment that "the center of Surrealism has shifted to Bucharest."

The rest of his bio was detailed in this essay, except for the numerous prizes he received, locally and internationally, including the prestigious European Prize Munster (1999). After the Romanian Revolution of 1989, he traveled abroad and gave public readings in France, Germany, Switzerland and the Netherland. In 1995, the German Academic Exchange Service appointed him scholar at the University of Berlin.

At the end of his life Naum was also shortlisted for The Nobel Prize in Literature. Naum spent much of his final years at his country retreat in Comana. He passes into immortality on 29 September 2001 and is buried in Bucharest.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

PETRE RĂILEANU

# Gellu Naum : Poésie & alchimie. Le désir passionné de retrouver l'unité du monde

Le surréalisme est, jusque dans ses fondements, une forme d'alchimie. J'entends par fondements tous les éléments qui structurent le mouvement : aspirations, corpus théoriques, moyens et pratique existentielle, textuelle et plastique. Le rapprochement surréalisme-alchimie apparaîtra comme une évidence à Breton sous la forme de « l'analogie de but » dans le *Second Manifeste du surréalisme* de 1929.

Comme certaines figures des cartes du Jeu de Marseille, les lames de Tarot redessinées par les surréalistes pendant la guerre, alchimie et surréalisme sont amenés à se regarder dans un miroir qui a la propriété d'invertir la symétrie : située surtout dans le passé, l'alchimie devient un genre poétique, alors que le surréalisme, actif et agissant, acquiert tous les attributs d'une voie pouvant mener jusqu'au bout : délivrer l'homme de toute servitude, transmuer le Possible en Réel.

Dans les textes des alchimistes le sens, très précis et invariable, est caché par goût et même par devoir du secret. Codifiés à outrance, les textes du corpus alchimique se laissent décrypter avec une table de clés. La démarche surréaliste est différente. Le surréalisme, qu'il s'agisse de texte ou de production visuelle, donne une autonomie presque totale au signifiant - écriture automatique, hasard objectif ou « hasard aidé », associations de mots, d'objets et d'idées les plus éloignés ou se pliant à la logique du rêve - alors que le signifié, incertain et discontinu, est voué à une existence aventureuse, au grès

des déclics provoqués au lecteur/ « regardeur ».[1] Ou non. Les surréalistes veulent assurer au signifié toutes les potentialités. L'incompréhension est prise en compte et même programmée. Dés le *Second manifeste du surréalisme*, Breton l'avait exigée de manière péremptoire : « L'approbation du public est à fuir par-dessus tout. Il faut absolument empêcher le public d'*entrer* si l'on veut éviter la confusion. J'ajoute qu'il faut le tenir exaspéré à la porte par un système de défis et de provocations.

JE DEMANDE L'OCCULTATION PROFONDE, VERITABLE DU SURREALISME ».[2]

Le texte alchimique est « poétique » par défaut, en dehors de toute intentionnalité. « Le surréalisme poétique » se situe lui-aussi « en dehors de toute préoccupation esthétique ou morale », selon la définition donnée par Breton dans le premier *Manifeste du surréalisme*.

Les différences sont importantes, entre alchimie et surréalisme, surtout en ce qui concerne le statut et la destination des textes. Vue comme „sécularisation d'une science sacrée" (Mircea Eliade), l'alchimie reste sur son versant spirituel un „véhicul du métaphisyque". Ce en quoi elle place le surréalisme devant une de ses contradictions, car il a toujours refusé toute métaphisyque et s'est reclamé vigoureusement du seul matérialisme. Notons, cependant, dans cette phase de notre recherche, ce que l'alchimie et le surréalisme ont en commun, à savoir, le désir passionné de redonner à l'univers l'unité. L'écriture automatique, le hasard objectif, le rêve, l'image comme éclair poétique en sont autant de voies propres au surréalisme.

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[1] « *C'est le regardeur qui fait le tableau* ». Comme la plupart des mots d'esprit de Marcel Duchamp jouant sur l'ambiguïté et l'attribution de sens, celui-ci devint une sorte d'alibi en trompe-l'œil de l'art contemporain.

[2] André Breton, *Second manifeste du surréalisme*, *Œuvres complètes* (Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris, 1988) tome I, p. 821.

## Les surréalistes roumains, l'espoir farouche dans la parole poétique et sa capacité d'agir sur le réel

Dans leurs textes comme dans la vie, les surréalistes roumains forment le vœux d'une forme de « vie dans la vie » non seulement comme « lieu idéal de la rencontre », comme écrira Trost à Breton, mais comme seule possibilité d'épanouissement de l'être. Moins sceptiques que leurs camarades français, ou en tout cas retrouvant le souffle des grands moments du surréalisme dont le Second manifeste en est un, les surréalistes roumains gardent un espoir farouche dans la parole poétique et dans sa capacité d'agir sur le réel. Excessifs dans tout ce qu'ils entreprennent, les surréalistes roumains prennent, avec un mot de Luca, « l'esprit à la lettre ». Ils adhèrent pleinement au programme de Breton et font leur la devise « changer le monde transformer la vie », mais ils sont persuadés que ce changement et cette transformation passent par ce qui se présente pour eux comme une urgence : retrouver l'unité du monde, élargir le domaine du possible. Et l'alchimie en est une voie.

Les surréalistes roumains se comportent en initiés, ils ritualisent leurs faits et gestes, entourent de mystère leurs recherches.[3]

Le caractère énigmatique est une particularité des textes des surréalistes roumains. Les textes s'ouvrent à plusieurs niveaux de lecture. Les significations les plus secrètes sont signalées, il est vrai, par endroit dans les textes, mais les références sont la plupart du temps excessivement discrètes, tant la possibilité de passer inaperçues semble un risque assumé. En dehors des manifestes, des textes-programmes, des propos théoriques rien n'est au premier degré, ou alors il faudrait redéfinir ce qu'est ce premier degré pour les surréalistes en général. En « surface », les textes restent (ou

[3] Dans une lettre de 1946 adressée à Breton Trost dresse en quelque ligne les principales directions d'activité du groupe surréaliste de Bucarest et fait état de la « tendance à s'organiser en centre secret, de type initiatique ». Voir Petre Raileanu, *Gherasim Luca*, (Paris: Editions Oxus, 2004) 105–106.

peuvent être perçus comme tels) 'poétiques', établissant de possibles analogies avec le monde et émanant une certaine force d'envoutement due à l'ambiance d'irréalité et à un maniement inhabituel de la langue, des mots et de la syntaxe. En profondeur, ces mêmes textes parlent de magie, c'est-à-dire des rapports cachés entre l'homme et l'univers, l'homme et les objets, les objets entre eux, d'alchimie, de médiumnité, de rencontres amenées par le « hasard favorable », des regards furtifs vers l'au-delà et d'autres moyens capables de transmuer le réel et qui se trouvent être les voies capables de donner accès au miraculeux. Plus qu'un simple moyen d'expression et mieux qu'une esthétique, le surréalisme se pose comme un discours alternatif à celui dominant, rationaliste-positiviste, et songe aboutir à une « nouvelle déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme ».

### *Medium*. Le récit alchimique

*Medium*, œuvre programmatique, est à la fois une défense et une illustration de l'univers poétique de Gellu Naum, au même titre que *Le Vampire passif* pour Gherasim Luca. Ecrit entre octobre 1940 et juin 1941, après le séjour parisien et la rencontre avec le surréalisme français, et publié en 1945, *Medium* assemble tout ce qui est censé marquer son propre territoire, donner le contour de son empreinte personnelle, contributions en terme de recherches, thèmes, lexique, obsessions, emblèmes.

Dans un rythme toujours égal, sans précipitation, avec une froide précision qui ne se dément jamais, le texte met en pages les idées théorique de Naum, raconte le voyage à travers les lieux périlleux qui appellent, comme un souvenir de Lautréamont, « le sourire féroce du noir pressentiment », évoque de façon énigmatique des faits de la vie quotidienne. Enfin, le même texte contient aussi cinq récits de rêves, intitulés comme tel et numérotés.

Avec son habileté habituelle Naum mélange rêve, écriture automatique et récit alchimique. Son écriture est comme l'eau d'une rivière obscure qui après un cataclysme charrie du tout, hommes et

animaux morts et vivants, fragments épars d'objets ou objets entiers, des cercueils, des fœtus morts et des femmes magnifiques avec des comportements bizarres, désastres, souvenirs et pressentiments, ici et là des « éclats de miroir » dans lesquels se poursuivent des actions, des dialogues. Rêve n'est ici qu'un des deux versants, sur l'autre, la narration est un récit alchimique hautement obscurci, compliqué davantage avec des allusions au mythe d'Isis et Osiris. Quelques référents subsistent, ils sont plantés à la fois pour nous orienter et pour nous égarer.

Il est nécessaire de préciser que toute interprétation est fatalement lacunaire, comme lacunaires et incomplètes sont nos connaissances en la matière. L'étonnante érudition du poète, le long exercice ainsi que la maîtrise toute naturelle de l'écriture, qui doit être considérée comme une partie inséparable de son être, ajoutent plusieurs degrés de difficultés à cette tentative de lecture. Et par ailleurs, Gellu Naum ne rédige pas un traité d'alchimie, il nous propose un texte poétique d'une étrange beauté et d'une grande complexité. Il ne faut pas s'attendre non plus à ce que les éléments que nous pouvons attestés ou seulement approximés comme ayant trait à l'alchimie désignent un ordre précis des opérations et du début à la « fin ». L'avertissement formulé par l'un des derniers grands spécialistes du domaine, Eugène Canseliet, vaut une consolation mais aussi une confirmation de la seule certitude du chercheur, celle qui veut que la quête n'est jamais terminée : « Il n'est personne, parfaitement au fait des livres hermétiques, de leur très spécial langage, qui ne se soit aperçu que jamais un auteur, fût-il le plus classique, ne traite le Grand Œuvre dans l'ordre et en entier ».[4]

J'ai choisi un fragment du Quatrième rêve de *Medium* qui me semble significatif de la façon don Gellu Naum réunit dans un même

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[4] *L'Alchimie et son Livre Muet (MUTUS LIBER). Réimpression intégrale de l'édition originale de La Rochelle, 1677, Introduction et commentaires par Eugène Canseliet F.C.H disciple de Fulcanelli* (Editions SugeR, 1986) 93.
*En français dans le texte.

texte poésie, alchimie, éléments autobiographiques et surtout la tentation permanente de franchir les bornes du Possible.

C'est dans le Quatrième rêve que Naum fait place à ce qu'il considère comme une de ses grandes découvertes, *Clava*, la Clé :

> « C'est le mot magique de la poésie, *j'en suis sûr*, et je suis fier de l'avoir découvert ». Il partage sa découverte aux habitants d'une ville, et tous et se mettent à déclamer de longs poèmes, interminables :
>
> « La ville toute entière est peuplée de milliers de gens qui marchent en récitant sans arrêt. Je suis terrorisé et content. Terrorisé, parce que je serai tué pour avoir dit le mot magique, content, car maintenant tout le monde est poète. Je commence à courir, je serai tué, voici que d'aucuns se mettent à courir. Je saute des haies, parcours des champs. Ceux qui vont me tuer, les poètes, sont là. Je les voie sous un arbre, dans l'obscurité. L'arbre est lumineux et j'y grimpe pour me cacher. *Je suis sûr* qu'il ne me verront pas, car je suis dans la lumière, et eux dans l'obscurité ».

Le poète sera coupé en morceaux avec une hache par ses semblables, par ses pairs. Trois figures mythiques se croisent dans ce récit, Prométhée, Orphée, Osiris, tous les trois ayant délivré aux mortels un savoir secret concernant la vie : le feu sacré, le mot magique et la renaissance cyclique. Ils ont tous à subir une punition de l'ordre de la désintégration corporelle, synonyme d'effacement de l'identité. Orphée, selon Strabon, aurait trouvé la mort dans un soulèvement populaire. Osiris est tué par son frère, dépecé, coupé en tranche et les morceaux dispersés. Désintégration et dispersion correspondent au magistère au noir, *nigredum*. Les opérations s'ensuivent, le feu qui s'intensifie et l'arbre de lumière sont des éléments du magistère. L'Œuvre est dans la phase de purification et de sublimation.

Les multiples significations de cet épisode, inséré dans le Quatrième rêve de *Medium* et dont les origines se situent aussi bien

dans le rêve et dans « la vie réelle » nous donnent un aperçu du cheminement de l'écriture comme processus métamorphique. Le 21 juin 1941 la Roumanie déclare la guerre à l'Union Soviétique avec comme premier objectif de libérer la Bessarabie annexée un an plus tôt. Mobilisé dans une unité de Hussards vite décimée par les tirs soviétiques, le poète avec le grade de caporal s'en sort miraculeusement vivant et vaque sur son cheval Platon à ses différentes missions. Une nuit de fièvre, le poète-soldat avait rêvé d'un prénom féminin, Klava. Dans le rêve le mot était une parole investie d'une puissance spéciale, capable d'amener la paix. Quelques jours plus tard, la troupe sévèrement réduite est obligée de cantonner dans un village moldave. « Les villageois parlent la langue roumaine mais ne le savent pas, ils se disent Soviétiques et Moldaves. 'Où avez-vous appris le moldave ?' S'étonne, soupçonneuse, l'institutrice du bourg. Gellu raconte la Roumanie, les armées roumaines, ces peuples dispersés qui apprennent le latin à l'aube des temps historiques pour émerger au bas Moyen-âge avec cette langue si proche de l'italien et du français. Il évoque aussi Bucarest, les théâtres et les cinémas. L'institutrice l'insulte : 'vous essayez de faire de la propagande, vous mentez, les théâtres et les cinémas sont à Moscou, chez vous il n'y a que la misère'. C'est dans ce village hostile, que Gellu entend à plusieurs reprises le prénom du rêve : 'Klava !'. Une mère appelle sa fille. ».[5]

De la réalité au rêve et d'un rêve à l'autre, le même mot a subi les métamorphoses de l'alchimie poétique. Dans le monde de l'histoire subie, les hommes, détournés de leurs vérités élémentaires, ne reconnaissent pas leur semblable et deviennent menaçants, tout comme les habitants de la ville du quatrième rêve de *Medium*,

[5] Rémy Laville, *Gellu Naum. Poète roumain au château des aveugles*, (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1994) 57. Refusant constamment de parler de cette partie de son existence autrement que par le biais de ses livres qui ne sont autre chose que vie transmuée, Gellu Naum s'est raconté pourtant devant celui qui devint son premier biographe autorisé, Rémy Laville, attaché linguistique auprès de l'Ambassade de France à Bucarest de 1988 à 1994. Il en résulta une sorte d'autobiographie dictée, dont la matière se constitue des souvenirs du poète.

auxquels le narrateur a remis le mot magique de la poésie. Dans un cas comme dans l'autre, la morale subtile qui se dégage est que la délivrance ne se vaut si elle n'est pas une nécessité intérieure. Le sacrifice sans retour perpétré dans le monde devient dans l'univers de l'Alchimie une promesse de bonheur, une étape vers la résurrection.

**« La connaissance par la méconnaissance »**

« Certitude éruptive. A quand une connaissance complète, éruptive ? ».[6] Il s'agit d'une connaissance soudaine qui dévoile les connexions dans le monde visible et invisible. Le poète, « hors de soi », est le scribe des ces illuminations. L'univers poétique de Gellu Naum autorise le portrait du créateur aveugle-sourd-muet.[7] Sa « méthode » de connaissance – il pourrait dire à juste titre qu'il n'en reconnaît aucune –, ou plutôt sa voie, favorise la rencontre, l'obscurité, la médiumnité, la magie. Elle est en quelque sorte une réhabilitation du mythe, cultive l'inexplicable et les phénomènes dont l'explication a été effacée par le rationalisme à outrance.

Naum préfère la nommer par son contraire : « la méconnaissance atteint les limites de l'intuition ».[8] A peine modifiée dans un sens plus programmatique : *la connaissance par la méconnaissance*, la formule est reprise dans le texte collectif *Le Sable nocturne* destiné au catalogue de l'exposition parisienne Le Surréalisme en 1947. André Breton relève dans le texte des surréalistes roumains juste ce passage qui semble répondre à ses attentes du moment. Il l'adopte sur le champ comme mot d'ordre du

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[6] *Medium*, *O 2*, 118.

[7] « Le seule peintre que j'ai connu était aveugle. Le seul poète était sourd-muet ». Teribilul interzis (1945), *in O 2*, 180.

[8] « Aici, unde se reclamă o cât mai urgentă intervenție din partea Noastră, *necunoașterea atinge limita intuiției* ». (C'est moi qui souligne) Gellu Naum, *Albul osului* (1947), in O 2, p. 232. La proximité de Gellu Naum avec les grands mystiques n'entre pas dans l'horizon de cet article, le sujet mérite d'être approfondi. La connaissance comme non-savoir, on la retrouve exprimée avec une brillante éloquence par Jean de la Croix : « *Qui en ce lieu parvient vraiment, /De soi-même a perdu le sens, /Ce qu'il savait auparavant /Tout cela lui semble ignorance, /Et tant augmente sa science /Qu'il en demeure ne sachant, /Toute science dépassant* ». *Couplets faits sur une extase de haute contemplation*.

surréalisme et en fait part dans le texte liminaire du Catalogue : « Selon l'heureuse formule de nos amis de Bucarest, 'la connaissance par la méconnaissance' demeure le grand mot d'ordre surréaliste ». Breton continue avec une autre citation, de William Blake, cette fois-ci, comme pour expliciter « l'heureuse formule » des surréalistes roumains, dont la teneur serait : le savoir donné par le vécu et par l'intuition contre les explications rationnelles ; l'intuition contre la mémoire :

> « Rejetons la démonstration rationnelle pour la foi dans le savoir. Rejetons les haillons pourris de la mémoire pour l'inspiration ».[9]

Gellu Naum est très tôt en possession de tout son savoir. Les textes publiés dans l'immédiat après-guerre, 1945–1947, avant l'installation du régime communiste avec ses diktats en matière de création artistique, qui mettra fin entre autres à toute forme d'existence publique du surréalisme, *Medium* (1945), *Castelul orbilor/Le Château des aveugles* (1946), *Cornelius de Argint/Cornelius d'Argent* (1946), *Albul osului/Le Blanc de l'os* (1947), sont, malgré leur organisation typographique, des livres de haute poésie qui comportent tous les éléments du système poétique de Gellu Naum : registre rhétorique ainsi que « thèmes », obsessions, référents manifestes ou cachés. C'est dans cette matrice que s'origine son œuvre future.

Dans cette perspective, *Calea Șearpelui*[10]*/La Voie du Serpent* occupe une position particulière. Les textes, rigoureusement datés, sont écrits tout au long de l'année 1948 (entre « 29.I.1948 », le premier, et « 14.12.8 », le dernier). En 1948 Gellu Naum a trente trois ans. Or, certains adeptes se réfèrent au nombre 33 comme étant l'âge

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[9] André Breton, *Devant le rideau, in Le Surréalisme en 1947. Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme Présenté par André Breton et Marcel Duchamp* (Paris: Editions Pierre à feu, Maeght Editeur, 1947) 15.

[10] Gellu Naum, *Calea Șearpelui*, ediție îngrijită și prefață de Simona Popescu (București : Editura Paralela 45, 2002).

de l'accomplissement de l'Œuvre. En ouvrant le cahier qui renferme tout son savoir Gellu Naum obéit à un rituel initiatique.

« Rituel » est le mot approprié, car il concerne au moins un autre membre du Groupe surréaliste roumain. En 1946, l'année de ses trente-trois ans, Gherasim Luca publie *Les Orgies des quanta. Trente-trois cubomanies non-œdipiennes*, Surréalisme, Bucarest. Il s'inscrit dans la tradition du *Liber mutus*, texte alchimique publié en France au milieu du XVII^e^ siècle qui donne, au travers d'une série d'illustrations mystiques, une méthode de fabrique de la Pierre philosophale. Chez Luca, en dehors de deux citations de Hegel et respectivement Sade mises en exergue, les seuls textes du livre sont les très courts commentaires donnés comme titre de chaque cubomanie. Parmi les manuscrits inédits de Luca, il existe un à la Bibliothèque Doucet de Paris qui porte comme titre *Je descends de la quatrième dimension* et qui reprend dans l'ordre, à peine développés dans le sens du bégaiement, les trente-trois titres des cubomanies. La version textuelle des *Orgies*... est un poème mystérieux et elliptique sur « les trente-trois périodes de ma vie » que Luca a préféré ne pas rendre publique, soucieux, comme Gellu Naum, de laisser entière l'énigme du trente-trois. Dans le texte inédit le *Liber mutus* est plus explicitement évoqué : « comme rêve, comme réveillée parle, parle, comme réveillé par le mutisme des sons comme réveillé par le mutisme de son rêve ».

Gellu Naum recueil dans *La Voie du Serpent* ses découvertes les plus secrètes. Les textes et les dessins composent ensemble un corpus poétique et initiatique, un traité de sagesse hermétique sur « la liberté de ne pas mourir ». La propre *voie* de Gellu Naum récupère des éléments d'alchimie, de magie, de mythologie dans un nouvel agrégat nommé par lui-même ailleurs *alchipoésie*. Edité en 2002, après la mort du poète, *Calea Șearpelui* devient son « dernier livre », une somme définitive et indépassable.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Petre Răileanu

Gellu Naum: Poetry & Alchemy

# The Impassioned Desire to Recover the World's Unity

Translated by Paul McRandle

Surrealism is, down to its foundations, a form of alchemy. By foundations I mean all the elements structuring the movement: aspirations; theoretical works; existential means and practice, both textual and visual. The surrealism-alchemy relation appears obvious in the form of "the analogy of purpose" in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* of 1929.

Like certain figures in the Jeu de Marseille deck (the deck of playing cards redesigned by the Surrealists during the war), alchemy and surrealism were drawn to regard themselves in a mirror that inverted their symmetry: situated mostly in the past, alchemy became a poetic genre, whereas Surrealism, active and acting, acquired all the attributes of a path leading to the goal: to deliver mankind from all servitude, to transmute the Possible into the Real.

In the alchemists' texts, very precise and unvarying meanings were hidden by taste and even out of a duty of secrecy. Codified in the extreme, texts from the alchemical corpus could be decrypted with a set of keys. The surrealist approach is different. Surrealism, whether it is a matter of text or visual production, gives almost total autonomy to the signifier — automatic writing, objective chance, or "assisted chance," associations of distant words, objects, and ideas bending to the logic of dreams — whereas the signified, uncertain and discontinuous, is consigned to a risky existence at the whim of responses provoked in the reader/"viewer."[1] Or not. The Surrealists want to preserve every potentiality for the signified. Incomprehension is taken into account and even programmed. From *The Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton had demanded it in a peremptory manner:

> The approval of the public is to be avoided like the plague. It is absolutely essential to keep the public from *entering* if one wishes to avoid confusion. I must add that the public must be kept panting in expectation at the gate by a system of challenges and provocations.

[1] "It's the viewer who makes the painting." Like most of Marcel Duchamp's observations playing on ambiguity and the attributions of meaning, this one became a sort of trompe-l'oeil alibi for contemporary art.

I ASK FOR THE PROFOUND, THE VERITABLE OCCULTATION OF SURREALISM.[2]

Alchemical texts are "poetic" by default, beyond all intentionality. "Poetic surrealism" also positioned itself "outside of every aesthetic or moral preoccupation," according to the definition given by Breton in the first *Manifesto of Surrealism*.

The differences between alchemy and surrealism are important, most of all regarding the status and destination of texts. Seen as the "secularization of a sacred science" (Mircea Eliade), alchemy remains on its spiritual side a "vehicle of metaphysics." This alone places surrealism squarely before one of its contradictions, because it always refused all metaphysics and vigorously invoked its materialism. We note, however, in this phase of our research, what alchemy and surrealism have in common: to wit, the impassioned desire to restore to the universe its unity. Automatic writing, objective chance, the dream, the image as poetic lightning are all methods appropriate to Surrealism.

## The Romanian Surrealists: Wild Hopes in Poetic Language and its Capacity to Act on the Real

In their texts as in life, the Romanian surrealists wished for a kind of "life within life" not only as an "ideal space for the encounter," as Trost wrote to Breton, but as the only possibility for being to flourish. Less skeptical than their French comrades, or in any case drawing fresh air from the great moments of Surrealism such as the *Second Manifesto*, the Romanian surrealists placed wild hopes in poetic language and its capacity to act on the real. Excessive in everything they do, the Romanian surrealists take, in Luca's terms, "spirit at the

[2] André Breton, *Second manifeste du surréalisme*, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1988) tome I, 821. [Quotation from *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, by André Breton, tr. by Richard Seaver & Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1972) 177–178. — Trans.]

letter." They fully adhered to Breton's program and made their motto "change the world, transform life," but they were persuaded that this change and transformation occur by means of what was most urgent to them: to recover the world's unity, to enlarge the domain of the possible. And alchemy is one way.

The Romanian Surrealists presented themselves as initiates; they ritualized their deeds and acts, shrouding their research in mystery.[3]

The Romanian Surrealists' texts are marked by a particularly enigmatic character. They open themselves to several levels of reading. It's true that the most secret meanings are signaled in places, but references are for the most part extremely discreet, such that the possibility of their passing unnoticed seems to be an assumed risk. Outside of the manifestoes, programmatic texts, and theoretical discussions, nothing is at the surface level or rather, it would be necessary to redefine what this surface level is for the Surrealists in general. On the "surface," their texts remain "poetic" (or can be perceived as such), establishing possible analogies with the world and a certain strength of enchantment by means of the ambiance of irreality and the unusual handling of language, of words, and of syntax. More deeply, these same texts speak of magic, meaning the hidden relations between mankind and the universe, mankind and objects, objects among themselves, alchemy, mediumship, meetings brought about by "happy coincidences," furtive glances towards the beyond, and other means capable of transmuting the real and which offer paths giving access to the miraculous. More than a simple means of expression and greater than an aesthetic, Surrealism presented itself as an alternative discourse to dominant rationalism/positivism, and dreamed of culminating in a "new declaration of the universal rights of man."

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[3] In a 1946 letter addressed to Breton, Trost notes the principal orientations of the activity of the Surrealist group of Bucharest and refers to the "tendency to organize in a secret center of an initiatory kind." See Petre Răileanu, *Gherasim Luca* (Paris: Editions Oxus, 2004) 105–106.

## *Medium*. The Alchemical Tale

A programmatic work, *Medium* is simultaneously a defense and illustration of Gellu Naum's poetic universe in the same way that *The Passive Vampire* is for Gherasim Luca. Written between October 1940 and June 1941, after Naum's Paris stay and encounter with French Surrealism, and published in 1945, *Medium* gathers all that seems to stake out its territory, giving the shape of its personal imprint in terms of research, themes, a lexicon, obsessions, emblems.

In an ever-steady, unhurried rhythm, with a cold precision that never belies itself, the text lays out on its pages Naum's theoretical ideas, recounts the voyage through perilous lands that recall, in memory of Lautréamont, "the ferocious smile of dark foreboding," and in an enigmatic manner calls up events from daily life. Rounding it out, the text also includes five accounts of dreams, titled as such and numbered.

With habitual ease Naum mixes dream, automatic writing, and alchemical narrative. His writing is like the water of a dark river that after a cataclysm carries away everything: dead and alive men and animals, sparse fragments or whole objects, coffins, dead fetuses and magnificent women with bizarre behavior, disasters, memories and presentiments, here and there "mirror fragments" in which actions and conversations play out. Dream is only one side here; in the other is a very obscure alchemical tale, complicated moreover with allusions to the myth of Isis and Osiris. Some references remain, installed to orient us and simultaneously lead us astray.

It must be said that every interpretation is fatally lacunary, as incomplete and lacunary as is our knowledge about matter. The poet's astonishing erudition, long practice, and natural mastery of writing, which must be considered an inseparable part of his being, add degrees of difficulty to this attempt at a reading. And furthermore, Gellu Naum isn't drawing up an alchemical treatise: he presents to us a poetic text of strange beauty and great complexity. We mustn't expect either that the elements we can attest or only assume to be

dealing with alchemy designate a precise order of operations from start to "finish." The warning of the last great specialist in this area, Eugène Canseliet, gives some consolation but confirms the only certitude for the searcher, who would never want the quest to end: "There isn't anyone perfectly informed about hermetic books, about their special language, who hasn't perceived that their authors, even the most classical, never treat the Great Work in order and in full."[4]

I've chosen a fragment of the Fourth dream in *Medium*, which seemed significant of the way that Gellu Naum unites poetry, alchemy, autobiographical elements, and most of all the permanent temptation to breach the boundaries of the Possible.

It's in the Fourth dream that Naum makes room for what he considers one of his great discoveries, *Clava*, the Key: "It's the magic word of poetry, *of this I'm certain*,* and I'm proud to have discovered it." He shares his discovery with the inhabitants of a town, and everyone begins to declaim interminably long poems:

> The entire town is populated with thousands of people who walk while ceaselessly reciting. I'm terrified and happy. Terrified, because I'll be killed for having said the magic word, happy because now everyone is a poet. I start running, I'll be killed, now others start running. I leap over hedges, run through fields. The ones who are going to kill me, the poets, are there. I see them under a tree, in the shadows. The tree is luminous and I climb up it to hide. *I'm certain* that I won't be seen since I'm in the light and they are in the dark.

The poet will be cut into bits with an axe by his fellows, by his peers. Three mythical figures cross in this story: Prometheus, Orpheus, Osiris — all three having given mortals secret knowledge

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[4] *L'Alchimie et son Livre Muet (MUTUS LIBER). Réimpression intégrale de l'édition originale de La Rochelle, 1677, Introduction et commentaires par Eugène Canseliet F.C.H disciple de Fulcanelli* (Editions SugeR, 1986) 93.

*In French in the original text. [*"j'en suis sûr"* — Trans.]

about life: the sacred fire, the magic word, and the cycle of rebirth. They all must suffer punishment of the order of bodily destruction, synonymous with effacing identity. Orpheus, according to Strabo, found death at the hands of a riotous mob. Osiris was killed by his brother, sliced apart and the pieces dispersed. Disintegration and dispersal correspond to the magisterium of black, *nigredum*. The operations that follow, the intensifying fire and the tree of light, are elements of the magisterium. The Work is at the stage of purification and sublimation.

The multiple meanings of this episode inserted in the Fourth dream of *Medium*, the origins of which are situated as much in dreams as in "real life," give us a glimpse of the act of writing as a metamorphic process. On June 21, 1941, Romania declares war on the Soviet Union with the objective of liberating Bessarabia, annexed a year earlier. Bearing the rank of corporal and mobilized in a unit of Hussars that was quickly decimated by Soviet guns, the poet miraculously escaped alive and devoted himself to various errands on his horse Plato. One feverish night, the poet-soldier dreamt of the feminine name Klava. In the dream it was a word invested with special power, capable of bringing peace. A few days later, the severely diminished unit had to set up camp in a Moldavian village. "The villagers spoke Romanian but didn't know it; they called themselves Soviets and Moldavians. 'Where did you learn Moldavian?' The village teacher was astonished and suspicious. Gellu described Romania, the Romanian armies, these dispersed peoples who learned Latin at the dawn of history to emerge in the late Middle Ages with this language so close to Italian and French. He described Bucharest as well, its theaters and cinemas. The teacher insulted him: 'You're spewing propaganda and lies, the theaters and cinemas are in Moscow. Where you're from there's nothing but misery.' In this

hostile village Gellu heard more than once the name from the dream: 'Klava!' A mother calling her daughter."[5]

From reality to dream, and from one dream to another, the same word underwent the metamorphoses of poetic alchemy. In this world of living history, men, diverted from elementary truths, don't recognize their fellows and grow menacing, just like those townsfolk in the fourth dream of *Medium* to whom the narrator had given the magic word of poetry. In both cases the underlying moral is that liberation is worthless if it isn't an internal necessity. Sacrifice without recompense in this world transforms in the universe of Alchemy into a promise of happiness, a step towards resurrection.

## Knowledge by Means of Willful Ignorance

"Eruptive certitude. When is knowledge complete, eruptive?"[6] It's a question of the sudden knowledge that unveils connections between the visible and invisible worlds. The poet "outside of himself" is the scribe of these illuminations. Gellu Naum's poetic universe permits the portrait of a blind-deaf-mute creator.[7] His "method" of knowledge — in truth he recognized no such thing — or rather his path, favored encounters, obscurity, mediumship, magic. It is in some way a rehabilitation of myth, cultivating the inexplicable and phenomena whose explication has been effaced by extreme rationalism.

Naum preferred to call it by its opposite: "Ignorance reaches the limits of intuition."[8] Slightly modified in a more programmatic sense:

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[5] Rémy Laville, *Gellu Naum. Poète roumain au château des aveugles* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1994) 57. Constantly refusing to speak about this part of his existence other than indirectly through his books, which are no less than his life transformed, Gellu Naum spoke about himself, however, with his first authorized biographer, Rémy Laville, a linguistic attaché to the French Embassy in Bucharest from 1988 to 1994. This resulted in a kind of dictated autobiography composed from the poet's memory.

[6] *Medium* (Bucharest: Collection Surréaliste, 1945) 118.

[7] "The only painter I've known was blind. The only poet was a deaf-mute." "Teribilul interzis" (Bucharest: Collection Surréaliste, 1945) 180.

[8] "Aici, unde se reclamă o cât mai urgentă intervenție din partea Noastră, *necunoașterea atinge limita intuiție.*" (Underlined by Răileanu) Gellu Naum, *Albul osului* (1947) 232.

*knowledge through willful ignorance*, the formula is reprised in the collective text *The Nocturnal Sable* written for the catalogue of the Paris exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. Seeming to respond to his hopes of the moment, this is the only passage in their text that André Breton noted. He adopts it on the spot as the watchword of surrealism and makes it part of the catalogue introduction: "In accordance with the happy turn of phrase coined by our friends in Bucharest, 'Knowledge by means of willful ignorance' remains the principal surrealist watchword." Breton continues with another citation, from William Blake, as if to explain "the happy turn of phrase" of the Romanian surrealists, of which the gist would be: knowledge gained by living and through intuition against rational explanation, intuition against memory: "To cast off rational demonstration by faith in [knowledge]. To cast off the rotten rags of memory by inspiration."[9]

From early on Gellu Naum is in full possession of this knowledge. The texts published in the after-war period, 1945–1947 (before the installation of the communist regime with its dictates concerning artistic creation put an end to any kind of public existence of surrealism) — *Medium* (1945), *Castelul orbilor/The Castle of the Blind* (1946), *Cornelius de Argint/Cornelius d'Argent* (1946), *Albul osului/The White of the Bone* (1947) — are, despite their typographic organization, books of high poetry that encompass all the elements of

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Communist censors refused *Albul osului* in 1946, but toward the end of that year, Naum had it translated into French, and from his typescript, 100 mimeograph copies (or similar method) were made and sent to Breton, Péret, Brauner, Mabille, and others (Laville: 85). Gellu Naum's closeness to the great mystics isn't part of the horizon of this article; the subject is worth deeper consideration. Knowledge as not-knowing was expressed with brilliant eloquence by Jean de la Croix : "He who truly enters this place, / Has lost the sense of himself, / What he knew beforehand/All of it seems ignorant to him,/And his knowledge grows so much/That he remains not knowing,/surpassing all knowledge." *Couplets faits sur une extase de haute contemplation*.

[9] André Breton, *Devant le rideau*, in *Le Surréalisme en 1947. Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme Présenté par André Breton et Marcel Duchamp* (Paris: Editions Pierre à feu, Maeght Editeur, 1947) 15. [Quote from "Before the Curtain" in *Free Rein*, tr. by Michel

Naum's poetic system: rhetorical register as well as themes, obsessions, explicit or hidden references. It's in this matrix that his future work originated.

From this perspective, *Calea Șearpelui/The Serpent's Path*[10] occupies a particular position. The texts, rigorously dated, were written throughout 1948 (between "29.I.1948," the first, and "14.12.8," the last). In 1948 Gellu Naum turned 30 years old. But some adepts refer to the number 33 as being the age of accomplishment of the Work. In opening the notebook that held all his knowledge, Gellu Naum obeyed an initiatory ritual.

"Ritual" is the appropriate word, since it concerned at least one other member of the Romanian surrealist group. In 1946, in his thirty-sixth year, Gherasim Luca published *The Orgies of the Quanta: 33 Non-Oedipal Cubomania* (Bucharest: Surréalisme). It is written in the tradition of the *Liber Mutus*, an alchemical text published in France in the middle of the 17th century that gave, through a series of mystical illustrations, a method for fabricating the Philosopher's Stone. Excluding two citations from Hegel and Sade, Luca's only texts in the book are three brief commentaries given as titles to each cubomania.[11] Among Luca's unpublished manuscripts is one at the Bibliothèque Doucet in Paris entitled *I Descend from the Fourth Dimension*, which takes up in order the 33 titles of the cubomania with very little of Luca's stuttering manner. The textual version of the *Orgies*... is a mysterious and elliptical poem about "the thirty-three periods of my life" that Luca preferred not to make public, taking care like Gellu Naum to leave whole the enigma of the thirty-three. In the unpublished text the *Liber Mutus* is more explicitly evoked: "like a

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Parmentier & Jacqueline d'Amboise (1995) 82. The French translation of William Blake's lines has deturned Blake's "Saviour" to "savoir." —Trans.]

[10] Gellu Naum, *Calea Șearpelui*, Ediție îngrijită și prefață de Simona Popescu (București: Editura Paralela 2002) 45.

[11] *Luca's coinage for his collage method in which a single image is cut into squares and then reassembled in a new arrangement.* [Trans.]

dream, as if awakened speaks, speaks, as awakened by the mutism of sounds as awakened by the mutism of its dream."

Gellu Naum gathered his most secret discoveries in *The Serpent's Path*. The texts and drawings together compose a poetic and initiatory corpus, a treatise of hermetic wisdom about "the freedom not to die." Naum's own path recuperates elements of alchemy, magic, and mythology in a new aggregate that he elsewhere called *alchipoetry*. Published in 2002 after the poet's death, *Calea Șearpelui* became his "final work," a definitive and unsurpassable summation.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Sebastian Reichmann

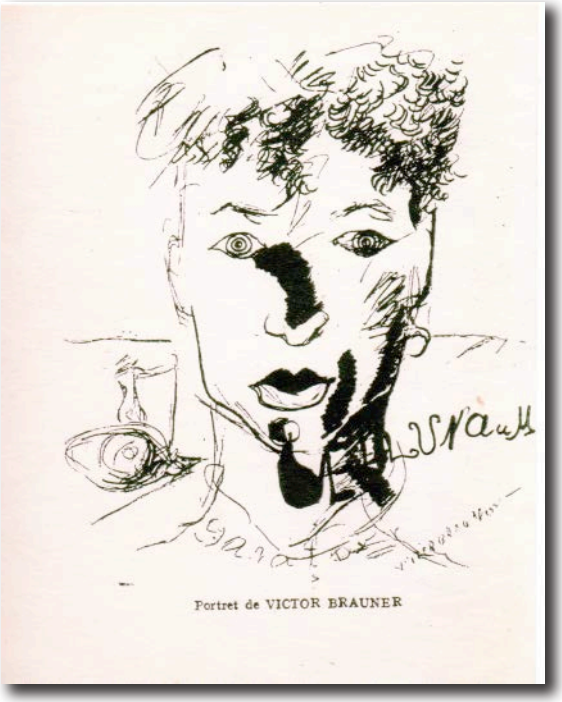
# *Ici et maintenant (de l'Autre Côté) avec Gellu Naum*

Au moment même où je voudrais évoquer la rencontre avec Gellu et Lygia je ne peux pas m'empêcher de penser à notre séparation à peine quelques années plus tard, et de me retrouver soudain seul, en préparant mon départ pour Paris. Dans une prison aux dimensions d'un pays, où nous aurions dû tous devenir parfaitement interchangeables il y avait encore, pour moi, un *ailleurs* désirable. Un ailleurs qui ne promettait rien. Qui ne demandait rien. Il fallait seulement rester conséquent envers ses propres exigences.

A quoi je rêvais, quand je rêvais de retrouver, de refaire, de continuer le surréalisme à Paris, après l'avoir goûté comme un *fruit interdit* à Bucarest et à Comana ?

Gellu Naum a été et continue d'être pour moi *le contemporain* essentiel et unique, dans une acception très proche de celle de Giorgio Agamben, pour qui « le contemporain est celui qui perçoit l'obscurité de son temps comme quelque chose qui le concerne et n'arrête pas de l'interpeller, quelque chose qui, au-dessus de toute lumière, s'adresse à lui directement et exclusivement. ». Il nous a montré à quelques-uns, très peu nombreux pendant les années de notre rencontre, à la fin des années 60 et au début des années 70, qu'il était possible, malgré la peur et l'instinct de conservation, d'exister comme esprits libres dans la Roumanie du « Génie des Carpates », en

nous faisant sentir que nos vrais *contemporains* n'étaient autres que Héraclite, Pythagore ou Hermès Trismégiste, ou encore Abélard, Maître Eckhart ou Paracelse. J'étais étudiant en philosophie, en première année, après avoir abandonné les études d'ingénieur, et je me sentais en ce temps-là, fortement attiré par le surréalisme, mais aussi, dans une moindre mesure, par l'existentialisme. Nos conversations pendant des soirées entières, autour de sujets réputés philosophiques dont Gellu Naum avait pourtant clamé haut et fort l'indigence, étaient passionnantes. Il me parlait de sa thèse de doctorat en philosophie, commencée en 1938-1939 à la Sorbonne, dont le sujet avait été la correspondance d'Abélard et Héloïse, mais aussi de l' « Enfer » de la Bibliothèque Nationale où il lui est arrivé de passer des longues heures, ainsi que de ses lectures des livres de Cornelius Agrippa et de Paracelse, et de nombreux traités d'alchimie. Il me racontait aussi comment il avait pris l'habitude de changer les salles de lecture de la Bibliothèque Nationale pour les cafés de Montparnasse, où il se rendait tous les soirs, surtout au Dôme, en compagnie de Victor Brauner, de Jacques Hérold et de Gherasim Luca, et où il lui arrivait souvent de rencontrer aussi Pierre Mabille, Benjamin Péret accompagné par Remedios Varo, Yves Tanguy et bien d'autres membres du groupe surréaliste. Mais sa manière de raconter ces années parisiennes n'avait rien de nostalgique. Sa vie de tous les jours, aux côtés de Lygia, dans ces années où nous nous voyions presque quotidiennement, ne rappelaient *extérieurement* en rien le surréalisme de sa jeunesse. A ces rencontres étaient parfois conviés également Sanda Rosescu, avec son mari d'alors, le poète Valeriu (le futur Valery) Oisteanu, ainsi que le metteur en scène David Esrig et le compositeur Stefan Niculescu. Deux ou trois années plus tard les très jeunes (ils étaient encore élèves au lycée de Beaux-Arts de Bucarest) poètes et peintres Gheorghe (Gigi) Rasovszky et Dan Stanciu, qui s'étaient d'abord présentés sous l'appellation « Polype », d'après le nom du groupe qu'ils formaient alors à eux deux seulement, sont devenus des amis à part entière de Gellu et Lygia Naum, et aussi, bien entendu, mes amis.




Dès nos premières rencontres j'avais gagné la conviction que Gellu Naum ne croyait plus dans la possibilité d'un nouveau « *centre du monde* », qui aurait eu le même rayonnement poétique et intellectuel que celui qu'avait fait la renommée de Paris entre les deux guerres et dans l'immédiat après-guerre. Ces premières impressions furent pourtant, pour moi, vite infirmées par les visites, le plus souvent nocturnes, de poètes surréalistes français, belges, yougoslaves, etc., qui venaient s'entretenir avec Gellu, non seulement de l'avenir de la poésie et de l'art contemporains, mais aussi du devenir du monde et du système dit communiste, en bravant ainsi les avertissements plus ou moins explicites reçus de la part de certains de ses « collègues », informateurs de la « *Securitate* ». De là à en déduire que le centre du monde avait déménagé à Bucarest il n'y avait qu'un pas. Un pas que je n'avais pourtant jamais franchi, malgré la fascination que Bucarest avait commençait à exercer sur moi, une fascination difficile à

comprendre même aujourd'hui, après plusieurs décennies de vie à Paris.

Lors de ces rencontres avec des « étrangers », qui étaient considérées comme un délit grave si elles n'étaient pas « supervisées » par la police politique, Gellu me prévenait toujours à l'improviste (j'habitais alors tout près, dans une chambre minuscule du même immeuble, située de surcroît au même étage). Je pourrais dire, du lieu où je regarde aujourd'hui ces entrelacs du passé, que ces occasions malgré tout assez rares, où je pouvais voir en chair et en os et parler à des poètes, à des êtres humains venus de « l'autre côté », se présentaient à moi comme un mélange subtile d'extrémisme et de sagesse. En réalité, l'extrémisme et la sagesse étaient, chez Gellu, une seule et même chose. Il était d'une part, beaucoup plus extrémiste que nous, « les jeunes », et d'autre part, était un exemple vivant de sens de la mesure.

Pourquoi alors vouloir quitter un supposé « *centre du monde* » où l'on vivait déjà, pour un autre « *centre* », imaginé et lointain celui-là ? « *Lâchez la proie pour l'ombre !* » avait été le mot d'ordre de Breton. Dans mon cas la proie n'était qu'un faux-semblant, pourrait-on dire, mais nous étions plusieurs à être comme « aveuglés » par la brillance intérieure (lisez « pureté ») de Gellu et Lygia, au point de réussir à ignorer sans effort le sordide de la vie quotidienne. De plus, Gellu nous mettait parfois en garde quant aux difficultés de la vie à Paris, telle qu'il l'avait connue lui-même, mais ce n'était jamais pour nous en dissuader. Cela aboutissait d'ailleurs le plus souvent par produire l'effet contraire, en nous incitant au départ, c'est du moins ce que je ressentais.

Aucune vérité n'était acceptée par Gellu Naum comme étant acquise pour toujours. Tout devait passer par le feu et le jeu de la mise à l'épreuve, nous étions témoins de l'invention, pas à pas, d'une vraie méthode expérimentale. Les épreuves, les inventions, les expérimentations, tout avait l'apparence et la force captivante du jeu.

Nous jouions sans arrêt, dès qu'on se retrouvait, à Bucarest dans la rue Vasile Lascar, ou à Comana. Parfois nous jouions dans l'atelier de Gigi Rasovszky ou dans ma chambre où pouvaient entrer à peine, en se donnant le plus grand mal, trois ou quatre personnes. Bref, nous jouions à deux, à trois ou à quatre, en écrivant des « *cadavres exquis* », ou en dessinant parfois selon la même « méthode ». L'antinomie entre le « sérieux » et le « pas sérieux » était certainement plus facile à dépasser que celle entre le rêve et l'action, entre la raison et la folie, ou entre le haut et le bas. Quant à l'antinomie entre le passé et le futur, nous étions sûrement trop jeunes pour envisager son dépassement, même si la figure paradigmatique de Gellu venait en aide à ceux qui se seraient risqués dans une telle entreprise.

Quand je l'ai rencontré, Gellu sortait à peine d'une grave dépression. Les médecins lui avaient interdit formellement de continuer son travail de traducteur, qu'il avait poursuivi pendant de nombreuses années, sans répit. Il avait choisi, dès les premières années du communisme, ce mode de vie extrêmement modeste, austère et digne, à la différence de beaucoup de ses « confrères » écrivains, prêts à accepter toutes sortes de compromis avec la dictature, en échange du moindre avantage matériel, pendant que d'autres se réfugiaient dans une existence de pseudo-bohème, qui n'était qu'une forme plus ou moins lente de suicide. Sans renier le sens de ses options politiques de gauche, il souhaitait exorciser les tentations révolutionnaires qu'il avait éprouvées à peine sorti de l'adolescence. Gellu était persuadé, et il le disait suffisamment haut et fort pour que ceux qui le souhaitaient puissent l'entendre, que le moment est venu pour « tourner la page ». L'année 1968 avait apporté la nouvelle de l'autodissolution du groupe surréaliste parisien, mais vu de Bucarest il y avait encore beaucoup à faire, et pas seulement là-bas, dans le « *centre du monde* », pour que *le poisson* redevienne *soluble*.

Paris, Août 2015

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Sebastian Reichmann

# Here & Now (from the Other Side) with Gellu Naum

Translated by Paul McRandle

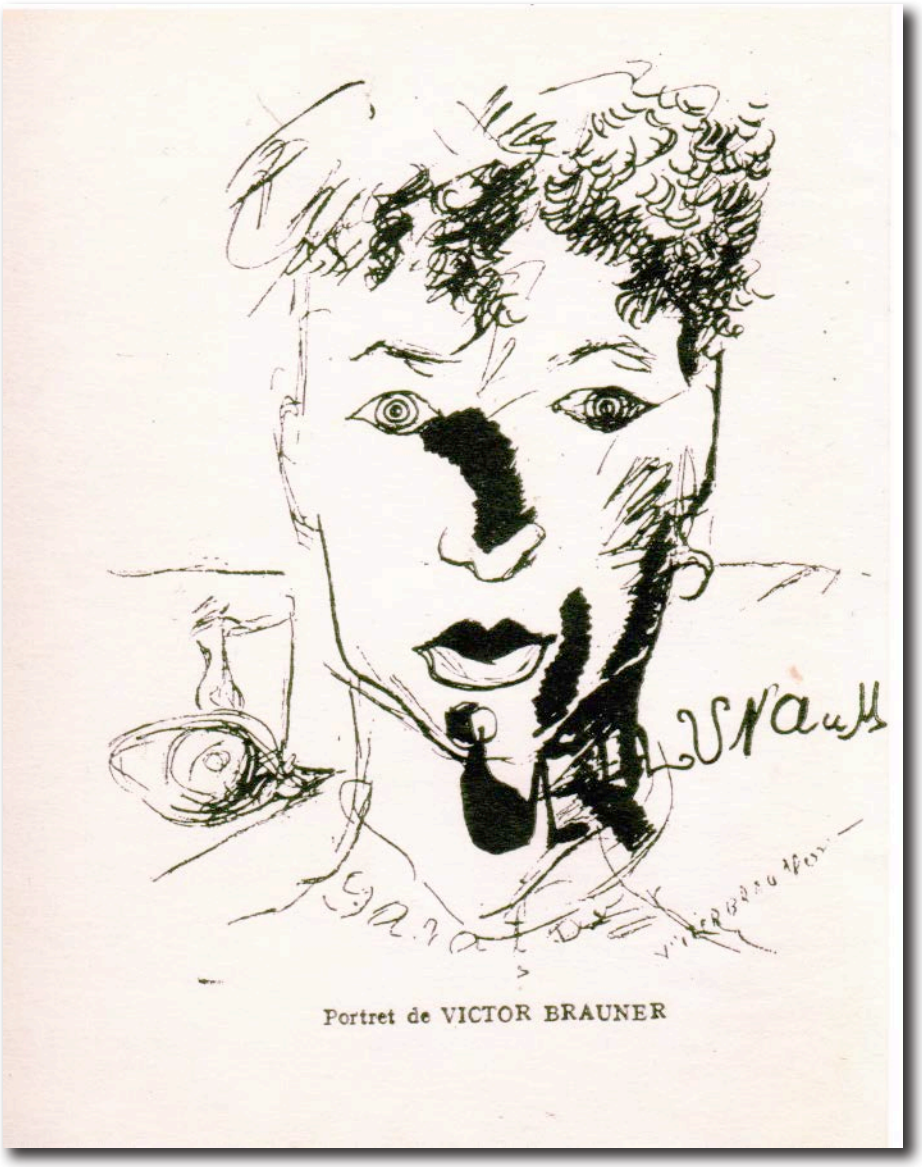
At the very moment when I would like to evoke the encounter with Gellu and Lyggia, I can't avoid thinking of our parting scarcely a few years later, and finding myself suddenly alone, preparing for my departure for Paris. In a prison the size of a country, where we should have each become perfectly interchangeable, for me, there was a desirable *elsewhere*. An elsewhere that promised nothing. That asked for nothing. It was necessary only to remain consistent to its own demands.

What did I dream of when I dreamed of recovering, of renewing, of continuing Surrealism in Paris, after having tasted it like a *forbidden fruit* in Bucharest and Comana?

Gellu Naum had been and continued to be for me the essential and unique *contemporary*, in a sense very close to that of Giorgio Agamben, for whom "the contemporary is the person who perceives the darkness of his time as something that concerns him, as something that never ceases to engage him. Darkness is something that — more than any light — turns directly and singularly toward him."[1] Naum demonstrated to our tiny number who gathered together from the end of the Sixties and through the early Seventies,

[1] *What is an Apparatus?* tr. by David Kishik & Stefan Pedatella (2009) 45.

that it was possible, despite fear and the instinct for self-preservation, to live as free spirits in the Romania of the "Genius of the Carpathians," in making us feel that our true *contemporaries* were none other than Heraclitus, Pythagoras, or Hermes Trismegistus, or yet again Abélard, Meister Eckhart, or Paracelsus. I was a first-year student of philosophy after having abandoned engineering, and in that era I felt myself strongly drawn to Surrealism, but also, in a slight measure, to existentialism. Our evening-long conversations around reputedly philosophical subjects, whose impoverishment Gellu Naum had nevertheless proclaimed loudly and clearly, were passionate. He spoke with me about his doctoral thesis in philosophy, begun in 1938–1939 at the Sorbonne, on the correspondence of Abélard and Héloïse, but also about the "Hell" of the Bibliothèque Nationale where he spent long hours, as well as of his readings of the works of Cornelius Agrippa and Paracelsus, and numerous alchemical treatises. He also told me how he had taken to the habit of exchanging the National Library's reading rooms for the cafés of Montparnasse, where he went every night, especially to the Dome, in the company of Victor Brauner, Jacques Hérold, and Gherasim Luca, and where he would often meet Pierre Mabille, Benjamin Péret accompanied by Remedios Varo, Yves Tanguy, and many other members of the Surrealist group. But he spoke of these Parisian years without nostalgia. On the *exterior* his daily life, alongside Lyggia, in those years when we saw one another almost daily, recalled nothing of the Surrealism of his youth. To these meetings Sanda Roșescu, with her then-husband, the poet Valeriu (later Valery) Oișteanu, director David Esrig, and composer Ștefan Niculescu were sometimes also invited. Two or three years later the very young poets and painters (they were still students at the Lycée de Beaux-Arts in Bucharest) Gheorghe (Gigi) Rasovszky and Dan Stanciu (who on their introduction were presented as "Polyp" after the name of a group of which they were the sole members) became fast friends with Gellu and Lyggia Naum and also, of course, my friends.




Portret de VICTOR BRAUNER

From our first meetings I became convinced that Gellu Naum no longer believed in the possibility of a new "*center of the world*," which would have the same poetic and intellectual brilliance as that of Paris between the wars and in the immediate after-war period. These first impressions were however, for me, quickly undermined by mostly nocturnal visits, of Surrealist poets of French, Belgian, Yugoslavian,

and other nationalities, who came to discuss with Gellu not just the future of poetry and contemporary art, but also what was becoming of the world and the so-called communist system, braving the more or less explicit warnings from some of his "colleagues," informers for the "*Securitate*." From there it only took a step to deduce that the center of the world had moved to Bucharest. A step, however, that I never took, despite the fascination that Bucharest had begun to exert over me, a fascination difficult even to understand now, after several decades in Paris.

During these meetings with "foreigners," which were considered a grave offense if not "supervised" by the secret police, Gellu always informed me at the last minute (I then lived nearby in a small room in the same building, situated on the self-same floor). Looking back on this interlacing of the past today, I would say that these occasions (which despite everything were fairly rare) when I could see in the flesh and blood and speak with poets, human beings from the "other side," presented themselves to me like a subtle mélange of extremism and discretion. Actually, extremism and discretion, at Gellu's, were one and the same thing. On the one hand, he was much more extremist than us youths, and on the other hand, he was a living example of the sense of measure.

Why then wish to leave a supposed "world center" where I was living, for another "center," imagined and far away? "Sacrifice the substance for the shadow!" had been Breton's watchword. In my case you might say the substance was only a sham, but many of us were as if "blinded" by the interior brilliance (read "purity") of Gellu and Lyggia, to the point of effortlessly ignoring the sordid aspects of daily life. Moreover, Gellu sometimes warned us about the difficulties of life in Paris, which he had known himself, but never to dissuade us. Most often this resulted in producing the opposite effect, inciting us to leave, at least in my case.

No truth was accepted by Gellu Naum as being forever settled. All should pass through the fire and be put to the test; we were witnesses to the step-by-step invention of a true experimental method. The

tests, the inventions, the experiments, everything had the appearance and captivating force of a game. We played ceaselessly upon arrival at rue Vasile in Bucharest or at Comana. Sometimes we played in Gigi Rasovsky's studio or in my room where three or four people could hardly fit in, and only with the greatest discomfort. In brief, we played in twos, threes, or fours, writing "exquisite corpses" or sometimes drawing with the same "method." The antinomy between the "serious" and the "unserious" was certainly easier to surpass than that between dream and action, between reason and madness, or between the high and the low. As for the antinomy between past and future, we were surely too young to envisage its surpassing, even if the paradigmatic figure of Gellu came to help those who would be at risk in a such an undertaking.

When I met him, Gellu was just emerging from a severe depression. The doctors had formally prohibited him from continuing his translation work, which he had pursued for many years without respite. From the early years of communism he had chosen this extremely modest, austere, and dignified means of living, unlike many of his writer "colleagues," ready to accept every kind of compromise with the dictatorship in exchange for the slightest material advantage, while others sought refuge in a pseudo-bohemian existence, which was just a more or less slow means of suicide. Without repudiating the meaning of his left political choices, he hoped to exorcise the revolutionary temptations he'd felt just out of adolescence. Gellu was persuaded, and he said this sufficiently loudly and strongly for those who wished to listen, that the moment had come to "turn the page." 1968 brought the news of the auto-dissolution of the Parisian Surrealist Group, but seen from Bucharest there remained much to do and not only down there, in the "center of the world," so that *the fish* would again be *soluble*.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

# Gellu Naum
# from Both Sides of the Iron Curtain:
# An interview with Valery Oisteanu
# by Paul McRandle

As a young man in Bucharest in the mid-1960s, Valery Oisteanu came to poetry in rejection of the reigning Proletkult mold for a freer, jazz-inspired verse. Although this earned him the condemnation of the official literary hierarchy, it gained his acceptance into Gellu Naum's circle of artists and writers. Oisteanu met Naum just as he'd started once more to publish surrealist poetry, for despite his debut in the brilliant early years of Romanian surrealism, what little Naum published in the 1950s and much of the 1960s hewed strictly to the Communist program. These new works and his example inspired a generation of dissident writers who would come to spread his writing across Europe and America.

PM: You first met Gellu Naum in the late 1960s. Were you familiar with his work beforehand?

VO: I was enthralled with the French surrealists and in Romania there were several surviving surrealists from the '30s and the '40s in Bucharest — Stefan Roll, Sasha Pana, the painter Jules Perahim, Virgil Teodorescu, all members of the surrealist group that was led by Gellu Naum. But I didn't know any of them personally. I'd only been in the poetry scene at that time for four or five years — I was quite a newcomer. But because I was published and criticized on almost a weekly basis by the literary magazines — who accused me of being a surrealist — I was even more attracted to them.

It just so happens that one of my close friends at that time, also met Gellu Naum. His name is Sebastian Reichmann and he later became the head of the Gellu Naum Foundation, so he was an important person in Gellu Naum's life.

He introduced me to Gellu, but unfortunately Gellu took the position that I should not call myself a surrealist. So we disagreed from the get-go. I didn't understand his logic at that time, but what he was saying was that since Breton died, no one else had the power of designating new surrealists — only the surrealists that were designated and/or approved by Breton before his death in 1966 were the "official "surrealists. The rest of us are just self-proclaimed surrealists.

This conflict spilled over into my friendship with Sebastian Reichmann and other poets who took the same position. I was the only one who insisted that there are such things as surrealists in our time and that I was one of them. After I realized that that conflict was a barrier between Gellu and me, I dropped the subject and accepted his position point-blank whenever in his company.

PM: And this was about the time he began to publish some new collections?

VO: In 1967 he'd just began to publish his surrealist poems again with *Athanor* (a poetry collection), meaning the furnace used by alchemists, then *Animal Tree*, and *The Description of the Tower*. Knowing him personally, we were able to borrow these texts and then copied them on a hand-cranked machine to be passed out secretly from hand to hand.

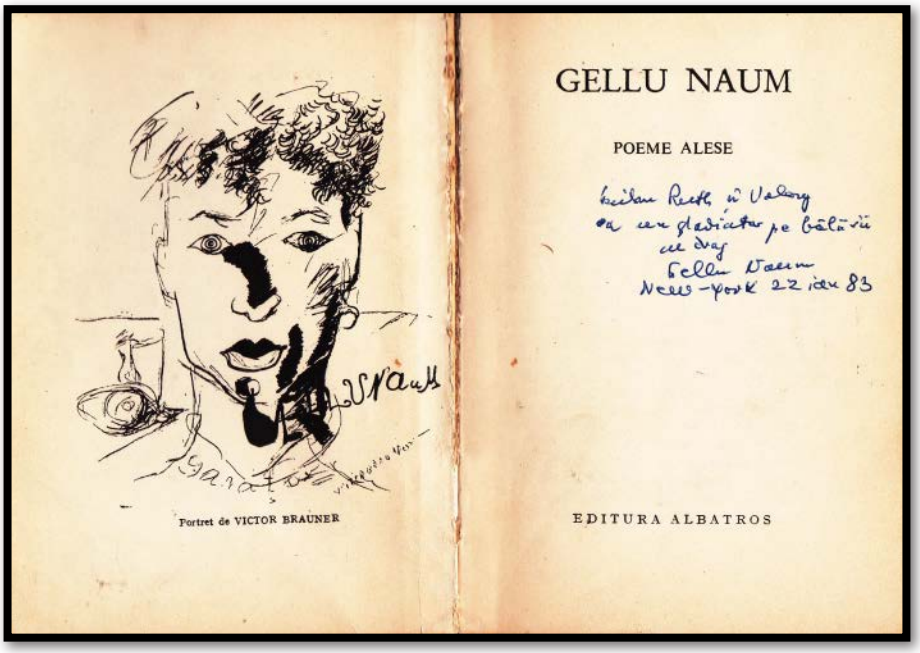
PM: So this is also getting close to the time in the early 1970s when you left Romania.

VO: Right, the end of the sixties and the start of the seventies was a very important period for me. In 1970 I published my first book, *Prosthesis*, all 66 poems in the surrealist vein. Basically I was trying to describe metaphorically how the Communist propaganda and social realism imposed on us was brainwashing and introducing false ideas. I wanted to write in a style that was much more free and open to rock-and-roll music, jazz, and improvisation, and not chained by the academic and literary restrictions of Proletkultism.

PM: And when you, Sebastian, and others left Romania, you brought Gellu Naum's work to the West?

VO: The first one from our group to escape to the West was Oskar Pastior in 1968. He was an older poet and the only thing he took in his meager luggage while escaping from Romania to Germany via Austria was a book by Gellu Naum and several manuscripts by me and by Sebastian Reichmann. He wrote an article in the German journal *Literatur und Kritik* pointing out Gellu Naum's activity in Romania, along with several younger poets following in his footsteps toward present-day surrealism. He was the first to translate into German Gellu Naum's poems as well as my own. I was very proud to appear next to Gellu Naum in a very prestigious literary magazine.

I was the second person from our group to escape from Romania and Sebastian Reichmann was the third. As soon as we had gained new language skills, we began to translate Naum's work into English and French.




PM: Could you say something about the way he lived?

VO: Gellu lived in a very small apartment in Bucharest and to escape its confines he bought a small property outside Bucharest in the country. It was a very nice country house, which he extended with a writing room overlooking a lake, a beautiful little studio. So we all had a place where we could escape from Bucharest and meet around "the master" and discuss things that we were afraid to discuss in Bucharest because all of the rooms, the telephones, and private apartments were bugged. We knew about that. We weren't necessarily talking about politics, but about experimentation, about poetry outside of the official line. We didn't like the idea that someone was listening to our conversations. My friends, musicians and artists, would gather around Gellu Naum in the country for privacy, beginning in the late sixties.

Shortly after I escaped, Sebastian Reichmann left for Israel, then for France. And we were in correspondence with Gellu but through a third party. I couldn't just write to him because my letters would have been copied and censored by the secret police in Romania. But my wife visited Romania as an American tourist and went to see my family in 1973 and 1974, bringing letters and little magazines and books with her. They would find their way into the group around Naum.

PM: You've mentioned that when you did return on a visit, he respected the way you'd left.

VO: He was very impressed that I decided to go to the United States without knowing the language, without knowing anybody there. And also the way I did it. I did not claim political asylum; I did not claim that I escaped as a political refugee. I simply declared that I'd fallen in love with an American woman and was going to marry her. And in 1973 we got married. That true story somehow also saved my family from being persecuted by the secret police. Meanwhile, my brother Andrei Oisteanu and my cousin Anca Oroveanu became friends with Gellu and Lyggia and part of the inner circle. I kept in touch with Gellu through them.
PM: Now by the 1980s, even though his career had improved, things had grown much worse in Romania. What was happening?

VO: Yes, he was appreciated and the literary critics gave him very good reviews for his books. He started publishing more and more. He started writing plays and his plays were staged, first in the provinces then in Bucharest, with critical acclaim. But life in Romania became more difficult strictly on a material level. They had no access to Western products; no access to Western technology; no access to food that was produced outside of the country. Nothing was imported; nothing was allowed to come through the gates of Communist hell.

PM: But Gellu Naum could travel?

VO: Yes, he was allowed to travel. He travelled to Yugoslavia for poetry readings and literary events. Then he got a nomination for a prize in Africa, in Kinshasa. He eventually traveled there for the awards ceremony.

He was allowed to travel because he was very "clean." He was a member of the writer's union; he was a member of the Communist Party. He was a person who respected all the laws and all of the idiosyncrasies of the politics of that time. So he never had problems with being on the blacklist or being forbidden by the Communist regime, except that they restricted him to very small editions of his works, so small that you couldn't find any of his books in the libraries, bookstores, or anywhere. You could only get his books if you knew him or knew somebody at the Romanian Academy Library.
PM: Even if he wasn't challenging the regime, he was conducting some very interesting experiments.

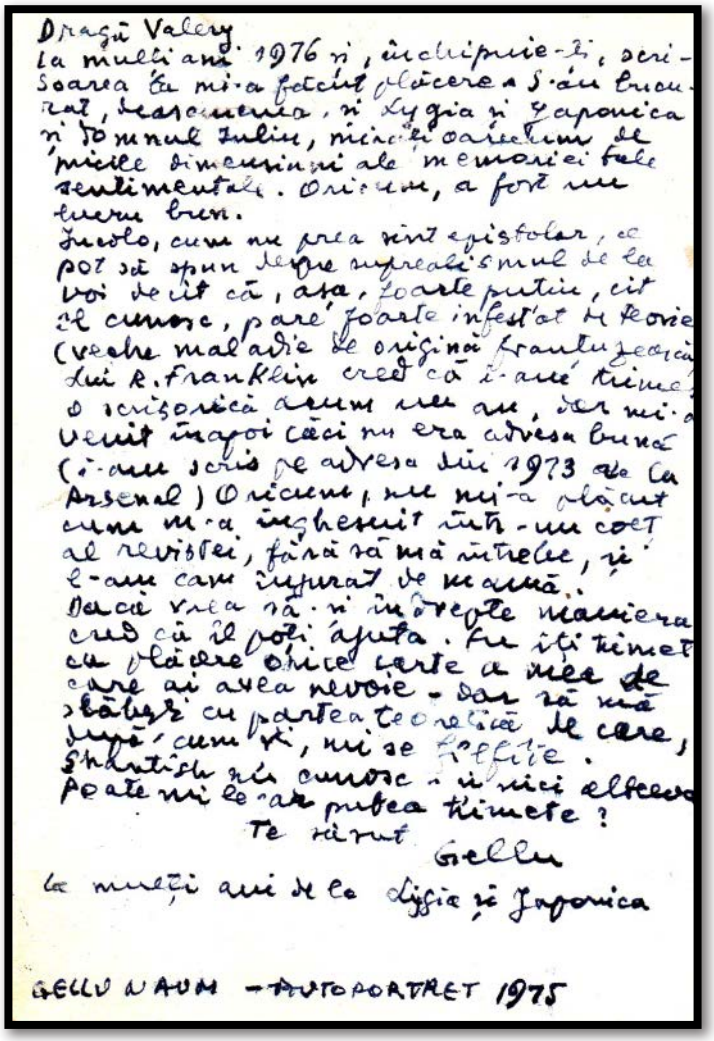
VO: Yes, he was experimenting with poetry in more ways than one. First he invented collage poems in which he used elements from old advertising catalogues—shoes, hats, corsets, rubber medical implements. The poems looked just like a page from a catalogue, but underneath each product in that bizarre catalogue would be a little haiku. And if you put them together, it was actually a ten-page poem called "The Advantage of the Vertebra." That was my favorite poem. It was one of the first that I translated (partially) here in the United States in a magazine called *Dream Helmet* (New Jersey: Somniloquist Press, 1978).

PM: And that was the work that he threatened to kill himself over if it wasn't published, wasn't it?

VO: There is a folkloric story that when censors refused to put this poem inside his volume Gellu threatened the editor that he would commit suicide. Actually, he was found walking on train tracks in the direction of the station. Nobody knew why, but everyone assumed that it was because the censor hadn't approved the collage poems. Eventually they allowed him to self publish a small edition of 150 copies of the book *The Description of the Tower* (Bucherest: Litera Press, 1975) with the collage poems included. But 150 was such a small edition that I am happy to have one of them, signed by him — it's a rare, rare book.

Other experiments he did were blind painting and blind poetry in which he would put a blindfold on himself and his wife, Lyggia Naum. Together they would lock themselves in a dark room and she would create so-called blind drawings and he would create blind poems. Beautiful drawings and poems came out of those experiments. Some of the surrealists did dream writing with eyes closed, either asleep or in that transition between sleep and reality, but this was pushing it even further.

Other experiments involved deprivation techniques: deprivation of speech, of sleep, of food. After not sleeping for five, six, seven days, he would get into a state of trance that can only be described in poetry or in drawings. I'm still trying to identify the poems that were written under those conditions. So his experiments are quite unbelievable.



Dragă Valery
La mulți ani! 1976 și, închipuie-ți, scri-
soarea ta mi-a făcut plăcere a s-ău bucu-
rat, Descoureca, și Ligia și Japonica
și Domnul Julin, mirați și ademeniți de
mirile dimensiuni ale memoriei tale
sentimentale. Oricum, a fost un
lucru bun.
Iacob, cum nu prea sînt epistolar, ce
pot să spun despre supreali'smul de la
voi de cît că, așa, foarte puțin, cît
îl cunosc, pare foarte infestat de teorie
(veche maladie de origină franțuzească
Lui R. Franklin creț că i-am trimes
o scrișorică acum un an, dar mi-a
venit înapoi căci nu era adresa bună
(i-am scris pe adresa din 1973 de la
Arsenal) Oricum, nu mi-a plăcut
cum m-a îngheșuit într-un colț
al revistei, fără să mă întrebe, și
l-am cam înjurat de mamă.
Dacă vrea să-și îndreagte maniera
cred că îl poți ajuta. Eu îți trimet
cu plăcere orice carte a mea de
care ai avea nevoie - dar să nu
stăruești cu partea teoretică de care,
după cum știi, mi se feftie.
Shakespeare nu cunosc - și nici altceva
Poate mi le-ai putea trimete?
Te sărut
Gellu
La mulți ani de la Ligia și Japonica

GELLU NAUM - AUTOPORTRET 1975

PM: Which would you consider to be his most important works in English?

VO: I would say the most important is the poem *My Tired Father*, which he called a "pohem," a joking pun on the word poem. It's sort of an autobiographical collage of his remembrances, but not much about his father, who died in 1917 fighting against the Germans, in World War I, in a famous battle won by the Romanian Army at Mărășești.

It's very interesting. He demonstrates a spirit of surrealism that is very fresh and it influenced Romanian poets as well as American poets in its English translation.

It's very strange that Gellu Naum has more impact on Americans than on English writers. He gelled with Americans because he was very close to American jazz. He listened to Miles Davis while writing poetry in Romanian. He felt close to American music and literature and jazz and not so much towards English works.

Another book, *Athanor*, was translated by a young poet, Chris Tanasescu-Margento, and Martin Woodside, but I wasn't very happy with their translation. Nevertheless, it's hard to destroy Gellu Naum's penchant for surrealism and his imagery. It's very hard to distort Gellu's genius. Although I disagree with parts of this translation, it is worth reading and has had an impact on many writers.

The third book, *Zenobia*, translated by James Brook and Sasha Vlad, is a work of autobiographical fiction concerning his wife and their incredible love story. They really believed they were soul mates. She changed her name, adding a "g" for Gellu, so that after marriage she was known as Lygia. And Gellu added an "l" for Lygia. They were just love-birds. They took care of each other, they nursed each other, and they inspired each other. She edited and typed his poetry; she participated in all of the experiments; and Penelope Rosemont, in her book on international women surrealists, included Lygia as one of the most important woman surrealists of Romania.

PM: Who were the Oneiric writers in the late 1960s and what was their relation to the surrealists?

VO: In 1969 the poet Leonid Dimov published a book describing reality as dreams. This was a different kind of literature, neither Social

Realism nor written in the vein of the Communist Party, and it spawned the movement of Aesthetic Onirism. This new generation of poets contemplated reality as dream, under the influence of older poets including Tristan Tzara, Gellu Naum, Stefan Roll, Constantin Nisipeanu and others. Now this new generation, including myself, Mazilescu, Tzepeneag, Ivaceanu, and other young poets, were for the first time coming outside of the self-publishing, samizdat situation. They were not in a vacuum, but they were in the process of opposing the governmental literature. And of course the magazines and newspapers ruled by Communists were criticizing them and trying to diminish them. The more they were criticized, the more that movement expanded and became popular.

This was a form of cultural dissidence. We didn't have social protest, but we had literary dissidence through poets, writers, and artists that were expressing themselves against the established norms of the Communist regime. Gellu Naum played one of the most important roles by giving them inspiration and an understanding of his research and experimentation into the realm of dreams. That gave me the courage to publish my first book, *Prosthesis* (Littera, Bucharest, 1970).

The head of the Oneiric group, Dumitru Țepeneag, also left Romania for Paris and they actually took away his citizenship. He could not come back to Romania. He was exiled in an official way and I was exiled in an unofficial way.
PM: Was there any real difference between Oneirism and Surrealism? Was there an Oneiric manifesto?

VO: Yes, they had an aesthetic manifesto, which they published in Romania. It was tolerated because it didn't have an overt political agenda, it had only an aesthetic agenda. So Oneirism and Surrealism were parallel movements with parallel manifestoes and ideologies, but they were both part of a literary dissidence.

PM: How did Gellu Naum's visit to New York come about?

VO: After 1972 I couldn't go back to Romania for over five years because I escaped sort of unofficially and in Communist terms illegally. I had to legalize my status by renouncing my Romanian citizenship and applying for American citizenship, which I got in 1977. So between '72 and '77 I would send my poems and essays to Romania, but they were rarely published and only circulated underground. In '77 I started visiting my family and I reconnected with the Oneiric and Surrealist poets, among them my mentor Gellu Naum. I visited him in his little apartment in Bucharest and his summerhouse outside the city.

In 1983, Gellu Naum paid a surprise visit to New York. He was visiting an old cousin in West Virginia and then came with Lygia to New York City, staying with me approximately two weeks. That was a historical visit, in which my friends and the "members" (it is an informal participation) of my little surrealist group in New York, the Poets and Artists Surrealist Society (PASS), had the pleasure of organizing several evenings with him. One of them was a poetry reading in which myself, Ira Cohen, the sitar player Ljuba Ristic, and Gellu read poetry with musical accompaniment. I still have the original recordings.

After his visit, his work appeared in translations in magazines like *The Matter*, *Voyeur*, *Cover Magazine*, *The Flu*, and *Dream Helmet*. Almost everyone who participated wrote poems to him. It was an absolutely marvelous meeting, with an intensity that's very rare in the poetry world.

PM: You mentioned that he came across a painting at MOMA by his old friend Victor Brauner, which had an impact on him.

VO: Yes, he paused for a long time in front of his friend's painting known as *The Surrealist* or *The Alchemist*. Actually the painting looks very much like The Magician from the Tarot. He was so taken to see this painting again that he decided to use it as the cover for one of his books. It appeared on the French reissue of *Zenobia*.

PM: Do you think he identified with the role of the alchemist?

VO: Yes, he did. We all consider him an alchemist of words. Remember, the alchemists were looking for the secret of eternal youth and eternal life, for the philosopher's stone, and how to turn lead into gold. Gellu partook in the same sort of attitude in his writing, in his experimentations, and in the surreal laboratory that he conducted in his summerhouse. In his studio, with its collection of strange, antique objects and statues from Africa, he was looking for the secret of turning common words, common sentences, and common language into gold, into poetry. At first glance, his poetry is very simple. With the hands of a magician he turned simple words and expressions from daily activities into absurd comedy. He gave them meanings that before him we had never observed.

PM: What became of PASS?

VO: PASS still exists. It's a very loose society. We have a reunion once a year on the 26th or 27th of September in which we give a reading at the Sidewalk Café in the East Village as part of the global movement, 100,000 Poets for Change. I invite 20 poets to create a new work for this event called "Jazzoetry" or sometimes "Dream Traveller."

From time to time we edit a magazine and hold meetings with new people that we invite into our loose organization of mail activity. We send each other books; we organize events.

What is different between us and the old surrealists is that we introduced an element of contemporary music in our performances. That's why we call it Jazzoetry — in which poetry is married to Jazz.

PM: Gellu Naum's complete works were published recently in Romania. What impact did that have?

VO: Thanks to the tireless effort of a beautiful poet, Simona Popescu, the four volumes of his complete *opera magna* are now in print. Because I'm not there I can't personally gauge the impact, but I've seen more and more theaters performing and adapting Gellu Naum in their repertoire. During his lifetime only three or four plays were staged out of the entire body of his theater work. But the fact that they were finally gathered in a volume created a blueprint for theaters throughout Romania. For his centenary they adapted *Zenobia*, which is quite remarkable.

His translations in French, in German, in English have had an impact all over the world. He's known in what was Zaire and is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he's known in Paris, he's known in Berlin, he's known in Prague. His work has had an impact on poets, artists, and readers all over Europe and I would say even all over the world.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Simona Popescu

# Lovitura aceea între umeri și gît[1]

## *Cum, cine, ce...*

„Cum l-ați cunoscut pe Gellu Naum?", mă întreabă acum cîteva luni o doamnă de la TV. Și întrebarea mă ia prin surprindere, ca de obicei, deși, evident, n-ar trebui. E nevoie de un răspuns scurt, nu e timp pentru povești, pentru detalii. „L-am cunoscut de mai multe ori", spun, după o mică ezitare.

„Cine e Gellu Naum pentru dumneavoastră?" mă întreabă de la radio. „Lovitura aceea dintre umeri și gît". Dar asta nu e pentru radio. „O parte din imaginarul meu". „Ești un imaginar", strigă într-o poezie (într-un vis) „o fată cu o păpușă de cârpe în brațe", „prietenă de multă vreme". „închipuiți-vă gestul ei narativ". Ori eu nu-mi pot permite gesturi narative la radio. Și-apoi, gesturile narative au nevoie de atîtea alte gesturi... La radio spui doar că este un scriitor pe care te bucuri că ai avut norocul să-l cunoști.

„Ce pierde un cititor care nu citește Naum?", mă întreabă de la gazetă. „Pierde legătura cu un poet important, pentru care poezia era un mod de viață", răspund. Și mă întreb oare ce înseamnă pentru alții

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[1] „Lovitura aceea între umeri şi gît" este un vers dintr-o poezie a lui Gellu Naum şi trimite la una dintre practicile spirituale (de „trezire") ale zen-ului. Învăţătorul, având un *kyosaku* (baston de bambus cu un capăt plat), aplică discipolilor adormiţi o lovitură peste umeri, ca să-i trezească.

„poezia ca mod de viață”? După suprarealiști, au spus-o atîția, care nu au nici o treabă cu adevărata semnificație. „Pentru mine, omul e literatura lui...”, declara Herta Müller, referindu-se la Gellu Naum, într-un interviu din 2005. Descoperisem asta în 1987, cînd l-am cunoscut. Indiferent cum ai pune accentul, omul e literatura lui. (OMUL e literatura lui ! Omul e LITERATURA lui). În ambele sensuri, exact în același timp !

„Ce-ați învățat de la Gellu Naum?”, mă întreabă cineva. Am încercat să deprind „cadrul retragerii în adânc/ acel mod de a trăi și așa mai departe” (ca să mă exprim cu ajutorul unor versuri de-ale lui). Am descoperit că atenția pentru „lucrurile cele mai obișnuite și mai ușor de trecut cu vederea” devin „puncte de miră ale unei limpeziri (acesta e un fel de a vorbi) pe cât de vastă pe atât de greu de suportat”. Am aflat multe despre unele lucruri *„etrap o ep emilbus”*. Am învățat niște semne. La propriu. Niște mici gesturi, ca să mă apăr. Le folosesc, chiar dacă nu sînt sigură că ajută la ceva. Am avut revelația forței pe care ți-o poate da renunțarea. Am încercat să iau în serios anumite detalii (inclusiv unele din vis), care funcționează ca niște „certitudini eruptive”. Să prețuiesc acel „misticism” pe care l-aș fi lăsat acolo unde credeam că îi e locul, în copilăria mea, puternic marcată de... suprarealism (ce știam eu ?). Am realizat cît e de important (el spune necesar) „să ținem seama de tot ce am rostit numai în treacăt în lunga noastră viață în plus va trebui să ne gândim la tot ce am uitat restituind astfel strălucitoarea tăcere care se cuvine” („și fiecare dintre noi lovindu-se de duritatea propriului său ochi se va trezi atunci la vârsta unei poetice dimensiuni indiferente care se anulează de la sine”). Nu în ultimul rînd, mă folosesc, la rîndul meu, de avantajul discursului dezarticulării (fără să uit o clipă de „avantajul vertebrelor”).

„Dar de la Lygia Naum?” Refuzul falsei conștiințe. Dialectica toleranței și a radicalismului. Să arăt ce gîndesc, oricare ar fi consecințele. Ea avea o vorbă: „Să nu dai oase la cîiini”. Să nu dau oase la cîini! Dacă mă apuc de un lucru, să-l fac bine pînă la capăt, fără

grabă, ca în povestea cu indienii. Care e povestea cu indienii? Cică erau niște misionari  însoțiți de niște călăuze, indieni. Călăuzele se opreau din cînd în cînd și stăteau așa, liniștiți, cu ochii în zare. „De ce stați, ați obosit?", au întrebat misionarii. „Nu, așteptăm să ne ajungă din urmă și sufletele noastre", au răspuns călăuzele. Să fac lucrurile fără grabă, cu suflet. Să aștept, dacă e nevoie. Nu e (doar) odihnă, așteptarea.

„Ce ți-a adus întîlnirea cu Gellu și Lygia Naum?" Deprinderea unui anumit tip de experiență de viață. Și prieteni, unii necunoscuți. Ultima dată, pe un site, *Lola Dream Factory*, o fată scrie că îi plac „bucuria, Alice și micul Prinț, domnul Gellu, Simona, Le Facteur Cheval, Il Postino, Anais, Aguda — plaja din gînd". Descopăr acolo și o fotografie din tinerețe a lui Gellu Naum într-o barcă. Nu știu de unde a luat-o. Eu n-am văzut-o niciodată. Studenților mei le vorbesc adesea despre Le Facteur Cheval. Să-mi fi fost, fata studentă? Fata trăiește undeva în străinătate. Cine o fi fata? E prietena mea.

„Ce e suprarealismul?" „Cine e Gellu Naum?" Mi-aduc aminte că mi-a povestit el odată cum a fost întrebat în Germania de un ziarist foarte grăbit ce e suprarealismul. Și -atunci, spre stupoarea jurnalistului, s-a ridicat de pe scaun, și-a luat rămas bun și-a plecat, nu înainte de a adăuga că e vorba despre viața lui. Dacă e grabă, mai bine rămîne pe altădată... Îmi vine și mie, uneori, să fac stînga-mprejur (sau dreapta-mprejur)... Ce-aș putea spune la radio, la tv., la gazetă despre suprarealism și despre Gellu Naum? Îmi vine greu și să țin curs despre el la Facultatea de Litere. Ce poți face într-o oră, două, într-un cadru — oricît de liber — totuși universitar? Să sistematizez ? Să spun ce poate spune oricine, din cărți „de specialitate"? Deși, cînd te gîndești ce înțelege cîte unul de capul lui... *Zenobia*? Se apucă să povestească ceva despre „un cuplu care stă într-o mlaștină și ea poartă rochii din plastic găurit" (cum mi-a spus odată cineva, apoi altcineva)! Iar la examen, ce să ceri? Poate cîteva pagini personale, de jurnal, după modelul *Tatăl meu obosit*... Jurnal lacunar!

Citesc toată poezia lui Naum (și, în general, poezia poeților care mă interesează) ca pe un jurnal lacunar!

Studenta mea, Ilinca, de la anul doi, la care țin anul ăsta cursul despre avangardă, îmi dă niște pagini minunate din jurnalul ei lacunar avînd ca model *Tatăl meu obosit*. Să adaug că Ilinca poartă mereu cu ea două ceasuri (am obsevat asta într-o zi, la un curs)!

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„Ce să le zic puștilor despre poezia lui Naum?", mă întreabă N., care e profesor. „Nu știu, vorbește-le despre *Nasturii de aur cusuți peste tricou*", sugerez. Asta e o excelentă emblemă a amestecului pe care îl face între sacru (să-i zicem așa) și cotidian. Unde mai pui că puștii o să înțeleagă la fix, li se potrivește și ca imagine: un tricou pe care sînt cusuți nasturi de aur! *Cool*!

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„Am făcut o poezie din tinerețea lui la clasă. Nu au înțeles nimic", îmi mărturisește tînărul profesor din orașul C. Cum poți înțelege un poet printr-o poezie? Mai bine le-ar fi spus ceva chiar despre Gellu Naum. O poveste. Și-apoi citite mai multe poezii, nu doar din stricta tinerețe. Căci există și o tinerețe fără bătrînețe — și-o viață fără de moarte — despre asta e vorba, de fapt, în toată poezia lui Naum. Ce-ar fi ca el să-și înceapă ora chiar de aici?

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Suprarealismul nu aparține doar suprarealiștilor — sau, vorba lui Gellu Naum, „așa-zișilor suprarealiști". Suprarealiștii îl identifică în felul lor, au metoda lor (bazată pe simțuri). Altfel, „fiecare crede că numai el știe lucrul acela pe care îl știu foarte bine și alții".

Suprarealismul — ca și poezia despre care Gellu Naum spunea că e „două lucruri" — e de două feluri. Cel al vorbelor, uneori poetice, și cel al faptelor poetice. Și primul poate fi cîteodată interesant. Pe urma lui vin cei care scriu despre metafora suprarealistă, imaginea suprarealistă, imaginarul suprarealist și așa mai departe, se pot face teze de doctorat, studii despre suprarealismul de limbaj, imagistic,

literar, vizual (uneori doar retinal), artistic. Se pot scrie poezii, literatură (bună, mediocră sau proastă de-a dreptul). Există însă, cum spuneam, și un suprarealism al faptelor, al întîmplărilor poetice[2] care țin, paradoxal, de o zonă obiectivă — nu pot fi controlate, nu pot fi declanșate rațional, nu sînt deliberate (de aceea se și vorbește de „hazard obiectiv"). Despre ele nu poate vorbi oricine, nu se poate vorbi oricum. Suprarealismul, înainte de orice altceva, înseamnă, cu o expresie a lui Gellu Naum „să ți se-ntîmple niște lucruri". Restul e ... literatură.

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Cîndva, am încercat să-i iau un interviu lui Sarane Alexandrian, care scrisese o carte despre Victor Brauner. L-am întrebat ce înseamnă suprarealismul pentru el. Nu știa cine sînt, o fi zis că-s vreo ziaristă din acelea care bifeză evenimente trimisă de gazetă. Îmi vorbea ca din carte. Citisem deja prin volume „de resort" ce auzeam. L-am întrebat ce e suprarealismul NUMAI pentru el, dacă îmi poate spune ceva *foarte* personal. S-a uitat fix în ochii mei și mi-a povestit o întîmplare cu o pasăre care a intrat în camera în care stătea exact cînd a aflat de moartea lui Victor Brauner  Apoi, în 2001, la o lună sau două de la plecarea lui Alexandrian, se stingea din viață Gellu Naum. Cînd am primit un telefon, o vrabie a intrat pe balconul cu ferestre mai mult închise decît întredeschise. Apoi, la ceva vreme,  au urmat o serie de întîmplări legate de el și de Sarane Alexandrian, la Paris (am scris despre toate astea în *Clava*).

P.S. Nu demult, dau de un vers ignorat atîta vreme: „s-a întâmplat ceva interesant cu o pasăre la fereastră într-o lume umedă".

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[2] Fapte sînt în *Nadja* sau în *Le paysan de Paris* sau în textele lui Artaud, Daumal, ca să dau doar cîteva exemple. Fapte sînt și cele care țin de "imaginația activă" (împrumut aici expresia lui Jung) sau de acțiunea „interior-exterioară" (parafrazîndu-l pe Gellu Naum).

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Nu vorbesc cu oricine despre Gellu Naum. Acum cîțiva ani stăteam într-un autobuz cu un amic. Ne povesteam unul altuia — eliberați de convenții și de inconturnabilele mecanisme de apărare — întîmplări bizare din viața noastră. După poveștile lui bizare, i-am spus și eu întîmplarea cu vrabia care a intrat în balconul meu înainte să primesc telefon că s-a stins din viață Gellu Naum (și ea legată de povestea lui Sarane Alexandrian cu Brauner, altfel n-aș fi dat nici o atenție, probabil). Ei, și cum spuneam eu asta, chiar atunci s-a întîmplat să trecem pe lîngă o stîncă pe care am văzut amîndoi, scrise mare de tot, literele G și N. Nu am am văzut siglele cu Gaz Natural pînă acum pe o stîncă! Și scrise cu ditamai literele de-o șchioapă! După cîteva luni, am citit relatarea făcută de amic în jurnalul pe care și l-a publicat. Juca rolul raționalului, mă taxa pentru coincindența cu literele de-o șchioapă de parcă aș fi declanșat-o eu, de parcă mă făceam vinovată pentru asta eu, definitiv înghițită, vai!, de iraționalul suprarealist! Ce să-i răspund? Realitatea era de vină, amice! De atunci mi-am spus să nu mai vorbesc cu oricine despre unele și altele... Nu merită. A se oculta (vorba lui André Breton)!

## *L-am cunoscut de mai multe ori pe Gellu Naum*

*Literatura, omul...*

Așadar, l-am (re)cunoscut de mai multe ori pe Gellu Naum din toamna lui 1987 pînă acum, în 2011. Din 2001, doar prin recitire. Se tot leagă lucrurile, continuă să... cristalizeze. Mi-au rămas amintirile legate de el, cărțile lui, dar mai ales acel secret care face ca ele să fie mai mult decît niște cărți de hîrtie, iar amintirile mai mult decît trecut. Dar s-o iau cu începutul, chiar dacă am mai vorbit despre asta.

Era în 1987, terminam Facultatea de litere și trebuia să-mi iau un subiect pentru lucrarea de diplomă. L-am ales coordonator pe profesorul Paul Cornea, mi se părea cel mai deschis ca mod de a privi literatura. Ar fi putut accepta chiar și un subiect despre

postmodernism, la o adică — pe vremea aia mă interesa mult, era ceva nou și doar simpla rostire a cuvîntului îi deranja teribil pe toți proștii („proștii inteligenți", cum ar spune Gellu Naum) — ceea ce îmi dădea o mare satisfacție! M-am oprit, totuși, la avangardă — avangarda era un fel de postmodernism al interbelicului, gîndeam. Printr-o întîmplare, domnul Cornea conducea pe-atunci o colecție la Editura Albatros, *Introducere în opera lui...* (erau niște cărți micuțe, albe, foarte prietenoase) și ar fi vrut să mă ajute să public, de pildă lucrarea de diplomă. Ce șansă ! Tema putea fi o problemă. Cît de „pasabilă" (plasabilă) putea fi în 1987 o carte despre un avangardist? Poate un avangardist... mort, mi-a sugerat el. M-am dus acasă și, în timp ce citeam eu niște pagini de unul, altul (morți!), am luat o decizie care m-a scos din toate frămîntările: să scriu despre un avangardist viu. Punct. Și așa l-am ales pe cel mai viu dintre avangardiști: Gellu Naum. Nu aveam să mai am parte de carte pe chestia asta. Pierdeam... totul - pe timpurile acelea, o carte apărută, în condițiile de cenzură „multilateral dezvoltată", era ceva aproape neverosimil. Am avut parte, în schimb, de Gellu și Lygia Naum... Aveau să însemne mult pentru mine.

Nu știam mare lucru despre suprarealism și nici despre Gellu Naum cînd am început să scriu pentru lucrarea mea studențească, așa că am tot căutat cărți lămuritoare prin biblioteci publice și private, am găsit mult prea puțin. Aproape regretam că nu-mi luasem un subiect mai frecventat sau măcar ceva despre postmodernism. Ce dacă nu aveam bibliografie? Nici pentru Naum nu aveam bibliografie. Nu exista nici o carte despre el, cîteva pagini ici, colo, în contextul avangardismului interbelic. Ca și cum de atunci nu s-ar mai fi întîmplat nimic nou. Am scris despre Gellu Naum cu sentimentul că îl salvez de niște clișee care circulau, de prizonieratul în ceva istoricizat, „suprarealismul istoric" (în plus — sau în minus — românesc) în care fusese înghețat. Îl aduceam pe Gellu Naum spre postmodernism, îl făceam contemporanul meu, vorbeam despre ironia poeziei lui și despre poezia cotidianului (care e și suprarealist!)... I-am arătat lucrarea lui Croh (Ovid. S. Crohmălniceanu) pe care îl știam de la cenaclul

*Junimea* (era printre puținii adevărați cunoscători ai avangardei). Mi-a spus că i se pare interesant cum îl aduc pe Naum spre zilele noastre, că ar merita să public ce-am scris.

Apoi l-amel întîlnit pe Gellu Naum însuși. „Atunci am primit lovitura aceea între umeri și gît" (cum spune  într-un poem). Cărțile despre suprarealism au pălit. Imediat după '90, îmi propunea cineva să public ce-am scris despre Naum (se adunaseră peste 100 de pagini). Era ceva și pe vremea aia să ai o carte, aș fi putut debuta ca eseistă (critic literar?). Nu am vrut. Îl cunoscusem pe Naum. O carte despre Gellu Naum fără Gellu Naum? Și omul era literatura lui!

### *Lygia Naum, Gellu Naum și Pădurea cu Sens(uri)*

I-am cunoscut pe Lygia si Gellu Naum cînd aveau peste 70 de ani. Priviți împreună erau ca niște adolescenți. Aveau secretele lor, limbajul lor, semnele lor incomprehensibile, sistemul lor poetic de orientare în lume care-i fascina chiar si pe cei care nu pricepeau nimic, de fapt. Se entuziasmau ca niște adolescenți și cînd se supărau o făceau serios, cu un fel de pasiune justițiară, care îi făcea să și greșească uneori. Dar mai ales aveau acea credință, pe care o au toți adolescenții, că destinul lor e dincolo de viață și de moarte și că asta are o confirmare zilnică, prin micile întîmplări atît de importante. Poate ca acest «adolescentinism» intens și luminos îi facea să fie înconjurați de atîția oameni tineri. În ultimele luni de viață, doamna Lygia mă uimea cu muzica pe care o asculta, cu filmele pe care le «vedea» (cu «povestaș» alături, căci era aproape oarbă) și pe care le primea de la junii ei prieteni. Îmi amintesc cum mi-a descris două cadre dintr-un documentar despre «Cirque du Soleil»: unul în care cineva arunca în față un cerc, care se întorcea la el; altul în care unii făceau niște mișcări leeente, leeente într-un spectacol plin, altfel, de agitați. Ei îii plăcuse ă sta cu cercul lui. Așadar, tot ce trimiți cu elan înainte, vine înapoi la tine — mai sînt și liniștiții pe lume, își văd de arta lor, de a trimite în lume lucruri, care să se-ntoarcă. Ultimul film pe care l-am imprumutat de la ea a ramas la mine, n-am mai avut cînd să i-l dau înapoi. Era un film despre un băiețel cu cap

rotund care se naște într-o lume de «capete ascuțite», OBLIO. Alungat de cei «neasemănători» lui în Pădurea fără Sens, Oblio descopera că lucrurile, pe lume, sînt altfel decît par (altora, celor mai mulți). Și îi spune însoțitorului său, cățelul Săgeată: „Săgeată, eu credeam că pădurea e doar o adunătură de copaci. Dar e mult mai mult decît atît. Sînt vîrfuri de copaci, orizonturi și pajiști. De toate". Îl leg pe OBLIO (băiețelul din film și filmul), acum, definitiv de Lygia si de Gellu Naum. Ei au venit pe lume (și) ca să arate că totul are rost, că «pădurea nu e doar o adunătură de copaci». Că e nevoie pentru asta de « adolescentinismul » fără vîrstă din noi și de multă dragoste pentru viață. Dacă ele există, Pădurea fără Direcții, fără Indicatoare, se umple de minuni (și mici și mari), de sens, de Sensuri.

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Dacă ar trăi, l-aș întreba cum vine asta „să studiezi în formă de stup"? Și cum e cu căutarea „cuvintelor hexagonale"? Cine e, de fapt, Gerda Cosmin care stă pe strada Maria Rosseti, într-o poezie? Doamna Gerda este cea care spune în *Zenobia* „Toți ne cunoaștem, dar ne-am pierdut legăturile". Interesant... Cine e Alexiou ă la „mort demult"? (Cînd e întrebat „ești supărat pe mine", el nu „răspunde și se duce mai departe"). Oare e „uitarea gînditoare" ceea ce înțeleg eu prin ea? Dar „privirea gîndire"? Ce e aia „Furia A?" (m-a întrebat și pe mine prietena noastră comună, Iulia). L-aș întreba despre „Muntele analog", despre Mungo-Park. Mai multe despre romanticul Jean Paul. Ce vrea să spună cu „Din măduvă ai făcut jocuri de cărți"? Care sînt „cele 32 de semne distinctive ale oricărei mari fihințe"? Cum e „licoarea de pietricele cunoscută încă de pe vremea lui Basile Valentin"? De ce vorbește el despre „trista și ciudata noastră nevoie de a scrie"? De ce tristă? Aș pune o grămadă de întrebări acum, începînd cu unele pe care le-am găsit într-o poezie: „că de ce punctul acela de fixație ar trebui șters fiindcă nici el nu e fixat nicăieri/ că de ce lucrul acela ne cere o îndelungă pregătire și nu se realizează nici într-o singură zi nici într-o singură viață/ că de ce experiența cea mai directă vorbește indirect/ că de ce deasupra tuturor influențelor care ne murdăresc stau influențele

lucrurilor”? I-aș povesti ce am mai descoperit recitindu-l. Ultima oară, despre „pomul luminos”: „Deasupra prin tavane sfărâmate creștea în aer pomul luminos/ el n-avea crengi nici frunze dormea printre impulsii/ în beznele știutului”. Dar mai ales le-aș povesti, lui și doamnei Lygia „niște lucruri” care mi s-au întîmplat. Fapte poetice, vorba lui. Poate le-aș arăta și cum se manifestă, inevitabil, „revanșa”. Prin domnul X, prin doamna Y. Mi-au explicat chiar ei cîndva cum stau lucrurile cu ceea ce numeau „revanșa” (un fel de, ân cel mai bun caz, „plictiseală”, care vine întotdeauna după un lucru bun pe care l-ai făcut —„ revanșa” fiind și o confirmare!).

Pe doamna Lygia aș întreba-o, tot ca într-o poezie, „însă de ce?”. Ea ar ști exact la ce mă refer.

Mă gîndesc că l-am cunoscut pe Gellu Naum prea devreme. Aș fi avut mai mult curaj să vorbesc cu el ceva mai tîrziu. Acum, de pildă. El mi-ar fi povesti niște întîmplări de-ale lui și eu altfel aș asculta. Aș avea și eu ce să-i povestesc, întîmplări de-ale mele. Înțelegerea ar fi directă. „Cu tine nu îmi pierd vremea cu explicațiile”, mi-a spus cîndva. Îl oboseau „străinii”, cei care nu vorbeau limba lui, faptul că e nevoie de lămuriri la tot pasul, începînd chiar cu cuvîntul *poezie*, de pildă (pentru care majoritatea folosesc un sens exact pe dos celui folosit de el) sau chiar *suprarealism*. Și despre niște cărți aș vorbi, altfel. Simt nevoia, din cînd în cînd, să-i cer un sfat doamnei Lygia. Ea nu îl dădea, propriu-zis, te făcea să ajungi singur la o concluzie, la... sfătuirea de sine.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Simona Popescu

# That Blow Between the Base of the Neck & the Shoulder[1]

Translated by Martin Woodside & Erika Mihálycsa

"How did you know Gellu Naum, a woman asked me on TV some months ago. The question took me by surprise, though obviously it shouldn't have. It required a short response, no time for anecdotes, for details. "I met him many times," I said, after some hesitation.

"Who is Gellu Naum for you?" I was asked on the radio. "That blow between the base of the neck and the shoulder." But that wasn't right for radio. "A part of my imagination." "You are imaginary," as "a girl with a raggedy doll in her arms," "a longtime friend" cries out in a dream. "Picture her narrative gestures." One cannot narrate with gestures on the radio. And then, narrative gestures require so many additional gestures...On the radio, you can only say that he is a writer, one you were glad to have the good fortune to have known.

"What's lost by the reader who doesn't know Naum?" I was asked by a magazine. "What's lost is a connection with an important poet, for whom poetry is a way of life," I respond. And I ask myself

[1] "That blow between the base of the neck and the shoulder" is a verse from one of Gellu Naum's poems that makes reference to a Zen spiritual exercise (of "awakening"). The master deals the disciples who have drowsed off a blow over the shoulders with his *kyosaku* (bamboo slat with one flat end), to wake them up.

what on earth does "poetry as a way of life" mean to most people? After the Surrealists, so many have said this, people who have no idea what it means. "For me, the man is his literature..." declared Herta Müller, referring to Gellu Naum, in a 2005 interview. I discovered this when I met him in 1987. Wherever you choose to put the emphasis, the man is his literature (THE MAN is his literature! The man is his LITERATURE). In every case, it's exactly the same.

"What did you learn from Gellu Naum?," someone asked me. I tried to learn "the descent into deep withdrawal/a way of living more and more so" (to convey the author through some of his verses). I discovered an attentiveness to "the most banal things those easiest to overlook" becoming survey points (this is a type of speech) as hard to bear as they are unbound. I found out about so many things, *„etra o ep emiblus*." I learned some signs. Literally. Some small gestures to protect myself. I used them, even when I wasn't sure they helped. I had strong revelations about the power of renunciation. I began to take serious note of some details (including those in dreams), which functioned like certain "eruptive certitudes." I cherished that "mysticism" I would otherwise have left where I thought it belonged, in my childhood, marked powerfully by... Surrealism (what did I know?). I realized how important (or as he said, necessary) it is "to keep track of everything we uttered in passing through this long life, in addition, to think of everything we forgot, restoring the true radiance of silence" ("each among us bouncing off the hardness of his own eyes waking to an indifferent poetic dimension that erases itself"). Not lastly, I, in my turn, take advantage of the discourse of dismemberment (without forgetting for a moment the "vertebrae's advantage").

"What about Lygia Naum?" The refusal of false consciousness. The dialectics of tolerance and radicalism. To show what I think, no matter the cost. She used to say: "stop throwing bones to the dogs." You should stop throwing bones to dogs! If I start one thing, see it

through until the end, without rushing, like in the story about the Indians. Which story about the Indians? There were some missionaries, accompanied by Indian guides. The guides stopped occasionally to rest, sat there and stared out quietly into the distance. "Why do you stop? Are you tired?" asked the missionaries. "No, we are waiting for our souls to catch up to us," the guides answered. Do something without rushing, with soul. To wait, if need be. Waiting is not merely resting.

"What have Gellu and Lygia Naum given you?" A certain type of life experience. And friends, some of whom I don't know. On a site called *Lola Dream Factory*, a girl posted that she liked "joy, Alice, and the Little Prince, Mr Gellu, Simona, *Le Facteur Cheval*, Il Postino, Anais, Aguda — the beach of the mind." There I discovered a picture of a young Gellu Naum in a rowboat. I have no idea where it came from — I myself had never seen it before. I often talk to my students *about Le Facteur Cheval*. Could she be a former student of mine? She lives abroad somewhere. Who might she be? A friend of mine.

"What is Surrealism?" "Who is Gellu Naum?" I recall him telling me how once in Germany a hurried journalist asked him what Surrealism was. He stood up and said good-bye, mortifying the journalist, but not before adding that it was about his life. If he didn't have time to hear the full answer, they could talk some other time... I, too, sometimes feel like taking to my heels. What could I possibly make clear on the radio, at the TV, in a magazine about Surrealism and about Gellu Naum? I find it difficult enough to lecture on him at the Faculty of Arts. What can you do in an hour or two, in a framework that is flexible, but, nevertheless, academic? Should I synthesize? Should I explain what anyone can read in his bibliography? On second thought, what can one grasp without help, from...*Zenobia*? Students invariably start telling the story of a "couple living in a swamp, how she wears clothes made of perforated plastic" (to quote a student, followed by another one telling the same story)!

And what should you put on the exam? Perhaps a few pages from one's personal diary, patterned on *My Tired Father*... a diary of lacunae!

I keep reading Naum's poetry (and in general, the poetry that interests me) like a diary of lacunae.

My student Ilinca, in a group of second-year students I'm currently teaching in a course on the avant-garde, gave me some wondrous pages of her diary of lacunae, inspired by *My Tired Father*... Shall I add that Ilinca always wears two watches (which I observed one day during class)!

"What should I tell the kids about Naum's poetry?," N., a schoolteacher asks me. "I don't know, you might talk to them about 'The golden buttons sewn on the T-shirt,'" I suggest. This is an excellent example of his blending of the sacred (let's call it) and the everyday. Besides, it will make sense to the kids, the image fits them like a glove: a T-shirt with golden buttons! Cool!

*

"I used one of his juvenile poems in class. The students didn't get anything," a young teacher from C. confesses. How can you understand a poet from one or two poems? It would have been better to tell them something about Naum himself. A story. And read more poems, not only from his younger years. Because there is youth without old age and life without death — this is what it all comes down to in the end, in all of Naum's poetry. What about starting the class from there?

*

Surrealism doesn't belong to the Surrealists — or, to quote Gellu Naum, to the "so-called Surrealists." Surrealists define it in different ways; they have their own method (based on the senses). Otherwise

"everyone believes that he alone knows the thing the others know just as well."

Surrealism — like poetry, about which Gellu Naum used to say is "two things" — is of two kinds: the Surrealism of words, often poetic, and the Surrealism of poetic actions. The former can also be interesting sometimes. Coming in its wake are those who pontificate about Surrealist metaphor, Surrealist image, the Surrealist imaginary and so forth; one can write PhD theses and scholarly articles about Surrealism in language and in imagery, about literary and visual (sometimes merely retinal) Surrealism, artistic Surrealism. One can write poems, literature (good, mediocre, or downright abysmal). There is also, however, a Surrealism of actions,[2] of poetic events that belong, paradoxically, to an objective domain — they cannot be controlled, cannot be triggered rationally, they are not deliberate (this is why we speak of "objective hazard"). Not just anybody can talk about these things, and they can't be talked about in any old way. Surrealism means, above all, to borrow a turn-of-phrase of Naum's, "that something happens to you." All the rest is — literature.

*

Once I tried to interview Sarane Alexandrian who had written a book on Victor Brauner. I asked him what Surrealism meant for him. He didn't know who I was and likely supposed I was one of those journalists who go through the motions, covering whatever her editor tells her to cover. He spoke like one reading from a manual. I knew those same words from the standard guides. I asked him what Surrealism meant for him ONLY, if he could tell me something *very* personal. He looked me in the eye and told a story about a bird that flew into his room precisely at the moment when he learned about the

[2] Such actions occur in *Nadja* and in *Le Paysan de Paris* and in the texts of Artaud and Daumal, to give just a few examples. Such actions belong to the "active imagination" (to borrow Jung's term), or to "interior-exterior" action (to paraphrase Gellu Naum).

death of Victor Brauner. Then in 2001, about one or two months after my meeting with Alexandrian, Gellu Naum died. When I received the phone call about Naum's death, a sparrow flew into my closed balcony whose windows were almost completely shut. Then, some time after this, a series of occurrences followed, connected to Alexandrian and Naum, in Paris (I have written about this in *Clava*).[3]

P.S. Not long ago I discovered a verse I'd long overlooked: "something interesting happened with a bird at the window in a wet world."

*

I can't talk about Gellu Naum with just anybody. A few years ago I was taking the bus with a friend. We were telling each other bizarre stories from our own lives — liberated from convention, from the ineluctable mechanisms of self-defense. After listening to his strange stories, I told him about the sparrow that flew inside my balcony just before I got the news of Naum's death (this, too, in connection with Sarane Alexandrian's story with Brauner, for otherwise I would probably not have paid any attention to it). And as I was telling him this, at that very instant we passed by a rock with G & N scribbled on it in huge letters. I had never seen the logo of Gaz Natural on a rock. And in letters this huge! In a few months' time I read my friend's version of the story in the diary he'd written and published. He was playing the part of the rationalist, making fun of me for the coincidence with the huge letters, as if I had invented it, as if I were to blame, sunk irredeemably into surrealist irrationality! How should I have responded? Reality is to blame, my friend! Ever since that, I swore to talk about some things with certain people only. It is not worth it. To occult ourselves (as André Breton used to say).

[3] Simona Popescu, *Clava: Critifictiune cu Gellu Naum* [Clava. Criti-fiction with Gellu Naum] (Bucuresti: Editura Paralela 45, 2004).

## *I knew Gellu Naum several times*

## *The literature, the man…*

So I was introduced — reintroduced to Gellu Naum several times, from the autumn of 1987 to the present. After 2001, only through my reading. Things keep linking up, crystallizing. I am left with memories of him, with his books, and especially with that secret that makes him more than books of paper, and the memories of him more than what has passed. But I'll start from the beginning, even if I've said this before.

In 1987, I was preparing to graduate from the Faculty of Arts and I needed a subject for my dissertation. I had chosen Professor Paul Cornea as my advisor, as he seemed the most open-minded of our professors in his way of reading literature. He would even have been willing to consider a dissertation about postmodernism — at that time I was totally engrossed in postmodernism, it was something new and the mere mention of the word made all the dickheads (the "intelligent dickheads," as Gellu Naum used to say) feel completely uncomfortable — something that, needless to say, gave me immense satisfaction. Still, I settled on the avant-garde instead — the avant-garde being a kind of postmodernism between the two world wars, as I thought in my naiveté. It so happened that Dr. Cornea was then editing a series for Albatross Publishing, the *Introduction to…* (small, white, very reader-friendly books), and he wanted me to publish with them, perhaps even my dissertation. What an opportunity! My theme would become an issue, however. How "passable" (not to mention "placeable") could a book about an avant-garde author be in 1987? Find a dead author, safely dead, he suggested to me. I went home and, as I read through several of them (all safely dead), I made a decision that ultimately put an end to my turmoil: to write about an avant-garde artist who was alive. Full stop. So I chose the most alive of all avant-garde artists: Gellu Naum. This was out of the question. I stood to lose everything — in those times, to publish a book under the

watchful eye of our "many-headed " censorship was an impossibility. I risked losing everything but gained... Gellu and Lygia Naum. They would come to mean a lot to me.

I didn't know much about Surrealism or about Gellu Naum when I started my student work, so I turned to books, to the public and private libraries, and found very little. I almost came to regret the fact that I hadn't chosen an easier path or at least something about postmodernism. What if I ended up without a bibliography? I couldn't find a bibliography for Naum. There was no book about him, only a few pages scattered here and there, in the context of the historical avant-garde between the wars. As if nothing had happened since then. I wrote about Gellu Naum with the ambition to save him from the clichés in circulation, from imprisonment by historicizing, from the "historical Surrealism" (more — or less —, a Romanian history) in which he had been frozen. I wanted to drag him towards postmodernism, making him my contemporary; I discussed the irony in his poetry and the poetry of the everyday (that is also Surrealist). I showed my dissertation to Croh (Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu) whom I had met at the Junimea literary circle (he being one of the few real connoisseurs of the avant-garde). He was interested in how I had brought Naum into our era and thought the work worth publishing.

And then I met Gellu Naum himself. "It was then I received that blow between the base of the neck and the shoulder," as his poem reads. The books about Surrealism had faded away. In 1990, somebody proposed I publish what I had written on Naum (more than 100 pages had materialized). In those lean times, publishing a book was no small accomplishment. I could have a name for myself as an essayist (a literary critic?) But — a book on Gellu Naum without Gellu Naum? The man was his literature!

## *Lygia Naum, Gellu Naum and the Point(less) Forest*

I met Gellu and Lygia Naum when they were both past 70. Together, they acted like teenagers. They had their secrets, their own language, their incomprehensible signs, their own poetic system to guide them in this world, one that fascinated even those who didn't understand an iota of it. They had the enthusiasm of teenagers and when they got angry, they were deadly serious, with a kind of righteous passion that sometimes led them astray. But above all they had that kind of faith teenagers have, that their destiny is beyond life and death, a faith confirmed on a daily basis through the small, all-important everyday occurrences. Perhaps this intense, luminous, sustained "adolescence" explains why they were constantly surrounded by so many young people. In the last months of her life, Lygia astonished me with the music she was listening to, the films she was "watching" (with a "story-teller" by her side, as she was nearly blind), all of which she received from her young friends. I still remember how she described two scenes from a documentary about Cirque du Soleil to me: one in which somebody threw a circle before himself, and the circle returned to him; and the other, in which several figures were moving veeeery sloooowly, veeeery sloooowly in an act that was otherwise marked by agitation. She liked the part with the circle best. Thus everything you send out with all the vigor you can muster, returns; there are quiet types in the world as well, going about their own art, sending things into the world that still return. I still have the last film I ever borrowed from her. It was a film about a little round-headed boy who is born into a world of "pointy heads," *Oblio*. Banished for being "pointless" into the Pointless Forest, Oblio discovers that things in the world are not what they seem (to others, to the majority). So he says to his helper, the dog Arrow: "Arrow, I once thought the forest was only a collection of trees. But it is much more than that. Trees, horizons, even meadows have points. Of all kinds." Now I will forever associate Oblio (the little boy in the film, and the film itself) with Lygia and Gellu Naum. They (also) came into the world to show that

there is a point to everything, that "the forest is not only a collection of trees." That it takes the ageless "adolescence" within us to do so, and much love of life. If they exist, the Pointless Forest, the Forest without Directions is filled with wonders (large and small), with sense, with Senses.

*

If they were alive I would ask him, what he meant by "studying in bee-hive form"? And what is this search for "hexagonal words"? Who, in fact, is Gerda Cosmin who in a poem lives on Maria Rossetti Street? It's Madame Gerda who says in *Zenobia*, "We all know each other, but have lost touch with one another..." Interesting. And who is that Alexiou, "long dead"? (When asked, "are you cross with me," he "doesn't answer and walks away"). Is that "thoughtful oblivion" what I think it is? And what about the "thought look"? What is the meaning of "Fury A" (our mutual friend, Iulia has also asked me this)? I would ask him about the "analogous mountain," about Mungo-Park. I would ask him loads of questions about Jean Paul, the Romantic poet. What does he mean by "you made/ playing cards out of bone-marrow"? What are "the 32 distinguishing marks of any great Behing?" And what is that "elixir made of pebbles, known from the times of Basile Valentin"? Why does he talk about "our sad and strange need to write"? Why sad? I would bombard him with questions, starting with some I found in a poem: "why should that point of fixation be erased as it is not fixed anywhere / why does that thing require great preparation without ever being achieved in a single day or a single life/ why does the most direct experience speak indirectly / why are the influences that soil us the influence of things?" I would tell him what I have discovered re-reading him. Last time, about the "radiant fruit-tree": "Above, breaking through ceilings the radiant fruit-tree grew in the air/ it had no branches no leaves it slept among impulses/ in the darkness of the known." But above all I would tell him and Lygia "some things" that have happened to me. Poetic actions, to

quote him. Perhaps I would even show them how "requital" inevitably manifests itself. Through Mister X and Mrs. Y. Once they explained to me what "requital" consisted of (in the best case, some sort of ennui that comes in the wake of a good deed you have done — "requital" being, among other things, also a confirmation!).

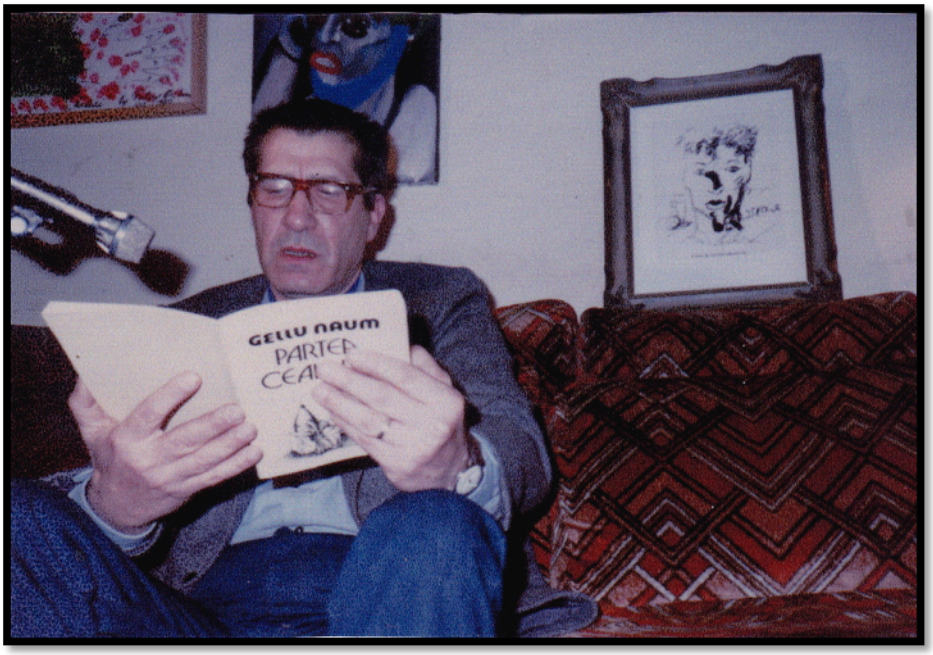
And Madam Lygia I would ask, as in a poem: "Yet why is it?" She would know exactly what I mean.

I was too young when I met him. Had I met him later, I think I would have had more courage to talk with him. Now, for instance. He would have told me stories from his life and I would listen. I would have some things to tell him myself, stories of my own. Understanding would be direct. "With you I don't need to waste time on explanations," he once told me. He was tired of the "strangers," those who didn't speak his language, the fact that he needed to provide explanations at every step, starting with the very word *pohem*, for instance (by which most people understand the exact opposite of the sense willed by him), or with *Surrealism*. And I would also speak differently about some books. I need to ask for Madam Lygia's advice every now and again. Strictly speaking, she never gave advice, she would let you come to the conclusion yourself, to... advise yourself.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Julian Semilian

# CHANCE ENCOUNTER




I came into contact with Naum's work in 1970, a few years after I left Romania. The long-held-tight fist of the regime yearned for a moment's stretch, and a miniature-sized book containing Naum's early work came out. It was either my cousin or a former high-school mate who sent it to me. Either way, it was a surprise, as neither of them had

sent me books before, one of those mysterious cases of gifts meant only for you.

I still have the book. From years of frequent reading it has taken on an antique aspect. I scotch-taped it carefully each time there was danger of losing pages or the dust cover. The dust cover and the last, blank pages are filled with notes I took at the time of those first readings.

Gellu's poems were responsible for my signing a lifelong contract with surrealism. There was something curative about them for me at the time, much needed, as I was still not coming to terms with my cultural shock. He was an advocate for what lies within. He pointed to humble, inner events *and* extolled them, certainly a protest against the marches of the day, and I felt right at home with his warm ferocity and humor. I liked "*suitcases stuffed with water*," or "*the plants that throttled the statues and caressed the travelers/those travelers naked like glasses of water/those travelers like lances*." The absurdity made me smile, even laugh, made me free. I had been gently but clearly liberated from all the world's rules. The words broke free from their binds to meaning and from their duties to mean and to command meaning, freeing me from mine. When he said: "*He came down the absent-minded stairs. The light, the air inundated his nerves insinuating themselves upon his cypress geometry. Then a door opened. The metal began to scream. Still, he entered. Immense corridors of mosaic and glass spied on him, sniffing him as he passed,*" he was talking about me. It transported me to where "*Sometimes we succeeded in feeling that strange harmony which connected us, disconnecting us from everything else*." That was me "*Under the ceiling, among the sciences*." I am the one who heard the rumble of "*something like an ocean of milk, like the memory of a breast*." And he also was speaking about me here, sitting "*down for a moment to catch his breath, careful not to shake his skull full of grenades*."

He was the voice of children speaking to the children who could no longer be children, inviting them to be children again.

About the same time I had another chance encounter: a photograph by Carleton Watkins at the Minneapolis Museum of the Arts, a boat on a lake about to enter a passage opening through a gigantic rock, reflected in the water. The reflections were entrancing, inviting, transported the viewer into another world. A single passenger worked the oars. The passage before him opened out into a flame-like oval of numinous white. The white numinousness drew me with otherworldly force. I tumbled into it and felt as if I was about to sink when I began to hear/feel/see an amalgamation of Naum's lines. Their word-energy opened me up and rooted me to the void and I melted safely in the flame-like oval. In a sense, at that moment, perhaps Romania and America had come together. I vowed then that I would also make objects, verbal or visual, that would make people experience what I had just felt.

Over many years I tried to translate Gellu Naum's poems from that miniature book. I craved to share their wonder with my friends. And for many years I found the task impossible. Perhaps I was not yet rooted into the subconscious of English. Perhaps, as some people believe, they are untranslatable. The unique tonality of street Romanian, so persistent in Naum's poems, despite the displacement he performs on it, may keep its flame intact only in the original.

So thus many years passed without anyone in the English-speaking world hearing the poems of Gellu Naum. One day a dear friend and inspirer, the Romanian writer Alexandru Suboni, told me shortly before he died that I still had time to make something beautiful in my life.

Those words worked magic into my consciousness and very soon after I made my first successful translation of many of Naum's early poems from the miniature book, which, recall, came out because

the regime's tight fist yearned for a moment's stretch. No telling what a little relaxation will lead to.

A few years ago I translated, with my wife Laura Semilian, three of Naum's poems from his book *the animal tree*. The circumstance is of interest: Someone from a magazine asked me for the translations and I was happy to comply, except I was squeezed for time. This was during flu season and I ended up staying in bed with a nasty case that shook me not only to the core of my physical being but thoroughly discredited me morally to my own self. In the middle of this agony I decided to translate. By the time I finished the first pass on the first poem I took on, I had regained a small degree of faith in myself. After Laura and I finished the second pass, I was nearly feeling fit, and although I soon sunk back into delirium, I felt hope and the desire to translate the second poem. And the same process occurred again. And by the end of the third poem, I was cured.

Gherasim Luca, the other noted Romanian surrealist poet and best friend of Naum, left a farewell note announcing that there is no more room for the poet in this world. I heard that when Naum was told about the note he replied: But he's wrong. Remembering how I felt upon encountering Carelton Watkins's photo in resonance with Naum's poetry and the subsequent effect on my destiny, I must concur.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Martin Woodside

# The Poet's Arrival at the (Great) American Desert

It's good to see Gellu Naum finding the English-speaking audience he richly deserves. For many years, James Brooks' *My Tired Father* (hard to find) and *Zenobia* were the only English books by Naum on the American market. MARGENTO and I were pleased to remedy that three years ago when we put together a collection of Naum's poetry, *Athanor & Other Poems*. As we prepped the book for publication, other translators were turning their attention to Naum. His reputation among American poets started to grow, with luminaries like Jerome Rothenberg and G.C. Waldrep attesting to the broad relevance of his work. In this light, *Hyperion*'s decision to dedicate an entire issue to Naum serves as a crowning moment for the father of Romanian Surrealism. This blush of attention to Naum and his work is certainly welcome, but I've been reflecting on the timing, wondering what makes Naum so appealing to American writers and readers at this precise moment in time.

Much of Naum's importance as a poet and thinker has been made abundantly clear. He's earned a reputation as an over-looked genius, an important poet obscured by unfortunate circumstances. Those familiar with Naum's work have likely read about his contributions to the Surrealist movement, in France, and then in Romania. They know the profound influence he had on generations of Romanian poets and writers — an influence that shouldn't be understated. They know how Naum was silenced by nearly two

decades of Communist repression. They know how others, Vasko Popa, Gherasim Luca, Paul Celan — friends, contemporaries, acolytes—found their way out of the country and to western audiences, while Naum languished in obscurity. After those decades of silence, Romania rediscovered him; eventually, the English-speaking world followed suit.

That serves as the briefest of summaries, a snapshot biography of a man whose life story has elsewhere been covered in significant detail by Naum scholars and Surrealist historians alike. My interest here is less on that biography and more on Naum's current allure to Western audiences. Poets and critics like Waldrep and Rothenberg are drawn to the work, not merely the story. I was drawn to the work, drawn to Naum's unmistakable authority. Surrealist poet, yes, Romanian poet, yes, but Naum is so much more. His work is that of the domestic-exile, his voice is that of the outsider entrenched within. Naum's poetry transcends the paradoxical to reveal the possibilities of poetry in an exhausted world. He reminds us of the power it has to speak to and through the daily grind of a hyper-charged era, one that seems, on the face of it, to have no time for poetry.

In America, this impression has been deeply felt. The poet is perceived as something exotic, as a practitioner of lost arts, a relic better suited to the museum than the moment, any moment that really matters. In fact, it's impossible for the modern American poet not to perceive him/herself through this lens — not accepting those terms, of course, but being forced to come to terms with them. There seems to be an endless supply of contemporary American poets, placed — sometimes of their own volition, sometimes not — in an endless inventory of schools and categories. There are lyrical poets and experimental poets, activist poets and academic poets, intellectual poets and anti-intellectual poets. There are, of course, poets who resist such categorization. This is a worthy cause, as these endless divisions are far from benign, threatening to further marginalize the (already) marginalized. Naum's poetry provides an antidote for this process. Refuting schools and divisions in favor of a

more holistic, encompassing poetics, he serves as an exemplary guide through this distracted world.

Naum's poetry is, of course, experimental and deeply Surrealist, but to label it as such threatens to be reductive. It threatens to ignore his deft lyricism and surprising humor, his use of form and his presentation of the spiritual. One could say, Naum's poetry offers something for everything, but more accurately, it offers everything at once, a kind of total synthesis that resists easy categorization, a kind of deep subversion that never feels smug or self-satisfied. Naum's poems do not indulge in the needlessly polemical or abstract. His abstractions are not exercises but demonstrate, rather, as MARGENTO puts it, "the endless immersion of the sacred in the profane."[1] Announcing himself as both skeptic and believer, Naum never betrays the slightest hint of artifice or ostentation. Much like fellow poet, and his closest American ancestor, Emily Dickinson, Naum's poetry tells all the truth but tells it slant. This quality, this ability to stand outside, from the position of exile, and to see within, deeply within, to enter the world and draw it within, creates and sustains a unique poetic model, a hopeful model that points the way forward for western readers who may have lost faith in poetry and its ability to take the measure of the world we see around us and the things that really matter.

For above all else, Naum sounds a clear affirmation of the poet's place in the world. Take for instance, "Describing the Tower," where the speaker draws a circle in the air and goes "through the motion of throwing it in the void."[2] The poem appears to be a testament to negation, all the things the poet does not want to do or say, a confirmation of the conditional, what might or could be, anchored by the unmistakable tangibility of "fear/claws stuck bark." Is the drawing of the circle the creation of the void? Is the simulation of throwing a gesture of affirmation or dismissal, of control or

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[1] "Introduction," *Athanor & Other Pohems*, xiv.

[2] The translation I use is the one MARGENTO and I published in *Athanor & Other Pohems* (Calypso Editions, 2013) 4.

release? In truth, this act of description is neither judgment nor confession. Here, as in so many of his poems, the poet collaborates with the unmistakably real and all its tantalizing, disturbing revelations. He works to make sense of the world without seeking to master it or contain it, but, rather, by attempting to meet it. Drawing the circle is more than imagining the circle; is encompassing all that's possible and all that might be. Naum's poetry can be mysterious, at times incomprehensible, but at the same time elemental, empowering the poet to believe in his or her voice, to retain the necessary conviction that the work matters. Naum's poetry inspires such belief. At its heart lies both recognition and hope, a deep conviction that acts of naming and describing go beyond words on paper; they make the poem, as the poem makes the world. This is the courage American poetry needs; at least, it's the courage this poet needs. Round and round, the grooves of the circle grow deeper and clearer with each revolution of the pen.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

# Gellu Naum, *Descrierea turnului*

Trasând în aer forma unui cerc
făceam și gestul de a-l arunca în gol

dar să nu mă faceți să povestesc aici visele mele cele mai murdare
să nu mă faceți să spun cum mă iubea domnișoara Lola din convingere
cum mă ducea la universități pe când eu m-aș fi îngropat în nisipul
deșertului ca să susțin că teoria pierde omenia
să nu mă faceți să mai amintesc cum aș fi vrut să fiu măcar un chior acolo pe
niște ape libere
refugiat din cele cinci mari forme ale spaimei
cu ghearele înfipte în copac
nici cum ieșeam brutal din aspra mea tentație
să nu încep descrierea bazată pe tot ce am văzut în lungul meu pelerinaj
să nu vă felicit că m-ați născut la timp

alături se desfășurau ceremonii înverșunate Cum pe atunci nu existau prea
multe bucurii duram câte o săptămână fiecare

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

# Gellu Naum, Describing the Tower

Translated by Chris Tanasescu (MARGENTO)
& Martin Woodside

Drawing a circle in the air
I go through the motion of throwing it in the void

but don't make me recount my ugliest dreams
don't make me say how Miss Lola loved me
with conviction
how she took me to the universities when I'd rather
have been buried in desert sand to prove that
theory loses humanity
don't make me recall that I'd rather have been a one-
eyed man out there in free waters
a refugee from the five great forms of fear
claws stuck in tree bark
nor how brutal I had been to avoid temptation
let me not begin to describe everything I saw on
my long pilgrimage
let me not congratulate you for birthing me on time

nearby some relentless ceremonies As back then
existed very few joys each of us lasted only
a week

NOTE: This poem comes from Tanasescu and Woodside's tr. of Gellu Naum's *Athanor* and is republished here with the kind permission of Calypso Press.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Catherine Hansen

# *De Praestigiis Daemonum*: Gellu Naum & the Monstrous Surrealist Object

The last extant issue of the lavishly produced Surrealist journal *Minotaure* was the double number 12–13, published in May 1939. Gellu Naum — already a dedicated surrealist, and soon to form part of the Bucharest surrealist group Infra Noir — recounts to one of his biographers that in that year, he and the painter Victor Brauner visited André Breton twice in his apartment at 42 rue Fontaine. Breton was preparing the next and fourteenth issue of *Minotaure*, whose overarching theme would be the Devil, and which the realities of wartime would force him to abandon.

As Naum remembers it, Breton asked the two friends and Romanian compatriots for their advice, and Naum proposed contributing an article on the "démonologie de l'objet," to be illustrated by Brauner.[1] Around this time Brauner was deeply preoccupied by the idea of a "monde inconnu [...] peuplé de somnambules, incubes, succubes, lycanthropes, éphialtes, fantômes, spectres, sorcières, voyantes, médiums."[2] And in June 1939, Brauner did indeed write to Breton that he and Naum were about to complete

[1] Rémy Laville, *Gellu Naum: poète roumain, prisonnier au château des aveugles* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994) 42.
[2] As he writes in the wartime surrealist magazine *VVV* ("Du Fantastique" in issue 1, 1942).

a text whose theme happened to eerily coincide with Breton's plans for *Minotaure* — a text involving apparitions of the Devil within or via objects, along with entities (lycanthropic and again, ephialtic objects, of which more below) that would later feature heavily in Naum's 1945 book *Medium*. In this letter, Brauner reminds Breton who Naum is, and promises that, as Breton has requested, he will mention nothing to Naum of a possible contribution to *Minotaure* until the right time comes.[3] In July Breton responded:

> Je maintiens ma proposition d'un numéro satanique de *Minotaure* mais je suis sans réponse de Skira et j'entends parler d'un échec total du 12–13. Nous en reparlerons bientôt. Reçu hier de sa part un cahier de poèmes de Gellu Naum. Je lui écrirai prochainement.[4]

A year later — before leaving Paris in the summer of 1940, and after the ultimate scuttling of plans for *Minotaure* #14 — Naum created "L'Image présente à l'esprit," a collection of images cut and pasted from a magazine feature, with an additional illustration by the painter Jacques Hérold. "L'Image" is a drama between a guinea pig and a vampire bat trapped together in a cage, recaptioned by Naum to tell a story in which the guinea pig alternates between submission to a presence now familiar to it, and sheer panic.[5] The title is a phrase taken from Breton's 1935 lecture "Situation surréaliste de l'objet / Situation de l'objet surréaliste," in the context of poetry's will to objectivate "la représentation intérieure [...] l'image présente à l'esprit."[6] In Naum's short introduction to this drama, the "image present to the mind" itself becomes a vampire: it sucks "avec une

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[3] This letter to Breton is held at the Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet (BRT 233, "Vendredi Juin 1939").

[4] This letter is available online at <http://bibliothequekandinsky.centrepompidou.fr/>. Dated July 19, 1939 (BRE c4 8818.60). Albert Skira was the publisher of *Minotaure*.

[5] Reproduced in *Athanor: Caietele Fundației Gellu Naum* 1 (2004) 63–68.

[6] André Breton, *Œuvres II* (Paris: Gallimard 2008) 477.

férocité généreuse la subjectivité devenant par une merveilleuse métamorphose en elle-même vampire objectif." The image does not need to be objectivated, since it is already a fragment of objectivity lodged like a foreign body within the subject, and this objectivity is a vampiric force that, feeding upon its host, transforms it. Ordinary, everyday objects are no safer than these image-objects ("Les objets nous sucent les yeux") and it is never clear whether one should submit to these familiar presences, or panic.

Naum's vampiric theory of the image and of the object, for all its strangeness, was not unique in wartime Surrealism. The Belgian-French surrealist group Main à Plume, for example — active between 1941–1945 and sharing many preoccupations with the Infra Noir group (1940–1951, approximately) comprising Naum, Gherasim Luca, Paul Păun, D. Trost, and Virgil Teodorescu — also entertained its vampires. For Main à Plume member Noël Arnaud, the poetic or artistic image is either a successful or a failed vampire. To the extent that it remains within the "prison" of the artist's particular personality, of concerns with self-expression, and of the subject in general, it is doomed to feed only on itself. But in the free, impersonal night air of the object-world — of everything that is not a self — it can sip from all sources: "elle ne peut évoluer qu'à travers des sangs insoupçonnés."[7] To Main à Plume member Léo Malet, bisecting images with mirrors to create new ones, what is vampiric is precisely the act of simultaneous division and reunion that forms these images. His "superbe vampire négatif" is thus a "trait d'union, fantôme d'attente," waiting to sever and to bind in one fell swoop.[8] Main à Plume's collective imagination — like Infra Noir's, via Brauner's occult interests, and particularly via Gherasim Luca, with his 1945

[7] "L'Image dans la poésie collective," in Vernay & Walter ed., *La Main à Plume: Anthologie du surréalisme sous l'Occupation* (Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 2008) 108.

[8] Léo Malet, "La Clé," in Vernay & Walter (99). Mirrors, of course, are fundamentally vampiric objects for this reason. Malet also shows how a mirror can transform an image of a woman's shoe: reflecting the heel-side upon itself, it reveals a flayed body. See also "Vie et survie du vampire (fragment)," in the same volume (150).

volume *Le Vampire passif* — is full of dialectical vampires, vampires of negation, of sublation and of objectivation. They appear in the strange, equivocal clearing between subject and object, and in the darkness of touch, sexuality, and dream, where the supernatural and the marvelous take root.

But what I would like to discuss here is how in late-30s and wartime Surrealism not just vampires, but a whole host of other monsters and demons, become strongly associated with objects, particularly the everyday, household kind, and with objectivity and materiality in general — as opposed to the immaterial domains, both conscious and unconscious, of the subject. I would also like to discuss, more importantly, how Gellu Naum participated in this tendency, and what he contributed to it.

Shortly after his return to Romania in 1940, Naum began writing *Medium*. The book is partly a taxonomy and behavioral study of what he calls the diabolic or demonial object:

> the hallucinatory persistence of the aggressivity of objects, the avidly succubal character of gloves, of hats, of chairs, of glasses, the vampirism of whetstones, of cameras that suck images [...] the vampiric lycanthropism of moneyboxes in the forms of animals [...] gas lamps, with their calm vampirism, that suck in our shadows, the asphyxiating comfort of heavy counterpanes that weigh on our chests like the purest succubi, the lucid game of houses that shut their doors after us [...] the subtle vampirism of the manicure scissors that draw out blood drop by drop, the strangling hands of a heavy collar [...] the presence of fingers on the hand [...] display with undreamed-of abundance, with a superb exemplificatory tenacity, the diabolic aspect of the object.[9]

All of *Medium*'s succubi, incubi, vampires and lycanthropes including, apparently, parts of one's own body (the fingers on the hand), are

[9] Gellu Naum, *Medium*. In Simona Popescu ed., *Gellu Naum II: Proză* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2012) 129–130. This and all further translations from *Medium* are mine.

subtypes of what Naum calls the "ephialtic object," where ephialtism is defined as "hermaphroditic demoniality that is convertible into spectres or objects." In a footnote Naum explains:

> I prefer this word, *efialte*, the Greek name for incubi and succubi, corresponding to the Latin *insultor*, since it also includes the meaning of hermaphrodite; being that this character of hermaphroditism — advancing via the dialectic process the becoming of HE, the potentiality for evil in magic, figured by the libation cup in the Tarot, by the Cteis, or by the column of Boaz in Solomon's temple, and seen as a principle of motion — links this principle with the light whose myth becomes in this sense equivalent to the myth of nocturnal pollution, of nightmare. It is known that in magic, light — symbol of the fecundity of nature in the sensible world of the incarnation in form of thought, of eternal becoming — is in its turn hermaphroditic, through its double polarity — the positive current or current of protection, the negative current or current of absorption — which determines its movement and forces at an invariable point, rigorously determined, the apparition of spectres. The movement of light, of the Great Androgyne, is an ephialtic movement. From this movement is born Hé, the potentiality of evil.[10]

What is to be most emphasized here is that Naum's ephialtism is a principle of dialectical motion and becoming, and a principle of objectivation — as above, the formal incarnation of the "image present to the mind." Naum's efforts to enfold these principles within a particular atmosphere derived from the occultist tradition and from medieval demonology, however, are what distinguishes the term from what one might find in any surrealist manifesto. To attempt a rational untangling of these terms (light, hermaphroditism), which keep referring back to each other in circles, would be beside the point, since what Naum is doing, rather, is prolifically and chaotically

[10] Ibid. (130).

borrowing and collaging in order to create this atmosphere. For the above paragraph, for example, Naum could have been relying on any number of occultist texts, but it was most likely Emile Laurent and Paul Nagour's 1902 *L'Occultisme et l'amour*. The Hebrew letter *he*, they write, is "la substance passive, le principe producteur féminin, l'âme universelle plastique, la potentialité du mal, figurés par le Ctéis, la coupe des libations du Tarot et la colonne Boaz. [...] Hé, c'est la fécondité de la nature dans le monde sensible, réalisations ultimes de la pensée incarnée dans les formes."[11]

Naum means his ephialtes ("An evil spirit supposed to cause nightmares; a nightmare," *Oxford Shorter English Dictionary*) to be, in the world of everyday objects like gloves and scissors, the equivalent of the demonic figures described by the likes of 16th-century demonologist Johann Weyer in *De praestigiis daemonum* (1563) or witch and werewolf hunter Henri Boguet in *Discours des sorciers* (1602). In the latter, the Devil himself, master of simulacra, often takes the form of nocturnal visitors: deceiving a husband, for example, by taking his wife's place in bed when she has gone to a witches' sabbat. In this context, Naum uses the word "demoniality" (*demonialitatea*) not simply to indicate the presence of demons or demonic possession, but with specific reference to Ludovico Maria Sinistrari's definition of the term, in *De la démonialité et des animaux incubes et succubes* (1876), as the sin of sexual intercourse between humans and demons. The ephialtic object in *Medium* is indeed a fundamentally sexual object, and if Naum frequently understands human-object relations in terms of an aggressive sexuality, the object is often the aggressor.

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[11] Emile Laurent and Paul Nagour, *L'Occultisme et l'amour* (Paris: Vigot frères, 1902) 12–13. Translated into English as *Magica Sexualis* in 1934 and 1966. The prolific Laurent also wrote on criminal anthropology, neurasthenia, "educative gymnastics," *L'Amour morbide* (Société d'éditions scientifiques, 1895), *Sadisme et masochisme* (Vigot frères, 1903), hermaphroditism, "infantile criminality," addiction to nicotine, fetishism, *La Poésie décadente devant la science psychiatrique* (A. Maloine, 1897), thieves' argot, duels, "pulmonary hysteria," gynecomastia, and impressions of a trip to Egypt and Syria.

André Breton owned a copy of *De la démonialité*, which may or may not have been an invention of its ostensible translator, the bibliophile Isidore Lisieux — a fact that would bring it close to the spirit of these collage-like passages and occultist pastiches in *Medium*. From the 16th-century political philosopher and demonologist Jean Bodin's *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (1593), to give another example, Naum apocryphally brings together unrelated passages in order to construct his ephialtic fiction. He relates the story of a certain king named "Caian" who "changed himself into all sorts of animals and sought female animals, 'puis coucha avesques elles charnellement, en la mesme sort et manière que font les hommes avec les femmes hormis que la sémence estoit froid.'"[12] In *De la démonomanie*, Bodin's passage on "Cayan Roy de Bulgarie" simply states that he "turned himself into all kinds of beasts." The passage that begins "puis coucha [...]" refers, much later, to the story of Jeanne Hervillier. Hervillier's mother had presented her to the Devil, who had taken the form of a tall man in black on a black horse, and who "coucha auec elle charnellement, en la mesme sort & maniere que font les hommes auec les femmes, horsmis que la semence estoit froide."[13] Again, Naum's fragments of demonomania serve to construct a certain aura around his ephialtic domestic objects, one of mystery and of the forbidden, but also one of marvelous transformations and ecstatic metamorphoses; a dense and supersaturated medium for the conjuring of apparitions, for the objectivation and becoming of aesthetic and experiential form, and for artistic and amorous exploration. It represents an escape from the limitations of subjectivity in its conscious or unconscious forms and an accession to the blind, unfettered, and teeming realm of matter and materiality.

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[12] *Medium* (131).

[13] Jean Bodin, *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (Anvers: Arnould Coninx, 1593). For "se tournoit en toutes sortes de bestes," 170; for Hervillier, 270. One also finds in this passages directed but unattributed quotations from Bodin's *Le Fléau des démons et sorciers* (1616).

Ephialtic objects appear in two spatiotemporal forms: coyly restrained (*reţinut*) and "exuberant." Restrained ephialtes are those that appear immobile and harmless but are actually lying in wait, ready to launch depth charges into the psyche or introduce their sinister purposes into human actions: examples include "a fixed window that looks out upon another window, an immobile ashtray, a coffin, a fastened button." Exuberant ephialtes are best represented by "lycanthropic" objects, defined as any object closely resembling an animal — often only upon close observation. These objects also exhibit an animalistic sexuality which Naum compares to that of his semi-fictional King Cayan.[14] Ephialtic objects can also take the form of succubi. Naum writes: "We are aghast when a knife, departing from its habit of cutting bread or a steak, has the indelicacy to cut off a piece of our finger, or when a rock dislodged from the pavement through who knows what miracle wanders onto the sidewalk to await a victim." Here, the abrupt but intimate relationship between a finger and the knife that slices it, a foot and the rock that trips it, is by Naum's definition a succubal one.

But Naum is also struck when seeing the "sureness with which some objects [...] hasten to enter others," like shoetrees within shoes — and this is also a succubal action.[15] Thus the succubus is a synthetic device that juxtaposes and fuses; to borrow the words of Malet above, it is a *trait d'union*.[16] No use pointing out that shoetrees fit into shoes because they were invented to do so: Naum treats the relationship between them as fortuitous, even predatory, as if it were a case of mimicry among insects. The human world of manufacture and profit, Naum seems to suggest, may very well be a mere epiphenomenon of a

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[14] *Medium* (130).

[15] Ibid. (129).

[16] I am also thinking of a passage by Main à Plume group member Christian Dotremont: "Je me garde bien sûr d'être presbyte vis-à-vis des relations entre objets: je veux voir tous les fils invisibles qui les lie à tous , que les fils soient longs ou courts. Et je ne trouve nullement moins légitime de visibiliser, par l'image, le trait d'union latent entre deux objets." From "Notes techniques sur l'image dite surréaliste," quoted in Anne Vernay, "La Main à plume et la peinture," in *La Main à Plume* (306).

primary network of relations between objects that call each other into being, or that use the world of commodities as a parasitic *Ephialtes* wasp might lay its eggs within the body of a helpless host.

Ephialtic demoniality, in the lycanthropic, vampiric, or succubal forms Naum elaborates, is a protean, metamorphic force that works against any act of definitive naming or form giving — the latter being a kind of "castration." The demonial power of the ephialtic object is not only what makes other things and beings pliable to its presence, but what makes it pliable in turn, constantly resisting description and shifting its outlines. Moreover, rather than attempt to avoid the knives, stones, shoehorns, and sinister hats and chairs of the world, personal and mutually metamorphic relations with such objects are to be actively sought, actively conjured. Raising demons, whether or not they take the form of objects, is all about the "terror of mysterious presences that begin to emerge into clarity, forced by the magic wand of waiting, of searching."[17] The search moreover, is also mutual: "the object," Naum writes, "waits for and searches for us with the same torturous ardor with which we wait and search, without knowing for *what* until the moment of encounter."[18] Breton writes in *L'Amour fou* — a book full of the vocabulary and imagery of magic and divination — that everything depends on the kind of open, attentive, wandering, both in body and imagination, with nothing determined in advance, that Naum evokes in *Medium*. "Je n'attends rien," says Breton, "que de ma seule disponibilité, que ce cette soif d'errer *à la rencontre* de tout."[19] A great deal of demonial power lies in the waiting and searching, in the attitude of acute but open expectation and attention that both reveals and provokes ephialtic, succubal, or lycanthropic phenomena, along with the "objectival virtualities of all objects, of all encounters"[20] — and in the shape of the trajectory that brings two objects, whether one of them be human

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[17] *Medium* (89).
[18] Ibid. (90).
[19] André Breton, *L'Amour fou* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001) 39.
[20] Ibid. (90).

or not, into contact. Naum would have agreed with Benjamin Fondane (in Romania known as Fundoianu), the author of a 1938 treatise on aesthetics that both admires and vigorously criticizes the Surrealists: "il se peut que la réalité ne doive ainsi nommée que dans le bref instant où elle est vécue et saisie dans l'acte de participation-inspiration."[21]

In all this, Naum seeks to hear "the true howl of the object in its ample and luminous presence [...] its fantastic adaptation to the hollow of the palm that knows how to hold it."[22] And in all their eccentricity Naum's ephialtes and other object-monsters, like the Main à Plume group's vampires, double as conceptual devices within a larger surrealist theory of objects, subject-object relations, and form-giving. The story of what is known as the "Surrealist object" — far more than the famously furry tea ware, lobster-telephones, aphrodisiac vests, and metronomes fitted with eyes that have made their way down to contemporary museums — is about a massive, and passionate effort to understand how it is that one names, participates in, inspires, and is inspired by material realities, whether long established or still embryonic. Surrealist object-theorists and object-makers, devoted to awakening dormant realities and watching for their emergent properties, find that objects of all kinds, both quotidian and surrealist, are "always shadowed by the traces of virtual uses" — to recall Naum's language — and the complicated circuits of knowledge, need, and desire that map those virtualities."[23] Thus, as André Breton explains in "Situation surréaliste de l'objet," the field of the Surrealist object potentially includes not only a "type de petite construction non sculpturale" but all things (tangible or intangible) present to the senses, events in time or material objects at a precise moment in time, entities in the imagination, entities present

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[21] Benjamin Fondane, *Faux traité d'esthétique: essai sur la crise de réalité* (Paris: Plasma, 1980) 108.
[22] Ibid. (112).
[23] John Frow, "A Pebble, a Camera, a Man Who Turns into a Telegraph Pole," *Critical Inquiry* 28:1, Things (Autumn 2001) 270–285 (284).

to the mind or understanding, or anything which a subject might address itself; from the furniture of everyday life to the *objet trouvé*, from objects of modern manufacture to the ghostly debris of the past, from the neutral and nearly invisible to the vivid commodity fetish.[24]

One of the first things a surrealist would point out about objects of any kind is that they share with things found in dreams the curious quality of being simply, rather monstrously *given* to experience. This givenness partakes of an original, fundamental intransitivity that undermines and frustrates the familiar transitivities of function (as in using a fork to eat) and of signification (as when cigars and boxes stand in for less innocent objects). However, the passage from waking to dream and back also stages, over and over, the undoing of the very givenness that dream-objects and waking-objects share.

Each time, this transition makes manifest that what appears to be inalienably true might in fact not be, and that for every "given" there is an alternative. Thus in surrealist object-theory and object-practice, the object becomes both the repository of givenness and the site of its undoing.

Objects as surrealists experience them are also, for these reasons and others, uncanny, even fearful. In Salvador Dali's version, for example, there is a special terror that arises "at the limit of the emerging cultivation of desire," where "we seem to be attracted by a new body, we perceive the existence of a thousand bodies of objects we feel we have forgotten." In each encounter between self and object, in each space of reciprocal communication, a phantasmal, virtual body takes shape, which Dali calls "the terrifying body of the objective self."[25] Every object holds out the lure of a different mode and shape of being, the opportunity of being not-oneself, or not a self

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[24] See *Œuvres II* (475) and Breton's own list: "cette table, la photographie que ce monsieur a dans la poche, un arbre à l'instant précis où il est foudroyé, une aurore boréale — entrons dans l'impossible —, un lion volant."

[25] Salvador Dalí, "The Object as revealed in surrealist experiment," in *This Quarter* (September 1932).

at all, of letting one's own boundaries dissolve. The specter of the "objective self" is the possibility of discovering, in every object, an uncanny double; or the possibility of meeting the object halfway on the plane of being to exchange not only gazes but features and parts, giving in to mutual metamorphosis. Thus everything about the object — its inhuman features, its ostensible functions, its sly immobility, its insentience constantly threatening to slide into sentience — becomes an intrinsic menace, though a strangely tantalizing one.

Roger Caillois's essay for the Surrealist journal *Minotaure*, "La Mante religieuse" (1934) evokes a self that is not merely permeable to the world but keeps recognizing, desiring, and rejoining itself beyond its own boundaries, like drops of oil meeting and joining across the transparent medium of water. An essay Caillois wrote the following year, "Mimétisme et psychasthénie legendaire," describes a powerful, mimetic-metamorphic desire for a "généralisation de l'espace aux dépens de l'individu," a desire to be "semblable," to be absorbed and subsumed by an object or by the space that constitutes it. The lure of this assimilation is particularly strong in the realm of aesthetic instinct: in a footnote to "Mimétisme," Caillois writes: "Pour ma part, d'ailleurs, si l'on veut réduire l'instinct esthétique à une tendance de métamorphose en objet ou en espace, je ne m'y oppose pas."[26] For a surrealist, again, what makes an object both seduce and repel is what makes the artist, the supplicant, the philosopher, or ordinary mortal who approaches it feel decentered, permeable, dysmorphic, monstrous, and feel that the distinction between being a self and being an object might suddenly, at any moment, fail.

But even taking all these features of the surreally experienced object into consideration, it is strange and rather extraordinary that during and after the Second World War, the monstrous, predatory, even demonically possessed and sexually aggressive object would gain such ascendancy in surrealist object-theory. Take the young surrealist Marco Ménégoz, who composed an essay — the year he was shot by

[26] Roger Caillois, "Mimétisme et psychasthénie legendaire," *Minotaure* 7 (1935) 5–10.

the Germans in the Fontainebleau forest — called "Du hasard à l'objet," in which he writes that objects:

> prend place dans la chair et dans le cerveau, pour mener loin de leurs cadres conventionnels la sexualité et la démence. Les objets nous font rentrer parmi eux.[...] La sexualité, lyrique par excellence, se hausse d'un degré, se dépouille de la sentimentalité, frise le sadisme.[27]

He goes on to explain that, after humans made the fatal mistake of raising themselves above the world of objects, maintaining their supremacy by straitjacketing "les objets usuels" within their habitual uses, these objects have finally turned on us, as in a return of the repressed. The only thing now is to give in to their lubricious advances — and thus be transformed by them into a kind of object-hybrid, "l'homme concret," freed from paralyzing self-consciousness in order to act "en harmonie" with nature in its immanent logic. Thus the mediation of objects wrests humans free from their errors, their false consciousness, the subjective distortions of vision that lead (for example) to war and aggression, and plunges them in the flow of a "poésie vécue" in which the truth of nature and the truth of history are indistinguishable. Prewar surrealist René Crevel, less obviously concerned with history and destiny, nonetheless had laid forth a similar vision: "Donc plus de housses," he announces, "sur les objets, ni de capote anglaise sur les idées. Ils bandent et craquent les préservatifs [...]. Aujourd'hui, s'il est affirmé que les objets bandent,

[27] This was a contribution to the unpublished issue titled *L'Objet* (1944) by the surrealist group known as Main à Plume. Michel Fauré reproduces it in his *Histoire du surréalisme sous l'Occupation* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1982) 391. Of course, as with Dalí, Surrealist objects are always to a degree monstrous, becoming abruptly more so amid the prewar Bretonian surrealists in the late 30s. See for example the dangerous domestic objects in the 1936 (n. 1–2) issue of the magazine *Cahiers d'Art* devoted to the surrealist object. Marcel Jean's "Arrivée de la belle époque" appears here — where objects' intimate participation in our lives is what gives them both a sexual and monstrous aspect — as well as Claude Cahun's "Prenez garde aux objets domestiques."

ce n'est point caprice métaphorique. Ils se caressent, se sucent, s'enfilent, ils font l'amour, quoi! Ces objets surréalistes [...]."[28] As with Naum and with Ménégoz, this sexual exuberance is tied to an ability to transform those with whom these objects come into contact — always into something more like themselves, more like an object.

Ménégoz was a member of a wartime French-Belgian surrealist group called Main à Plume (1941–1945) — to whose members a formulation like "concrete man" would have rung familiar. Main à Plumer Jean-François Chabrun, for example, sets forth two poles or modalities between which the human being oscillates: the pole of the subject is diurnal, the cloudless realm of reason and rationality; the pole of the object is nocturnal, the trackless realm of dream and unreason. Within the nocturnal realm of the object, it is possible to escape beyond one's own limits, into another body, an objective self. Chabrun calls this other self the "homme-objet." It is, for Chabrun, as if the dreaming subject, at a certain depth in its labyrinth, always discovered itself to be a dreamed object; in fact, for Chabrun, the dream's primordial function is to facilitate this discovery, leading finally to a vast and generalized *Einfühlung* where the *homme-objet* swims in a universe of object-selves.[29] One answer to the question, then, of why there are so many monstrous objects in late-30s and wartime Surrealism, is that making objects predatory is yet another way of talking about the *hommes-objet*, *hommes-concret*, and the objective selves dear to the movement.

For Main à Plume member Jacques Bureau, similarly to Ménégoz, daily objects have become our slyest enemies, because we have attempted to entower ourselves above them, or pin them within unjustly unreciprocal relations. Now, "ils nous saississent à la gorge en pleine innocence, au moment de notre plus grand candeur" —

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[28] René Crevel, "Nouvelles vues sur Dalí et l'obscurantisme," in *L'Esprit contre la raison* (Paris: Tchou, 1969) 70.

[29] Jean-François Chabrun, "Naissance de l'homme-objet," in Vernay and Walter (51). *Einfühlung* (the word Chabrun uses) is empathy, a literal feeling-into.

former companions, now wearing the conspirator's "cagoule."[30] The Main à Plume painter Roger Brielle evokes a twilight world of predatory household objects: armchairs that snap at one's ankles in the night or sneak up on one in the woods. The artist in particular must be advised to tread softly, for he is the intruder: "Confonds-toi avec la rainure du parquet, le pli du rideau, la fleur du papier [...] rends-toi complètement invisible [...]. Et si tu n'est pas mort, raconte ce que tu as vu." This amounts to a command to the artist to leave behind all his personal neuroses and torments, all his desire to express himself (along with all the attendant tics) in the act of representing the world.[31] The object here is monstrous insofar as it is a principle opposed to the act of self-expression. In Brielle this opposition takes a quite literal form: the artist takes "un verre qui se brise dans sa main, un couteau qui le coupe, une corde qui l'étrangle, il ouvre une porte qui donne sur un couloir sans fin" (232).

Making objects monstrous is also a critical move that highlights the ungraspable, unpredictable, even recomposable nature of the objects that make up reality, making space for a sur-real or sur-rational understanding of them. One can also read monstrous objects as a specific response to the great catastrophe of the Second World War. The experiments and theories of Main à Plume, of Infra Noir, and of other surrealists can perhaps be understood as simulated encounters with new, bitter, and terrifying realities, hollowing out an aesthetics of catastrophe within the most innocuous of objects. And the longing for a monstrous transformation into an *homme-objet* might in this context be understood as a desire to ride or merge with the wave crashing over history, rather than simply drown. Finally, the monstrous object can be seen as a means of engagement, critical or otherwise, with the commodity. The dozen or so years after the end of WWII witness the advent of a "société de l'objet" (in the words of

[30] Jacques Bureau, "Morale des mots et des objets," in Vernay and Walter (65).
[31] Roger Brielle, "Notes sur la représentation," in Vernay and Walter (230).

historian Pierre Jouin.)[32] In a society that was increasingly one of mass consumption and production, surrealists might well have suspected that their theories of the object as cipher of latent desire and of future potential had come better to describe the world of advertising, for example, than a subversive way of being and doing. It might become increasingly difficult to distinguish the ormulu clock on the mantelpiece, as an accretion of a social and consumerist imaginary, from what André Breton had once described as a "precipitate" of surrealist desire; and to give into the lure of objects might be no more than to plunge headfirst into the roar of mass culture and into all the myths that yoke consumers to what they consume. Celebrating the alien "objectivity" of the object might amount to no more than an alienating glorification of the hermetic surface of the commodity, its mystificatory masking of the human labor that gave it form. Thus to make the object monstrous might also be an attempt to firmly separate properly surrealist concerns from consumerist or capitalist myths, and to force the object to turn on itself, to negate itself.

Giorgio Agamben outlines a genealogy of the monstrous object in late modernity that oddly resonates with the surrealist examples above:

> objects lose their innocence and rebel with a kind of deliberate perfidy. They attempt to evade their uses, they become animated with human feelings and intentions, they become discontented and lazy. The eye is not surprised to discover them in lecherous attitudes.[33]

This "phantasmagorical conspiracy" is actually the result of one thing: a bad conscience about the commodification of objects. "The

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[32] Pierre Jouin, *Une Liberté toute neuve … Culture de masse et esthétique nouvelle dans la France des années 50* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1995) 25–32.

[33] Giorgio Agamben, "Beau Brummel; or, the Appropriation of Unreality," in *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 47.

degeneration implicit in the transformation of the artisanal object into the mass-produced article is constantly manifest to modern man in the loss of his own self-possession with respect to things"; the menace of these objects arises from our refusal to acknowledge this degradation. Long forgotten and rendered *unheimlich*, they now rise to seek revenge.[34]

Curiously, in Agamben's formulation, objects cannot be "redeemed" from their monstrous degeneration unless we ourselves, their companions, become objects. As an example of becoming an object, he offers the dandy. The dandy makes himself a kind of "living corpse, constantly tending toward an *other*, a creature essentially nonhuman and anti-human [...] the artist now puts on the inhuman mask of the commodity." The dandy takes alienation and self-dispossession to their limit, using their own momentum against them: this is called the "appropriation of unreality." The object meanwhile, attaining the status of "absolute commodification," is capable of pushing its degradation to such an extreme pitch that the latter cancels itself out.[35]

On the one hand, for Agamben, the object's monstrosity is its very commodity status, which has phantasmagorically freed objects from their mere use-value but taken away their "innocence"; on the other hand, this monstrosity recalls something prior to, or concealed behind, the commodity. When it comes to the latter case, Agamben's tone enters a distinctly Bretonian register as he evokes a topology of object-relations found "on this side of objects and beyond the human in a zone that is no longer objective or subjective, neither personal nor impersonal, neither material nor immaterial, but where we find ourselves suddenly facing these apparently so simple unknowns: the

[34] Ibid. Agamben traces this bad conscience through Grandville's illustrated *Petites misères de la vie humaine* in 1843, through Rilke's *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, Odradek in Kafka's *Cares of a Family Man*, and the Angel of the Odd in Poe's story of the same title.
[35] Ibid. (50).

human, the thing."[36] The tendency in the texts above — by Naum, by Main à Plume, and by other surrealists — to tarry with monstrosity, disguising pleasure with exaggerated silent-screen horror, bears witness to this vacillating, equivocal status of the monstrous object. As they seek to articulate the relationship between human and thing, the monstrous object stands in both for resistance to change and for the resistance that *changes*; as that in which the power of the status quo makes itself visible, or as this power's undoing within this very visibility (in the same way that a wall implies that something might be beyond it, or that a command implies the possibility of disobedience).

To Adorno, in Naum and the others we have what looks like a project of "destroy[ing] the boundary between the body and the world of objects." But Adorno adds that this particular Surrealist project tends to turn against itself, for "the more subjectivity renounces its right over the world of objects, aggressively announcing the supremacy of that world, the more willing it is to accept at the same time the traditionally established form of the world of objects."[37] But Adorno elsewhere wonders whether — at least in the specific case of the commodity object — it might be possible to "appropriat[e] the fetishization of commodities" for oneself and thus détourn it: "everything must metamorphose into a thing in order to break the catastrophic spell of things."[38] In this move, which recalls Agamben's, it may be that the key is to continue assaulting the boundary between the body and the world of objects, but to refuse to renounce one's rights over the world, continuing to act both within and against it.

In *Medium*, Gellu Naum channels these issues through his various monsters. He imagines, for example, "that sirens can sing us

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[36] In his essay "The Toy Fairy," in *Stanzas* (59). I am thinking mainly of Breton's famous statement in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*: "Everything leads us to believe that there exists a certain point in the mind from which life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the high and the low, are no longer perceived as contradictory."

[37] Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973) 51n.

[38] Theodor Adorno, "A Portrait of Walter Benjamin," in *Prisms* (London: Spearman 1967) 233.

their most phenomenal melodies without that so tempting danger of shipwreck, that vampires can be observed [...] without giving them the smallest drop of blood."[39] In other words, it is possible to respond to the monstrous and metamorphic demands of the object and its other world without renouncing anything, without disappearing into it or becoming a mute and passive part of it — but also without silencing its demonial "howl." Naum's monsters are, among many other things, about how to dream and imagine while remaining rooted in the objective, material world; how to approach the blunt reality of the object while continuing to imagine and to dream; how to glimpse the unknown (whether it be the promise of the future, or of a revolution in thought and life, or of anything else) without stifling it with the known and the present; and finally, how to struggle against the known and the present while remaining in closest intimacy with it. The monster, taken as a principle of creation, both severs and binds, cuts and joins; it is a means of transforming one's world, and one's self with it, into a surrealist collage in the making.

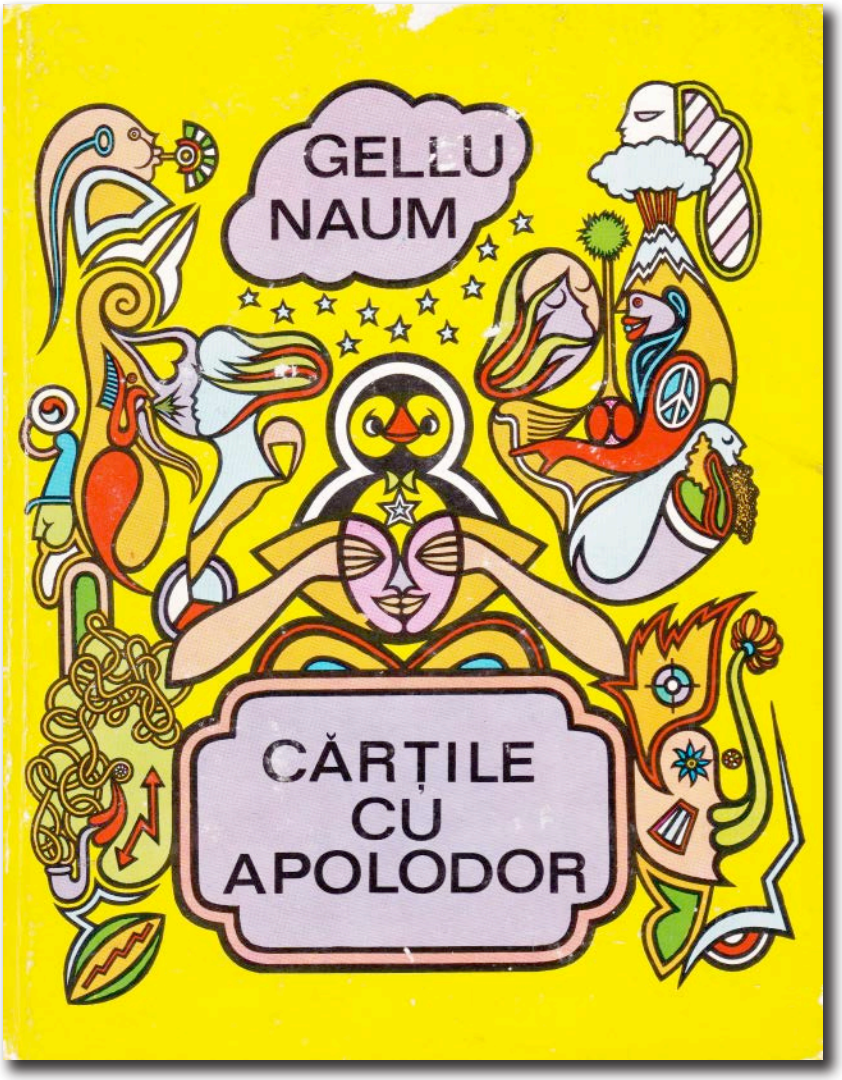
[39] *Medium* (89).

# GELLU NAUM IN TRANS LAT ION

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Florin Bican

# APOLODOR'S ALLUSIONS



In the introduction to the previously published excerpt from Gellu Naum's *Apolodor* in the Spring 2015 issue of *Hyperion*, I mentioned the author's propensity for inserting cultural allusion in his epic. The technique is subtly employed throughout the book, providing an encyclopedic background against which events appear oddly defamiliarized.

The current excerpt pursues our penguin's predicaments from Tunis to Cape Verde, all the way across the Sahara, where romance briefly buds (in an oasis), only to be nipped in the bud by parental opposition, in an episode reminiscent of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (with a palm tree substituted for the balcony).

At this point, Naum chooses to allude to the concluding tale in Giambattista Basile's *Pentamerone*, worked by Prokofiev into his opera *The Love for Three Oranges*, and consequently joins a reputable line of authors who indulged in the same allusion, ranging from Italo Calvino to Charles Bukowski.

Love is thus signaled by the three oranges the little monkey proffers to Apolodor on descending from her tree (another tongue-in-cheek allusion, this time to the theory of evolution).

Gellu Naum, ***Cartea cu Apolodor***

***16***

Fiind un bun peisajist
Aș vrea, oricum, să mai insist
Și să redau, măcar prin scris,
Priveliștea de la Tunis.

De sus, de sus, de foarte sus,
Spre sud, spre est și spre apus,
Cît vezi cu ochii marea mare
Și apele strălucitoare,
Trec elegantele fregate
Ca niște cupe de cristal
Și-n urma lor, din val în val,
Ca niște pietre nestemate,
Plutesc prin zarea de opal
Caicurile colorate.

Iar mai spre nord, peste cîmpii
Vezi siluete de geamii
Și, albe, fremătînd la soare,
Livezi de portocali în floare...

*17*

Aici, pe țărmul Syrthelor,
S-a pomenit Apolodor
Și se gîndea: «O fi frumos,
Dar e-o căldură tropicală
Și eu sînt mort de oboseală
Și nu mai pot să merg pe jos...»

Și cum jelea să-i plîngi de milă
Veni spre dînsul o cămilă
Și-l întrebă:—Cum te numești?
—Apolodor.
—Ce tot vorbești?
Apolodor e-n Labrador.
Am eu o soră-n București,
La circ, în Tîrgul Moșilor.

Ea mi-a trimis, de-acolo, vești
Despre acel vestit tenor
Și le-am primit acum o oră.
Plecarea lui a fost o dramă...

—Cămila Suzi vă e soră?
A fost cu mine ca o mamă:

Ea m-a-nvățat întîia gamă...
Cînta la cor și, cîteodată,
Chiar mă trata cu înghețată...

Apoi, oftînd, Apolodor
A spus:—Pesemne am să mor,
După un drum atît de lung,
Aici, pe țărmul Syrthelor,
Și niciodată n-o s-ajung
La frații mei, la Polul Sud...

—O, Doamne! Ce mi-e dat s-aud!
A lăcrimat acea cămilă—
Mă doare inima, de milă!
Te duce tanti către sud...

*18*

Și l-a purtat cămila-n spate
Cu salturi moi și legănate
Cum le e rostul la cămile;
Și-au străbătut cîmpii și sate,
Și-au mers așa mai multe zile,
Și au ajuns, într-un tîrziu,
La marginea unui pustiu.

Acolo s-au oprit din drum
Și-a spus cămila: —De acum
Începe, cum e scris pe hartă,
Sahara, albă și deșartă,
Și în Sahara, dragul meu,
Nu-i apă și e cald mereu,
Iar tu, pe cît te văd de crud,

N-o să învingi cu nici un chip
Atîta mare de nisip.
Fiindcă vroiai să mergi spre sud,
Eu te-am adus. Dar sînt cămilă
Și sînt și mamă - și mi-e milă,
De-aceea am să-ți dau un sfat:
Pe mulți, Sahara i-a ucis...
Întoarce-te, imediat!
Te duc în cîrcă, la Tunis...

Și i-a răspuns Apolodor:
—Eu, tanti dragă, sînt decis
Să merg spre sud, la frații mei,
N-am încotro! Mi-e tare dor
Și trebuie să dau de ei.

Oricum, îți mulțumesc frumos...

Și a pornit-o, curajos,

Spre sud, peste nisip, pe jos...

*19*

O, dați-mi voie să descriu

Măcar o parte din pustiu,

Să spun, în cîteva cuvinte,

Cît e nisipul de fierbinte

Și cum nu vezi măcar un cort,

Cum n-ai un mijloc de transport,

Cum nu zărești un baobab

Sau o colibă de arab

Și cum, pe-ntinderea pustie,

Nu-i urmă de cofetărie

Și nici n-a existat vreodată

Măcar un chioșc cu limonadă,

Un Cico, o răcoritoare...

Atîta doar: nisip și soare.

*20*

Și cum mergea Apolodor

Și se gîndea, cuprins de groază:

«Aicea îmi e dat să mor!»

Dădu în calea lui de-o oază

Cu umbră multă și răcoare,

Cu arbori năpădiți de floare,

Cu tufe mari, de iasomie,

Cu apă bună, de izvor.

Și a băut Apolodor

Și a cîntat de bucurie...

*21*

De sus, ascunsă lîngă cer,

Pe creanga unui palmier,

L-a ascultat, întîi cu frică,

O foarte mică maimuțică.

Iar el cînta, fermecător,

Cu glasu-i dulce, de tenor...

Și ea simți un început
De sentiment necunoscut,
Ceva între alean și dor,
O tulburare, un fior,
Acel ceva, profund și mut
(În orice caz, foarte plăcut)
Pe care îl numim *amor*.

***22***

Ținîndu-și coada grațios
Ea coborî pe creangă, jos,
Și, înclinîndu-se ușor
În fața lui Apolodor,
Îi dărui trei portocale,
O pungă plină cu migdale
Și-i spuse cu sfială: —Ia-le!
Sunt toate, toate, ale tale...

Apoi, aceeași maimuțică
—De data asta fără frică
Dar cu sfială și mai multă—
Îl întrebă cum se numește.
(Ca orișice persoană cultă

Vorbea, firește, românește.)

Și el a spus: —Apolodor...

Și-atunci, aceeași maimuțică
Șopti, roșindu-se ușor,
Dar fără urmă de sfială:
—Deși sînt încă foarte mică
(Abia la toamnă merg la școală),
Nu am decît un singur dor:
Să fiu soție de tenor.
Deci, dacă dragostea există
Și dacă nu dorești cumva
Să vezi o maimuțică tristă,
Aș vrea să fiu soția ta...

Și i-a răspuns Apolodor:
—N-aveam de gînd să mă însor
Dar, fiindcă dragostea există
Și nu mi-ar fi plăcut nici mie
Să văd o maimuțică tristă,
Sînt gata pentru cununie...

*23*

Apoi, ca doi copii cuminți
Ce vor să facă totul bine,
S-au dus și ei, cum se cuvine,
Să ceară voie la părinți.

Și gata, domnul Cimpanzeu,
—Altminteri, o persoană cultă
Deși se exprima cam greu—
A spus: —Fetița mea, ascultă
Un sfat de tată iubitor:

Știi că stimez nespus de mult
Profesiunea de tenor;
Am, pentru muzică, un cult
(Visam, pe cînd aveam un an,
S-ajung și eu măcar sopran),
Îmi place și Apolodor

Și nu mă port ca un tiran,
Căci nu prea sînt, din fire, crud
Deci, aș putea fi de acord—
Dar *dînsul*, după cîte-aud,
Venind încoace, dinspre nord,

Se duce către Polul Sud

Și-acolo e un ger cumplit.

N-ai să reziști! Nu-i cu putință...

Vrei să te am pe conștiință?

De-aceea n-am să te mărit.

Pe urmă, doamna Cimpanzeu,

Gîndind, ca mamă și femeie,

Găsi cu cale să încheie:

—Eu, dragii mei, nu pot să spun

Decît atîta: Mă opun!

*24*

Și ei, ca doi copii cuminți,

Ce vor să facă totul bine,

Au ascultat, cum se cuvine,

De sfatul scumpilor părinți.

Și a plecat Apolodor.

Și a rămas pe-o rămurică,

Departe, suspinînd de dor,

O foarte mică maimuțică...

*25*

Iar el a rătăcit un an
Pe continentul African,
Pierdut prin Africa de Sud
(La Capetown s-a găsit un nud,
Adică o fotografie
De pinguin cu pălărie
Și fără altceva pe el
—Un fel de pinguin-model–
A cui o fi, nu prea se știe
Dar parcă-i seamănă nițel.)

Apoi, un timp, a fost văzut
Hamal, în portul Cabo-Verde,
Cărînd stafide și năut.

Pe urmă, urma i se pierde.

GELLU NAUM

APOLODOR'S TRAVELS (fragments)

Translated from the Romanian by Florin Bican

16

A landscape artist of my skill
Should take some time and use his quill —
If not his brushes — to convey
The gorgeous view of Tunis Bay.

Once you have reached the proper height,
South, east and west invade your sight —
There's sea as far as you can see,
The waves are sparkling mightily,
The frigates elegantly sail
Like crystal cups, and in their trail,
Riding the surge with bobbing grace,
Like diamonds in a field of lace,
The many-coloured caïques dance
On the horizon's matt expanse.

Then northwards, past the white plains' sheen,
Trim minarets complete the scene,
And bright, vibrating in the breeze,
Blossoming groves of orange trees...

17

This chanced to be the very shore
He'd been washed on. Apolodor
Thought to himself: "The view is grand,
But what's the use? It's much too hot —
I could expire right on this spot,
I'm loath to either walk or stand..."

And as he cried, and cried, and cried,
A camel ambled to his side.
"Tell me your name?" she did request.
"Apolodor." "You mean to jest —
Apolodor's in Labrador.
I've got a sis' in Bucharest;

The circus she is working for —
My information does attest —
Used to employ Apolodor,
Yet he is working there no more —
The tenor's leave was a disaster..."

"You're Suzy's sister, Madam? Oh,
She was to me my mum and master.
Taught me the notes... It wasn't past her
To give me ice cream as a treat.
I say, she was extremely neat..."

Apolodor then, with a sigh,
Concluded: "Now I'm bound to die,
After I've left so much behind,
On this here alien shore... Goodbye!
I know I'll never ever find
My kith and kin at the South Pole..."

The camel cried, and cried, and cried:
"That I should hear such rigmarole!
Don't talk like that, it grieves my soul —
Come, Auntie's giving you a ride..."

18
The camel bore him on her back,
Swaying along the beaten track,
The way all camels tend to sway,
Past village, plain and lonely shack,
Day after day, day after day,
Till suddenly they broke their race —
A desert stared them in the face.

They stopped abruptly on its shore.
"Now," quoth the camel, "Nevermore
Can we go on... As maps will tell,
That's Sahara — it's hot as hell,
And Sahara's deserted, honey,
Can't get a drink for love or money.
You're still green, if I may say so —
No way to get the upper hand
Against this desert of hot sand.
Since it was south you meant to go,
I've brought you here, as camels should.
And yet, by dint of motherhood,
I warn you earnestly, my son:
You enter Sahara — You're dead!
I'll take you back to Tunis, lad....
Apolodor apologised:
"I've got it firmly in my head
To travel south through thick and thin,
And though this desert's oversized,
I have to find my kith and kin.
Still, thank you, Auntie, for the ride —
I'll foot it to the other side..."

And thus he braved the sandy tide...

19
Oh, do allow me to portray
A bit of desert, if I may,
And, in a word or two, to tell
How hot the sand is: hot as hell!
And how no tent is to be seen,
No bus, nor any such machine,
No tree, however big or small,
Nor any Arab shack at all.
The arid waste has nought by way
Of soda fountain or café,
Nor any spot of quiet shade
Where you can sip your lemonade,
Or have some cola on the run —
There's nothing there but sand and sun.

20
As he traipsed on, Apolodor, —
Reflecting: "Oh, how hot this haze is
Now it's all over, I'm done for," —
Stumbled across the odd oasis:
Thick shade, a cool and pleasant breeze,
Sweet fragrance wafting from the trees,
Large clumps of jasmine everywhere
And, for a change, water galore.

He drank his fill, then drank some more,
And sang with glee a joyful air...

21
From way above, beneath the sky,
Hid in a palm tree swinging high,
A tiny little monkey-maid
Was listening, at first afraid.

His song was truly a delight,
His tenor voice so sweet and bright…

She felt a budding sense of grace,
A sentiment she couldn't place,
A longing deep within her breast,
Mixed with anxiety, unrest,
That thing transcending every name
(Extremely pleasant, all the same),
Called *love*, as you, no doubt have guessed.

22
Her tail coiled in a graceful pose,
She scrambled down and came quite close.
Then, eyes averted to the floor,
She curtsied to Apolodor
And offered him oranges three,
A bag of almonds from the tree,
And told him shyly: "They are yours,
Do take them, *all* of them, of course…"

The selfsame little monkey-maid,
This time she was quite unafraid,
Though rather bashful, it appears,
Asked him as to what name he bore
(She'd moved in cultivated spheres —
She spoke Romanian, therefore.)

And he replied: "Apolodor…"

To which the selfsame monkey-maid
Piped, blushing redder than before,
Yet somehow not bashful at all:

"Though I've not even made first grade —
(I only go to school next fall),
There's just one thing I'm longing for:
A tenor husband — nothing more.
If you believe in Cupid's dart,
And if you don't want in your life
To break a little monkey's heart,
I'd like to be your wedded wife..."

Apolodor said: "I had not
Exactly planned to tie the knot,
Yet I believe in Cupid's dart,
And since I'm really not the kind
That breaks a little monkey's heart,
Let's marry — I've made up my mind."

23
Like all good children, they next went
To Mum and Dad. For when we marry,
It's right and meet and customary
To ask our parents for consent.

The father, known as Mr Chimp,
A cultured person, truth to tell,
Although his speech was rather limp,
Replied: "My baby, listen well
To Daddy's sound and kind advice:

You know I hold in high esteem
A tenor's high and noble call;
My love of music is extreme
(I used to dream, when very small,
Of quite a similar career),
As for Apolodor, he's nice.

Since I'm no tyrant, am I dear?,
Nor will I ever sink so low,
I could, in principle, say 'yes.'
Yet he, as I have come to know,
Though coming from up north, I guess,
Is, nonetheless, ready to go
To the South Pole — that's freezing cold!
You cannot take it... Simply not —
Being a chimp of the old block,
You'll simply die of thermal shock.
I won't consent to such a lot,
You are the only child I've got.

You should just do as you are told."

Then Mrs Chimp, wrinkling her nose
(As every mum and woman knows),
Just brought the matter to a close:
"My dear children, for my part,
I've been against it from the start."

24
And, as befits good children, they
Did neither mope, nor did they tarry.
They simply hastened to obey
Their parents' will, as customary.

Thus did Apolodor depart.

And on a tiny branch there swayed,
While sobbing with a broken heart,
A tiny little monkey-maid.

25
Then, for one year he roamed, we know,
Through Africa, and kept a low
Profile while travelling around,
(Cape Town — that's where a nude was found,
A kind of photograph, I mean,
In which a penguin can be seen
With nothing on except his hat...
One wonders what he's playing at
Could that be him acting that scene?
...Yet he did look a bit like that.)

Next, Cabo Verde's where one sees
Him in the harbour, loading bales
Of raisin clusters and chickpeas.

And then his trail abruptly fails.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

# Gellu Naum, *Umbrela onorifică*

Am fost într-un ținut atât de pur încât se cere să mă murdăresc Venea
o domnișoară ne sărutam pe întuneric (mă rog dacă ești tu
adu-mi pipa aia am uitat-o pe masă) Dar nu se întâmpla nimic
fiindcă mai erau prin partea locului și niște fascinanți unu și
unu oameni cu experiență
se ascundeau în papură și în pământ
se înecau și povesteau de joaca lor sub apă
erau frumoși cu glugile lor ude

eu mă adăpostisem sub clopotniță
o masculă se teoretiza pe lângă zid
și-a cerut scuze i-am spus că nu face nimic nevoile omului

niște copii intrau într-o cochilie de melc

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

# Gellu Naum, The Honorary Umbrella

Translated by MARGENTO & Martin Woodside

I was in a country pure enough that I need now to get dirty Came
a young lady we were kissing in the dark (pray if it's you
there or
whatever bring the pipe I forgot
on the table) But nothing happened as
some others were loitering fascinating ones, peerless
and experienced
they hid in the rushes and the earth
they drowned and talked about playing underwater
they were beautiful with wet hoods

I sheltered beneath the belfry
a (fe)male grunted out theory along the wall
and begged pardon I said it's human not at all

some children entered a snail's shell

**Seara acoperiţi de bulbi şi de ciuperci dar necontagioşi sătui de forfota locuitorilor din noi ne ducem**
să vedem detaliile
în sălile de cinema ne facem semne undeva peste ecrane Atunci apare conturul de cuţite al iubitei în colorata lui singurătate

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

# Gellu Naum, *Advantage of the Vertebrae*

A cycle of poems tr. from the Romanian by Valery Oisteanu

## *When She Goes By*

**When she goes by**
in her very fine tatters
and when she opens
the lion's mouth
a cloud darkens the entire
*city*

A lone swimmer
on an empty
horizon

We are arranging
the pillows
in her ceramic bed

A **white** myopia
petrifies us
a well-intended
myopia

The one who loves
*holds*
earth
in his fists
tightening the la-
ces of his beloved's cor-

set
**He asked**
for a precise bestiary

a long passage
through rigorous
dunes

**In the evening** covered with bulbs and mushrooms but noncontagious fed up with the background noise of those populating us we go to see the details
**in the** cinema **halls** we make signs to each other somewhere on a scre-
en Then the beloved's contour of knives appears in his co-
-lorful loneliness

# Avantajul vertebrelor

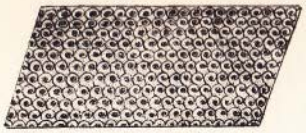
5221 **Aleluia** dragostea mea dă-mi programul serii cartela de *sentimente* recită-mi tehnicile *nupţiale* **.45** 1.95

**Răguşit** de rîs şi fără memorie pentru tine rămîn dervişul care îşi ţine *mucurile* de ţigări în urechi Ianţul de la closet rafala cosmică **.95** 1.50

5251 **Pentru** tine rămîn ceea ce se cheamă transparenţa absolută reversul pleoapelor insigna veneriană a concursului de *canotaj* **45** 1.95

5266. **Ca Mungo-Park** „albul turbat" pe malurile Djolibei după formulele de politeţe îmi rod cartuşiera plină de nămol îmi port toate decoraţiile pe limbă

5.75 3.75



5215. **Umerii mei** uscaţi se odihnesc pe trepiedul tău ameninţat de invazia lăcustelor Saliva mea de aur îţi murdăreşte *perna* **4.90**

5214. **Fără să ştiu caut** izvoarele fluviului fără să ştiu dezastrul glorios al şoldurilor **5.**

5213. **O caravana mea** sedusă de faraoni fosforescenţi prin mijlocul deşertului de sare prin sarcofagele cu supă **2.** » **0**

**Aleluia** purtătoare de voaluri dă-mi din cuier tridentul cu număr de ordine **6.25** 6.75

**Peşti fascinanţi** ne aleargă sub piele **4.90**

5241. **Acolo e ceea ce se** cheamă transparenţa înlocuibilă albă sau neagră de sticlă de oţel de argint sau de apă **44.** 55.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Gellu Naum

# *Advantage of the Vertebrae*

**Hallelujah** my love give me
the program of the evening the card
of your *feelings* recite to me
the *nuptial*
techniques

**Hoarse** from laughter and without memory for
you I remain the dervish who holds
his *cigarette butts* in his earlobes
the toilet chain the cosmic ruckus

**For you** I remain that which is called
absolute transparence
the reverse of eyelids
venerian badge
of the *canoeing* competition

**Like Mungo-Park** the "rabid white" on the shores of Djoliba
according to the formulae of politeness I gnaw at my cartridge
full of mud
**I wear** all my medals on my tongue

My dry **shoulders** rest on your tripod
threatened by the locusts' invasion
My golden saliva
stains your *pillow*

**Without knowing I am searching**
for the springs of the river
**without** knowing
the glorious disaster of
the hips

**Oh my caravan** seduced
by phosphorescent pharaohs
through the middle of the desert of salt
through the sarcophagi
with soup

**Hallelujah** you who wear the veils
give me from the coat rack
the trident
with a serial number

Fascinating **fish**
are running under our skin

**There is what they**
**call** replaceable
transparence
white or black of glass of steel
of silver or water

# Lămpile

77163.

Grupuri de lebede şi grupuri de corăbii vechi porneau spre larg Ai fi obosit nu mărindu-le

**13.50**

Crezi că sînt măcar adevărate mă întreba văduva

18.50

Nu-i ştiam numele dar fusesem martorul fericirii ei Ri dea şi plîngea vorbindu-mi

**9.90**

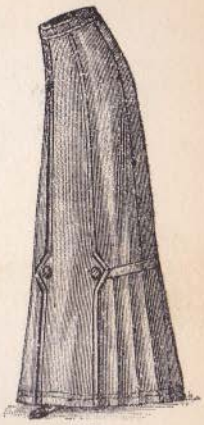
13.90

Nu trebuie să pleci atît de repede îmi spunea Rámui toată iarna cu mine

**11.75**

Îşi înclina fruntea cu graţie

17.50

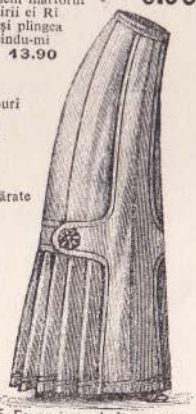


77164.

Îmi arăta bunăvoinţă invîtîndu-mă în cercul ei strălucitor

**15.50**

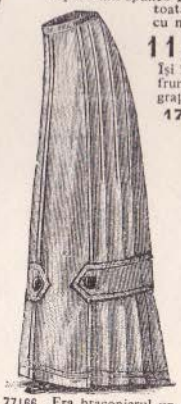
Îţi dăruiesc geografia mea singura carte în care am încredere



77165. Ea nu ieşea decît noaptea ca să culeagă cîteva fructe sălbatice.

**16.90**

Odată însă pe cînd *dor meam adînc* cineva bătu la uşă



77166. Era braconierul un adevărat prieten Acest om avea braţul drept paralizat

**19.75**

dar mai putea lucra fiind stîngaci

21. »

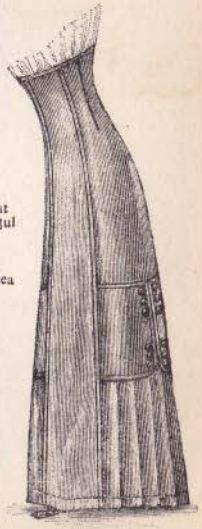
Omul stătea cu spatele spre noi cu faţa rezemată de stîlp Avea pe cap *două pălării*

Pe vremuri îmi fusese ghid şi *salvator*

Am venit să vă ajut ne-a spus vom înota în şir indian Am să vă conduc unde trebuie

Afară ardeau lămpi de argint lumina lor se răspîndea pe cîmp din ce în ce mai depărtată

77167.



77168.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

## The Lamps

**Flocks** of swans and **fleets**
of old sailboats set out
for sea You would have got tired co
unting them

Do you think they are for real
the widow asked

**I didn't** know her name
but I was a witness
to her happiness She laugh
ed and cried
talking to me
**You shouldn't** leave so
early she said **Stay**
the whole winter
with me

She tilted her
forehead
with grace

**She was** showing good will wel
coming me in her bright lit
circle

I am gifting you with my geography
the only book that I
trust

8

She would come out only at night
to gather some
wild fruits.

**Once** when
I was *deep asle*
*ep* somebody knocked
at the door

**It was** the poacher a true
friend He had his
right arm paralyzed
but he still worked
because he was a
lefty

**The man stood** with his back to
us with his face next to a pole

He had *two hats* on his head

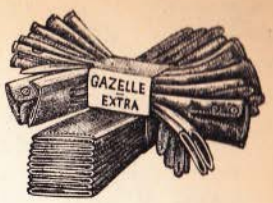
Before he used to be my guide
and *savior*

**I came** to help you he said
we will swim in formation I
will take you where necessary

**Outside** lamps of silver were glowing
and their light was spreading onto the field
further and further

1350. **Ca să-mi anihilez prea marea puritate**

1351. 2.45




1352. Sandalele ei reinventau un mers de o eleganță *ulutoare* pe fruntea ei erau 1.95

1353. pictate lacuri *celebre* în orice caz nu avea legătură cu 2.90

1354. *vegetația* își mutilase pieptul și-l umpluse cu *panici* 1.95

1355. scria de mînă dar cîteodată se auzea *un răcnet* o durea fiecare sunet 2.90

1356. care îi atingea umbra 1.95

357. Îmi plăcea de ea îmi vorbea de neconceput 4.90

358. ne puneam pelerine strigam unul la altul 4.75

359. învinuiam melancolia lucru rilor știute vorbeam de soarele acela 4.90

360. intern-portocaliu 5.90

1361. Oricum îi adresam cuvinte 1.95

1362. spuneam ah da ar tre bui să ne ascundem 2.90

1363. acolo am putea să ne mîncăm 3.90

1364. sau ne-am putea uita *domesticirea* 4.90

*În numele dragostei (noastre)*

**umblam despletiți**

**Situație incomodă**

*O psihologie de stup (exclusivă)*

**îi menținea**

**Sensibilitatea**

1366.

Ce vreme doamnă îi spuneau albinele existente

4.90
7.50
9.50
1.75
3.75
6.50

Vă dați seama

Atunci ningea pe esplanade într-un fel de uimire

3.90
4.25
5.75
7.25
8.90
10.75

Dar și acolo

Poate ar fi plăcută o plimbare pe un tandem pe o alee

4.75
5.90
7.90
9.90
11.90
14. »

Ca să-mi anihilez prea marea puritate țineam lînga mine singurul poem al marchizului cel intitulat „Aux stupides scélérats qui me tourmentent" 5.90

Aceasta ne garanta puțina posibilitate de a ne regăsi 6.90

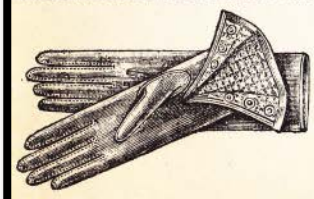
CÎTEVA ANIMALE MARI
SE ASCUNDEAU
ÎN PĂMÎNT

1.95
2.90
5.90
2.90

buzunarele pline de silexuri sunau extrem de plăcut

3.75
4.25
4.90
6.50
7.50
9.50

**Sărutul prin grilaj**



Pe-acolo am putea vedea în turbărie un arbore crescut printre impulsii

1.95
2.90
3.90

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Gellu Naum

# To Annihilate My Overgrown Purity

**I liked her s**he spoke of
the inconceivable

**we put on** cloaks and shouted
at each other

**we accused** the melancholy thi
ngs we knew

we **talked** about that
internal-orange sun

**her sandals** reinvented
a walk of an *astonishing*
**elegance**

**on her forehead** were
painted *famous*
lakes

**In any** case there was
no connection with the
*vegetation*

**she had mutilated** her breast
and filled it
with *panic*

she wrote by hand but
sometimes a *scream*
was
heard

each sound pained her
that
touched her
**shadow**

**Anyway** I addressed
words
to her ah yes we ne
ed to hide

**there** we could
eat each other
or we could
forget our
*domesticity*

In the name
of (our) love
**we were walking with our hair down**
**Uncomfortable situation**

what weather we
have Ms
were saying
the existing
bees

Do you realize

Maybe
it would be
pleasant
to go out
on a tandem
in an alley

*The psychology*
*of the hive*
*(exclusive)*
**maintains**
**her Sensitivity**

Then
it snowed
on the esplanades
in a
kind of
surprise

But even there
the pockets
full of
silex
sounded
very
pleasant

**To annihilate** my overgrown purity
I held close the only poem of the Marquis titled
"**Aux stupides scélérats qui me tourmentent**"
These were guarantees of the possibility to find each other

SEVERAL BIG ANIMALS
WERE HIDING
IN EARTH

## KISS THROUGH THE GRID OF A FENCE

Over there in the peat
we could see
a tree growing
between the impulses

# Adolescența și tinerețea mea exactă

Îmi alesesem reședința într-un depozit de lemne **8.90**

Mă plimbam printre stive aveam buzunarele *pline cu scînduri* și cu tăieturi din ziare

Uitasem implicațiile emoționale și meditam la U.

64041

64040

Mă speriam cînd mă uitam în apă

Vedeam ceva nedefinit departe

| 0m,80 | 0m,90 | 1m |
|---|---|---|
| 13. » | 15. » | 17. » |
| 1m,10 | 1m,20 | 1m,30 |

*Sub* baldachin aveam vise de uriaș intram ca un sprinten în necunoscut

Scriam cu vopsea galbenă

| 0m,80 | 0m,90 | 1m |
|---|---|---|
| 28. » | 29. » | 32. » |
| 1m,10 | 1m,20 | 1m,30 |
| 35. » | 38. » | 42. » |

Utilizam un bob (porumb) *imunizat la umbră* acolo unde e sămînța *cea mai bună*

**15. »**

Vorbeam atît de tare încît ceilalți se apărau cu scuturile

64042

75005

Dar fiți atenți o doamnă de aviator mă jignește am spus o vorbă zice dar foarte la locul ei ii înghețau genunchii (în autobuz)

| 0m,80 | 0m,90 | 1m | 1m,10 | 1m,20 | 1m,30 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15. » | 17. » | 19. » | 21. » | 23. » | 25. » |

64041. Starea aceasta ne făcea plăcere fiindcă se petrecea în domeniul biografiei unde ne pupam botișorul

| | 0m,80 | 0m,90 | 1m | 1m,10 | 1m,20 | 1m,30 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vorbeam amîndoi echilibrați de o mîhnire comună | 9.75 | 12.25 | 14.50 | 16.75 | 19. » | 21.50 |
| | 14.50 | 17. » | 20. » | 23. » | 26. » | 29. » |
| ne tulbura prin cipiul puterii altora | 18. » | 21. » | 24. » | 27. » | 30. » | 34. » |
| | 8.50 | 11.50 | 14.50 | 16.50 | 18.50 | 20.50 |

Surplusul unui vid străin

| | 0m,80 | 0m,85 | 0m,90 | 0m,95 | 1m | 1m,05 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Eram stăpînii locului unde | 9. » | 10.50 | 12. » | 13.50 | 15. » | 16.50 |
| căzuse trăsnetul | 13.50 | 14.75 | 16.25 | 17.50 | 19. » | 20.50 |
| spuneam să cum | 16. » | 18. » | 20. » | 22. » | 24. » | 26. » |
| peri niște vată | 8. » | 9. » | 10. » | 11.50 | 13. » | 15. » |

67931

67932.

67933

**25. »**

67934

67935

67936

67937

Și oasele se rugineau indiferente la tot ce se afla deasupra

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

# Gellu Naum, Adolescence & My Exact Youth

**I chose** my residence in
a firewood warehouse
I was walking among stacks of boards
my pockets
*full of planks*
and newspaper
clippings

I had forgotten
the emotional
implications
and meditated
on U

**I would get scared when I**
**looked at the water**

I saw something undefined
far away

*Under* the canopy I had
dreams of a giant I was entering
like a sprinter into the
unknown

I wrote in yellow
paint

using a grain (of corn)

*immunized in the shade*
where the *best* seeds are
*found*

I talked so loud
that the others
guarded themselves
with shields

**But pay attention** an aviator's lady insults me
I said a word she says but quite decent

her knees were **freezing**
(on the bus)

**This state** pleased us because
it happened in the domain of biography where
we were smooching each other's pursed lips

We were both **talking**
balanced by
a mutual sorrow

we were disturbed by the prin
ciple of other people's
power

**The surplus of an alien vacuum**

**We were** masters
of the place where
lightning had hit

I said go pur
chase some
**cotton wool**

**And bones were** rusting indifferent
to all that was happening above

# Ora de miere

53201 bis.
1.95, 1.45
».95

53351.

53206.
2.75, 1.95
1.45

53206 bis.

53209.
1.45

53209 bis.

53207 bis.
2.95, 2.45, 1.95, 1.45
1.15

53201.
2.45
3.50, 2.95
1.95 1.45

8.50, 6.90, 5.90
7.50

53205.
Practicam răguşala căpătată în groapa cu lei
».95,
».65

53204.

3.25

53431 bis.
Pe alocuri mai subzistau diverşi copaci

Ăştia *rideau* ştiau şi ei ceva
15. »

Rudele mele se opuneau tentaţiei de a vorbi

Foloseau un singur simţ neactiv
8.90

4.50, 3.50, 2.95
3.90
2.45
1.95

53350.
4.90, 3.90
8.75, 6.90
9.50, 7.50, 5.90

53207.
1.95, 1.50, 1.25, ».95, ».65

53200 bis.
Aveau ochi albaştri *veneau* de departe
1.45, 1.25,
».95

53352 bis.

Îmi dăruiau eşarfe colorate şi atît
Un fel 6.90
de somn 6.90
şi de refuz
Trăiam pe *lingă* nara lor

Îi chinuia o aprigă nevoie de dedramatizare
2.45
1.95, 1.45, ».95

53200.
Acceptam legea aceluiaşi spaţiu *Acolo* mă şi pieptănam 4.50,
3.50, 2.95, 2.45

Din cînd în cînd nathura îmi îngăduia o viaţă mai *cam pestră* 8.75

Încet încet pierdeam din vedere *faptele* 5.90
Postaşul culegea seminţe negre
25. », 22. »,
19. », 16. »,
14.50, 12. »,
9.75 7.90

Era convins că-mi aduce gazeta
10.50, 7.50, 4.75
8.75 5.90
*Oricît* ar părea de ciudat 5.90

Întins pe pat la asta meditam zile întregi

Odată adormit îmi ştergeam de pe faţă urmele potopului
14.50, 8.75
Urma sărutarea de seară

3405.
Apoi mă duceam în grotă să-mi vizitez 1 iubita
9.90

Ah dacă aş fi avut *un pian*
26. »

Purtam cămaşă proaspăt călcată vestă de in şi coliere
6.90
53203 bis.

Iertaţi-mă că amintesc de toate astea *dar nu* 6.9
pot să ascund nimic.
19.50, 17.50,
14.75, 12.75,
9.75 7.90

Îmi păstram şi la Ea pălăria *pe cap*
1.95

Ea mă primea purtînd spiralele ornamentale
3.90
2.95, 2.45, 1.95

Spunea tu vînătorule de vidre răsfaţă-mă *fă-mi cinste*

53452.
O stranie lumină îi poleia corsaiul
2.95, 1.95
Era ora de miere

3.90, 3.50, 2.95
1.95
53203.

53412.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

# The Honey Hour

**I was practicing**
hoarseness
acquired in
the lions' den

**Here and there**
assorted trees
still subsisted

Those guys were
*laughing*
they knew something

**My relatives**
resisted
the temptation
to talk

Using
one non-active
sense

**They were**
blue-eyed
*they came*
from afar

**They** gifted me
colored scarves
nothing else

A sort of
sleep and
denial

I lived *next to*
their nostril

They were tormented
by a fierce need for
de-dramatization

**I accepted**
the law of a shared
space *It's where* I
combed my hair

**From time**
to time nathure
would indulge  me with
a more *cam*
*pestral*
life

**By and by**
I was losing si
ght of the
*facts*

The mailman was picking
black seeds

**He was** convinced
he is bringing the
newspaper

**Lying** on my bed
I meditated over it
days on end

Ah if I had had
*a piano*

**Once** asleep
I washed from my
face the traces of the flo
od

The evening kiss
would follow

**Then** I would
go into the pit
to visit
my sweetheart

**Wearing** a freshly
ironed shirt
a linen vest and
necklaces

Forgive me
for mentioning
all these *but I can't*
conceal anything

*As* strange
as it sounds
I ke
pt my hat
*on my head*
even at Her place

She would **recei**
**ve** me wearing
the ornamental
coils

**She said**
you otter-
hunter
pamper me
*indulge me*

**A strange**
light
gold froasted
her corsage

It was the honey-hour

# Reversul unor afinităţi

Cînd îi îmbrăţişam
păreau preocupaţi
Construiau *edificii*
de lemn

| 143001 | 143002 | 143003 |
|---|---|---|
| 2.75 | 3.90 | 4.90 |
| 2.55 | 3.65 | 4.50 |

Mai de mult fuseseră
fetiţe cuminţi *Acum* deve
niseră bărbaţi în toată
firea

| 143004 | 143005 | 143006 | 143007 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2.95 | 3.90 | 4.90 | 6.90 |
| 2.85 | 3.75 | 4.75 | 6.50 |

Erau încă celibatari Ne
voia de dragoste le-a
venit *mult mai tîrziu*

| 143008 | 143009 | 143010 |
|---|---|---|
| 3.75 | 4.50 | 6.50 |

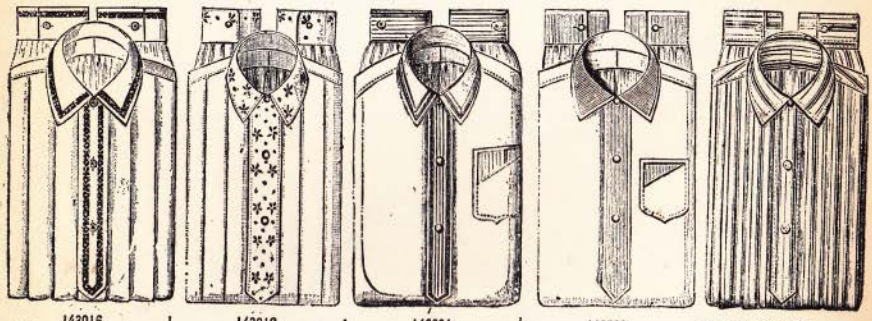
| 143011 | 143012 |
|---|---|
| 3.90 | 5.90 |

La masă numărau
şi păstrau în memorie
fiecare bucată din
carnea *sau* **5.90**
din pîinea
care se consuma
în tăcere

6.90

Cînd se duceau la
teatru figuranţii
îi trimeteau să
cumpere
bomboane **9.25**
(Unul din ei
dormea pe podium)

8.50



143016.
Aplaudau puternic
orice sunet
Aveau **2.75**
pasiuni
(e un punct de vedere)
În *pauze* **3.45**
obişnuiau să facă
tablouri vivante **3.90**

143019.
Stîngeau luminile
una cîte una pentru ca
fiecare să *poată* privi
armonia **4.50**
fundamentală la care
rîvneau ceilalţi **6.50**

143021.
Cînd se trezeau
la mijlocul nopţii por
neau spre *uşă şi* cădeau
ca *morţi* pe prag Gestul
acesta îl dezaprobam
cu *toată*
energia **4.95**

143022.
De fiecare dată
păreau cam demoralizaţi
şi mă rugau privindu-mă
în *albul*
ochilor **3.45**
să-i înţeleg

Le aşterneam pe
jos cîrpe ude
ca să *calce* **2.95**
pe ele şi să se
reîntoarcă **4.50**
în pat
*Acolo* **9.75**
îşi regăseau toate
pasiunile **14.50**

## Ecourile unor gesturi practice

| Forme şi centre | Calitatea I-a | Calitatea a II-a |
|---|---|---|
| Trebuiau | ».55 | ».35 |
| *să intre* | ».55 | » |
| pe un | ».55 | ».35 |
| *coridor* | ».60 | ».40 |
| să bată | ».95 | ».65 |
| *la o uşă* | ».75 | ».65 |
| şi să | ».55 | ».35 |
| *întrebe* | 1.15 | ».75 |
| de | | |
| *cineva* | | |
| care | | |
| *nu* | | |
| locuia | | |
| *acolo* | | |

## Un spectator susţinea stîlpul

Sala şi coridorul
erau înţesate
*de lume* **5.75**

143028.
143029. Ei se culcau pe
marmura
*scărilor* **3.25**

Dormeau
aşa din piatră
*în piatră* **3.25**

Formau
un cerc destul
de *cenuşiu* **6.75**

Fireşte 32.
unul practica
acordeonul **3.25**

143033
143034 Oricine ar
fi murit de
*ruşine* **3.25**

Urma 35.
o pauză apoi se
îmbrăţişau **3.25**

Dar unde e cas
cada despre care
*vorbeau* **3.25**

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

# Reverse of Some Affinities

**Whenever** I hugged them they
seemed preoccupied
they were building wooden
*structures*

**Long** ago they had been
decent little girls *Now*
they've be
come full-fledged
men

They **were** still bachelors The ne
ed for love
*came much later*

**At the table** they counted
and memorized
each piece of
meat *or*
bread
that was consumed
in silence

**When** they went to the
theater the walk-ons
would send them to
buy
candy

(One of them
was sleeping on the podium)

**They** would loudly
applaud every sound

They had
passions
(it's a point of view)

In *intermissions*
they would do
tableaux-vivants

**They turned** off the lights
one by one so that
each *could* look at
the fundamental
harmony others
strived for

**When** they woke
up at midnight they would sta
rt for the *door* and fall like
*dead* on the threshold This gesture
I disapproved of
with all my
energy

**Every** time
they seemed a bit demoralized
and would ask me staring
into the *whites*
of my eyes
to understand them

I would spread
wet rags
on the floor

for them to step on
and return to bed
*There*
they would recover
all their passions

**The Echoes of some practical moves/gestures**

| Forms and center | Quality I | Quality II |
|---|---|---|

They had to
*enter*
a *corridor*
to knock
at a *door*
and *to ask*
for *someone*
who *did not*
live
*there*

## A Spectator Propped Up a Pillar

The room and the corridor
were chockfull
of *people*

**They** would lie down
on the marble
of the *staircase*

thus they would
**sleep** from
stone to *stone*

They **formed**
a rather *gray*
circle

**Naturally**
one of them practiced
accordion

**Anyone**
would have died of
*shame*

A pause would
**follow**
then they would hug

**But where** is the cas
cade they were
*speaking* of

## Conversaţia în trăsură

371068.
10.90
13.90
Cu un voal peste faţă şi cu o lampă electrică în mînă la confluenţa vidului

371072.
13.90

371074.
14.90

371080.
la confluenţa vidului
10.90

16.90

12.90

371083.
ai să vezi cum morala platfussului naşte o complicaţie dramatică
11.90

371079.
un fioros foc verde cu cele două dimensiuni suplimentare 9.90

371081.
Tu care strigi fără dureri şi porţi o dedicaţie *pe colţul gurii* .90 4.90

371082.
Memorie care din doi va vorbi despre sora lui moartă despre capra lui vie .90

371084
Şi stăm ca doi bieţi gemeni în profil ce putem face 0.90

## Conversaţia devenea intimă (Comunicam la perfecţie)

371103.
De foarte multe ori se pare că la geneza probelor nimic nu e prea vesel
13.90

371104.
Ca în serile cînd soţia-model intră în camera amantului imaginar 8.90

9.90
Sau cînd în faţa magne tofonului i se descoperă forţa compen satoare a marilor *meditaţii depresive*
10.90

371112.
În plus soţia-model cunoaşte drumul *cu exactitate* şi totul se petrece pe vîrfurile picioarelor
18.90

În ciuda aparenţelor avem impresia că ne aflăm în faţa elementelor unui răspuns care nu ne-a fost niciodată transmis în întregime
13.90

371106.
Atunci o ploaie de lăcuste albe îi mîngîie obrajii

371107.
Dezertări irecuperabile atîtea idei higienice Oh dar mai bine să tac.
16.90
Sau să-mi repet că nimeni nu-i profet în gara lui 19.90

La ce servesc cearceafurile puse pe oglinzi

Vreau să spun că unul din pereţi e acoperit cu tablouri reprezentînd *corăbii* pe una din corăbii e camera aceea 8.90 12.90

Şi cînd noi martorii ne pregătim buchetul de insulte pe jumătate adormită corabia porneşte

Atunci se clatină *sticlele natale* pe care nu le PĂRĂSIM NICIODATĂ

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

# Conversation in the Carriage

With a veil over the face and with
an electric lamp in hand
at the intersection of the void
**now you will see** how
the moral of the flat foot
gives birth to a dramatic
complication
**a fierce** green fire with the
two supplementary
dimensions

**You who** shout without pain
and wear a dedication
*in the corner of your mouth*

Memory which of the two will speak
about his dead sister
about his live goat

**And we stand** like two poor
twins in profile

what to do

## The Conversation Was Getting Intimate
## (We Were Communicating Perfectly)

**In spite**
of appearances
we have the impression that we face
the elements of
an answer
that was never transmitted
in its entirety

Many times
it seems that
at the genesis of the probes
nothing is too happy

**As in**
the evenings when
the model-wife
enters the room
of her imaginary
lover

**Or when**
in front of the tape recor
der she discovers the compen
satory power of great
*depressive meditations*

**Then**
a rain
of white locusts
strokes her cheeks
What is the use
of the bed sheets
on the
mirror

The irretrievable desertions
so many hygienic ideas Oh I'd better
not speak

**Or it's better that I** repeat
that no one is
a prophet in his own train
station

**More**
the model-wife
knew the way
*exactly*
and everything happened
on her toes

**I want** to say that one of the walls
was covered with paintings representing
*sailboats*
and that room is on one of the sailboats

**And when**
we the witnesses
are preparing
the bouquet of insults
half asleep
the sailboat starts off the journey

Then the *natal coffins* shake and we are NOT LEAVING THEM EVER

15. », 11.50 **8.50**

6. » **4.50**

20. », 16. », 13.50 **10.50**

61553.

12.50 | 15. » 11.50 **8.50**

15. » **11.50**

61557. El își făcuse rost de alte expli căţii 11.50 6.90, 4.90 **3.90**

8. » **5.90**

Tot ce spunea era adevărat cu unele mici exagerări

5.90 **4.90**

After o trecere prin straturi prin tr-o severă apăsare

6.90 **4.90**

61563.

Apoi mînca pămînt fără nici o jenă

4.90, 3.90 **2.90**

poate mai jos sau mai în adîncime la capătul fiecărui ciclu **6.90**

Se așeza pe o movilă cu aripile încrucișate

**6.50**

61559. un om mînca o piatră

6.90, 4.50 **2.90**

Lîngă fotografia lui se afla o femeie de pe cînd era vie

3.90, 2.90 **2.45**

Îmi adusese zece ouă Era un animal

4.90, 4.90, 3.90 **2.45**

61565. Adeseori creștea își săruta *pantofii* **3.90**

Avea o serie de amintiri emoționante **3.90**

Se înțelege că trăia din propria ei respirație **1.45**

Avea monezi mici resturi de paie Își arunca galoșii *peste gard* **3.50** 12.50

NOTA Aș fi stat lîngă ea cu ochii în gol ca un cîine într-o pădure de oase

## Frumoasele elastice

ÎNCĂ O UȘĂ SPRE IZOLARE

53220 *bis.*

Cîțiva călători încercau să rezolve pe propria lor piele infecția altora

8.50 **6.90**

53310 *bis.*

*Se sinu* cideau cu mult succes la han

**9.50**

53408 *bis*

Acolo în contact cu aerul lichidele ruginesc Aceasta ne-ar putea solicita entuziasmul

**37.75**

53603. Și poate înăuntru e mai cald

7.25 **4.50**

53602.

13.75 **7.90**

Să intrăm repede **10.** »

53600. Așa ne trebuie

**12.** »

E un cer ca o vînătă

53620.

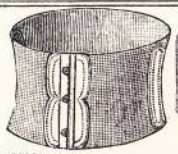
4.90 **3.25**

53621.

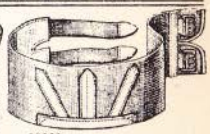
11.75 **6.50**

53622. Incestul laptelui

14.75 **8.25**



53661. Atîtea lucruri ne mureau în gîtlej asasinate de cuvinte



53660.

Deliberatul valet umbra Simulacrul lumi nei

12.50, 14.25 **5.50**

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

# The Beautiful Elastics

**After** crossing
through the layers thr
ough a severe pressure

**maybe** a little down or
a little deeper at the end
of every cycle

**a** man
ate
a stone

obtained
other expla
nations

**Everything** he said was
true with some
small
exaggerations

**Then** he ate earth
without shame

He sat down on a mound
with crossed
wings

**He** had brought ten eggs
He was an
animal

**Next to** his photograph
there was a woman
from the time she was
alive

Often she grew
and would kiss her *shoes*

**had** a series of emotional
memories

It was understood that
**she** lived from her own
breathing

had small coins
leftovers of hay

would throw galoshes
*over the fence*

NOTE I would have stayed next to her staring into empty space like a
dog in a
forest of bones

**The Beautiful Elastics**

ANOTHER DOOR
TO ISOLATION

**Some** travelers were trying
to resolve on their own
skin the infections of others

*They were*
committing sui

cide with much
success at
the inn

There
in contact
with the air
the liquids
rust
This might
solicit our
enthusiasm

And maybe
inside
it's warmer

**Let's go in**
quickly

We had
it coming

**It's a**
sky like an eggplant

The incest
of milk

**So many** things
were dying in
our throat
assassinated
by words

The deliberate wail
shadow Simulacrum of
li
ght

***Dedicated to the value and the indispensable importance of the individual voice,***
***to testing the boundaries of thought & experience.***

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# HYPERION

## On the future of aesthetics

Aside from essays and interviews, *Hyperion* has featured translations from Russian, French, German, Turkish, Hungarian, Italian, Romanian, Arabic, Farsi, & many other languages.

In addition, we have published special issues on Gherasim Luca, Miklos Szentkuthy, James Purdy, and now Gellu Naum. Our next issue will focus on Stéphane Mallarmé and feature contributions from many leading French thinkers and writers.

*Hyperion* is concerned with aesthetics, with the value of art and the ways in which it can be transformed and renewed. We are looking for applied criticism — philosophical essays that are evaluative of specific artists and specific works of art. For further details, visit the *Hyperion* section of Contra Mundum's website. Write to us at info@contramundum.net if you wish to contribute a translation, essay, or interview.

All previous issues are available to download for free on our website by going to the HYPERION tab.

**Oh**

**se**

**petrec**

**atîtea**

Niciodată nu am fost
mai departe
unul de altul prin
stricta aplicare
a unei
raţiuni

Tumefiaţi
de riduri trans
figuraţi de ploi
şi vorbele ne curg
printre degete
ca apa

*Mi-ar* place să aştern
cearceaful mov peste
nămol
să sparg oglinzile cu
tirnăcopul
*de jos în sus*
*şi invers*
într-o muţenie
înverşunată

03191. Oh se petrec atîtea momente
caligrafice dar ele pot fi
numai sugerate nu descrise
*De fapt*
am adormit **11.90**
pe un fotoliu instalat
în mijlocul străzii **12.50**

03190.
O tehnică de paradis şi spun ce se mai **2.90**
poate spune
trecînd
din camera aceea izolată în alta **16.50**
mai inaccesibilă

Apreciind experienţa catego
rică a osului care creştea
creştea
pe-o traiectorie de păsări
mi-ar place să revăd masa cu
trei picioare în jurul căreia
dansăm
o siluetă
care ne cunoaşte Tăcerea ei
nu mă interesează nici ges
tul amoros făcuţ cu o pot
coavă

În momentul acela
feţele noastre intră
în penumbră
şi iată norii experi
mentali
refuzul programat

Nu ştiu
nu vreau
nu-mi amintesc

Tu domnişoară
ca orice persoană lip
sită de apărare *du-mă*
în braţe

*frumoasă călăuză.*

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

## *So Many Things Happen*

**Never** have
we been so far
from each other by
strictly applying
a rationale

**Swollen**
by wrinkles trans
figured by rain
and words are leaking
like water
between our fingers

Oh so many calligraphic
moments are happening but they can
only be suggested not described

*Actually*
I fell asleep
in a lazy chair installed
in the middle of the street

A paradisiac technique and I say whatever one
can say
going
from one isolated room to another
more inaccessible

*I would* like to spread
a purple bed sheet over
the mud
to break the mirrors with
a pickax
*from below upward*
*and back*
with obstinate
muteness

Appreciating the catego
rical experience
of a bone growing and
growing
on a trajectory of birds
I would like to see again
the table with three legs around which
we dance

a silhouette
that knows us Her silence
doesn't interest me
neither her erotic ges
ture made with a horse
shoe

**In that moment** our
faces enter
a penumbra

and here are the experi
mental clouds
the programmed refusal

**Don't know**
don't want
don't remember

And **you Miss**
like every person with
out protection
*take me* into your arms

*beautiful guide*

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

# THE TAUS WATCH REPAIR SHOP

## *By way of an Introduction*

Allan Graubard

Gellu Naum's *Taus Watch Repair Shop* is a world unto itself, with its own ludic laws and characteristics. From the oppressive cultural and political space Naum lived in when he wrote the play in 1963 (Ceausescu's Romania), a repair shop is born where nothing is fixed, except perhaps our laughter at what takes place in and because of it. The opening gambit is proof enough that time and its twin for us, endurance, while certainly insistent, really don't matter all that much. Enter the owner of the shop, Taus, only to find a customer, Maus, who has been sitting there for two years, waiting to tell him good-bye. New Zealand awaits, all that beautiful water and life below the surface as a diver. The doorbell rings. Another customer walks in. But who it is at first is a bit uncertain. He's forgotten his name. A business card retrieves the identifier, and the trio — Taus, Maus, and Klaus — begin their charade. Subtle buffoonery, shifting identifies, mannerist asides and satirical wit fuel a momentum from scene to scene over the two acts of the play that grows infectious. How else can a playwright elide a *securitate* from his desires and the greater world his desires embrace? More to the point, how else can we, a half-century later, do anything less?

Perspective also enters this mix. Not only is time malleable, something to shape at will, but space is heterogeneous. At stage rear there are two smaller stages with their curtains drawn. Have we entered a puppet theater where a Punch 'n' Judy will debrain us? Or has Naum got something else up his sleeve to pull out when he needs it, if only to keep his audience just slightly off-kilter enough not to expect the expected? The latter, of course, is his method, and he uses it with gusto. Even love, that emotional and sexual realm we repair to for resolving our conflicts and for creating others, erodes. But then satire has little truck with sacrosanct presumptions and cultural givens — relieving us of any of the burdens they might accost us with as we encounter *it*: the satire, not the kiss.

But then I don't believe that the two lovers, Melanie and Maus, ever do kiss; this man that Melanie dreamed into existence. Oh, yes, they elope or escape to a desolate landscape where they talk a lot and where it storms too much. At one point they begin to sway together as if "under a spell," or so the stage direction tells us, and they suffer — don't romantic couples always suffer — as their speech becomes ludicrous and rhapsodic:

> MAUS: We loved each other on bloodied snows...
> MELANIE: Sometimes the wind was blowing...
> MAUS: I was a rubber band, a crippled colonel, a beaver in limewater...
> MELANIE: And I slept on a comb, like a salamander...

Then there is "Mrs. Klaus," actually "Mr. Klaus," who sometimes fancies himself his wife and talks to her, which simply means he's talking to himself but then, as if to prove the point, appears as his wife. At one moment, from out of the blue, he hits himself over the head. Why? — because his wife has dreamed the same. There is also "Mrs. Burma," a lascivious widow who finally beds with an Angel rather than a human suitor and then kills him; the Angel, not the suitor.

*Taus Watch Repair Shop* keeps us ever vigilant. And for our world, circa 2015, with its ever-shifting facades and bountiful tragedies, the wrenching wars that sprout up like wild mushrooms and failed policies which proliferate as if they were confetti thrown from a listing ship, it's best that we stay there, upraised, attentive, our jack rabbit ears quivering for another sense of that time when watches don't run us into ruin, and each, one after the other, winds down and stops.

And of the Angel? He's meat for the tiger. The tiger? Oh, yes, there's a tiger, too, an unseen, coddled beast lurking somewhere in the shadows, but who is probably so tired or so utterly self-consumed that he can't be bothered to pounce. I only hope this Angel, as much corporeal as incorporeal, has enough flesh on him to satisfy the tiger. But then Naum doesn't say; the potential threat remains and we, like that tiger, are left in the lurch.

There's much more to this play of course, but for that I leave you to it — this comedy of manners that verges, now and then, into the Punch 'n' Judy, not so much as a metaphor of the world the playwright faced as a piquant reminder of what we have to face each and every day, repair shop or not.

And remember, as Naum tells us, amidst all this dialogue: "People talk when they don't want to understand each other."

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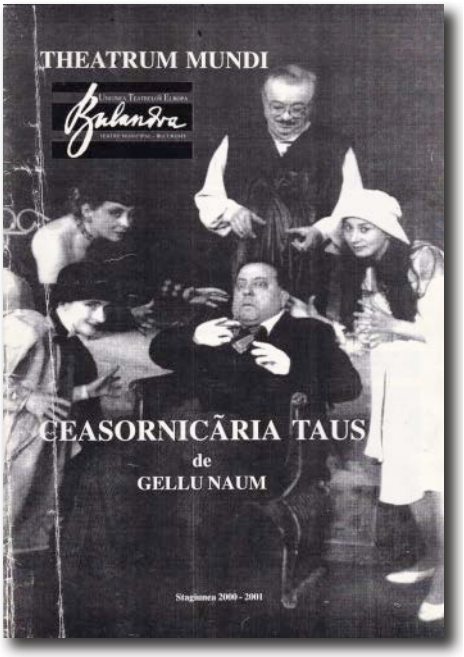
On the future of aesthetics

# GELLU NAUM

# THE TAUS WATCH REPAIR SHOP
## A Statistical Comedy in Two Acts




English translation by Allan Graubard & Sasha Vlad
with Valery Oisteanu

The original translation of *Taus Watch Repair Shop* was first published online by Green Integer Blog, edited by Douglas Messerli:
http://greeninteger.com/pdfs/naum-taus-watch-repair-shop.pdf

This is a new, revised version.

Characters

TAUS
KLAUS
MAUS
PAPUS
MELANIE
THE ANGEL
MRS. BURMA

Beside the above, there appear:
THE DIVER COCLES and HIS GHOST, played, as needed, by Papus and The Angel
MRS. KLAUS, who is actually Klaus
A PRIEST, who is Taus
ATLAS, played by Papus
THE CENTAUR, played by Maus
TWO SALTIMBANQUES, played by Melanie and Mrs. Burma
A WAITRESS and A VEILED PASSERBY, played by Mrs. Burma
AN OLD WOMAN and A YOUNG GIRL, played by The Angel.

# THE PROFANE ACT

The interior of Taus Watch Repair shop; toward the back at the same level are two smaller stages with curtains drawn. Maus sits on a chair near the footlights. A clock strikes eight o'clock. Taus enters. He adjusts a clock then notices Maus.

TAUS: Maus! Have you been here long?
MAUS: Two years.
TAUS: Over the last two years, I was busy, too. Is there anything I can do for you?
MAUS: No, no... I wanted to say goodbye. I'm leaving for New Zealand. I found a job as a diver.

*(The doorbell rings.)*

TAUS: Excuse me.

*(Klaus enters the shop.)*

KLAUS: Good day.
TAUS: Good day. What can I do for you?
KLAUS: I'm looking for Mr. Taus, the watchmaker.
TAUS: That's me.
KLAUS: Are you sure?
TAUS: As sure as anyone.
KLAUS: You were recommended...
TAUS: An honor...

(In this first part until indicated in the text, TAUS and KLAUS are two old people with grey hair.)

KLAUS: Naturally. I am Mr... Mr... I forgot my name!

TAUS: It happens to me...
KLAUS: Yes, but I have a name... I'm quite well known.
TAUS: Good for you... should I call you "sir."
KLAUS: That's too... short...
TAUS: As you wish.
KLAUS: Wait. I have a card. *(He hands him a business card)*
TAUS: *(reading)* Klaus, Architect. Pleased to know you. How can I be of help.
KLAUS: You were recommended. (*He hands over the watch)*
TAUS: (*examining the watch)* Is it fast?
KLAUS: No.
TAUS: Is it slow?
KLAUS: No *(sad)* It's accurate.
TAUS: I could make it go a little faster or a little slower.
KLAUS: Same thing.
TAUS: Of course... It's a simple adjustment. You can do it yourself.
KLAUS: Oh, no!
TAUS: You're right. That's completely different...
KLAUS: Completely different...
TAUS: Then I'll make it go slower. Slower is more relaxing.
KLAUS: Could you make it go faster sometimes and slower sometimes?
TAUS: That could be fun.
KLAUS: Or make it stop, for good?
TAUS: Without noticing...
KLAUS: Or make it go square?
TAUS: Difficult. Watches go round.
KLAUS: Then make it go round with a square time.
TAUS: The corners can be a problem.
KLAUS: And put initials on the dial.
TAUS: Or a mark.
KLAUS: I want initials, my initials.
TAUS: You say "initials," I say "mark" -- they're the same thing.
KLAUS: For us, it's the same.

TAUS: Exactly.

*(Papus enters and goes to them.)*

TAUS: *(to Papus)* Sir?
PAPUS: *(bowing)* Papus... *(He shows them a collection of photos)* Do you take... nudes?
TAUS: This is a watch repair shop, sir.
KLAUS: *(defending Taus)* He was recommended!
PAPUS: So? *(furious)* Aren't watch repairmen people?
TAUS: Who knows?
PAPAUS: Well, then? *(more furious)* If it's not clear, why don't you let me earn my ...nudes!
KLAUS: He stutters, no? He mixes up his words.
TAUS: Not only his words...
PAPUS: *(choking)* It doesn't, Papus! Facts are facts. Do you buy...?
KLAUS: *(pointing to Taus)* I'm very sorry but his name's well known.
TAUS: *(pointing to Klaus)* And he was recommended to me...
PAPUS: OK, OK... *(He exits mumbling)*
KLAUS: *(returning to their interrupted conversation)* We'll put the initials P.N.
TAUS: That is?
KLAUS: "P" from Papus, "N" from nude.
TAUS: Great!
KLAUS: No one will know...

*(They both laugh as if at a good joke.)*

TAUS: You're very sympatico.
KLAUS: I like it here. It's pleasant. It's fun.
TAUS: Won't you stay for another hour, perhaps two? *(clock strikes once)* It's just eight. We can chat some more.
KLAUS: Delighted. But on one condition.
TAUS: And that is?

KLAUS: That we don't call each other "sir."
TAUS: As you wish... It's eight. Time to close up. *(He locks the door)* Would you care for a drink? *(He shouts.)* Melanie!

*(An Angel appears, male.)*

KLAUS: *(pointing to the Angel)* Is it yours?
TAUS: Mine.
KLAUS: Is it real?
TAUS: Yes.
KLAUS: Can it fly?
TAUS: *(to the Angel)* Melanie!

*(He makes a sign. The Angel hooks a cord to his waist. He flies and glides a bit then floats down and bows modestly.)*

KLAUS: (*enthusiastic*) Bravo! Bravo!
TAUS: I have a tiger, too — black market. Want to see it?
KLAUS: Not now. *(To the Angel)* A glass of mineral water.

*(The Angel exits.)*

TAUS: I'll show you the tiger.
KLAUS: Not now. *(confidentially)* My wife woke up...
TAUS: I didn't know...
KLAUS: *(to himself)* My dear, here is my good friend Taus... *(to Taus, pointing to himself)* Dear Taus, I'd like you to meet my wife.
TAUS: *(bowing before Klaus)* Madam...
MRS.KLAUS: *(who, in fact, is also Taus, yawns)* Delighted...
TAUS: Please, madam, have a seat.
MRS. KLAUS: Thank you. I'll sit over here. *(She points to an armchair a little to the side)* I'm so tired. *(She sits in the armchair and falls asleep. Klaus gets up and becomes himself again)*

KLAUS: *(pointing to the armchair)* She falls asleep, just like that. She sleeps deeply, but she can't wake up so quickly.

*(Someone knocks violently on the door.)*

TAUS: Who is it?
PAPUS: Papus.
TAUS: What do you want?
PAPUS: Photos...
TAUS: We don't need any. And stop that knocking.

*(Klaus sits in the armchair and falls asleep.)*

MRS. KLAUS: *(wakes up yawning)* What's going on?
TAUS: Just a peddler, madam...
MRS. KLAUS: Oh! *(She falls asleep again. Klaus gets up. The knocking stops.)*
TAUS: Did he wake her up?
KLAUS: She fell asleep again. She falls asleep, just like that.
TAUS: You make a lovely couple.

*(The angel enters, gives Klaus a glass of water and exits silently.)*

TAUS: How long have you been married?
KLAUS: Forty years.
TAUS: Out of love, of course...
KLAUS: I can't recall. Anyway, I dreamed of a different kind of love.
TAUS: We all dream that dream.
KLAUS: I wrote plays, dramas, tragedies. Then the architect came and wrecked everything.
TAUS: Perhaps when you were younger...
KLAUS: Who can say. I was at sea...

*(The lights focus on the small stage to the right as the rest of the stage dims. The curtain opens. A seascape. Klaus goes to the stage, takes off his white wig and puts on a black moustache.)*

KLAUS: The fashion, you know...
TAUS: Please, I'm from the Charleston generation. But let me show you the tiger.
KLAUS: Wait... *(He undresses and hangs up his clothes for a bathing suit from the turn of the twentieth century, with wide horizontal stripes and trunks covering his knees. He cups his hand to his mouth and shouts.)* Don't catch cold!
TAUS: I don't understand.
KLAUS: My wife. She talks in her sleep. *(He looks toward the horizon, his hand over his eyes. One can hear the sea. Mrs. Burma, wearing a bathing suit but wrapped in a cape, comes out of the waves then stands perfectly still.)* Something's wrong.
TAUS: She's the diver's widow.
KLAUS: No, no... She was blond... Now she's brunette.
TAUS: *(to Mrs. Burma)* By yourself?
MRS. BURMA: As you see.
KLAUS: Bored?
MRS. BURMA: What do you care?
KLAUS: I asked that out of human solidarity... *(to Taus)* Now, watch this...
TAUS: Don't worry, go ahead!
KLAUS: Care to take a walk, just the two of us?
TAUS: *(encouraging him)* That's it, go on!
KLAUS: *(gallantly)* An intimate stroll on the beach, to a pub...
MRS. BURMA: Or behind a hearse.
TAUS: I told you, she's in mourning.

*(Mrs. Burma exits.)*

KLAUS: *(disconcerted)* Something must have gone wrong.

TAUS: It happens. Let me show you the tiger. Get dressed.
KLAUS: It's better like this. I feel younger. *(He gets down, feeling his hair. The little stage grows dimmer.)* Is this my hair?
TAUS: That, I don't know.
KLAUS: The others know, though.
TAUS: Do they?
KLAUS: In any case, the moustache is fake. I'll take it off.
TAUS: Why?
KLAUS: Because it's fake.
TAUS: And the hair? How do you know that your hair isn't a wig? Are you sure it's not fake?
KLAUS: Who knows? *(He knits quickly with his fingers)*
TAUS: What are you doing?
KLAUS: My wife knits in her sleep.
TAUS: Socks?
KLAUS: Gloves.

*(They both laugh. A clock strikes one.)*

KLAUS: Eight o'clock.
TAUS: At my place, it's always eight.
KLAUS: An even number.
TAUS: What number is your shoe size?
KLAUS: 1846.
TAUS: You see!
KLAUS: That's it...
TAUS: In 1846, I...
KLAUS: I prefer 1486.
TAUS: I was too young ... and too inexperienced.
KLAUS: Then let's say 1946.
TAUS: Let me think... Yes!... Look there.

*(He points to the little stage to the left, where the lights focus. The curtain rises. A sidewalk cafe. Papus and Melanie sit quietly at a table. The Angel stands perfectly still behind Melanie.)*

KLAUS: There's your Angel.
TAUS: For the time being, he's her other half. *(He points to Melanie)*
KLAUS: Right! And Papus? What's he doing?
TAUS: He's her father.
KLAUS: *(to Papus)* Do you have... nudes?

*(Papus shakes his fist at him and points to Melanie.)*

TAUS: He doesn't... *(He giggles with Klaus)*

*(The waitress — Mrs. Burma, but slightly disguised — enters silently and takes the order. The characters at the table become more animated.)*

PAPUS: A brandy for me. *(The Angel gestures: "what about me?")* And another one... And another one for me.

*(The waitress exits.)*

MELANIE: Papa...
THE ANGEL: You cretin...
PAPUS: *(furious, to Melanie)* Shut up, you! When it comes to people, young lady, it's difficult to tell an Arabian from a Trojan horse.
MELANIE: What are you talking about?
PAPUS: About the whole wide world.
THE ANGEL: Are you sure the Trojan horse wasn't a mare?
PAPUS: Quiet!

*(The waitress silently serves the drinks and exits.)*

PAPUS: *(to Melanie)* Have you ever seen a horse's soul? Or a human soul? Have you ever seen anyone's soul?
MELANIE: I'm too young...
THE ANGEL: On what occasion?
PAPUS: You insolent...
MELANIE: I swear Papa... *(She cries, the Angel laughs)*
PAPUS: You laugh? Don't you have any respect for the memory of your mother. She wore tapeworms. She wore tapeworms. She had ribbons. I loved her... *(sobbing, his head falls to the table, Melanie cries with him)*
MELANIE: *(stops crying)* Papa, calm down. You know it doesn't do you any good...
THE ANGEL: Just a little more and you'll croak.
PAPUS: No, no... I loved her at night when she set... By the fence, the faucets. *(in a paroxysm)* Why?
THE ANGEL: That is the question.
PAPUS: *(furious, to Melanie)* You, shut up! *(He points to the Angel)* Let him, he's good, he's good and dead...
MELANIE: Calm down, Papa.
PAPUS: No, no... I made you. I'll make you marry. *(cries softly)* With your mother... your grave... the salt mines...
THE ANGEL: There you go again. *(He tastes the brandy)*
PAPUS: She had bees on the back of her head... and backwaters... and everything... *(Mrs. Burma enters dressed elegantly for a night out, a rifle on her shoulder. Papus recovers and jumps to his feet.)* Ah, Mrs. Burma! Marry me! *(He moves to get closer to her)*

MRS. BURMA: *(threatens him with the rifle)* Don't or I'll shoot! You know I don't like that.

*(For a moment, as Taus and Klaus talk, the people at the table fall silent.)*

KLAUS: She looks like...
TAUS: Now she's someone else...

PAPUS: Mrs. Burma, you know that I... Here is my daughter.
MRS. BURMA: She's cute... so fresh...
THE ANGEL: Precocious motherhood.
PAPUS: *(to Melanie)* Be polite now. Remember, she's a widow. I'll take her.
MELANIE: The edelweiss is my favorite flower.
MRS. BURMA: That's fine... How old is she?
PAPUS: She'll turn eighteen this summer.
THE ANGEL: And twenty-eight in the fall.
PAPUS: Mrs. Burma...
MRS. BURMA: Don't come any closer, or I'll shoot.
PAPUS: Melanie, put your earplugs in! *(Melanie does that)* Mrs. Burma, I love you to death.
MRS. BURMA: You know I'm in mourning.
PAPUS: Everyone's mourning... something. I'll take you, mourning or no mourning.
MRS. BURMA: Patience. Let me get to know you better.
PAPUS: When shall I come to your place?
MRS. BURMA: I receive on Thursdays, between four and six in the afternoon.
PAPUS: Couldn't we meet at night?
MRS. BURMA: At night?
PAPUS: Yes.
MRS. BURMA: Why at night?
THE ANGEL: It's cooler.
PAPUS: I don't know, but at night.
MRS. BURMA: Then on Thursday... no... Friday... no... Let's say on Saturday, between two and four fifteen.
PAPUS: Why not sooner?
MRS. BURMA: On Saturday? Impossible...
PAPUS: Fine. Melanie, take out your earplugs!

*(Melanie can't hear him. The Angel gestures to her. She obliges.)*

MELANIE: Thanks, Papa.
PAPUS: Don't mention it. Have a seat, Mrs. Burma.
THE ANGEL: Perhaps you're in a hurry...
MRS. BURMA: Thank you. *(She sits next to Melanie)*
PAPUS: Mrs. Burma, you who've been through so much, do you know where the restroom is?

*(Mrs. Burma points straight ahead and to the right with the palm of her hand turned vertically. Papus leaves. The characters at the table fall still.)*

KLAUS: I like Mrs. Burma...
TAUS: She's a bit wilted...
KLAUS: It's a matter of taste. I like her.
TAUS: Hmm...
KLAUS: I'd like to meet her.
TAUS: I'll call her over. Mrs. Burma!
MRS. BURMA: Yes.
TAUS: I'd like you to meet a friend.
MRS. BURMA: Gladly. *(She comes down. The others on the small stage stay motionless.)*
TAUS: My friend Klaus...
KLAUS: Madam... *(He steps toward her)*
MRS. BURMA: *(threatening with the rifle)* Don't come any closer. *(sweetly)* Men frighten me...
KLAUS: That's a pity!
MRS. BURMA: It all begins like this...
TAUS: I'll leave you two alone. *(He steps to the side and finds something to do)*
KLAUS: Mrs. Burma, I swear, it's an intimate matter.
MRS. BURMA: Oh?
KLAUS: A matter of the heart. I'd like your advice...
MRS. BURMA: That's different... I'm listening... *(Klaus wants to get closer)* Not one step closer!

KLAUS: I can't speak loudly. My wife will hear me...
MRS. BURMA: She's here?
KLAUS: She's asleep over there, in the armchair...
MRS. BURMA: Right! *(She lets him take one step closer)* Talk.
KLAUS: No, not here. I can't. Even when she's asleep...
MRS. BURMA: Then come to me, on Thursday. Between four and six in the afternoon.
KLAUS: It's a matter of the heart. Is it possible at night?
MRS. BURMA: Then Sunday from three to five.
KLAUS: I'm out of town.
MRS. BURMA: Then, Saturday, between four fifteen *(She examines him from all sides)* and nine.
KLAUS: Perfect. *(He tries to get closer)*
MRS. BURMA: Freeze!
KLAUS: Ooooh!
TAUS: Done? *(He comes to them)* Shall we continue? *(He points to the small stage)*
MRS. BURMA: Ah, yes... Good bye...
KLAUS: It's a deal.
MRS. BURMA: Of course... *(She climbs on the small stage and sits at the table. Lights focus on the small stage.)*
MELANIE: You're so nice, Mrs. Burma *(She cries)*
THE ANGEL: I know, I know...
MELANIE: Can you give me advice?
MRS. BURMA: I receive on Thursdays...
THE ANGEL: Between four and six...
MELANIE: No, no... *(She cries)*
THE ANGEL: Now...
MRS. BURMA: I've suffered in my life, but now I'm not so... inspired. Anyway, what's the matter?
MELANIE: It's Dad. He's always so... irritable.
MRS. BURMA: I've noticed. He was furious today.
MELANIE: He had a tough time, today.
THE ANGEL: He ate like a pig.

MELANIE: *(crying)* He's always like that. I can't take it any more. Mrs. Burma!
THE ANGEL: *(points at Melanie)* She's crying.
MRS. BURMA: Calm down, my dear.
MELANIE: He wants to marry me off...
MRS. BURMA: That's our fate.
THE ANGEL: I can't believe it.
MELANIE: I have dreams, Mrs. Burma...
MRS. BURMA: As every girl...
MELANIE: No, no...I have different dreams.
MRS. BURMA *(curious)* Erotic?
MELANIE: Sentimental. *(She cries)*
KLAUS: Oh, cut it out!
MRS. BURMA: Mr. Klaus, let the girl...
KLAUS: Yes, but not like that...
THE ANGEL: You're right
MRS. BURMA: What do you know?
KLAUS: Anyway...
MRS. BURMA: Continue, little girl.
MELANIE *(without crying)*: I have dreams, Mrs. Burma. I have dreams with plants and animals. I hear how the suitcases sigh. I have sentimental dreams.
MRS. BURMA: Any men?
MELANIE: Only one...
THE ANGEL: Hmm! Hmm!
MRS. BURMA: If you tell me his name and address, maybe I could do arrange something.
MELANIE: Maus, his name is Maus.
MRS. BURMA *(writing down)*: And his last name?
MELANIE: I don't know *(She cries)*
MRS. BURMA: Where does he live?
MELANIE: How would I know, Mrs. Burma?
MRS. BURMA: But, didn't you two meet?
MELANIE: In my dreams, Mrs. Burma...

KLAUS: That's too much!
THE ANGEL: Right!...
MRS. BURMA: Mr. Klaus, please!
KLAUS: OK...
MRS. BURMA *(to Melanie)*: Don't mind the interruptions. So, tell me, where did you meet him?
MELANIE *(crying)*: In a dream.
MRS. BURMA *(melancholy)*: I understand...
MELANIE *(without crying)*: I know his name is Maus. He told me so. One morning, at the Tropics. He told me that his name was Maus. Since then, I am not scared of mice any more.
MRS. BURMA: I don't quite see how I could help you...
MELANIE: Convince dad... *(She cries)* He torments me... The child was born dead... It was less than two weeks old...
MRS. BURMA: The child?
MELANIE: Yes...
MRS. BURMA: With Maus?
THE ANGEL: Who cares? It's been such a long time since then...
MRS. BURMA: But have you ever seen Maus, in reality?
MELANIE: No...
MRS. BURMA: Then it will be difficult...
MELANIE: But why? I love him. I buy him cigarettes. I take walks with him, with my hands on my head. I have sentimental... *(She cries)*
KLAUS: I can't stand it! Enough!
TAUS: Call them over here. We'll have some fun.
KLAUS: You think so?
TAUS: What do we have to lose?
KLAUS: Right. Mrs. Burma!
MRS. BURMA: Yes.
KLAUS: Why don't you come on over?
MRS. BURMA: Both of us?
TAUS: Yes.
MRS. BURMA: Are you sure?
TAUS: Yes.

MELANIE: Without dad?
KLAUS: Without...
MRS. BURMA: We're coming, with pleasure.

*(Mrs. Burma, Melanie and the Angel step down to the watch repair shop. The little stage remains open but the light focuses on the big stage. Maus is still in his corner.)*

TAUS: We'll be better here.
THE ANGEL *(gestures approvingly).*
KLAUS: It's more intimate.
TAUS: More appealing. Do you know Mrs. Klaus?
MRS. BURMA *(pointing to the armchair)*: The lady over there?
KLAUS *(making the introductions)*: My wife...
MELANIE: Is she ill?
KLAUS: She's sleeping.
THE ANGEL: Or she pretends to.
TAUS: It doesn't matter.
MELANIE: Certainly. She's harmless. She doesn't torture anyone. *(She cries)*
MRS. BURMA: When a person sleeps...
THE ANGEL: Or pretends...
TAUS: What can I say!
KLAUS: What do you mean?
TAUS: Nothing.
KLAUS: Right...
MELANIE: Sleep doesn't smother sentiments.
MRS. BURMA: On the contrary. It amplifies them.
THE ANGEL: It makes them stink.
MRS. BURMA: It amplifies them. At least, I hope it does...
TAUS: Maybe, but it still gives them an unpleasant odor...
KLAUS: We may never know.
MELANIE: My sentiments are always perfumed when I dream.
KLAUS: How do you know?

MELANIE: From experience.
KLAUS: How do you know they are perfumed?
MELANIE: In any case, I know they are sentiments. *(She cries)*
KLAUS *(to Taus)*: There she goes again.
TAUS: You'll just have to get used to it.
MRS. BURMA: Still I believe it amplifies them. The dreams, that is...
TAUS: It could be.
MRS. BURMA *(pointing to the armchair)*: Why not ask her? Now, while she's asleep.
KLAUS *(firmly)*: She doesn't talk in her sleep. She talks only to me.
THE ANGEL: Who can say? Let's try.

*(They all go to the armchair save Klaus.)*

KLAUS: Let her alone. Let her sleep.
MELANIE: Just a little...
TAUS: It would be interesting.
KLAUS: You're wrong.
MRS. BURMA: *(offended)*: What do you mean?
KLAUS *(losing his temper)*: I mean...No one has sentiments. You are all like trained animals. Bow-wow!
TAUS: There is also the presentiment of a sentiment.
THE ANGEL: Trained. Back to your cage. Bow-wow!
TAUS: It's a point of view...
MELANIE *(to Klaus)*: You mean to say I have no sentiments? *(to the others)* Please, forgive me! *(She cries)*
TAUS: As you wish...

*(The light focuses again on the little stage. Papus pounds the table with his fist, ignoring what's going on below.)*

PAPUS: Is there anybody here? Hey! Waiter!
MRS. BURMA: I'm coming! *(to Klaus, with conviction)* I have the sentiment of duty! *(She climbs up to the Café, gesturing like a waitress.)*

PAPUS: Is there anybody here? Where's the girl?
MRS. BURMA: She's taking a walk. With the widow.
PAPUS: What widow? She's a widow! There's a girl with her. *(As if telling a secret, pointing to where he came from)* Over there, for ladies...
MRS. BURMA: For men, too.
PAPUS: Where?
MRS. BURMA *(points with her hand like the first time).*
PAPUS: Over there, for the ladies. They cursed me out.
MRS. BURMA: The other door. With the picture of a man's shoe.
PAPUS *(losing his temper again)*: If I find ladies there, I'll curse them. And beat them. With the shoe. Over their mouths and shoes. Over their ears. And over the widow. *(He leaves, determined)*
MRS. BURMA: OK, OK... *(She exits through the other side)*
TAUS: He took the wrong door.
KLAUS: Poor man...
THE ANGEL: Because he ate like a pig! Where is the restroom?

> *(Taus shows him with the same gestures as the widow Burma. But he points to the sky. The Angel exits.)*

MELANIE *(to Klaus)*: You, if you want to know, you have sentiments.
KLAUS: No, I don't. Nobody does.
MELANIE: Not even your wife?
KLAUS: Not even her.
MELANIE: Really? And Mrs. Burma? And the sentiment of duty? And her sentimental drama? *(She cries)*
TAUS: What drama?
MELANIE: It's in the papers...
TAUS: I don't read the papers that much...
MELANIE: That's why you don't have sentiments.
KLAUS *(giving in)*: That could be true...
TAUS: Would you tell us the story?
MELANIE *(crying)*: Tell you? It's in all the papers. *(She takes a newspaper out of her purse and stops crying.)*

*(On the curtains of the little stage to the right—the one with the seascape—a text in Khutsuri characters appears. The little stage remains dark.)*

TAUS *(looking at the text)*: I don't understand.
KLAUS: It's an unknown alphabet.
MELANIE: Those are Khutsuri letters. *(She cries)* Nobody understands them!...
KLAUS: Do you understand them?
MELANIE: I do.
TAUS: Read it to us.
MELANIE *(happy)*: That's right!... *(apologetic)* When he is not with me *(she gestures as if she had wings, referring to the angel)* I think slower...
TAUS: Nevertheless, sometimes you think...
KLAUS: Correctly enough...
MELANIE: Really? Then I will read. "The sentimental drama of the widow Burma." See? The sen-ti-men-tal drama. "The revenge of a woman, whose husband cheated on her." See? *(She cries)*
TAUS: It's true!
KLAUS: One can see with the naked eye...

*(A brief fanfare precedes each illuminated text, tableau vivant, or pantomime. During Melanie's reading the fanfare decreases then grows deafening and stops abruptly every time the little curtain falls in between tableaux. The tableaux vivants are fairly motionless with certain slight movements if necessary.)*

MELANIE *(reads the new text)*: "Moved by her best sentiments Mrs. Burma suspects her husband. She lies in wait."

*(The curtain rises showing the seascape. Two movements: Mrs. Burma looking toward the sea and Mrs. Burma hiding behind a rock and lying in wait.)*

MELANIE *(reads the new text)*: "Well-meaning locals try to change the course of the respectable, if barbarian, sentiments of Mrs. Burma. But their efforts *(She cries)* are bound to fail..."

> *(Pantomime between Mrs. Burma and the Angel, slightly disguised as an old woman.)*

TAUS: She seems determined.
KLAUS: I wonder how far she'll go.
MELANIE: How far? Until death. Sentiments are strong, Mr. Klaus!
KLAUS: I don't think so.
TAUS: Me neither.

MELANIE *(reads the new text)*: "On a deserted part of the shore, Mrs. Burma's husband, the diver Cocles, has illicit encounters with a dark, unmarried, local young lady."

> *(Cocles, who is actually Papus but unrecognizable because of his antique helmet and diving suit, comes out of the water. He looks to his right and to his left then sits down, sighing. The Angel appears without wings and disguised as a young Roman lady. He covers the helmet visors with his hands. Amorous scene. They exchange wedding rings. Then the text changes.)*

MELANIE: "But Mrs. Burma will catch her husband red-handed."

> *(Crawling on her hands and knees, Mrs. Burma approaches the two lovers. She rises suddenly. Panic. The Angel runs away. Cocles takes off his helmet. It is Papus, still unrecognizable because of his thick hair and beard. He laughs sardonically. Mrs. Burma fires. He continues laughing until the third bullet when he collapses. She leaves the stage crestfallen. The fanfare becomes a sad waltz. The curtain falls.)*

MELANIE *(triumphantly, to Klaus)*: See?
KLAUS: Yes.
MELANIE: Now do you believe?
KLAUS: No.
TAUS *(enthusiastically)*: Bravo!
MELANIE *(crying)*: If you don't believe, you have no sentiments.
TAUS: But he has presentiments.
MELANIE: Preconceived.
TAUS: Premeditated.
MELANIE: I don't believe in presentiments.
KLAUS: That means you don't have them.
TAUS *(curious)*: How do you know?
KLAUS: I have a presentiment. My presentiments are sure, while her sentiments... what can I say!
MELANIE *(crying)*: You're so offensive...
TAUS *(conciliatory)*: What if we talked about something else?
MELANIE: Something more pleasant.
KLAUS: Or stop talking altogether.
TAUS: People talk when they don't want to understand each other.
KLAUS: When they understand each other, they are silent.
MELANIE: A *tacit* agreement. What did I say?
KLAUS: Nothing intelligent.
TAUS: We are not intelligent at all.
MELANIE *(happy)*: How nice!

> *(The Angel enters with glasses on a tray. They all clink their glasses in agreement.)*

TAUS: There is an extra glass.
THE ANGEL: I could drink it.
TAUS *(tolerantly)*: Anyway Mrs. Burma left...
KLAUS: It's for my wife. *(He takes the glass and goes to the armchair)* Would you like a drink, my dear?

MRS. KLAUS *(yawns)*: Who is she?
KLAUS *(drinks and makes the introductions)*: Miss Melanie... She has sentiments.
MELANIE *(comes closer to the armchair)*: Nice to meet you, madam... Have you slept well? *(She cries)* Why doesn't she answer?
KLAUS: She fell asleep again.
TAUS: Why don't we let her sleep. She's a very quiet woman.
MELANIE: She is as ill-mannered as her husband. *(She moves away from the armchair then notices Maus)* You?
MAUS *(stands up and introduces himself)*: Maus...
MELANIE: Maus!
TAUS: Maus! Have you been here long?
MAUS: Two years.
TAUS *(makes the introductions)*: My friend Maus, Miss Melanie, Mr. and Mrs. Klaus... Mrs. Klaus is sleeping...
MAUS: Charmed.
MELANIE: It's like we've known each other forever...
MAUS: I'm sure we've met before...
MELANIE: Do you remember?

> *(Taus, Klaus and the Angel form a wide circle around the two who swing to the right and to the left as if talking under a spell.)*

MAUS: We loved each other on bloodied snows...
MELANIE: Sometimes the wind was blowing... *(The wind whistles; they keep swinging)*
MAUS: I was a rubber band, a crippled colonel, a beaver in lime water...
MELANIE: And I slept on a comb, like a salamander...
MAUS: Every night, a bull sat on my mouth and whispered your name...
MELANIE: In the sand, your words looked for me like blue bees...
MAUS: We'll run away together...
TAUS *(pointing to the Angel)*: What about him, her other half?

MELANIE: You take him. I don't need him any more.
KLAUS: A souvenir.
MELANIE: Why do you interfere?
KLAUS: True!
TAUS: Then *(points to the Angel)* he is mine.
KLAUS: You can feed him to the tiger.

*(The Angel exits, crying.)*

MELANIE *(starting to swing again, together with Maus)*: Let's run away somewhere, the snow drifts...
MAUS: To a closed space, transparent and odorless...
KLAUS: Here they go again.
TAUS: They are in full rut.
KLAUS: But they lack nuance. *(He yawns)*
TAUS: Tired?
MRS. KLAUS: No, I just woke up. Where is my husband?
TAUS: Probably in the loo. We could take advantage of the situation.
MRS. KLAUS: What do you mean?
TAUS *(points to the two who swing mutely, in ecstasy).*
MRS. KLAUS *(sizes him up)*: You are a bit old... And I am tired... *(She yawns)*
TAUS: Do you work a lot?
KLAUS: Lately, poor thing, she's doing it all. She's carries the world on her shoulders.
TAUS: Physical labor.
KLAUS: The first woman night guard.
MAUS *(recovering from his ecstasy, agitated, to Taus)*: My friend, lend me a suitcase. I have to run away. With her.
MELANIE: Let's hide from the world, from dad...
KLAUS: A straw chest would be good.
TAUS: I have a suitcase. But it doesn't have a key.
MELANIE: Whatever. I keep no secrets from him. *(She points to Maus)*
TAUS: What if you two hid in the armoire.

MAUS: No, no... The first train: when is it?
TAUS: Where to?
MELANIE: The snow drifts.
MAUS: Anywhere.
KLAUS: The principle of indetermination. The first train is at ten fifteen.
TAUS *(checks his watch)*: You have time. It's only eight.
MELANIE: Give us the chest...
KLAUS: The suitcase...
MELANIE: True... *(She cries)*

*(Taus brings a suitcase.)*

MAUS *(upset)*: There's no key.
TAUS: I was wrong. *(He gives them another suitcase)*
MAUS: Hurry, my love... Put the documents in the suitcase...
MELANIE: The handkerchiefs...
TAUS: Hurry...
KLAUS: The snow drifts...
MAUS: The neckties...
MELANIE: The chair...

*(Seized by the fever of departure, they empty their pockets and put in the suitcase all they can lay their hands on, including the chair, which doesn't fit.)*

MELANIE *(cries)*: It's too big...
MAUS: Don't waste your tears.
KLAUS: Be more thrifty.
TAUS: You know what? I'm not running away any more.
KLAUS: Me neither.
TAUS: You stay, too.
KLAUS: In the tiger's room.
MELANIE: And dad? He is going to kill us.

MAUS: What's the time?
TAUS: Eight. You have time to change your minds.
MELANIE: I'm sick! *(She moves to and fro; she falls down)*
KLAUS: She's dead.
TAUS: Just wounded.
MAUS: I loved her. Maybe she fainted.
TAUS: From emotion.
KLAUS: In any case, she's lost blood.
MAUS: We'll still be together. And I will walk; I'll walk as long as I live.
TAUS: It's exhausting.
KLAUS: If she's dead, she'll rot in your arms...
TAUS: It depends...
KLAUS: It's certain...
TAUS: What about in the cold, in the north, the cold northern realms?
KLAUS: Hmm...
TAUS *(to Maus)*: Stay here. I have a cold room in the basement.
MAUS *(broken-hearted)*: No, no... Her last wish... The snow drifts...
KLAUS: Try to make her stand.

*(Maus raises Melanie to her feet. She stands like that with her eyes closed.)*

TAUS: That's a good girl! She behaves even when she's dead.
KLAUS: Make her walk.

*(Maus makes Melanie walk.)*

TAUS: She walks. You're in the clear.
MAUS: I'll take her to the snow drifts...
KLAUS: You can bury her in the snow when you get bored.
MAUS: Goodbye!
TAUS: Safe journey!
KLAUS: Write to us from Amsterdam...

*(Maus exits with Melanie.)*

TAUS: They're gone.
KLAUS: Finally! What time is it?
TAUS: Eight. Don't you want to see the tiger?
KLAUS: Perhaps he's asleep.
TAUS: He's not asleep. He's doing his homework. *(He points to the door, stepping aside)* Please.
KLAUS: After you...
TAUS: Oh, no, no... *(They both get going as if they were together, although Taus, speaking to an imaginary Klaus, goes toward the door, while Klaus goes toward his wife's armchair, where he falls asleep.)* The tiger has his own schedule. On Wednesdays I make him wear a muzzle. On Thursdays, it's the bathroom... *(He makes room for the imaginary Klaus at the door, then exits.)*

(*The light focuses on the little stage to the left, where Papus reappears. He bangs furiously on the table.)*

PAPUS: Hey! Is anybody here? *(Mrs. Burma enters as Mrs. Burma and not as a waitress)* Mrs. Burma, I cursed them, all six of them.
MRS. BURMA: Blond?
PAPUS: Of course. Mrs. Burma, marry me.
MRS. BURMA: I'm in mourning.
PAPUS: What mourning? I love you to death. Where is the boot?
MRS. BURMA: Melanie?
PAPUS: Yes. She was on the table.
MRS. BURMA: Mr. Papus, Melanie ran away. With a young man.
PAPUS: Where to?
MRS. BURMA: The wide world...
PAPUS: So why did it take her so long? She couldn't find the door?
MRS. BURMA: Yes, yes. But she's not coming back. She's in love.

PAPUS: In love? I'll beat her over the mouth. With the shoe from the restroom door. Marry me.
MRS. BURMA: Melanie ran away with Maus.
PAPUS: What, Maus? Never heard of it.
MRS. BURMA: That's his name. That's it! She's not coming back.
PAPUS: But the police? I'm going to the police. With Maus tied up and beaten over the mouth. You're a witness.
MRS. BURMA: I am.
PAPUS: So? I'll tie them up. I'll kill them. I'll destroy them. And afterwards I'll take you.
MRS. BURMA: Dear Papus, they're in love...
PAPUS: Never heard of that. *(He pounds the table with his fist)* I'll destroy them!
MRS. BURMA: Be reasonable...
PAPUS: I am but I'll destroy them. *(He points the direction with his hand, imitating Mrs. Burma's initial gesture)* Straight to the police... *(He exits, dignified)*
MRS. BURMA: Mr. Papus... *(She goes after him)*

> *(The lights on the little stage go to black. On the big stage Mrs. Klaus, alone in the armchair, sleeps peacefully. The Angel enters, comes close to her and looks at her silently.)*

MRS. KLAUS *(yawns)*: Is there anybody here? *(She notices the Angel)* Are you a boy or a girl?
THE ANGEL: If necessary, I can be a man, too.
MRS. KLAUS *(yawns again)*: Interesting... And you don't know where everybody went?
THE ANGEL: To see the tiger.
MRS. KLAUS: *(She looks at him with interest)* What do you do?
THE ANGEL: I was an angel, madam...
MRS. KLAUS: A guardian?
THE ANGEL: If you wish...
MRS. KLAUS: What a coincidence! *(She yawns)* Day or night?

THE ANGEL: Permanently. *(He yawns, too)* Now I'm going to be an overseer.
MRS. KLAUS: Overseer is not bad either. If you work honestly...
THE ANGEL: That's it...
MRS. KLAUS: Any work... *(She yawns)*
THE ANGEL: True.
MRS. KLAUS: And are you married?
THE ANGEL: No.
MRS. KLAUS *(yawns)*: Physical deficiencies?
THE ANGEL: No. *(He shows his wings)* The profession...
MRS. KLAUS: Yes, but an overseer...
THE ANGEL: It's different. But it's still bad.
MRS. KLAUS: Anyway... *(She yawns)*
THE ANGEL: I was an orphan, from this high... I liked to study but I didn't learn much; I'm stupid ... If I could find someone, a mother...
MRS. KLAUS: I'm tired. *(She yawns)*
THE ANGEL: It's no big deal being an angel...
MRS. KLAUS *(asleep)*: That's possible...
THE ANGEL: But it's still... *(He notices that Mrs. Klaus fell asleep)* Better than nothing... *(He shrugs and exits on tiptoe)*

**Curtain**

## THE SACRED ACT

Same sets in black. A vaguely iridescent light suggests a cathedral's stained glass. Melanie and Maus crouch near the footlights in a tightly focused spotlight. When the curtain comes up, one can hear a Gregorian Mass, which grows fainter but persists barely audible. Melanie and Maus speak in whispers.

Note: In this act, the change of scenery — from cathedral to watch repair shop — is done only by means of lighting.

MAUS: Melanie!...
MELANIE: Yes...
MAUS: Are you cold?
MELANIE: Yes. Is it still raining?
MAUS: Yes.

*(One can hear the rain and wind over the Mass in the background.)*

MELANIE: The door is open...
MAUS: That's how I found it.
MELANIE: Why is he so late?
MAUS: He wasn't home. But I left him a note saying: "Father, come quickly. I'll be waiting at the church."
MELANIE: A telegram. *(She cries)*
MAUS: I left it with the maid.
MELANIE: What if she reads it?
MAUS: What if?
MELANIE: She can call the police...
MAUS: I didn't sign the note.
MELANIE: The telegram. *(She cries)*
MAUS: The telegram...

MELANIE: What if she loses it?
MAUS: Out of the question.
MELANIE: Why?
MAUS: Because it's out of the question.
MELANIE: Right... *(pause)* Show me the wedding rings.
MAUS: Here. *(He hands them to her)*
MELANIE: What do you want? A boy or a girl?
MAUS: Let's not rush into anything...
MELANIE: Rush? We have two more months.
MAUS: What? It's been only a few days...
MELANIE: We have two more months...
MAUS: Are you sure?
MELANIE: You know I love you. What do you want it to be?
MAUS: It's all the same to me.
MELANIE: What if they are two, twins?
MAUS: That could be a problem... With the breastfeeding...
MELANIE: Nature is wise. That's why mothers have two breasts.
MAUS: Why not three?
MELANIE: I've never heard of mothers with three breasts.
MAUS: I read about a case like that in New Zealand. There were eight twins. But on the snow drifts, it is out of the question...
MELANIE: Of course. That can happen only on the high plateaus. Women have seven or eight breasts there. And even if they don't, there are other women who come to you and say: Dear, you have, let's say, one breast... You know, that happens pretty often on the high plateaus. The Amazons were like that, to fight better...
MAUS: On the high plateaus, yes, I read about it...
MELANIE: And then the Amazons would say: Dear, you have only one. Keep one. We have one each. Seven of us will breastfeed the remaining seven... And that's it!
MAUS: Life is beautiful on the high plateaus!...
MELANIE: On snow drifts, too... But it is cold here... And the police are looking for us... *(She cries.)*

MAUS: Hush!

*(The priest — as Taus in a beard, black cape and white collar — appears in the semidarkness.)*

TAUS: Anyone here?
MAUS: Father...
TAUS: You left the note?
MELANIE: The telegram. *(She cries)*
TAUS: What can I do for you?
MAUS: I have wedding rings...
TAUS: A wedding?
MAUS: A secret one. I am Maus.
MELANIE: And I am Melanie.
TAUS: Melanie, and what else?
MELANIE: Melanie Papus. *(She cries)*
TAUS: Poor little thing.
MELANIE: Why do you say that?
TAUS: Three times poor! You might be an orphan by now!
MELANIE: Alas!
TAUS: Papus, your father committed suicide. Out of desperation...
MELANIE: He died?
TAUS: He's struggling between life and death. It's in the papers...
MAUS: I don't read newspapers.
MELANIE: I used to read them. They are instructive. And educational. But now, given what's happened... *(She cries)* I haven't read a newspaper in five days...
TAUS: Now, now, my child...
MAUS: Be strong, Melanie. Don't cry. We love each other. We are happy...
MELANIE *(not at all convinced)*: It's true.
TAUS: Given the circumstances, you understand... Keep the wedding rings...
MELANIE: But in two months...

MAUS: In two months we may be on the snow drifts, or the high plateaus...
TAUS: Unknown are the paths of the Lord.
MELANIE: It's true...
MAUS: Father, we are poor runaways. Without shelter. And it's raining. Can we stay here overnight?
TAUS: Sure.
MELANIE: And the door, can he close it? I'm cold. *(She cries)*
TAUS: As you wish. But don't latch it, so the gendarme can come in.
MAUS: The gendarme?
TAUS: When he makes his rounds, sometimes he stops here. Especially when it rains.
MAUS: When does he make his rounds?
TAUS: Never before ten o'clock.
MAUS *(looks at his watch)*: It's eight.
TAUS: I'll go now. Good-bye.
MELANIE: Good-bye.
MAUS: Good bye.

*(Taus exits. The couple crouches in the old place.)*

MELANIE: It's so cold!... Could you close the door...
MAUS: Sure. *(He wants to get up)*

*(The Mass grows louder. On the little stage to the right — seascape — the light comes up on the window Burma, rifle in hand, standing motionless like a statue in a niche. The rest of the stage is dark except where the two runaways are. The choir music fades.)*

MAUS: What do you know! An altar.
MELANIE: A snow drift!
MAUS: There are no snow drifts in churches.
MELANIE: Then it is a high plateau.

MAUS: Impossible. It's an altar. A marine altar. An altar of the Virgin. *Stella Maris.*
MELANIE: By the sea, it is warm...
MAUS: What if we hid over there?

*(They get up. He takes a step toward the back scene.)*

MRS. BURMA: Stop! Who goes there?
MAUS: Sweet Mother of God, we...
MRS. BURMA: Stop, or I shoot!
MAUS: We...

*(He takes another step. Mrs. Burma shoots. The choir is Fortissimo. Maus and Melanie scream. The light fades slowly on the little stage along with the music.)*

MELANIE: Are you hit?
MAUS *(from the dark)*: I don't know. *(He comes into the light, near Melanie)* She missed me.
MELANIE: That was a mystical vision.
MAUS: A warning from the sky.
MELANIE: Dad's curse... *(She cries)*
MAUS: Don't cry, Melanie. *(He checks his watch)* It's eight. Maybe the gendarme will come, because of the shot.
MELANIE: Maybe he didn't hear it.
MAUS: They hear everything.
MELANIE: Let's run...
MAUS: Let's run!
MELANIE: But it's raining!...
MAUS: Be strong, Melanie. We love each other. We are happy.
MELANIE *(regretfully)*: That's true...

*(They both leave the cathedral on tiptoe. The Angel enters through the door they used and turns on the lights. Now one can*

*see the same set from the first act. The Mass has ceased. Mrs. Klaus sleeps in her armchair. The Angel kisses her forehead then moves away.)*

MRS. KLAUS: Stop it, Ernst!...
THE ANGEL: It was me, madam.
MRS. KLAUS: It seemed like... It seemed that I was in a church...
THE ANGEL: Dreams, madam...
MRS. KLAUS: True. They are not back yet?
THE ANGEL: No.
MRS. KLAUS: Do you think the tiger ate them?
THE ANGEL: It's possible. (*He exits*)

*(Mrs. Klaus gets up from the armchair. Taus enters the room and politely gives an imaginary Klaus space to stand in. He's still in the priest's disguise but doesn't realize that, and continues his discussion with Klaus. Mrs. Klaus goes to him.)*

TAUS: Ah, no... Nevertheless, purple is a pleasant color. That's what I think...
MRS. KLAUS *(yawns)*: Interesting.
TAUS: Did you rest well, madam?
KLAUS *(looks to the armchair)*: She fell asleep again.
TAUS: She's so peaceful.
KLAUS: Yes.
TAUS: Life's merry with her, yes?
KLAUS: Like a merry widow... Like the widow Burma... Widow Burma is beautiful...
TAUS: It's a matter of taste...
KLAUS: I've thought of her from the moment I saw her.
TAUS: That happens.
KLAUS: It's a kind of... sentiment... What do you think she's doing now?
TAUS: Taking a bath perhaps...

*(The light dims on the big stage and comes up on the little stage to the left — the sidewalk café. Instead of a table, Mrs. Burma's bed is on the sidewalk. The bed is made up for sleeping. Widow Burma, dressed for the night, is in bed with the Angel. They both sit upright from the waist up and look straight in front of them. The Angel holds Mrs. Burma's rifle. The bed is parallel to the background and its end is toward the left, so that the little stage to the right — the seascape — now dark, is in the direction of the two characters' feet.)*

KLAUS: Lo and behold! Your Angel!
TAUS: He's just a poor soul!
KLAUS: He's a dog. Why do you call him "soul?"
TAUS: Have you read the Zohar?
KLAUS: It's a Jewish book. What's in it?
TAUS *(explanatory)*: It's written that before descending into this world, each soul is part of an animate mystery. After descending, they split in two, bringing life to two different bodies: a man and a woman. And the men and women who unite are...
KLAUS: Yes but this dog *(He points to the Angel)* is the soulless half of a soulless half. The crippled half of a crippled half. He lives the doubling of a half that became the half of a half, and so on. Awww! *(He struggles as if he's been hit by someone)*
TAUS: What's with you?
KLAUS: It's my wife... She's beating me in her sleep.
TAUS: That's a biographical detail.
KLAUS: Yes, but it hurts like hell!... *(He calms down and resumes in a learned tone)* In this world, one has to find a way to unify the half that he or she possesses: the unity of the half, or the other half of the unity. I have spoken!
TAUS: Plato has a different opinion...

*(The light comes up on the cathedral. Melanie and Maus enter and move to their places as previously. They believe that they are in the church. The mass resumes.)*

MELANIE: I am completely frozen... *(She cries)*
MAUS: It's better here. At least it isn't wet. *(He points to the small stage lit up)* What a beautiful icon! The Immaculate Conception.
MELANIE: It's the widow Burma. And the angel? What is he doing in her bed?
MAUS: He is giving her the news.
MELANIE: I think he is doing something else. I know him pretty well...
TAUS *(to Klaus)*: Plato has a different opinion...
MAUS: Are you here, Father?
TAUS: Yes. *(He moves toward them)* You've come back?
MAUS: Wretched weather.
MELANIE: My soul is frozen.
TAUS: Stay here. Until the rain stops.
MAUS: We're not putting you out? Is the gendarme coming?
TAUS: I'll perform the service. It's only eight. Why don't you rest a bit.
MELANIE: Thank you... *(She cries)*

*(Melanie and Maus crouch as previously and fall asleep. Taus returns to Klaus.)*

KLAUS: You were saying that Plato...
TAUS: Rubbish...
KALUS: Nevertheless...
TAUS: Plato made Aristophanes.
KLAUS: Aristophanes? So what does Aristophanes have to say for himself?
TAUS: In the beginning of all beginnings, our nature was different than it is now. At first, there were three kinds of humans: male,

female, and a third androgynous kind with the name and shape of the other two but distinct from them.
KLAUS: Right!
TAUS: On top of that, each human was round or spherical. Their spherical character was due to the fact that the male came from the Sun, the female from the Earth, and the mixed from the Moon. They were spherical because they resembled their parents...
KLAUS: They must have looked great!...
TAUS: And they walked round and round like saltimbanques in a circus...
KLAUS: If you say so...
TAUS: And they had four arms, four legs, two faces on one head, four ears...
KLAUS: And so on... What are you getting at?
TAUS: And these round people began to storm the sky. So Zeus in his anger split them in two, turning one face to the split part...
KLAUS: Let's talk about something else.
TAUS: Wait... When the bodies were separated, each one, missing its other half, rushed toward it. And they embraced. They wanted to melt into each other. But because of hunger and inaction, they died. And when one half died and the other half survived, the latter searched for another half and so on...
KLAUS: I understand. You want to justify that dog.
TAUS: I was speaking, you know, in general...
KLAUS: What if we dropped it?
TAUS: Let's be silent, dammit!...
KLAUS: Let's let them speak...

> *(He points to the couple in bed. The Mass plays continuously in the background. Mrs. Burma and the Angel get excited.)*

MRS. BURMA: You're all like that, just for... Give me the rifle.
THE ANGEL *(slightly absent-minded, looks straight in front of him, speaks without any inflection)*: It's unloaded.

MRS. BURMA: You don't even look at me...
THE ANGEL: That's your impression. You have a flea on your elbow.
MRS. BURMA *(catches the flea)*: It's true! How did you know?
THE ANGEL: Because I'm looking at you.
MRS. BURMA *(reconciled)*: What are you thinking of?
THE ANGEL: My future.
MRS. BURMA: And mine, too?
THE ANGEL: Sure.
MRS. BURMA: So what do you think?
THE ANGEL: I'm going to be an overseer. I'll study bridges and roads at school.
MRS. BURMA: What about me?
THE ANGEL: Give me a cigarette.
MRS. BURMA *(pulls out a pack from under her pillow, gives him a cigarette and lights it for him)*: What about me?
THE ANGEL: Light it yourself.
MRS. BURMA: I am a widow...
THE ANGEL: It doesn't matter.
MRS. BURMA: Yes, but being a widow and overseer at the same time doesn't work...
THE ANGEL: You are what you are...
MRS. BURMA: Let's drop it...
THE ANGEL: That is, a widow...
MRS. BURMA: Ah, yes... Are you going to the beach with me on Sunday? Just the two of us...
THE ANGEL: No.
MRS. BURMA: I gave you the rifle. I'll give it to you on Sunday, too. You could be a little nicer... Are you going?
THE ANGEL: No.
MRS. BURMA: Why?
THE ANGEL: Because.

*(When Mrs. Burma utters the word "beach" the lights come up on the small stage to the left — the seascape. The ghost of the Diver*

*Cocles appears on the beach. This time the Diver is Papus, who is unrecognizable because of the helmet.).*

MRS. BURMA: I thought that angels were completely different... After all, I have my dignity as a woman...
THE DIVER *(like an echo, tragically)*: Woman!...
MRS. BURMA *(to the Diver)*: Cocles! He's my nephew, I swear! He came from the country!...
THE DIVER: In your bed?
MRS. BURMA: He is resting...
THE DIVER: With you?
MRS. BURMA: He is an overseer... he studies bridges and roads...
THE ANGEL *(to Mrs. Burma)*: Give me a bullet.
THE DIVER: I loved you... Even dead, I loved you... I kept your memory intact...
MRS. BURMA *(who looks under her pillow, gives the Angel the bullet)*: It's a dum-dum. *(to the Diver)* I have fond memories of you, too, Cocles.

*(The angel shoots.)*

THE DIVER: You, woman!... You killed my soul!... *(He collapses to the ground)*
MRS. BURMA *(cries in her handkerchief that she took out from under the pillow)*: I loved him... Fondly...
THE ANGEL: It's over.

*(The little stage to the right — the seascape — goes dark. The shot woke up Melanie and Maus. The Angel cleans the weapon with a gun rod that he took from beneath Mrs. Burma's pillow. Mrs. Burma cries mutely in her handkerchief.)*

MELANIE: Thunder...
MAUS: The storm outside...

MELANIE: We can't leave any more... I'm cold... And I'm scared...
MAUS: Take my jacket. *(He gives her his jacket)* Father, are you still here?
TAUS: I am.
MAUS: Do you have a blanket? It's very cold...
TAUS: I don't have one, my son.
MAUS: She's shivering, the poor thing...
KLAUS: Let her do some calisthenics.
MELANIE: No! No calisthenics! *(She cries)* No calisthenics!...
MAUS: She got scared. She's soaking wet.
TAUS: And the child?
MAUS: It's not born yet... *(thunder and rain)* My God, what a storm! Lest the policeman comes!...
TAUS: He's not coming. It's only eight.
MAUS: Fine. My, how she shivers, the poor thing!
KLAUS: Let her do some calisthenics.
MELANIE: No, no! (She cries) No calisthenics!

> *(The lights come up again on the little stage to the right — the seascape. There is an iron bed without linens on the beach in the same direction and symmetrical with Mrs. Burma's bed. The bed's end is to the right in such a way that Papus, who is in the bed in a hospital gown, has Mrs. Burma's bed from the other stage in front of him. Mrs. Burma and the Angel face Papus but they ignore each other.)*

MAUS: One more altar. It's Job.
MELANIE: It's dad! Let's run!...
MAUS: In this rain? Out of the question!

> *(The Mass sounds forcefully accompanied by rain and thunder. The dialogues that follow, numbered 1, 2, 3, as well as Papus' monologue, occur simultaneously and separately, in the sense*

*that in each pair one person takes into account only the counterpart's speech, and Papus only his monologue.)*

1.

KLAUS: Let her do calisthenics.
TAUS: She could walk round. On four arms and on four legs, like our parents the Sun, Earth and Moon.
KLAUS: But she is a half of a half...
TAUS: The whole is always one half.
KLAUS: Her half is in the widow's bed.
TAUS: It's not that simple. Plato claims...
KLAUS: Who cares about Plato! I believe in mechanics.
TAUS: You're wrong.
KLAUS: Fine. I'm wrong.

2.

MELANIE: Let's run. It's dad, I'm telling you.
MAUS: In this rain? Out of the question! It's an altar.
MELANIE: I'm frozen to the bone. Do you love me?
MAUS: What bones? It's an altar.
MELANIE: The bones of love. My bones of love are frozen.
MAUS: I always loved you.
MELANIE: Me, too... But in this cold...
MAUS: In blankets, not in churches. I mean to say...
MELANIE: It thundered eight times...
MAUS: Even numbers were always lucky for me.
MELANIE: You are my luck. Although you are not my husband.
MAUS: You are very witty tonight.
MELANIE: It's because of the cold.

3.

MRS. BURMA: I loved him...
THE ANGEL: Enough!
MRS. BURMA: But you don't understand. You think that since I'm not an angel I can't... I have my dignity, too.
THE ANGEL: Fine.
MRS. BURMA: You are a child. What would you do without me?
THE ANGEL: An overseer.
MRS. BURMA: No, what would you do in general... How would you manage in life...
THE ANGEL: You have a flea on your elbow.
MRS. BURMA: How you see them. Extraordinary!

PAPUS: Doctor... Nurse... I'm finished... I committed suicide... I shot myself in the left leg... Cut it... No... Cut the other one... There... It's better now... Cut an arm, too... My left arm... There... I feel much better... I'm finished... I'll take it... Nurse, give me a leg... I'm thirsty... Cut, doctor... there... I feel much better each time you cut my nurse... Nurse... Give me a finished...

*(The dialogues and Papus' monologue continue, repeated as long as necessary, and finish as Taus and Klaus intervene in each one separately.)*

TAUS *(shouts over the uproar)*: Enough! Stop it! *(suddenly, it's quiet)* You can't hear yourself think!
KLAUS: The whole lot is a pain in the... We've lost the knack.

*(The dialogues and Papus' monologue resume in low voice accompanied by the Mass in the background.)*

TAUS *(goes to Melanie and Maus, who stop whispering and respond in normal voices)*: That's it! It's not raining any more. Here, off with my beard! *(furiously)* What are you waiting for? Scram!

MAUS: Well, see, Father, the poor thing…
MELANIE: It's dad! We have to run…
TAUS: Then, what are you waiting for?
MAUS: Right… Good-bye, Father…
MELANIE: Don't tell dad…
TAUS: You're still here?

> *(The two run on tiptoe. Taus remains in place and covers his forehead with his hands as if recuperating. Meanwhile, Klaus engages in a dialogue with Mrs. Burma. From the moment Klaus talks to Mrs. Burma and the Angel, they stop their dialogue. Now they both speak in normal voices.)*

KLAUS: You're a mature woman, Mrs. Burma. It's not nice…
MRS. BURMA: But I'm beautiful…
KLAUS: I never said you weren't. But, don't you think, with that dog… *(He points to the Angel)*
THE ANGEL *(to Mrs. Burma)*: Give me a bullet.
MRS. BURMA *(to the Angel)*: Don't be a child! *(to Klaus.)* I am a widow and I don't have to report to anyone!
KLAUS: He's a dog. And it's below your dignity.
THE ANGEL *(gets down from the bed)*: Give me a bullet!
MRS. BURMA *(to Klaus)*: You are wrong, sir. He is an overseer. *(She kisses the Angel on the forehead)* He is a student at the School of Bridges and Roads. And he is my nephew.
KLAUS: You have many relatives.
MRS. BURMA: What are you trying to say?
KLAUS: I can't explain it to you in his presence…
MRS. BURMA *(to the Angel)*: You can go… I'll give you a call, at bridges and roads. *(the Angel gives her the rifle and leaves, humbled)* What did you mean to say?
KLAUS: Let's drop it. I was jealous.
MRS. BURMA *(coquettish)*: Of me?
KLAUS: Of you.

*(Mrs. Burma makes room for him in the bed beside her. Klaus wants to climb onto the little stage. Taus recovers from his state of apathy.)*

TAUS *(to Klaus)*: It's not possible!
MRS. BURMA: Oh, come on, Mr. Taus! I wouldn't have expected that, especially from you...
TAUS: Mrs. Burma, our talk was Thursday, between four and nine...
KLAUS: We anticipate a little...
TAUS *(points to the armchair)*: And the wife?
KLAUS *(scared)*: Did she hear me?
TAUS: She's sleeping.
KLAUS *(whispers)*: Mrs. Burma, then on Thursday...
MRS. BURMA: Mr. Taus, I want you to know that I'm angry with you. I didn't expect that!

*(She pulls the curtain furiously. The lights on the little stage go off.)*

TAUS *(to Papus, who resumed his monologue in a loud voice)*: You stop it, too!
PAPUS: True. *(He comes down from the bed)* I got well. Good doctors, good medicine...
KLAUS: The sun, the sea... That helps...
PAPUS: Right. I'm going to destroy them... Would you like some... ? *(He takes out photos from the gown's pocket)*
TAUS: No.
PAPUS: Maybe you'll change your minds. Now I'll destroy them.

*(He exits. Lights go off on this stage, too. The Mass stops completely.)*

KLAUS: Alone, at last...

TAUS: As always...
KLAUS: It's pleasant at your place.
TAUS: I do what I can.
MRS. KLAUS *(yawns)*: And it's so quiet!
TAUS: Did you rest well, madam?
MRS. KLAUS: Perfectly! When it's quiet, I rest perfectly.
TAUS: Here it's always quiet. I live far from the world.
MRS. KLAUS: Interesting... *(She yawns)*
KLAUS: She fell asleep. She didn't hear a thing.
TAUS: I think she didn't.
KLAUS: Otherwise, she would have made a scene!...
TAUS: Oh yes!..

> *(The ghost of the Diver, this time played by the Angel, enters slowly through the door. The bushy hair and beard—covered at first by the helmet—make it impossible to identify the two different characters. The Diver comes close to them and speaks unintelligibly because of the helmet.)*

TAUS: What? *(The Diver repeats his mumbling)* I don't understand a word.
KLAUS: Let's take his helmet off. *(He tries to do that with the Diver's help)* Do you have a screwdriver?
TAUS *(gives him a screwdriver)*: It works! *(the helmet is off)* Who are you?
KLAUS: And what are you doing here?
THE DIVER: I was the diver Cocles Burma...
KLAUS: Divers look alike...
TAUS: He's the husband of widow Burma.
THE DIVER: It was written up in all the newspapers.
KLAUS: Then, you are dead.
THE DIVER: Does that bother you?
KLAUS: On the contrary...
THE DIVER: Which of you two is Taus, the watchmaker?

TAUS: That's me.
THE DIVER: I was sent to you.
TAUS: If it's about a repair, come tomorrow. We're closed now. It's eight.
THE DIVER: No. It's about something completely different. I was sent by the counselor Kubich.
TAUS: You don't say! The counselor Kubich, the nudist?
THE DIVER: Yes.
TAUS: He hasn't stopped by for five years since he died. Why didn't he come in person?
THE DIVER: He doesn't have consistency...
KLAUS: How come?
THE DIVER: It's hard to explain. After death, you wander about for seven days as much as you please. That's my case... You'll have the chance soon enough...
TAUS: Not too soon, I hope...
THE DIVER: As you wish. But after seven days, good-bye wandering. They don't let you any more...
TAUS: Who?
THE DIVER: You'll see...
KLAUS: We are not in a hurry...
THE DIVER: For seven years you don't have consistency. You're like a stream. That's why the counselor Kubich could not come in person. He will come in two years.
TAUS: I will be delighted.
THE DIVER: Counselor Kubich called me and said: Cocles, —because, over there, we are not formal...
KLAUS: That's normal.
THE DIVER: Why do you keep interrupting me? Cocles, he said, here is a note. *(He takes out a note from the helmet)* Take it to Taus, from me.
TAUS: How is Mr. Kubich doing?
THE DIVER: Good. He plays the piccolo with the others while phonographs gallop. But he doesn't have consistency yet.

TAUS: And he walks about in the nude?
THE DIVER: Over there, only the divers keep their costumes. Like they do in the water. And we listen to the little bells that dangle from women's nipples. Everything is speckled with blue, and women have little round bells. And when they walk, the bells tinkle...
TAUS: I think that Mr. Kubic listens to them all day long... I know him...
THE DIVER: Mr. Kubich doesn't have time. He stays to the side and talks about thermal radiation with a lemonade vendor.
KLAUS: Like my wife...
THE DIVER: What wife?
KLAUS *(points to the armchair)*: There. She's dead...
THE DIVER: Apparent death.
TAUS: And what did Mr. Kubich write to me?
THE DIVER: Patience! He called me and said: Cocles, something doesn't work in the world. Go tell Taus.
TAUS: A lot of things don't work in the world...
KLAUS: Be more specific...
THE DIVER: More specific? OK. It's about love.
KLAUS: Love still works...
THE DIVER: Really? Then what is this?

*(The little stage to the right—the seascape—lights up, where Melanie and Maus shiver wretchedly because of the cold.)*

TAUS: The dramas of love...
KLAUS: Jealousy and medicine...

*(The little stage darkens.)*

THE DIVER: Over there *(He points to the sky)* we see things differently. Mr. Kubich told me: Cocles, explain that to the watchmaker. He understands mechanisms. Read this to him from me. *(He reads the note)* "In the case where two coherent rays appear from

a ray through reflection and refraction, we find that their total entropy is greater than that of the initial ray; we can recompose a single ray from two coherent rays through proper reflection and refraction. The entropy of the two coherent rays must, therefore, be equal to that of the initial ray." *(to Taus)* Do you understand?
TAUS: Sure, why not.

> *(The Diver gestures with his arm. The little stage to the left—the sidewalk café—lights up. Mrs. Burma's bed has disappeared; in its stead are the table and chairs. Melanie and Maus are begging in squalor. Mrs. Burma passes by and refuses to give them anything. The two look at each other sadly. The light on the little stage goes off.)*

THE DIVER *(reads further)*: "The contradiction is resolved if we renounce the activity of entropy; one of the two rays is determined in all the details of its oscillation by the other: it is not statistically independent of the other." That's what Mr. Kubich wrote.
KLAUS: It's too much...
THE DIVER: I'm going to go now.
TAUS: Give my regards to Mr. Kubich.
KLAUS: Are you going to see your widow?
THE DIVER: Maybe. Why do you ask?
KLAUS: Just because...
THE DIVER: I know what you think.

> *(The Diver exits. Circus music. Three saltimbanques, their faces covered by very pale masks; Papus, costumed as Atlas, and Melanie and Mrs. Burma, both with long hair in a different color than usual. They are dressed in costumes and unrecognizable.*
>
> *The two women carry a heavy globe lit from within. When they reach stage center, they put the globe into Atlas' arms and position themselves to his right and left in pictorial poses. The*

*globe is attached to an invisible thread that will lift it at the right moment.*

*Atlas struggles but can't hold the weight of the globe by himself. He stumbles, nearly falls. The two women support Atlas' arms, which would collapse without them. Atlas then lifts the globe up to his chest. Enters the Centaur, who is Maus but unrecognizable under his square mask. He approaches the group, stretching his arms out to the two women. Each one in turn wants to come to him but they can't leave Atlas. In despair, they sense that if they did so Atlas, and they, would collapse.*

*The Centaur thrusts a dagger into his chest and slowly exits, wounded. Hesitating at first the two women follow him, one by one. Atlas, alone and powerless, crushed under the globe's weight, squats slowly, all his movements now in slow motion. Drum roll. In a supreme effort, Atlas lifts the globe above his head and throws it in the air. The globe rises slowly and erratically. Atlas follows the globe, his arms reaching for it. As he lifts off the ground, rising slightly, the Mass crescendos*

*Melanie and Maus re-enter the stage in their usual costumes. They don't see what's happening and crouch frozen on the ground in their customary place. When the globe has disappeared in the air, Klaus and Taus applaud anemically. Atlas returns to the ground, salutes and exits.)*

MRS. KLAUS *(yawns)*: It wasn't so amusing…
TAUS: That may be, madam, but, statistically, it was true.
MRS. KLAUS: The statistical point of view makes me sleepy. *(She yawns)*
TAUS: It's just a point of view…
KLAUS: Let her sleep. I will explain it to her tomorrow morning…
TAUS: Were you bored?

KLAUS: Not at all! The girls were pretty. One of them reminded me of Mrs. Burma... Where could she be?
TAUS: Forget her... We've got to talk to the lovers. Otherwise, counselor Kubich might get angry.
KLAUS: You could lose him as a client...
TAUS: I do what I can...

*(He shows him the armchair. Klaus sits comfortably, stretches his legs and falls asleep. Taus lights a cigarette and goes to the two lovers.)*

TAUS: Melanie...
MELANIE: *(half asleep)* Leave me alone... I'm tired...
TAUS: Melanie...
MELANIE: I can't take it any more!... Why don't you let me sleep?
TAUS: I want to talk to you.
MELANIE: I can't take it any more!... I sleep in churches, in vacant lots... I haven't washed in five days...
TAUS: What about love?
MELANIE: I can't take it any more!... I want home!... *(She cries.)*

*(Melanie falls asleep again. Taus goes to the middle of the stage and starts shouting.)*

TAUS: Papus! Hey, Papus!...

*(The little stage to the right – the seascape – lights up. Papus lies in the hospital bed leaning on an elbow facing the audience reading a magazine. He talks without lifting his eyes from the page.)*

PAPUS: Did anybody call me?
TAUS: Yes, me.

PAPUS: Do you want any... ? *(He takes out a collection of photos from his gown's pocket)*
TAUS: No.
PAPUS: Then, what?
TAUS: Let's talk about your daughter.
PAPUS: I don't have one. I'm convalescent.
TAUS: About Melanie.
PAPUS: I don't...
TAUS: She's your daughter.
PAPUS: I'm a nurse. I love orphans.
TAUS: It's not about Mrs. Burma, but Melanie. She wants to come home.
PAPUS: I will destroy her. With the shoe and the gendarmes.
TAUS: You are so willing to call the police. She can't take it any more. She wants home.
PAPUS: I have a situation. Nurse... Nurse!...

> *(The small stage to the right — the sidewalk café — lights up. The bed is there again, aligned with Papus' bed. Taus is on the big stage between them. Mrs. Burma lies down in the same position as Papus but with her feet toward him in such a way that they face each other on two different stages, both in bed. Next to her, toward the background, the Angel, half-raised in bed, holds the rifle in his hand, oblivious and motionless.)*

MRS. BURMA *(to Papus)*: Did you call me?
PAPUS: I forgot my saddle in the rain. Give me some syrup.
MRS. BURMA *(tenderly)*: You are not allowed...
PAPUS: Then give me zinc ointment. I'm thirsty.
MRS. BURMA: You are not allowed.
TAUS: Mrs. Burma, you persuade him.
MRS. BURMA: I can't. *(She points to the Angel)* I'm unarmed.
TAUS: But you're a woman!...

*(Brief, solemn and forceful outburst of the Mass. A few fireworks.)*

MRS. BURMA *(astonished)*: It's true!...
TAUS: You convince him... She sleeps in vacant lots, she shivers, she wants home...
MRS. BURMA: Fine. *(to Papus.)* You, idiot!
PAPUS *(still reading the magazine)*: Did you call me?
MRS. BURMA: Are you thirsty?
PAPUS: Yes.
MRS. BURMA: Fine. Then I'll give you your daughter.
PAPUS: I'm not allowed.
MRS. BURMA: Yes, you are. You are convalescent.
PAPUS: I have witnesses.
MRS. BURMA: Everybody has witnesses. Witnesses don't count.
PAPUS: Yes, but mine are non-flammable. Will you marry me?
MRS. BURMA: No.
PAPUS: Why?
MRS. BURMA: Because you don't wash.
PAPUS: I'm not allowed.
MRS. BURMA: Yes, you are.
PAPUS: No, I'm not.
MRS. BURMA: Come on, dear Papus! You wash, Mrs. Burma marries you and Melanie will give you little grandchildren. Why don't you want that?
PAPUS: I won't wash!
MRS. BURMA: At least your neck...
PAPUS: No!
MRS. BURMA: Then your ears...
PAPUS: No!
MRS. BURMA: At least your teeth...
TAUS: Out of love...
PAPUS: So be it!... *(to Mrs. Burma)* Consider yourself engaged.
MRS. BURMA: I'll make a note of it.
TAUS: Congratulations.

MRS. BURMA: Thanks.
TAUS: And Melanie?...
MRS. BURMA: Don't you worry. Now, that she has a mother...

*(Papus, bored, gets down from his bed and pulls the curtain over his stage.)*

TAUS: Mrs. Burma, you are a kind-hearted woman!
MRS. BURMA: But I have my own suffering... *(She points to the Angel)* I am suspicious...
TAUS: But it's not sure...
MRS. BURMA: That's the point, it's not sure... How is your friend doing?
TAUS: Klaus? I think he's asleep by his wife's side.
MRS. BURMA *(pensive)*: But it's not sure...

*(Mrs. Burma remains motionless. Taus goes to Melanie.)*

TAUS: Melanie...
MELANIE: Leave me alone!... *(She cries in her sleep)*
TAUS: That's it! He will take you back!
MELANIE *(waking up)*: Who?
TAUS: Your father.
MELANIE: Home?
TAUS: Yes. He is marrying the widow Burma...
MELANIE: She is a kind-hearted woman. She always understood me...
TAUS: Papus brushed his teeth. He's a new man.
MELANIE: How wonderful!... And the ears, too? *(She cries)*
TAUS: Not the ears, yet. But, maybe, in time...
MELANIE: Hope is everything. I have high expectations.
TAUS: That's very good, because they make it easy...
MELANIE *(curious)*: What do they make easy?
TAUS: The separation.
MELANIE: What separation?

TAUS *(points to Maus)*: From him...
MELANIE: Right...
TAUS: Now I'll leave you alone.
MELANIE: Why?
TAUS: For you to wake him up and tell him. To explain to him.
MELANIE: Why? He has very high expectations and I am cold. I am going home.
TAUS: Aren't you going to say good-bye?
MELANIE: I rarely ever say good-by.
TAUS: Then I'll walk you to the corner, to the Boulevard of the Barracks.
MELANIE: I can manage on my own from there... *(She cries)*

> *(They both leave. Klaus stands up, as if waiting for that moment, and goes to the stage with Mrs. Burma and the Angel.)*

KLAUS *(gallantly)*: Good evening, lovely lady...
MRS. BURMA: Ah, Mr. Klaus! Gallant, as always! How are you, how are things?
KLAUS: So-so...
MRS. BURMA: What brings you here?
KLAUS: I can't talk to you with the dog...
MRS. BURMA: He doesn't hear us... He's thinking.
KLAUS: It doesn't matter! Kick him out...
MRS. BURMA: Just a second... *(to the Angel)* You, go to the movies...

> *(The Angel stands up, stretches out his hand, Mrs. Burma gives him money from under the pillow. The Angel exits, still absent-minded.)*

MRS. BURMA *(to Klaus)*: That's it!... What did you want to tell me?
KLAUS: Matters of the heart... *(He climbs onto her stage)*
MRS. BURMA: Oh, Mr. Klaus!...

*(Klaus pulls the curtain over the small stage. Taus enters.)*

MAUS *(wakes up with a start, scared)* Don't shoot! I surrender!
TAUS: I'm not shooting.
MAUS *(coming to himself)*: It was you?
TAUS: It was me. Have you been here long?
MAUS: Two years. I came to say good-bye.
TAUS: You are leaving?
MAUS: Yes. For New Zealand. I found a job as a diver. I have high expectations.
TAUS: Then, I wish you a safe journey.
MAUS: Good-bye... *(He exits)*
TAUS: Klaus!... Where the heck are you? *(to the armchair)* Madam, do you know where Klaus might be?... She sleeps all the time... Klaaaus!...
KLAUS *(pushes aside the curtain of the small stage and appears, fixing his clothes)*: I'm here!
TAUS: Where have you been?
KLAUS: I went to the restroom.
TAUS: Human needs...
KLAUS: Sure... And you?
TAUS: I went to the Boulevard of the Barracks.
KLAUS: You started hanging around the barracks! *(He laughs as if it were a joke)* I miss the tiger. I wonder what he is doing.
TAUS *(checks his watch)*: It's eight now. It's time for his piano lesson. Do you want to hear him play?
KLAUS: I can hardly wait...
TAUS: Please! (*He steps aside and walks towards the door, accompanying the imaginary Klaus. The real Klaus goes to the armchair, where he falls asleep. Taus speaks while walking.)* He has a new teacher. He ate the old one, last week... *(He exits, stepping aside to make room for the imaginary Klaus.)*
MRS. BURMA *(from behind the curtain)*: Klaus! I'm coming too, in a second...

*(The Angel enters, goes to Mrs. Klaus and kisses her on the forehead.)*

MRS. KLAUS: Ernst!... *(She wakes up and yawns)* What does it mean when you dream that an Angel kisses you?
THE ANGEL: I don't know.
MRS. KLAUS: Interesting! *(She yawns)* Have you been here long?
THE ANGEL: Since only just now.
MRS. KLAUS: Do you know where my husband might be?
THE ANGEL: I killed him.
MRS. KLAUS: When? *(She yawns)*
THE ANGEL: Just now.
MRS. KLAUS: What about Mr. Taus?
THE ANGEL: I killed him, too. I killed everyone.
MRS. KLAUS *(yawning terribly)*: Why did you kill them?
THE ANGEL: So I can be an overseer.
MRS. KLAUS: That's not a reason. *(She yawns)* Why do you want to be an overseer?
THE ANGEL: Because I love you. *(He falls on his knees before her)*
MRS. KLAUS *(yawns)*: Oh, no!... I am a housewife...
THE ANGEL *(passionately)*: Precisely!
MRS. KLAUS: And since when do you love me?
THE ANGEL: Since only just now... *(He hugs her knees)*

*(Mrs. Burma appears from behind the curtain of the little stage, carrying the rifle.)*

MRS. BURMA: Didn't you go to the movies?
THE ANGEL *(turns his head toward her)*: Stay where you are!
MRS. KLAUS: Come down, dear... *(She yawns)* You are doing me a favor...
THE ANGEL: If you come, I'll beat you!
MRS. BURMA: You'll beat me, who loved you? Me, who adored you? I'm committing suicide with this weapon!

MRS. KLAUS: Is it loaded? *(She yawns)*
MRS. BURMA: Yes!
THE ANGEL: What are you waiting for?
MRS. BURMA: You, dog!... He was right!... *(She points to Mrs. Klaus)*
THE ANGEL *(looking closely at Mrs. Klaus)*: What do you mean "he?" Don't you see it's a woman?
MRS. BURMA: I see! So, you're cheating on me! With a woman! Oh, God! Love blinded me!... I thought it was Klaus!... *(desperate)* Then, die, dog! *(She shoots. The Angel collapses, fatally wounded. Short pause. Then, to Mrs. Klaus)* Please, forgive me, madam...
MRS. KLAUS: I understand you perfectly. *(She yawns)*

> *(Mrs. Burma goes behind the curtain of the small stage, which is lit, even though the curtain is drawn. Klaus stands up from the armchair and crosses to stage center where he meets with Taus, who entered, stepping aside politely and continuing his discussion with the imaginary Klaus.)*

TAUS: He was making a fuss over nothing. What does a hand count for a piano teacher?
KLAUS: If we shouldn't have come, he would have eaten both of his hands.
TAUS: These new teachers, they are like this. Two weeks ago, the old teacher left home without both of his legs, and he didn't say a word.
MRS. KLAUS *(yawns)*: I think it's time to go home. What's the time?
TAUS: It's early, madam. It's eight...
MRS. KLAUS: At nine I have to be at my job...
TAUS: As you wish...
KLAUS: Fine, my dear. Let's go. Good bye, Taus. It was very pleasant at your place.
TAUS: I hope you come again...
KLAUS: Tomorrow, at eight o'clock, I'll be here...
TAUS: I'll be waiting for you. You are coming together, aren't you?
MRS. KLAUS: Of course. *(She yawns.)* Good bye...

*(Taus accompanies his guests politely. They completely ignore the dead body of the Angel. After Klaus' departure, a few clocks strike eight o'clock. Taus listens to them, then goes to the little stage to the left—the sidewalk café—where one can see the lights on behind the curtain.)*

TAUS: Mrs. Burma!...
MRS. BURMA *(sticking out only her head)*: Ah! Mr. Taus!... Long time no see... Had I known...
TAUS: Did I bother you?
MRS. BURMA: You, bother me? *(confidentially)* I was with someone...
TAUS: I see...
MRS. BURMA: No, no... It's not what you think!... It's a young man. I give him advice for his trip. He is leaving for New Zealand. He wants to be a diver. And I, as a diver's widow...
TAUS: I see... I stopped by only to ask you to turn off the light.
MRS. BURMA: I'll turn it off immediately. One can give advice in the dark too, right? *(She laughs, knowingly.)* Mr. Taus, when can you come for a little longer?
TAUS: I'll find some time... How is Papus doing?
MRS. BURMA: He washes his ears. *(She laughs)* For the wedding...

*(Mrs. Burma goes behind the curtain. The light on the little stage goes off. The clocks strike again eight o'clock. The ghost of the Diver enters.)*

THE DIVER: Are you alone?
TAUS: As always...
THE DIVER: He sent me to you again...
TAUS: Mr. Kubich is very active...
THE DIVER: Mr. Kubich has nothing to do with it. He doesn't even have consistency...
TAUS: You said that he...

THE DIVER: That's because there were other people present...
TAUS: I see...
THE DIVER: Of course...
TAUS: Then who?
THE DIVER: The other one...
TAUS: What other one?
THE DIVER: The one who has consistency...
TAUS: Papus?
THE DIVER: Papus plays a rather insignificant role. He has been dead for only sixty-five years...
TAUS: Then?
THE DIVER: If you haven't found out, I can't tell you. It's too big a secret.
TAUS: And what does he want?
THE DIVER: He told me to tell you that *(He takes out a note from his helmet and reads):* "the core of the problem was not the intensity of the formula but the dependence linked univocally to it, between the energy, frequency and entropy of radiation." That's all...
TAUS: Sounds like a quotation.
THE DIVER: He steals from books. *(convinced)* He has the right!
TAUS: He does.
THE DIVER: Then, I'll go. Good-bye.
TAUS: Good-bye? Maybe you'll come again...
THE DIVER: Tomorrow is the seventh day. The wandering is over!
TAUS: Good-bye, then!...

*(The ghost of the Diver walks towards the door. Taus accompanies him and notices the dead Angel.)*

TAUS: Can you give me a hand?
THE DIVER: Gladly. *(He turns and looks at the Angel)* What's that?
TAUS: An angel. He's dead, too...
THE DIVER: These people drop like flies. What do you want to do with him?

TAUS: Let's feed him to the tiger. Will you help?
THE DIVER: Of course!... Let's go...

*(They grab the body of the Angel from both ends and exit slowly, accompanied by the sounds of the Mass.)*

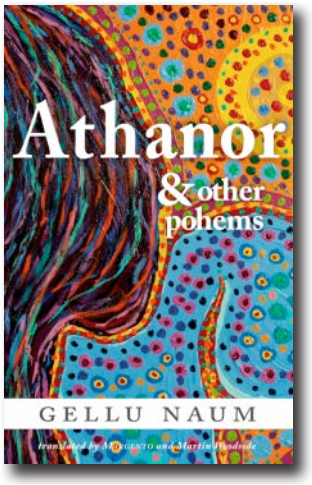
CURTAIN

*(1966)*

# GELLU NAUM IN RE-VIEW

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

# Butterfly Knocking on Our Window: A Review of *Athanor & Other Poems*




Gellu Naum, *Athanor and Other Poems*,
tr. by Martin Woodside & Margento (PA: Calypso, 2013)

Janel Spencer

Gellu Naum (1915–2001) remains one of Romania's most significant and influential surrealist poets. His work and vision inspired readers and, later on, visitors from many parts of the world who would make pilgrimages to visit him. Fellow Romanian poet and translator Chris Tănăsescu, also known as MARGENTO, was one such visitor. After his experience, MARGENTO and Martin Woodside began translating

Naum's work, fueled by an appreciation for Naum that one finds deepens with each careful reading of his poems. The two ultimately compiled *Athanor & Other Poems*. Their thoughtfully translated and meticulously selected collection allows the reader a strong entrance or closer look into Naum's poetry; a re-envisioning of life and successful demonstration of the power of words to transform the everyday. The bilingual collection features 29 of Naum's original poems alongside new English translations, carefully chosen from eleven of Naum's works (*Athanor*, *Descrierea turnului*, *Partea cealaltă*, *Copacul animal*, *Poeme alese*, *Drumețul incendiar*, *Fața și suprafața urmat de malul albastru*, *Calea șearpelui*, *Ascet la baraca de tir*), which span a period of over 60 years (1936–2001).

A master of complex images, Naum weaves lines that create a world of their own within each of them, and tell of what the world is, could, and may be as their stories unfold one unto the other. Always rooted in this world, meanwhile with one foot (or wing) off of it, he tells us of the world we thought we knew, stringing together pieces of it that build it anew with its own parts. In "The Horse," Naum presents familiar parts of an ultimately new but seemingly familiar scene, compelling us to also watch, as the "kids" in the poem do, "with a world-old understanding in their eyes":

> The horse had grown up in my garden
> It was harder in winter
> I had to keep him safe from the mulberry roots
> from the frozen touch of the sun
> ... his mane rustled like withered reeds
> ...
> Then the dahlias grew large and heavy
> like brass mirrors
> and once in a while a tired tree would lie down in the grass

Approached with this otherworldly gaze, the poems lead us forward as if each poem is not yet finished until it is met with another — the

poems work to displace the reader as much as to direct them, and we are forced forward to gain our footing within Naum's world.

The poems take us straight into the heart of Naum's perception. He asks us to pay special attention to the world on a microscopic scale, listening to the "snail shells and wing-cases breaking under our steps," all the while pushing our limits of perception and bringing us into the poem, as "we walk great boulevards telling the memories of locusts" with him. And yet with all this power of perception and imagination, there is nonetheless both inherent power and powerlessness in words and in silence: "sometimes I happen to fly or keep silent which is one and the same" Naum offers us. In "What About the Wind Blows," he further meditates on perception, expression, and power:

> Maybe it's better to get lost in our caves
> ...
> c'mon let's sing since it's inaudible in this beneficent
> deafness
> ...
> ... the blind man at nightfall
> ... he goes along slowly without
> needing eyes
> ...
> says he hears colorfully
> ...
> flowers grew above flowers I looked out at night and saw
> what I wanted
> they asked me what I wanted and I said candies I would
> chew them desperately
> all my philosophy down the drain
> as if it were a big deal to be desperate and chew candies
> and hide the cartridges in your ears
> while a pale girl looks at you with a flash light.

The poems feed us, yet always keep us hungry, and remind us to never take them for granted ("each pencil is a voice") or too

seriously ("It takes high art / to pick one's brain like a nose / and pull from those depths the poem's sad snot"). Naum was also a writer for children; word play and wit were never far from the tip of his own pencil, and as 'the fool thinks himself to be wise, and the wise man knows he is a fool,' as Shakespeare claims — Naum plays the part of the "fool" well.

In the very least, Naum's "pohems" give us a renewed zeal for what the art of words can conquer, and leave us wondering if they can indeed conquer themselves. Does Naum create a new alchemy within his *athanor*, his "alchemist's cauldron"? Or is Naum merely showing us "a drop of water" from the ocean, held up under a telescope?:

> I wanted to be a popular astronomer with long hair
> out on the boulevard charging people to look through my
> telescope
> to show them something ludicrous a button a fly a cigarette butt
> to lay them out in the ocean paying to see a drop of water
>
> (from "The Animal Tree")

Naum shows himself in the poems; glimpses of his mind and his purpose as a poet unravel there. He is the butterfly, knocking on our window ("Eutychia"), the "[archeologist] of kisses," the "[diver] ... listen[ing] to every wave's cry of terror," "the master bird of the new song to rise," "the blind man at nightfall," and most (or least) importantly, he is the fisherman, and he is our "guide astray" — which he admits:

> I yelled to them, "stay calm on the shore there stay calm like
> ants"
> I was their guide astray
> ...
> I stayed there with a horizon over the eyes
> the others sleeping inside dogs
> stayed in those depths and listened as the earth rumbled
>
> ("The Guide Astray")

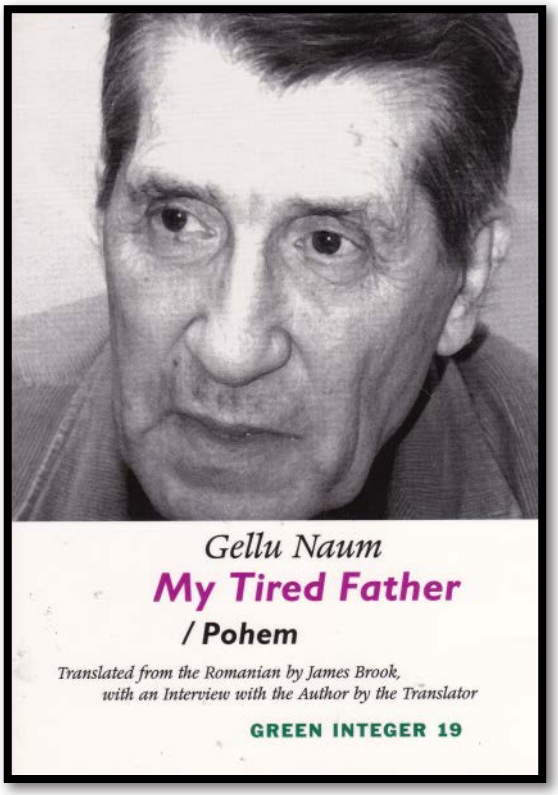
Naum's self-revealing begs us to ask ourselves where we may be hiding within his words, where we may find ourselves in our own meditations, and if he will follow us there.

With the scarcity of English translations of Naum's work, *Athanor* acts as a belated introduction. A vibrant echo of the words that have inspired so many others has finally made its way overseas, and this echo has managed to successfully give us a look out of Naum's window, where we are invited to see with him: "two trees growing there above the sky / signifying tranquility into the far distance..."

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Allan Graubard

# A Few Comments on Gellu Naum's *My Tired Father/Pohem*




Translated by James Brook (LA: Green Integer, 1999)

Recently, I was asked by the curator of this issue to review the poetry of Gellu Naum in English. I had read Naum's poetry in English, more than a few times, in the two volumes now available: *My Tired Father/Pohem* and, more recently, *Athanor & Other Poems*.[1] Not literate in Romanian, the language Naum wrote in, I have no way of assessing the accuracy of these translations. I can respond, however, to their clarity and vivacity. And for this purpose, I choose the first if briefly.

*My Tired Father/Pohem* is Naum's only complete long poem in English. Originally published in Romania in 1972, it depicts a world, perhaps autobiographical, but then again perhaps not — the "pohem" is elusive in this regard.[2] Concomitantly, it builds its momentum and heat from several centers of gravity, invoking a disorientation fed by its language; phrases taken from, or that duplicate, different sources (journalistic, scientific, philosophical, fictive) then reworked, transformed, or arranged; inhabiting several urban and rural landscapes where incongruous events take place; its teasing clarity, kept distant just enough to sustain our interest; and its introduction to the "father," no doubt "tired," no doubt mine (as in "my") who may reappear here and there, a disarticulate presence or subtext. Is "he" a man, a dictator, a political machine, an art form, or a collective illusion? Perhaps "he" is all of these? Perhaps "he" assumes aspects of each or of none, or of someone or something completely other? Perhaps "he" is nothing more than a trap that Naum has set for gullible readers? Perhaps this is just a title without particular reference, and as useful or useless as any other similar title? The

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[1] *Athanor & Other Poems*, tr. by Margento & Martin Woodside (PA: Calypso Editions, 2013).

[2] Categorizing this work as autobiographical, or seeking autobiographical elements in it, does not serve it well. At the same time, it seems to represent a personal account of different experiences written by one man, the author, or so I want to believe; in itself, a kind of effacement that both draws and distances.

author avoids these issues, if issues they are. Certain readers might not follow his lead.

A love affair evolves with one "Catherine Mahoney...a young actress and real star," until she dies. Other characters flicker to life then fade as if they were real apparitions. All of this seems normal, even narrative, with several parallel and intersecting narratives that distend and reconfigure. Has the "Pohem" absorbed into it different perspectives, technologies, values and judgments that make up the real for us, giving it the verisimilitude either the author felt he needed or that his readers need, or is its pressing and changeling reality ours? I would like to say that Naum chose the latter but, of course, I never spoke with him about the work, and critical commentary in English is scanty. But whether or not he used either as a rationale, they avoid the usual, especially in regard to fixing within the "pohem" a presumed affective authenticity. Naum has a more kinetic approach, as if he were performing a high-wire balancing act over quite separable scenes whose discontinuities compel, and whose risk — the risk of failure, above all — is fuel.

*My Tired Father/Pohem* thus emerges with its unfixed, irresolute horizons, its tensions that rise and suspend, and with some striking exceptions its fluid neutrality between images. Psychology, whether of place or character, is certainly not the point. What might appear to our expectations set by literary habits is no longer — which is another way of saying that Naum has forged a medium that defenestrates presumption within a contemporary space marked by discontinuity, duplicity, humor, and a kind of chaos that is muted enough to bear (depending on where and how you live) or quite simply expected, along with a fatalism that prompts laughter as an antidote. The last line to the "Pohem," for instance, is a question that can fall on either side of the issue, and which Naum does not respond to but leaves again, for us, his reader: "What are you doing down there in the dark?"

Returning to the first page of the "Pohem," as if he were drawing in ink a self-portrait as Prospero, to set all else in motion, he

states: "I had heard of the terrible storms there and had come to know them." And then: "I made identical gestures the dial had no numbers and those on shore somewhere very low."

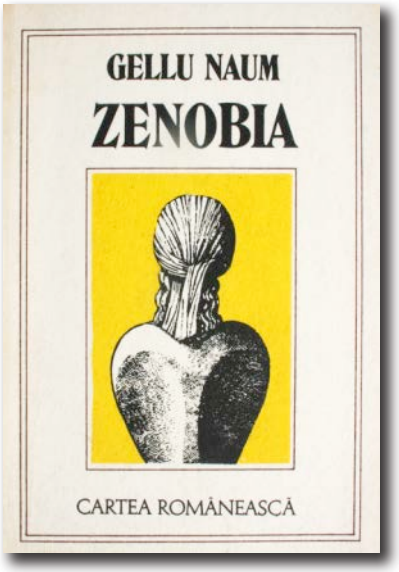
Upon meeting a "young girl with a charming smile" he adds, as if recalling something that has already happened, even if with a tinge of regret: "I don't know what I would have done without you." The sentiment reads truthfully. Is it? Does it matter if it isn't?

Jim Brook's translation has presented in English a complex and nuanced poet who survived in a world whose insidious and oppressive state apparatus is now a subject for historians. As far as the place of the work within the surrealism of that period internationally, I rather doubt you will find anything comparable.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

**Paul McRandle**

# *Zenobia: Sublime Love*




Translated by James Brook & Sasha Vlad
(Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1995)

This vast, thin book, puzzling and straightforward, gnomic, charming, and riven with poetic images, is a love story encompassing the life of its narrator and the woman he calls Zenobia, seemingly after the third-century warrior queen of Palmyra. If the relationship between the narrator (named Naum)

and Zenobia bears similarities to that of Gellu Naum and his wife Lyggia, the movement of the novel is anything but a straightforward autobiographical account of historically verifiable details.

The plot, however, is straightforward: Naum first meets Zenobia in a swamp at the home of a friend. He immediately falls in love, fights for her, and the pair go off to build a home together elsewhere in the swamp. They move to the city. Years pass in which he writes and she pastes flowers on fabric in a "sordid novelty shop" (92).[1] These labors, Naum writes, which at first "seemed meant to cover too brilliant a life, now I saw in them a sort of resignation" (92). As if to return her to the source of her brilliance, they move back to the swamp. Or it's the story of his initiation by the Woman Spirit into the art of moving back and forth between his private, poetic, visionary existence, their lives together, and public daily life; how to decipher signs in the world; and how to love. "Zenobia helped me to reestablish, step by step, a partially forgotten, partially prefigured nature, but one that entitled me to doubt the reality of my perceptions; this nature constituted for her the natural field of existence" (40). Or it's a narrative of a succession of mental crises faced by the poet that have plagued him from childhood on and the succor she provides. Cryptically referring to circles, Zenobia tells him to avoid the margins of more powerful ones (14) and warns him he's placed himself "between circles, on the edges, in the void" (20).

There is too much to encapsulate in this deceptively short novel, for Naum is constantly creating systems within the work, then escaping from them. He signals this profusion from the opening sentence: "Too many things solicit us, and, given the equivocal solicitation mechanism, too many words flock to contain them, to hide them in their useless and deceiving labyrinth...."

[1] Lyggia Naum actually worked at a children's book publisher.

Speaking of the difficulties he and Zenobia faced on first moving to the city, he writes, "Everything was happening according to the laws of a strange active indifference, thanks to it, the most insignificant gestures gained in importance while the limits of the conscious grew more and more unstable: anything that happened seemed at the same time constant and reversible, certain and treacherous, but we'd better change the subject…" (39).

In this "strange active indifference" there is something like philosophical indifference — the ground F.W.J. Schelling postulated for the fundamental oppositions of identity and difference, real and ideal, subject and object — at work in *Zenobia* that suggests a means of navigating certain of its treacherous shoals.

Despite (or as a result of) his years of philosophical research, Naum resisted joining his fellow Romanian surrealists in their theoretical and philosophical works, concerned that it kept him at a distance from the sensual world that was the source of poetry (120).[2] Yet in *Zenobia*, Naum frequently draws on his intellectual background, either allusively, incorporating philosophical and occult language into poetic statements, or by direct references to figures such as Hegel, Cornelius Agrippa, Meister Eckhart, and Raymond Roussel. But he seldom offers up propositions, and you'll search in vain for a list of the laws of the strangely active indifference (even if he numbers the sections of each of *Zenobia*'s chapters as if in homage to philosophical tradition).

For "indifference," Schelling uses two terms synonymously: "Indifferenz" (which is borrowed from French and has no psychological connotations), and "Gleichgewicht" ("balance" or "equilibrium).[3] Where the noun "indifference" appears in the

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[2] *Gellu Naum, Poète roumain prisonnier au château des aveugles* (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1994) 77.

[3] *Bruno, or On the Natural and Divine Principle of Things*, tr. and ed. by Michael Vater (New York: SUNY Press, 1984) 101.

English version of *Zenobia* (37, 39, 99, 118), Naum uses "nepăsare" (or its plural form) in the original. For "indifferent" Naum uses "indiferente" on seven occasions — (in the English translation pages 1, 2, 6, 23, 97, 120, 173, 191). Both words in Romanian can also connote carelessness or lack of interest or enthusiasm. "Active indifference" is translated from "nepăsare-activa."[4]

Considering the first appearance of this "strangely active indifference," as quoted previously, Naum notes that "insignificant gestures gained in importance while the limits of the conscious grew more and more unstable: anything that happened seemed at the same time constant and reversible, certain and treacherous." Clearly not the indifference of a lack of interest, this is a toing and froing of oppositions — insignificance and meaning, the constant and the reversible, the certain and the treacherous. It undermines the stability of the limits of the conscious, but what that means is something Naum deliberately shies away from expressing.

Already in this strange activity arises a notion of Schelling's related to indifference, that of the inbuilding of opposites towards unity (*Ineinsbuildung*), a mental (and poetic) operation in which opposites are interwoven to form totalities, an ingathering of subjectivity and objectivity. Michael Vater expresses the importance of *Ineinsbildung* succinctly: "The activity of systematic reason in its inbuilding, in its play, encompasses and comprehends all isolated factors, brings them together for the first time into a cosmos."[5] As I hope to make clear, in *Zenobia*, Naum shares with us the unstable effort to formulate a cosmos through love in the face of chaos.

Another reference to active indifference comes early on in a crisis that deprives him of the ability to write:

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[4] *Zenobia* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2005)

[5] "Schelling's Neoplatonic System-Notion: 'Ineinsbilding' and Temporal Unfolding'" in *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, ed. by R. Baine Harris (New York: SUNY Press, 1976) 290.

> I lived, as usual, among alarm signals, waiting for a more and more indefinite something. "Actually, nothing serious is happening," I would say to calm myself. But threatened and weak amid the aggressive unleashing of unsure laws, I increased my confusion by tormenting myself to elucidate their mechanisms. My usual active indifference deserted me in favor of an obsessive need to find coherent guidelines. (118)

At first glance, active indifference here seems to be the ability to endure ambiguity, and may sound more akin to Keats' negative capability than to Schelling. Yet the "aggressive unleashing of unsure laws" may be the very reason he has been deserted by his usual [laws of a] strangely active indifference — they are, perhaps, the very same laws. Whereas for Schelling indifference may be equilibrium (*gleichgewicht*), for Naum it seems far more unstable and threatening, an overflowing that demands to be channeled and guided.

Two pages later Naum takes this instability into the moral sphere:

> Maybe all I'm doing is uttering a string of errors, but I have to say that at such moments the monsters of the imagination, not always imaginary, start to swarm around you.
>
> Indifferent or not, they try to muddle even more the uncertain antinomy between good and evil, outside which you occasionally succeed in positioning yourself. In this way, scattering to the winds your poor behavioral solutions, they reverse the immediate effects of any thought process. (120)

Naum's toying reference to the indifferent here associates it with the unconscious mind in its amorality and as the source of phantasms. This suggests the passage in Schelling's essay on freedom about the reversed god, which through false imagination entices the individual to evil by placing the self at the center of creation.[6] But Naum once again asserts the potential malevolence of the indifferent. The spirit, which per Schelling necessarily exists outside of the antinomy of good and evil so as to be free to will either, is per Naum only able to position itself there occasionally. For Naum, the monsters may be imaginary or may very well exist, and either way good and evil become so muddled that even one's "poor behavioral solutions" are so ambiguous it can't be said whether any moral framework exists within which they might be judged.

A third longer reference to "active indifference" arrives in his description of the Woman Spirit, the "all-encompassing presence of a feminine principle" (97).

> Shortly before I left the swamps, the concept and the physical attributes of the Woman Spirit had balanced again. I mean to say that, for instance, the prefigured giantism had become for me a kind of purely spiritual abstract, fluid, and formless dimension, in which immensity and smallness, anomaly and naturalness, promiscuity and splendor coexisted, without existing as such.
>
> I had started to intuit the total active indifference included in its most direct solicitations: imagine a lighthouse on the seashore at night during a storm; while the mad Keeper sends signals to all ships, each individual ship struggles unnoticed and alone in the dark. The flash of light doesn't render the cliffs visible anymore...

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[6] *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Freedom,* tr. by Jeff Love & Johannes Schmidt (New York: SUNY Press, 2006) 54–55.

> A vague causal link, however, made me believe in the beneficial effects of a certain behavior on which I won't insist so that I leave to each one the pleasure of finding it again, between mortification and debauchery.
>
> (Zenobia calls this: to behave.) (99)

As the giantism of the Woman Spirit becomes a dimension in which immensity and smallness and other oppositions coexist without existing as such, she becomes a personalized form of indifference. And this becoming recalls Schelling's god coming to itself out of the *Ungrund* and against the ground of nature, particularly as Schelling developed this notion in *Ages of the World*. Out of the becoming of indifference, the will that wills nothing, two wills arise: one that is light, expansive, and affirming, the other dark, contracting, and negating. From the contradiction of these two wills, divinity arises, which is neither one will nor the other nor their unity but rather none and all three. Swayed by love, the contracting will cedes to the affirming will to become the unconscious ground for spirit so that time may begin.[7]

Naum rewrites this mythic narrative in the image of the mad lighthouse keeper. In this "total active indifference," the negating darkness has not ceded to the affirming light, love has not swayed the balance (at least not yet), and chaos has not given way to cosmos. The Woman Spirit as the mad Keeper can only signal her presence and can no longer indicate where the dangers lie.

That formerly the mad Keeper could have rendered the cliffs visible hints at the comments of a character known as the "old man of the Revenue Office" who asserts that for the last few thousand years we've witnessed the masculinization of the sacred and the clinical death of love (132). Now the "whole world has gone crazy"

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[7] *The Abyss of Freedom / Ages of the World*, tr. by Judith Norman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997) 169–170, 176, 181.

and people are capable only of pseudo-loves, sustained by a spiritual police in the belief that love ultimately can only yield unhappiness (133). It is as if the negating spirit, having been swayed by love to cede to the Woman Spirit at the dawn of time, had risen from its unconscious state as a masculine Spirit to deny love and negate the cosmos.

In the final chapter of *Zenobia*, the narrator has a vision while sitting on a plank with his old friend Sima. It seems prompted by the "voice of requital," which in a nagging, undermining monologue states: "Not one of the millions of people who have populated this poor earth from time immemorial preserved for us the image of miraculous love, and all believed they did love" (169).

Then, when looking up at the sky, the narrator sees a white cloud bearing the exact outline of his face, to which a smaller cloud attaches itself, before the two melt together and flow through one another. A reminder of a drawing of Zenobia's showing their heads conjoined (105), the image spurs an ecstatic vision:

> I was inside myself, alone, even though loneliness had disappeared. Nothing could have undone our embrace. ... I saw beyond, where heavenly bodies spun, and beyond them. We floated, light and free, above the earth where our bodies filled with a sense of uselessness and the void waited for us, distances seemed...nostalgic. The ocean of silence rumbled with the noise of the rotation inside us, the axes of the world thundered between the pillars of our embrace.

For this moment, he sees the heavenly bodies and beyond the spheres — he and Zenobia are the very axis of the world. This is a vision of the cosmos with their entwined bodies at the center; love the relation that raises the cosmos into existence. It is momentary but suggests the eternal before landing him back on the plank next to Sima.

Whereas for André Breton, love is the only guarantee that our lives and our witnessing have not been in vain,[8] for Naum, we live in a state of chaos receiving signals from a mad lighthouse keeper, where love offers no guarantee. We've entered a period of history unforeseen by Schelling in which the world is being undone by the negative will and, by implication, it's now necessary for human beings rather than primordial wills to sway that will through love. Naum apparently does not take it as given that love can redeem our lives, or even that love exists, but finding and fixing the miraculous image of love nevertheless remains the poet's task.

[8] "This blind aspiration towards the best would suffice to justify love as I think of it, absolute love, as the only principle for physical and moral selection which can guarantee that human witness, human passage shall not have taken place in vain." *Mad Love*, tr. by Mary Ann Caws (University of Nebraska Press, 1987) 119.

# POEMS DEDICATED to GELLU NAUM

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Ira Cohen

## *For Gellu Naum*
## *On the Occasion of his First Reading in America*

Timothy Baum claps because his hands are asleep
Miguel Algarin takes Valery's plastic cock in his hand
And discovers the virtues of blood under stretched skin,
Invokes Ramses & the sunbaked straw cities of antiquity
George-Therese a fresh breeze from Hawaii
Blows thru the room an air of mingled fragrance
Bill Wolak was drained by the emotionally unbalanced children
(We will go one day to New Jersey)
What Romanian elixir fevers my brain?
What Latin eloquence makes me twitch invisibly?
My lymph nodes fill with mercury
And the upward flow of my piss
Contradicts gravity, the terrible vanity
Of being alive.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Timothy Baum

# For Gellu Naum

Gellu, Gellu Naum!
Here's your newest brother (Baum)
Recalling all the lovely little sandwiches
And moments when we met the other night
Et madame Naum, aussi: Bonjour again, madame.

And that reminds me that we ought
To Talk (again) in French a little bit, thus:
Naum, mon Gellu Naum
Ici c'est (encore) Monsieur Baum
Se souvenant de notre rendez-vous
Des petits sandwichs et grands sourires
Cette soiree-la (chez Ruth et monsieur Oisteanu)
A week ago last Sunday

Naum, my friend and Gellu, Naum,
Whose name seems much the same as Baum,
Except that Baum translates to Tree
And what of thee, my Naum of Naums then?
(I asked our Monsier Oisteanu if Naum translates to anything,
And he replied: "His father was a famous poet, too")

So Gellu (j'ai lu!), Gellu Naum
I hope you'll soon be back in town
And than we'll meet and chat again
And smile and wink, but never frown,
For we are men of great renown,
That famous team of Naum and Baum
In case you never heard of us.

3 Feb. 1983

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

**Bill Wolak**

# Gellu Naum Reserved This Dream for You

I first heard Gellu Naum's name in 1978. At that time, I was editing the first issue of my surrealist magazine *Dream Helmet*, and Valery Oisteanu sent me some of his translations from Romanian of Gellu Naum's poetry. I found Naum's work startling and have read it whenever and wherever I've been able to find it. Valery and I agreed to reproduce a few pages of Naum's collage poem "Advantage of the Vertebrae," which consisted of text juxtaposed with images of nineteenth century women's bonnets. Eerie, stark, and provocative, his poem included lines such as "A man / was eating a stone" and "Note: I could have sat and / looked at her like a dog / in a forest of bones."

Much to my surprise, a few years later Valery called me with an invitation to meet Gellu Naum at a party at his 2nd Avenue apartment to celebrate Naum's visit to New York City. Of course, I accepted and arrived prepared for anything. Valery greeted me at the door with an enthusiastic smile and his basso profondo, "Hello, Biiiillllll." After a quick greeting to Ruth, Valery's affectionate wife, I was ushered over to meet the poet.

As Valery introduced me in Romanian, I was struck by Gellu Naum's long, angular face and could sense a deep sadness in him. At first Gellu spoke to me in faltering English; luckily I discovered that he spoke fluent French and for the rest of the night we were able to communicate effortlessly.

At that time Valery's apartment was a surrealist museum: his paintings, collages, and mixed media works covered the walls while the remaining space was crammed with mannequins sporting wigs, gas masks, and elegant dresses, some arranged in delightfully obscene positions. Those left unadorned evoked an arousing shop-window nakedness. Still others were combined with objects into the most complicated sculptures.

The lights were low, the conversation intense, and the drinking and smoking continued all night. For a brief interlude, it seemed as if poetry had replaced breathing, and the oneiric seepage that transforms the mere turnstile of time into an immediate, undeniable intimacy bound us all that magic night.

Gellu Naum's life story revealed itself through a montage of languages: his birth in Bucharest, his Surrealist days in Paris with André Breton and Victor Brauner while studying at the Sorbonne, his return to Romania at the beginning of World War II where he was drafted and fought on the Eastern Front, the emergence of the Romanian Surrealist group during the war, which included Gherasim Luca and Virgil Teodorescu, and his long "surrealist silence" in the years of Communist oppression in Romania.

It wasn't until many years later that I realized the full impact of Valery's invitation. Gellu Naum represented one of those fearless voices that could never be silenced except in his own self-imposed avant-garde asceticism. He was a poet who was never afraid to dream in public. He was generous and available to the younger generation, who were struggling to find a path in the world that reconciled the marvelous with the quotidian. Gellu Naum became for me one of these early guides to a life committed to poetry; others followed to reinforce this path including Charles Henry Ford, Joyce Mansour, Ted Joans, Paul Grillo, John Digby, and Ira Cohen. Valery Oisteanu, of course, has always remained one of those trailblazers, as well.

HYPERION
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Ion Pop

# CRAVATA LUI GELLU NAUM

Într-o zi de după moartea poetului,
Doamna Lygia mi-a făcut un dar,
cum se face, de sufletul morților,
o cravată a lui Gellu Naum.

Un alt confrate primise o vestă,
ca din zale fragile de litere, — eu
urma să port ștreangul festiv,
deși citisem undeva la o pagină
că « aceste cravate mă fac inuman »,
iar la alta, că poți deveni,
la cea mai mică neatenție,
« un popă sau o cravată ».

Nu l-am văzut, de altfel, niciodată
pe fostul stăpân purtând-o,
cum n-am citit nicăieri
vreun sonet sub semnătura G.N., —
îmi aduc mai curând aminte
de niște ciorapi împuțiți ai unuia
zis Dumețul Incendiar,
fluturați la porțile Academiei Române.

Hazardul obiectiv,
ca și « obiectul oferit obiectiv unui obiect »,
a ținut să se manifeste încă o dată,
iar teribila lykantropie a ipocritelor lucruri,

criză fiind de aramă,
și-a dat acum sângele pe față,
ca un vampir numai în aparență pasiv.

Cravata trăgea, nu-i așa, spre cravată, —
de gâtul meu tânăr, apoi tot mai uscat,
atârnaseră câteva zeci, de toate culorile,
dar mai ales sobre, ca și cum
le-ar fi purtat un triunghi,
ori un pătrat, ori un tetraedru, erau —
am spus undeva —
un fel de cravate pedagogice.

Dar au servit o dată chiar de lassouri
aruncate către bezmeticele cirezi din mine,
spre hergheliile speriate,
împrăștiate de nu știu ce vânt,
de nu știu ce mici, mari cutremure,
îmbulzindu-se, încălecându-se, în nechez și muget,
prin pulberea dintre punctele cardinale.
(Îmi compuneam atunci o ținută demnă,
nu se cădea să să-mi fie obrazul schimonosit,
boțit gulerul, nu trebuia
ca petele dinăuntru
să iasă prin tencuială, ca igrasia).

Dar au fost, din când în când, și capcane
pentru niște hiene confuze, — o, nu,
o, nu, de fapt,
nu mirosea încă a mort...

De-atunci, îmi pun cravata cu dungi
albastre și negre doar când
nu mai știu unde sunt. Când simt
de pildă, că-mi fuge
pământul de sub picioare,
și fac câte-o piruetă neașteptată,
ca un balerin șchiop ori ca o paiață, —
vertebrele mele, zdravăn sudate cândva,

o iau razna ca niște zaruri,
și mă cuprinde o amețeală
cu alfabete amestecate
în asurzitorul vacarm din jur.

Tu mă salvezi atunci, cravată a lui Gellu Naum,
un gât mai țeapăn printre atâtea capete moi, plecate
printre atâția mușchi tatuați cu ță ță
de vedete, inimi
săgetate, dragoni și ancore,
insigne și decorații, —
bietele tălpi amorțite,
genunchii ruginiți, unghiile-nvechite
parcă mai prind un pic de curaj —
nu strică, se vede, să-ți scoți
din când în când
din omenire capul de piatră
ori piciorul de bronz:
Poate, îmi zic, puțină solemnitate
ar mai putea să intimideze.
Încât par a avea chiar dreptul apoi
să mă tot compar cu o linie perpendiculară,
până ce obosesc, și chiar ajung să cred
că sunt o linie
perpendiculară.

De la o vreme, mă tem însă că până și linia
se apleacă, o îndoaie un fel de vânt,
poate că ar fi mai potrivită
metafora aceea a trestiei,
cam uzată și ea,
fiindcă, mai pur și mai simplu,
îmi vine să scot un muget,
da, chiar așa,
să scot un muget,
« aș zbiera, doamnă, ca o vacă nu ca un om,
dar vreau să știu că s-a limpezit lumea » —
cum a spus o țărancă pe nume Elisabeta,

schingiuită în închisori foarte roșii, —
chiar așa, doamnă,
chiar așa, Doamne.

Dar, uite, lumea nu se prea limpezește,
nu se limpezește,
nu se limpezește.

Și iată au și pornit satrapii cu lavalieră,
ciobanii cu oile lor păscând cenușă,
negustorii au umplut din nou templele,
pe tarabe, la preț redus, la a doua mână,
se vând cămășile însângerate
ale învinșilor,
(da, s-a mai spus și se va mai spune)
dar meterhanalele fluieră, chiuie,
aghiazma-i un bun înlocuitor de benzină,
văd chiștoace plutind în cristelnițe,
necredința mută munții din loc,
un elev îmi spune că, în sfârșit,
și-a prins  profesorul copiind
pe când asuda să devină definitiv,
câteva mii de iude nu mai știu număra
decât până la 30, —

pe când în fresce se scorojesc, Doamne,
trâmbițele Apocalipsului,
și sub jumătate din degetul Tău arătător
se vede piatra și cărămida.
Ici-colo, câte un steag găurit,
mai flutură
ostenit și decolorat,
pe câte-un morman de gunoi.

Notații, clișee poeticești, desigur,
tropi anacronici, tropăind în zadar prin poem.

Dar încotro, încotro?

M-ați înnebunit, mă scoateți
din minți, netrebnicilor, lichelelor,
hoți de drumul mic, tâlhari de drumul mare,
cărați-vă,
întoarceți-vă să grohăiți
în mare, pieriți Legiuni,
sub trăsnete și talazuri !

Și, totuși, ce criză de blesteme!

Chiar așa, Domnule Gellu Naum,
singurul chior din ținutul tău avea dreptate,
« lumea a început să pută »,
și continuă tot așa,
pute, pute, pute,
pur și simplu pute.
— Scuzați, o, Metafore !

Și, iată, mă poticnesc  chiar acum, nu mai știu
cum să-mi continuu poemul,
mi s-au terminat
figurile de stil, majusculele,
și, oh, acea muzică, muzica,
pe când năvălește de pretutindeni
"Muzica! Muzica !"...

Dezleagă-te, așadar,
cravată cu dungi albastre, negre,
nu mai pot, lasă-mă să urlu,
nu mi-au mai mai rămas decât
sinonimele urletului
și nu mai găsesc în memorie
decât o antologie de gemete,
în vremea asta, a noilor,
vechilor asasini.

Ia de la mine paharul acesta,
*Mehr Licht*, vine întunericul,
la gheață, da, și la urși,

pe mine însumi
mie redă-mă,
botează-mă cu pământ,
*ora pro nobis pecatoribus*
*nunc et in hora mortis nostrae*
*amen...*

Aici m-ați adus, nerușinaților.
Îmi vine să trântesc toate ușile,
îmi vine să dau cu piatra
în propria mea fereastră —
să nu mai rămână, cravată a lui Gellu Naum
decât cioburi și țăndări,
nisip, fărâme, praful și pulberea...
Și știu că voi plânge apoi, amar,
cu lacrimi de sânge-o să plâng
la apa aceea a Babilonului.

O, voi, azur, Azot, Calciu, caliciu,
Fier, fiare, fiere,
cărbune cândva aprins, Carbon,
Sulf, și tu, sulfină,
Pb otrăvit, atribut rodnic al norilor,
Se, lunar seleniu,
Ag, argint, agent angelic fără prihană,
Natriu, atriu natal, sare
a lacrimii de odinioară,
Clor și clopote, clorofile, clocote
ale sângelui, Heliu, heliotrop, Helios,
Tu, Oxigen, aer, Aur,
văzduhuri sub Carul Mare,
și tu, $H^2O$,
apă botezătoare...

Înapoi, toate,
Acolo,
în marele, dreptul Tabel !

Vers, verset printre viermi,
rime și râme,
rumegușuri, virgule de sânge,
schelete de semne ale mirării —
și, poate, într-un mare Târziu,
trezirea, un verde pur, verde pur,
un foșnet, un scâncet,
un murmur, o adiere,
un cântec, măcar îngânat,
de leagăn, sub soarele nou.

Dar acum, te deznod,
dezleagă-te, dezleagă-mă,
lasă-mă să strig, să țip, să mugesc,
să zbier, să urlu până voi răguși,
să urlu până mai pot urla, —
dezleagă-te, dezleagă-mă,
cravată a lui Gellu Naum !

Dezleagă-mă, te rog,
și Tu, Doamne,
să vină Dezlegarea!

HYPERION
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**Ion Pop**

# GELLU NAUM'S TIE

English translation by Valery Oisteanu
Edited by Nadia Brunstein

Some day after the poet's death,
Miz Lygia gave me a present,
for the sake of the departed's soul:
as is the custom,
a tie of Gellu Naum's.

Another fellow-poet got a vest
that looked as if made from a fragile chain of letters
— but I was destined to wear the festive noose,
though I had read on some page
that "these neckties make me non-human,"
and on another, that at the slightest gap of attention
one becomes "A priest or a tie."
What's more, I had never seen
its former owner don it — nor had I ever read
a sonnet signed G.N. —
but rather, I remember
the stinking socks of somebody called
"The Incendiary Wanderer"
being waved at the gates of the Romanian Academy.

Once again, an objective chance,
in the guise of "an object objectively offered to an object,"
decided to reveal itself,
and the terrible lycanthropy of gold-plated facetious things,
bronze being in short supply
now let its true bloody colors shine through,
like a vampire that only looks passive

A tie would flock together with other ties — wouldn't it?
a few dozens, in every color, had been hanging
around my young neck subsequently getting drier and
drier,
ties in every color, but mostly demure
as if worn by a triangle,
or a square, or a tetrahedron,
they were —
as I had said at some point —
sort of training ties.

Still, occasionally they were used as lassoes
hurled over zany herds inside me,
over the frightened horse troops
scattered by some unknown wind,
some unknown earthquakes, small or large,
thronging, saddling each other, amidst neighing and
roaring,
across the dust between the cardinal points.
(at the time I was composing a dignified demeanor for
myself,
it wouldn't do for me to have a contorted face,
a crumpled collar; the inner stains
shouldn't show through the plaster as moldy dampness).

But at times, they were also traps
for some bewildered hyenas, — well, no,
well, no, actually
no cadaver smell was present as yet ...
From that time on I wear this tie,
Striped blue and black, only when
I don't know where I am. For instance, when I feel
the ground slipping from under my feet,
and I do an odd unexpected pirouette,
like a lame ballet dancer or a clown —
My vertebrae, once sturdily welded together,
scatter out like dice,
and I am overcome by dizziness
of mixed-up alphabets
in the midst of a deafening uproar.

That's when you rescue me, Gellu Naum's tie,
my neck is made stiffer among so many soft heads, bent,
among so many muscles tattooed with tits
of celebrities, hearts pierced by
arrows, dragons and anchors,
badges and decorations —
pathetic foot-soles numb,
knees rusty, nails worn out,
it feels like I am catching a bit of courage —
it turns out, it doesn't hurt,
Occasionally, to stick out
one's stone head or one's bronze foot from under
humankind:
Maybe, I tell myself, a little gravitas
could still intimidate.
So that eventually I get the right
to compare myself to a vertical line,

until I grow tired, and even come to believe
that I am indeed a vertical line.

However, recently I came to fear
that even a line can get bent, by a sort of wind;
perhaps, the metaphor of the reed
would be more appropriate,
though it, too, is pretty overused;
just because, to put it in purer and simpler terms,
I feel like giving a howl,
yes indeed,
giving out a howl.
"Lady, I could bellow like a cow not like a human,
but I just want to know that the world grew clearer"—
said a peasant woman named Elizabeth,
who had been tortured in very red prisons —
even so, ma'am,
even so, o Lord.
But see, the world grows no clearer,
no clarity,
no clarity.

And look, lavaliere-outfitted satraps already set out,
as did the shepherds with their ash-grazing sheep,
temples, again, are full of merchants' stalls,
selling discounted, second-hand,
bloodied shirts of the defeated.
(Yes, it has been said and will be said again),
but Balkan brass bands keep whistling, shrieking,
holy water is a good stand-in for gasoline,
I see cigarette butts floating in christening fonts,
un-faith does move mountains,
a student tells me that, finally he caught

his teacher plagiarizing others people's work
while sweating to get tenure,
A few thousand Judases no longer can count
Beyond 30 —

while, Lord, o Lord,
Apocalypse's trumpets shrivel in frescoes,
and one can see naked brick and stone
half under your index finger.

Here and there, a rebel flag with a hole at its center,
still waves, tired and faded,
over a pile of garbage.

Notes, rhymesters' drivel, to be sure,
anachronistic tropes, fruitlessly trampling through the
poem
but where to, where to?

You're driving me out of my mind, to lunacy,
you, good-for-nothings, low-lifes,
low-way thieves, highway robbers,
scram, go back
and grunt in the sea,
get lost, Legions,
under thunderbolts and billowing waves !

Still, what a dearth of curses!

Even so, Mr. Gellu Naum,
the only one-eyed man in your land of the blind was right,
"the World started to stink,"
and keeps at it,

it stinks, stinks, stinks,
simply stinks.
— Excuse me, oh you, Metaphors!

And behold, right now, I stumble, I no longer know
how to continue my poem,
I ran out of figures of style, capital letters,
and, oh, that music, music,
while it's rushing from everywhere
"Music! Music!"...

Therefore, untie yourself,
black-and-blue striped tie,
I cannot take it, let me scream.
All I have left is the synonyms for roaring;
all that my memory preserved
is an anthology of groans,
at this time, of new and old
assassins.

Let this cup pass from me,
*mehr Licht*, darkness is coming,
over ice, yes, over bears,
return myself to myself
christen me with loam,
*ora pro nobis peccatoribus*
*nunc et in hora mortis nostrae*
*amen...*

Here's where you've brought me, shameless creatures.
I feel like slamming all the doors,
like throwing a stone
through my own window —

So that, o Gellu Naum's tie,
all that's left
would be shards and splinters,
sand, grit, dust and grime ...

And I know I'll cry bitterly,
I'll cry tears of blood
by those rivers of Babylon.

O, you, azure, azole, calcium, calyces,
Fierce iron of ferrous frustrations,
coal, once incandescent, carbon,
Sulfur, and you sulfine,
poisonous lead, fertile feature of the clouds,
moody selenium of the moon
silver, untainted argentine angelic agent,
natrium, native atrium, chlorine, salt
of a long-gone tear,
beryl and bells, clusters of chlorophyll, bubbling
blood, Helium, heliotrope, Helios,
you, oxygen, air, aura,
ether under the Big Dipper,
and you, $H_2O$,
baptismal water ...
Get back, all of you,
over there,
into the great, righteous Table!

Verse, verses amidst worms,
rhymes among roaming maggots,
muggy sawdust, blood commas
skeleton interrogation marks —
and maybe, in a great Thereafter

the awakening: a pure green, pure green,
a rustle, a whimper,
a murmur, a breath,
a lullaby even if murmured under the breath,
beneath a new sun.

But now, I will untie you,
and you — untie yourself, untie me,
let me cry, scream, bellow,
holler, yell till I get hoarse,
let me howl while I still can howl —
untie yourself, untie me,
you, Gellu Naum's tie!

Thou too, o Lord,
Untie me, absolve me.
Come the Absolution, come!

HYPERION
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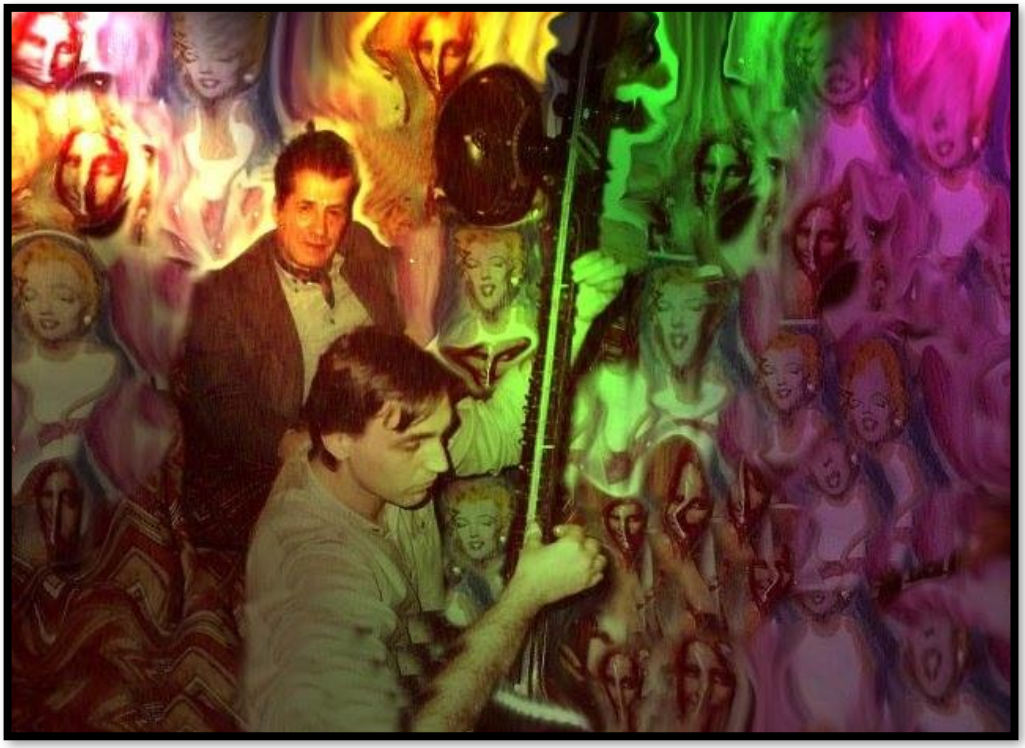
# OUTSIDE TIME

**to Gellu Naum @100**

**Valery Oisteanu**



The temptations of St. Naum

Just one of those things, an apparition
Next life misery wrapped in "hypotheticals"
Defeated by passion but un-subdued by destiny
Naum, keeper of the Alchemical love secrets
His experiments transferred to an occult code
A critical ghost above a surrealist domain
The world so unbalanced after he's gone
Those who know smile enigmatically
Burning down idols of submission
Inside a reincarnation station of deafness
His ears full of unfiltered imagination
Deep light enters as a deafening silence
Never dreaming in vain
Erudite anxiety, beyond the brain
Unfailing to suffer blindness fruitlessly
Insights distilled into a "white of the bone" cloud
Rhythms of subjective channeling & jazz of old spirits
Invisible performers, cats with four deadly eyes
The incoherent civilization trampled upon your work
Ignorant vandals, exorcizing beyond perishability of life
Naum, the monk of occultization secret society
Unadulterated radical revolt of words and concepts
NAUM—ZAUM, fertile silence
Naum Umlaum Zazeum,
Zen Naum — zazen AUM

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IMAGE CREDITS

1. Cover: Gellu Naum, Self-portrait (1975). Postcard.
2. Gellu Naum's books at the Library of the Romanian Academy. Photo by Valery Oisteanu.
3. French edition of *My Tired Father*. Graphic by Jules Perahim (1983).
4. Transcription of Gellu Naum's dream, Nigredo.
5. Victor Brauner, *Portrait of Gellu Naum*. *Selected Poems* (Albatros Press, 1970).
6. Naum & Valery Oisteanu, chez Naum. Photo by Ruth Oisteanu, Bucharest (1980).
7. Victor Brauner, Naum, including a dedication by Naum to Ruth and Valery Oisteanu. New York, January 22, 1983.
8. Letter of Gellu Naum. Happy New Year 1976.
9. Gellu Naum. Photo by Valery Oisteanu, Comana, Romania (1993).
10. Ligia Naum, Two graphical images (1947). Drawn with her eyes closed.
11. Naum reading from *The Other Side* at PASS (1983). Photo by Valery Oisteanu.
12. Cover image of *The Description of the Tower* by Aurel Stoicescu.
13. *Apolodor's Travels* (Editura Tineretului, 1959). Cover art by Dan Stanciu.
14. Naum's "Marvelous Garter Belts" with collages by Bill Wolak (1979).
15. Ion Lucian (actor), Theater Mundi production of *The Taus Watch Repair Shop*, Bucharest, Romania (2000–2001).
16. Cover image of *Athanor & Other Pohems* (Calypso Edition, 2013). Photo Nude by Derick Burleson.
17. Cover image of *My Tired Father* (Green Integer, 1999). Gellu Naum photo by Marius Caraman, 1999.
18. Cover image of *Zenobia* (Cartea Românească, 1985).
19. Gellu Naum with Ljubisha Ristic on Sitar at PASS. Photo by Valery Oisteanu, NYC (1983). Photoshop adjustment by Liuba (2015).

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Timothy Baum** is a poet and an art dealer specializing in all facets of the subject of dada and Surrealism. He has published his poems worldwide, and is also the author of many articles and books concerning dada and Surrealism, with an especial focus on Man Ray (who Mr. Baum represented for the last six years of the artist's life, and about whom he is considered the world's leading expert). Mr Baum has also curated many shows concerning various aspects of Dada and Surrealism, including the only retrospective exhibitions of Surrealism ever presented in Australia (1993) and Canada (2011). Separately, Mr. Baum is the publisher and editor of an interesting collection of limited edition books published under the name of Nadada Editions, in existence since 1971. Mr. Baum an extensive world traveler makes his home in his natal city, New York.

**Florin Bican** is a compulsive translator of literature from Romanian into English and English into Romanian, of authors ranging from Lewis Carroll, T.S. Eliot, Roald Dahl and J. K. Rowling, to contemporary Romanian poets like Mircea Dinescu, Doina Ioanid, Ofelia Prodan. When not translating, he writes (mostly) children's literature and politically incorrect cautionary rhymes. His new book, *Și v-am spus povestea așa* ("And That's How the Story Goes"), is a collection of Romanian traditional fairy tales, retold from the talking horse's perspective. Between 2006 and 2012 co-ordinated the Romanian Cultural Institute's programme for training foreign translators of Romanian literature.

**Ira Cohen** (1935–2011) was an American poet, photographer, filmmaker, & publisher. After a series of films & photographic work in collaborative ventures, and travels across the globe, his literary and artistic breakthrough came in the 1990, with the publishing of his poems (*Ratio3: Media Shamans Along with Two Good Friends*). A founding member of the NY-based improvisational music theatre group 'CosmicLegends', he collaborated at the world premiere of Angus

MacLise's *ORPHEO* (The Kitchen, NY). Cohen had a series of major exhibitions in the 2000s; his first CD (*The Majoon Traveller*) came out in 1994 (Sub Rosa Records).

Poet, critic, and playwright **Allan Graubard** has published and performed internationally, with translations in numerous languages. In a previous *Hyperion*, he guest-edited an issue dedicated to Gherasim Luca. From his late summer perch in Manhattan, Allan dedicates his contributions in this issue to those who have inspired him and are no longer here: Clarence John Laughlin, Butch Morris, Ira Cohen, and Laurence Weisberg.

**Catherine Hansen** is a research affiliate at the American University of Beirut, Department of English. She earned her Phd in Comparative Literature at Princeton University. Her work has appeared in *Cabinet* magazine, *The American Reader*, *ARTMar-gins*, *Dada/Surrealism,* and *L'Esprit Créateur*.

**MARGENTO** (**Chris Tănăsescu**) is a poet, performer, academic, & translator who has lectured, launched books, and performed in the US, South East Asia, Australia, and Europe. His pen-name is also the name of his multimedia cross-art band that won a number of major international awards. MARGENTO continues his work on the graph poem project now at an academic level together with Computer Science Professor Diana Inkpen and the latter's students at University of Ottawa. MARGENTO is Romania & Moldova Editor-at-Large for *Asymptote*.

**Paul McRandle** recently launched Phasm Press, which produces hand-made works featuring collaborations between artists and poets. He edits the blog *Surrealist NYC*, writes reviews for *Rain Taxi*, and served as the arts editor for the journal *3rd bed*. His writing has appeared in *New England Review*, *Quarter After Eight*, *Black Ice*, and elsewhere.

**Valery Oisteanu** is a poet, essayist and visual artist. Born in the USSR (1943) and educated in Romania, he started publishing poetry in 1970 (*Prosthesis*). A the age of 20, he adopted Dada and Surrealism as a philosophy of art and life, and a few years later, English as his primary language. Since his emigration to New York in 1972, he has been writing in English. He is the author of 12 books of poetry, a book of short fiction (*The King of Penguins*, Linear Art Press, 2000), and a book of essays, *The AVANT-GODS*.

**Ion Pop** is Emeritus Professor of Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj, editor-in-chief of *Echinox* magazine (1969-1983) and former director of the Romanian Cultural Institute in Paris (1990-1993). Author of ten volumes of poetry, he has published over a dozen volumes of criticism and literary history, several centred on the avantarde (including *Gellu Naum — poezia contra literaturii* [Gellu Naum — poetry against literature], 2001). Prolific translator of literature and theory, including works by Ionesco, Tzara, Jean Starobinski, Ricoeur, Genette, Todorov.

**Simona Popescu** teaches contemporary Romanian literature and creative writing at the University of Bucharest. She is author of the following volumes of poetry: *Xilofonul și alte poeme* (*Xylophone and Other Poems*, 1990), *Juventus* (1994), *Noapte sau zi* (*Night or Day*, 1998), *Juventus și alte poeme* (*Juventus and Other Poems*, 2004), *Lucrări în verde. Pledoaria mea pentru poezie* (*Work in Green. My Plea for Poetry*, 2006), of the novel *Exuvii* (*Exuviae*, 1997), and three volumes of essays: *Volubilis* (1998), *Salvarea speciei. Despre suprarealism și Gellu Naum* (*Saving the Species. On Surrealism and Gellu Naum*, 2000), *Clava. Critificțiune cu Gellu Naum* (*Clava. Critifiction with Gellu Naum*, 2004). She coordinated a collective novel she wrote together with 28 young writers, *Rubik* (2008).

**Petre Răileanu** is an independent researcher and essayist who has published numerous essays in the field of French-Romanian cultural relations between the two world wars and pertaining to the avant-gardes. He published several book-length studies on Romanian avant-garde artists: *Gherasim Luca* (Editions Oxus, Paris, 2004); *Fundoianu/Fondane et L'avant-garde*, in collaboration avec Michel Carassou (Editions Paris-Méditerranée, Paris, 1999); *The Romanian Avant-garde* (Plural, Bucarest, 1999).

**Sebastian Reichmann** is a prolific poet, novelist, critic and translator who started publishing in Romania at the end of the 1960s, then emigrated to France in 1971, after the banning of his second volume. To date he has published eight volumes of poetry in French, his poems and translations have come out in *Poésie*, *M.E.E.T.*, *Po&sie*, *La Traductière*, *Autrement* among others. A close friend of Gellu Naum's, he translated four of his books into French: *Mon père fatigué* (1983), *Zenobia* (1995), *Discours pour les pierres* (2002), *Voyage avec Apollodore* (2009).

**Julian Semilian** is an experimental filmmaker, film editor, teacher, poet, translator, and novelist. He was born in Romania and has been teaching film editing and experimental cinema at the University North Carolina School of the Arts for the last 17 years, following a career as a film editor in Hollywood, where he worked on more than 50 movies and TV shows. You can find out more about him at juliansemilian.com.

**Janel Spencer** is a poet from Tucson, Arizona. She currently lives in San Diego, where she teaches writing at San Diego State University and works for *Poetry International*.

**Sasha Vlad** is a Romanian-born, San Francisco-based artist whose visual and written work explores the zones of automatism and chance through automatic drawings, collages, objects and visual poems. He has proposed new surrealist techniques (*dépliage*, *carbonisage*, *le cadavre carbonisé*, *le cadavre ressuscité*, *le cadavre provoqué*, *transpelling*, etc.) and collaborative projects and games (*before/after*, *racollage*, *the parasite of the azure*, *the common place*, *visual translation*, *exquisite corpses in 3D*, etc.). He co-translated Gellu Naum's *Zenobia* into English with James Brook (Northwestern University Press, 1995), his other writings and co-translations appearing in *Analogon*, *Exquisite Corpse*, etc.

**Bill Wolak** is a poet who lives in New Jersey and teaches Creative Writing at William Paterson University. He has just published his thirteenth collection of poetry, *Love Opens the Hands: New and Selected Love Poems* (Nirala Press). His most recent translation with Mahmood Karimi-Hakak, *Love Me More Than the Others: Selected Poetry of Iraj Mirza*, was published by Cross-Cultural Communications in 2014. Recently, he was a featured poet at The Mihai Eminescu International Poetry Festival in Craiova, Romania.

**Martin Woodside** is a writer, translator, and founding member of Calypso Editions. He spent 2009–10 as a Fulbright Fellow in Romania. His work has appeared in numerous literary journals, including *The Kenyon Review*, *Asymptote*, *Guernica*, *The Cimarron Review*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, and *Poetry International*. He published five books for children, a chapbook of poetry, and a full-length collection of poems, *This River Goes Two Ways*. He translated and edited *Of Gentle Wolves*, an anthology of Romanian poetry, and working with MARGENTO, translated Gellu Naum's poetry for the English language collection, *Athanor & Other Poems*. For more, visit martinwoodside.com.