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## Blood, Stigmata and The Prison Cell: Trauma and Redemption in Radu Gyr's Detention Poetry

Poetry produced in the prisons of communist Romania still represents a lost page in the history of European literature, as it has so far received less attention from critics than prose and memoirs. In this contribution, after some preliminary reflections on Romanian Gulag poetry, I will propose a close reading of Radu Gyr's poetry, focusing in particular on the two posthumous cycles *The Blood of the Prison* [Sângele temniței] and *Stigmata* [Stigmat] and on some recurring themes and motifs in his prison poetry: the infernal space of the prison and the cell, blood and wounds, which converge in the shocking image of the stigmata. By analysing how these themes evolve and change in the author's poetic universe, I will demonstrate that Radu Gyr, through his search for a sacred, ritual, and cathartic language, transformed the brutality of imprisonment into poetry, making his poetic art not only a testimony to trauma, but also an act of inner healing.

### 1. A Brief Introduction to Romanian Gulag Poetry

Poetry produced in the communist prisons of Romania remains largely a lost page in European literary history. Despite embodying an emblematic form of survival and resistance in a violent and hostile universe, it has so far received less attention from critics than prose and memoirs of detention.<sup>1</sup> Com-

posed mentally during the traumatic experience of the Gulag, this poetry has a high value of immediacy. Its placement in the *hic et nunc* of the concentrationary space makes it one of the most appropriate literary genres for studying *in vitro* the direct

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nored, and that is Gulag poetry. It may be hard to believe, but to date only a limited number of articles have ever been devoted to this huge body of texts. It is quite a surprising fact, if we compare it with the importance that the study of poetry had in scholarly research on literature generated from other traumatic historical contexts, such as Holocaust poetry, Apartheid poetry, or the poetry of African-American authors concerning racism in the USA' (Gullotta 2016: 175).

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<sup>1</sup> The situation regarding studies on Romanian prison poetry is in many ways comparable to that of studies on Russian Gulag poetry. As Andrea Gullotta observed in one of the few articles devoted to Russian Gulag poetry: 'In the cartography of Russian studies, a large area has been almost completely ig-

effects that trauma can have on literary creation. Alongside its value of vivid immediacy, Gulag poetry also takes on a particular function within the concentrationary space. It seems to have not so much the purpose of documenting hell as a more therapeutic/cathartic and even soteriological function. We can consider the vast poetic production of the Romanian Gulag almost as a form of exorcism of pain and suffering, an inner cure for trauma that also aims, spiritually, at a sort of redemption for the condemned. To express and obsessively repeat the trauma and pain in all its brutality within one's verses, sharing it with other condemned people, not only serves the purpose of feeling part of a fallen, dehumanized, and suffering humanity, but also that of projecting evil outward, cauterizing one's wounds. Proof of this hypothesis could be found in the fact that, although some Gulag poets were already writing poetry before their arrest (in particular well-known and established professional poets such as Radu Gyr, Nichifor Crainic, Aurel Ciurunga, Vasile Voiculescu, Ion Caraion, Ionel Zeană, etc.), many poets made their debut in the Gulag (Constantin Aurel Dragodan, Zahu Pană, Ioan Victor Pică, Sergiu Mandinescu,

Constantin Oprișan, Dumitru Oniga, Ștefan Vlădoianu, Valeriu Gafencu, Dumitru Bacu, Mihai Buracu, Demostene Andronescu, etc.) and in some cases died in the Gulag. When I say they died in the Gulag, I am not referring only to those poets who died during their imprisonment, but also (and above all) to a specific category of poets who, once they left the Gulag, would never write poetry again. This is a clear example of poetry that arises and is consumed exclusively in the dramatic experience of the Gulag. It only makes sense to exist within that space, as it fulfils a specific function: to survive and to find a possible way out of trauma through the enchantment of words.

The slow emergence of Gulag poetry in the Romanian cultural space began in 1990,<sup>2</sup> owing

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<sup>2</sup> I would like to point out that during the communist regime, six anthologies were published between 1952 and 1985, one of which was in English. All the anthologies were published abroad (Portugal, Spain, Brazil, Canada), either independently or through short-lived publishing houses. Due to these circumstances, these publications had little circulation in Romania: Ion Stegaru, *Din Poezia rezistenței românești / Pușcăriașul Onofrei* [Radu Gyr], *Poeme din închisoare*, cu o prezentare de Victor Buescu (Lisbon: Universitatea din Lisabona, Colecția Lectoratului Român, Colecție Românească, 1952); Dumitru Bacu (ed.) *Ofrandă, Poezii din închisori*

above all to the publication of a series of anthologies that made the vast poetic corpus produced in communist prisons available to critics and readers. Between 1990 and 2010 several anthologies were published: *Poets behind Bars (I-IV)* [Poetii după gratii (I-IV)], edited by Constantin Aurel Dragodan between 1993 and 1997 for Editura Ramida in Bucharest; *Poetry in Handcuffs* [Poezia în cătușe], edited by Aurelian I. Popescu (Craiova: Editura Omniscop, 1995); *Last night Jesus entered my cell. Poets Behind Bars* [As'noapte Iisus mi-a intrat in celulă. Poeti după gratii] edited by Cezarina Bărzoi (Bucharest: Editura Elisavaros, 2005); *Anthology of Detention Poetry* [Antologia poeziei carcerale] edited by Ioana Cistelean (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Eikon, 2006), author of the first monograph dedicated to prison poetry (*Detention Poetry, Poezia carcerală*, Pitești: Editura Paralela 45, 2000) and *Poets behind*

*Bars* [Poeti după gratii] published by Mănăstirea Petru Vodă in 2010. More recently, in 2012, a bilingual Romanian/French anthology was also published, edited by Paula Romanescu (Bucharest: Editura Betta, 2012). Except for the anthology edited by Ioana Cistelean, published by Editura Eikon, all the other anthologies have had limited circulation, as they were published by small publishing houses. In 2016, Ilie Popa edited a comprehensive anthology for Editura Fundației Culturale MEMORIA, now in its second edition (2023): *Anthology of Anti-Communist Detention Lyric Poetry from the Romanian Space* [Antologia liricii de detenție anticomunistă din spațiul românesc].

This is a valuable work that brings together 177 poets and over 1,300 poems, undoubtedly the richest collection of prison poetry published to date in Romania. Reading this monumental work, it is easy to see that the poetry produced in Romanian Gulag, despite the differences in style, can be interpreted as the emergence and irradiation of a great collective work, whose value is not only documentary but has, in many cases, aesthetic value as well. In this poetry, characterized by a remarkable emotional and visual impact, images, themes, and motifs re-

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(Madrid: Gráficas Benzal, 1963); Nicu Dima et al. (eds.), *Poeme din închisori* (Madrid: Editura Drum, 1970); Arhim. Roman Braga (ed.), *Voi n-ați fost cu noi în celule*, (São Paulo, Brazil: 1972); Zahu Pană (ed.), *Poezii din închisori*, cu un cuvânt introductiv de Vintilă Horia (Canada: Editura Cuvântul românesc, 1982); Zahu Pană (ed.), *Poems from communist prisons*, translated by Mother Alexandra (Hamilton-Canada: Editura Cuvântul românesc, 1982).

cur obsessively, as do words, rhythms, and sounds that migrate from one author to another, from one text to another, in a deep labyrinth of references, allusions and mutual influences. The folkloric substrate present in many texts is unifying and homogenizing, not only from a thematic point of view, but also from a technical and stylistic one. These characteristics align with the literary strategies systematized by Anne Whitehead (see Whitehead 2004: 85-87), which are very common in works focusing on trauma and its consequences: ‘obsessive repetition’ (of themes, motifs, and images), and ‘intertextuality’ (in the case of Romanian poets in the Gulag, intertextual practice primarily involves folkloric texts).<sup>3</sup>

The fact that this poetry was produced mentally and spread orally led to the partial revival of specific forms of Romanian popular and folkloric literature, such as the *Baladă* or the *Colind*. Due to their metrical and rhythmical structure, these poetic forms lend themselves well to memorization. It was precisely the pressure of having to create

these poems mentally and then disseminate them orally that brought these archaic and traditional genres back to the fore in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among other things, this rediscovery creates a stark contrast, and incredibly modern hybridization between the imagery of violence expressed by this poetry, which clearly approaches poetical Expressionism, and the traditional forms originating in popular culture. As Ioana Cistelecan states, proposing the formula of *inverted ballads*:

The images amaze us with their newness; ultimately, we find ourselves reading a poem that is not only modern, but very contemporary even [...] The closed space of detention supposes an annihilation of the natural, even an intrinsic preference for the overturned order. This preference is transposed into the so-called inverted ballads. Reinvented as a form of prison creation, ballads lose their brightness and meaning [...] they gradually become distorted, pertinently inhaling

<sup>3</sup> Although Whitehead has systematized these techniques of representing trauma in post-traumatic fiction, they are also partially applicable to poetry produced within the Gulag.

the ashes of the cell (Cis-telecan 2019: 123).<sup>4</sup>

In this vast poetical corpus, the poetical works of Radu Gyr, dark and monolithic, emerge as the most significant and consistent poetry composed within Romanian Gulag. In this contribution, taking into account the preliminary reflections made so far, I will propose a close reading of Radu Gyr's poetry, focusing in particular on the two posthumous cycles *The Blood of the Prison* [Sângele temniței] and *Stigmata* [Stigmată], as well as on some recurring themes and motifs therein: the infernal spaces of the prison and the cell; the blood, and the wound, which converge in the shocking image of the stigmata, analysing how they evolve and modify in the author's poetic universe.

## 2. Radu Gyr's Poetry in the Gulag and after the Gulag: Circulation and Survival

Before analysing Radu Gyr's detention poetry, it is necessary to provide some biographical details concerning the circulation of the author's poetry in the Romanian Gulag and its preser-

vation and survival after his release from the hell of communist prisons. Radu Gyr spent a substantial part of his life in prisons, suffering detention under three different dictatorships: under the dictatorship of King Carol II,<sup>5</sup> under the dictatorship of Marshal Antonescu,<sup>6</sup> and finally under communist dictatorship. In the 1930s Radu Gyr published in right-wing, nationalist literary magazines and newspapers and joined the Iron Guard fascist movement, becoming in time its commander in the Oltenia region. The Iron Guard [*Garda de Fier*] was a far-right paramilitary organization and a political party founded by Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu<sup>7</sup> as The

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<sup>5</sup> King Carol II (1893-1953), the most controversial Romanian king. He was King of Romania from 8 June 1930 following a coup that deposed his son King Michael I [Mihai I] until his forced abdication on 6 September 1940. His policy was disastrous for Romania.

<sup>6</sup> Marshal Ion Antonescu (1882-1946) presided over two successive wartime dictatorships as Prime Minister and 'Conducător' [The Leader] during most of World War II. Having been responsible for facilitating the Holocaust in Romania, he was overthrown in 1944 by King Mihai I. He was tried by Communists (under Soviet tutelage) for war crimes and executed in 1946.

<sup>7</sup> Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu (1899-1938) was a fascist Romanian politician, the founder (in 1927) and leader of the Iron Guard or The Legion of the Archangel Michael or The Legionary Movement,

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<sup>4</sup> All the translations from Romanian to English are my own - G.M..

Legion of the Archangel Michael [*Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*] or the Legionary Movement [*Mișcarea Legionară*], an anti-democratic and anti-semitic movement. When the Iron Guard was repressed by the regime of King Carol II, Gyr was arrested and imprisoned. After the Legionary Movement came to power in September 1940, he was appointed General Manager of the Romanian Theatres. Under his administration, the Barașeum Jewish Theatre was founded. The creation of the Jewish Theatre was accompanied by an interdiction against Jewish actors playing anywhere else in Romania, part of a joint effort to purge Jewish people from 'Romanian' (non-Jewish) theatres across the country. Under communist dictatorship, Radu Gyr's imprisonment took place in two phases: from 1945 to 1956, when he was imprisoned in Brașov and Aiud as an extreme right-wing journalist and writer

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an ultranationalist and violently anti-semitic organization active throughout most of the interwar period. Noted for its mystical and Romanian Orthodox-inspired message, the Iron Guard came into conflict with the political establishment and the democratic forces, often resorting to terrorism. The members of the Iron Guard traditionally referred to Codreanu as 'Căpitanul' [The Captain]. He was assassinated in 1938, at the order of King Carol II.

and then from 1958 to 1964. In 1958, he was sentenced to death by the Military Tribunal of Bucharest for his anti-communist manifesto poem 'Get up, Gheorghe, Get up, Ion' [*Ridică-te Gheorghe, Ridică-te Ioane*]. The death sentence was then commuted to 25 years of hard labour, and he was imprisoned in Aiud, where he was subjected to a particularly harsh re-education program. As Ilie Popa states, in a brief bio-bibliographical presentation, only after publicly renouncing all of his work and beliefs, he was released in 1964 and once freed he was systematically persecuted by the Securitate until his death in 1975 and he was forced, along with Nichifor Crainic, to write propaganda articles for *Glasul patriei* (*Tribuna României*). In this bio-bibliographical presentation Ilie Popa recalls that:

In the Aiud prison, Radu Gyr was subjected to an extermination program with unimaginable tortures [...]. Seriously ill, suffering from haemophilia, gangrenous rectal prolapse, hepatitis, and tuberculosis, he was denied all medical care (Popa 2023: 50).

In the Romanian Gulag, the spread of Radu Gyr's poetry took place in three distinct phases, as reported by Dan Tudorache:

The first phase took place among intellectuals and high-ranking officers imprisoned in the section reserved for 'war criminals and those guilty of the country's disaster,' where Gyr was also imprisoned in June 1949. During this phase, his poems were disseminated with the help of his poetry notebook, which the poet had brought with him from the Braşov penitentiary and which, until its confiscation in the fall of 1948, contained about 60-70 poems. One of the main disseminators of Radu Gyr's poetry during this period was the philosopher Mircea Vulcănescu, Gyr's cellmate [...]. A second phase was the dissemination of his poems among the legionnaires imprisoned in Aiud, dissemination which gained momentum in the years 1948-1950, with the help of bowls greased with an emulsion of water, soap, and DDT powder, and with writings on the walls

of the cells. Finally, a third phase was the dissemination of his poems in other prisons and camps in the country, to all political prisoners, regardless of their political orientation. In this phase, the poems were disseminated either orally, using various means improvised by the prisoners, or through Morse code (Tudorache 2020: 143).

Radu Gyr's poetry, as with most of the poetry composed in the Gulag, often ends up taking on a totally dematerialized aspect, in some cases becoming nothing more than the cold ticking of the Morse code, as Aspazia Oţel Petrescu has evocatively witnessed:

The walls began to speak in a strange language, the dots and dashes of Morse code. The cold pipes of the radiators became the channels through which hot words passed; the verses and cadences became the beating of brotherly hearts (Oţel Petrescu 2010: 11).

Deprived of its written support, constantly suspended between presence and absence, this poet-

ry seems to reflect the same liminal condition of the imprisoned poet, who is both alive and dead, reduced to the larval condition of a shadow. After his release in 1964, Radu Gyr worked intensely on the poems that he had created mentally during his imprisonment, reorganizing them into various cycles, but he was unable to see them published. Instead, he was forced to hide them from the watchful eyes of the Securitate until his death in 1975. Even after the dramatic experience of the Gulag, Radu Gyr's poems remained in this liminal state of suspension, between existence and non-existence. Their publication could only take place after the fall of the communist regime in Romania, as Ioana Cistelean notes:

We owe their preservation and publication in volume to the poet's former fellow in suffering, Dumitru Cristea, who memorized them and, once freed, wrote down over 200 poems signed by Radu Gyr, as well as to the kindness of Simona Popa Gyr, who offered her father's poems for publication to the Marineasa publishing house in Timișoara be-

tween 1992 and 1994 (Cistelean 2019: 113-14).

### 3. Phenomenology of an Abject Space: The Prison and the Cell

Most of Radu Gyr's poems are mentally born in the cell, which gradually takes on the aspect of an infected and degraded womb. It is a claustrophobic place, contained concentrically within another closed and oppressive space: the prison. These infernal places pervade the life of the imprisoned poet, transforming him into 'beast, hatred, and fog' ('Son of a Thief,' Gyr 2009: 54).<sup>8</sup> Since one contains the other, there is almost a fusion, an overlap between these two places:

Good morning, cell, / good night, bars, – / I would smash your teeth, like a dog, / cell, I would break you with my teeth / Prison, Prison, rabid bitch / how my heart would set you on fire! ('Days,' Gyr 2009: 12-13).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> 'Bestie, ură și ceață' ('Fecior de hoată').

<sup>9</sup> 'Bună dimineață, celulă, / noapte bună, zăbrele, – / sparge-v-aș, ca un dulău, în măsele, / rupe-te-aș cu dinții,

Prison and cell, which in Radu Gyr's poems profoundly shape the poetics of abject space, are always described in a distorted and hallucinatory way. This is a probable effect of the physical and psychological trauma suffered. In the poem just quoted, the poet addresses them with hatred and resentment, personifying the prison as a monstrous female creature ('a rabid bitch'). The poem that opens the cycle *The Blood of the Prison* – significantly entitled 'Preface to Songs from Prison' – already outlines the apocalyptic atmosphere of the entire collection:

In my fierce shackles, / the  
stone swallows me, the  
iron sucks me dry. / I sink  
into darkness, day after  
day, and into ugliness, /  
first to my ankles, then to  
my neck. // Soon, the slab  
of the prison, with tiny in-  
sects, / will pass my  
mouth, my forehead, / and  
I will disappear into its  
horrible throat, / into its  
underground roar and into  
ashes... (Gyr 2009: 8).<sup>10</sup>

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celulă / Temniță, temniță, turbată cățea  
/ cum ți-ar da foc inima mea!' ('Zile').

<sup>10</sup> 'În aprigele mele belciuge, / piatra  
mă-nfulecă, fierul mă suge. / În bezne  
m-afund, zi de zi, și-n urât, / întâi pân'  
la glezne, apoi pân' la gât. // Curând, o

The poet's progressive descent into the submerged, mineralized, and metallized, yet visceral world of the prison is rendered with violent and vivid imagery. The 'horrible throat' into which he disappears is a metaphor for the cell, the innermost, most devouring place in the prison.

The personification (or animalization) of the prison and the cell, their representation as evil living creatures, is an almost obsessive constant in Radu Gyr's poetry, in some ways atypical within prison poetry. At a first level of analysis, they are only beasts that brutally attack the poet's body and mind:

This thieving cell / is  
squeezing my throat, is  
strangling me...  
(‘Longing,’ Gyr 2009: 10);<sup>11</sup>  
The waking burns me with  
rods, / gnaws me to the  
bones. / The cell rushes on  
me with hammers, / crow-  
bars and saws (‘Insomnia,’  
Gyr 2009: 38).<sup>12</sup>

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să-mi treacă de gură, de frunte, /  
lespedea temniței, cu gângăanii mărunte,  
/ și-am să dispar în grozava ei gușă, / în  
mugetul ei subteran și-n cenușă...'  
(‘Prefață la cântece din temniță’).

<sup>11</sup> ‘Celula asta tâlhară / mă strânge de  
gât, mă sugrumă’ (‘Jind’).

<sup>12</sup> ‘Veghea mă arde cu jorii, mă taie, /  
mă ronțăie până-n ciolane. / Celula

In the second poem quoted, the poet describes in an anguished way the metallic aggression of the cell during his state of insomnia – which is also personified: ‘it hangs from the ceiling, by hooks’ (Gyr 2009: 38)<sup>13</sup> – and his mental state through the night, dominated by a deep longing [jind] caused by physical deprivation (even in a sexual sense): ‘Ha, my thoughts raise spines / prickly, erect, like wild boars, – / I hear them rubbing against all the walls... / Above me, longing sharpens spits’ (Gyr 2009: 38).<sup>14</sup> During the night the cell, reflecting the alienated mental state of the sleepless poet like a distorted mirror, takes on an even more disturbing shape, revealing its most violent and corrupt aspect, as for example in ‘Song of Hatred:’ ‘The cell gurgles in the night, / with the sap of tears that nourishes / evil stems, overripe / with black, malicious fruit’ (Gyr 2009: 75).<sup>15</sup>

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năpustește pe mine ciocane, / răngi,  
fierăstraie’ (‘Nesomn’).

<sup>13</sup> ‘Atârnă-n tavan, de cârlige’  
(‘Nesomn’).

<sup>14</sup> ‘Ha, gândurile mele ridică spinări /  
țepoase, sculate, cum au mistreții, – /  
le-aud cum se freacă de toți pereții... /  
Deasupra mea, jindul ascute frigări’  
(‘Nesomn’).

<sup>15</sup> ‘Celula gâlgaie, în noapte, / de seva  
plânsului ce-ngrașă / hainele tulpini

In some poems, Radu Gyr even goes as far as to talk to his cell, asking it for news of his loved ones who have remained in the world of the living, as for instance in ‘Postcard:’ ‘Here, I talk to my cell slowly, / I ask about you, I caress it, then I scratch it, I bite it, I curse it’ (Gyr 2009: 33).<sup>16</sup> These verses not only testify to the poet’s extreme isolation but could also be a sign of anxiety and dissociative disorders caused by the psychological and physical trauma suffered in the dehumanizing space of prison. Another alienating association that falls into this category is that between the cell and the prisoner himself:

We never see autumn in  
prison. / But at night, next  
to us, we hear the cells  
coughing (‘Autumn in  
Prison,’ Gyr 2009: 60);<sup>17</sup>  
And at night, / when the  
wild air burns, / my thiev-  
ing whistle gathers / all  
the cells with sleep of em-

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răscoapte / cu pârgă neagră și vrăjmașă’  
(‘Cântec de ură’).

<sup>16</sup> ‘Aici, stau de vorbă cu celula mea pe-  
ndelete, / o-ntreb de voi, o dezmierd,  
apoi o zgârii, o mușc, o blestem’ (‘Carte  
poștală’).

<sup>17</sup> ‘Toamna, în temniță, n-o vedem  
niciodată. / Dar noaptea-auzim cum  
tușesc celule, alături’ (‘Toamnă în  
temniță’).

bers ('Hallucinations,' Gyr 2009: 81).<sup>18</sup>

In these two poems, 'the cells' are personified, becoming metaphors *in absentia* for the prisoners themselves. In the verse 'at night we hear the cells coughing,' the cells are represented as subjects capable of 'coughing,' an action that can be interpreted as a sign of illness and suffering. This process of substitution, between 'prisoners' and 'cells,' achieved through personification, creates a mixed, complex image in which cells are no longer simple containers. It is, in fact, a metonymic metaphor, through which the subjects ('the prisoners') are replaced with their containers ('the cells'), based on a relationship of contiguity between the people and the place where they are locked up. This hybrid and highly layered image, suggests the suffering and sickness not only of the people, but also of the abject and rotten concentrationary space itself.

In other poems, the prison is shockingly personified in the figure of a monstrous, vampiric bride who prepares the wedding bed in the darkness of the cell in

<sup>18</sup> 'Și noaptea, / când arde văzduhul sălbatic, / tâlhărescul meu şuier adună / toate celulele cu somn de jărat' ('Halucinații').

order to suck the 'bridegroom flesh' of the imprisoned poet:

And you, Prison-bride, /  
waited for me with a large  
table: / only tears in the  
glasses, / and thick bile in  
the bowls. // Prison, ugly  
bride, / may the wind blow  
away your dust, / for you  
bid death and its band / to  
play us lute chords. / [...] /  
The bedbugs are your  
wedding guests; / you  
danced my wedding *sârbă*  
/ alongside lifers and  
thieves... // And in this  
cell you breezily laid out /  
a bed of wedded lovemak-  
ing, / twelve years in  
darkness / to suck my  
bridegroom's flesh  
(*'Wedding Song,'* Gyr  
2009: 47-48).<sup>19</sup>

In her well-known essay *Journey to the Center of Hell. Memoirs and the Literature of Communist*

<sup>19</sup> 'Și tu, Temniță-mireasă, / m-așteptai cu masa mare: / numai lacrimi în pahare, / iar în bliduri fiere deasă. // Temniță, mireasă slută, / spulbera-ți-ar vântul praful, / c-ai pus moartea cu tariful / să ne zică din lăută. / [...] / Fă, mireaso, fă, spurcato, / ploșnițele ți-s nuntașii; / sârba nuntii mi-ai jucat-o / cu tâlharii, cu vietașii... // Și-n celulă-ntins-ai lesne / pat de nuntă și-ndrăgire, / doisprezece ani în bezne / să-mi sugi carnea mea de mire' (*'Cântec de nuntă'*).

*Prisons and Labor Camps* [Călătorie spre centrul infernului. Memorialistica și literatura închisorilor și lagărelor comuniste, 2018], Ruxandra Cesereanu, focalizing on the violent erotization of the prison space, speaks about a vast and complex allegory in Gyr's poetry, an allegory in which imprisonment is represented as a black wedding:

Radu Gyr is original [...] especially for his brutal sexualization of the prison, projecting the cell as a space of instincts and erotic frustrations: the bran bread becomes a woman's black breast, the moon is a young lady who tempts with her carnality, the blanket becomes the body of a gypsy woman, life itself is personified as the 'whore' of the guards. [...] Erotic fantasy and frenzy are generated by the evil of the cell ('... I laugh like a madman, / I scribble thighs and sex on the wall') (Cesereanu 2018: 256-57).

The metamorphosis of the prison and the cell into living creatures is specific to Radu Gyr's poetry, but in some poems, we can observe a symbolic associa-

tion, which is much more obvious and common in Gulag poetry, that is between the cell and the grave (or coffin):

From the depths of senseless torment, / from the cells, from the graves, / we still want to tear ourselves a piece / of the days with burning bodies ('Song from the swamp', Gyr 2009: 43);<sup>20</sup> From the cells, as from the coffins, / Lord, we ask You for lockpicks, / for pincers and tools, to burst / the dungeon like amadou, / to smash its beasts, / to crack the latch / to break the lock (*Colind*, Gyr 2009: 72-73).<sup>21</sup>

The cell, represented as a coffin, is a liminal space suspended between life and death, reflecting the prisoner's own condition as undead. The folkloric figure of the *strigoi* (the undead), which reemerges insistently in Gulag poetry, symbolizes precisely this liminal condition of prisoners in

<sup>20</sup> 'Din adânc de chin bezmetic, / din celule, din morminte, / tot le-am smulge câte-un petic / zilelor cu trup fierbinte' ('Cântec din mlaștină').

<sup>21</sup> 'Din celule, ca din racle, / Doamne, Îți cerem șperacle, / clești și scule, să trosnească / ocna ca o iască, / să-i plesnească fiarele, / să crape zăvoarele, lacătul să sară' ('Colind').

comparison with the outside world, with the world of the living.

As Emanuela Ilie has demonstrated in an essay about alterity and terror in Gulag poetry, it is precisely the hostile space of the prison that degrades prisoners, transforming them into *strigoi*: 'In this case, a specific lyrical motif is that of the *living dead*, the *revenant*, or the *ghost*: after several tortures, often combined [...] the prisoners are transformed into *ghosts*, or rather, shadows in stripes destined to experience an eternal death' [Un motif lyrique spécifique, dans ce cas, est celui du *mort-vivant*, du *revenant* ou du *spectre*: après les tortures diverses, souvent combinées [...] les détenus se transforment en *spectres*, sinon des *ombres rayées* qui doivent expérimenter une mort éternelle] (Ilie 2015: 29).

In Radu Gyr's poetry (and in general in Romanian Gulag poetry), the *strigoi* can take on an ambiguous and ambivalent aspect. On the one hand, he embodies the poet himself and his fellow prisoners, now reduced to the state of undead: 'With dead hands, with mummy faces, / undead in earth-colored uniforms, / in the geometry of the circle of silence, / we remain silent, as our jailers command us' ('Walk

in a Circle,' Gyr 2009: 93).<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the *strigoi* seems to materialize all those demonic apparitions that haunt the closed and dark space of the cell like, for example, in the poem 'When I will die:'

When I will die in this  
filthy prison, / crushed by  
the vampires of the cell  
and by millennia, / or  
alone, putting a noose  
around my neck, / in my  
death there will not be  
tenderness, nor holiness  
(Gyr 2009: 61).<sup>23</sup>

Cold, Hunger, Terror, and Iron, are the four demons that haunt the concentrationary space. As Adrian Popescu evocatively defines them, they are the 'four horsemen of the prison Apocalypse' (Popescu 2013: 112, see also Cistelean 2019: 118-19):

Everywhere, in bones, in  
veins, / the prison cold  
spurs on the hounds [...] /  
My fingers break with dry

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<sup>22</sup> 'Cu mâini de mort, cu fețe de mumie, / *strigoi* în uniformă pământie, / în geometria cercului tăcerii, / tăcem, cum ne ordonă temnicerii' ('Plimbare în cerc').

<sup>23</sup> 'Când voi muri în temnița asta spurcată, / strivit de *strigoi* celulei și de milenii, / or singur punându-mi o sfoară de beregată / în moartea mea nu vor fi duioșii, nici sfințenii' ('Când voi muri').

cracks, / stalactite splinters. / Over my feet, / trucks and tractors have passed, / and my ankles have fallen, somewhere, in a cellar. / I am cold, I am cold ('Cold,' Gyr 2009: 66-67);<sup>24</sup> At night in iron cells, stealthily / Hunger gnaws, lurks, / [...] / and demands Food ('Hunger,' Gyr 2009: 87).<sup>25</sup>

In this infernal space, there is a fifth horseman of the Apocalypse, the stench that always has a cadaverous connotation, indicating putrefaction and decomposition: 'From pillows, from blankets, from straw, / a stench rises like a blaze / and the prison stinks, through old walls, / of yesterday's dead and of tomorrow's dead' ('Pestilence', Gyr 2009: 92).<sup>26</sup> As Ruxandra Cesereanu states, in the universe of the prison 'the putrid, the fet-

id, and the gangrenous element are true obsessions of smell, cosmically projected' (Cesereanu 2018: 256).

Memory, Sadness, and Despair, form a fallen, decayed trinity that visits the poet's tormented psyche, embodying not only different mental states, but even disturbing and almost demonic characters:

Every night, from liquid spaces, / at the cell door, a chariot stops, groaning / A hooded shadow gets out from it: – I am Memory, open up... / [...] // Every night, at the iron bars, / Sadness comes and, grinning, sets its dogcatcher's trap towards me [...] // And every night, in the feverish cell, / thundering, roaring, on purple rails, / Oh Despair, I hear your black train / coming over me, loaded with darkness ('Every Night,' Gyr 2009: 26).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> 'Peste tot, în ciolane, în vine, / frigul temniței asmute zăvozi / [...] / Degetele mi se rup cu pocnete seci, / așchii de stalactită. Peste picioare, / mi-au trecut camioane, tractoare, / și gleznele mi-au căzut, undeva, într-un beci. / Mi-e frig, mi-e frig' ('Frig').

<sup>25</sup> 'Noaptea-n celule de fier, tâlhărește, / Foamea scrâșnește, pândește, / [...] / și cere Mâncare!' ('Foamete').

<sup>26</sup> 'Din perne, din pături, din paie, / urcă un duhnet ca o vâlvătaie / și temnița pute, prin ziduri bătrâne, / a morții de ieri și-a morții de mâine' ('Molimă').

<sup>27</sup> 'În fiecă noapte, din spații lichide, / la ușa celulei oprește, gemând, o cotiugă / Din ea se dă jos o umbră cu glugă: – Sunt Amintirea, deschide... / [...] // În fiecă noapte, la gratii de fier, / vine Tristețea și lung își întinde, spre mine, rânjind, zbilțul ei de hingher [...] // Și-n fiecă noapte, în celula cu febre, / tunând, uruind, pe vinete șine, / ți-aud, Deznădejde, venind peste mine / trenul

Alongside these ghostly presences, which become increasingly concrete, there is also a degraded bestiary that populates the darkness of the cell. These are the poet's little 'companions in loneliness' ('cumetri de singurătate'): insects (bedbugs, fleas, cockroaches, beetles, lice, spiders) and rodents (mice, rats) that Radu Gyr evokes obsessively, through a lexical field characterized by popular and regional terms, as he constructs vast scenarios that convey all the ambivalence of the poet's relationship with these creatures. They are 'blood relatives,' 'accomplices of darkness,' by whom the poet consciously allows himself to be devoured in a final act of bodily communion:

Dear friends of loneliness,  
/ when the cell is filled  
with darkness, / sister bug,  
brother-in-law mouse, /  
aunt beetle // And you,  
beast sisters, / spiders,  
lice, and cockroaches, /  
only you, from the gloomy  
walls, / with brotherly  
hearts / cross my poisoned  
hours. // [...] // Spiders,  
weave, weave for me in the

---

tău negru, încărcat cu tenebre' ('În  
fiecare noapte').

web / a thick tear. / Come,  
louse, come and drink /  
my soul, my mourning //  
You, bedbug, suck me,  
suck me dry / the dog rose  
of my blood, thorn after  
thorn, / and you, rat, come  
and tell me / what my sigh  
tastes like, / and what this  
sick heart smells like – of  
flowers? of poison?  
(‘Companions of Loneli-  
ness,’ Gyr 2009: 18-19).<sup>28</sup>

The obsession with the damned space of the cell reaches its peak in ‘Even up There in the Sky.’ Here, the sky deteriorates in a sort of ontological reversal, reflecting the earthly condition of the condemned. It is a decayed Paradise, invaded by iron because, as Radu Gyr reveals, even up there, prisons and cells, bars

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Dragi prieteni de singurătate, / când  
celula cu beznă se-ncarcă, / ploșniță  
soră, guzgane cumnate, / mătușă  
libarcă. // Și voi lighioane surate, /  
păianjeni, păduchi și gândaci, / numai  
voi, din pereții posaci, / călcați cu inimi  
de’ frate / prin orele mele înveninate. //  
[...] // Înnoadă, înnoadă, păianjene-n  
plasă / și pentru mine o lacrimă deasă. /  
Vino, păduche, vino și bea / sufletul  
meu, jelania mea // Tu, ploșniță, suge-  
mi, suge-mi din plin, / măceșul din  
sânge, spin lângă spin, / iar tu,  
șobolane, vino să-mi spui / care mi-i  
gustul oftatului, / și cum miroase – a  
flori? a otravă? – inima asta bolnavă’  
(‘Cumetri de singurătate’).

of fire, and peepholes, chains, and padlocks are everywhere:

Even up there, in the sky, / there are, of course, plenty of prisons and dungeons, / and behind granite and copper doors / locked cells lie...// In space, sometimes, slow cries are heard, / at night, above, on the vault of the sky, bars of fire materialize / and condemned eyes peer through peepholes, / shedding tears and misfortune. // Other times, the clanking of chains descends / from the heavens, over our foreheads. / Keys turn in blue locks / and aerial latches creak (Gyr 2009: 55).<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> ‘Și-acolo sus, în văzduh, de bună seamă / temnițe sunt și ocne destule, / și după uși de granit și aramă / zac, ferecate, celule...// În spații se-aud, uneori, plânsete-ncete, / noaptea, apar sus, pe boltă, dreve de foc, / și ochi osândiți se ivesc la vizete, / lacrimi să verse și nenoroc. // Alteori, zăngăt de lanțuri stă să coboare / din slăvi, peste frunțile noastre. / Chei se-nvârtesc în lacăte-albastre / și scârțâie-aeriene zăvoare’ (‘Și-acolo sus, în văzduh’).

#### 4. Among Trauma, Redemption, and Language: Blood, Wounds, and Stigmata

In the cycle *The Blood of the Prison*, the title itself reveals a powerful symbolic association that links blood and concentrationary space. This ambivalent image pervades all of Radu Gyr’s prison poetry. As Ioana Cistelean has already observed, ‘the blood of the prison’ is an obsessive ‘leitmotif [...] that invades and dominates the entire universe, producing disgust’ (Cistelean 2019: 123). Blood is in the center of a vast thematic constellation that radiates to another posthumous cycle with an emblematic title: *Stigmata*. Closely connected to the image of the wound, blood is mainly the obsessive and concrete sign of the torture suffered by the poet; it is also a mediating element between the wounded body and concentrationary space, between the subjectivity of the condemned and the oppressive prison system. In this perspective, the body appears as a map and a liminal surface – always suspended in limbo between life and death – on which the traumas caused by imprisonment are inscribed in blood. In ‘281,’ where the reduction of the condemned to a simple number – ‘the number of my

tears / the number of my blood' – is told in a repetitive and hallucinatory way, the poet drags himself along, barks and growls through 'the blood of the cage' (Gyr 2009: 77). In 'The Devil's Journeyman,' a poem based on the great theme of *nostos*, the crowd surrounding the poet, seeing his wound pulsing, asks him: 'Where do you come from, tell us, covered in blood, / from what raging forests? / [...] / Where do you come from? Who tore your flesh with pincers / In what devilish workshop?'<sup>30</sup> Even after his return from concentrationary hell, the poet continues to bear on his body the traumatic marks of his imprisonment, symbolized by the persistence of bloodstains. In 'The Mirror,' the poet represents himself as a two-faced Janus whose cursed countenance, eternally split and disfigured, is half-covered in blood: 'My heavily condemned face, / what splintered mirror reflects you... / One cheek laughs, the other cries, / one is azure, the other is blood' (Gyr 2009: 141).<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> '– De unde vii, spune, mânjit de sânge, / din ce turbate păduri? / [...] / – De unde vii? Cine ți-a rupt carnea-n clește / În ce drăcesc atelier?' ('Calfă la diavol').

<sup>31</sup> 'Greu osânditul meu chip, / ce hârâ de oglindă mi te răsfânge... / Un obraz râde, celălalt plânge, / azur e unul, celălalt sânge' ('Oglindă').

In the close interrelation between the body of the condemned and the prison space, blood not only materializes the physical wounds inflicted by the torturers, but it also is a sign which marks the cold, metallic space, and even objects, as an ambiguous trace, of death and life, of degradation and resistance. In the poem 'Cold,' 'The blood yelps: I am cold, I am cold, / then it drips down onto the concrete' (Gyr 2009: 67);<sup>32</sup> in 'Red Clothes,' after a night 'of insomnia and fever,' looking at the red and black stripes of his clothes, the poet remarks: 'I sprinkled you with the blood from my arteries / and with pitch streams of tears and bile' (Gyr 2009: 52).<sup>33</sup> In 'Prisoners' Graveyard,' the autumn leaves 'tremble in circles, fall on graves, / written in hot blood, / like red, bitter flowers: / prison registration numbers' (Gyr 2009: 89). In this poem there is an evident intertextuality with George Bacovia's poem 'Dusk:'

With big tears of blood /  
leaves flow from the  
branches flow / And, slow-

<sup>32</sup> 'Sângele scheaună: mi-e frig, mi-e frig, / apoi se scurge jos, în ciment' ('Frig').

<sup>33</sup> 'V-am stropit cu sângele meu din artere / și cu șiroaie smolite de lacrimi și fiere' ('Haine roșii').

ly the bloodied dusk /  
passes through the win-  
dow/ [...] / At the window,  
in the sick dusk / A girl  
coughs / And now her  
handkerchief / Looks like  
flowing leaves (Bacovia  
2012: 39).<sup>34</sup>

but while in Bacovia the bloody autumn leaves are a metaphor *in absentia* for tuberculosis, in Radu Gyr they are a metaphor *in praesentia* for the prison registration numbers, evoking once again the condition of detention that seems to last even *postmortem*, being forever ‘written’ even on the graves. In other texts, however, the flowing blood refers, just as in Bacovia’s poem, to tuberculosis, from which Gyr himself suffered. In ‘Autumn in Prison,’ autumn slips into the prison at night, personified as a large reddish bitch, ‘to lick the blood, vomited under the blankets’ from the ‘coughing cells’ (Gyr 2009: 60).<sup>35</sup>

Radu Gyr seems to constantly amplify the symbolic ambiguity of blood. In some poems, it is no

longer a metaphor for trauma and illness, but becomes a metaphor for the vital force – ‘May our blood, lively as petrol, / rise the flames of the stake towards the stars’ (‘The stake towards stars,’ Gyr 2009: 107)<sup>36</sup> – sucked by the small beasts that inhabit the darkness of the cell – ‘You, bedbug, suck me, suck me dry / the dog rose of my blood, thorn after thorn’ (‘Companions of loneliness,’ Gyr 2009: 19)<sup>37</sup> – or by the traumatic memories that haunt the poet: ‘For a hundred years, red leeches / suck me dry, drain all my blood: / they are memories, they are memories, / I can’t take it anymore...’ (‘Song,’ Gyr 2009: 99).<sup>38</sup> Closely connected to this vitalistic aspect, there is a further symbolic value of blood in Radu Gyr’s poetry, which is atypical within Gulag poetry. Blood that ‘screams’ is a metaphor for repressed erotic instincts and, consequently, for the deep frustrations caused by sexual deprivation:

<sup>34</sup> ‘Cu lacrimi mari de sânge / Curg frunze de pe ramuri / Și-nsângerat, amurgul pătrunde-ncet prin geamuri/ [...] / La geam tușește-o fată / În bolnavul amurg / Și s-a făcut batista / Ca frunzele ce curg’ (‘Amurg’).

<sup>35</sup> ‘Să lingă sângele cald vomitat de sub pături’ (‘Toamna în temniță’).

<sup>36</sup> ‘Sângele nostru să întărate, / viu ca petrolul, rugul spre stele’ (‘Rugul spre stele’).

<sup>37</sup> ‘Tu, ploșniță, suge-mi, suge-mi din plin, / măceșul din sânge, spin lângă spin’ (‘Cumetri de singurătate’).

<sup>38</sup> ‘De-o sută de-ani, lipitorile roșii / îmi sug, îmi golesc sângele tot: / sunt amintirile, sunt amintirile, / nu mai pot...’ (‘Cântec’).

Heart, – love calls and  
plays, / outside, with bare  
tits, on the streets... /  
Here, as if crushed under  
the lid of a box, / blood  
screams numbly for prey /  
and flesh grinds, dazed  
(‘Bars,’ Gyr 2009: 9).<sup>39</sup>

In some poems, blood no longer belongs only to the physical and biological dimension, but shows clear connections with the sacred and the transcendent. In this perspective, blood and wounds, when they become part of this metaphysical dimension, converge in the shocking image of *stigmata*, as in the poem ‘Tonight, Jesus...’ This is a visionary and surreal text centered on a Christological apparition which, as Simona Popa Gyr (Gyr 2009: 304) remembers, circulated by word of mouth in the Romanian Gulag more than any other, probably because of its mystical aspect and its intensely cathartic value. Christ’s descent into the abject and putrid space of the cell, which is marked by an intense smell of roses (‘the straw smelled of roses’), indicates Christ’s participation in

<sup>39</sup> ‘Inimă, – dragostea cheamă și joacă, / afară, cu țâțele goale, pe străzi... / Aici, ca strivit sub capacu-unei lăzi, / sângele urlă năuc după prăzi / și carnea scrâșnește, buimacă’ (‘Zăbrele’). See Cesereanu 2018: 256-257.

the suffering of the prisoners. As Alexandru Marchidan stated, one of the most productive and obsessive motifs in Romanian Gulag poetry is precisely the

Christ-like model of suffering and redemption: the prisoners participate, live, share in the death of Christ, and they are aware that He crucifies himself and suffers with them in their cell (Marchidan 2013: 105).

While on the one hand Jesus Christ seems to humanize himself in order to share the pain of the imprisoned poet, on the other hand his supernatural presence transfigures the visceral space of the cell, which becomes ‘a Mount’ and ‘a Calvary.’ It is a place of martyrdom, but also of spiritual elevation and supreme redemption: ‘a monk’s cell, the place where the prisoner is alone with God, the space of the most eloquent silence’ (Marchidan 2013: 105) and where the condemned experiences a total identification between him and God, as these verses from the poem ‘Identity’ testify:

You are good, Lord, I am  
earthly and evil, and in  
love I do not resemble

You, nor in mercy. / But, if  
I consider my wounds, I  
am the image of Your im-  
age, / as if I have been  
molded from heaven, not  
from clay (Gyr 2009:  
278).<sup>40</sup>

In 'Tonight, Jesus...' this identity  
between the prisoner and the  
divinity is affirmed through a  
constellation of images that in-  
clude the wound, the traces of  
rust left by the chains and,  
above all, the marks of the nails  
that the poet finds on his hands:

– Put your hand on my  
wounds, / On his ankles  
were marks of wounds and  
rust, / as if he had once  
worn chains... / [...] // –  
Where are you, Lord? – I  
screamed to the bars. / In-  
cense smoke came from  
the moon. / I touched my-  
self, and on my hands / I  
found the marks of His  
nails... (Gyr 2009: 22-23).<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> 'Ești, Doamne, bun, eu pământean și  
rău, și-n dragoste nu-Ți seamăn, nici în  
milă. / Dar, după răni, sunt chip din  
chipul Tău, / de par dospit din cer, nu  
din argilă' ('Identitate').

<sup>41</sup> '– Pune-Mi pe răni mâna ta, / Pe  
glezne-avea umbre de răni și rugină, /  
parcă purtase lanțuri, cândva... / [...] //  
– Unde ești, Doamne? – am urlat la  
zăbrele. / Din lună venea fum de cățui. /  
M-am pipăit, și pe mâinile mele / Am

The stigmata, which synthesize  
blood and wounds into a single  
image, are at the center of pow-  
erful mystical imagery that ap-  
pears here, however, in a modi-  
fied, almost reversed form. In  
Radu Gyr, a highly layered  
Christian symbol, encompassing  
both suffering and salvation,  
leads to a sort of secular drama-  
tization of trauma and political  
martyrdom, filtered through  
Christian imagery.

Within this secular dramatiza-  
tion of trauma and through a  
process of symbolic transfigura-  
tion, blood is transformed into  
the anatomical manifestation of  
the poet's (psychic and spiritual)  
interiority. Thus, the image of  
blood that 'whimpers,'  
'screams,' or 'responds' ('I  
scream, – the scream seeks only  
me, / I touch, – My sad blood  
answers,' 'Darkness,' Gyr 2009:  
45),<sup>42</sup> seems to refer not only to  
the wounds of the body and to  
sexual deprivation, but also to  
the movements of the soul: emo-  
tions, thoughts, memories. It is  
as if blood, representing the  
deepest part of the Self, had re-  
placed, in a pagan and ancestral  
way, the poet's very soul, desig-

găsit urmele cuielor Lui..' ('As-noapte  
Iisus').

<sup>42</sup> 'Strig, – strigătul Mă caută numai pe  
Mine, / pipăi, – tristul Meu sânge  
răspunde' ('Întuneric').

nating a primordial principle of life that inhabits the space of his body. In a significant text such as *The Blood of the Prison*, the poet finally transforms blood and wounds into liturgical and cathartic language:

If I press my ear against  
the concrete of the cell, / I  
hear, I hear / the prison's  
blood, like a great tumult,  
/ like a sudden groan, /  
flowing beneath, / flowing  
like a torrent of bitter  
venom, / held under-  
ground beneath latches. //  
The prison's blood, a pris-  
oner himself, / gurgles in  
cruel pain / under stone  
and under iron, / under  
condemnation, under si-  
lence, / through under-  
ground arteries. // I press  
my ear down and hear it: /  
sometimes it boils with a  
hot roar, / it cries, it cries  
at the bottom of graves. //  
Other times it screams,  
wild and cruel / like a  
fierce lust for life, / or  
hisses like a temptation /  
that, wandering, incites  
you / to kill, to plunder...  
(Gyr 2009: 30).<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> 'Dacă-mi lipesc urechea de cimentul  
celulei, / ascult, ascult / cum sângele  
temniței, ca un mare tumult, / ca un  
geamăt abrupt, / curge pe dedesupt, /  
curge torent de veninuri amare, / ținut

In this poem, blood reemerges  
as a word<sup>44</sup> that sings, curses,  
and invokes, like the tumultuous  
voice of an underground and  
unstoppable flow or like a force  
that demands to return to the  
outside world, breaking every  
limit. Paradoxically, the cell ma-  
terializes the womb in which the  
possibility of this new language  
is generated. It is a poetic voice  
that becomes a vehicle for re-  
sistance against annihilation and  
for memory beyond the degra-  
dation of time, since 'the blood  
of the prison' transforms suffer-  
ing into collective memory, con-  
necting past and present: 'Under

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în pământ sub zăvoare. // Sângele  
temniței, prizonier, / gâlgâie-n cruntă  
durere / pe sub piatră și pe sub fier, / pe  
sub osândă, pe sub tăcere, / prin  
subterane artere. // Lipesc urechea jos  
și-l aud: / uneori fierbe un muget  
fierbinte, / plânge, plânge în fund de  
morminte. // Alteori țipă, sălbatic și  
crud / ca o aprigă poftă de viață, / sau  
șuieră-a ispită răzleață, / cu brânciul ei  
ațățător / la jaf, la omor...' ('Sângele  
temniței').

<sup>44</sup> In another poem, 'We had no youth'  
[Noi nu am avut tinerețe], the associa-  
tion between blood and language is  
even more explicit: 'We sang: blood was  
the poem' ('Cântăm: era sânge poemul'  
Gyr 2009: 290). Other critics have al-  
ready noted this association between  
blood and the poetic word without,  
however, proposing a more in-depth  
analysis of this specific theme, see in  
particular Popescu 2013: 112, and Cistel-  
ecan 2019: 123.

bitter and large boulders, / someone has been screaming for a thousand years, / someone has been singing for centuries' (Gyr 2009: 31).<sup>45</sup>

Under the unstoppable drive of the 'blood of the prison' which drags the poet beyond his own limits and toward his total dissolution into matter:

And when, in the end, the red torrent / draws back from me to the concrete, / with the heavy blood of prison / I draw back from myself too, / and I go with it, with its tremendous flood, / backwards, under the concrete... (Gyr 2009: 32).<sup>46</sup>

the body is no longer just a painful map of trauma, but also becomes the space of metamorphosis and a form of vital resistance:

And my flesh suddenly cracks, / my limbs begin to open, freed from diabolical

locks, / like doors, like windows: / – Come in, blood of the prison, come in, / come, come and overwhelm me, / from otherworldly depths... (Gyr 2009: 32).<sup>47</sup>

Radu Gyr outlines here a bodily mutation that breaks down the boundaries between the individual and the prison. The prison is no longer just a place of confinement and oppression, but also of transformation and redemption, in which the body becomes the very instrument of liberation, embodying a subjectivity that regains value and power through the image of blood. Imprisonment produces a new language and a new identity, since 'the blood of the prison' makes possible a deep reconfiguration of the Self, one that screams, curses, invokes, and sings beyond the cell. I stated earlier that blood is resurrected in the form of sacred, liturgical, and cathartic language. This hypothesis is confirmed by the formal and stylistic aspects of the text analysed. In 'The

<sup>45</sup> 'Sub marii, amari bolovani, / cineva urlă de-o mie de ani, / cineva cântă de-un veac // cineva n-are geamă, nici leac' ('Sângele temniței').

<sup>46</sup> 'Și când, pe urmă, roșul torent / se trage din mine, îndărăt, în / ciment, / cu sângele temniței greu / mă trag din mine și eu, / și plec cu el, cu grozavu-i șuvoi; / sub ciment, înapoi' ('Sângele temniței').

<sup>47</sup> 'Și carnea mea trosnește deodată, / din zăvoare drăcești, / prind măduarele să se deschidă / ca niște uși, ca niște ferești: // – Intră, sânge al temniței, intră, / vino din funduri nepământești, / vino să mă cotopești...' ('Sângele temniței').

Blood of the Prison,’ in fact, a ritual and incantatory rhythm predominates, giving the text a high performative value, bringing it closer to the form of prayer. The figures of repetition give the rhythm its obsessive and hypnotic aspect, while the use of enjambement intensifies the idea of a flow, of blood flowing hypnotically from one verse to another, and beyond the page itself.

## 5. Conclusions

In the space of the prison, ‘the prisoner finally understands that only a return to the sacred and to faith can represent the solution of supreme salvation’ (Ilie 2015: 36). In this infernal and violent place, he mentally creates poems that take the form of prayers. The emergence of a poetic word with a sacred character in such a hostile world is, therefore, itself an effect of trauma and can be considered one of those forms of ‘internal migration’ discussed and analysed by Natalya Lebedyntseva in a recent article dedicated to the Ukrainian poet Vasyl’ Stus. The scholar, drawing on the studies of Bohdan Pylypushko, Tetiana Tsymbal, Dzhinna Litinskaia, and Liia Kaufmann, first describes the concept of

‘internal migration’ as a form of resistance and self-preservation, as a phenomenon of psychological isolation that manifests itself through withdrawal into a mental and spiritual space. She then applies this concept to Vasyl’ Stus’s poetry of repression, identifying within his work specific forms of ‘internal migration’ such as the dream and the inner journey (see Lebedyntseva 2024: 45-66). In the case of Radu Gyr, the primary forms of ‘internal migration’ towards a spiritual space are represented by the Sacred and by the form of ‘prayer-poetry.’ Gyr has transformed the brutality of imprisonment into poetry, by making his poetic art not only a testimony to trauma, but also a supreme resistance and a profound process of inner healing. Blood, wounds, and stigmata then become a performative language that allows the poet to transcend the alienating logic of prison, to fix in words a memory that remains alive beyond the temporal horizon of traumatic experience, and to transform horror into a form of spiritual and artistic redemption.

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