

THE PERSISTENCE OF HISTORICAL EVIL. ION CARAION – POETRY AS RELAPSE AND EMBODIMENT OF TRAUMA

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Résumé : La littérature joue un rôle essentiel dans la lutte contre l'oubli en problématisant des événements catastrophiques à impact individuel et collectif. Filtrées par le prisme autobiographique ou fictionnel, les expériences personnelles s'inscrivent dans un parcours existentiel où la souffrance devient un vecteur de connaissance et de reconfiguration identitaire. Toutefois, la littérature du traumatisme ne constitue pas nécessairement un espace de réparation : elle peut également fonctionner comme un lieu de réactivation du mal.

Cet article propose une relecture des trois premiers recueils poétiques d'Ion Caraion (*Panopticum*, *L'homme projeté dans le ciel*, *Chants noirs*), à partir de l'hypothèse de la persistance du mal historique et des tentatives d'intégration de l'événement traumatique. L'analyse mobilise les concepts d'*acting-out* et de *working-through*, issus des théories du traumatisme élaborées par Dominick LaCapra, afin d'interroger les modalités de fixation de la mémoire traumatique, les déclencheurs sensoriels et le rôle du corps dans la réactivation ou la mise à distance de l'expérience traumatique.

Mots-clés: *guerre, poésie albatrosiste, Ion Caraion, acting-out, working-through, mémoire traumatique.*

1. Albatross poetry—on the “edge of the nightmare”

From a historical and literary point of view, the beginning of contemporary poetry is associated with the end of World War II. The literary generation of the war distinguishes three major artistic directions—a mannerist revitalization of lyricism and an attempt to modernize myths (Radu Stanca, Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, Ioanichie Olteanu—the Sibiu Literary Circle), an extension of surrealism (Gherasim Luca, Virgil Teodorescu, Gellu Naum, Dolfi Trost, Paul Păun—Romanian Surrealist Group) and a rebellious formula that prioritizes the brutality of existential experiences over aesthetics (Ion Caraion, Geo Dumitrescu, Constant Tonegaru, Dimitrie Stelaru—the Albatros Group in Bucharest).

Albatross poetry, deeply subjective, takes on a rebellious aspect both through its expression of horror at war and through its rejection of old poetic techniques. Hypersensitive, nonconformist, authentic, the poets of this generation define themselves in relation to the hostilities of history, and their creative imagination constantly revolves around these dark points. Poetry partially satisfies the need for refuge within a space under siege, becoming an authentic form of resistance in a world disrupted—

both mentally and materially—by the violence of war and ideological pressure. By referring to the experience of war, an event that imposes uniformity, the cancellation of the individual and of otherness, poetry defines itself as a living manifestation of inner freedom, communication with the other, individualization. The awareness of chaos, the intuition of a world in free fall, and the sensation of plunging into the void provoke a legitimate struggle against terror—expressed through processes of subject formation and existential reconfiguration, beyond the dark specter that casts its net over the consciousness of an entire generation.

The aesthetics of rupture manifests as a rejection of lyrical, harmonious poetry and the deliberate incorporation of anti-poetic elements, through which impure words and shocking themes are articulated, in disdain of the “rheumatic meekness” of verse. Both the volumes published during the war and those appearing in the subsequent years obsessively reactivate multiple mechanisms of trauma reliving, resulting in the fixation of this lyrical imagination at the very edge of nightmare.

2. Ion Caraion—a twilight world of trauma

Ion Caraion, whose real name was Stelian Diaconescu, made his debut in 1939 with poems and reviews in “The Literary Universe” and “Literary Current”¹. In 1943, his first volume of poems, *Panopticum*, was published by Prometheus Publishing House, followed by *The Man Profiled Against the Sky* (1946) and *Black Songs* (1947)². Viewed as a whole and reduced to their essential structures, the volumes configure a deeply alienated world, marked by the convergence of neurosis, absurdity, and suffering (*Panopticum*), a symbolic space humanized through strange landscapes fragmented by the presence of war (*The Man Profiled Against the Sky*), as well as a register of traumatic images of the war experience, distilled in memory (*Black Songs*). Ion Caraion’s poetry is marked by prohibition and finds no place in a space that tries by any means to cover up ugliness, inhumanity and the visible and invisible degradation of the world. It absorbs all the mechanisms of war, becoming, as Mihail Petroveanu points out, a spectacle of the “fear of being”:

Ion Caraion’s poetry, a spectacle of a world haunted by failure, chaos, and non-existence, even in the midst of the triumph of vitality, oscillates, in a Rimbaudian manner, between Enlightenment and the Infernal Season, between mirages and nightmares of the abyss. That the poet of a generation struck in its dream of harmony, under the triple assault of money, fascism, and war, is still haunted by everything from solitude to the tentacles of

¹ Original names: „Universul literar” și „Curentul literar”.

² Original titles: *Panopticum*, *Omul profilat pe cer*, *Cântece negre*.

imposture and the breath of nothingness, is called the fear of being. (Petroveanu, 1978, p. X)³.

These mechanisms of trauma metabolism—governing rebellion, denial, and fractured spirituality—are reinforced throughout Ion Caraion's three volumes of poetry. The analysis traces the obsessive reworking of war-induced trauma, utilizing sensory triggers, heightened corporeality, and the transfer of meanings between the outside and the inside. The interpretative framework we will use to analyze Ion Caraion's first three volumes of poems propose two concepts discussed by Dominick LaCapra, namely acting-out and working-through. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), the theorist examines how narrative influences the assimilation of collective and individual traumas. His theories are based on the concept of "transgression" or "transcendence" of trauma, defined as a complex process of identity reconstruction, whose mechanisms are active throughout life (LaCapra, 2001, pp. 22-23). Whether trauma is already part of the history of the self or whether we are talking about a certain type of valorization of trauma, there is a strong unconscious resistance to resolving and overcoming it. In this direction, the two key concepts under discussion, taken from the sphere of Freudian psychoanalysis, capture two types of attitudes towards trauma, which LaCapra recaps in a 1998 interview:

There are two very broad ways of coming to terms with transference, or with one's transferential implication in the object of study: acting-out; and working-through. Acting-out is related to repetition, and even the repetition-compulsion—the tendency to repeat something compulsively. This is very clear in the case of people who undergo a trauma. They have a tendency to relive the past, to exist in the present as if they were still fully in the past, with no distance from it. They tend to relive occurrences, or at least find that those occurrences intrude on their present existence, for example, in flashbacks; or in nightmares; or in words that are compulsively repeated, and that don't seem to have their ordinary meaning, because they're taking on different connotations from another situation, in another place [...].

I see working-through as a kind of countervailing force (not a totally different process, not even something leading to a cure), because I tend to disavow, or take my distance from, therapeutic

³ Original quote: „Poezia lui Ion Caraion, spectacol al unei lumi pîndite de eșec, de haos, de neființă, chiar în plin triumf al vitalității, pendulează, tot rimbaldian, între *Iluminări* și *Anotimpul infernal*, între miraje și coșmaruri de abis. Că poetul unei generații lovită în visul ei de armonii, sub triplul asalt al banului, fascismului și războiului, e încă bîntuit de tot ce, de la solitudine la tentaculele imposturii și suflul neantului, se numește spaima de a fi.” (Petroveanu, 1978, p. X).

conceptions of psychoanalysis, and try to take psychoanalysis in more ethical and political directions. In the working-through, the person tries to gain critical distance on a problem, to be able to distinguish between past, present and future. For the victim, this means his ability to say to himself, 'Yes, that happened to me back then. It was distressing, overwhelming, perhaps I can't entirely disengage myself from it, but I'm existing here and now, and this is different from back then.' There may be other possibilities, but it's via the working-through that one acquires the possibility of being an ethical agent. (LaCapra, 1998, p. 2).

According to the theorist, the two forms of trauma metabolism should not be understood as antithetical, but as interconnected points, as stages of trauma processing. In relation to Ion Caraion's three volumes of poetry, it can be observed that the first two deal with the dynamics of reactivating trauma (acting-out) through compulsive repetition, the tendency to bring the past into the present, or through intrusive sensory manifestations, while in the third volume, signs of working-through trauma can be observed, gradually building the necessary distance from the traumatic event.

3. Sensory reactivations – acting out or memory without distance

Especially in the first two volumes of poems, *Panopticum* and *The Man Projected on the Sky*, sound manifestations, unmediated by temporal space, trigger traumatic memory. Unlike visual memory, which allows for contemplative distancing, auditory memory is intrusive, traversing the subject and fixing itself as an affective reaction before becoming representation. Playing a central role in the processes of remembrance, it is not limited to reconstructing the past, but reactivates it, producing an effect of presentification of the event. The fury of noise—the gong sounds apocalyptic, the asphalt roars, dogs howl, whips crack, sirens scream, machine guns rattle rhythmically—and the paradigms of inner screaming construct the image of an acidic world, where exasperation reigns and time seems to have stopped. Under the sign of terror, people seem gathered beneath a closed sky, and the pain of one reverberates, stretching like a net over all, as illustrated in the opening lines of the poem: "The dinners we stopped at, the fields/ twisted our souls, dried up our legs. / Earthlings, we linger. So many hollows, so many wrinkles.../ We wrote neurotically on the walls/ and we caroled our neurasthenia, to drink/ dampness from the rain, brandy from the poem/ dirty poison, the hairless scream..." (Caraion, *The Opening Lines of the Poem*, 1974, p. 18)⁴

⁴ Original lyrics: „Cinele la care ne-am oprit, ogoarele/ ne-au sucit sufletele, ne-au secăt picioarele./ Pământenii, adăstăm. Atâtea scorburii, atâtea riduri.../ Noi am scris cu

The poet pursues the extreme sensory, situating the lyrical imagination between scream and silence, clusters of images and desolation, exhilaration and complete apathy, the smell of death and the sweet scent of hay. Silence shifts from the auditory to the sensory register, perceived not as the absence of sound but as an organic, material presence: “I feel the silence with the round sleep/ walking in the indelible watercolor, / the hand that goes deep / into the heart of the park, burned.” (Caraion, *The Bird of Doom*, 1974, p. 32)⁵. Fragile and paradoxical, fixed on the edge of the indelible watercolor, silence becomes a symbol of memory that refuses to dissolve. Between apparent calm and hidden trauma, a latent tension emerges, and silence does not provide a space for reconciliation with the self or the world; instead, it becomes a sign of traumatic memory, a mute presence radiating violently beyond words. Yet, in this inverted world, even silence eventually loses its contours and meanings, becoming “modest” and “meaningless” (Caraion, *Urban Planning*, 1974, p. 43)⁶.

The air is heavy with the bitter scent of wormwood dust, the acrid taste of the wind, and the odors of manure, mold, or corpses, while thirst, cold, and hunger weigh oppressively upon the body. Illness and the image of the dying recur persistently, becoming tangible, visible consequences of war. Eschewing sentimentality and the temptation to lament, the poetry denounces all forms of neglect and any embrace of comfort or benevolence. The inner scream catalyzes crisis, hallucination, and markers of alienation, at a moment when “it would be ridiculous to think of anything other than war” (Caraion, *Reason*, 1979, p. 20)⁷. On the margins of life lie “the people of the dark age” (Caraion, *The Bird of Doom*, 1974, p. 32)⁸, whose strange gaze nullifies the notion of the other as an independent self; uniformity engulfs everything, leaving no space for the formation of personal identity.

Reina van der Wiel, in *Literary Aesthetics of Trauma: Virginia Woolf and Jeanette Winterson*, discusses knowledge situated in the body—what the mind suppresses or refuses to process, the body externalizes (Van der Wiel, 2014, *passim*). Traumatic experience eludes cognitive processing, manifesting instead through the senses, and literature becomes a space for articulating a bodily epistemology. In this sense, Ion Caraion’s poetry constructs not a conceptual map of the self, but one that materializes trauma, expressing it through the body. These exchanges

nevroză pe ziduri/ și-am colindat neurastenia, să bem/ igrasie din ploaie, rachiul din poem/ otrava murdară, țipătul spân...” (Caraion, *Antreul poemului*, 1974, p. 18).

⁵ Original lyrics: „Simt liniștea cu somnul rotund/ plimbându-se-n aquareaua neștersă,/ mâna care intră pîn-la fund/ în inima parcului, arsă.” (Caraion, *Pasărea urgiei*, 1974, p. 32).

⁶ Original lyrics: „modestă” și „fără însemnătate” (Caraion, *Urbanism*, 1974, p. 43).

⁷ Original lyrics: „ar fi ridicol să te poți gândi la altceva decât la război” (Caraion, *Motiv*, 1979, p. 20).

⁸ Original lyrics: „oamenii veacului întunecat” (Caraion, *Pasărea urgiei*, 1974, p. 32).

intensify the experience of emotional violence, despair, and hopelessness: “Through our absurd chests wander/ incendiary, bitter cities./ The birds in them are birds of prey./ [...] Their faces are covered in charcoal/ with bullets, with tent sheets,/ During the war,/ in us the neighborhoods burned like Calabrian hats, like sports hats.” (Caraion, *Panopticum*, 1974, p. 27)⁹.

In the context of resistance to overcoming trauma, the external world, as Cathy Caruth observes, is transferred inward without any mediation (“the outside has gone inside without any mediation”—Caruth, 1996, p. 59). Ghostly, menacing, and sinister cities are transformed into interior landscapes, into grotesque projections of the self. Even nature is filtered through this inner spectrum, an operation that produces violent distortions, ultimately rendering it a sign of the contortions of personal memory:

On the field of flames beneath which I drown/ rivers of the dead pass by barefoot/ and a devastated sky—only wounds, only wounds—/ flows through our bones with stones, with clothes/ when from the passages hidden beneath our temples, plants emerge/ with worms and hair on tall leaves. (Caraion, *Confluence*, 1974, p. 49)¹⁰.

Images of scarred, tattooed, crippled, decaying, and diseased bodies crowd the creative imagination, channeling through an alternative bodily experience, the crisis of being: “With crippled, tattooed hands/ we carry on our backs all the deserts of the distance/ the flesh stings, —the snows, the years/ have broken our hearts, the boulders have killed us.” (Caraion, *The Opening Lines of the Poem*, 1978, p. 3)¹¹. The skin and flesh become a traumatic map of being, and the idea of “seal” translates the embodiment of trauma, emphasizing the idea of collective suffering. The individual bears the marks of a limiting experience, impossible to assimilate on a conscious level, and the body, symbolically overloaded, becomes the repository of a violent history. This corpus traumaticum, in which the exterior insinuates itself without reflective distance, defines the impossibility of integrating shocking experiences, which determines a

⁹ Original lyrics: „Prin piepturile noastre absurde se plimbă/ orașele incendiare, amare./ Păsările din ele sunt păsări de pradă./ [...] Fețele au pe ele cărbune crescut/ cu gloanțele, cu foile de cort,/ Pe timpul războiului,/ în noi cartierele au ars ca pălăriile calabreze, de sport.” (Caraion, *Panopticum*, 1974, p. 27).

¹⁰ Original lyrics: „Pe cîmpul de flăcări sub care mă-nec/ trec fluviu de morți în picioarele goale/ și-un cer devastat – numai răni, numai răni –/ ne curge prin oase cu pietre, cu țoale/ când din ganguri pitite sub tîmple, ies plante/ cu viermi și cu păr pe frunze înalte.” (Caraion, *Confluență*, 1974, p. 49).

¹¹ Original lyrics: „Cu mâinile ciungi, tatuate/ ne ducem în cărcă pusele depărtărilor toate/ carnea înțepă, – zăpezile, anii/ ne-au spart inimile, ne-au omorât bolovanii” (Caraion, *Antreul poemului*, 1978, p. 3).

compulsive return of the event. The outside world is no longer perceived as otherness, but as traumatic matter, a mirror of devastating suffering, a hypostasis of the being that has lost its identity. References to drowning, decay, and carbonization suggest a history of violence that cannot be told linearly, but only evoked through discontinuous images specific to traumatic discourse. Poetic language rejects coherence, logic, and balance, reflecting the fragmentary structure of traumatic memory and the crisis produced by the repercussions of war.

The image of the man outlined against the sky becomes a symbol of collective suffering, a spectral image of the individual suspended, without recourse, between life and death, between history and memory. Caught in an eternal “yesterday,” the poems in these two volumes are authentic testimonies of individuals crushed by brutal historical events, who refuse to accept resignation and healing, but obsessively evoke the absurd, the strange silence, alienation of being, neurosis, and hallucination, signs of a world in free fall.

4. Symbolic sedimentation – working through or the labor of memory

The third volume published by Ion Caraion, which falls under the same “sign” of war, is nevertheless marked by some changes. Whereas previously we spoke of poetry as a space of permanent recurrence, in which traumatic memory was obsessively reactivated, and the sharpened senses kept the being in a state of constant alert, we can now observe new ways of valuing memory, that necessary distancing, marked by symbolic charge and an attempt to escape from the infernal labyrinth of memory. According to Dominick LaCapra’s theory, working-through is a logical stage in the traumatic journey, a moment marked by the sedimentation of memory and changes in perspective, which, among other things, cancel out the overlap between past, present, and future, interpreting temporal sequences from a distance. Even if old wounds still throb, and the same scenes of a fleshless world, which foreshadows the salty taste of mines and bread pierced by screams, sometimes reappear, another level of self-knowledge is now accessible. As Mihail Petroveanu observes, in this volume “we discover a more lucid poet, with a vaporous fever, but full of cerebral ebbs and flows,” and “the war has remained only in memory.” (Petroveanu, 1974, p. 9)¹². The Box with Phosphorus Hearts becomes a true manifesto of the self that feels the need to detach itself from the past, to cast off the uniformizing mask of the damned and to chase away the dark breath of death, which has dug its claws deep into one’s own being. In this volume, we identify both the despair of the individual emptied of

¹² Original quote: „descoperim un poet mai lucid, cu o febră vapoasă, dar plină de fluxuri și refluxuri cerebrale”, iar „războiul a rămas numai în memorie” (Petroveanu, 1974, p. 9).

his own identity, brutally erased by the metamorphoses of war, and the bold cry of the poet, who writes the poem as if he were writing himself:

I come in the name of the poem that no one has written,/ because everyone was afraid of themselves,/ I come in my name (the one who promised nothing, to anyone, ever)/ and I proclaim:/ I hate you/ Because you are close to me,/ because I am like you/ because I hate and want to destroy all things/ that are close to me and resemble each other;/ and that is why/ I cast aside the mask/ that you sell and buy every/ morning –/ and I speak to you.// It is time./ Listen.// Let us throw away everything gray within us./ Tonight we will clean/ the rooms/ from one end to the other./ We will speak from person to person (we will speak breathlessly)/ so that the words inside us burst through the ceiling.// Look: aren't you better off now?/ It's true, there isn't much food or grain to be found—/ Joy is missing. The bread is gone. But we live. "Seven more were shot yesterday!" some say. If you think about it: only a month! / Beyond that, blood is good, it ferments./ Wheat dies in it like in an Amazon,/ but we'll make peace. What beauty! (Caraion, *The Box with Phosphorus Hearts*, 1974, pp. 53-54)¹³.

The silence is finally broken by ordinary, common, rhythmic speech, and the deafening scream of the being and the roar of the highways of yesteryear are not the standard of this world, but fleeting configurations. It is a world thirsty for simple communication, even if the smell of rust, blood, and earth lingers in the air—"Good morning, unknown travelers!/ The headlights pierce the night. The trees bow down. Take, souls, the evening and go/ your polar star, until it becomes light..." (Caraion, *Virgin Incursion*, 1978, p. 46)¹⁴. In relation to trauma theory and the concept of working-through, the lyrics of these poems process reality,

¹³ Original lyrics: „eu vin în numele poeziei pe care n-a scris-o nimeni,/ pentru că fiecare s-a temut de el însuși,/ în numele meu vin (cel care n-a promis nimic, nimănui, niciodată)/ și proclam:/ vă urăsc/ Pentru că îmi sunteți aproape,/ pentru că semăn cu voi/ pentru că urăsc și vreau să distrug toate lucrurile/ care îmi sînt aproape și care seamănă-ntre ele;/ și de aceea/ dau la o parte masca/ pe care voi o vindeți și-o cumpărați în fiecare/ dimineată –/ și vă vorbesc.// E timpul./ Ascultați.// Să zvărlim tot ce-avem cenușiu în noi./ În seara asta vom face curat/ prin odăi/ de la un capăt la altul./ Vom vorbi de la om la om (pe nerăsuflăte vom vorbi)/ să năvălească vorbele din noi până-n tavan.// Uite: nu-i așa c-o duceți mai bine acum?/ E drept, nu prea se găsesc bunătăți, cereale –/ Lipsește bucuria. S-a terminat pîinea. Dar trăim./ «Au mai fost împușcați ieri șapte!» – zic unii.// E puțin. Dacă stai să te gîndești: numai o lună!/ Încolo, sîngele e bun, dospește./ Grîul moare-n el ca-ntr-un amazon,/ dar o să ne-mpăcăm. Ce frumusețe!” (Caraion, *Caseta cu inimi de fosfor*, 1974, pp. 53-54).

¹⁴ Original lyrics: „—Bună-dimineata, călători neștiuți!/ Reflectoarele străbat nopțile. Copacii se închină. Ia-ți, suflete, seara și du-ți/ steaua ta polară, până s-o face lumină...” (Caraion, *Incursiune virgină*, 1978, p. 46).

allowing catastrophic images to stratify. For the first time, the being distinguishes between past, present, and future, reacting positively to extreme factors, in the conditions of that “critical distance” mentioned by LaCapra (LaCapra 1998, p. 2). The image of otherness, of common, typical verbalization between individuals, is now being restored as a lever for the regeneration of the world. However absurd it may be in context, communication is part of a healing process that brings to the surface a very cerebral idea: “We were where we were supposed to be!” (Caraion, *Bakeries in blood*, 1974, p. 57)¹⁵.

Ugliness, death, disease, war, loneliness are now sedimented in memory, viewed from a certain distance: “It was war and leprosy, people were dying in the burg/ disfigured, terrifying/ like black vases with flowers/ wilted at dusk, at the bottom of the waters.” (Caraion, *Memory*, 1978, p. 41)¹⁶. Memory at times glosses over past traumas, and a “disgust for life” permeates a world attempting to conceal its anxieties, projected onto yellowed faces, the desolate emptiness of taverns or the deserted village. Change, however, is inevitable: the individual can no longer apprehend the caustic tableau of war as a present reality, but moves toward a new stage of (re)cognition of the self, “archiving” everything by recording details, smells, images, and specific sounds as key components of a monstrous landscape. The “black” songs signify the transfiguration of the self on two intimately connected levels – the personal and the creative:

Some don’t understand, they look/ sadly at the black songs,
full:/ ‘Why doesn’t he write like before?/ These songs aren’t
beautiful...’/ Of course, not all songs are beautiful to everyone/
Some have the mud and stones in us,/ some are murky, harsh,
changeable/ others are tangled like wires,/ some are like a
magnifying glass/ that we carry with us, with our memory and our
blood,/ some are gentle like a bent ear of corn. (Caraion, *Black
songs*, 1978, pp. 47-48)¹⁷.

Collective trauma is preserved as historical memory, whereas individual trauma continues to manifest through the repetitive experience

¹⁵ Original lyrics: „*Am fost acolo unde trebuia să fim!*” (Caraion, *Brutării de sînge*, 1974, p. 57).

¹⁶ Original lyrics: „*Era război și lepră, oamenii mureau în burg/ schimonosiți, îngrozitori/ ca niște vase negre cu flori/ coclite-n amurg, pe fundul apelor.*” (Caraion, *Memorie*, 1978, p. 41).

¹⁷ Original lyrics: „*Unii nu-nțeleg, se uită/ triști la cîntecele negre, pline:/ «Pentru ce nu scrie ca-nainte?/ Cîntecele astea nu-s frumoase...»/ Sigur, nu toate cîntecele sînt frumoase pentru toți/ Unele au mîlul și pietrele din noi,/ unele sînt tulburi, sînt aspre, sînt schimbătoare/ altele răvășite ca niște sîrme,/ unele sînt ca o lupă/ pe care o purtăm cu noi, cu memoria și sîngele nostru,/ unele sînt blînde ca spicul aplecat.*” (Caraion, *Cîntece negre*, 1978, pp. 47-48).

of despair and feelings of uprootedness: “Your will has been done, war!/ We went, we killed, we died.../ Then—/ (meat warehouses,/ tendons, bandages)/ then—torn apart, naked—/ we returned to our fields,/ which no longer knew us...” (Caraion, *Entering the City*, 1978, p. 60)¹⁸.

Conclusions

The critical discussion of Ion Caraion’s work is inseparable from the configuration of a traumatic consciousness forged within a history of violence. War is felt “through every pore”, as a consuming experience, permanently etched in the individual’s personal memory (“These moments are not forgotten... preserved in formaldehyde or in/ lime milk” —Caraion, *Memory*, 1978, p. 41)¹⁹. The first two volumes of poems can be read as expressions of a lyrical discourse dominated by acting-out, in the sense theorized by Dominick LaCapra, with poetry becoming the space for the compulsive repetition of trauma, through which any form of symbolic integration is rejected. Poetic language does not mediate suffering, but reactivates it, absorbing everything inside, and trauma functions as the present continuous of being. The third volume, however, marks the onset of a shift in attitude towards what can be called “Great History”. Without losing sight of the figurations of suffering, the poetic discourse begins to exhibit signs of a potential working-through, via an effort of distancing and rearticulation. Trauma does not disappear, but is subjected to a process of symbolic reconfiguration, which allows for the emergence of a reflexive distance from the event. This transition from acting-out to working-through demonstrates that trauma can also function as a form of knowledge, not just as an open wound.

Ion Caraion understands war and ideology as traumatic structures of history, not as mere matrices of reality. His poetry articulates both the discourse of individual trauma, manifested as a fracture in biographical continuity and the impossibility of integrating events into a coherent narrative of the self, and collective trauma, which constructs the image of historical catastrophe as a mark on an entire community. This disjunction explains the internal tension of poetry, which manages, on the one hand, compulsive reiterations, discontinuity, and sensory violence, specific to individual trauma, and, on the other hand, the instruments of testimony, specific to collective trauma. Poetry thus becomes a space for (re)negotiating one’s own image, and the creative imagination shifts between the contours of personal experience and the structures of

¹⁸ Original lyrics: „Ți s-a împlinit voia ta, războiule!/ Ne-am dus, am ucis, am murit.../ Pe urmă —/ (depozite de carne,/ tendoane, bandaje)/ pe urmă — sfîrtecați, goi —/ ne-am întors la bătăturile noastre,/ care n-au mai avut de unde să ne cunoască...” (Caraion, *Intrarea în oraș*, 1978, p. 60).

¹⁹ Original lyrics: „Clipele acestea nu se uită... păstrate în formol sau în / lapte de var”, (Caraion, *Memorie*, 1978, p. 41).

collective memory, between the impossibility of forgetting and the need for historical integration.

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