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### THE INVENTOR OF LOVE & OTHER WRITINGS

by Gherasim Luca; translated by Julian and Laura Semilian  
Black Widow Press, Boston, MA,  
143 pp. Paper \$19.95  
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“...from one temple to the other, the ebony blood of my virtual suicide drains in virulent silence... the bullets crisscross my brain day and night... dispersing inside the skull an odor of detonated gun powder, of clotted blood, of chaos.”—Luca, *Inventor of Love*

Gherasim Luca, surrealist poet, artist, and theorist, has finally been translated into English, with two volumes this year: *The Passive Vampire* and *Inventor of Love & Other Writings*. Known as well to allies of surrealism and related circles in his native Bucharest and in Paris—where he exiles himself some 40 years until his actual suicide in 1994—he has come to us, as it often happens, through the praise of another. In this case, it is Gilles Deleuze who finds in Luca, quite simply, “a great poet among the greatest.” Nor should we forget Luca’s influence on Deleuze for his part in *Anti-Oedipus*, which seems at this juncture to have passed largely from interest or commentary.

The relationship of poetry to philosophy has commonly been one of precedence. From the origin of a sensibility comes a discursive horizon that details its own evolution, for its own time. Whatever the philosopher sustains of the poet is something to discover, of course. But for a poet such as Luca, sensibility has a primacy that time does not diminish by virtue of alterations in the character of an idea. The poetic work eludes the constraints imposed upon it by history, its clarities and opacities interweaving perhaps in new ways as we encounter them but there, precise to the inspiration that revealed them.

Luca composes *Inventor of Love* in the 1940s, during the dark days of fascist rule in Romania, still suffering under its terrorist arm, The Iron Guard. As a surrealist committed to the overthrow of class society, principally by subverting its psychological underpinnings, and as a Jew, his marginalization is acute. In

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order to survive, he secludes himself and endures a clandestine existence along with his women and his few friends who comprise the Romanian surrealist group.

Yet as a group—founded in 1940, disbanded in 1947—they maintain collective activity as they can. Post-war, before the Iron Curtain descends and socialist realism absorbs cultural activity, crushing independence as it does so, they make significant contributions to surrealism internationally, outlining a revolutionary poetic program, with Luca playing a decisive role.

There is little question that *Inventor of Love* is a major accomplishment. Within it, Luca charts an act of poetic and theoretical revolt against the moral universe that typifies love as merely romantic or otherwise monogamous, and for procreation. As the myth of Oedipus is foundational here for Luca, he makes it his target; this myth which ties love to its repressed, reflected image in family, religion, and too much of the myriad relations of power that form our world.

It is, in no uncertain terms, Luca's attempt to reinvent love, to free this voluptuous, anti-social passion from the fetters that deform it. There is risk here, of course. And for one such as Luca, whose clarity is matched by the fervor of his writing, the tensions evoked are consequential. So much so that suicide, in contrast to the epochal blood baths crashing around him, is not something to avoid. And however desperate this may seem to us, especially in terms of poetry, or precisely because of poetry, it is necessary to note the authority in the act, from whence it comes and how it repudiates a world where mass butchery is the norm by a final act of desertion.

Luca thus attempts to commit suicide five times: strangulation by the aid of a necktie fastened to a door handle, Russian roulette, stabbing, poison, and self-strangulation. Before each attempt he leaves a note and afterward a commentary that depicts his struggle to rob death of its anonymity in a world flush with death, to rob death finally of the fear it induces; and to survive, which he does, with death for him "dead" thereafter.

And so he writes, animated by the extremity he has brought himself to, with love balancing the scales, the body erupting through it all: tormented and tormenting, supernal with pleasure and power, this chaos he sublimates and transmutes; a font, in fact, of a poetic asceticism that allows him to grasp between a man and a woman the lineaments of a new kind of bond that will ground his efforts from then on. Along the way, as if in counterpoint, Luca assembles objects from things he finds or,

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more to the point, that find him, assemblages with near magic potencies that reveal the latent content of dreams as they confirm, however partially or completely, a route for his next move.

He writes: "...the female bodies that rendezvous inside my lover leave at the door, like a useless corpse, all their knows, the ideas they had formulated about love... that cause her to search in me for that same lugubrious personage of a thousand masks that is her father."

He writes: "...nothing can make me believe that love comes by anything other than this mortal passageway to the marvelous, inciting lascivious perilousness, in its aphrodisiac catacomb, where the never-before-encountered and the never-before-seen are the current characters of a continual surprise."

I should add, to balance this nexus, that it is for man as for a woman, with the father replaced by the mother, and love for both an all too congenial substitute for ideational incest, with procreation the resumption of mothering and fathering along with the values it attracts. This is another reason that Luca pursues his arc; and something for us to consider during a period when genocide, however corralled by place, stalks us under the guise, yet again, of a nationalized father image.

Where does such a poet come from? Biographical details or a discussion of influences will not do much to draw this man, born as Salman Locker, and who, upon finding an obit to his liking, took its name for his own, substituting a phantom for his lineage. Perhaps, because his desire is magnetic, he will attract you by his words and the objects he creates and discusses as external punctuations of this quest, amazed at the reciprocity that chance avails him through manufacturing and misuse. Perhaps you will find something of yourself in him; something you might wish not to meet yet which he compels you to admit; that you, too, might do as he did--were you free enough or compelled enough to follow the spark to its inevitable, overarching combustion in this particular way.

Most disarming, of course, is his candor; his understanding that poetic liberty is a very risky business in a world where family absorbs passion, genuflection masks love, and petty fears and hatreds proliferate as social mores and political platforms infused by the power of armaments and the illusions that control their use.

*Inventor of Love* is structured into four texts: *Inventor of Love, I*

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*Roam the Impossible, The Dead Death, and an Appendix.* Luca's "other writings" fall under the rubric *The Praying Mantis Appraised* with 14 texts. Throughout are gems brilliant with incisions, sudden fulgurations, critical incantations, lucent despairs, and a lucidity tempered by sex whose white heat protects a definitive cold perception of duplicities with incendiary ruthless concision: alias Gherasim Luca.

Michael Punt is the Editor-in-Chief of *Leonardo Reviews* which is the work of a dedicated production team and an international panel of scholars and professionals invited from a wide range of disciplines. He is also Professor of Art and Technology at the convenor of Transtechnology Research at the University of Plymouth. Details of his research projects can be found at <http://www.trans-techresearch.net>