

**„Babeş-Bolyai” University  
Faculty of Letters  
Doctoral school „Linguistics and Literature Studies”  
Cluj-Napoca**

**ANDREI DOBOŞ**

**BACOVIA AND THE AESTHETICS  
OF THE BACKGROUND**

*SUMMARY*

**2019**

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**INTRODUCTION**

**CHAPTER I. Controversies in the critical reception G. Bacovia's poetry**

**CHAPTER II. Topographies of the deficiency**

**CHAPTER III. Bacovia and the aesthetics of the background**

**CHAPTER IV. Bacovia and the poetry of the atmosphere**

**CHAPTER V. On foreign bodies: influence, affinity, dislocation**

**CONCLUSIONS 203**

**Bibliography**

**Keywords:** natural, artificial, techné, poesis, flânerie, strategic, tactical, aura, atmospheric poetics, background aesthetics, immunological analysis, influence, self-influence, poetic metabolism

Our thesis aims to reopen the file on the critical reception of George Bacovia's poetry in three of its essential moments: the controversy over the origin of creation, the poetics of atmosphere and the debates around what we have called *the poetic metabolism*. Our approach is an interdisciplinary one, combining literary theory with philosophy, phenomenological sociology and applied reading. The study aims to reveal a series of potentialities in Bacovia's poetry, insufficiently explored so far by its critical reception.

Many critics, from different eras, have elaborated on the difficulties in approaching the Bacovian text. From the first reviews, Bacovia's poetry seemed simultaneously dated and innovative (see, for example, in the following discussions, the references to the texts written by Ovid Densusianu or Ion Vinea). Starting here, the exegesis has, over time, refined to the paradoxical relation of its object.

A series of explanations can be found for this orientation of the critical debate. To start with, similarly to the archetypal poet of Socratic dialogue *Ion*, the Muse seems to have granted the privilege of some of the best poems to a banal character with an unremarkable biography (throughout this study we will have the opportunity to explore the insistence of the critics on this point). *Théia moira* was thus offered, surprisingly, and for a short time, to a seemingly unqualified character considering the weight of the situation. This has generated a frustrated search for traces and gestures (biographical, paratextual) that could have proven salvific in explaining the genesis of the work. A pursuit that has predictably proven, , not to produce the expected results. Secondly – and here we are dealing with a burst of the first perplexity – his strongest work, that of the volumes *Plumb (Lead)* and *Scînteii galbene (Yellow Sparks)*, Bacovia has written between the ages of 18 and 22 (reference to a Rimbaud complex being mandatory in this case). However, unlike the poet of *A Season in Hell*, after this first explosive moment, Bacovia does not give up poetry ("to enhance his empire", as Maurice Blanchot would add), but continues to write – probably at his own expense, as stressed by Vladimir Streinu's theory of "the declining talent". Divine

possession, just as Plato defines it, offers his subject a definite, specific and time-limited help.

Another facet of Bacovia's "miracle" poetry has to do with the sources of his compositions, with the influences and with the type of poetics to which Bacovia aligns, through his own gestures, or with which he was later associated by critics.

It is indisputable that his work appears and develops in the symbolist-decadent climate of the late 19th century, around Alexandru Macedonski's literary circles, and its primary sources are to be found in French poetry: Verlaine, Rollinat, Baudelaire etc. Bacovia's rebellious gesture at a time when Romanian poetry was dominated by Eminescu's influence is unequivocal in terms of the poet's aesthetic options. The first analogies that critics make are, in fact, almost without exception, references to poets outside the native sphere.

This state of affairs did not last, however, and the post-war reinterpretations will update the "local" potentials of the Bacovian opera, by repositioning him around local analogies, admitting that Bacovia's poetry equally belongs to the local literary tradition. Parallels are now drawn with Alecsandri, Macedonski and Eminescu, in particular. Bacovia thus represents, in this critical perspective, a happy synthesis and influence of the great centres of culture and the local tradition. Although his poetry has nothing that might, at first sight, seem "specific" or peculiar to Romanian literary mythologies, rather, the attitudes of the decadent aesthetic stand out: disgust, alienation, neurosis, hatred, nothingness. There are, however, two particularities that distinguish him from the general symbolist aesthetic. For Bacovia, unlike the commonly accepted canon of symbolist poets, we find no attitudes that can be associated with the aristocratic refinement. The figure of the dandy is completely alien to him. Paradoxically, the symbolist trope with which he seems to have most in common is one that is much closer to the Baudelairian core of modernism: that of the flaneur. In the Bacovian inventory, dissimilar to the symbolist post-Romanticism poets, spiritualist attitudes, searches in the direction of occultisms are missing - although, as we will see in this study - there are indications that make us believe that the poet nevertheless integrates this theme, but as a simple reference not without ambiguity. Bacovia - it has been said before - is an atheist poet.

A final differentiation in relation to the Symbolist poetics is that related to musicality. Although it is mainly based on a "lyricism of presence" (i.e. on the tonal-

material effects of the expression), it is not a proper one or in the classical musical sense. Not the harmony, but the syncope is part of its favourite instrumentation. Bacovian musicality should be placed in the vicinity of the dodecaphonic experiments.

Also, it is possible to inventory a series of negative relationships that the Bacovian poetry establishes within the Romanian literary tradition. You first notice that he is an essentially urban poet. His thematic spheres of interest do not usually extend beyond the perimeter of a generic suburb. The slum or the fair are its own domes in which the Bacovian anti-utopia takes shape.

If, for Eminescu, Alecsandri or even Macedonski, nature represented an orderly framework, a place of refuge or reflective element of subjectivity, for Bacovia, when it is not rightly indicated as an active absence, it becomes a threatening, historically-corrosive presence. It gains a violent and disintegrating foreground. Bacovian nature, although just matter, establishes with the lyrical self - as we shall see - a relationship much more complex than it might seem at first sight.

Matter, a sure indicator of a cynical conception, does not have, in this universe, the characteristics of an inanimate and amorphous totality, contrasting with an animated and active agent (say - the lyrical subject), and it does not possess the transcendental characteristics of the older poetics.

For Bacovia, nature as matter, though purely immanent, is an active element in the composition of affections. To him, the emotion is meteorology. What's missing from Bacovian perception is not 'nature' itself, but the "nature" of pictorial picturesque, rural or similarity - rural.

The horizon, the distance are ubiquitous elements in Bacovian poetry, but here they are no longer loaded with the same qualities of the intangible as in Romanticism.

For Bacovia, the horizon becomes a close border, acquiring cloistered, tyrannical, suffocating attributes. This is not only a sign of the disintegration of the world, but also of its decline. Although it is not yet possible to speak of an actual disappearance of the aura - for this precise moment in the history of Romanian poetry - not in the sense intended by Walter Benjamin when discussing the metamorphoses of modernist aesthetics. It can be said, however, that in Bacovia's case this spatial order is seriously disturbed. The reification of the distance and the movement of the world produce an irremediable confusion in the plane of perception: the background and the foreground become interchangeable.

Therefore, a degradation of the "aura", , even if not its actual disappearance, an aspect that approximates the Bacovian aesthetic to that of the avant-garde, makes it, in a paradoxical sense, a precursor to them.

We have to deal with the position of a fertile and happy intermediate existence: situated in the tension of the breaking point between romanticism and modernism, the Bacovian poetry can be characterized as post-romantic, insofar as neither of the two historical terminals in dispute can fully claim it for itself.

The same situation is encountered from the point of view of the cultural-identity debate: it is not clear to what extent Bacovia is on the side of endogenous or exogenous influences (his poetry being a paradoxical example of alignment with the local poetic tradition and of synchronism in the Lovinescian sense).

Last but not least, the ambiguity between manufacturing and ingenuity not only builds upon the cumulative effect of this series, but it also explains it to some extent, throwing a revealing light on the forces present there.

Bacovia aims to find other ways of access, from other coordinates, in the major topics that the Bacovian poetry has criticized, and thus, implicitly, an access path today. The study chapters follow this through a series of cuts, as follows:

Chapter 1 builds a critical reception map of Bacovian poetry through the controversies that have arisen within it. There are three debates that correspond to this open situation: the one regarding the value status, the one regarding the historical- literary framing of the poet, and what we call the controversy over the origin of creation. The latter, and the most important of these, will be studied extensively in this chapter. The defining notions around which this debate revolves are those of natural and artificial, fabrication and emanation, intentionality and ingenuity. These oppositions have their source, on the one hand, in the naturalizing interpretation of E. Lovinescu in the Bacovian poetry and, on the other, in the reaction they provoke in G. Călinescu, who manages to deflect the hypothesis of the ingenuous natural, that which Lovinescu understood as the basis of Bacovian poetry.

Continuing the discussions around the split in interpretation, Chapter 2 deals with a number of dyadic models that appear in critical readings on the Bacovian text, determined by one or another of the positions. The terms used in this chapter are those of empirical and poetic self, author and actor, picture and prose, as forms by which are updated, in post-war

criticism, the hypotheses on the origin of creation: fabrication , respectively emanation. The critics we will insist on in this part are: N. Manolescu, M. Petroveanu, D. Dimitriu, D. Flămând and Mircea Scarlat. Thus, the historical transformations that critical concepts such as "transcription" or "record", formed in the Lovinescian branch of Bacovia's exegesis, are traced are resized in the vein of an avant-garde poetics of the report or of a sensuous aesthetic of the ordinary.

Chapter 3 introduces the problem of the aesthetics of backgrounds in the Bacovian poetry. Firstly, through retrospect, two great antagonistic critical insights are rooted, called here Techné and poesis. Techné refers here to a type of control, management, planning or programming, while poesis reproduces self-expression, inner orientation and refers to the promiscuous activity of creation. The tools by which these two categories will be analysed fall within the sphere of immunology. While the supporters of the "technical" hypothesis, starting with G. Călinescu, seek to isolate the exogenous elements of the work, either by minimizing the original contribution or by enhancing it, critics oriented poetically in Bacovia's interpretation are concerned with ways of establishing the self. The dialectic between itself and the other is common to both approaches - the difference being the orientation of the attentional : for Techné, the figure (or what has contour) is designed as otherness (the influences, the nominal, as those related to the cultural formation substrate of symbolism, expressionism or existentialism), and the background is conceived as self (what makes Bacovia himself can only be understood by a gradual analysis of his otherness). In contrast, for the poesis, the figure is the self, and the background is alterity (influences or contexts have an environmental role, the foreground being confiscated by the presence of Bacovianism).

I've shown in this chapter that there was a confusion of intention and strategy in the Bacovian exegesis. However, a modernist poetics that is devoid of strategy does not automatically become involuntary or accidental (as in the hypothesis of "involuntary modernism" by Mircea Scarlat). Starting from Michel de Certeau and his sociological analysis of daily life, Chapter 4 makes a distinction between strategic and tactical and proposes the hypothesis of a tactical modernism, whose representative figure is the flaneur.

The study developed in this chapter proposes - starting from the classic bibliography of Flannery, from Charles Baudelaire to Walter Benjamin, but also from recent conceptualizations of the socio-mental category of attention and its various artistic

applications, such as the concept of attentional diversion. at Eliatar Zerubavel - to demonstrate that, for Bacovia, as for his great master Baudelaire, walking acquires the valences of an artistic practice.

In the gestures of the anonymous Bacovian man we'll find the camouflaged techniques of the flâneur, always looking for the most effective position against what's being "picked" by observation. In this acceptance, Bacovia appears as the poet-flâneur of the fair and marginal world of the townlet, dedicated to the common life and the representation of the anonymous man of the urban modernity, for which the irrelevant everyday has the most urgent interest. This chapter states that, together with Bacovian Flânerie, a poetics of outsourcing is inaugurated in Romanian literature, in which the backgrounds are explained and brought to the foreground. It thus reveals itself as an apophatic modernist poetics, in which attention is directed to empty space or time, in a negative effort to name non-occurrence.

Chapter 4 discusses the value of the aesthetics of the backgrounds and elaborates theoretically on the concept of "atmospheric poetics", starting with the works of Peter Sloterdijk, Timothy Morton and Liviu Rusu. According to Sloterdijk, the explanation of the backgrounds implies a cultural exodus, in which living (in a tradition, but also within an environment of existence, be it a semiotic environment) is no longer possible. The tyranny of the explicit sends both to the evanescence of "outside", as well as to a Heideggerian "break in the whole system of referrals" in which the medial is made visible in its dysfunctionality.

Chapter 5 looks at the ways in which the relationship can be thought of in respect to the Bacovian work. A new immunological pattern is analysed here, starting from the Techné-poiesis distinction made in chapter 3. Viewed from the technical perspective, Bacovia's poetry is exhausted by its relation, but viewed from the perspective of poetic criticism, the Bacovian poetry is singularized, metabolizing its relationships. A number of affinities and influences are discussed both in the context of the poet's creative periods. If, in the first age of creation, significant influences come from the French symbolists, especially Maurice Rollinat, and the proto-decadent Traian Demetrescu, in the second period of creation we have to deal with a pronounced case of self-influence, in which the author of the *Bourgeois Stanzas* seeks to break free from the author of *Lead* and *Yellow Sparks*. I've analysed this form of self-influence especially in

an intermediate age, that of the volumes *With you* and *Comedies after all*, when the poetry of the "second Bacovia" had not yet crystallized in its definitive form, and the echoes " the first Bacovia " were not completely extinguished. Finally, the assertion of critics that Bacovia has no poetic descendants is nuanced, his poetic experience being singular and irreproducible. In this context, I have shown how the Bacovian influence, although persistent and extremely fertile throughout the Romanian literary history, is secondary in nature, and its contaminating force can be reduced to an "atmospheric" element. However, there are two important directions in the post-war poetry for which Bacovia was significant: that of the "notation" poetry, of avant-garde inspiration, which culminates in the neo-realistic poetics of the eighties and that of the trauma poetry, of expressionist inspiration.