

George Bacovia: A translation agenda

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TUNE IN the Bacovia radio station and hear a Mozart sonata stirred by conflicts and dissonances. As if a DJ were mixing tunes and rhythms, pulverizing a *larghetto* in a profusion of syncopations. Bacovia's poetry (1881-1957) grows precisely in the void in which it is contained. I cannot miss in the translation the series of *staccati*, ellipses, changes in register.¹

Largo

Muzica sonoriza orice atom...
dor de tine și de altă lume,
dor...
plana:
durere fără nume
pe om...
toți se gândea la viața lor,
la dispariția lor,
muzica sentimentaliza
obositor, -
dor de tine, și de altă lume,
dor...
muzica sonoriza atom.

Largo^{TN1}

A música sonoriza os átomos...
nostalgia de ti e do outro mundo,
nostalgia...
paira:
uma dor sem fundo
sobre o homem...
reflete sua vida,
e como se abrevia.
A música sentimentaliza
frágil via –
nostalgia de ti e do outro mundo,
nostalgia...
a música sonoriza os átomos.

*

Tuning in Bacovia radio is complicated. It is impossible to eliminate static. The noises of translation into Portuguese will be clearly received on shortwave. Like Khliébnikov's "The Girls". Like Mandelstam's "The Black Sun". The charm of a predominantly white swan. Someone put together the feeling-idea of whiteness and swan, in a merger process, by saying *cisnencanto* (*charmswan*).

*

At the Humanitas bookstore, facing Crețulescu Church, I listen to Bacovia's album. The fundamental gesture of the poet reading his poems, such as

^{TN1} An English translation of the poem is provided in the "Notes" section.

“Amurg Violet” and “Nervi de Primăvară “. An admirable score. Without music. Without emphasis. Colorless. I remember Sergiu Celibidache – his opposite – conducting Enescu’s second rhapsody.

*

Compared to Verlaine’s absolute pitch, Bacovia is practically deaf. This is the thesis of Nicolae Manolescu, according to which the Romanian poet dissolved the symbolist orchestra. Reduced its instruments.² Wisely out of tune. In this *flaw* lies the quality of the work. Far from the precepts of pure bel canto, negative values. Silence and incompleteness. Thus, when translating him, *pas de la musique avant toute chose*.

*

To deal with the fragments of Bacovia’s poetry, I register Heidegger’s construction of the word abyss - *Abgrund*. Suspended in a condition, Ab-Grund.

Din Urmă	No fim ^{TN2}
Poezie, poezie...	Poesia, poesia...
galben, plumb, violet...	amarelo, plúmbeo, violeta...
Și strada goală...	a rua deserta...
ori aștetptări târzii,	a espera tardia,
și parcuri înghețate...	e os parques congelados...
poet și solitar...	poe ta e solitário...
galben, plumb, violet	amarelo, plúmbeo, violeta,
odaia goală,	a sala deserta,
și nopți târzii...	e as noite tardias...
îndoliat parfum	perfume doloroso
și secular...	e secular...
pe veșnicie...	por toda a eternidade...

*

Bacovia’s verses grow inwards, according to a solidarity economy between phonemes. As an addendum. Delicate shades. Progressive.

*

I follow a register with almost no variety (Grigurcu 1974, Ch.1). As in the litanies of the Orthodox church - the *ectenie*. And yet, nothing in Bacovia matches the plan of salvation. A perennial orphanage governs his world. In the dispersion of the white. In the contraction of the black. And finally, the gray, which dominates permanently, if not overwhelmingly, that pluvial land, linked to the color of lead (Cimpoi, 2005, p.57).

^{TN2} An English translation of the poem is provided in the “Notes” section.

La Țărm

O, gând amar...
singuratăți,
pribege seri de primăvară,
parfumuri ce se duc pe vânt
și flaute din stânci de mare...
- A fost ca niciodată ...
și valuri ce fosnec la țărm,
îngrijitoare asteptări,
singurătăți
și flaute
din stânci de mare...

Na Praia^{TN3}

Ah! Pensamento amargo...
solidão,
as noites vagas de primavera,
perfumes que se espalham pelo vento
e flautas nos arrecifes do mar...
- Era uma vez...
e as ondas junto à praia a murmurar,
esperanças inquietas,
solidão
e flautas
nos arrecifes do mar...

*

The dark metal skies of Georg Trakl (*schwarze himmel von Metall*) reappear here, keeping the rhyme *al*, plus the exact title of the source-poem “Winterdämmerung”:

Amurg de Iarnă

Amurg de iarnă, sumbru, de metal,
câmpia albă – un imens rotund –
vâslind, un corb încet vine din fund,
tăind orizontul, diametral.

Copacii rari, și ninși, par de cristal.
Chemări de disparitie mă sorb,
pe când, tăcut, se’ntoarce-acelaș corb,
tăind orizontul, diametral.

Crepúsculo de Inverno^{TN4}

Crepúsculo de inverno, frio, metal
um prado alvíssimo – vasto, rotundo –
já vem remando um corvo lá do fundo,
cortando o horizonte, em diagonal.

As árvores na neve são cristal. Funes-
tos pensamentos absorvo,
e volta o mesmo silencioso corvo,
cortando o horizonte, em diagonal.

*

A diagonal agenda? There is no definitive poem. Trials. Attempts. As if the Desired continued even more lost. Or, perhaps, as if the most Lost continued to be desired.³

^{TN3} An English translation of the poem is provided in the “Notes” section.

Notes

- 1 The original poems were taken from Bacovia (2006).
- 2 For Manolescu (2003, p.7), “*symbolismul urmărea să fie musical, sugestiv, evanescent. arta poetică a lui Verlaine conține întreg programul. Muzica lui Bacovia e dizarmonic, sincopată, țipată la trompetă, histerică. Față de violinele lui Verlaine, el pare amuzical; sau procedează prin stenogramă de elemente disparate ca Trakl*”.

TN1 - Largo

Every atom sang that music . . .
longing for you, for another world,
longing . . .
to fly . . .
The man gave himself
to a nameless pain . . .
All were thinking of his life,
his tired exit.
The music expressed
fatigue —
longing for you, for another world,
longing.
Every atom sang that music . . .

TN2 - Latterly

Poetry, poetry ...
Yellow, lead, violet ...
And the empty street ...
Or else late waits
And frozen parks ...
Poet, and solitary ...
Yellow, lead, violet...
The empty room...
And late nights ...
Fragrance mournful ...
And secular...
For eternity...

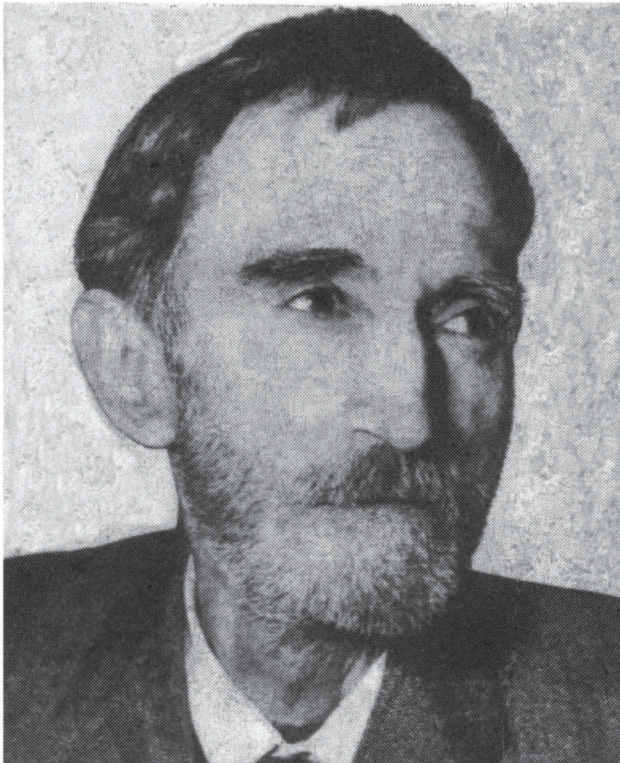
TN3 - On The Beach

Ah! Bitter thought ... loneliness,
night spots spring scents that are spread by wind and flutes reefs in the sea ...
- Once upon a time ...
and the waves along the beach muttering, hopes restless,
loneliness
and flutes
reefs in the sea ...

TN4 - Winter Dusk

Gloomy, metallic winter dusk.
The white plain — a huge circle —
A raven comes, rowing,
obliquely cutting the horizon.
Rare snowed trees seem crystal.
I think of disappearing
while the same raven turns back,
obliquely cutting the horizon.

Photo reproduction



George Bacovia (1881-1957).

References

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ABSTRACT – Notes for a translation of the Romanian poet George Bacovia. The word and the silence. The array of colors and their intervals. The polyphony of reading. The dissolution of the symbolist orchestra and the challenges of translation.

KEYWORDS: Translation, Poetry, George Bacovia.

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