

Literature

**GEORGE BACOVIA
A TOUCHSTONE OF ROMANIAN SYMBOLIST POETRY¹**

Cristina Mirela NICOLAESCU
Yozgat-Bozok University, Turkey

e-mail: chris2013x@yahoo.com

Abstract

Romanian symbolism, whose theoretician was the poet Alexandru Macedonski, discovers its authentic and original vision only in a later stage, through George Bacovia. The greatest Romanian symbolist poet caused a mutation of structure and vision in Romanian lyric poetry. In Romanian lyric poetry, authentic Romanian symbolism gained definitive recognition in 1916 with the appearance of this volume "Plumb" [Lead]. It was highly acclaimed for its uniqueness, which derives from an exacerbated pessimism of life, the illustration in a hostile environment and fear of death, an interwar poet who created a lyric of deep sadness. He profoundly transformed poetic language, remaking the basic structure of poetry, especially on the syntactic level. Several types of sonorities can be distinguished in Romanian symbolism, in which, the inner music of Bacovia sounds distinctly, so different, for example, from Minulescu's chansonette. The one that produces the unmistakable sound of Bacovian poetry is, of course, autumn, with its fatal role of turning everything it touches into a lament. Published in the interwar period, Bacovia's volumes belong to "a later phase of symbolism", with openings towards modernism. This paper investigates such features in two of his most known poems: "Plumb" and "Decor". From the very beginning, Bacovia has consistently attracted the interest of critics. Consequently, numerous studies have been written about him, with scholars classifying him in various literary movements. Some, like Lovinescu, consider him a Symbolist; others, such as P. Constantinescu, see him as a Romantic. He has also been labeled an Expressionist (Ov. Crohmălniceanu, I. Negoitescu, L. Ulici) or even a precursor of Postmodernism (Marian Popa). In truth, Bacovia embodies elements of each, following an ever-evolving and intriguing literary path. Others, including Mihai Cimpoi and Dinu Flămând, interpret him as an Existentialist, while V. Fanache views him as a Decadent poet. Despite these numerous labels and the challenges of classifying his work, Bacovia's uniqueness remains undeniable, distinguishing him as a singular phenomenon in Romanian literature. Like most symbolist poets, Bacovia was attracted to the magic of correspondences or the technique of synaesthesia. In the spirit of Rimbaud, the Romanian poet assigned certain meanings to colors, associated them with emotional states, and expressed them in a totally new way. Grey, black, violet, yellow lose their status as simple chromatic reflexes and enter the category of affects. Bacovia took up the symbolic themes that he integrated into his work in a personal vision, with a new language, giving them unprecedented suggestiveness. In-depth readings can convey states of melancholy and anguish, the poetry captivating, at the same time, through its exasperating simplicity and the transparency of meanings, the mastery with which the poems are constructed. Repetition, expression of the inner emptiness, the whole network of parallelisms, the perfection of rhymes, the limited vocabulary (which expresses the tendency towards abstraction), the specific punctuation, the musicality and chromaticism are all trademarks of Bacovian lyricism. The analysis though, will not be limited only to the study of stylistic figures and poetic techniques, but it attempts to highlight the poetic message that emerges from his great work that goes deeper into a philosophical view. The depressive and oppressive state, suggested by the Bacovian

¹ Article History: Received: 24.12.2024. Accepted: 24.01.2025. Published: 15.05.2025. No funding was received either for the research presented in the article or for the creation of the article.

sonorities, is accentuated further outlining the semantics of the words. The two aspects, the sound background and the semantic background, together make up a unitary, complex whole, bearing universal truths. One of the aspects of Bacovia's rhetoric, achieved through the emphasis on imbalance, despair, and acute sadness, is irony, an important element that prevents his poetry from becoming monotonous. His creation may be limited in scope but is most surprisingly unequalled in terms of thematic and expressive inventiveness.

Keywords: Symbolism; Bacovia; symbol; poetic imaginary; stylistic analysis.

Introduction

European Symbolism got its name from the literary manifesto, the programme-article entitled "Le symbolisme" by Jean Moreas. With Charles Baudelaire, who theorised the movement and authored the representative poem "Correspondances" [Correspondences], a new creative perspective has emerged, one in which his vision of the world is intriguing and original, while promoting the concept of modern poetry. The principle of correspondences is based on the cultivation of unusual analogies between things, objects and states, between the outer universe and the world of feelings. The symbolist poems combine elements such as: the internal musicality of the verses, synesthesia, the expression of a state of spleen, desolation and depression, the use of chromaticism. Symbolism offers a new creative perspective that aims to address all the senses according to the principle of synesthesia. Thus, the visual and auditory images intertwine with the olfactory ones (related to smell). The symbolists proposed to make use of the symbol, hence the name of the current. As Mallarmé argued in an interview, symbols contribute to deepening meanings in poetry: "To name an object is to take away three-fourths of the pleasure given by a poem. This pleasure consists in guessing little by little: to suggest it, that is the ideal" (Huret, 2022, p. 2).

Symbolism 'paves the way for actual modernist schools and movements. Moreover, it represents, compared to Romanticism, Junimea and Sămănătorism literary movements, an indisputable step forward' (Goci, 2001, p. 37, our translation)².

The main characteristic of this literary movement is the use of the symbol, but, along with this, there is also the cultivation of suggestion and synesthesia. At the formal level, the musicality of the lyrics is cultivated, obtained through the elements of prosody such as: free verse, refrain, leitmotif, harmony, assonances, rhyme and elaborate rhythms. Symbols are fundamental elements of symbolism through which correspondence is made between the proper meaning of the word and the one intended by the poet such as *plumb* [lead]. Specific themes and motifs are cultivated among which: the condition of the poet and poetry, nature, love, the state of neurosis, the city dweller, death, escape, confinement. At the same time, loneliness, melancholy, the spleen, mystery, rain, autumn, colors, music, the park, the cemetery are the most frequent grounds. The atmosphere of the city is oppressive, the urban environment crushes individuality. Despite a small work (six volumes published during the poet's lifetime and one posthumous volume of poetry) extensive works, studies, reviews, monographs were dedicated exclusively to the poet, who was present in every history of literature, even if he was not always praised. Bacovia is an innovator in Romanian poetry, one of the first truly modern poets of Romanian literature. His lyrics, symbolist for the most part, marked a remarkable

² Original source text: "deschide drumul grupărilor și tendințelor moderniste propriu-zise [...], reprezintă, față de romantism, junimism și sămănătorism, un incontestabil pas înainte".

progress in the direction of poetic expression: ‘Bacovia is one of the most authentic representatives of our modern literature’ (Flămând, 1979, p. 44, our translation)³.

The emblematic poem of the Bacovian lyrical universe is the one that opens and gives the title to the debut volume (published in 1916), *Plumb* [Lead]. It imposes a referential and meaningful symbol on which the poetic vision is based, thus illustrating a characteristic of Bacovian poetics. Seasons and feelings unify the object and inner universe of the poem under a dominating color-obsession, thus creating a strange effect and a strongly personalised language. Nowhere does the word *plumb* appear more tragically repeated than in this poem. Heavy and soft among metals, with its high specific density, with a dull and depressed color, it becomes the absolute metaphor of oppressive, suffocating and monotonous mediocre life irremediably captive to matter, without the chance of opening to the dream.

1. The emblematic poem “Plumb” [Lead]

The poem “Plumb”, which originally appeared in 1911 in the magazine *Versuri* [Verses] under the pseudonym George Andoni, was later included in the debut volume with the same title published in 1916.

Its privileged position reveals its importance as a programmatic text, key to the interpretation of a singular lyrical universe in Romanian literature. It is considered an implicit poetic art, in which the main conceptions of the artist about the world and life, about his purpose in the world, are revealed in a distinct literary language.

The poetic text is part of the symbolist lyrics through the theme and motifs specific to this movement, through the use of suggestion, correspondences between the interior and exterior world, as well as chromaticism in imagery. The technique of repetitions gives inner musicality and drama to the experience of the lyrical ego, while the poetic atmosphere is woven with the help of the recurring symbol “plumb”, [lead] which suggests death. The specific features of symbolic rhetoric contribute to the amplification of lyrical tension. The musicality generated by the syntactic parallelism produced by the obsessive repetition of the word “lead”, the cadence imposed by the pause lines and symmetrically placed suspension points subtly induces a state of restlessness and hopelessness. The suggestion is made at the most diverse levels of the text - from sleep - death analogy, to inner musicality, and the very structure of the text. An ambiguity specific to the first stage of modernism is thus generated.

The poem is an elegiac confession on the theme of the inability to face destiny and the artist’s inadequacy, expressing a feeling of sadness, in the form of a lyrical monologue of a restless self. The main theme is the condition of the individual isolated in an oppressive environment, which generates a state of anguish, a condition marked by the impossibility of communication or escape. The symbol of love combines funeral symbols (“sicriele de plumb”, “cavoul” și “coroanele de plumb”) [lead coffin, vault, and lead wreaths]. The lyrical motifs with symbolic value, such as coffins, graves, sleep, cold and wind configure the funeral setting and support the themes of the lyrical discourse: the death of love, soul oppression, existential failure, and loneliness. The title announces the fundamental symbol, repeated six times symmetrically, which gives musicality to the text and expresses the correspondence between an element of nature and the states of the soul, emphasising the depressing state of the lyrical self. In a denotative sense, “lead” is a chemical element, malleable, heavy metal, illustrating the illusion of transforming one state into another, the illusion of salvation, hopelessness. The connotative meaning derives from the proper meaning and suggests, poetically, anguish, pressure and monotony. The meanings are built on the correspondences between the subjective / human and the objective / cosmic plane. The symbol is associated with different tactile

³ Original source text: “Bacovia este unul dintre cei mai autentici reprezentanți ai literaturii noastre moderne”.

sensations of coldness and hardness, chromatic of grey, yellow and auditory through the use of closed vowels and consonants.

Through repetition, the title-word becomes a central motif in the text and it suggests death: the outer world and the soul world are subjected to mineralisation under the effect of the toxic metal. Lead is associated with all elements: “sicriele de plumb” [lead coffins] as immobility, freezing, isolation, “amorul meu de plumb” [my lead beloved] as death of feelings, coldness of the soul, “aripile de plumb” [lead wings] as fall, broken flight, and “flori de plumb” [lead flowers] as degradation and ephemerality. The vision of the world is gloomy, as a tragedy assumed with lucidity, typically symbolist and defined by the conviction of the impossibility of escaping from a closed Universe, which limits and destroys the being, a drama found also at the level of correspondences established between Matter and Spirit. The vision is non-metaphysical; the text hyperbolizes the state of loneliness, the obsession of a solitary, of a prisoner, of a consciousness frightened of nothingness, of the outside, of itself, of premonition of death, of mineralization, of lead that generates the impossibility of communication. Subjective lyricism is rendered by the marks of the lyrical self: the first person, the singular of the verbs and the possessive adjective. The verbs in the imperfect express the idea of continuity of the state of loneliness, and shouting suggests the inability to communicate.

Structurally, this poem is a creation in which all planes express the same idea: the obsession of the end, of nothingness, of death. At the compositional level, the poem proposes an external structure of canonical type, highlighted by a concentrated speech, organized in two quatrain-type stanzas, respecting the prosodic principles. At the level of the internal structure, the text gravitates around a central symbol, recurrent in Bacovian lyrics, the lead. The two quatrains highlight two planes of recording reality: one exterior, built from a small number of funerary elements rendering a feeling of loneliness and that of lost love. Through the description, in the first stanza a funereal atmosphere is outlined, the outside world is described, literary motifs reminiscent of a symbolic literary topos. The opening verse anticipates the theme of death through the motif of sleep and depicts the world as a huge cemetery. It contains two recurrent symbols in Bacovia's lyric: “sicriu” [coffin] and “plumb” [lead], placing the last symbol at the end of verse expressing the confinement in the horizon sealed by lead and the impossibility of escape. Unlike the romantics, who see death as an opportunity for total liberation, Bacovia proposes a vision of a descent into Hell. The incipit is entrusted with the task of introducing the lecturer to a strange universe, in which objects take on human states, sleeping.

The cemetery is highlighted by the image of coffins, wreaths, flowers, nouns that receive the determiner “lead”, which multiplies the chromatic and tactile suggestions, insisting on the awkward existence, devoid of the possibility of salvation. The epithet “flori de plumb” [lead flowers] suggests ephemerality, but also the loss of charm, tenderness, they are artificial and portend death. The universe becomes a huge cemetery, a coffin covered by death both horizontally and vertically, by figuratively dressing it in a funeral garment. The repetition of the word symbol and at the level of rhyme has the role of suggesting the limitation of the human condition and the closure of existence as in a fateful, implacable circle. The correspondence between the loneliness of the ego and the hostile reality is highlighted by the leitmotif of being alone and feeling the wind. The wind produces acoustic shrills and the cold sensation, specific to death, in the auditory image of the creaking sound, which amplifies the premonition of an inevitable end. In the third verse, the only explicit reference to the lyrical self appears standing alone, thus moving from the external reality to that of the self, the dominant state being anguish, typically symbolist. The second stanza outlines a second poetic plane, represented by the inner world of the symbolist self, which in the static, immobile universe, feels cloistered in a metaphorical cave. The beginning of the stanza is under the sign of the existential tragedy,

generated by the death of love. Love seems abandoned, extinguished, belonging to an irrevocable past. The structure signifies the idea of passing into non-existence. Death-sleep is all the more unsettling as it is not perceived as a transition to a transcendental plane of being, but as the ultimate closure, as the ultimate limit.

The metaphor “*amorul meu de plumb*” [my lead beloved] suggests mineralization, produced by the toxic effect of lead, also including the inner world, while the lyrical self looks at this process as a spectator. The cold amplifies the inner insecurity. The rescue attempt is illusory, like a pose of the desperate self, while the sound of human voice is lost into nothingness. The cry becomes the way of expressing the despair felt by the lyrical self, which he realizes the drama of his existence, as if recalling the vain cry from the painting.

The last verse “*Și-i atârnu aripile de plumb*” [And the wings of lead drooping] evokes metaphorically the image of an angelic flight, a symbol of spiritual ascension in the telluric sphere. The wings are drawn towards the earth and degradation, a metaphor which implies the definitive collapse and abandonment into death. The predominantly decadent Bacovian imaginary, as well as the self-damned attitude is obvious in this respect. The poetic imaginary is organized around symbols and two semantic fields: death, the vault, and the poetic self. The central symbol is lead, which suggests the state of neurosis and soul collapse. The artistic language is marked by an extreme simplicity. Expressiveness has multiple sources, in morpho-syntactic, phonetic and prosodic, lexical terms. The auditory, shrill, “*scârțâiau coroanele de plumb*” [lead wreaths creaked] imagery suggests the effects of an enclosed space and limited existence.

At the stylistic level, the presence of the central symbol “lead” is noticeable, associated with some metaphorical structures and gives visual images the value of obsession. At the syntactic level, parallelism is retained, the dominant method, through which the final quatrain resumes and nuances the atmosphere and feelings of the first stanza. The sentences are affirmative, developed, non-addressed, as a sign of acceptance of fate. Phonetically, the word “plumb” contains a single closed vowel “u”, placed between sonorous consonants, suggesting a heavy, echoless fall. Closed vowels give the feeling of existential emptiness, inner vacuum. The inner musicality is given by the psychic movement that the words trigger.

At the level of discourse construction, the Bacovian phrase refuses expansion, branching, preferring the sequence of simple sentences, in relation to junction or juxtaposition

In terms of prosody, the poem has a sober, rigorous construction that suggests the presence of death, through the closure of the lines, the fixed meter, ten syllables, embraced rhyme, predominantly iambic rhythm, which supports the serious tone of the speech and accentuates the sense of failure. This poem remains an authentic lyrical landmark, both for Romanian symbolism and for the openings towards modern lyricism, being defining for the Bacovian vision, constituting itself as an original existential creed. Bacovian creation possesses a special lyrical charge, joining the series of perfect poetic arts.

Existential elegy and symbolist pastel, the poem that bases its speech on this symbol is one of the masterpieces of Bacovia’s youth. The theme of existential failure and that of death, of the doomed condition of the captive creator in an artificial, inert world develops in a scholarly orchestrated composition. The two quatrains are perfectly symmetrical at the level of poetic syntax and metrical structures. The strange, internalised rhythm is achieved from the predominance of the iambic, embraced rhyme, as well as from the use of sound figures and the recurrence of the key word (lines 1 and 4 of each stanza end with the word *lead*, which also reappears in two medial positions). Structurally, the poetic imaginary is configured on two planes - that of external, objective reality, and that of internal, subjective reality, located in a correspondence relationship, defining for symbolist aesthetics. The plans become coincident under the sign of the same symbol - the lead - and in the space of the same semantic field of

death. The first stanza outlines the landmarks of external reality, in a stylised image, a symbolic space is imagined, the space of sleep, of death. The vault and the coffin are explicit metaphors of death, symbols of the existential void in which the being is feeling captive. They directly name the thanatic space or symbolize (through the technique of suggestion, typical of the symbolists) the closed space of the vault-room, of the provincial fair or of the vast universe of a cave or, perhaps, one's own body in which it is evening and there is silence.

All the words of the first verse are symbolic metaphors of death, of falling into the inertia of lead. The syntactic determinants (the deep complement and the lead attribute) have the value of stylistic superlatives, signifying the collapse into nothingness or inert matter. A fragile and uncertain relationship is established between the lyrical self and this reality hardened in the patterns of death, always torturing. The wind, an obsessive symbol in Bacovian poetics, is an enigmatic entity, signifying the ephemerality and inconsistency of existence or the restlessness of the captive spirit. It is associated with the reason of the loneliness of the being in the universe, emphasizing the existential tragedy of loneliness. In the second stanza, the feeling of loneliness becomes so overwhelming that the being expresses its fear of nothing by shouting. The cry is in vain, without an answer, without an echo in a world where love itself died. The first line of this stanza constitutes the foundation of the plane of inner reality and an unmistakable poetic image. There is no antithesis between this plane of the lyrical self and that of external reality. The inner universe is not configured as a compensatory universe, but as an invariant of the erroneous world outside, in a correspondence relationship specific to the symbolist imaginary. The double verbal metaphor *sleeping* turned is the absolute expression of the definitive removal from life (the image of the one who turns his face from life to the troubling enigma of death. It speaks not only of the ephemerality of love, but also of the loss of faith in it.

The consciousness of this loss increases the feeling of bitter loneliness. Thus, social and erotic loneliness becomes a metaphysical loneliness felt as an inner coldness, as an existential failure: "Stam singur lângă mort... și era frig... / Și-i atârnav aripile de plumb" [I stand alone next to the dead and it was cold / His wings were hanging from lead]. The last metaphor of the text expresses the Bacovian feeling of falling into the sleep of frozen matter, into the nothingness of non-being or into the inner abyss, with a poetic art in which the author directly expresses his vision of the world in an original manner. For Bacovia, the world is a hostile universe, not only unfriendly, but even hostile, belligerent. Death is an archetypal super-character. The feelings revealed are sad, melancholic, and cold. Loneliness is a state of fact felt by the poet cloistered in the morbid environment of the cave. The Bacovian poetic imaginary focuses on the symbols of death.

The expression of disturbing intuitions about the absurdity of an anti-metaphysical world is achieved through the melodic symmetry of the verses, by accentuating words with muted echoes: lead, garment, and wind, and through the music of words with onomatopoeic valences: creaking, cold and cry. The entire poem is built through the successive accumulation of poetic images, through coordination, gaining unity, through the technique of syntactic parallelism that provides musicality. Freezing in the lead of oppressive feelings, the Bacovian lyrical ego transfers its oppressive sadness to the entire universe.

Starting with this first poem, George Bacovia gives Romanian Symbolist aesthetics the depth of substance, vision and expression, generating a definitive break with Eminesque epigonism: 'Bacovia interrupts in the development of our poetry the lyrical discourse confident in self-transcendence. It is his own break from illusion, from romantic dreaming or from the chimera of the symbol endowed with the power to suggest the cosmic mystery' (Fanache, 1994,

p. 57, our translation).⁴ It is apparent that the Bacovian lyrical universe, with its desolate autumns, torrid summers, annihilating, with oversized lead and rain - records an essential milestone in the development of Romanian poetry and a new way of articulating the self.

The correspondence between lead and the emotional states is obvious. The weight of lead symbolizes soul oppression, the gray color represents the monotony of existence, malleability represents psychic lability, and toxicity represents soul intoxication. The theme of the poem is the condition of the poet condemned by a society that does not understand his aspirations. This isolation generates a state of anguish, of restlessness in relation to two fundamental experiences: love and death, sub-themes of the poem. The symbol of lead becomes a leitmotif in the poem.

Structurally, the poem has two quatrains thought on two levels: interior and exterior. In the first sequence, the closed space of the cave suffocates the poet. The poem begins with a verb in the imperfect “dormeau” [were sleeping] that expresses a lasting and unfinished action from the past. Pressing becomes permanent. Time supports the style, and the meaning of the word refers to the idea of universal death, of existential sleep into matter. The epithet “de plumb” [of lead] appears for the first time here in the poem. Flowers should be elements of life, but they are constituents of death. The verses are arranged in quatrains, have a measure of ten syllables, the rhyme is embraced, and the combined rhythm (iambic, amphibrachic) enhances the sensation that the reader is mentally savoring a typical symbolist poem.

At the phonetic level, the consonants (b, p, s, ș) together with the vowels (ă, â, o, u) give the poem a strange, bizarre musicality. At the morphological level, the syntactic parallelism (coffin-love, grave-dead, wind-cold) exemplifies a perfect geometry of the poem.

The general atmosphere is one of Bacovian suffocating, torturous anguish. Although we do not fully understand such a lyrically reflected path, we take into account the need for the prior existence of a state of melancholy to produce such a text, but we do not want to pronounce an absolute verdict in this regard.

The third line subjectivizes the lyrical speech. The poet turns to himself: “Stam singur în cavou...” [I was standing alone in the vault]. Two essential elements (loneliness and the vault.) give an indication of solitude and isolation. It can also mean the inability to overcome one's own limits and one's own condition, which causes enormous suffering. Next, an acoustic element functions as a disintegrating force of the soul: “and there was wind”. The stanza ends with a sinister auditory image, as the plaintive, metallic sonority amplifies the feeling of anguish and paves the way to the inevitable that can happen at any time.

The second stanza surprisingly repeats the pattern of the first stanza through the technique of symmetry: “Dormea întors amorul meu de plumb” [My lead beloved lay asleep upturned]. The poet focuses on the feeling of love encumbered by pessimism and heaviness. The plane is an inner one, belonging to the poetic microcosm of despair for the separation, coldness, death. Moreover, falling asleep is a state preceding death, a dreary expectation. The image of lead flowers reappears; that they are part of the wreaths or the bouquets is no longer important. What matters is that they become a bed metaphor for numb love. On the other hand, even an artificial coffin. The tone is surprising because it implies dynamism, while the general atmosphere is static because of its human, inert features. Only the wind is still blowing. However, the cry is a materialisation of the popular habit of wailing. The dead is called out by the mourners, by the family, friends to mitigate the drama of the final separation.

⁴ Original source text: “Bacovia intrerupe, în devenirea poeziei noastre, discursul liric increzator în depășirea de sine. Lui îi este proprie ruptura de iluzie, de visarea romantică sau de himera simbolului investit cu puterea de a sugera misterul cosmic”.

The imagery echoes the related verse from the first stanza about sleep, stillness and death: “Stam singur în cavou... și era vânt ... Și scârțâiau coroanele de plumb” [I was standing alone in the vault... And there was wind... And the wreaths of lead were creaking].

The phenomenon of death is implacable, irreversible and this fact is suggested by the presence of cold in a synesthesia of sensations. The cold is the prerogative of the night and death, their symbols being combined. The nocturnal setting amplifies the sense of horror that the poet intended.

The final verse implies hopelessness, the lack of hope that ascension will ever be possible again: “Și-i atârnav aripile de plumb.” [And the wings of lead were drooping]. The implosion of the feeling of love is inevitable. The microcosm resonates with the macrocosm and is reflected by it. The isolation in the hostile society leads to the disaggregation of the most human of feelings in the inner forum of the poet. Instead of ascent, resurrection, ascension, we have descent, death and fall. The wings are made of lead. The lead leitmotif ends the poetic discourse.

The poem is a lyrical confession in which the marks of the lyrical self are present. Therefore, we have verbs in the first person (“stam”, “am început”) [I sat, I started] and the possessive pronominal adjective in the first person “my”. Likewise, the lyrical self is also expressed at the level of punctuation through ellipsis and the break line. Both involve a larger pause in the flow of speech, which means additional time for meditation.

2. Symbolistic lyricism in the poem “Decor” [Scenery]

The title of the poem is very suggestive. The poem gives an image of the city, in a hibernal ambience, a setting marked by the image of the park with black and white trees. From the point of view of structuring the vision, there is an alternation of static and dynamic, movement and rest. Thus, the quatrains give, to the greatest degree, the feeling of freezing, of inertia and immobility, while the isolated verses produce a certain impression of movement. The alternation of white and black brings with it the stridency and contrast between two colors with a certain symbolism: white would suggest life, a mineralized life, in hibernation, while black can bring connotations of nothingness, of death. Despite the representative character of the images, Bacovia’s poetry is not actually a pastel. The decor, the description, the depiction of the landscape, are not an end in themselves, but a pretext for suggesting certain states of mind, for rendering certain affections. This was also noticed by Nicolae Manolescu: ‘Right from the first reading, we notice that some phrases are repeated, in a certain order, and that the representation of the winter landscape is strongly stylized’ (Manolescu, 1987, p. 31, our translation).⁵

The picture of the nature’s death is achieved by alternating black and white. The first verse can be read referentially: the white trees and the black trees are the trees without leaves, as well as charred, covered with snow. The resumption of the scheme (in lines 6 and 11), however, attacks the impression of a faithful description by the fact that the extension of the black-white opposition to other aspects of reality (the bird’s feathers, the leaves) introduces a criterion of artificial similarity. The intuition is contradicted by the very simple color code used by the poet. The poet does not describe the landscape, but organizes it according to two opposite features, white and black, which do not immediately have strict correspondences with reality”. The atmosphere that the author builds in the poem “Decor” [Scenery] is one of maximum austerity. The elements of nature are of extreme simplicity, associated with such monochord moods: sadness, melancholy, loneliness. The repetition of some words or some phrases has the

⁵ Original source text: „Chiar de la prima lectură remarcăm că niște sintagme se repetă, într-o ordine anumită, și că reprezentarea peisajului de iarnă este puternic stilizată.”

role of intensifying the emotion, of emphasizing the feelings even more or pressing the accents distributed on one or another of the elements of the lyrical atmosphere.

The symmetries and structural correspondences are, moreover, very eloquent: the first and third quatrains are almost identical, a fact that has the purpose of amplifying the impression of monotony, a non-differentiation (“Copacii albi, copacii negri / Stau goi în parcul solitar / Decor de doliu funerar... / Copacii albi, copacii negri”) [White trees, black trees / Stand bare in the lonely park / A mourning, funerary decoration, White trees, black trees]. The middle quatrain brings, in the freezing atmosphere of the winter setting, a certain dynamism, a more strongly noted movement sensation (“Cu pene albe, pene negre / O pasăre cu glas amar / Străbate parcul secular... Cu pene albe, pene negre”) [With white feathers, black feathers / A bird with a bitter voice / Walks through the secular park... / with white feathers, black feathers].

Bacovia's poem, whose originality lies in the gloomy atmosphere of sadness and decomposition, can only be analysed through the prism of stylistic figures, especially those of construction, because, for this poet, the figures of repetition are just as important as the words in sending the message. Poetry of the antinomies of a nature that expresses soulful contrasts, “Decor” [Scenery] sheds light on the full range of characteristics pertaining to Bacovian processes and techniques. The symbolism passes, through the stylization of the affects and the austerity of the landscape, towards expressionism, revealing the artistic availability of one of the most original Romanian poets. The phonetic elements are often organised in such a way that their use generates, intentionally or no, the expressiveness and musical harmony of the lyrics. There are situations, in the last volumes, when the proximity to the spoken language supports, in fact, the poetic idea and the author uses phoneticisms, deviations from phonetic nature, mostly aphereses, syncope, apocope, useful insofar as they facilitate the musicality of the lyrics.

What is first perceived in reading Bacovian poetry is the sound effect of the verses. Repetition, as a specific procedure of Bacovian poetry, always returns, cyclically, to a fundamental idea or a key word to reinforce it obsessively, to emphasise it.

The poems in which the lines are grouped in quatrains, usually symmetrically organized, with care for measure and rhyme, alternate with creations in which care for form is abandoned.

The prevalence of adjectival epithets should be pointed out. The epithets are not characterized by a great semantic variety, being oriented towards the area the depressive. Special stylistic effects are obtained, above all, by the synesthetic epithet, especially capitalized by symbolists; the simile merges with other figures of speech, creating figurative interference.

Conclusion

The first half of the 20th century was energised by the various artistic experiences, with complicated structures, with an amazing innovative language, with philosophical issues, with a modernist technique. In this literary climate, Bacovia, a symbolist poet with “expressionist sensibilities (open to the metaphysical)”, distinguished himself.

From the first volume, “Plumb” (1916), until the last volume, “Poems” (1957), Bacovia, a symbolist in vision and writing, opened a path for Romanian poetry to new poetic experiences, going through expressionism, modernism and avant-garde in general. Most of the critical approaches to Bacovia's work referred, first of all, to the particular technique of structuring the imaginary universe based on a relatively small number of stylistic figures, which return obsessively, in an obvious attempt to deepen the feeling of existential anguish.

It is surprising that the definition of Bacovianism was sometimes made paradoxically, common conclusions referring only to evidence such as: the austerity and simplicity of the

poetic means, the frequency of mechanical processes, the sharing of a fundamental expressionist existentialism, symbolically manifested.

Critical contradictions can be encountered even in the field of poetic technique. From the contradictions of opinions between Lovinescu and Călinescu, to inventories at the lexical level with diametrically opposite conclusions of Ion Caraion or Sanda Golopentia, this attitude is obvious. Kernel Bacovianism thus remains ineffable, it can always be approximated and only apparently captured.

Although the two views are not mutually exclusive at a deep level, their basis must be pointed out as clearly impressionist. The sometimes-adverse reactions of criticism, the contradictory opinions of the exegetes of Bacovian poetry, attempt to define Bacovianism, to place the poet in one current or another, which only demonstrates the value of a great, modern and current poetry. Bacovia, through his simple speech of great depth, imposes himself in the literary Romanian landscape (despite some negative criticism) through radical innovations that changed the path of poetry from traditionalism to modernity.

References:

- Bacovia, G. (2009). *Plumb* [Lead]. București: Editura Litera.
- Boldea, I. (2005). *Istoria didactică a poeziei românești* [The didactic history of Romanian poetry]. Brașov: Editura AULA.
- Fanache, V. (1994). *Bacovia, ruptura de utopia romantică* [Bacovia, the Separation from Romantic Utopia]. Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Dacia.
- Flămând, D. (1979). *Introducere în opera lui G. Bacovia* [Introduction to the Work of G. Bacovia]. București: Editura Minerva.
- Flămând, D. (2007). *Ascunsul Bacovia* [The cryptic Bacovia]. București: Editura Pergamon.
- Goci, A. (2001). *Geneza și structura poeziei românești în secolul XX* [The genesis and structure of Romanian poetry in the 20th century]. București: Editura Grama.
- Huret, J. (2022). On literary evolution: An 1891 interview with Stéphane Mallarmé, translated from the French by poet Cid Corman, Caesura magazine, May 2, 2022 <https://caesuramag.org/posts/on-literary-evolution-interview-stephane-mallarme-cid-corman>
- Iliescu, A. (1985). *Poezia simbolistă românească* [The Romanian symbolistic poetry]. București: Editura Minerva.
- Mancaș, M. (1991). *Limbajul artistic românesc în secolul XX (1900-1950)* [The Romanian artistic language in the 20th century]. București: Editura Științifică
- Șiugariu, I. (2011). *George Bacovia studii critice* [George Bacovia critical studies]. București: Editura Dacia XXI
- Trandafir, C. (2001). *Poezia lui Bacovia* [Bacovia's poetry]. București: Editura Saeculum.