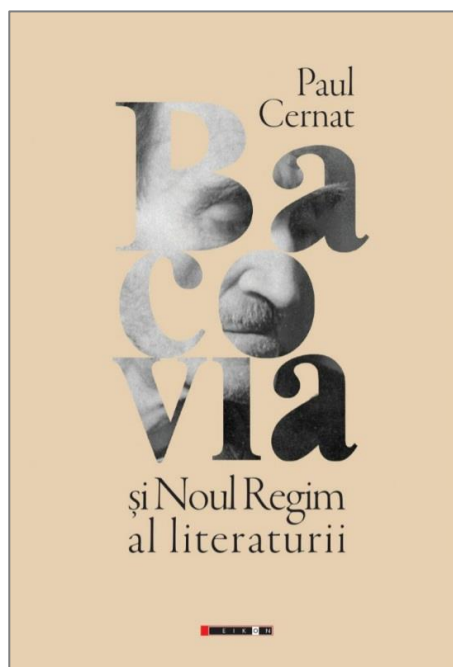


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**Paul Cernat, *Bacovia și Noul Regim al literaturii*,  
București: Eikon, 2022, 446 p.**

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Paul Cernat's recent volume, *Bacovia și Noul Regim al literaturii* (*Bacovia and the New Regime of Literature*), is an in-depth analysis of Bacovia's case by delving into the history of reception, underscoring that "it is not so much the validity of the evaluations that is of interest here, as the «mutation of aesthetic values» that favored or, on the contrary, disfavored the reception of one segment or another of Bacovian literature" (p.6), hence the division into *the old regime*, respectively *the new regime* of criticism. The book's main aim is obvious right from the title: the rehabilitation of those volumes that were overlooked by what the critic calls *The Old Regime of Criticism* which includes the commentators who privileged the debut volume (*Plumb*), identifying in the following ones signs of creative decline and, implicitly, an involution. However, the later poetic generations (from the war generation to the Generation 2000 and post-2000)

relate to the last volumes, as Cernat convincingly demonstrates when he compiles an inventory of influences, based on the testimonies of writers regarding the influence of Bacovia and inventorying, at the same time, poems with references in the verses or in the title to the poetry of the last Bacovia. Aligning alongside the commentators who argue that the volumes published after *Plumb* does not mark a regression, but, on the contrary, the intuition of a new paradigm (*the new regime of literature*), Cernat pleads for the existence of two directions/ "two Bacovianisms" that would characterize the path from *Plumb* to *Stanțe*: "the symbolist-decadent one" and the one "of «shorthand» notation – a term taken from Mircea Scarlat - demetaphorized, direct", the latter

revealing not the involution, but the awareness of the limits of the models assimilated until then.

To reconstruct the writer's profile and the trajectory of his work, the critic turns to the available resources, consulting the critical editions of the work and even comparing variants of the texts, from the one in the manuscripts to the published versions, when they serve to explain Bacovia's options. Regarding the reception, in addition to the exhaustive exploration of the references, there are also exposed cases in which the critics revise themselves pleading in favor or against the writer in question (the examples of Manolescu, Vladimir Streinu). The sources of documentation include related documents that can shed light on some aspects from both work and biography, such as Mușoiu's security file, also relevant for Bacovia's political beliefs, interviews, memoir volumes of relatives or personalities with whom Bacovia intersected: the contributions of Agatha Grigorescu-Bacovia, *Amintirile despre Bacovia (Memories of Bacovia)* of grandson Maximilian Vasiliu; I.M. Rascu, *Memorii și medalioane literare (Memories and Literary Medallions)*; Mihail Sadoveanu, *Pagini de jurnal și documente inedite (Diary Pages and Original Documents)*; Tudor Opris, *Pietre la templul adevărului (Stones at the Temple of Truth)*. The documents consulted reveal the portrait of a multifaceted writer which invalidates some of the clichés attached to both the author and his work.

In accordance with the idea of the two Bacovianisms, a significant part of the volume explores Bacovia's adherence to symbolism, with nuances regarding the specific difference that the Romanian poet brings in relation to the foreign representatives of the current. In the chapters dedicated to the analysis of the imaginary, there are delineated themes and motifs specific to symbolism ("morbid Bachovianism", with the "figures of fall and dissolution", "meteorology of poetry", urbanism and technological innovations – in *The Poetry of Electricity and Asphalt*) to demonstrate that, in fact, the writer relates to the models, but eventually stands in their proximity to expose conventions, in order to finally release from the tutelage of the influences. Cernat's idea is that, in Bacovia's case, there is not so much an overcoming of symbolism as a "structural incompatibility", which simultaneously allows "the situation inside and outside the current" (p.103), considering, on the one hand, the foreign influences and, on the other hand, the reference to Eminescian romances. Taking into account the elements that characterize Bacovia's poetry from the first volumes, the critic launches a plea in favor of a "de-idealized symbolism" (p. 103) or even pseudo-symbolism that manifests itself through the lack of encryption. Consequently, "the function of Bacovian poetry is no longer, can no longer be, a visionary, prophetic or militant one, but much more modest - nevertheless essential: a technique of survival at the limit" (p. 106). Existence at the limit implies the integration of the biographical component that allows the investigation from the inside of the deficiencies of the outside world, taking into account the fact that "«disease as a metaphor» of the dying century becomes, in *Plumb*, an anagolon of his own suffering" (p.235). At the same time, Cernat depicts, from the level of themes and motifs identified, the changes produced in Bacovian writing and the way in which the writer manages to produce mutations both within his own formula and in the literary landscape. For example, in *The Meteorology of Poetry* the reference to autumn is intended to signal the difference between the poems in *Plumb* and the later ones, "where the old musicality

gets an abrasive-modern note and an acute grip on the real" (p. 132). Similarly, the appearance of ravens in the last books is seen as a path to de-symbolization: "the poetic significance of ravens does not remain the same over time; symbolically marked in the age of *Plumb*, it will progressively de-symbolize itself, until the confidential irony of *Stanțe burgheze*" (p. 394).

Next to the sections that explore the Bacovian imaginary are those oriented towards the writer's profile, with notable effects on the reception of the work. Thus, clichés appearing in criticism are taken up polemically, in order to be deconstructed, such as, for example, the signaling of madness and Bacovian aphasia, as indicators of involution, being, in fact, "an effect of the confusion between the person and *persona*" (p.242). In the chapter *A Poet of Madness*, Cernat explains the appearance of the signs of madness starting from the biographical background which, combined with the decadent conventions, generates a personal imprint as "the poet drills, under the cover of fashionable lyrical discourses, a language of his own use of neurosis, psychosis, imbalance and alienation" (p.238). In contrast to the alienated label appears the idea of the one who stages the speech of an alienated person and controls it rationally: "Bacovia does not write, cannot write from within his own crises, but post festum, «when it's quiet». He therefore simulates the confusion, recalling and transcribing it; he enters, that is to say, into the experience already surpassed as in an assumed role as if it were life itself" (p.246). The self-censorship of some verses that could jeopardize his recovery during the totalitarian regime is also seen as a sign of lucidity, the selection of verses demonstrating "awareness of the ideological charge of any word" (p.322). The extension of the idea of a rational Bacovia appears in the chapter *Cogito and Reflexivity* where Cernat nuances opinions explored to a little extent, such as those of Ion Caraion, or Constantin Călin, that offer relevant insights. The exercise of inventorying the references to thought in Bacovian poetry reveals a continuity, since these references appear from the debut volume crossing the last volumes as well, although the change is registered by diminishing the morbid notes in favor of recording the elements that make up the everyday setting. What emerges from the analysis of the semantic fields associated with thought is that "the cogito is not only a reflexive exercise, but the precondition of existence: the entire Bacovian poetry involves, after all, the overlap between thought and lived. An existential-reflexive poetry, not a genuine, cenesthetic or artificial-theatrical one" (p. 362).

Another assumption is that of a Bacovia dismantled of the theoretical insight. The idea is questioned through the examination of the book fund highlighted by the numerous quotations from the work which reveal, in the poetry's case, the reference to internal referents (Traian Demetrescu) or external ones (Poe, Verlaine, Rimbaud etc.) as a way of bringing the conventions to light, activating the metatextual dimension through the writer's pose that can be found both in his poetic and prose texts. Considered as extensions of poetry, Bacovian prose excels when the confessional notation is used and fails with the tendency towards objectification. Through language or narrative techniques, with the attention given to the direct recording of the daily data, intriguing associations are made, Bacovian proses becoming compatible with those of Hortensia Papadat Bengescu, Doina Ioanid, Gheorghe Crăciun, Gabriel Marineasa and others.

Metaliterary fragments also reveal "a writer's aesthetic consciousness that expresses itself better in and through his own literature than in interviews or articles" (p. 343). However, the exploration of interviews alongside some fragments of the texts in verse and prose reveal, beyond the clumsiness of expressing ideas about literary creed, which confirms the "ineptitude for conceptual discourse", a voice that goes against theorizations with a persiflant attitude proving that "not the «Aphasic» degeneration took over Bacovia's late lyrics, but irony" (p. 369). Irony thus appears as a fundamental dimension of the writing, counterbalancing the existential sadness and becoming, at the same time, a "symptom of the desacralization of poetry" (p.399) and a mark of "defensive lucidity" (p. 404) so that, later on, it also appears as a form of a masked protest against the triumphalist attitude inscribed in the political context, the smile functioning only as an ephemeral form of hope. The repudiation of the defiant attitude that allows a critical look through distancing is, in fact, responsible for the poet's failures: "every time the poet indulges in the manner, conventions of romanticism and decadent symbolism – abandoning the 'realistic' notations that give sharpness to his lyrics and at the ironic distance –it fails poetically" (p.264).

Through the elements exposed so far, Paul Cernat's volume obviously represents an important contribution from the series of research dedicated to Bacovia, adding nuances to the last stage of Bacovian writing and demonstrating, through an exceptional documentation, the compatibility with new poetic tendencies, while deconstructing preconceptions that have obscured some defining elements of writing. A volume that manages to highlight the achievements without overlooking the failures, reconstructing the profile of a rather polyphonic "mutant" who managed to defy the framings by reinventing himself.

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