

Musical aspects of George Cosbuc's Poetry (150 years from his birth)

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Abstract: *This paper aims to reflect (at the musical level too) the special sonority of George Cosbuc's poetry, 150 years from the birth of this national poet. We will provide relevant poetic and sonorous examples, and offer data from a rarely performed analysis concerning the semantics of the poetic verse and its musical aspects.*

Key-words: *music, poetry, semantics, expressiveness*

1. Preliminary considerations

“Theories about beauty and art are known in Chinese, Indians philosophers writings, but especially in the Greek ones“ (Arsenescu 2004, 5) and the connection between music and philosophy are millennia old. In the spirit of this tradition we continue a personal research on the sound reference in the poetic text. Romanian poetic universe has this year a landmark in the birth anniversary of George Coşbuc, described particularly shortly after his departure into eternity: “Coşbuc’s poetry contains the deep wisdom of simple people who, over the drama of death, has the supreme resignation coming from the same ethnic tradition of Mioriţa“ (Gyr 1943, 1).

George Călinescu saw him in a professional, critical perspective: “poeziile sale, fără colori deosebite, încântă prin spectaculosul folcloric și sunt un fenomen literar turburator prin bătrâneța ghicită, țărănească “² (Călinescu 1982, 210). Coşbuc „a fost considerat poetul țărănimii, cântărețul frumosului real în viața țaranului român“³ (Goga 2004, 19).

The aim of this paper is to reflect (at the musical level) the special sonority of George Cosbuc’s poetry, 150 years from the birth of this national poet. The paper will provide relevant poetic and sonorous examples, and offer data from a rarely performed analysis concerning the semantics of the poetic verse and its musical aspects.

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² “his poems, without special colors, are so special by the spectacular folklore; they are a literary phenomenon through the wisdom of peasant“

³ “Coşbuc was considered a poet of the peasantry, the beautiful singer of their real life”

George Coșbuc is one of the classical poets of the Romanian literature, literary critic and translator, member of the Romanian Academy since 1916. George Coșbuc emphasized the human personality, its evolution in an authentic peasant world, being a precursor of the populist movement. If other authors of that time favoured the idea of landscape, of natural beauty, Coșbuc focused on the solar, idyllic side of the Romanian peasant's soul, insisting on the human being.

2. Theoretical perspectives

From the point of view of the prosody, he left a distinctive mark on the Romanian literature, being a special artisan of this poetic dimension: he used a wide range of meters and rhythms, from those of the popular poetry to the terza rima. As translator, George Coșbuc produced a complete version of Dante's work, *Divina commedia* – which shows his unique erudition in the Romanian cultural landscape. George Coșbuc has the great merit of introducing genres of oriental poetry (such as the ghazal) in the Romanian poetry.

He was the eighth of 14 children in the family of the Greek Catholic priest Sebastian Coșbuc and of Maria, the daughter of the Greek Catholic priest Avacum of Telciu.[1] He spent his childhood in Hordou, in the mythical universe of the village, surrounded by his mother's fairytales. He received the first elements of his education from the peasant Ion Guriță, from a neighbouring village, about whom Maria Coșbuc heard that "he knew stories". From the old church singer Tănăsucă Mocodean, Coșbuc learnt to read when he was only five years old.

3. Analytical perspectives

We have studied on other occasions the auditory resonances in poetic, religious texts with metaphoric and semantic load, full of poetic or mystical symbols. In George Coșbuc's work, these references to active auditory elements are more frequent than in other cases (especially if we compare him with other great Romanian poets. A few examples highlight this fact: in his poetry *Noapte de vară* (Summer night) there are references to noises produced by turning carts, young lads and herds:

NOAPTE DE VARĂ (1893)

Care cu poveri de muncă
Vin încet și scârțind;
Turmele s-aud mugind,
Și flăcăii vin pe luncă

Hăulind.

SUMMER NIGHT

Carts with work loads
Come slowly squeaking;
You can hear the herds mooing,
And the lads coming from the plains
Whistling.

In another fragment of the same poem there are musical resonances of the poetic lyrics:

Şi, cu poala prinsă-n brău, Vin cântând în stoluri fete De la grâu.	And, with the lap of their dresses at their waist, Young girls come singing From the wheat crops.
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...De la gărlă-n pâcuri dese Zgomotoşi copiii vin; Satul e de vuiet plin; Fumul alb alene iese Din cămin.	...From the brook large bands Of rioting children come; The village is full of noise; The white smoke slowly rises From the chimney.
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Several stanzas later, George Coşbuc includes rhythmic valences in his lyrics, expressed by the rhythm of the waves; the figure of speech is preceded by references to one of the metaphysical musical instruments: the bell.

Ca un glas domol de clopot Sună codrii mari de brad; Ritmice valurile cad, Cum se zbate-n dulce ropot Apa-n vad.	Like a gentle bell song The fir trees ring; The waves fall rhythmically, As water slowly bursting In the riverbed.
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In the same poem, Coşbuc exploits poetic notions related to sounds and noises (musical or natural), as well as those related to silence, peace (different concepts in his poetry, but also in music semantics):

Dintr-un timp şi vântul tace; Satul doarme ca-n mormânt- Totu-i plin de Duhul Sfânt: Liniste-n văzduh şi pace Pe pământ.	After a while even the wind is silent; The village is quiet like a grave- Everything is full of the Holy Spirit: Silence in the sky and peace On earth.
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(...) Dar din ce în ce s-alină Toate zgomotele-n sat, Muncitorii s-au culcat. Liniştea-i acum deplină Şi-a-nnoptat.	(...) Slowly the noises in the village Die down, The workers have gone to bed. The silence is now complete And it has grown dark.
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...Şi prin satul adormit Doar vrun câine-n somn mai latră Răguşit.	...And through the sleepy village Only some dog barks in his sleep Hoarsely.
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Other such poetic references can be encountered in the poem CRĂIASA ZÂNELOR (The Queen of the Fairies), in which silence protects certain secrets of very pure angelic and childish universes:

(...zânele) ușoare, ca de neguri, fug Prin liniștea adâncă.	light fairies ran, like from a mist, Through the deep silence.
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In the poem MÂNIOASĂ (Angry Woman), Coșbuc brings forth the metaphor of the lover's voice, which seems to resonate with the nightingale's elaborate song:

În privighetori să-mi pară Glasul Linei că-l ascult.	The nightingale's song resembles Lina's voice.
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George Coșbuc's creation includes many poetic metaphors which hide the elements of the auditory sonorous universe; the poet is very sensitive to incentives of this kind, which shows once again the depth of his poetic thinking and expression. For example, his poem NU TE-AI PRICEPUT (You did not understand) talks about the metaphoric cry of grief as poetic image of loneliness, of lack of resonance of his message to his lover.

Și plângea durerea-n mine Că tu nu te-ai priceput.	And grief cried in me Because you did not understand.
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The same poetic phenomenon can be observed in the poem CÂNTECUL FUSULUI (The Spindle's Song), in which the song is a metaphor for the loneliness of the girl who spins the spindle:

Eu mi-am făcut un cântec Stând singură-n iatac- Eu mi-am făcut un cântec, Și n-aș fi vrut să-l fac. Dar fusul e de vină Că se-nvârtea mereu, Și ce-mi cânta nainte Cântam pe urmă eu.	I wrote a song Sitting alone in my room - I wrote myself a song, Although I would not have wanted. But the spindle is to blame Because it keeps on spinning, And what it sang to me I then sang to myself.
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The spindle takes over – in an imaginary song – the pain of the girl who spins alone, thinking about her loved one; music plays, in this case, the same role as the myth of Margareta at the reel (subject who is the source of many cult literary works):

Și-ngrop în palme capul Și-mi cânt amarul tot.	To bury my head in my palms And to sing all my grief.
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Am stat la roata morii,
 Şi roata umblă des,
 Şi roata morii cântă
 Cuvinte cu-nţeles.

...

Şi-am mers pe lunci, dar jalnic,
 d-a lungul peste lunci,
 Cum plâng şi cântă toate!

I stood at the mill wheel,
 And the wheel kept on turning,
 And the mill wheel kept on singing
 Words full of wisdom.

...

And I walked through plains, but sad,
 across the plains,
 How everything was crying and
 singing!

Another representative creation from this point of view is also FATA MORARULUI (The Miller's Daughter), a poem in which the poetic lyrics convey the tension of the hero's longing under the form of a metaphor concerning the art of sounds:

Sub plopii rari apele sună
 Şi plopii rari vâjâie-n vânt,
 Iar roata se-nvârte nebună!
 Eu stau la covată şi cânt,
 Dar singură nu ştiu ce cânt,
 Şi-n ochii mei lacrimi s-adună.

The waters sound under the poplars
 And the rare poplars swing in the wind,
 And the wheel turns like mad!
 I sit by the kneading trough and sing,
 But I do not know what I sing,
 And my eyes fill with tears.

The auditory elements which contribute to the story, the narrative context, are also constant elements of George Coşbuc's poetry: in the poem NUNTA ZAMFIREI (Zamfira's wedding) we find numerous sonorous characterizations of the wedding guests arriving to the event:

De cum a dat în fapt de zori
 Veneau cu fete şi feciori
 Trăsnind rădvanele de crai,
 Pe netede poteci de plai.
 Prin vulturi vântul viu vuia,
 Vrun prinţ mai tânăr când trecea.

As soon as it was daybreak
 Girls and boys came
 In noble carriages,
 On smooth roads.
 The wind blew lively through the eagles,
 When a young prince passed by.

There are rare direct references to proper musical manifestations, but they are especially eloquent when they occur, betraying the poet's particular attachment to the musical dominant; the poem NUNTA ZAMFIREI (Zamfira's wedding) reminds us of wedding music, but also of folkloric authentic music:

Şi ca la mândre nunţi de crai
 Ieşit-aşn cale-ales alai
 De sfetnici mulţi şi mult popor
 Cu muzici multe-n fruntea lor;

Like those from proud noble weddings
 Elegant entourages crossed our path,
 Made up of many advisers and people
 With music at the fore;

Și-n vremea cât s-au cununat S-a-întins poporul adunat Să joace-n drum după tilinci: Feciori, la zece fete, cinci, Cu zdrăngăneii la opinci Ca-n port de sat.	And when they married The people gathered there To dance to the whistle song: Ten girls for five boys, With bells at their feet As if in national costume.
Trei pași la stânga binișor Și alți trei pași la dreapta lor; Se prind de mâini și se desprind, S-adună cerc și iar se-ntind, Și bat pământul tropotind În tact ușor.	Three steps to the left Three steps to the right; They hold hands and then they let go, Form a circle and then separate, And pound the ground On an easy rhythm.

4. Conclusions

“The main purpose of art is to introduce auditors into a world of feelings; some of them escape by the control of rationality“ (Mos, 2008, 55): in terms of current research (part of a broader research, that concerns us for a long time), we try to highlight certain sonorous aspects not direct related to Cosbuc’s poetry, establishing bridges with musical art.

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