



Yoshiro Sakamoto

Ștefan Baciu. Archipelagic Poet from Romania

ABSTRACT

Ștefan Baciu, a Romanian exile poet born in Brașov who escaped the oppression of the communist regime after WWII in his country, vastly wandered across the oceans, travelling through many cities such as Berne, Rio de Janeiro or Seattle, and reaching the Hawaiian Sandwich Archipelago. During his odyssey, he created his own cosmological geography through the poetic fusion of his fragmental memories of places and people. It was also generated by the melancholic nostalgia caused by the loss of his “home.” This article attempts to carve out the force of Baciu’s “poetry” through the “archipelagic vision” advocated by Ryuta Imafuku. He promotes an alternative view which dissolves the modern dominant and normative world-perception into the fluid and contingent world of the ocean. Imafuku was also inspired by Baciu’s poetic life to weave this vision. Their views of the world resonate with each other across the ocean.

KEYWORDS

Romanian Literature; Ștefan Baciu; Ryuta Imafuku; “Archipelagic Vision”.

YOSHIRO SAKAMOTO

Tokyo University of Foreign Studies,
Tokyo, Japan
o.clipa.de.tacere.la.mare@gmail.com

În arhipelag de stele
rime caut : Brașov și Mele
Guatemala, Sighișoara
și în piept îmi bate vioara¹

Et que serait-ce que l’Archipel?
La dispersion du non-Etre,
qui réassemble l’étant du monde.
L’étant comme étants.²

1. The Encounter of Two Archipelagic Visionaries

In the spring of 1992, soon after the end of the Cold War, the encounter between two *hommes de lettre* of completely different origin who had vastly drifted across the “Americas” on similar trails, took place. The two met in Oahu Island of the Sandwich Archipelago, Hawaii, far off in the Pacific Ocean.

One of them was Ștefan Baciu, a Romanian exile poet born in Brașov who escaped the oppression of the communist regime after WWII in his country, wandering across the oceans mainly through the two Americas, Latin American countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Peru, etc. and finally settling in the periphery of North America, in Seattle and Hawaii. He wrote poems, memoirs, literary criticism, essays and articles expressing political opinions, which resulted in more



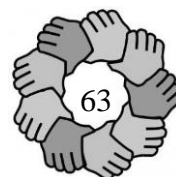
than 100 books and 5000 articles in six languages, the outcome of his continuous, life-long writing in all the places that he had lived in and visited. Throughout this everlasting odyssey, he even created his own cosmological geography through the poetic fusion of the fragmental memories of places and people he loved. Yet, his literary activity may also have supported him throughout the mourning and melancholy caused by the loss of his homeland, the places he had visited, his precious friends and family in exile, including Mira, his beloved wife, who had always accompanied him, but had passed away in 1977. He was left alone in the Hawaiian Sandwich Archipelago, and even worse, he almost lost his eyesight. In the last years of his life, he spent time reminiscing his life of itinerancy in solitary “darkness.”

The other writer is Ryuta Imafuku, an anthropologist and cultural critic from the Japanese archipelago, who has also travelled and investigated many places across entire America, such as Mexico, Brazil, Cuba and the U.S.A. Since the middle of the 1980s, Imafuku has tried to conceptualize the plurality of “Americas” against the monocular view of a singular “America”, as a modern dominant cultural value represented by political-economic-military imperialism, (post-)colonial exploitations, the slavery underpinning its social development, consumerism, monetarism or tourism, which gathered steam during the period of the collapse of the Soviet communist regime and attempted to homogenize the world through the power of nation and capital. In contraposition to that, the term “Americas,” pluralized America, was used by Imafuku as an alternative vision in order to articulate cultural diversity and dynamics. In 1991, one year before his encounter with Baciú, he had just published *Creolism – The Heterology of Culture*³, in which he discussed

strategies for rejecting the essentialism of a monocular identification of the subject within modern normative frameworks such as nation, race, and ethnicity. In this work he cited innumerable writers, poets, cultural theorists and philosophers who struggle on the borders between white and black, colonizer and colonized, ruler and subject, as Creole, Mestizo, Chicano, etc., and whose ideas are based on solidarity through the cultural consciousness of hybridity, fluidity, border-crossing, heterogeneity and multilingualism that tries to overcome modern dominant values.

After declaring “Creolism” as encapsulating the dynamic plurality of “Americas,” Imafuku attempted to shed yet another light on this issue. Especially, he was concerned about the “Americas” of the immigrants from the East, fleeing the communist regime, and wanted to examine what cultural prism emerges from this *mélange* of exiles from the east with the “Americas.” To find out more about this certain issue, he met Ștefan Baciú, an exile poet from communist Eastern Europe who had been a literary celebrity in the “Americas,” deeply engaging in the Latin American literary scene during the post-war era. Baciú had published many important volumes, including two excellent anthologies, *Anthology of Latin American Surrealist Poetry*⁴ and *Anthology of Latin American Poetry*⁵, the first anthologies collecting representative poems from the vast range of Latin American modernism. In an essay recalling the encounter with Ștefan Baciú, Imafuku wrote that the purpose of visiting him seemed to be immediately achieved on the first glimpse in Baciú’s room in “Arcadia,” the name of his final residence in Honolulu.

I approached Baciú and shook hands with him. He was holding a brand new white book in the other hand. He started explaining about the book, after



the brief greeting, that it is his first poetry book, recently republished in Bucharest. He seemed to find it difficult even to stand up straight and shake hands with me. Seeing his vulnerable figure, I felt that the purpose of this visit had almost been achieved at that moment. An exile poet provided with nursing care in a senior residence, pleased with the republication of his first Romanian poetry book, which had originally come out in 1935, when he was just 17 years old. This spoke volumes...⁶

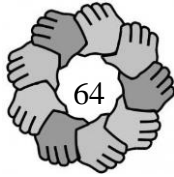
Facing Baciu's vulnerable appearance surrounded by a transparent atmosphere of death, Imafuku felt the complexity of his delicate and nameless sentiments in the life-long trail of his itinerancy: melancholy, longing, joy... originating in the absolute distance to his home, and in the countless encounters with and losses of places and people.

He tried to feel the depth of this exile poet's sentiments that cannot be reached by analytic and theoretic, or even linear usages of words. It seemed to him that only "poetry" could do that, since he had found it at the core of Baciu's life. Actually his life itself was "poetry." As the force to survive in his itinerancy, he was gifted by it.⁷ Imafuku tried to see the "Americas" from Baciu's point of view, yet they seemed to have dissolved into his "poetic" life itself. Imafuku wrote: "Baciu's struggle to survive in his solitude, ultimately arming himself with 'poetry', can be seen as a universal choice of exiles."⁸ Imafuku saw this "strategy" as a common way of surviving in itinerancy for every exile poet. After encountering Baciu, he had a vision of the exiles' imaginary community. "At that time, I envisioned a dreamlike scene. In it immense numbers of windows of the residences in which all exiles live came to the mountain of Manoa,

led by the voice of a vagabond who had crossed oceans and continents."⁹ He imagined that all exile poets from all over the world who resisted suppression and struggled for their lives and liberty gathered in the resonance of their voices of "poetry." Inspired by this imagination, Imafuku elaborated his vision in a more expanded range of thought from this period on through getting inspiration from countless poets, writers, artists and philosophers not only from the "Americas," but from all over the world. Precisely he indicated the birth of this vision as "Archipelagic" in an essay about the life of a prestigious Russian exile poet, Josef Brodsky and the cities he had passed through.

Brodsky... stands motionless in-between the river and the sea in Venice, and measures his own thought as exile with the various heights of the tides whose water seeps in there, witnessing the coalescence of the Adriatic and Baltic water expanses in their miraculous reflection....The water cities which get connected to each other in the exile's diasporic perception of the world, also mean the birth of a new imagination that sees the world as the archipelagic linkages among the "water cities."¹⁰

Imafuku imagines the network of the exiles' voices echoing through the sea and the ocean. In the sea, the exiles' imaginations connect places with places, time with time, beyond the normative sense of reality. In this "archipelagic" vision, it is not difficult to also hear Ștefan Baciu's voice, which echoes across the oceans and the places he was attached to, such as Brașov, Berne, Brazil, Seattle, Honolulu... In 1993, only a year – after the dialogue with Imafuku, Ștefan Baciu passed away. His entire work is still not read and evaluated



enough today, despite its importance in modern literature across borders¹¹. Yet, in the “Archipelagic vision,” his life and literature can be unfolded in poetic solidarity with other authors against the violent and rigid regime of modernity. In this article, I examine the poetic force of Baciu’s literature through the “archipelagic vision,” especially concentrating on his posthumous compilation of short poems, all consisting of rhymed four lines, titled *Over One Thousand Quatrains – under the tâmp... from Honolulu–*, written in the last three years before his death in Hawaii. He wrote at least one quatrain every day in the solitude in a far off island in the Pacific Ocean, just like keeping a diary, recalling the trail of his odyssey, collecting fragmentally the memories of lost places and lost friends, dispersed across the oceans. He wrote these lines, resonating the atmosphere of death, with deep melancholy. This volume reflects or rather reconceives his whole life and poetry itself.

2. Poetic Resistance against Modern History

In this article, I will show how the archipelagic vision unfolds in Ștefan Baciu’s poetry in connection with Imafuku’s understanding of this idea. In 2008, Ryuta Imafuku published *Archipelago – Mundi*¹², a book which manifests the archipelagic vision as an alternative viewpoint on the world, against the modern global domination of the world. At the beginning of the book entitled *The Sea Notes*, he declares his rejection of the normative order built throughout modern History, which is full of blood and pain – colonialism, imperialism, cultural and economic exploitation, the Holocaust, concentration camps, environmental destruction. – Instead he craves for the

reversal of the modern world-perception into an oceanic or, rather, archipelagic world perception.

The external and internal ruins covering the world today, the paradox of “modernity” – the progress of History, which was led by oceanic transits. The paradox of the nations’ global domination based on the continental principle, by ruling the oceans. Shouldering all things mentioned above with pain, History must be inverted into the state of the ocean, so as to allow the emergence of the unity and resonance of relations which were sunk deep into the ocean, on the surfing edge of joyous memories, rejecting the order or system imposed on the continent.¹³

For Imafuku, the essential notions representing modern values – such as nation, race, and ethnicity – were the invention of the “continental” principles, which are normative, static and rigid, fixed and ensured by authority. The archipelagic vision, which comes from the sea, leads to cultural non-essentialism, represented by creolisation, fluidity, and elasticity. Its open solidarity is celebrated through the practices of vernacular culture¹⁴, like songs, dancing, poetry and other artistic activities.¹⁵

In this vision, primarily the resonant voices of the dead in dreadful history must be listened to in the sea. For instance, in Imafuku’s *Archipelago-Mundi*, the poem “The sea is History” written by Derek Walcott, a creole poet from Saint-Lucia island in the Caribbean sea, is cited as one of the most important voices resonating in the vision.

Where are your monuments, your
battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,

in that gray vault. The sea. The sea
has locked them up. *The sea is History*.
(...) Exodus.
Bone soldered by coral to bone,
mosaics
mantled by the benediction of the
shark's shadow.¹⁶

Here, the painful lament of the dead slaves echoes throughout the sea. They were jettisoned from the ships and sank into the depths with their bones soldered to each other by coral at the bottom of the sea. They did not have any monuments, any national records to acknowledge their truths, even their existence, they just sank in the sea. Authorized, conventional History abstracts and ignores their individual lives and stories. In the catastrophe of slavery trading which is one of the origins of modernity, countless people were namelessly annihilated. Walcott's poem "The sea is History" tries to engrave the dead's existence on History.

In this sea of suffering, Ștefan Baciu uttered his voice from other archipelagos. As Imafuku does in his archipelagic vision, Baciu bundled the resonant voices of the poets, writers and artists struggling against modern oppressive history. He collected the words of his fellow poets and writers dispersing across the oceans in which the national borders and differences of language dissolve, so as to create an independent and intimate sphere of poetic resistance.¹⁷

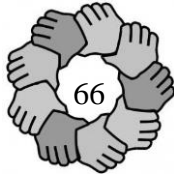


3. Against the Consistency of Time and Space

To refuse the linear description of History in the modern era is the prime attitude underlying the archipelagic vision. Thereby, Koji Taki, a philosopher who highly inspired Imafuku's thought, wrote a fable-like interpretation of *Titanic's foudering*. Taki saw the accident of the Titanic as the symbolic catastrophe of modernity.¹⁸ Everybody knows what tragedy happened on this majestic "unsinkable" ship, but no one knows who drifted away and died in the cold sea, or the stories of every victim. Authorized History ignores its victims' individual lives in catastrophes. The only one that knows the dead is the sea, which embraces them at its depth, as lamented in Walcott's "The Sea is History." Besides, the Titanic was the most "advanced" ship, seen as a symbol of the accomplishment of technological progress at that time. The notion of "progress" or "evolution" is a modern value. In this modern context, time is solely linear, heading toward the future, and never back to the past, like a ship, which only advances forward at sea.

This imagination of the catastrophe caused by the linearity of modern times is strongly influenced by Walter Benjamin's "The angel of history,"¹⁹ which is described in the 9th of his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*.

A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures *the angel of history*. His face is turned toward the past. Where we



perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.²⁰

Inspired by Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, Benjamin imagined "The angel of history" who resists the storm of progress going forward to the paradisiacal future. The angel regards the past and tries to awaken the dead and to collect the debris in the ruins of History, which had been annihilated in the catastrophe caused by that storm. Yet, it was an impossible task in the face of the storm's strong wind.

Ștefan Baciu's poetry in exile overlaps with Benjamin's "The angel of history". Here, the following quatrain comes into mind.

Între Berna și Geneva
Paul Klee mă însoțește
îngeri negri încep greva
și-mi vorbesc – pe românește.

(Paul Klee accompanies me
Between Berne and Geneva
black angels start a strike
and they talk to me – in Romanian.)²¹

This quatrain coincidentally (or perhaps intentionally?) shares a similar theme with Benjamin's "angel of history," even though it apparently seems to talk about a personal memory during his stay in Switzerland that

could be a set piece on the train to Geneva after seeing Klee's paintings in the museum of Berne. Yet, it cannot be such a simple reminiscence, for the rejection of linear time also shows in his words. His quatrains always speak indirectly of the loss of his past time and places in exile, craving for their (impossible) recuperation. Klee's angels in the quatrain – black, not white, which may imply a rather pagan divinity – break the linear time passing by, and from the crevice, Baciu could hear their whispering in "Romanian", his poetic language, which had always accompanied him beyond times and places, crossing any borders.

Another quatrain also can be read in resonance with Benjamin's idea about History.

Poezie ca o mască sau un steag
Peste țări și-oceane ai venit cu mine
Poezie ești busolă și pe drum toiağ
Peste ziduri ridicate între vechi ruine.

(Poetry, you are a mask or a flag
Across countries and oceans you came
with me
Poetry, you are a compass and a
walking stick for the road
Over walls standing among old ruins.)²²

Poetry had always led Baciu in his wandering life and helped him survive in solitary exile, coming over "the skyward debris" (in Benjamin's words) in the ruins of modern history. Ioana Baciu Margineanu, a Romanian literary critic and Baciu's sister, who wrote the preface for *Over One Thousand Quatrains*, cited the quatrain above in the preface. In this essay, she discusses the poetic principles of Baciu's quatrains: "the purpose and means for being able to survive in his sorrow and solitude through re-living his luminous past"²³. And about Baciu's poetic "geography," she writes the following:



an alchemy in which past and present, real and unreal and telluric and cosmic mutually infiltrate and determine each other, as in the entity of his poetry, the poet creates a self-generated “geography”, in which his the forest of his birth place – Tampa, Bucegi – raises the hills in the Pacific ocean, the sound of rings in the mioritic space resonates in the craters of the Pacific volcanoes. (...) Brașov, Bucharest from the poet’s young days are combined with cities like Berne, Rio de Janeiro, or others which sound unfamiliar, such as Tegucigalpa or Cochabamba. Streets in the city hill in Sighișoara connect to the old streets in Mexico City, a lilac in Warte blooms like mandarin in Tonga.²⁴

His quatrains are “his last poetic testament as a poetic continuity which presents itself in complete lyrical unity.”²⁵ She stated that Baciu’s life was in the complete unity with his poetry, in which time and space in his exile are mixed up, and this unity generates his own specific geography.

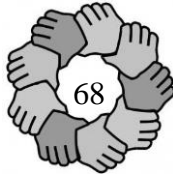
This poetic geography is the product of the reminiscence of his past to survive his present. In this process, the linearity of time and the homogeneity of space in our modern consciousness are completely disorganized. In the archipelagic vision, Imafuku calls this kind of deconstruction of the continuity of time and space, the art of “Anachronism (Parapraxis of Time)” and “Anatopism (Parapraxis of Location)”.

To understand the archipelagic vision, it is essential to have an imagination that liberates our thought into space, represented by the liquid form of the sea. In the conventional perception of modern knowledge, our historical recognition has been fiercely temporalized. It must be spatialized by pushing

it into the coral ocean and making use of the force of water whirl and infiltration in the ocean and seashore. Meaning is not generated in diachronic causal connections and rational explanatory systems, but in the poetic intensity of contingent encounters with things in concrete and elastic space. Through this, the archipelagic map comes to us, liberating our perception for the oppression of History and recordings in modern temporality into the spatial imagination in which rich voices and memories resonate.

To be aware of the practice of Anachronism one needs Anatopism, which is practiced when perception spatializes History. The known dependent-territorial “World Map,” as a representation of modern nationalism, would be disorganized and pushed into abeyance by this new cartographic sensibility. Archipelago is the name given to the force of a new imagination that generates such an independent-territorial map.²⁶

The archipelagic map delicately reflects the exiles’ voices or memories into the elastic and fluid imaginary space. The contingent events, encounters with people or places, which exiles experienced in itinerancy in modern catastrophic history, are the sources of “Anachronism” and “Anatopism”. This is also seen as the principle of Baciu’s poetic geography, charted throughout his exile.



4. Home and the Archipelagic Vision

The archipelagic map is created through the prism of exiles' memories, which mix various times and places in their itinerancy. Yet, naturally, in this map, their lost "homes" are an important part, since the literary sentiments of exiles are generated in-between the attraction of loss or nostalgia and the repulsion for leaving "home". These delicate sentiments cause "Anachronism" and "Anatopism." This passage examines how Baciu's "home" activates his poetry in the archipelagic vision.

As Ioana Baciu Margineanu wrote, "Baciu's poetry had been created with the magic of the power of 'Dor' (a Romanian expression for the inexpressive sentiment of nostalgia or loss)"²⁷, he always felt inexpressive nostalgia in the face of the loss of his "home" in his last years. He tried to find his "home" in exile, to sustain his life even during unbearable solitude. Therefore, his home country Romania was the privileged source for his poetry. The following quatrain precisely tells it.

Am plecat din "Prundul Rozelor"
Nu știam ce-i pribegia
Busolă mi-e cuvântul dor
Corabia mea se cheama România.

(I left "Rose Gravel" Street.
I didn't know what wandering meant
The word dor is my compass
My ship is called Romania.)²⁸

Also the fact that he wrote *Over One Thousand Quatrains* in Romanian as his language of poetry, tells about his nostalgia. Even if almost nobody could understand it in the solitary island far off in the Pacific

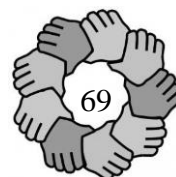
Ocean, he chose it in order to express his deep feelings at the end of his life.

Yet, Baciu's "Anachronism" (to recall the past times in his exile and to mix them up at present in his poetry writing) and "Anatopism"(his poetic geography as the result of the spatialization of "Anachronism") describe "his" Romania not as fixed, substantial or essential, but rather as imagined, dispersing, bleary and even portable. A representative poem which manifests the relationship between his "home" and poetry, written in his late years in Hawaii, called "Home" (in Romanian: "Patria") is reproduced here.

Home

I
Home is an apple
in a Japanese grocery window
on Liliha Street
in Honolulu, Sandwich Islands
or a gramophone record
heard in silence in Mexico
– Maria Tanase beside the volcano
Popocatepetl –
home is Brancusi's workshop in Paris
home is a Grigorescu landscape
(...)
home is a skylark that soars
anywhere
without borders and without plans
home is a Dinu Lipatti concert
in Lucerne, Switzerland, on a rainy
evening
home is this gathering of faces
of events and sounds
scattered across the globe
but home is
especially
a moment of silence.

This is home.



II

With home you can talk by telephone,
You can hear it in distant whispers,
Carry it in your pocket, like a comb,
Or find it decapitated in the papers.

It's not just earth or stone or air,
But a smell, a face, a twirl in the park,
A sound that echoes from anywhere,
A voice that pierces the midnight dark.

Because home is not an anthem bound,
illuminated, decorated, with border.
It's a shroud, in deepest dreams
rewound,
At dawn unravelled, in disorder.

Nor is home revived by boasts,
But by silence, by distance, by sorrow,
Squeezed from dust, on tropic coasts,
Scatter it around the world. in hope.

III

The steeple of Saint Nicholas in Schei,
The echo of the train off Mt. Tâmpa at night,
(...)

Father commenting on War and Peace,
Or a page of poetry by Nietzsche
(tapping into the book with his index
finger),
A cappuccino at the Crown

And this banknote of 500 lei,
Found in the bottom of a yellowed
envelope,
Brought I don't know how,
From Brașov to Brazil,
And then to Honolulu, Hawai'i,
Island of Oahu,
Sandwich Archipelago.²⁹

In part I, the consistent repetition of "home is..." gives us a deep impression of his nostalgia. Here, the voice of Maria Tanase echoes at the bottom of the volcano

in Mexico, and the Romanian Rhapsody of George Enescu in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, etc.

The things and people, which got out of Romania just like Baciu himself, encounter him on his exile journey, and they are regarded as his "home". It unboundedly spreads beyond borders, and it is also the gathering "of faces / of events and sounds"; concrete, tangible and perceptive things or events can represent his home. Yet, on the contrary, an abstract and mysterious expression, "a moment of silence" is emphasized as his "home" more than anything in the last line.

In part II – with its manifesto-like writing – Baciu poetically declares what is "home" in his poetry and what he seeks with it. Through the dazzling transformations and variations of "home", he overcomes the "distance" from it, emphasizing its portability or accessibility. It can suddenly approach him, like a sound, the wind, or a piercing voice in the dark night. Of course, this poetic practice of the imaginary recuperation of his "home" is originally generated from the sorrow of loss and is full of melancholic nostalgia. Yet, here obviously also a bright side of his poetic "home" is visible. By the distance, by silence, even by sorrow, he scatters "home" around the world in hope. He rejects putting it in the national framework, for example, with patriotic anthems or boasts. It doesn't have rigid and fixed forms. Rather it is an instant luminary woven in a dream and unravelled at dawn with pleasure.

Part III is full of his sentiment of "dor". The beginning lines are the flashbacks of his memories of the old days in Romania. They are juxtaposed with a fable episode, which represents his itinerancy. It's about the discovery of an envelope enclosing 500 lei accompanying him on his entire journey in exile without having noticed it. It is surely a symbol of Romania, yet it also seems to be



the incarnation of his whole wandering life and his poetry itself. Or, it may also be a gift from the distance just as a “sea-mail letter”, or from “home”, suddenly appearing.

Taking into consideration his nostalgic writing in the last lines about his journey (Braşov, Brazil, Honolulu, Hawaii, the island of Oafu, Sandwich Archipelago), the very last word of this poem, “Archipelago”, doesn’t merely signify the name of a geographical feature, but the constellation of the places that he lived in and he loved, and it implies the dispersive entity of his poetic life. This complex entity itself which created his identity may also be what he calls “home”.

Thoroughly reading this poem, we can see that Baciu’s “home” doesn’t simply mean his lost country, Romania. Rather, his poetry dissolves “Romania” into other places of the world and draws the “independent-territorial map” through his rich memories in his exile journey. This map is woven with two kinds of sentimental orientations, which seem to oppose each other: the sorrow of melancholic loss and the pleasure of unfolding it into the world with hope.

This paradoxical identification to his “home” is also done through overcoming the “distance” in his poetry, in the very instant epiphany of a mysterious sphere: as “a moment of silence” or “revived by distance, by silence and by sorrow”, “woven in dream and unravelled at dawn with pleasure”. Even if it is still not clear at this point what these expressions mean, it is significant to verify them, since *Over One Thousand Quatrains* also has same poetic principles: it was written in the bi-literal orients – internal struggle of solitary nostalgia and external disclosure of his poetry to the world, through combining “silence”, “distance” and “sorrow” of his exile to each other. Actually, they are

among the important words in his poetry and frequently appear in his quatrains.

In the next chapter, I read Baciu’s quatrains as an attempt to survive in his solitary nostalgia through disclosing a poetic communion with the world through the archipelagic vision.

5. The Poetic Communion with the World

In the last years of his exile when he wrote the quatrains, Baciu found himself in cruel solitude and deep nostalgia, filled with the atmosphere of his own death. He sustained his life through writing quatrains everyday, like keeping a “diary of poetry”. “Silence” is one of the most important words in his quatrains. There are over one hundred quatrains associated to “silence” in the book – including many words related to it such as mute (*mut* or *tacut*), silence (*tacere*), hush, or the symbolic movement of the index finger in front of the mouth, etc. Mostly, it represents the inexpressive pain of his sorrow and nostalgia. This is precisely implied in the following quatrains.

Tăceri cad peste mine seara
și stam de vorbă fără de cuvinte
Simt ca pe-o ranită povara
When the gatherings of old memories
accompany me.

(Silence falls on me at night
and we stand talking without words
I feel like being with the wounded
weight
Când mă’nsoțesc aduceri vechi
aminte.)³⁰

Scriu în aer c’un condei de vis
fluturi zboară peste mine
și coboară umbra lor pe manuscris
într’un mut concert de violine.



(I write in the air with a pen of dreams
butterflies flapping above me
and their shadow descending on the
manuscript
in the mute violin concert.)³¹

Basically, almost all of the quatrains are performatively written, meaning that he refers to the act of writing the quatrains within the quatrain. Silence surrounds Baciu as a representation of the pain caused by speechless nostalgia. The paradox of silence – writing by not writing – gives a poetic intensity to the quatrains, being the core of Baciu’s poetry. For instance, talking without words (in No. 287) or writing in the air with a pen of dreams (in No. 295). The silence just tells the impossibility of remembering through words, indicating another depth of re-living the past, as Ioana Baciu Margineanu wrote that his poetry is “the contradicting states of his soul, tonalities loaded with comfortable sorrow, deep nostalgia or melancholy, the dazzling thunder or eruption of the Sun, the Moon or the love for life.”³²

Apropos, it is a remarkable fact that he describes a butterfly leaving letters on his manuscript. This theme also repeatedly comes up in the quatrains, also with lizards, spiders, shooting stars, birds, etc. He tried to dissipate himself as author-subject into the world through finding a source of poetry in the natural elements. It can be said that his authorship dissolves into the poetry of the natural world.³³

Colecționar de stele căzătoare
De hippocampi și pete’n soare
Cu un condei făcut din poezie
Am înălțat eterna, suferita Românie!

(Collector of shooting stars
of a seahorse and of the sun’s speckle
with a pen made in poetry
I’ve elevated to eternity, suffering
Romania!)³⁴

In this quatrain, contrary to the lament for his lost Romania, he points to eternity of cosmological elements like: shooting stars, a seahorse and the sun’s speckle. It could be referred to as a communion with nature. In this poetic communion, Baciu dissipates his subjectivity as a poet into the world.

The language of the Archipelagic vision is also based on such a mutual infiltration between words and nature.

Books seeping in like water. Books flowing like sand. The letters which unboundedly spawning like corals and nidating on the bottoms of the seashores around the world. Texts suddenly coming up like the music of a flute or a drum, and returning again to the forest where they were born. The hope for certainty is only found in contingency. The words must also entrust themselves to *contingency*, which is embodied by nature: tides of the sea, delicate morning dew in forests, or shimmering of faint light of dawn. Words in the Archipelagic world don’t have synthesis or comprehension.³⁵

In this vision, “books” are not limited to conventional form. “Books” are fluid and infiltrating nature. We can also find a very similar idea in one of Baciu’s quatrains.

Stele și litere într’o carte
sunt ca un câmp de poezie
de foarte aproape, de atât de departe
urechea ascultă, ochiul vede, mână
descrie.

(Stars and letters in a book
I am like a field of poetry
from very near, from far away
the ear listens, the eye sees, the hand
describes.)³⁶



In *Over One Thousand Quatrains* not only letters but also stars are conceived.

For him, the book is not only the accumulation of literary lines but it is also the cosmos of poetry. He listens, sees, and describes from various distances during his itinerancy – from near and far.

Imafuku respects the force of contingency as the fundamental principle of the world. The *écriture* of the Archipelagic language is far off from the will to control or comprehend the world. But it is marked by the sharing the intensity of the flows of “relations” intertwined with each other in nature, with the world.³⁷ This attempt can be done through regarding things and events which approach us as dispersed and porous “bundles of relations”, not as the enclosed order of a linear and fixed cause-result thinking. Everything coming up to him or her is the result of a crossroad where the strings of “relations” contingently meet. One of Baciú’s haikus, called “Solitude” shows the language used to communicate in such an encounter, calling it “Esperanto”.

Singurătatea
Şopârla pe geam
Stă de vorbă cu mine
În esperanto.

(*Solitude*
A lizard on the window
stands talking with me
In Esperanto.)³⁸

On this tiny creature which suddenly visited Baciú, he seems to reflect his feelings and experiences during itinerancy of exile and feels solitude. The accent of this poem is on “Esperanto,” a language used in the communication between Baciú and the lizard. Baciú’s Esperanto is a term generally used to describe a universal language invented by human beings to seek

communication beyond linguistic borders among humans. Rather, we can say that Baciú put another connotation on the language, amplifying the common usage of this word. He often uses this kind of metaphoric terminology for communicating to natural elements. Esperanto was frequently used by him. There are several languages which are used for communications with such natural elements: the dead language, unedited language, unknown language and so on.

Baciú’s thought about each encounter is far from the attempt to comprehend the world, rather a symbolic expression of sharing his poetry with the world or at the same time receiving it as a gift from the world. This is the genuine attitude of the archipelagic vision, which stands against the monocular “comprehension” through possession or categorization in the modern sense. Imafuku writes as follows on the very last page of *Archipelago-Mundi*.

All things are important. It is required of us not to make arbitrary relative merits, but to equally touch them. Yet also, not to shoulder them without making any difference, but to engage dedicatedly and enthusiastically with the events that coincidentally visit you all the time, as an encounter, a chance, hospitality or a small grace.³⁹



6. Conclusion

In this article, I tried to outline the fundamental principle of Baciu's poetry, focusing on the connection and resonance between his literary work and Ryuta Imafuku's archipelagic vision. Overcoming the loss of the world in his exile journey caused by the catastrophic modern history, his practice of "Anachronism" and "Anatopism" generates his own specific imaginary geography with places that are fluid, hybrid and transformative. Romania is still there, however as imaginary field of his poetry. It dissipates in things or events, which contingently visit him in "silence" while experiencing the solitude of exile. The eternal time of nature made him traverse the indescribable nostalgia of loss, and took him to another sphere of the cosmological communion with the world.

Many topics to discuss are left, since Baciu's literary work is tremendously vast, just like the oceans in which he drifted. Brașov, Berne, Brazil, Seattle, Honolulu... The poet's relationship with these places where he had lived and which he visited in exile, could not be discussed enough here, even though he had received a lot of inspiration there. Also, the intimate sphere over the oceans charted throughout his archipelagic literary activities has to be focused on. It was built through Baciu's correspondence with countless poets and writers from the islands around the Pacific Ocean, Latin American countries and all over the world, connecting their literature and poetry by writing articles, editing anthologies or magazines, and translating them into many languages. These are very important practices of the archipelagic vision. The entity of Baciu's literary works is a huge constellation covering the oceans, which is still unknown and could show us another important sphere of the literary

world. Further navigations are required and could make vital contributions to various discussions in the research of literature, especially exile literature.

Bibliography

Derek Walcott, "The Sea is History", *Collected Poems: 1948-1984*, New York, The Noonday press, 1986.

Édouard Glissant, *La Poétique de la relation* [The Poetics of relation], Paris, Gallimard, 1990.

---, *Traité du Tout-Monde*, Paris, Gallimard, 1997.

George Steiner, *Extraterritorial: Papers and the Literature and the Language Revolution*, New York, Atheneum 1971.

Koji Taki, Ryuta Imafuku, *Eizou no Rekishitugaku* [The Historical Philosophy of Image], Tokyo, Misuzushobo, 2013

Ștefan Baciu, *Antologia de la Poesia latinoamericana* [Anthology of Latin American Poetry], New York, State University of New York Press, 1974

---, *Antologia de la poesia surrealista latinoamericana*, [Anthology of Latin American surrealist poetry], Mexico City, Mortiz, 1974.

---, *Singur în Singapur* [Single in Singapore], Honolulu, Editura "MELE", 1988.

---, *Poemele Poetului Singur*. [The Lonely Poet's Poems], Bucharest, Editura Eminescu, 1993.

---, *Peste o mie de catrene – sub tâmpa din Honolulu* [Over One Thousand Quatrains – under Tampa from Honolulu], Brașov, Aldus, 1994

---, *Un Brașovean în arhipelagul Sandwich – Hawaii*. [A Brasovean in the Archipelago Sandwich Hawaii], Bucharest, Editura Eminescu, 1996.

Ryuta Imafuku, *Kureorushughi – The Heterology of Culture* [Creolism – The



Heterology of Culture], Tokyo, Seidocha, 1991.

---, *Utsurisumu tamashiitaci* [Emigrating Souls], Tokyo, Chuokoron-sha, 1993.

---, *Kokodehanaibasho – To the Passage of Image* [A place Not Here – To the Passage of Image], Tokyo, Iwanamishoten, 2001.

---, *Gunto – Sekairon* [Archipelago – Mundi], Tokyo, Iwanamishoten, 2008.

Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, edited and introduced by Hanna Arendt, trad. by Harry Zohn, New York, Schocken Books, 1968.

Website:

Far Outliers, <http://faroutliers.blogspot.-de/2008/07/on-translating-bacius-patria.html> (accessed 20/12/2015)

Notes

¹ Ștefan Baciu, *Peste o mie de catrene – sub tâmpa din Honolulu* [Over One Thousand quatrains – under Tampa from Honolulu], Brașov, Aldus, 1994, p. 151. Engl.: “In the Archipelago of stars / the rhymes are looking for : Brașov and Mele / Guatemala, Sighișoara / The sound of a fiddle beating in my heart.” “Mele” means “poesy” or “song” in Hawaiian. It is also the name of Baciu’s most representative literary magazine, which contained contributions by his fellow poets and writers from all over the world in over 11 languages. In this article all poems written by Baciu were translated into English by the author of the article.

² Édouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde*, Paris, Gallimard, 1997, p. 237. Engl.: “What is the Archipelago? / The dispersion of not-to-be / it reassembles the being of world / The being like beings.”

³ Ryuta Imafuku, *Kureorushughi – The Heterology of Culture* [Creolism – The Heterology of Culture], Tokyo, Seidocha, 1991.

⁴ Ștefan Baciu, *Antologia de la Poesia Surrealista Latinoamericana*, [Anthology of Latin American Surrealist Poetry], Mexico City, Mortiz, 1974.

⁵ Ștefan Baciu, *Antologia de la Poesia Latinoamericana* [Anthology of Latin American Poetry], New York, State University of New York Press, 1974.

⁶ Ryuta Imafuku, *Utsurisumu tamashiitaci* [Emigrating Souls], Tokyo, Chuokoron-sha, 1993. p.119. translation by the author of this article (all following citations of Imafuku’s texts in this article are translated by the author).

⁷ Ștefan Baciu was regarded as one the most talented young poets in Romania’s interwar-period. When he was still 17 years old, he received the prestigious prize for young poets from Carol II and he published his first volume, *The Young Poet’s Poems* (1935). This is the volume which was republished in Bucharest, 1991 after the end of the communist regime and which he was holding in front of Ryuta Imafuku.

⁸ Imafuku, *Emigrating Souls*, p. 124.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹⁰ Ryuta Imafuku, *Kokodehanaibasho – To the Passage of Image* [A Place Not Here – To the Passage of Image], Tokyo, Iwanamishoten, 2001.

¹¹ George Steiner in his book *Extraterritorial: Papers and the Literature and the Language Revolution* (1971) stated that modern literature cannot be told by conventional national literatures, but it was made by innumerable exiles, refugees, diasporas, wanderers, homeless out of their countries through his concept of “Extraterritorial”.

¹² Ryuta Imafuku, *Gunto – Sekairon* [Archipelago – Mundi], Tokyo, Iwanamishoten, 2008.

¹³ *Ibid.*, in The sea notes.

¹⁴ It is required to distinguish this terminology “vernacular” from essentialist



concepts like “native”, “tradition” “origin” or “national”. “Vernacular” culture is not based on the exclusive origin of the culture restricted to a certain place but on the knowledge woven in dynamic cultural processes which happens in this place. For example, in Baciu’s poetry, the “Ukulele” – the beautiful Hawaian “vernacular” instrument often appears. The ukulele is not “originally” invented in the archipelago Sandwich-Hawaii, but its archetype was brought from the archipelago Azoles in Portugal and developed during the colonization of Hawaii. It is a remarkable fact that the ukulele has its origin in dynamic cultural fluidity over the ocean. It is surely understandable that Baciu identified with this wandering instrument to express his love for the Hawaiian islands. See Baciu’s short essay about the ukulele, “Waikiki care a fost... (Waikiki once upon a time)” in *A Brașovean in the Archipelago Sandwich Hawaii* (1996).

¹⁵ Here, I’d like to briefly introduce the theoretical background of *Archipelago – Mundi*. Imafuku’s vision is surely influenced by post-colonial theories, traveling theories or global studies established by Edward Said, James Clifford, Arjun Appadurai or many others which have already theorized cultural contact, exchange or fluidity beyond the national, racial, ethnic or language borders. However, rather his *Archipelago-Mundi* takes distance from the (sometimes euro-centric) theoretical methodologies, since the force of poesy, which is fundamental for cultural practice, frequently has been left out of their theoretical sphere. Imafuku deals with the intensity of the force of poesy itself as “poetics of the relations”, rather than through an attempt of theoretical comprehension or unification. About Eduard Glissant, a creole poet from the Martinique

island in the Caribbean sea, one of the most influential poets or philosophers for Imafuku’s archipelagic vision, he wrote: “In his (Glissant’s) book *the Poetics of ‘Relations’*” (Gallimard,1990), he named ‘the place of relations’, the place where the innumerable torsions of events and memories are generated and the flow of ‘History’ – constructed in a quasi-consistent form of time – is cut off. He strongly believes that the manner of the archipelagic storytelling – connecting such tangled yarn balls of ‘relations’ – requires new ways of understandings of beings. “It means to regard the world as the entity of fluid flows and dynamic crossings of “relations” beyond normative and static perceptions of time and space.

¹⁶ Derek Walcott, “The Sea is History”, *Collected Poems: 1948-1984*, New York, The Noonday Press, 1986, p. 364.

¹⁷ His anthologies, translations or independent literary magazines consist of a lot of poems written by poets of exile and resistance from the oppressive regimes like communist Romania or the Latin-American countries of dictatorship. As an example, he had enthusiastically translated the poems of Nicaraguan poet Ernst Cardenal into German and introduced his poetry works into Europe. Cardenal had been a main member of Nicaraguan Sandinista. Owing to Baciu’s translation, he received Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 1980. In 2005, he was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

¹⁸ Koji Taki, Ryuta Imafuku, *Eizou no Rekishitugaku* [The Historical philosophy of Image], Tokyo, Misuzushobo, 2013, p. 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.4. Acturally, just before the fable of the *Titanic’s foundering*, Taki places the short passage about Benjamin’s “The Angel of History”.



- ²⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, edited and introduced by Hanna Arendt, trad. by Harry Zohn, New York, Schocken Books, 1968, pp. 257-258 (Emphasis mine).
- ²¹ Ștefan Baciu, *Over one thousand of quatrains*, p. 135. The number of this quatrain is 479. He noted “Muzeul Klee” (Klee Museum) after the quatrain.
- ²² Ștefan Baciu, *Over One Thousand Quatrains*, p.14. The quatrain number is 7.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 9: in the preface written by Ioana Baciu Mărgineanu.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10: in the preface written by Ioana Baciu Mărgineanu.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10: in the preface written by Ioana Baciu Mărgineanu.
- ²⁶ Ryuta Imafuku, *Archipelago - Mundi*, pp. 77-78.
- ²⁷ Ștefan Baciu, *Over One Thousand Quatrains*, pp. 9-10. In the preface written by Ioana Baciu Mărgineanu.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 156. The number of this quatrain is 564.
- ²⁹ Ștefan Baciu, *Poemele Poetului Singur*. [The Lonely Poet's Poems], Bucharest, Editura Eminescu, 1993, pp. 138-140. I adapt English translation which is found on the following website: *Far Outliers*, <http://faroutliers.blogspot.de/2008/07/on-translating-bacius-patria.html> (accessed 20/12/2015).
- Partially, the author of this article modified the translated lines to respect the nuance of the original text.
- ³⁰ Ștefan Baciu, *Over One Thousand Quatrains*, p. 86. The number of this quatrain is 287.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88. The number of this quatrain is 295.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 10, in the preface written by Ioana Baciu Mărgineanu.
- ³³ The manuscript written by the natural element is also seen in other quatrains. For example: Una mie de catrene/ quatrainsam scris ca'n vis/ marea și cântec de sirene/ mi-a fost manuscris. Engl.: One thousand quatrains/ I wrote them like in a dream/ The sea and song of Siren/ wrote the manuscript for me, *Ibid.*, p. 273. The number of this quatrain is 1000(A).
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 189. The number of this quatrain is 673.
- ³⁵ Ryuta Imafuku, *Archipelago – Mundi*, “The Sea Notes” (Emphasis mine).
- ³⁶ Ștefan Baciu, *Over One Thousand Quatrains*, p. 185. The number of this quatrain is 659.
- ³⁷ See Édouard Glissant’s “The Poetics of ‘Relation’”, introduced in footnote nr. 15.
- ³⁸ Ștefan Baciu, *Singur în Singapur* [Single in Singapore], Honolulu, Editura “MELE”, 1988, p. 46.
- ³⁹ Ryuta Imafuku, *Archipelago – Mundi*, p. 498.