

THE INFLUENCE OF GERMAN POETRY ON LUCIAN BLAGA'S VERSIFICATION

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Zusammenfassung: Dieser Artikel widmet sich der Untersuchung des Einflusses der deutschen Dichtung auf Lucian Blagas Versifikation. Er zeigt auf, dass Lucian Blaga originale Versformen auf Grundlage der deutschen Verskunst geschaffen hat, insbesondere nach dem Vorbild der “freien Verse“ und „freien Rhythmen“. Die ersten Beispiele für Blagas poetische Formen erschienen in Form von freien Versen, die dem Modell der sogenannten Madrigal folgten, aber im Gegensatz zu den deutschen “freien Versen“ weder Reime noch eine Strophenorganisation aufwiesen. Eine andere Versform, die von Lucian Blaga verwendet wurde, sind die Werke, die mithilfe der Technik der “freien Rhythmen“ konstruiert wurden. Dabei werden zwei Typen unterschieden: der heteroiktische Dolnik mit einer regulierten Struktur und Strophenorganisation und der unregulierte heteroiktische Dolnik, bei dem Zeilen unterschiedlicher Länge und Metren zu astrophischen poetischen Formen mit unreimten Zeilen und abwechselndem Anakrusis, mit einer umgangssprachlichen Intonation kombiniert werden.

Schlüsselwörter: “freie Verse”, “freie Rhythmen”, Ungereimte Gedichte, Strophenlose Gedichte, Deutsche Versifikation.

Cultural contacts and interactions between two or more different cultural literatures are the subject of numerous specialized studies, with comparative research contributing to the elucidation and resolution of issues related to multiculturalism and the phenomenon of multilingualism. Of particular interest in this regard is the work of Lucian Blaga, which manifests the relationships between Blaga's poetry and German literary models. In literary criticism articles, much has been discussed about influences and interferences in the realm of poetic imagery and modernist rhetorical innovation, but, until now, there has not been a study on the association of Lucian Blaga's prosodic techniques with German versification.

Emilia Ștefan, who conducted a comprehensive study on the German influence on Lucian Blaga's work, demonstrates that the proximity to the German environment “does not lead to the Germanization of the poet but, paraphrasing him, this was the only way to

bring him to his profound self” (Ștefan, 2013: 10), with the German environment and culture becoming a “guide in assimilating the patterns of the «harsh and cold» language” (Ștefan, 2016: 269).

Indeed, with the volume *Poemele luminii (Poems of Light)*, Lucian Blaga introduces into Romanian literature a unique universe and an original poetic form unknown in the Romanian literary space. The poet’s novelty and originality lay in the typographic style that “did not conform to either traditional patterns or the verslibristic variants of new modernist poetry” (Paladian, 2022: 163). Regarding Blaga’s technique, Vladimir Streinu wrote in the “Vitrina literară” (“Literary Display”) on November 18, 1929:

“A new and miniature art, emerging from the loom of the whimsical happenstance of capricious graphics and often encapsulating a vibrant affirmation of life, appeared in all its violent novelty of shattered Venetian crystal, for a literature like ours, which had upheld the harsh classicism excessively. [...] The disruption of common verse patterns spilt into prose, thus transcending the experience of symbolist prosody. The unpleasant yet unmistakable impression of translation that burdens us when reading the first two volumes of Blaga’s work must be attributed to that audacity of verse to surpass itself.” (Streinu, 1983: 335)

In V. Streinu’s opinion, even though the first two volumes show “influences” and “affinities”, the “moral ground that Blaga masters with the right of the first occupant”, the “novelty of poetry relationships”, and the “unknown quantity ratio on which another architecture structure is built” suggest the “substantive autonomy of his poetry” (Streinu, 1983: 334). In fact, Blaga himself admits that “most of the great men have not shied away from the influences of others on them. [...] This was the only path that led them to their profound self: the influence they suffered” (Blaga, 1973: 113).

Another interpreter of Lucian Blaga’s versification, Ladislău Galdi, acknowledges elements of versification specific to German expressionism in the poet’s legacy:

“From 1919 to 1943, spanning from *Poemele luminii (Poems of Light)* to *Nebănăuțele trepte (The Unimagined Steps)*, each volume presents a different kaleidoscope of poetic «forms»; above the entire concept hovers, especially at the beginning, the so-called «Wort-an-sich-Dichtung» of the German Expressionists. Syntactic constructions are reduced to a minimum: «Always main clauses», as was advised by Yvan Goll. However, at the same time, the autonomy of the word was also emphasized.” (Galdi, 1971: 361).

Starting from the concept of free verse, L. Galdi affirms that the freedom of Lucian Blaga’s verses in his debut volumes is ensured by the heterometric verse of syllabotonic versification. Most often, the rhythm is iambic, but “the heterometric units rely on a series of repetitions and symmetries”, which “emphasize a single word, in accordance with the requirements of expressionist aesthetics” (Galdi, 1971: 361-363).

Lucian Blaga made his debut during the period of the affirmation of Romanian modernism, a movement theorized by Eugen Lovinescu, who, in his effort to synchronize Romanian literature with European literature, suggested the idea of broadening thematic horizons and adopting new artistic forms through imitation of western cultures. In response to the demands of the era, Blaga creates new verses liberated from the rigid rhythm of classic poetry and normative rhymes. In his quest of looking for an organic form naturally linked to content, that opposes traditional verse; the poet composes a

specific verse that lacks rhythmic musicality. In fact, Blaga creates a new verse through which the poet demonstrates that poetry is an act of language, and prosodic technique exists outside the realm of poetic imagery. In this regard, a distinct segment in Blaga's versification is the verse liberated from the canonical form of classic versification. However, Blaga's structural freedom is entirely different from what had become established in Romanian literature.

While at the beginning of the 20th century, Romanian poets were creating free verses inspired by the French model – “vers libre”, Lucian Blaga, on the other hand, turned to the German model of free verse, becoming the first Romanian poet “to successfully and definitively synchronize Romanian poetic forms with European ones” (Mincu, 1995: 13).

It is a universally recognized fact that the first form of free verse was created in German literature in the second half of the 18th century by the poet Klopstock, who successfully experimented with syllabo-tonic imitations of antique lyric stanzas such as alcaic and asclepiad ones. In the opinion of R. Newald, the discovery of Klopstock is considered the greatest achievement in the field of language and poetic form, without which “the history of the development of German poetry is inconceivable” (Newald, 1957: 31). This type of verse was termed “freie Rhythmen” in German terminology.

It should be noted that in German versification, there are two concepts: “freie Verse” and “freie Rhythmen”. “Freie Verse” refers to a so-called “madrigal verse” in which the length of the line is not restricted by metrical constraints, but has a strict division into feet. In other words, it is an irregular and unregulated verse of one meter, characterized by the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables and rhyme. “Freie Rhythmen” has an irregular foundation and is a verse with not only a varying number of feet in a rhythmic sequence but also a varying number of syllables in each foot. The early models of German free rhythms consisted of lines of medium length, often shorter than longer, typically fragmented syntactically. They resembled prose more than traditional poetry, lacking rhythm and rhyme, but having an internal rhythm caused by the intensity of accents, that brings these forms closer to the poetic structures of tonic versification.

These poetic structures, without rhythm and rhyme, became original poetic forms of poets like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Hölderlin, Heinrich Heine, Arno Holz, Reiner Maria Rilke, all of whom are present in the personal library catalogue of L. Blaga compiled by E. Ștefan (Ștefan, 2016: 267).

In the literary legacy of Lucian Blaga, we can distinguish two categories of poetic forms adopted from German literature: verses composed on syllabo-tonic versification¹, and oeuvre composed on tonic versification².

Lucian Blaga's initial prosodic attempts are created on the basis of classic versification, but syllabo-tonic versification is merely the starting point for the construction of new forms of poetry specific to modernism³. Prior research, conducted on the basis of

¹ Syllabo-tonic versification, which is also called classical, is a system of versification based on the regular alternation between stressed and unstressed syllables in a verse. Syllabo-tonic versification is characteristic of traditional poetry from the 19th century. In the 20th century, syllabo-tonic verses were specific to irregular poetic structures, which categorizes them as non-classical versification.

² Tonic versification is a versification system that is regulated solely by the number of stresses in a verse, with the number and position of unstressed syllables being variable and modifiable. The length of the verse is not considered a component of the metrical scheme in this system

³ About the non-classical forms of Blaga's verses constructed based on syllabo-tonic meters, see: Paladian, Cristina, (2018), “Versificația lui Lucian Blaga: *Poemele lumini?*”, in *Glasul Bucovinei*, 98(2), pp. 43-51; Paladian,

Blaga's poems that were published in the volume edited by the Romanian Academy in 2012, highlights that in the first two volumes, the dominant rhythmic pattern is that of syllabo-tonic versification: 37 out of 38 poems in the *Poemele luminii (Poems of Light)* and 23 out of 24 poems in the *Pașii profetului (The Steps of the Prophet)*. However, the deformed graphic structure, asymmetric organization, and irregular and unmotivated alternation of syllabo-tonic meters demonstrate that such forms, while displaying a regular horizontal alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, which indicates that the verse is composed of classical meters, vertically exhibit metric chaos arbitrarily divided into verses with different rhythms, which is typical of non-classical versification. Such forms are called free in the sense of “unrestrained” or “voluntary”, meaning verses that maintain rhythmic cadence like iambic, trochaic, amphibrachic, etc., while having an unsystematic and unmotivated arrangement in the text.

Ladislău Galdi refers to them as heterometric structures, but such constructions differ from the heterometric verses of classical poetry. In traditional versification, we make a distinction between regular and irregular heterometric forms. Regular heterometry is characterized by the normative and periodic alternation of verses with different measures (for example, in Mihai Eminescu's poem *Luceafărul (The Evening Star)*, he combines in a quatrain iambic tetrameter with iambic trimeter in a regular succession – Iamb 4343 – which repeats throughout the work). Irregular heterometric structures are distinguished from regular forms by the fact that unequal-length lines in terms of measure alternate in an unregulated organization but remain on the basis of a measure that is dominant in the text.

In the segment of blagian heterometric structures, several prosodic patterns can be distinguished: asymmetric forms constructed on the basis of one kind of meter, where verses with identical rhythms alternate but have unequal measures; heterometric forms with an alternating anacrusis, which are also known as binary forms (in which iambic verses alternate with trochaic verses) or ternary (composed of dactylic, amphibrachic, anapestic verses) characterized by the unsystematic presence of extra syllables at the beginning of the verse; heterometric structures with combined rhythms, where verses with iambic, trochaic, dactylic amphibrachic rhythms alternate in an irregular and unmotivated succession; heteromorphic structures in which syllabo-tonic verses are combined with tonic verses, but syllabo-tonic predominates (Paladian, 2020: 469-478). We will illustrate this with a fragment from the poem *Pan*:

Acoperit de frunze veștede pe-o stâncă zace Pan.
E orb și e bătrân.
Pleoapele-i sunt cremene,
zadarnic cearc-a mai clipi,
căci ochii-i s-au închis – ca melcii – peste iarnă.
Stropi calzi de rouă-i cad pe buze:
unu,
doi,
trei.
Natura își adapă zeul (Blaga, 2012: 51).

Cristinia, (2020), “Modernism și tradiționalism în lirica lui Lucian Blaga”, in *Schimbarea lingvistică și schimbarea lingvistică*, Cernăuți, Editura Universității din Cernăuți, pp. 469-478; Paladian, Kristiniia, (2021), “Disordered Verse vs Early Romanian Verse Libre”, in *Philobiblon. Transylvanian Journal Of Multidisciplinary Research in the Humanities*, XXVI(1), pp. 3-19.

Regarding the meters of tonic verse, the interpretation of these terms has been provided by formalist researchers. Comprehensive research on tonic versification was conducted by academician M. Gasparov, who “presented the full and comprehensive information on the basic forms of modern tonic versification. Dolnik is the verse in which the scope of the intervals between the stresses varies in the range of 1 and 2 syllables; taktovik allows three variants: 1, 2 and 3 syllables, more rarely 0, 1 and 2; in the accent verse, the range of inter-ictus intervals is unlimited, from 0 to 4, 5 and more syllables, and the first feature of the accent verse is zero and four syllabled intervals in the verse. Thus, in order to reveal the meter of the tonic verse we take into consideration the length of inter-ictus intervals” (Paladian, 2021: 13-14).

Lucian Blaga cultivates both regular tonic verse and irregular tonic verse. The first tonic forms appear in the volumes *În marea trecere* (*The Great Transition*) and *Lauda somnului* (*In Praise of Sleep*), in which the poet experiments with irregular tonic verse.

Previous research on the distribution of accents in verse and the length of intervals between scansion has allowed us to delineate irregular structures in tonic versification that we will refer to as different ictus lines. Such structures exhibit two diametrically opposed dimensions: on the one hand, poetic forms are characterized by maintaining a certain regularity in determining the number of intervals between scansion and the arrangement of verses in stanzas; on the other hand, poetic forms are distinguished by a weakening of regularity regarding the length of intervals between scansion and by denying the organized structure of verses in stanzas. Lucian Blaga used both variations of irregular tonic verse. The forms with a more orderly organization are specific to verses composed on the dolnik, for instance:

O voce ieri din adânc s-a-nălțat	(1) – 1 – 2 – 2 – 5
amară, amară, amară.	(1) – 2 – 2 – (1)
Îngeri mulți murind și-au lăsat	– 1 – 1 – 2 –
lutul în țară.	– 2 – (1)
Un semn de subt cer ieri s-a dat	(1) – 2 – – 1 –
în cercul înșelăciunii.	(1) – 4 – (1)
Apoi spre Saturn au plecat	(1) – 2 – 2 –
vântul, lăstunii (Blaga, 2012: 162).	– 2 – (1)

The provided fragment serves as an example of different-accented lines of the dolnik with a regulated structure, characterized by the alternation of four-, three-, and two-stressed verses in quatrains according to the scheme – 4332. The presence of a four-syllable interval in the second verse of the second stanza is a rhythmic form of a three-stressed dolnik with an omitted stress in the line. However, although there are two stresses in the verse, it is treated as a rhythmic form of three-stressed dolnik. In this construction, the regularity of heteroictic verses (the one- and two-syllable inter-stanzas intervals are almost not violated) is compensated by adhering strictly to organisation of stanzas and the method of rhyme. The poet never deviates from the chosen stanza and rhyme scheme. Another characteristic feature of this regulated verse is the presence of a null or one-syllable anacrusis and a clausula, indicating a certain regularity in the poetic size.

⁵ In the provided schemes, the dash (–) represents the stressed syllable, the numbers (1, 2, 4) represent the number of unstressed syllables between the ictuses, and the numbers in parentheses ((2/0)) represent the number of syllables in the anacrusis and clausula.

Similar forms can be found in the works of Goethe, for example, in the first part of the tragedy *Faust*. These verses share a structural resemblance with so-called “madrigals” and are characterized by mandatory rhyme. They are better known as “Faustian verse”. However, unlike free verses, where there is an internal meter, Goethe’s verses are not as regularly constructed and lack an internal measure. Therefore, Goethe’s verse not only features a varying number of feet in the rhythmic sequence but also a varying number of unstressed syllables between accents.

Compared to other literatures, where tonic forms are prevalent (such as Russian and Ukrainian), where tonic forms emerge based on ternary syllabo-tonic verses, in L. Blaga’s poetry, tonic forms result from experiments with binary meters within the syllabo-tonic versification. This further demonstrates that the poet, in his poetic experiments, adhered to the models of German literature, particularly Goethe, his favourite poet.

The second group of irregular heteroictic forms includes maximally open tonic forms, characterized by the combination of different scansion lines in astrophic or uneven strophic constructions. In terms of structure, these forms can be associated with *vers libre*, but in the vast majority of lines, the intervals between stresses fluctuate in the range of one to two syllables, corresponding to the metrical structure. As an example, let’s consider an excerpt from the work *Pe multe drumuri (On Many Roads)*:

Pe multe drumuri, pe multe, se-ncearcă	(1) – 1 – 2 – 2 – (1)
gândul spre tine. O, sfârșitul acela de zi,	– 2 – 1 – 1 – 2 – 2 –
peste care căzură grabnice brume!	(2) – 2 – 1 – 2 – (1)
În grădina mea florile	(2) – 2 – (2)
spre alte foarte înalte poiene tânjind	(1) – 1 – 2 – 2 – 1 –
mai invocă și-acum	(2) – 2 –
lumina ta fără de nume (Blaga, 2012: 244).	(1) – 1 – 3 – (1)

The poem in this work tends toward tonal irregularity, a variable rhythmic pattern, and a multi-component structure. There is no specific stability of rhythmic forms in the work, and the poet does not create independent monometric *dolnik* verse. His poetry consists of the unsystematic combination of different sizes and various meters (*dolnik* verses, *taktovik* verses, combined with syllabo-tonic verses). The poet actively experiments with combining lines of different meters within the syllabo-tonic system of versification, but in his interpretation, syllabo-tonics take on a different meaning, with classical meters serving as the foundation for creating *dolnik* forms.

Such forms with free rhythms, “freie Rhythmen” in which only the rhythmic orientation is felt, are specific to poets like Heine (in the volume *Die Nordsee (The North Sea)*) and Rilke (in the volume *Duineser Elegien (The Duino Elegies)*). The abrupt alternation of short verses and extra-long verses, creating a specific colloquial intonation akin to prose, is the poetic hallmark of A. Holz’s lyrics.

Summarizing the points made, it can be noted that Lucian Blaga was an innovator in the realm of versification, introducing original and “one-of-a-kind” poetic forms from German verse to Romanian versification. Based on the ideas of M. Bakhtin, who introduced the concept of the “alien word” suggesting that a poet does not create words but receives them from predecessors, similarly, a poet adopts verse forms from predecessors, and it depends on them how well they can establish such a form in the national literature.

E. Simion argues that the young Blaga “breaks traditional rhythms and dares, as no one had dared after Eminescu in our culture, to encompass everything and put his rural

tranquillity and metaphysical restlessness into myths. [...], but we must define the nature of this versification that reconciles philosophy with poetry” (Simion 2012: VIII, IX). We can confirm that the nature of this versification has its roots in German verse forms.

Lucian Blaga indeed borrowed poetic forms from German poetry, but at the same time, he gave these forms a unique and original shape. The young poet utilized both forms of German models: “freie Verse” – free verses and “freie Rhythmen” – free rhythms. Blaga’s free verse was created following the model of so-called madrigals, in which there is an alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables. However, his free verse lacked rhyme and strophic structure, and their tonality resembled the intonation of spoken language, which is not typical of German “freie Verse”. On the other hand, the poems that correspond to the concept of “freie Rhythmen” – free rhythms, appeared more organized. Among them, two forms stand out: regulated heteroictic structures with rhyme and organisation of stanzas, based on the dolnik, characterized by one- and two-syllable inter-ictus intervals and one-syllable anacrusis; and unregulated heteroictic forms in which lines of various sizes and meters are combined into astrophic constructions with unrhymed lines and variable anacrusis.

Therefore, when referring to German influences, it must be emphasized that these influences helped him become himself. Lucian Blaga did not merely borrow German poetic forms; he mastered them, giving them a fresh and distinctive appearance.

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