Confessional Poetry and Music: John Berryman and Mircea Ivănescu

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The study examines the works of two foremost confessional poets: the American John Berryman, with his deep interest in Bach, and the Romanian Mircea Ivănescu, with his lifelong obsession for Chopin, observing how, though greatly interested in music, they shared the same diffidence towards it.

Keywords: literature and music / American poetry / Berryman, John / Romanian poetry / Ivănescu, Mircea / confessional poetry / trauma

1.

The contiguity of music and literature, as well as that of music and philosophy, is historically informed and documented. It is almost supererogatory to insist upon it; poetry and music have superimposed their poetics so often, and philosophy and music have mutually informed their ideological structures so luxuriantly, that any further attempt of proving this evidence is fatuitous.[1]

Which makes the more surprising the observation that, in fact, this mutual and fertile relation has not been quite happily accepted from the very beginning. In fact, music was regarded rather apprehendingly by philosophers and poets – from Plato to Thomas Mann, there have been 25 centuries of continuous apprehension towards the emotional manipulation which music puts into effect. As Peter Kivy synthesizes,

> As any reader of the *Republic* knows, Plato thought that 'music,' as the translators render the Greek word, could arouse emotional states in the listener: what I have been calling in this book the 'garden-variety' emotions, like love, fear, happiness, sadness, and a few others. He was, as you will recall, very concerned about this because the arousal of such emotions might, he feared, prove harmful to the citizenry. As a matter of fact we know little, if anything really, about what the 'music' Plato talked about was like; how it sounded. But we certainly know enough to conclude that he was very likely talking about sung music with a text, not anything even remotely like absolute music in the modern Western tradition. In any event, Plato's (and Aristotle's) belief in the power of music to arouse the garden-variety emotions re-emerged, with a vengeance, at the end of the sixteenth century, has

> remained a presence ever since, and was extended, not without difficulty, to absolute music as well, by the end of the Enlightenment. (*Antithetical* 224)

The same "concerns" of musical emotions which may "prove harmful to the citizenry" are to be found, two and a half millenia after Plato, in Thomas Mann's understanding of music. In *Doktor Faustus*, Mann build his argumentative key on the idea that Germany desecended into political barbarianism not in spite of its extremely spiritualized classical music, but almost directly because of it; music is, in Mann's understanding, a *Seelenzauber*, a wizard or rather a black magician of souls, with direct access to the most emotional layers of the being – which it can both intensify and manipulate. Thus, in the *Magic Mountain*, Lodovico Settembrini dismisses music as a pure "opiate"; and in his later essays on Germany and the Germans, Mann, who loved music desperately, and sometimes thought he was writing musical scores rather than novels, is quite diffident in what regards the sane spiritual effect of music. (One can find an excellent synthesis of Mann's view on music in the fifteen essays comprised in Hans Rudolf Vaget's wonderful book from 2006, *Seelenzauber. Thomas Mann und die Musik*.)

As I have always been interested in the confessional poets, arguably the most emotional type of writers, I have often wondered how music, as the most emotional art, affects them. The present study is a result of this interest: its case studies are represented by two foremost poets who understood literature as confession: the American John Berryman, with his deep interest in the music of Bach, and the Romanian Mircea Ivănescu, with his lifelong obsession for Chopin. The purpose of this study is to observe and explain the relation between the confessional poetics and the music with which the respective poets have elective affinities; and to show the bizarre and yet catalytic influence of this harmonic apollinic sonorous structures upon the disharmonic dionysiac psyches and poems. And, finally, to see how Berryman and Ivănescu, though greatly interested in music (Ivănescu was even a practitioner, as piano player), shared with Plato and Mann the same diffidence towards it. (It is not a coincidence, I am sure, that both Berryman and Ivănescu were also deeply interested in the works of Plato and Mann.)

2.

In what regards a so-called practical methodology, I will aim at observing how musical images and references are metabolized in the poetic discourse; or, to put it simply, I will observe how the structures of music and literature hybridize each other. Something similar has been done by James H. Donelan in his study of the relation between Romantic poets

and philosophers (namely Hölderlin, Wordsworth, and Hegel) and the Romantic music (of Beethoven, mostly). Even though I deal not with Romantic poets, but with confessional ones, Donelan's method seems quite appropriate to me also; moreover, there are some serious studies which re-define confessional poets as "Neoromantic" – in his study from 1990, Albert Gelpi includes Berryman in this category, along with Robert Lowell and Theodore Roethke, among others, arguing that "[t]he poets I am designating as Neoromantic all believe, even in the face of the violence of contemporary history, that the word can effect personal and social change, that poetry can, almost certainly against the odds, make things happen – psychologically, morally, politically, religiously" (Gelpi 516; see also Philip Coleman's comment on Gelpi's theoretical proposal – Coleman 208). While it is still debatable whether the concept of "Neoromanticism" is preferrable to that of "confessionalism", it is nevertheless obvious to me that the method used by Donelan in his study also suits my purposes; here we have Donelan's own explanation:

> Rather, the relationships among music, philosophy, and literature, some direct, some mediated, take place in historical time as part of an entire matrix of communicative structures that is far from subterranean. These structures do not precondition the creation of philosophy, poetry, or music; they are the result of reciprocating relationships among these individual modes of discourse. I intend, therefore, to explore the relationship between self-consciousness and music in poetry, music, and philosophy as a series of exchanges in form, structure, material, and metaphor in the works of four central figures: Hölderlin, Hegel, Wordsworth, and Beethoven. (3)

What I also technically explore in the present study is "the relationship between self-consciousness and music in poetry", as well as "a series of exchanges in form, structure, material, and metaphor" – the exchange being realized from music towards literature. I will read the works of Berryman and Ivănescu, observing how music informs their superficial and profound structures and how it perpetually negotiates with the confessional canon the limits within which it can infiltrate in the very core of the "confession". While always remaining a cultural product, music is nevertheless for Berryman and Ivănescu intricately connected with some of their most profound traumas – for Ivănescu with his elder brother's suicide, for Berryman with his own intended suicide. Therefore, the presence of music in their poems is subtly intertwined with the presence of the "confession" which they both articulate and repress (as any genuine confessional poet does).

3.

As I have already hinted at before, there are serious reasons to build such a case study by drawing a comparison between John Berryman and Mircea Ivănescu; their names have been already associated by Romanian literary criticism at least once, by Mircea Cărtărescu, who writes in his doctoral thesis: "The influence of John Berryman (from his poems with Henry), Kenneth Koch, or Frank O'Hara is visible" (Cărtărescu 2010: 315); but no extensive study has ever been made so far. I will list below three series of arguments proving why this comparative reading of their works is both necessary and fertile.

i. There are some obvious similarities of poetics and of literary careers: Berryman and Ivănescu are both confessional poets, sharing similar poetics and writing in approximately the same period – even though there is an age difference of 17 years between them (Berryman is born in 1914, Ivănescu in 1931), Ivănescu starts publishing his works in literary magazines only 10 years after Berryman makes his debut. They both tend to write narrative poems, and in their most important books built an imaginary character which functions as an *alter ego*: Berryman's Henry and Ivănescu's Mopete. (*The Dream Songs*, in their complete form, where Henry appears for the first time, is published in 1968; Ivănescu's equivalent of Henry, Mopete, makes his appearance in the Romanian writers' two books from 1970, *Poeme* and *Poesii*.) They place both the same emphasis on the necessary relationship between poetry and scholarship. This is expressed *verbatim* by Berryman in his last interview: "I'm about *equally* interested in those two activities" (Stitt 34), namely poetry and scholarship, he says (emphasis in the original)Ivănescu was a wonder child – and this interest resulted in his splendid Shakesperean opus, *Berryman's Shakespeare*, in his wonderful book on Stephen Crane, and in his essays from *The Freedom the Poet*. In what regards Ivănescu, this necessary relationship between poetry and scholarship is manifestly comprised in his poetry, which contains immense amounts of intertexts from and with the works he has translated – Ivănescu was the translator not only of Berryman, but also of Joyce, Faulkner, Eliot, Kafka, Nietzsche, Musil, Broch, and some other classics of the modernity. One can easily notice that they often shared the same literary and cultural interests.

ii. There are also numerous biographical similarities. As confessional poets, they were trying to articulate in their works a "confession" stemming from deep personal traumas, connected with the suicide of close relatives – Berryman's father committed suicide when John was almost 12 years old, leaving him with a lifelong "survivor's guilt", which led him to a suicidal obsession culminating with his own suicide in 1972; Mircea

Ivănescu's much elder brother, Emil (himself likely a substitute of a father's figure), commited suicide when he was 22 and his brother 12, also imprinting on Mircea a "survivor's guilt" and a suicidal obsession which the Romanian poet eventually succeeded to manage (Mircea Ivănescu died in 2011, and not of suicide). Their works are imbued with this suicidal obsession, and the manner in which they metabolize the emotional energy of music in their poetry is connected with this thanatophoric drive of their sensibility.

iii. In their poetry, as well as in their critical prose, Berryman and Ivănescu share a deep interest in music. We will see in the following analysis the explicit ocurrences of musical allusions and information in their poems. For now, I must mention that they were both interested in music from their young age; Eileen Simpson, Berryman's first wife, remembers in her brilliant memoirs how the young Berryman was almost addicted to music, and how he listened to music with the passionate physical attention which will later be characteristic to his poetry readings (he was known to perspire abundantly while giving poetry readings and lectures):

> John had become seriously interested in music at about the time I met him. With characteristic enthusiasm and zeal, he had trained himself to listen to records with the help of B.H. Haggins's *Music on Records*. […] Having found a brilliant instructor, John became the kind of pupil teachers dream of. […] He set about building a record library with the same care he had taken in building up his library of books. […] John's upper lip, shaved of its mustache, is beaded with perspiration. He bends over, his right ear inclined toward the turntable, listening with his whole brain. From time to time, looking as though he might levitate, he grabs hold of my hand and with an ecstatic expression on his face says, 'You *hear*?' as the cello pizzicato plucked at our hearts. (Simpson 17; emphasis in the original.)

Mircea Ivănescu was a wonder child in piano, playing Chopin in an exquisite manner when he was 10; so was his elder brother Emil, who delivered concerts prior to his early suicide – he even postponed his suicide (whose date he announced to two best friends) when he learned that the German pianist Walter Gieseking scheduled a concert in Bucharest in the summer of 1943 at the exact date of his planned suicide. Convinced that music and literature drew their son to suicide, Ivănescu's parents forbade to the young Mircea to play the piano anymore; so he quit playing music but remained a lifelong melomaniac, with music informing the core of his literary writing. (For more information on Emil Ivănescu, see the edition of his works gathered in 2006 by Raluca Dună in *Artistul şi moartea*; besides the valuable prefaces of Matei Călinescu and Alexandru George, there is also an essential text by Alexandru Vona, one of Emil Ivănescu's two friends to whom he has announced his planned suicide.)

4.

This section observes extensively the manner in which music instils itself in the very substance of Berryman's poetry. This instilation takes place at several levels, starting with the mere musical adaptability of Berryman's work and ending with the devoutly wished, yet disturbing presence of music in the intimate core of his poetry and his suicidal phantasm. I will list below each of these layers, from the most superficial to the most profound ones.

A. At a surface level, the musical nature of Berryman's poetry is empirically demonstrated by its capacity of being adapted for music (or its musical adaptability). Indeed, there are already numerous bands which use Berryman's poems as lyrics for their songs, or compose their music using Berryman's figure and the mythology developed around his poetry. I mention here only the most famous cases: the band Okkervil River, whose vocalist Will Sheff attended the Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, being thus a sort of fellow countryman with Berryman – which explains why many of their songs contain lines and references from Berryman; the band The Hold Steady, which has a song about how the Devil and Berryman are taking a walk which ends up on Washington talking to a river (Berryman committed suicide by jumping from the Washington Avenue Bridge in Minneapolis); and the case of the composer Janika Vandervelde, who attended the University of Minnesota and wrote a thesis about Berryman's character, Henry. This is the most visibile, and yet the most superficial level – as it only proves the Berryman's literature is adaptable for music, but says nothing about its own musical nature and the representation its author had about music (the songs obviously represent the musical intentions of their authors, not of Berryman).

B. There is then a literal level at which Berryman's works simply signalize that they are intricately connected with music or with musical sources. For example, *The Dream Songs* make clear from their very title that they are *songs*; even one motto of the *77 Dream Songs* is chosen such as to specify this in clear letters: "I am their musick", reads the quote from *Lamentations* 3:63. From his early letters to his mother, Berryman names his poems "songs" – as he does, for example, in a letter from Sunday 4 April 1943: "Did you get some Songs I sent you weeks ago?" (Kelly 179). In his interview given to Peter A. Stitt, he acknowledges that poems must formally obey to "necessities" as compelling as those of rhyme and meter, even if they written in free verse: Berryman thinks a poem is good when it is "as classical as one of the *Rubáiyát* poems – without the necessities of rhyme and meter, but with its own necessities." (36). The interest in the euphonic nature of the poem is constant throughout his whole work.

C. In what regards the effective presence of musical references and intertexts in Berryman's works, there are also different layers of intensity, as follows:

C1. It is strange, at this level, to notice that a poet with such a high interest in serious classical music pretends not to be particularly interested in it. In *The Dream Songs*, Henry pretends to be a fan of fancy popular musical genres, such as vaudeville or jazz, for example. William J. Martz shows that Berryman has borrowed from jazz the technique involving the "crumpling of the syntax" (36).

C2. When he admits his interest in music, the poet directs his empathy towards important, yet rather secondary figures in the history of music, such as Scarlatti; the only first-rate figure in this category is, quite sporadically, Schubert. He seems to identify his own *ars poetica* with Scarlatti's music: he writes that plainly in *Dream Song* 103: "I consider a song will be as humming-bird / swift, down-light, missile-metal-hard, & strange / as the world of anti-matter / where they are wondering: does time run backward – / which the poet thought was true; Scarlatti-supple; / but can Henry write it?". Besides the formal features, what he seems to admire mostly in their music is its capacity to bestow tranquility on the listener, to "undo heavy weeks" and to bring "to its work a broken heart": "He put up his feet / & switched on Schubert. / His tranquility lasted five minutes / for (1) all that undone all the heavy weeks / and (2) images shook him alert" (*Dream Song* 256), "Scarlatti spurts his wit across my brain, / so to does *Figaro*: so much for art / after the centuries yes / who had for all their pains above all pain / & who brought to their work a broken heart / but not as bad as Schubert's: that went beyond the possible" (258). At this level, Berryman seems to understand music as a sort of artistic anaesthetic, a sonorous art whose main function is to ease the qualms and pains of the poet. This is also a mask which falls off in some poems where the poet openly admits that actually music cannot soothe anything. The obeyance to its strict formal rules does not bring strict formal solutions in one's life: "Henry, weak at keyboard music, leanèd on / the slow movement of Schubert's Sonata in A / & the mysterious final soundings / of Beethoven's 109-10-11 & the Diabelli Variations / You go by the rules but there the rules don't matter / is what I've been trying to say" (*Dream Song* 204).

C3. The *summum* of Berryman's musical references is represented by Mozart and especially Bach. In Berryman's personal pantheon, they stand for the highest achievement in art; which is, taken *per se*, a trivial statement. What is both remarkable and meaningful is that this aesthetic perfection also qualifies them, in Berryman's eyes, as ethical and sometimes even theological standards. He puts it plainly in *Dream Song* 153: "A friend

of Henry's contrasted God's career / with Mozart's, leaving Henry with nothing to say / but praise for a word so apt". In such lines, one can infer that Berryman is a mystical poet who prefers to remain in hiding – so that his later plain mystical poems from the *Eleven Addresses to the Lord* do no represent a surprise.

As such, art and ethics are geminated; and the perfection of music also involves for Berryman an ethical perfection. It is exactly this gemination of art and ethics that made Donald Davie write, while reviewing Berryman's collection of essays *The Freedom of the Poet*, that he was "not only one of the most gifted Americans of his time, but also one of the most honorable and responsible" (Davie 1976: 24).

Writing about Bach, Mozart, and Chopin, Peter Kivy also observes this innate tendency of associating an ethical standard to their music: "We *do* want to be told – *want* to believe – that great music such as that of Bach, Mozart, and Chopin has power for the good. We do, at least some of us, have a strong intuition that you can't love Bach, Mozart, and Chopin, and love genocide too" (*Antithetical* 218). Kivy also observes here that this "moral force" of music has to do with "music alone," that is with instrumental music which does not have a text which to state or convey its ethical message – the ethics is in the sonorous perfection *an sich*: "The question, as previously posed, is whether the music of such great composers as Bach, Mozart, and Chopin is a 'moral force' in the world: a moral force, that is to say, for the good. And I will begin by reminding the reader that the music about which this question is raised is pure instrumental music: music without a text or dramatic setting; in other words, absolute music; music alone."

The standard modernist interpretation of this ethical purity of Bach's music associates it with the post-Mallarméan ideal of the work of art epured by any impure feeling; or, as Paul Valéry states:

> Une oeuvre de musique absolument pure, une composition de Sébastien Bach, par exemple, qui n'emprunte rien au sentiment, mais qui construit *un sentiment sans modèle,* et dont toute la beauté consiste dans ses combinaisons, dans l'edification d'un ordre intuitif séparé, est une acquisition inestimable, une immense valeur tirée du néant (Kirby-Smith 274).

The beauty of the poem or of the "oeuvre de musique" consists in its infinite combinations, in its variations on the "ordre intuitif". *The Dream Songs* are apparently exemplary embodiments of these variations, resembling closely what Roger Scruton writes about Bach's Goldberg Variations or Beethoven's Diabelli Variations, "in which the theme is repeatedly lost to view, as the music meditates on its deeper and more occult forms of order". (114).

Nevertheless, one immediately feels that the variations of the *Dream Songs* on the topics of pain and sexual lust and suicide are not at all variations on purity and order. It is exactly their impurity and, quite non-Mallarméan, their unbearably intense *feeling* which, combined with the aesthetic perfection of the variations, gives them their consistency and strength. The musical quality of these variations, as well as the musical patterns of the lines, has the function of transforming the chaos of these feelings into *kosmos*, that is into a definite structure: "But each dug down for himself a definite hole / in a definite universe which he could bring to mind / structured" (*Dream Song* 348).

The re-structuration of the feelings into a perfectly musical sequence does not alter their chaotical nature. Even though perfect in itself, music is nevertheless inextricably connected with pain, suffering and even suicide. Its beauty is always accompanied by a frightful "ghost": "I am trying, trying, to solve the andante / but the ghost is off before me" (*Dream Song* 204). This "ghost", I think, has to do with the presentiment of an *exitus*, of a sudden ending: "Music comes painful as a happy look / to a system nearing an end" (*Dream Song* 207). In one of Berryman's most haunting poems, *Henry's Understanding*, the perfection of Bach is directly contrasted with the horrible imperfection of suicide: "Suddenly, unlike Bach, / & horribly, unlike Bach, it occurred to me / that one night, instead of warm pajamas, / I'd take off all my clothes / & cross the damp cold lawn & down the bluff / into the terrible water & walk forever / under it out toward the island."

In such poems one can see that, for Berryman, the perfection of music is far from sublimating the imperfection of life; music can give aesthetic perfection to feelings, it can work at the most as an anaesthetic, temporary yet perverse – as the more perfect it is, the better it sets off the imperfection of existence. It happens extremely rare that a great creator can also master his life with the musical perfection with which he has mastered his creation; and this is probably one of the reasons for which Berryman identified so desperately with Bach. He probably aimed at mastering his disordered life with the same command with which Bach managed to master his life; Peter Kivy shows how the life of J. S. Bach perfectly resembled the life of the middle-class artisan (*The Possesser* 165–166) – an image very similar to the image of the "workaholic" Berryman in John Haffenden's wonderful biography. Kivy writes here about "the workaholic theory of genius" (172); and one can see that Berryman would have wholeheartedly adhered to this theory. Unfortunately, he was unable to master his life accordingly; and his apprehension towards this "ghost" of the music was thus proven consistent.

5.

In what regards Mircea Ivănescu's relation with music, the dissimulation of his apprehension towards music is never as sophisticated as Berryman's. A highly sophisticated poet himself, one of the most intertextual European poets of the late 20th century, Ivănescu did not nevertheless feel the need of dissimulating his complicated and torturous appeal to music, like Berryman did. Music is a constant and highly troubling presence in his poems, always connected with extremely intense and yet contradictory emotions: on the one hand music and love, and the other hand music and fear. Even in Ivănescu's love poems music is a disturbing presence, inflicting pain or fear in the same measure in which it produces pleasure: "listening to music and telling her how I / was winding like burnt paper in the sounds of the piano" (*A Visit in the Evening*); "once, atfer departure, one of them / sat at the piano – […] and that fear was made / a body of sounds" (*The Fight between Angels and Clouds or on Thunder*); "she reads, but her voice with rueful resonances – like a lied with the melodic line always resolved in minor, her head bowing on to the page (but the lamplight in her hair, invertebrated) – it scares me – and after a while I beg her to stop" (*Memories*, XXX), etc.

Unlike Berryman, Ivănescu does not strive to conceal this apprehension towards music, which in the American poet's work is mostly dissimulated. From the beggining of his work (late 50s) to its end (late 90s), Ivănescu was a passionate melomaniac; he even wrote classical music reviews for the academic magazine *Transilvania*; but he was also openly apprehensive of it, and he never played the piano again after his brother's suicide. He "knew the mechanism of music", as he says once, and he was fascinated by it – but he also associated music with the suicide of his brother, which took place in his childhood: "to music i know the mechanism – i have listened / in my childhood to music, and it was not the essence of life – it was / feeling like drowning, covering my ears, / my nose, eyes, with the descending arpeggios, like a canvas of water / in which i stumbled – and to haunt like a phantom / my corridors, and it was indeed music not life / but dance, steady, of the phantoms, jealously imitating / the gestures in life – with the afternoon sun hitting / the carpet near the window, with loneliness / made fear, and i do not want / to listen to music anymore." (*english cynicism part two or the sequel of the fable about music with images by j. cocteau*). And he concludes, in the same poem: "music being not the essence of life – but of fear".

Music as the essence of fear – even though Berryman has not put is that plainly, it is quite obvious that the "ghost" the American poet wrote about was made of the same substance as Ivănescu's fear. It is of interest to note

that Ivănescu, who openly acknowledged his fear, resisted to the very end the idea of suicide; while Berryman, who so elaborately concealed it, did not. Even though music is construction, while suicide is destruction, the perfection of music seemed to be inescapable associated with the imperfection of suicide. Music (or art?) builds in the same measure in which it destroys. Berryman could notice this on himself only; while Ivănescu had the example of his suicidal brother, for whom literature and music apparently functioned as incentives towards self-destruction. His brother's suicide was as real as it gets, so there was no point in denying and dissimulating this effect; while in Berryman's case his father's suicide had nothing to do with art, and he probably thought he could keep his own at arm's length by dissimulating his passion for music under the mask of his passion for jazz and vaudeville or for lightsome composers such as Scarlatti or Bach.

Nothing of this dissimulation remains in Mircea Ivănescu's poems; he quite often directly names Chopin, especially in connection with intensely dramatical, even tragical biographical circumstances; but these tragical circumstances are never mentioned – and this is where another important differentiation from Berryman occurs: while Berryman almost never dissimulates any biographical detail, Ivănescu puts a series of complicated masks between the biographic and the poetic. One as to be a *conaisseur* of Ivănescu's life in order to grasp the references to its tragic events; while in Berryman everything, even the domestic tragedies, are stated directly, without any intention of disguise or encryption. Thus, for example, almost whenever he refers to a memory from childhood involving Chopin's music, Mircea Ivănescu actually refers to his suicidal brother, without ever naming him. Beneath their calm appearance, such poems dissimulate a tragic substance, imbued in the very music which accompanied (and maybe caused) the death of the beloved brother: "and around there was a bleached sadness, / like a phrase in a lied, about a fancy / which you know deceitful. it was, in fact, a fragment / barely remembered from a movie – and one played meanwhile / chopin at the piano" (*A Visit in the Evening*), or even more transparently for the reader knowing the code: "in that afternoon, when i was home alone with him, / and he sat at the piano, and played the funeral march / (of chopin) – and i was moving around terrified by the scent of flowers / and coffin of the chords of sun and wet earth" (*On the Irreality of Memory*).

Even Ivănescu's lines, from his debut to the last collection, have a recognizable Chopinian quality; he obviously composed them intentionally like a reconstruction of Chopin's mood and technique. In a note about Vladimir Horowitz, Peter Kivy writes: "Vladimir Horowitz once said that he played Mozart like Chopin and Chopin like Mozart. If he meant that he

played Chopin the way he knew Mozart played Mozart, and played Mozart the way he knew Chopin played Chopin, then his performances of both Mozart and Chopin were, on this construal, historically informed." (*Music* 94) Ivănescu also composed his poems as if he wanted them to be "played" by Chopin – or as he knew Chopin played Chopin – with a passionate lentitude, with a sentimental idea whose closure is perpetually deferred. His poetry is thus made of the same Chopinian matter which contributed to his brother's death. This fact gives it both a tragic substance and a surprisingly luminous consistency – because, even though music "is the essence of fear", even though it affected his brother's life, it is also the medium which allows a strange posthumous reunion of the separated brothers – who are joined once again in the substance of this poetry informed by the music they both loved. Moreover, Matei Călinescu also observed once that, as it is quite frequently written in the first person plural, Ivănescu's poetry has a "double voice" or a "double sonority", involving also the voice of "his dead brother, resuscitated by the magic of poetic speech" (22–24).

This Chopinian mood and technique of Ivănescu's poetry also has implications in what concerns its extremely intertextual nature. In an analysis which involves Haydn, Schubert, and Chopin, Roger Scruton observes that the "slow movement" specific to their melody allows them to venture quite frequently into the neighboring keys: "[T]he melody of the slow movement, constructed in a completely different way, without reference to the consonant intervals of the triad, and harmonized chromatically, so as to venture constantly into neighbouring keys. Haydn was able to do this kind of thing, so too were Schubert and Chopin: but you won't find many competitors." (94) I think that the possible equivalent of this contant venturing into the neighbouring keys is represented by the infinite associativity of Mircea Ivănescu's poetry; the "slow movement" of its unusual long lines allows endless intertexts with both biographical and bibliographical sources and references, perpetually complicating it – and make it more consistent with each and every intertextual reference. It is exactly this hybridization of Chopinian mood with Joycean intertextuality that gives the particular quality of Ivănescu's poetry.

6.

The resemblances and differences between Berryman and Ivănescu in what regards their attitude towards music are, I presume, quite noticeable:

A. Both of them had an ambivalent love-and-hate relationship with music; they had a good expertise on it, they were informed and dedicated

melomaniacs, but in the same time they feared or distrusted it. This fear and distrust were quite common, as a matter of fact, among the French modernists which both Berryman and Ivănescu affectionated – Kirby-Smith observes that "Hytier says that what attracted Valéry about music was (as for Mallarmé) the possibility of a purely formal system, but that he distrusted the emotional power that music exercised." (Kirby-Smith 275). Berryman and Ivănescu share this distrust in the "emotional power" exercised by music: the American poet ascertains it on himself, the Romanian one could see it at work on his suicidal Chopinophile brother.

B. In his poetry, Berryman aims at dissimulating his fear of music under sophisticated layers and masks; Ivănescu, on the contrary, acknowledges it from the start. For both of them, music is "the essence of fear", or a mischevious "ghost" accompanying them both in their construction of beauty and in their self-destruction. On the other hand, Berryman does not dissimulate his biographical data, he makes obvious use of them in his writing, while Ivănescu never uses openly biographical information in his poems. Nevertheless, what is really important is that, in secret or in plain sight, music is always connected in their writing with the avowal of their deepest biographical traumas – namely the loss of beloved persons (a father, or a father-figure). For both of them, music is ineluctably associated to confession.

C. This hybrid between biographical confession and musical dissimulation proved extremely capable; as Berryman and Ivănescu are ever more central to the poetic canon of their national poetries, it is obvious that this hybridization of music and confession eventually led to the coagulation of the dominant poetics in both American and Romanian contemporary poetry.

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b. Poems quoted

Dream Songs 103, 153, 204, 207, 208, 256, 258, 348.
All *Dream Songs* are quoted from the 1981 edition indicated *supra*.
Henry's Understanding, quoted from Berryman, John. *Collected Poems 1937–1971*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989.

II. Works by Mircea Ivănescu

a. Volumes mentioned

Ivănescu, Mircea. *Poeme*. București: Eminescu, 1970.
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b. Poems quoted

O vizită, seara / A Visit in the evening
Lupta dintre îngeri și nori sau despre trăsnet / The fight between the angels and the clouds or on thunder
Amintiri, XXX / Memories, XXX
Cinismul englez partea a doua sau continuarea parabolei despre muzică pe imagini de j. cocteau / English cynicism part two or the sequel of the fable about music with images by j. cocteau
Despre irealitatea amintirii / On the Irreality of Memory

All poems have been quoted from the following edition:
Ivănescu, Mircea. *Versuri*. Edited with a foreword and chronology by Al. Cistelecan. București: Humanitas, 2014.
(Mircea Ivănescu's lines and titles translated by R. Vancu).

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Konfesionalna poezija in glasba: John Berryman in Mircea Ivănescu

Ključne besede: literatura in glasba / ameriška poezija / Berryman, John / romunska poezija / Ivănescu, Mircesa / osebnoizpovedna lirika / travma

Pričujoči sestavek izvira iz preučevanja navideznega paradoksa: revolucionarne konfesionalne poetike so se kljub poglobljenemu zanimanju za glasbo v glavnem opirale na njene klasične oblike. Zapletena in mučna psihologija konfesionalnih pesnikov ima, kot je videti, kar največje razumevanje za kristalne strukture velikih predmodernih skladateljev. To je pravzaprav presenetljivo, če pomislimo, da so se drugače od njih bitniški pesniki (v svojih poetikah prav tako revolucionarni in vplivni) zanimali za glasbo svojega časa, denimo za transgresivne forme jazza z orientalskimi vplivi in celo za porajajoči se rock. Namen študije je opazovati in pojasniti odnos med konfesionalnimi pesniki in glasbo, s katero so se po svoji izbiri poistovetili, in pokazati na grotesken, a spodbuden vpliv harmoničnih apoliničnih zvočnih struktur na disharmonično dionizično psi-

hologijo in pesmi. Za primer vzame dva izmed ključnih konfesionalnih pesnikov: Američana John Berrymana s svojim poglobljenim zanimanjem za Bachovo glasbo in Romuna Mircea Ivănescuja s svojo vse življenje trajajočo fascinacijo nad Chopinom. Pesnika sta si delila nadvse ambivalenten odnos do glasbe, ki je nihal med ljubeznijo in sovraštvom; o glasbi sta veliko vedela in sta ji bila predana, hkrati pa sta do nje čutila nezaupanje.

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