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ȘTEFAN BACIU AND THE *MELE* MAGAZINE AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL OF GLOBAL LITERATURE

ȘTEFAN BACIU E A REVISTA *MELE*
UM MODELO ALTERATIVO DE LITERATURA GLOBAL

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ABSTRACT: This article analyses *Mele*, the magazine edited by the exiled Romanian writer Ștefan Baciu, which was published in Honolulu from 1965 to 1993 and distributed free of charge. Described as an “international poetry newsletter,” the journal was produced in an artisanal manner, with a limited print run, yet it featured contributions from well-known contemporary writers and visual artists drawn from a wide range of cultural and geographic contexts. Baciu’s chief aim was to create a network of writers and artists that would cross linguistic, political, and cultural borders. *Mele* printed poems in roughly thirty languages—including translations—and its pages brought together both established figures such as Octavio Paz and Carlos Drummond de Andrade and emerging, exiled, or otherwise marginalized poets. By operating outside the logic of the publishing market and the dominant cultural centers, *Mele* built a deterritorialized literary space and fostered a kind of transnational “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983) grounded in intellectual affinities and friendships. In this sense, the magazine can be regarded as an alternative model of global literature, promoting a form of resistance to literature as a “big business” and positioning itself as a polyphonic, multilingual, and transcultural poetic universe.

Keywords: *Mele* magazine. Intellectual Exchange Networks. Ștefan Baciu.

RESUMO: Este artigo analisa a revista *Mele*, publicação editada pelo escritor romeno no exílio, Ștefan Baciu, de 1965 a 1993, em Honolulu e gratuitamente distribuída. Caracterizada como uma “carta de poesia internacional”, a revista era produzida de forma artesanal, com tiragem limitada, mas contava com colaborações de conhecidos escritores e artistas visuais contemporâneos oriundos

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de diversos contextos culturais e geográficos. O principal objetivo de Baciú era criar uma rede de escritores e artistas, rompendo fronteiras linguísticas, políticas e culturais. *Mele* publicou poemas em cerca de 30 idiomas, incluindo traduções, e abarcou tanto nomes consagrados como Octavio Paz e Carlos Drummond de Andrade, quanto poetas iniciantes, exilados ou marginalizados. Ao operar fora da lógica do mercado editorial e dos centros culturais hegemônicos, *Mele* construiu um espaço literário desterritorializado e fomentou um certo tipo de “comunidade imaginada” (Anderson, 1983) transnacional, fundamentada em afinidades intelectuais e laços de amizade. Nesse sentido, pode ser considerada um modelo alternativo de “literatura global”, promovendo uma forma de resistência à literatura como “grande negócio” (*big business*) e afirmando-se como um universo poético polifônico, multilíngue e transcultural.

Palavras-chave: Revista *Mele*. Redes de intercâmbios intelectuais. Ștefan Baciú.

INTRODUÇÃO

Sua revista *Mele*, de impressão manual, tem precisamente este sentido: é poesia do mundo inteiro, brinquedo de louco manso entre loucos furiosos: nosso homem em Honolulu.

Carlos Drummond de Andrade, “Um brasileiro em Honolulu”.

The Romanian writer Ștefan Baciú (1918-1993), upon settling in Hawaii in 1965, had already traveled great distances and, eagerly, thrown himself into a range of new cultures. By going into self-exile in 1948, refusing to live under the communist regime established in Bucharest, the already award-winning poet and journalist Baciú definitively left Europe and took refuge in Rio de Janeiro, where he lived for 12 years and from where he departed, on various occasions, to countries in Latin America. He learned Portuguese and Spanish, read extensively in both languages, familiarizing himself with the continent's literature and translating the Brazilian Jorge de Lima and the Nicaraguan Ernesto Cardenal into German, and the Bolivian Raúl Otero Reiche into Romanian. He formed a friendship with Manuel Bandeira, who introduced him to Hispanic-American literature and to whom he dedicated his aesthetic-biographical study *Manuel Bandeira de corpo inteiro*. As he became part of Rio's literary scene, Baciú mingled with, among others, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Rubem Braga, Cecília Meireles, Jorge de Lima, José Lins do Rego, Fernando Sabino, Otto Lara Resende, Ledo Ivo, Ribeiro

Couto, Augusto Frederico Schmidt, and Pedro Dantas. A prolific polymath, Baciú continued to produce poems in his native language and in the ones he had just learned. He was the editor-in-chief of the magazine *Cadernos brasileiros* and published, in Brazil and in Hispanic American countries, an impressive quantity of books and journalistic articles on politics, culture, literature, and the visual arts. He wrote about, among countless others, the Peruvian Cesar Vallejo, the Nicaraguans Azarías Pallais and Salomón de la Selva, the Mexican Carlos Mérida, the Honduran Rafael Heliodoro Valle, the Guatemalan Carlos Samayoa Chinchilla, the Salvadoran Claudia Lars, the Panamanian Rogelio Sinán, the Dominicans Juan Bosch and Manuel del Cabral, and the Costa Ricans Eunice Odio and Francisco Amighetti. He also published articles that opposed Pablo Neruda, Gabriel García Márquez and other writers aligned with left-wing ideologies.

Baciú maintained correspondence with various writers and artists from all over the Americas and also with Romanians, both those who remained in the country under the socialist regime and the exiles scattered across the planet, like the playwright Eugène Ionesco. Thus, when he arrived in Honolulu to work as a professor of Brazilian and Hispanic American literature at the University of Hawaii, Baciú had already consolidated a significant network of relationships with Brazilian, Hispanic American, and Romanian intellectuals. As the poet and his friend Pablo Antonio Cuadra wrote, Baciú was "el solitario con más amigos que hoy existe sobre la faz de la historia literaria" (Cuadra, [1990?]).

This network of contacts and friendship, a strong, gregarious drive despite the geographical distance, and a tenacious commitment to spreading literature gave rise to an editorial venture that Ștefan Baciú sustained for almost three decades. In December 1965, newly arrived in the "Sandwich Archipelago," as he used to call the islands that form Hawaii, Baciú launched the first issue of *Mele* — *Carta Internacional de Poesía/International Poetry Letter*. The magazine, which Cuadra would consider "the most universal poetry magazine", describing it as an "aeropuerto internacional poético" [international poetic airport] (Cuadra, [1990?]), resulted, according to Baciú, from the "push" of his wife Mira Simian and the artists Ben Norris and Jean Charlot (Baciú, 1980, p. 4). The inaugural issue

detailed the intentions that guided the magazine's creation, named in the Hawaiian language:

MELE, Hawaiian for poetry, poesia, poesie, gedicht, shi, hopes to serve as an international tie between poets, artists, and readers of poetry throughout the world. MELE is a step toward that universal understanding about which so much is said and so little done. MELE: from an island in the Pacific to the world, a letter which may be signed by all who believe poetry is freedom, truth, action, revolution. From these shores we sing with Lautréamont: "Faisons un grand effort, et accomplissons, avec le sentiment du devoir, notre destinée sur cette terre. Je te salue! Vieil ocean!" (*Mele*, n. 1, 1965)

1 *MELE*: A DIY ONE-MAN SHOW

Driven by a "sense of duty," *Mele* endowed literature—and especially poetry—with an artistic, humanistic, and political mission: a "bond between poets, artists, and readers," "universal understanding," and action in the name of freedom, truth, and revolution. A revolution, it should be said, attuned to the libertarian spirit of the artistic avant-gardes and averse to parties and guerrillas. The resilient longevity of *Mele* was also fully articulated with the individual need of an exile: "Life," confessed Baciu, "has treated me like a heavyweight... rather rough, when one feels like a butterfly. My only ammunition was the written word" (*The Arcadian*, p. 23). Not surprisingly, *Mele* featured countless pieces by Baciu, his wife Mira, and many other poets who, forming a kind of community, make exile their central theme. In 1988, Pablo Antonio Cuadra writes to Baciu, telling him that he will send him poems by Ligia Guillén and other Nicaraguan exiles for publication in *Mele* (Cuadra, 1988). In his own poem "Exile," Baciu depicts, through a succession of metaphors that evoke absence, solitude, disconnection, death and utter incommunicability, the emotional price the exile must bear: "Exile is when you say exile and it is exile / When, above all, nothing belongs to you" (Baciu, 1963, p. 33). Part of Baciu's heavy burden was the fact that, between 1948 and 1990, his name and works had been banned in the public sphere and literary life of Romania (Șontică, 2022, p. 226-227).

Mele can be understood as an effort to offset Baciu's geographical isolation and the emotionally charged experience of exile. The Romanian writer Horia

Stanca declared that *Mele* "carried beyond the Pacific something of the fresh air of the Carpathians and brought us back from there, in compensation, the exotic and strange air of the Iberians transplanted to the new world" (Stanca, 1993). Baciú, with only one or two assistants and the cooperation of students and university colleagues, kept this mission alive until his death in 1993. With his own funds, occasional donations, and a modest financial contribution from the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Hawaii (Chang Ka, 1982), Baciú managed to finance 89 issues of *Mele* released over 28 years. According to his testimony, the magazine "is very badly organized commercially because it's a one-man show" (Carter, 1984, p. 7). Good-humoredly, Baciú comments that besides being editor-publisher, he played the roles of "mecena y bedel, general y ordenanza, archivista y revisor de pruebas, tenedor de libros y administrador, redactor-jefe y corresponsal, secretario y compaginador, mozo de recados y cargador, secretario de redacción y reportero-itinerante" (Baciú, 1980, p. 4). Although the magazine depended especially on an individual effort, Baciú does not fail to mention with gratitude, on the occasion of *Mele*'s 15th anniversary, a significant group of collaborators who offered a "helping hand".

From a material standpoint, the magazine is quite modest, having been made as a xeroxed montage of handwritten or typewritten clippings. Not infrequently, the clippings reproduced texts published in other media, such as magazines, newspapers, and books. The result is an unpretentious, almost rustic appearance, which reveals both the evident limitation of financial and human resources and the determination to establish, without pomp and at any cost, communication between writers and artists through literature and the visual arts, as suggested by the subtitle printed in two languages on the cover of each issue: *Mele* consists of a "carta de poesía" or "poetry letter".

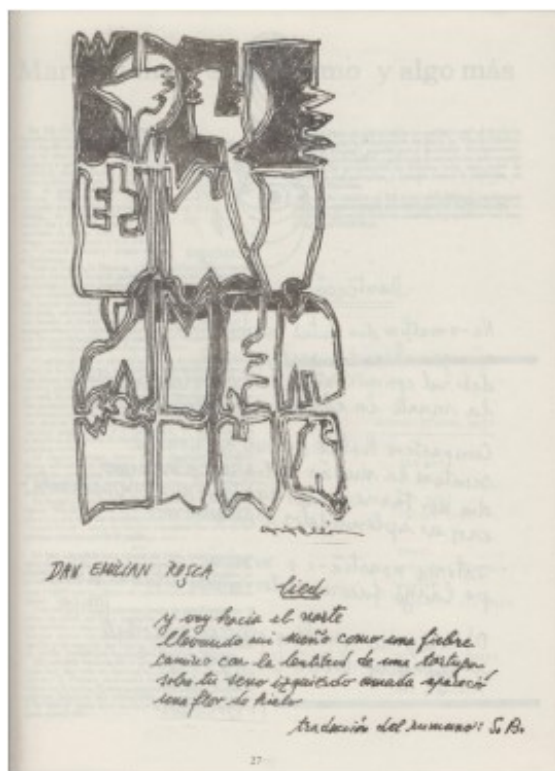
Despite the predominant graphic simplicity, *Mele* provides a refined visual experience. The magazine's covers feature drawings, graphics, woodcuts, and photographs that were often specially produced for *Mele* by contemporary artists. Furthermore, the internal pages almost always included abundant and sophisticated illustrations. Analyzing the correspondence between Baciú and the married artists Ludwig Zeller and Susana Wald, the researcher and professor Iván

Pérez Daniel reports that Baciu frequently requested engravings and illustrations from Susana and Ludwig for *Mele* (2023). Baciu himself highlights the visual dimension on the magazine's fifteenth anniversary:

Nuestras portadas fueron ilustradas por Alfredo Zalce, Maurice Henry, Mattis Teutsch, Carlos Mérida, Juan Ortega Leytón, Ludwig Zeller, Oswaldo Guayasamin, Sorel Etrog, A. Demian, Grete Csaki-Copony, Marina Nuñez del Pardo, Alfonso Ximénez, Stefan Munteano, Vasile Dobrian, Ben Norris, Harold Meschendorfer, Jacques Hérold, pero al mismo tiempo, tuvimos la ayuda de colaboradores «locales», como el maestro Jean Charlot, su esposa Zohma, y su hijo Martin, el excelente fotógrafo Francis Haar y sus jóvenes colegas Tia Johnson y Arnold Kishi, sin hablar de la dibujante Rowena Adachi, lista siempre a ilustrar una página en blanco o una poesía, sea ésta en chino, rumano, alemán o hindú, hawaiano o francés, thai o japonés [...]. (Baciu, 1980, p. 5)

In some issues, visual poems (Figures 1 and 2) and clippings from handwritten texts (Figure 3) were reproduced, promoting variety in the magazine's graphic appearance and creating an atmosphere of informality, authenticity, and intimacy, as the following examples show.

Figure 1: Poem by Emilian Roșca, translated by Ștefan Baciu



Source: *Mele* (1984)

Figure 2: Arabic translation of the poem “J’ai mille yeux en moi,” by Jacques Hérold, rendered by Mustapha Bénouis



Source: *Mele* (1974)

Figure 3: Poem by Carlos Drummond de Andrade.



Source: *Mele* (1971)

The periodicity and the number of pages of the magazine varied: in many years, there were three or four issues containing approximately between 15 and

35 pages, but there were cases where *Mele* reached much larger dimensions: for example, number 56, from February 1982, contained more than 70 pages, while issue 44, from March 1979, in memory of Baciú's wife, Mira Simian, reached 97 pages. In certain years, only one issue was published, and some issues contain only a few pages, such as the November 1992 issue, which came out with only nine pages due to Baciú's then precarious health (Cremer, 1992). There were several special issues, such as the one dedicated to the poetry of Haiti (January 1967), to Romanian poetry (October 1974), to surrealist poetry in Portuguese (organized by Mário Cesariny in March 1981), and to contemporary poetry of Bolivia (October 1984). Certain issues paid tribute to a single poet or artist, such as the Brazilians Manuel Bandeira and Raul Bopp, the Spaniard Eugenio Fernández Granell, the French-American Jean Charlot, the Mexican Octavio Paz, the Bolivian Jaime Sáenz, the Guatemalans Carlos Mérida and Rafael Arévalo Martínez, the Costa Rican Francisco Amighetti, the Nicaraguans Manolo Cuadra and Pablo Antonio Cuadra, and the Romanians Urmuz, Mihail Arșavir, Jacques Hérold, Eugen Titeanu, Ștefan Munteanu, Corneliu Temesky, and Emil Gulian.

2 CREATING MULTILINGUAL INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Original texts in Portuguese, Spanish, and Romanian were published in *Mele*, and less frequently, in other languages such as French, German, English, and Hawaiian. Over the years, texts in approximately 30 different languages appeared in *Mele* (Sakamoto, 2022, p. 168), including originals in or translations into Arabic, Japanese, Hungarian, Hindi, Polish, Latvian, and Samoan. To enable understanding among the magazine's recipients, who came from such varied geographical, cultural, and linguistic realities, translations played an important role, and often the same text received translation into several languages. The poem "Encontro em Temishoara," by Ribeiro Couto, was translated into Arabic, Hungarian, English (two different translations), Spanish, French, Romanian, and Samoan (*Mele*, n. 76, November 1987). The poem "El orden de los días," by Ricardo J. Bermúdez, was translated into Arabic, French, Italian, Catalan, Indonesian, Romanian, and Portuguese (*Mele*, n. 78, January 1989). "No meio do caminho," by

Carlos Drummond de Andrade, was translated into Japanese, English, Italian, Tagalog, and Polish (*Mele*, n. 61, January 1983). From Manuel Bandeira, "Consoada" was translated into Romanian and "Andorinha" into Samoan (*Mele*, n. 69, February 1985). The *crônicas* "O pessoal" and "A outra noite," by Rubem Braga, were translated into English, French, Turkish, and Samoan (*Mele*, n. 64, August 1983). "Poema para a Poesia," by Newton Braga, received translations into French, Romanian, Spanish, English, Catalan, Turkish, Japanese, Italian, German, Latvian, and Hawaiian (*Mele*, n. 54, August 1981). Pablo Antonio Cuadra highlights the important function of translated texts in the pages of *Mele*:

Gracias a esa volátil revista hemos elaborado sus lectores una red de amistades poéticas única en el disperso mundo actual. Un poema escogido puede aparecer en un número de *Mele* traducido a seis lenguas y así un poema nicaraguense ser leído en Polonia o en Lisboa, como quien siembra poesía al boleo sobre la tierra toda. (Cuadra, [1990?])

The reach of *Mele* was certainly limited, although copies of the magazine crossed many borders. According to Pablo Antonio Cuadra, *Mele*

[...] milagrosamente se difunde por el mundo, encontrándose lo mismo en la mesa de trabajo de Jorge Luis Borges que en la de Drummond de Andrade en Río o en la de un político notable de América o también en los Balkanes [sic] o en Portugal, que en Francia o Senegal. (Cuadra, [1990?])

Information about its print runs is discrepant and must have varied over time. According to some sources, between 200 and 300 copies were produced (Spiridon and Toader, 2010, p. 165). In a 1974 testimony, Ștefan Baciu states that 500 copies of *Mele* were produced, with 100 staying in Hawaii and the rest being sent to subscribers and distributed to literary magazines, newspaper supplements, and libraries around the world: "from Manila to Warsaw, and from Buenos Aires to Anchorage" (Lueras, 1974). Surely, a significant portion of what are called "subscribers" were members of Baciu's personal network of relationships, created and maintained based on intellectual affinities and a sense of solidarity and friendship (Carter, 1984, p. 7 and 10). In the second issue of the magazine, Baciu publishes a poem of his own that, in a way, attests to the "ecumenical" nature of his work:

Estandarte

Para aqueles que colhem uvas na Lituânia
 para aqueles que tomam banho no Mar Vermelho
 para aqueles que choram no México
 para aqueles que colhem flores no Chile
 para aqueles que escrevem nas paredes em Cuba
 para aqueles que fazem poemas na Baviera
 para aqueles que fazem saltos-mortais em Samoa
 para aqueles que morrem de tédio na Hungria
 vai o silêncio da minha poesia
 no qual haverão que encontrar-se
 como num trem que não vem de nenhum lugar
 e vai para todas as partes. (Baciu, 1966)

Mele did not intend to be a vehicle especially aimed at the formation and information of a wide readership. Hence, the great majority of the poems were published devoid of contextual information, and interpretive essays were rare. Often, texts in Spanish, Romanian, French, or Portuguese were not accompanied by translations. At the end of each issue, there is only a brief section, in Spanish and English, in which the contributors of that respective issue are succinctly described. Baciu's intention was clearly to connect writers and artists scattered around the world by sharing their recent production (and Baciu's own), which would hardly have circulated with such reach were it not for the work of collection and distribution carried out by the Romanian polymath and editor. As the professor of comparative literature Pierre Rivas wrote in the posthumous issue of *Mele*, “[d]ans la lointaine île d'Hawaï, *Mele* était le centre incandescent et irradiant d'une poésie des ‘cinq continents’” (Rivas, 1994, p. 16).

It is difficult to precisely trace the scope of this international community of writer-readers. Only vestiges of these friendships and intellectual connections remain. Baciu himself, in a 1984 text, writes that “muchas cartas se me han trasapelado, llevadas por la tormenta, al mudarme de un continente al otro” (Baciu, 1984, p. 61). Indeed, although voluminous and comprehensive, the archives of the Ștefan Baciu House-Museum in Brașov and of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest, to which Baciu made a series of donations of books, manuscripts, correspondence, photographs, and art objects while still alive, have gaps in this respect (Bogodan, 2021, p. 4). It is evident that only part of his passive

correspondence reached those archives, and even less of his active correspondence. For example, the years of friendship in Brazil between Baciu and Carlos Drummond de Andrade and the numerous contributions of the poet from Minas Gerais to *Mele* suggest that there was a significant exchange of letters, at least after Baciu left Brazil. However, there is only one letter from the Brazilian poet in the library of the Romanian Academy. The same can be said about Pablo Antonio Cuadra: although Baciu and Cuadra enjoyed a close friendship and Cuadra's contributions to *Mele* were among the most significant, the archive holds only two letters from the Nicaraguan poet.

In any case, the list of correspondence held in the 'Donăție Ștefan Baciu' collection at the Library of the Romanian Academy is an indication of the extent, if not the frequency, of his network of correspondents. Among the 262 senders, there are many Romanians and Hispanic Americans and a few Brazilians, such as Ledo Ivo, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Otto Lara Resende, Sérgio Lacerda, Murilo Mendes, José Nabuco, and Armando Correia Pacheco. The list of Hispanic Americans is much more extensive, including names like César Brañas, Octavio Paz, Jorge Carrera Andrade, Enrique Gómez-Correa, Raúl Henao, José Miguel Oviedo, and Ángel José Fernandez. As for the Romanian intellectuals, the archive of the Romanian Academy holds a significant number of letters from exiled Romanians addressed to Baciu, while the archives of the Romanian Department of State Security (*Securitate*) reveal that Baciu corresponded with several residents of the country. As an example, the journalist and poet Arșavir Acterian recalls how the letters and *Mele* strengthened the relationship between him, who lived in Romania, and the exiled Baciu:

At one point, I received a missive from Ștefan Baciu. It was around 1970. He asked me to write about my memories of the poets persecuted under Ceaușescu so he could publish them in the journal *Mele*. I had nothing to lose. I complied, signing my articles under a pseudonym: Ar. Manu. The poet bombarded me with letters, regularly sent me the journal *Mele*, and whereas before his departure abroad we only had superficial connections, we became close friends, engaging in a vast correspondence. After a short interruption—since the so-called revolution—I recently received a stack of *Mele* and little journals. (Acterian, 1993, p. 13).

The connections established by Baciú can, however, be better apprehended through the more than one thousand pages of the 89 issues of *Mele*. According to the researcher Yoshiro Sakamoto, author of a substantial critical-biographical study on Ștefan Baciú, more than 400 poets and writers from over 60 countries were published in the magazine (Sakamoto, 2022, p. 168). Testimonies from writers about *Mele* are abundant: they can be found in the correspondence preserved in archives, in newspaper articles from various countries—including the re-democratized Romania after 1989—and in statements reproduced in the magazine itself.

To cite a few examples, the Panamanian writer Ricardo J. Bermúdez recalls that “a través de los generosos envíos de *Mele*, se inició una correspondencia bastante regular” (Bermúdez, [1991?]). The Ecuadorian poet Jorge Carrera Andrade thanks Baciú for the materials sent and highlights *Mele*, “que ya se está convirtiendo en un documento de difusión de la poesía latino-americana” (1974). The Guatemalan journalist and poet Cesar Brañas registered his wishes in a 1975 text: “[que] *Mele* siga por mucho tiempo difundiendo cultura y haciendo efectiva fraternidad” (1975). In the Costa Rican newspaper *La nación*, Rocío Fernández de Ulibarri writes that Baciú “ha dedicado su vida a convertir en realidad la exclamación: ¡Abajo las fronteras literarias!” (1983). In a 1981 letter, Carlos Drummond de Andrade acknowledges receipt of issue number 54 of *Mele*, calling it “as always, interesting,” and adds:

Sinto que minha coleção de *Mele* esteja incompleta. Faltam-me os números 1, 48 e 49. Os dois últimos, creio que você ainda terá alguns exemplares de reserva. O no. 1, este é **introuvable**. Mas você poderia fazer uma edição em xerox, de um só exemplar, para este seu amigo? Eu ficaria feliz da vida. [grifo no original] (Drummond de Andrade, 1981)

Mele also served as a meeting point for poets who paid mutual tribute, which indicates that the magazine provided a deterritorialized space for coexistence and fostered an effective network of intellectual connections. To cite just a few examples, the Nicaraguan poet and essayist Jorge Eduardo Arellano pays a double tribute by dedicating to his compatriot Ricardo Llopesa the poem titled “Francisco Amighetti entre nosotros” (*Mele* n. 69, February 1985). The Costa Rican

Amighetti, in turn, joins many others—Carlos Martínez Rivas, Raúl Henao, David Escobar Galindo, Alberto Baeza Flores, Rodolfo Arévalo Salazar, Ruben Astudillo y Astudillo—to honor Pablo Antonio Cuadra in an issue of *Mele* dedicated to the Nicaraguan poet (*Mele* n. 53, June 1981). On another occasion, “Recado ao poeta” is published, in which Carlos Drummond de Andrade also pays tribute to Cuadra (*Mele* n. 66, February 1984). Drummond, in turn, is honored by the poet from Minas Gerais, Wilson Alvarenga Borges (*Mele* n. 33, March 1976, p. 3-4) and by the Colombian Raúl Henao (*Mele* n. 61, January 1983, p. 8).

There are, evidently, many tributes to Ștefan Baciú throughout the issues of *Mele*, such as the poem “Cântarea mierlei din Raubach” (The Song of the Blackbird from Raubach), in which the Romanian poet Alexandru Lungu, also an exile living in West Germany, imagines a “bridge of soul over two oceans, / beyond the straits of time, / on this side of distant grief” (*Mele* n. 69, February 1985, p. 20-21). In the poem, Lungu refers to *Mele*, as did Raúl Henao in the magazine's fifteenth-anniversary celebration:

[...] Ștefan Baciú se ocupa de destacar a los mejores representantes de esa poesía “ignorada y olvidada” como la llamara el maestro Jorge Zalamea que, por sobre todos los booms publicitarios, está conformada de los poetas locales y de provincia... en ocasiones las voces más puras y representativas de América Latina. (Henao, 1980)

3 THE POLITICS OF POETRY

Henao points out an important facet of *Mele*: the attention given to writers not consecrated in the hegemonic literary field. It is notable that Ștefan Baciú's intellectual circle did not include many renowned Hispanic American writers nor Romanian writers who surrendered to the demands of the communist regime in Bucharest. Jean-François Sirinelli (1986, p. 104) proposes that social networks among intellectuals are conditioned by both affinities and dislikes: “a simpatia e a amizade, por exemplo, e, ao contrário, a rivalidade e a hostilidade, o rancor e a inveja, a ruptura e a desavença desempenham, como em toda microssociedade, um papel decisivo.” This seems to apply precisely in the case of Ștefan Baciú, who openly opposed the writers of the so-called Latin American boom and for decades

engaged in a crusade against all who, before, during, or after that period, openly identified with communism, such as Pablo Neruda and Gabriel García Márquez. In 1970, Baciú even published a booklet with his poem “La Cia. Ltda.,” in which he ironically reduces the boom to a network of mutual praise and, implicitly, contests the literary value of the writers involved:

Vargas Llosa escribe sobre García Márquez
 García Márquez escribe sobre Vargas Llosa
 Vargas Llosa escribe sobre Carlos Fuentes
 Vargas, Márquez, Fuentes & Cia. Ltda.
 García Márquez escribe sobre Carlos Fuentes
 Carlos Fuentes escribe sobre García Márquez
 Carlos Fuentes escribe sobre Vargas Llosa
 Vargas, García, Fuentes & Cia. Ltda. (Baciú, 1970)

For Baciú and several other writers of the Cold War period, literary and political loyalties were inseparable. The point of intersection between these two dimensions—the aesthetic and the political—consisted for Baciú above all in the non-negotiable defense of the freedom of artistic creation, and therefore, a systematic attack on censorship, ideological subservience, and totalitarian regimes. It is true that Baciú spoke out against oppressive political regimes of all persuasions such as those of Franco, Salazar, Batista, Somoza, Trujillo, and Stroessner. But for the Romanian writer, the defense of freedom and democracy implied above all a phobic and intransigent anti-communism. Not by chance, Ștefan Baciú, while living in Brazil, found a home in two institutions whose mission was a well-defined anti-communist campaign: the newspaper *Tribuna da Imprensa*, of his great friend and political idol Carlos Lacerda, and the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), an international anti-Stalinist organization. *Mele*, however, rarely served as a vehicle for political debates. Even the Romanian Intelligence Service, upon inspecting the correspondence sent by Baciú to friends residing in the country in the 1980s and his work as editor of *Mele*, concluded that Baciú “hardly referred to the socio-political system of our country, although he did not accept it” (Spiridon; Toader, 2010, p. 165).

Therefore, it is even more remarkable that Baciú's animosity towards the exponents of the Latin American boom came to light in *Mele*, through the

reproduction of a column from the newspaper *L'Express* signed by Fernando Arrabal, in which the Spanish writer accused Gabriel García Márquez of being a "soldier of communism" (*Mele*, n. 62, March 1983, p. 38). Another example of political debate in the pages of *Mele* is the inclusion of the article "Calumnias a un muerto: Manuel Bandeira," in which Baciú defends Manuel Bandeira from the accusation by Lucas Fabio [sic] that the author of *Estrela da manhã* was a "UDN bourgeois." At the end of the article, Baciú refutes the author of the "slander" against Bandeira by suggesting an affinity between "comrade" Fábio Lucas and communism, since the Brazilian literary critic had been "invitado para integrar el jurado de Casa de las Américas de Cuba" (Baciú, 1988).

For the most part, Baciú seems to have reserved his political verve for the column "Palabras en libertad," which, in parallel with the publication of *Mele*, was published between 1965 and 1991 in several Hispanic American newspapers, such as "Estrella de Panamá," "La prensa" from Nicaragua, "El imparcial" from Guatemala, "La vanguardia" from Argentina, and "La prensa libre" from El Salvador. According to the Panamanian writer Ricardo J. Bermúdez, the texts of the column signed by Baciú were "fervientes empeños emanados de su oposición a cualquier forma de dictadura" (Bermúdez, [1991?]). Baciú himself explains the premises of "Palabras en libertad":

Comencé a escribir las primeras cuartillas en una época muy diferente de los días en que vivimos: los stalino-nerudianos estaban en el poder en el mundo entero y quienes nos oponíamos a este tipo de dictadura, éramos, yo lo sabía demasiado, un puñado disperso (¿por qué no decirlo?) de valientes. (Baciú, 1992)

4 A DIVERGENT WORLD LITERATURE

Although *Mele* remained almost always aloof from political indoctrination, configuring itself as an essentially literary vehicle, it is evident from his texts in "Palabras en libertad"—sporadically reproduced in *Mele*—that Baciú never abandoned the political mission he took upon himself. As the selection of writers and texts published in *Mele* depended exclusively on Baciú's network of relationships, it necessarily reflected his aesthetic and ideological preferences.

Thus, one can propose that Ștefan Baciu, by distancing himself from necessarily consecrated names, preferring to promote "marginal" poets (because they were unknown, novice, avant-garde, "non-communist," censored, or exiled), articulated an "alternative," "parallel," or "opposite" literary universe to the mainstream world republic of letters, as proposed by Pascale Casanova (2002, p. 28; 2005, p. 80 *et seq.*). This is because *Mele*, in the first place, ignored national limits, bringing together writers from multiple linguistic and geographical origins, and, at the same time, disassociated itself from the logic of the market of symbolic goods and the channels and criteria of literary consecration of the hegemonic cultural centers by putting into circulation, in its precarious graphic printing, authors and texts that were not necessarily renowned or prestigious. In this sense, Yoshio Sakamoto is right to highlight the intimate and personal character of *Mele* as a resistance to literature as big business. In the context of the Cold War and decolonization, *Mele* represented a rare experiment: a form of world literature from the margins, created not by institutions or markets but by individuals in conversation (Sakamoto, 2022, p. 166-167 and 177-178).

Consistent with its purpose as a magazine essentially by and for writers "in dialogue", the focus of *Mele* was on the literary production of living authors. In this way, the magazine served primarily as a showcase for contemporary poetry (and to a lesser extent, prose), including that of novice writers, such as the "poetas nuevos de Colombia" published in issue 69 of *Mele*. In the 1974 special issue, Ștefan Baciu explains that, since his time as a writer and journalist in Romania and later in Brazil as a columnist for *Tribuna da Imprensa*, he had always been interested in publishing debut poets, some of whom became well-known. He continues: "Since 1965, in Honolulu, I have been trying to do the same thing in the pages of *Mele* [...] and this effort has meant the affirmation of the first generation of young poets in a state of the Americas [Hawaii] known more for its pineapples, tennis, and the hula of Waikiki" (*Mele*, Special Issue, October 1974. Translated from the Romanian). Larry Kauanoe Kimura, a professor of Hawaiian language and studies at the University of Hawaii and one of the Hawaiian poets who collaborated on the magazine, attests to the importance of *Mele* as a vehicle for disseminating non-canonical literatures. In an interview, Kimura emphasizes the importance of

publishing texts in the Hawaiian language in *Mele*. This was crucial not only for disseminating Hawaiian heritage and cultural production in its own language to readers of other cultures but also for circulating this production and this language—threatened with erasure—among Hawaiians themselves (Kimura, 2025, 00:15:45).

CONCLUSION

The Romanian writer and philosopher Emil Cioran, who was Baciú's teacher at the Andrei Șaguna high school in Brașov, described him with a potent paradox: “You have gone to Honolulu/ Where you were gloriously shipwrecked” (cited in *The Arcadian*, p. 22). The difficult life of an exile, the certainly painful feelings of loss and distance—Baciú would never revisit Romania, which nonetheless endured in so many of his poems—seem to have found a palliative in intellectual activity, in writing, and in the dissemination of literature.

Isolated on a remote Pacific outpost, Ștefan Baciú turned *Mele* into a polyphonic, multilingual collage that follows the avant-garde tradition to which he belonged as poet and literary critic. The magazine functions as a deterritorialised cartography, a poetic space where borders dissolve and cultural geographies intertwine. In the thousands of rustics and laboriously xeroxed pages of the magazine, voices converged from a world divided and strained by the Cold War and by all the dictatorships that, at the mercy of different ideologies, oppressed, censored, imprisoned, killed, and exiled. The longevity and broad scope of *Mele* depended on Baciú's impetus and tenacity. Despite his animosities and political biases, he seemed to believe in literature's capacity to promote human connection and understanding, and thereby to provide an alternative homeland—a habitable territory. It was as if the “old ocean” of Lautréamont, mentioned in the first issue of the magazine, were to hypothetically meet the sea of Camões and, therefore, “unite, no longer separate.”

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