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SEX AND POWER. A HISTORICIST APPROACH TO
FEMININE REPRESENTATIONS

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Keywords: representation, femininity, patriarchy, politics, gender, nineteenth century, modernism, postmodernism, psychology, psychoanalysis, masculinity, misogyny, metatext, feminist self-portrait, social emancipation, myth modernism, fatal woman, bachelor, animus, anima, narcissism, female stereotypes, power relations, cultural hegemony, body without organs, feminist criticism.

The purpose of this work, structured in seven chapters (plus the argument and introduction), is to examine the representations of women in relation to power structures from the second half of the nineteenth century to the present - a period that coincides with what feminist critic Elaine Showalter calls "the three waves of feminism" (*Towards a Feminist Poetics*, 1979).

The few mutations, or waves, as they have been called, of women's emancipation movement took the form of a consciously assumed mission in the late nineteenth century, in the person of a new character in modern society - the New Woman.. Whereas previously classes and social types had been divided according to rank, descent, or possessions - all of which were indicators of their material status - the New Woman was rather an actor on the world stage, carefully fashioning her public role, figure, and behaviour according to a subversive scenario with a set of symbolic gestures: clothing inconsistent with social conventions, defiant behaviour, masculine practices (smoking, sports, cycling).

Another category of proto-feminists followed an agenda that aimed far beyond social scandal. They were the suffragettes who wanted to be represented on the map of political geography and the women who claimed their right to education - aspiring to the power of knowledge - and to a public career. As today statistic confirms the greater presence of women in various professions, including the High Court of Justice, we may say that one of humanity's problems, at least in the democratic world, has been solved.

In order to avoid accusations of a pro domo plea, we resorted to statistics. The picture emerging therefrom is absolutely amazing. In just one century the participation of males or females in institutional life has undergone a total reconfiguration.

Here are a few examples provided by the National Institute of Statistics and other forums interested in the presence of sex in social life.

The stereotype of the intellectually inferior woman, driven by reading into crises of hysteria and mental imbalance, wherein originated the need to keep her away from schools and libraries, has been invalidated by the statistics of educational performance, which indicates a higher proportion of female students passing exams and getting a degree.¹.

Tab.4.2 Numărul de elevi care s-au prezentat și au reușit să obțină diploma de bacalaureat, pe filiere și pe sexe, în anul școlar 2016/2017 (persoane)

Filiera	Prezență				Absolvenți cu diplomă			
	Total		Absolvenți din anul curent		Total		Absolvenți din anul curent	
	Masculin	Feminin	Masculin	Feminin	Masculin	Feminin	Masculin	Feminin
Total	66645	74565	55339	66481	43440	57334	40004	54548
Filiera teoretică	32742	45232	29848	42445	27225	39853	26193	38815
Filiera tehnologică	27163	23325	20108	18495	11852	12409	9860	10920
Filiera vocațională	6740	6008	5383	5541	4363	5072	3951	4813

Sursa: INS, Statistica educației

Table 1: A table of high school graduates from the 2016-2017 school year.

In terms of occupancy rate, the presence of women exceeds that of men in areas that require intelligence, culture and responsibility and sometimes even power at the top.

It is from the same Report of the National Institute of Statistics, entitled “Women and Men. Working and Life Partnership”, that we reproduce three more graphs showing the presence of women in medicine (2)², education (3) and magistracy (4). As far as the last is concerned, the Romanian rate of representation in international bodies of female magistrates exceeds even that of the European Union.

¹ See Lisa Appignanesi, *Bad And Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the Present*, 2011.

² A funny detail is that the page with this table, present in the 2018 edition of the book, is missing from the next edition.

competențelor profesionale a asistenților medicali generaliști formați înainte de aderarea României la UE.

Personalul medico-sanitar din sistemul de sănătate din România se caracterizează printr-un profund dezechilibru pe sexe. Acest fenomen este și consecința faptului că profesiile medicale sunt profesii considerate feminine. În anul 2017, raportul dintre femei și bărbați din categoria personalului medical cu studii superioare era de 3:1, în favoarea femeilor. Pentru personalul cu studii medii, raportul este de 9:1, situația fiind la fel de gravă atât în mediul rural (91% femei), cât și în mediul urban (90% femei).

Fig.3.4 Personalul medico-sanitar după nivelul de pregătire, pe sexe, în anul 2017 (persoane)

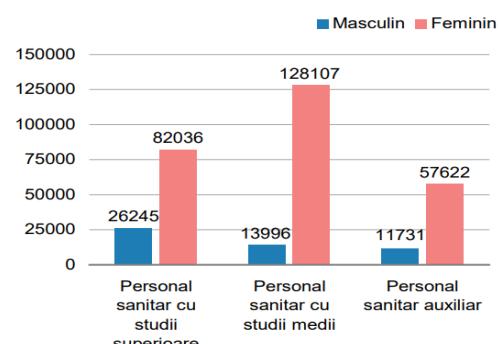
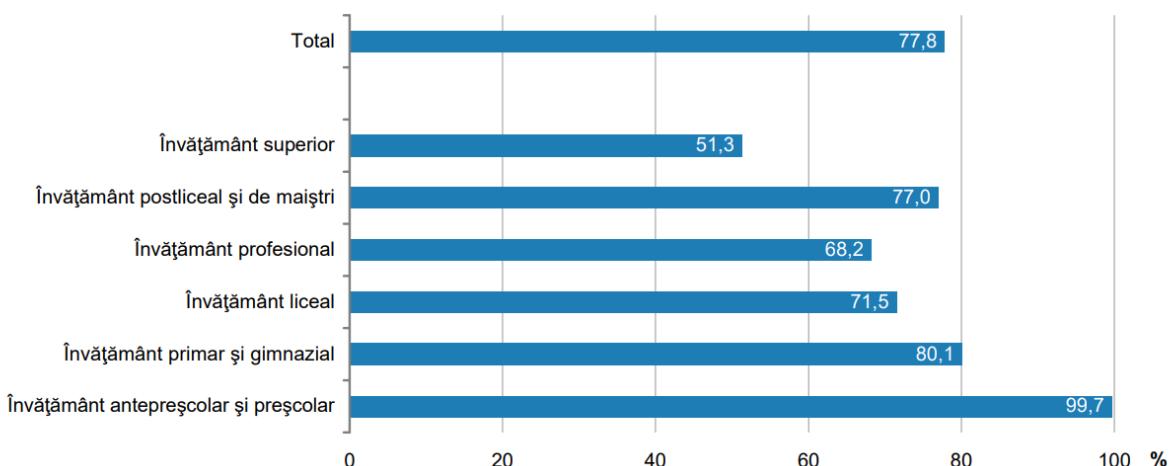


Table 2. Gendered occupancy rate in medicine.

Fig.4.3 Ponderea personalului didactic feminin pe niveluri de educație, în anul școlar 2017/2018 (%)



Sursa: INS, Statistica educației

Table 3: Occupancy rate in education.

Figura 54: Proporția femeilor membre (judecătoare) în Curtea Supremă de Justiție, la nivel național și media UE28 (2014-2019)



Table 4: Presence of Women in the Supreme Court of Justice

Mihaela Mocanu and Carmen Emanuela Rusu published a documentary on *Representation of Women in the Academic Space of Jassy, Between 1860–1945* (2016), which reminds us of the site wherefrom the process of women's emancipation started in Romania. (Table 6).

In short, it started from zero. The picture offered today is that of the second gender, as Simone de Beauvoir calls femininity, successfully competing with male competitors.

With injustice removed from society's power structure, why have we nevertheless set out to research this success story? Because we believe that any victory is safe only if the battle is carried on? Because we opted for a model fighting back social adversity, for which the word heroism is not exaggerated? Certainly, we approached this subject because we wanted to convince ourselves of the truth of Hamlet's definition of art's mission: "to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature: to show [...] the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."

What echo did the feminist movement have in literature from its birth in the nineteenth century to postmodernism? This is the question we tried to answer by examining plots, characters, dominant ideas, metaphors, structures and functions of language.

The binary in the title of this chapter of the thesis entitled "Sex and power - female representations from a historical perspective" was suggested, not accidentally, by the British protofeminist Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), author, among others, of the book *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1792. The choice of the edition we are referring to, published in London a century later in the "Walter Scott" collection, is not accidental either. It is an edition prefaced by Elizabeth Robins Pannell, an American writer who spent several decades in London, traveled extensively, signing, for example, this preface in Budapest in October 1891. Pannell worked to promote new ideas in areas considered at that time to be disjointed: politics and aesthetics, the latter not only in art but also in life, as she also included culinary art (she owned a collection of a thousand such books). In London, she opened her house to social meetings on Thursday until the end of the century. Her guests were aesthetes reputed for their socialist and non-conformist ideas (Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, George Gissing, George Bernard Shaw, George Moore, Henry James, the Impressionist painter Whistler, and others).

Looking back to the origins of her own "New Woman School" model she saw Wollstonecraft as the first in a series of fighters for the liberation and emancipation of half of humanity, a kind of first specimen of a new species.

Wollstonecraft's book is dedicated to Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, ambassador to England and a key figure in the French Revolution, who drew excommunication from Pope Pius VI upon his head for what was considered to be the betrayal of the clergy, namely, the legislative support of the expropriation of the Catholic Church. The reason Wollstonecraft appeals to him is that, under Jefferson's guidance, Talleyrand-Périgord participated in the drafting of the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (Declaration of Human Rights and Citizenship) adopted by the Constituent Assembly in 1789.

Wollstonecraft considers in this book that the ideological program of an event that had taken its first steps in Paris aimed only at the progress of a future society of men, while women were still reserved the historical presence in the children's room, away from public life, and especially , away from the light of education.

Wollstonecraft's criticism was justified, because even JJ Rousseau, a representative of the French Enlightenment, that current of thought which led to the establishment of the Republic of

Fraternity and Equality, considered in his novel *Emile* that there can be no model woman, so that it is for man, like a modern Pygmalion, to educate one according to his tastes and principles.

The nineteenth century meant a radical change in the status of women in society. Whereas in the previous century the reformist ideas of the Enlightenment had often been debated in salons of aristocrats in France, which increased their personal prestige, it was only by launching in the public sphere a discourse in favour of the emancipation of women by women themselves that managed to bring about changes in society. The similarities between Wollstonecraft's and MP J.S. Mill's arguments prove that the ideas supported by the latter were a symptom of the influence exerted by the former's writings. Mill argued that, just as women in history, invested with the power of government, had provided models of leadership (referring to Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria), so will they succeed in any other public career. His idea was fully endorsed by the books published by women writers, such as Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Jane Austen or the Brontë Sisters. Queen Elizabeth had saved England from the Invincible Army and the Pope's wrath, but she had not convinced public opinion of the effectiveness of political power in a woman's hands.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the unfavourable status of women led to the appearance of women's coordinated journals (*Amicul familiei, Mama și copilul, Revista pedagogică, Aurora, Femeia română*) which deplored the poor level of education of girls in cities and the absence of girls' schools in villages.

In the first chapter, *Slave or Tyrant? Representations of femininity in relation to power in the second half of the nineteenth century*, we present literary works in which woman is demonized or satirized because she dares to access exclusively masculine environments, such as politics or literature. I approached texts from both Romanian and world literature.

Even in France, a nation whose national motto was the triad of freedom, equality, and fraternity, successful women like George Sand were not recognized as such by influential authors such as Charles Baudelaire. In *Les fleurs du mal*, he draws a symbolic map of the sexes, humanity being divided into the subhuman woman (feline, demon, snake) and the superhuman man (dandy, esthete). Modernism, springing from Baudelaire's "flowers of Evil", operates through binaries, which oppose the positive to the negative pole. There are no intermediate states. The opposite of

the artist (dandy) is nature: *via artis* versus *via vitae*, therefore, woman. In Charles Baudelaire's diary, *Mon cœur mis à nu*, in a way, his will, an emanation of the last years (written between 1852 - 1866 and published posthumously in 1887), women are reduced to the life of instincts, to a body that wants to satisfy its needs of hunger, thirst and sex.

Famous for misogyny and also influential is Arthur Schopenhauer, woman being in his writings presented as a being unable to write a complete and original work, reduced to the condition of an animal that must be trained and locked in the house to meet the needs of men. Unable to exert some physical or intellectual profession, she is doomed to eternal suffering, having to go through the pains of childbirth and the exhausting raising of children. Only through self-alienation and serving others can she fulfill her destiny.

At the beginning of the century, therefore, Romania had the same point of view as the misogynistic West, described by Éliane Viennot in *Et la Modernité fut masculine*, a book in which the status of women in the social and political sphere is reconstructed. Even after the French Revolution, women continued to be excluded from literature and the game of power, with the modern era still dominated by patriarchal authority. Woman's desire to assert herself in public life inspires caricatures, either in dramatic key (Vidra) or as its comic counterpart (Chiriță).

Sigmund Freud, coming to the field of debate around typical female psychoses from the point of view of the new discipline of psychoanalysis, considered that the intellectual inferiority of women was due to the inhibition of thought, (an inhibition necessary for the gratification of sexuality).

Psychological analysis played a significant role in women's war against the cultural stereotypes passed off for scientific theories, first encountered in Freud. The cultural fantasy of female inferiority in relation to men acquires the status of metatheory.

The historical short story *One of Cleopatra's Nights*, written by a representative of Parnassianism, Théophile Gautier, builds the image of the victimizing woman, with a cold heart, who never falls in love, killing all her suitors. Her beauty is charming, but dangerous for those who allowed themselves to be seduced by it.

In the poem *Angel and Demon*, Eminescu presents woman in an angelic pose. As in most of his works, woman is granted in the social hierarchy a rank inferior to the "hyperionic" status of the man: "She? "A daughter of a king, blonde in a star tiara." The big blue eyes signify the purity of her soul that opposes the stormy, black-eyed demon, whose European prototype, throughout the nineteenth century, was Byron's doomed hero.

Luceafărul (Hyperion) rewrites the motif of the love triangle as an allegory of a woman's inability to transcend her earthly condition, choosing a social inferior as a more appropriate lover than the spirit incarnated from the primordial elements (air, water) Hyperion being fire - the only element foreign to the earth in the scripts of the creation of the universe by the Demiurge (cf. Plato's *Timaeus*) Catalina and Hyperion represent fire and earth, but the woman is to blame for the fall from unity.

Miron and the Bodyless Beauty is a poem about the female body whose role is to become the possession of a man. As Miron's love is not idealistic, contemplative, but possessive, he perishes consumed by desire.

In the Romanian literature of the 19th century, woman enjoys a social dignity equal to that of man, being often represented in love or family relationships, while being demonized as an aspirant political candidate. Such is the case of Princess Clara in Alexandru Davila's *Vlaicu Vodă*, constructed as an ambitious, cosmopolitan, conspiring woman. Alexandru Davila created thus a type of tyrannical woman who is not afraid of anything at all and who violates all human rules.

Another memorable female character in the Romanian literature of the 19th century also falls into the category of tyrannical women is the protagonist of the drama *Răzvan and Vidra* by Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu. She is a brave woman, described by the generic conventions of a fairy tale or epic, who tries to usurp a masculine role through various grasps perceived then as being typically masculine, but which is not denied the typically feminine beauty.

In Vasile Alecsandri's comedy, *Chirita în provincie* (Chirita in the Country), the power-thirsty woman in the comic-grotesque version is embodied by the eponymous character. Because

of the courage to get involved in politics, an exclusively male field, Chiriță, inspired by a real model, is rendered responsible for having embattled the spirits. She presents herself as an uneducated and upstart woman, the comic face of the Otter. In similar fashion, she drives her husband into the struggle for the dignity of steward.

In his two novels, *Life in the Country* and *Tănase Scătiu*, Duiliu Zamfirescu constructs the image of the woman-victim of patriarchal society to which the author gives a more complex coloration by attaching another social context: the degradation of social relations following the infiltration of a new class, a product of rural capital: the lessee, the upstart who disturbs the pre-established hierarchies.

In the second chapter, *Female stereotypes of modernism*, we argue that the first decades of the new century were dominated by psychology. We demonstrate how Freudian and Jungian concepts are used in the construction of the characters, which is why the female figure is fashioned as an enigmatic being.

The misogyny inherited from Baudelaire, Schopenhauer or Nietzsche is also displayed by influential thinkers of the new century, such as Otto Weininger (*Sex and Character*, 1903) or Sigmund Freud (*Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930), according to which woman opposes intellectual and spiritual life, being interested only in the gratification of libidinal instincts which civilization tries to repress in favor of the creation of culture.

The consensus over this identity construct makes us suspect an epistemic source at the basis of all of them, a vision imposed by the authority of science - in this case, a new discipline, psychoanalysis, and, therefore, attractive.

In "Delusion and Dream in Jensen's *Gradiva*" (1907), Sigmund Freud applies psychoanalysis as the archeology of the ego, the recovery of the abysmal psyche of a character obsessed with the graceful gait of a woman, the female figure being thus represented metonymically, by her feet. The whole action is centered around Dr. Norbert Hanold, an associate professor of archeology, who falls prey to a fantasy, after which he guides all his actions. That woman even disturbs his dreams, penetrates his subconscious. He substitutes dreams for a woman in his life, thus introducing chimeras into real life.

Nourished by the recently formed psychoanalysis, modernism creates the archetype of a woman as an object of the fascination exercised from the unconscious, as well as the libido generating behavioral disorders due to the repression of desire by social conventions. For instance, in Liviu Rebreanu's novel, *Adam and Eve*, a book about metempsychosis, characters are subject to this timeless, ancestral attraction.

In contrast, in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, metempsychosis includes sex change. Closer to Jung, Woolf is an androgynous being, the ideal person being able to identify with the other gender.

The character in the title of the novel was born in a world impossible to understand, this may be the reason why he enters the area of femininity, after that long sleep from which he wakes up as a woman. Since he is not alarmed at being reborn in the other sex, he becomes a person able to understand what "anima" symbolizes.

In his novels, Henry James illustrated his brother's ideas by constructing characters as focalizers of the narrative. There is nothing in the novel that is not perceived by one of the characters. Again, woman is the object of desire, of the projection of masculine modes of perception (see *Portrait of a Lady*, 1880-1881).

Vasile Voiculescu too follows the narrative model proposed by William James, introducing pragmatist principles in the construction of characters as an effect of memory and language, as can be seen especially in *Sakuntala*, *Magic Love* and *Lostrită* (The Otter).

In the works mentioned above are brought "to the center of attention the ego and the phenomenology of the mind whereby it transcends matter, reality, relaunching, in a century oppressed by the collectivist spirit and positivist determinism, the speculative game over the open universe of psychology" (Tupan 2009). Psychology becomes the discipline that gives anti-traditionalist simulation models used in the construction of characters and the fictional universe.

Spectralized, creatures born of texts, are only women in Voiculescu. Man lives in the real world, being a victim of the illusionist woman, born from language or operating inside him.

The fatal woman is a cultural stereotype of modernism, victimizing men fascinated by her.

In Eliade, too, mythical characters are represented by beings with supernatural powers, as in the short story *Les trois grâces*. Frusinel Mincu / Eufrosina plays the fatal woman in mythical guise, recounting the experience she had had during Dr. Tătaru's experiment, in which she had been one of a group of female subjects. By naming them "Amazons," along with "the three Graces", Dr Tătaru is alluding to those mythological beings who killed men.

As well as the *femme fatale* stereotype, the *machine celibataire* stereotype presents man as victim. The latter stereotype that belongs to the fin-de-siècle period and high modernism, presents the masculine party as superior, intellectual, artist, rejecting carnal eroticism, loving only art and associating only with men with whom he shares his passion for art. or science.

The above can be seen in Raymond Roussel's protagonist who manifests himself in this way. In his novel, *Locus Solus*, we observe the stereotype of the *machine celibataire*, illustrated by the protagonist's obsession to create life, substituting himself for woman, like Frankenstein.

In *The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War*, the female protagonist, Ela embodies an instinctive woman, the very opposite to the active, fighting, reflective male self, its construction being grounded in the concept of anima, as a bipolar figure. This novel even begins with a discussion of a trial in which a man was acquitted after killing his wife in a way that legitimizes the man and demonizes the woman.

Similarly to the companion poems, *Meeting at Midnight, Parting at Morning*, in which British poet Robert Browning constructs in his own voice (dramatic monologue) a man coming from the open sea to spend the night with a woman he breaks up with at the rising of the sun, following the path of glory illuminated by it for him alone. Gheorghidiu is also healed by the passion for a woman by the experience of confronting death against the background of the historical fresco of World War I.

In *Procrustes's Bed*, we come upon the same misogynistic view of woman, the presence of masculinity being all-sufficient. Living in Utopia, Camil Petrescu's male literary puppets filter external events through their own consciousness, despite their illusion that they have isolated themselves from the banal world out there.

In *Otilia's Mystery* the female protagonist closes in like an enigma, being incomprehensible to male rationality. She is only granted the status that a woman occupies in the life of a man who lacked a maternal figure.

Romanian fiction is no exception in terms of the vision and discourse on genres from the period of European modernism.

In the literature of the period, social roles are differentiated according to gender, sometimes men engaging in political or aesthetic conversations even occupying a space separate from that in which uneducated and libidinally obsessed women unleash their erotic fantasies (James Joyce, *Ulysses*).

Considered capricious and irrational, women represent enigmas for the rational and logical man (Proust's Albertine, Ibrăileanu's Adela, G. Călinescu's Otilia). The scenarios in which characters are inserted are also gender dependent: public career for a man and domestic life for a woman, concerns for fashion, delicacies, bovarism for the latter.

Feeble attempts to reform the unfavorable mentalities of women in the previous century, including Titu Maiorescu with his doctoral thesis, *Einiges Philosophische in gemeinfasslicher Form*, acquire an international character, the suffrage movement for the right to vote is supported by speeches about the New Woman , an opponent of patriarchy, but especially through Virginia Woolf's novels and essays.

There is a change in the perception of woman in light of a new discipline, psychoanalysis, which shifts the emphasis on women's biological deficiencies (heredity, atavism) to her libidinal subconscious and the danger of sexuality alienating men from his high command and missions in the service of civilization. Man must be a "bachelor" (Marcel Duchamp), united with other men in scientific speculation (*Ulysses* by Joyce), social revolutions (The Plumed Serpent by DH Lawrence), explorations of new territories (*Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad) .

In the third chapter, *La femme elle-même*, we present two historical figures who managed to break misogynistic patterns. Ecaterina Teodoroiu went down in history as a revolutionary figure changing the perception of the feminine gender in terms of the value of her contribution to the life of a society. She turned inside out the misogynistic vision of the past, the cliché of

inferiority, inspiring movies ranging from contemporary heroic quasy-documentary to postmodern remakes.

Contradicting the commonplaces of criticism of monarchical absolutism, a book played by the Bolsheviks of the Russian Revolution of 1917, only to create a new model of totalitarianism, Queen Maria was a unique example of an active monarch, involved in state affairs, dedicating herself even to exhausting work in field hospitals, authoring a self-fashioning book and imagining fairy-tales in search of a national specificity.

In the fourth chapter, *Rewriting power relations between the sexes in postmodernism*, we argue that texts written under this period term positively evaluate women, most often by rewriting a precedent (an intertext results therefrom), which gives the author the opportunity to correct the sexism of the patriarchal era by change of point of view, all the more obvious as it is the same intrigue or an analogous chrono-diegetic fiction. During this period, the deconstruction / demystification of hierarchies and the denunciation of hegemony also affect the social / cultural status of the sexes through the reality effect of language in the context of the domination of significant signs and practices. The sphere of public discourse has now a much greater influence on social relations than in patriarchal eras, in which social status is determined by the materiality of socio-political factors.

In our approach, we do not confuse gender and sex, cultural construction and the sexually symbolized body. Feminism is one of the studies of identity, along with postcolonial studies (racial identity) or the critique of class society (social identity).

The deconstruction of patriarchal binaries (woman-instinct, man-reason; woman-domestic existence, man-public career, etc.) is undertaken in the examples selected by us by male authors, who reject sexist representations, giving women roles usually played in the traditional society by men.

The rewriting of previous texts is practiced, as Julia Kristeva says in *Semeiotike*, to plant in them another ideology, for example, the overthrow of power relations. Unlike Umberto Eco, a semiologist who demonstrated the openness of a text, Kristeva writes about "closed text,"

because each new text only rewrites a precedent by approximation, permutation, or transformation.

Presenting a society which has gone awry, such as Hamlet's Denmark, DR Popescu's three selected novels make up a kind of Satyricon of our times: post-December chaos and corruption, immorality and corruption of new elites, mercenaries inherent in military participation in international conflicts or lack of prestige of Romanian culture, all the more evident as it is transposed in the setting of Renaissance Italy. However, these Menippean satires also have a moral center, a character who tries to "set right the out of joint" world, and this is, in all three, a woman. The fact that, in the novel *Cain's Jaw*, the role of Hamlet is taken over by a female character is not accidental; Irina (*The Return of the Prodigal Father*) is trying, in existentialist fashion, to do her duty in an absurd universe, while Simonetta Berlusconi, from the eponymous novel, is emancipated to the status of author, with the real author cast as a character in the world of her presumed text.

The frames and methods of approaching our theme in postmodernism are different, because even the cognitive models change, the psychological ones of modernism giving way to the linguistic ones. In a famous book, *Language and Power* (1989), Norman Fairclough evolves a theory of the pragmatic function of language through which modes of social interaction can be controlled.

I also pointed out the changes in society in forms of language. The social dependence of the husband's wife or the father's child is reflected in formulas such as "Ioana a lu' Petre" from D. R Popescu's novel, *The Return of the Prodigal Father*. At the other pole, women have gained the right to independent forms of address, which are also accompanied by clues of a profession, such as "Dr. Ruxandra."

In the play *Three Generations* by Lucia Demetrius, the three female protagonists of a transgenerational drama evolve from passive submission to parental authority over the choice of a husband, to resistance and, finally, to free choice in marriage.

Hegemonic positioning in language depends on access to social resources such as strength, money, social status (class membership), knowledge, information, "culture", etc. The power of

the dominant group becomes manifest in laws, rules, norms, customs - what the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci calls "cultural hegemony".

In this sense, we compared the dialogues of Filippo Lippi from the novel *Simonetta Berlusconi. Fra Filippo Lippi and Sister Lucrezia Butti* by D.R. Popescu, both with the nun Lucrezia, who is shy, innocent, fearful of the abbess, and with Simonetta - a mixture of patroness of Renaissance Italian arts and malevolent female character, serenely murderous, from the family of Lucrezia Borgia or Caterina de Medici. Simonetta has access to ancient culture, in her fantasies of power, even the ancient gods are dwarfs at her command.

Unlike these feminist voices at the turn of the century, Marta Petreu chooses to confront discourses rather than social issues, deconstructing masculine hegemony and changing the position of women in the literary tradition, those sexist clichés inherited from male writers. In one of her poems, for example, the legendary Calipso ridicules Odysseus' choice to return to a banal domestic life, while she remains to represent the world of legend, adventure, exoticism. The poem *I Think* seems to be written in response to Alfred Tennyson's dramatic monologue, *Ulysses*.

Marta Petreu's voice is ideologically imprinted, the poet writing a feminist poetry directed against all instances of masculine authority, as well as the imaginary and stereotypes of discourse that accompany them.

Nobel laureate Coetzee rewrites *Robinson Crusoe* from the perspective of an author, Susan Barton, who denounces the inequities of Defoe's time: the exclusion of women from the universe of representation or her presentation as promiscuous and criminal, the victimization of blacks, slavery, colonial expansion. Thus, the infinite potential of words and discourses in postmodern vision is realized, rewriting lending these texts a hybrid character.

In the fifth chapter, *Feminist Self-Portrait*, we compare and contrast two types of self-fashioning.

In *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* by Pinkola Clarissa Estes, the author offers us a vision of the wild woman, an endangered species like wild nature. For a long time, the typical female instinctuality was considered a defect, a reason for marginalization. Even when the misogyny of D.H. Lawrence took the form of

enslaving women to the man's needs for sexual revitalization, this was only a preliminary gesture to his engagement in aesthetic projects (*The Rainbow*, 1915) or revolutionary ones (*The Plumed Serpent*, 1926). The same revitalization, but now serving woman, is being sought by Estes.

At the other pole we place *Becoming* by Michelle Obama. The title is very suggestive, as this the story of a woman who was in the minority because of her color, but who at the same time is presented as one becoming strong due to gender qualities, From her first steps in public life she had felt herself glorified as the most powerful woman in the world, yet also as a woman of colour blinded by rage. Discrimination here is no longer based on gender, but on race.

In conclusion, this work started from the identification of the most dynamic component of the history of civilization in the era of late modernity: the emancipation of women, their acceptance as an equal partner in the sphere of public life. The past, as new historians know, is only known through language. Be they historiographical writings, artifacts, documents, etc., the objevcts of study allow us a restricted and mediated access (in the sense of interposing another consciousness between us and those of that time).

Our culture, in relation to the past, is one of selection: past representations are reevaluated, opened, as Kristeva says in *Semeiotike* to plant therein a new ideology. Operators can be historians of multimedia phenomena, but also authors who rewrite previous texts to limit themselves from the poetics / politics of those times.

We have therefore selected female figures from among the authors, characters or personalities present in public life and in the language of artifacts - literary works, journalism, cinematography - in order to get a comprehensive view of the chosen research topic.

For postmodernists, identity is a linguistic construct. Studying these representations we can get an idea about the construction of gender, the identity construction of women in relation to the other sex as it appears in canonical texts, in the symbolic imaginary or in the media discourse.

We also found a correlation between the representations of femininity in various authors, which indicates that social relations were perceived according to a certain episteme emanating mainly

from the dominant science: biology (nineteenth century), psychology (modernism) and philosophy of language (postmodernism).

The existence of clichés (the fatal woman, the woman-angel, the woman-demon, the woman-doll ...) also proves that the representations took into account some codes or conventions of gender construction (also valid in terms of masculinity, such as *machine celibataire* - man's refusal to consume himself in erotic relationships).

The representation of women in postmodernism distances itself from what it had been in previous eras. Women are allowed access to the ethereal field of art, as we saw in two of the novels presented (*Foe* and *Simonetta Berlisconi: Fra Filippo Lippi and Sister Lucrezia Buti*), the male authors symbolically ceding their place, reversing the situation which was common not long ago in which women authors adopted masculine pseudonyms in order to get published.

Women have managed to generate their own space of representation, they realized, as the existentialists demand, their own creative project, their own literary tradition. Moreover, as proved by the two postmodern authors set in a feminist perspective, J.M. Coetzee and D.R. Popescu, they managed to impose on the other sex their own vision about the condition of women in society and in the history of civilization. In conclusion, we wanted to know, in an age of self-reflexivity, how women self-represent themselves, how their aesthetic self is being fashioned. For this purpose, we chose two extreme cases: on the one hand, a writer (by profession, post-traumatic psychoanalyst), Clarissa Pinkola Estes, raised in an American village in the ancient lands of the Great Lakes, in a multiethnic community of immigrants, who came to America without even knowing how to read, and on the other hand, Michelle Obama, who recounts in her autobiographical book the formation and career among American elites, including the experience of the first lady. Estes believes that the regeneration of women can be achieved by returning to the vital, primary sources that civilization amputated. On the contrary, Michelle Obama is a landmark for everything that can be superlative in the life of the modern woman: in professional, family and interpersonal relationships. A reconciliation of the need for authenticity and the aspiration towards cultural and social refinement is probably the royal way to a woman's self-fulfillment.

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