THE SOLITUDE OF WOMAN IN HORTENSIA PAPADAT-BENGESCU NOVELS

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Abstract*: Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu is, undoubtedly, a writer that imposed herself in an age in which writing belonged to men. She writes an "eminently feminine" literature, as Garabet Ibrăileanu used to say and as she herself asserts through the voice of one ofher characters: "The study of women always seemed to me more interesting than that of men, because in a man's case you go round the actions and actions are seldom interesting, while a woman has a rich stock of spiritual material, in search of which you can go on an adventurous research, full of surprise". When she feels lonely, Hortensia confesses to G. Ibrăileanu: "I sometimes take from letters joys that others do not need because they take them from the environment in which they live or because they are self-sufficient. I'm used to being lonely. It is one of my great delights."*

Keywords*: femininity, solitude, confession.*

"The woman, the eternal story, do not ask who she is, always love her." (Sanda Radian, 1986: 5). When we talk about Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's work, we clearly refer to feminine literature. All the more, the image about the woman and her role in society has changed over time, but femininity has remained the same. The eternal feminine and the mystery slipped among the myths. The eternal feminine is present in literature, starting with the myth of history, if we are talking about Greece or ancient Egypt. In fact, this concept is a psychological archetype or a philosophical principle that symbolizes the "woman." Also based on this principle is the belief that men and women have different structures that can not be changed by time or environment.

Simone de Beauvoir used to say in "Tout compte fait" ("All said and done"): "... there are, of course, between the human female and the male genetic endocrine-anatomical differences; they are not sufficient to define femininity, it is a cultural construction and not a natural given."(Simone de Beauvoir, 1972: 497). This myth was present in the nineteenth century life, literature and culture, when women were described as angelic, destined to put the man on the path of morality and spirituality.

"Woman, eternal, beckons us on." /, Goethe said at the end of the opera "Faust", from here it is noticed the idea of femininity and what it represents in society.

Literature has always reflected crystallization of the female eternal in characters, consciously or not. But femininity, as a function of the narrative structure, is not successful in the modern novel, where, in most cases, it is the trigger of the action. Until the nineteenth century, the figure of the woman is contoured in antithesis - the beneficial or evil side - even from antiquity and to date they are archetypes of different spheres, which make the personality of each one unmistakable.

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At the advent of the novel and realistic dramaturgy, the female character regains its individuality within the conflict that breaks the couple or the family. Thus, to the notion of woman and femininity is added the idea of feminism.

Hence, it is women's time to alienate from themselves, that is to become initiated, to make a long detour, a long journey around herself only in order to eventually return but consciously and perfectly liberated, also to herself. The presence of the female character is similar in the large construction of Balzac, Tolstoy or Zola, reflecting the woman's condition in society. The virgin personality differs, the female authors retain romantic reminiscences, and the plea for the emancipation of women is stronger, while the great advocates of the plea are accompanied by a guard against virilization and sterilization of the so-called superior woman.

On the other hand, emphasis is placed on the mothers, as characters that look at their appearance, and do not want maturity to change them, as they are cold with the offspring, especially after they have passed the age of childhood. She has a placid and indifferent behavior, especially when the adolescence of the daughter is not a danger to her appearance. As it is to our author, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu describes them without maternal love, but only for the purpose of ascending on the social scale. One example would be the old lady Smoala, the mother of Drăgănescu, who is an absent character, but it is mentioned by another character that she is the image of the wealth of the parish priest who managed to climb the hierarchical ladder, Elena, daughter of a landowner, so a family reaches the high society of a newly enriched bourgeoisie. Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu says: “I saw her performing her respective prerogatives in the Blowzy Virgins and Bach Concert Music, without mercy. But if the first novel leaves her to triumph at the end, the second brings to Lică the first sign of vindictive humiliation. The mother completely loses her role of repressor on the Hidden Road, giving it to her legitimate daughter (Coca-Aimée performs Hilde's relegation here, without the knowledge of Lenora, who passed on her side). Persecution therefore became the ally of the persecuted.”(Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, 1984: 158).

Rarely the maternal principle is accompanied by the paternal one, the examples being doctress Rim or Lenora. They do not worry about their children, on the contrary, there is repulsion and remorse to their own sin. There are women who do not want to lose their beauty and ambition. Beautiful Elena in Roots wants her son Ghighi to become a good landlord and take care of the Prundeni estate, which leads to the boy's depression and he is committing suicide. Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu had already prepared this narrative thread in the auctorial voice, Mimi, still from the Blowzy Virgins: “Elena prepared her heir for her preconceived ideas, loved him because he could satisfy them. The fact that through him she could amplify her ambition, that she could add him to her property rights, that she could once again represent herself through him, was the big argument of her affection.”(Sanda Radian, *op.cit.* : 46). After this description of Hortensia, it is noted that there is such a feeling among the members of every family: “It is true that the family instinct reduced to its spontaneity would be very weak without the addition of that selfishness.”(Ibidem)

In both Romanian and French literature I have noticed that they bring to the forefront the orphaned characters, those that are abandoned by biological parents in most cases, as the writer Chantal Bertrand Jennings said about Emilé Zola: "It is particularly

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significant that almost entirely, the Zola's ideal female characters are orphaned. Of course, this subterfuge allows the novelist to steal the subject under observation of heredity and natural environment, to better carry on scientific and literary experimentation."(Chantal Bertrand Jennings, 1977: 124).

In Romanian literature, the ideal heredity of the characters is not considered a big problem, because the authors want to describe only beauty and moral purity, unrelated to their origins. The concern with the non-ideal orphans is interfering in the "blowsy virgins" in Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's work, who are not orphaned by the disappearance of their parents, but because they are illegitimate children. Mika-Lé, the daughter of Lenora Hallipa, is made with an Italian mason and she does not accept the idea that his lover did not have a high social status and thus generates a conflict between the two, which will lead to Mika's unstable condition. A similar situation represents the character of Sia, who informs that the doctress Rim's handmaiden is her daughter, made with Lică the Troubadour. All the more, the child's father looked after her and had an unbelievable admiration for her.

For the orphan, the absence of parents or the unclear family situation makes her impose either by revolting or relentlessly agitating, desiring to draw attention to her, so in the Bengescu's work we see the transition from the category of the found child to the bastard. The most conclusive example is Nora Baldovin. The feelings these women have for the society they belong to are disgust, immorality and failure because they do not belong to this world, being considered bastards born outside the marriage. They are analyzed in depth by the author, their reactions to the other characters, especially by the reflective character, Mimi, which observes all their behavior during the novels.

In the Romanian interwar book it is emphasized the interest for the physiology of marriage, the amorous triangle of husband-wife-lover and the breaking up of destinies that unite with other. In the author's work, adultery is not a solution by those involved, so female characters want to legalize their extramarital relationship, such as Elena Drăgănescu who decides to divorce to marry her lover, Marcian. Also, as an example, there is Ada Razu, who is a ruthless being waiting for her husband's death, prince Maxentiu to marry Lică the Troubadour.

Indeed, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu builds strong, but at the same time sensitive, feminine characters, weakened by everything that is happening around them. Nora Baldovin is a strong woman, manned by the hatred she has for all men. Her protective attitude towards her elder sister, Dia, who is a legitimate child, becomes a jealous one. In the novel "Roots", the author leaves the reader to deduce Nory through her behavior towards her sister, Dia, for whom she wanted a fiancé, but her sister has made her choice, but she describes it in a very delicate manner, her run away with Coty Pascu in Buşteni, the one she had chosen for Dia and the experiment of Coca Aimée with Coca the Pers from "The Hidden Road".

So, as I said, the female characters are made of hard material and dominate the masculine characters. For example, Elena imposes to Marcian, as she did with Drăgănescu, the ex-husband, Coca-Aimee gets what she wants from Lenora and Walter and throws Hilda out of her estate, between Mini and Nory is a conversation about real things and the Mini opposes a romantic vision of chivalry to conquer the world. This is how we realize that the two attitudes are not irreconcilable in the mind of the author, because she already had the

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ideas of both characters before the Hallipa Cycle, in the novel The Dragon where, in the name of the main character Laura, she had made a plea for women's rights and capacity they hold after the first war, demonstrating that this will bring a greater harmony in the family and a better evolution in the growth of the country's economy.

The writer herself wrote about this phenomenon in the article "Raise the veil" that appeared in the Sburător: "The feminism so clear in its main desires is still struggling with the shadows of public perplexity and a veil - the last one - seeking to cover it with an obscure and doubtful fog. It is believed by a remnant of error that she would ask for the social place that belongs to the man. From the shadow and shelter of the workshop, from where I only ask the chisel to be faithful to the thought, I think she does not require the place of anyone. She does not want to take - she wants to share - if it is true that she shared the worries and needs and even the work [...] << Woman wants to be a public servant, deputy, minister! >> I think no more than she wanted to be a doctor, a teacher and just as much as she responded in these directions to a public need for collaboration. Female doctors and women in education have not destroyed marriage or maternity - on the contrary. But, can these settlements that are not in the power of anybody, be destroyed - are they not eternal? The forms will be susceptible to progressive evolutions in harmony with the overall evolution of social progress; but no one should be afraid that the woman will no longer be a woman. Her prerogatives are too expensive to be left, nor can she leave them; they are her essence. Men have always received the woman's collaboration and have called her to share evil and good with them. They will not refuse a hand they have always asked for. The moment when this peaceful marriage of sexes is done in the field of social law is a moment of emotions shared after sharing the dangers; a moment of universal social exaltation and national happiness. As for the woman's abdication from her gentleness and natural graces, there is no fear."

Just before this confession of the author, Tudor Vianu talks about the inclination to lift the veil over the mystery of femininity, counting on the decipherment of female psychology in the volume "Deep Water". He disagrees with those who are against writing about rational and active women in society, which is the charm of femininity: "A feminine Romanian literature is blossoming under our eyes. This, always rising to the common level, made by men, escape any eyes. But the unanimous aspiration of the feminine soul, in other parts of the world as well as in here, proves the formation of a new femininity (something very different from the a bit ridiculous agitation and the trendiness that is called feminine). The woman wants to create a conscious destiny. I do not think its purpose is to be harmed." (Tudor Vianu, Sburătorul, 1919: no. 3).

Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu brutalizes all the characters in the novels of the Hallip cycle, slightly ironizes Nory, the representative of absolute feminism, but also Mini, makes her incomprehensible, ironizing also the romanticism she has.

In interwar prose, women are financially independent by profession or artistic talent, being recognized in society. But this does not bring happiness and they usually break apart from the beloved man. This aspect had been analyzed in the universal literature, especially by Balzac. Arlette Michel investigates the empowerment of women in 19th century literature, and notes works such as "Corrine" by Madame de Stäel and Lelia de George Sand, impose this type of woman's superiority from a sentimental and intellectual

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point of view. Lelia is the feminine archetype that leads the intellectual man, Camille Maupin being another female character of Honoré de Balzac, who has the same sentimental and intellectual probes, especially with politics and deceptions after 1830. Arlette Michel says of Balzac's vision: "Intellectual superiority, which allows the woman to emancipate, to conquer her social independence, constitutes an obstacle to true fulfillment that is for any woman of the order of love and of absolute."(Arlette Michel, 1976:p. 1135).

In the Romanian literature of the interwar period there is such a Balzacian vision, but it is changed because of the difference of era and ethical conception, but the emancipation of the woman and her profession is no longer contested, only her rights equal to those of the man can be heard echoes of discomfort. From a professional point of view, the women's professions are not those accepted as feminine during the interwar period: florist, nurse, doctor, teacher, writer, painter, singer. For example, in the work of Camil Petrescu, the business woman is the owner of a shop in Procust's Bed or company director in the comedy Mitică Popescu. On the other hand, in the work of Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, more important is the social success than the professional one, in the Hallipa cycle the emphasis is on the polishing of a landowning aristocracy, a borrowed bourgeoisie, and churl. Nory's commentary on the relationship between Drăgănescu and Elena Hallipa shows cynicism and envy: "How fortunate Drăgănescu came after the prince! His whole concern is not to seem unworthy of being the successor of such a person. He is not jealous not to be rude - he thinks! It's not avaricious not to be rude – he is not a cad - idem [...] He has a quality, as Elena told me - as big as you see him, he does not exist!"(Sanda Radian, op. cit.: 66).

So Balzacism has a bigger print in the family chronicle of the Bengescu's work than in Proust's work, especially since the author takes the Proustian model, but in her manner of writing, and finally the return to the origin, to the ground, reveals the problem of uprooting, the distancing from the healthy rural environment, a problem that will be discussed by many prominent writers of the time. The area where the amateur meetings take place is the palace and the salon, where reputation is formed in the high society. Ada Maxentiu invites Lică to the Bach music concert organized by Elena just to be sure of her relationship with the chosen lover.

The righteous virgins, the women of the highest class, ideal or superior, appear in antithesis, as I have said before, so they value their beauty of soul, merits or destiny. The most common opposition is that of the honest and courteous woman. A courtesan has several meanings: frivol, adventurer, demi-rep, vampire and prostitute. Frivolity says its word in the Mika-Lé case, from the novel "The Blowsy Virgins". She is likened to a "poisonous weed" because she wants to seduce all the men who know her from vice and to destroy the plans of the mother and daughters of law, seducing the fiancé of Elena, prince Maxentiu, getting under the skin of Doru Hallipa, succeeding to have a lot of shameful ties that be said. Mika-Lé is not a narcissist; she defends herself in front of the family who sees her from the very beginning as inferior. The author does not put her with anyone in the antithesis, but on the contrary she is analyzed alone, and everyone calls her with some not very beautiful words: "the bug", "locust", so the character reflector, Mini, is surprised that this being, can have human reactions anymore. So Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu rejects Mika-Lé, as being the destroyer of the family and its reputation. Elena re-accepts her in the

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house just to cover up the scandal and show her superiority. I point out that such a courtesan, like the character of Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, does not choose her existence from necessity, but from vice.

In opposing superior woman / inferior woman, angelic / demonic, pure / vicious, the characters were on a plan of equality in the narrative structure. Predominant is the big sister / little sister couple, the latter will put in the foreground the features of the former, especially since the little sister admiring the big one can fulfill more functions. But at Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, the little sister becomes the main character, adoration for the great sister will change in envy and jealousy, bringing to light the bastard complexes.

Viola Vancea, to the author: "the clarification, the stage of the lucid, directed elaboration, involves the loading of the intuition of things with intense, affective experience, in order to increase their coefficient of impressibility."(Viola Vancea, *op. cit*.:18) We are told that Hortenzia Papadat-Bengescu has followed from the very beginning a way of self, she wanted to reflect the dramatic, real, palpable events to reveal the profound implications of the consciousness of those involved in the action. How could she do that? Through personal experience, events such as World War I, independence from husband at a time when women's rights were few, the profession they exerted and did not match with home-based requirements and so on.

The image of the woman in the interwar novel is a complex one, it is a profound, changing analysis from one epoch to another, which demonstrates that the eternal feminine and its mystery will never disappear.

The distinction of these types differs from one generation to another, according to the acceptance of the couple and the clan and the relationships between them in society.

In conclusion, every female character dissected by the writer's eye is a singular destiny, every woman is actually alone and in fact. No matter what their goal in life is, failure occurs, a failure of the "soul body", which tired of so much inner struggle quits and finally dies.

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