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**THE DOUBLE MARGINALITY OF ROMANIAN FEMINIST POETRY.
EDGINESS, THEORETICAL GAP, AND NEOLIBERAL ABSORPTION**

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Abstract: This paper aims to outline the urgency of Romanian Feminist poetry in light of neoliberalism and the capitalist world-system which together have become an uncontrollable and increasingly unequal mechanism. Rooted in neoliberal ideology, a postfeminist framework can provide grounds for the hypothesis according to which Romanian society, given its post-communist character, skipped over western feminist waves that were overlapping, catalyzed after the 1989 Revolution. Moreover, a postfeminist mindset can be detected to the extent that the reflexivity, the consciousness of the historicity of Eastern and Western feminism, and by overcoming the traditional antinomy of women versus men provide a useful follow up to the radicalism and to the militancy.

Keywords: Romanian feminist poetry, double marginality, postfeminism, neoliberalism, feminist network, western feminism, Eastern Europe, glitter materialist feminism

The Urgency of Romanian Feminist Poetry

In light of the progress of international feminist studies and the publication of *Feminism as World Literature* (Bloomsbury, 2022), as well as in the context of local and global cases of violence against women, contemporary Romanian literature is currently experiencing a consolidation of the feminist poetry phenomenon. However,

there is a noteworthy difference between the poetry of Romanian feminists and the import of foreign feminist theory. As a (semi)peripheral space still dominated by a deeply patriarchal and sexist culture, feminist lyric discourse, increasingly asserted in the last few years, has become a forceful, vehement, and disruptive pole in the local literary field. This paper aims to analyse the paradox of this phenomenon: the double marginality of Romanian feminist poetry (firstly, because it belongs to a cultural field still on the margins, secondly because within it, it remains on the periphery, being dismissed or even demonised within social media or mass media) does not prove to be the guarantee of an intersectional, socially detained perspective. A global neoliberal circulation of ideas largely imported from the international space – both European and non-European – nevertheless produces a local discourse that risks becoming, as Susan Watkins observes, “a mantra of the global establishment”, thus losing “its critical edge” (Goodman 2). It is not by chance that militant feminist poetry as a phenomenon, with a strong left-wing ideological agenda, takes shape after 2015, when Romania’s economic situation begins to stabilise, if one considers the economic crisis of 2008. Before 2015, there is only one female poet in postcommunist Romania who fully assumes a feminist, if rather exhibitionistic (especially at the beginning of her literary career), direction in her literature and in her public interventions: Elena Vlădăreanu.

More specifically, Romanian feminist discourse, materialised most often and most strongly in poetry, tends to be negatively absorbed/mainstreamed by the central faction of the Romanian cultural stage, becoming, even if to the advantage of revolutionary strand of feminist texts, just a manifesto, a form, rather than a programme of exploration, following a mission to fertilise these new ideas that have yet to claim their place and role in the Romanian literary field. Thus, contrary to the double marginality that I previously mentioned, the absorption takes place, on the one hand, according to the neoliberal order and, on the other hand, according to the typical shape of the *manifesto*, because, as a rule, feminist poems or feminist poetry books tend to structure themselves as manifestos, which leads to an inflation of such texts, and a weakening of their social impact. Even if the radical nature of a manifesto is necessary for rupturing the heteronormativity of a literary field such as the Romanian one (which is deeply infused with machismo and sexism), the quantity of manifesto-texts that was produced during a short time tend to build a stereotype, a formula, which is not at all

desirable. Symptomatically, the editors of a handbook about postfeminism point out that “for a post-1970 generation of women/feminists, feminism exists not only – or indeed, some might argue, less – as a political and social movement but also as a distinct identity position or, worse, a stereotype, most vividly expressed in the iconic figure of the humourless and drab ‘braburner’” (Genz, Brabon 12). Romanian female writers Elena Vlădăreanu and especially Medeea Iancu express their radical and socio-political messages through manifesto-texts whose pathways are either built through drastic imperatives – as in the case of Medeea Iancu in *Delacroix is taboo: the Romanian suite* (2016) and *Delacroix is taboo: Lyrical Amendments* (2019) – or through a confessional, narrative, but impulsive and emancipatory mode, as in Vlădăreanu’s case. Both assume a left-wing feminist consciousness that they assert to spread as a social project, rooted in literary production.

Based on an assumption made by Caitlin Newcomer on the relationship between theory and poetry, it seems that a fluid poetical discourse not only prompts a dialogue with feminist theory, but also represents a fertilising space, which would imply an evolutionary, dynamic character of the theory that is born in movement. Trinh Minh-ha observes, marking the strangeness of this phenomenon, that “it is still unusual to encounter... instances where the borderline between theoretical and non-theoretical writings is blurred and questioned, so that theory and poetry necessarily mesh, both determined by an awareness of the sign and the destabilization of the meaning and writing subject” (Goodman 223). There are two particular cases of putting into practice theories that do not yet circulate, or circulate very poorly, in Romanian literary studies. Obviously, not only is their circulation precarious, but also the representation of subjectivities such as mad-feminist or posthumanist-feminist are rare cases, which have found fertile ground in this context of the emergence of a hard, multifaceted local feminism. The two volumes I am talking about are Ileana Negrea's *jumătate din viața mea de acum* [Half of My Life So Far] and Nóra Ugron's *Orlando postuman* [Posthuman Orlando], both published by frACTalia Publishing. Before discussing them as two case studies, it is necessary to geopolitically approach the state of contemporary feminism in Romania. As a post-communist country, it was only in the 2000s that Romanian culture experienced several feminist perspectives: on the one hand, a large theoretical-philosophical feminism, essentially humanist and liberal, through Mihaela

Miroiu; on the other hand, an exhibitionist feminism, which extracted its characteristics from a deeply bodily, sexual dimension, in which one can observe the progressive birth of a materialist feminist consciousness. However, the cultural landscape does not look too promising in this regard, as macho and misogynistic attitudes intensify as militant feminism grows:

In spite of the un-*tabooing* (the expression of many critics of the 2000 generation) of language, given the constitution of the so-called 2000 generation, in spite of the updating of the poetic imaginary and the minimal contact with social realities, poetry written by women poets was seen as either indecent, insufficient, peripheral, insignificant¹ (Iancu 30, 2020).

It is therefore quite difficult to discuss a feminist literature like that of 2000s in Romania: is it not a feminism *avant la lettre*, but rather an ingenuous feminism that found its purpose and explored its methods and its strategies only later, when mainstream international female authors became a central focus of the Romanian literary press. Writers such as Doris Lessing or Kate Millett are mentioned in short excerpts of cultural journalism, but I would like to shed light on the negative reception that 1960s American feminism had in post-communist Romania, which may seem quite peculiar, as the ‘American dream’ was a commonplace of the mentality of the newly liberal society. I refer to the utopian image that America had in the years of the transition from communism to capitalism in Romania, as a capitalist paradise and a high-quality system of living.

For example, Kate Millett, a major figure of ‘60s militant feminism, is described in 1999 as being ‘outdated’ by the editors of the magazine *România literară*. Certainly, feminism had evolved by then compared to the 1960s and 1970s, but the essential issue is the strategy through which the local cultural press was discrediting the militancy of the second wave, perceived as a latent danger in Romanian cultural field. Following techniques of tabloid journalism, the paragraph about Millett reproduces several pieces

¹ În pofida detabuizării (expresia multor critici din generația 2000) limbajului, odată cu formarea așa-zisei generații 2000, în pofida actualizării imaginarului poetic și a minimului contact cu realitățile sociale, poezia scrisă de poete a fost văzută ca fiind ba indecentă, insuficientă, de periferie, ne semnificativă. (My translation)

from an interview published by the British newspaper *The Observer*, in which she expresses her outrage and sadness at having been forgotten. The Romanian editors come up with an argument that not only exposes why they consider Millett old-fashioned, but which also criticises a militant, so-called aggressive feminism: “In fact, this shock feminist generation, which barely figures as a museum piece in American studies, has been criticised for not knowing how to evolve, for thinking that everything begins and ends with them, for being mistaken is believing that they have said everything that needs to be said. The new feminist generations no longer recognise themselves in these outdated militants of the 1960s”² (***) 22). Another note explicitly assaulting the feminism of the 1960s is part of a review by Virgil Stanciu focused on the Ruxandra Cesereanu’s *Oceanul Schizoidian* [Schizoid Ocean]. By linking Cesereanu’s poetry to the “affective-feminist and deeply sensual poetry of Erica Jong or Margaret Atwood” (Stanciu 23), Virgil Stanciu underlines the metaphysical, abyssal character of Cesereanu’s feminism, which is positively validated in contrast to, according to Stanciu, a “dead militant feminism” (Stanciu 23) that would have entailed the book’s failure. Two matters emerge from these illustrative examples of the Romanian post-communist mentality: 1) according to Romanian reception, western feminism is wrongly equated to the second wave feminism of the ‘60s and ‘70s, which is of course a militant, aggressive feminism, the sticking points of which come from its largely white and privileged representation, and the binary and antinomic thinking in terms of women vs. men; 2) in post-communist Romania, feminism is either considered unnecessary because of the freedom gained after the fall of communism, or it is often confused with communist/totalitarian ideology. These ideological misconceptions and handlings of feminism are not only specific to Romania but seem to be symptomatic for other Eastern countries as well. Alena Heitlinger mapped feminism in post-communist Czech Republic by using the frame alignment theory, which requires an empirical basis of the host culture to make the imported social movement functional. Similarly to failed

² “De fapt, acestei generații-șoc a feminismului, care mai figurează ca piesă de muzeu în studiile americane, i se reproșează că n-a știut să evolueze, că reprezentatele ei au crezut că totul începe și se termină cu ele, că s-au înșelat crezând că au spus tot ce era de spus. Noile generații de feministe nu se mai recunosc în aceste depășite militante ale anilor ‘60.” (My translation)

American peace movements (Heitlinger 80), western feminism became unproductive once transferred to a post-communist country:

In a similar vein, we can argue that the collective action frames of western feminism lack resonance with Czech women (and men). As a mode of diagnostic and prognostic attribution, western feminist discourse emphasizes patriarchy and capitalism. In contrast, Czech grievance interpretations focus on the social legacy of communism. Thus, when transplanted into the very different political, economic, and cultural context of Czech post-communist, western feminist explanations and attributions of blame have no empirical credibility, no experiential commensurability, and no ideational centrality. Inasmuch as the very mention of feminism ‘provokes in Czech audiences – both male and female – responses ranging from jokes to aggression’ (Smejkalová-Strickland, 1993, p.18), framing efforts along western feminist lines can be counter-productive. (Heitlinger 80).

In other words, the transfer failure is caused by the lack of equivalence of social emergencies. Furthermore, Jiřina Šiklová, apud Heitlinger, outlines the linguistic issue rooted in communist trauma:

It is no wonder that the discussion of western feminists about whether women are a social class or not, whether social or sexual inequality is primary, appears to post-communist women as futile: the terminology reminds them of Orwellian newspeak. For this reason, formulations like ‘the struggle for gender equality is a never-ending revolution’, ‘women are a class antagonistic to men, since it is exploited by them’... incite only aversion to feminism” (Heitlinger 80).

Thus, a post-communist culture has clearly skipped few international stages, since in the ‘60s and ‘70s, when the second wave of feminism was altering Western society, in communist Romania there could be no talk of such a radical, liberating attitude towards individuals (either women or men) within a dictatorship – a society that was in any case mainly run and orchestrated by men. Because of its obvious difference compared to feminist movements in the Western world (USA and France especially), feminism in Romania can only be approached through a “post” grid, because otherwise it risks being

seen as a delayed echo of what is happening/ happened in the centre. Thus, given the skipping of certain stages, as well as the multifaceted nature of local feminism today, I believe that approaching this literary phenomenon through a postfeminist framework allows us to follow it historically and to identify its position within the Romanian literary field today, as well as to question its links to other feminist voices in the international arena. On the background of the liberal global field in which we live and considering the difficulty of local feminists to find models in their own culture, they seek legitimacy through a kind of sisterhood with international voices, both European and non-European: Virginia Woolf, Natalia Ginzburg, Sylvia Plath, Jana Orlová, Anne Sexton, Doris Lessing, Donna Haraway, Maryse Condé etc.

So, could a postfeminist approach really provide the theoretical infrastructure of such an approach, if a hybridisation of feminist waves is currently taking place in Romania? Propitious and treacherous, this is a neoliberal, postmodern, and heteronormative society without a well-defined brand of feminism, because such a marketplace of ideas tends to absorb even the most militant and effervescent discourses, thereby postponing a real shift. That is why the plenty feminist and anti-capitalist literary manifestos risk to become dysfunctional, leading to extreme redundancy as an unfortunate consequence. The needless effect of the militant circularity congealed a second-wave feminist set-up which must fight both against conservative opponents, and the patriarchal, and misogynistic cultural tradition, but must equally reinvent itself to exceed the commodification within a neoliberal society. Symptomatically, one of the most questionable relationships seems to be that between postfeminism as a new wave, and popular culture rooted in the postmodernist spectrum, because, on the one hand, feminism becomes a product ready to be commodified; on the other hand, “a popular feminism” (or even “the viability of the category of ‘popular feminism’”, Genz, Brabon 19) implies the depoliticization of feminism: “Consequently, the media-friendly postfeminist stance is interpreted as an abatement and depoliticization of the feminist movement, whereby feminism’s entry into the popular is represented as a damaging attempt to manage and contain the revolutionary potential of the feminist enterprise.” (Genz, Brabon 19). Postfeminism as a quintessentially capitalist wave, born in the middle of the rise of mass media seems to be a danger to what feminism has managed to do for women’s empowerment: “Postfeminism, Greer argues, is a luxury shoved down

the throats of big business in the developed West, other worlds in which very poor women work for next to nothing to produce for the success of upper- and middle- class Westerns.”³ (Dragomir, Miroiu, 145).

From another point of view, there are some different feminist strands within the same phenomenon, which is a hybrid assimilation of foreign feminism: while the edginess of international second wave feminism is not visible in Romania, and the unstable background of the transition from communism to capitalism proposes either a humanist-philosophical engagement with feminism (specific to the academic, institutional context), or a more insurgent one that starts from the female body, assumed to be non-academic, contemporary feminism hopes to catch up with the radicalism and the revolutionary character of the lost wave, but also gains a multi-layered, slightly diffuse morphology. Consequently, a postfeminist approach lends itself to the phenomenon of current Romanian feminist poetry, because there is an awareness of the historicity of global feminism and locally through more or less ingenuous samples. In fact, the sarcastic, postironic component of certain discourses like that of Cătălina Stanislav envisages the “meta” strand that this movement takes on. On the other hand, the marginality of this phenomenon, as I noted, further proves the need to shape its exacerbated militancy, which only suggest that Romanian writers have not yet overcome the pressure and the aggressivity of the traditional structures of the community from a socio-cultural standpoint, nor has Romanian society yet enabled the absolute integration of sexual minorities. This remark would undermine the postfeminist perspective by criticising it for pushing the framing of an apparently reactionary local phenomenon through a present global framework. It is partially true, because the emergence of postfeminism actually implies a radical shift within society, reassessing traditional, oppressive structures as confusing and dysfunctional forms of living. In the words of David Gauntlett and Patricia S. Mann: “Likewise, in social and political investigations, postfeminism has been read as indicative of a ‘post-traditional’ era characterised by dramatic changes in basic social relationships, role stereotyping and conceptions of agency” (Genz, Brabon 1).

³Postfeminismul, susține Greer, este un lux vârat pe gât de către marile companii ale vestului dezvoltat, altor lumi în care femeii foarte sărace lucrează pe mai nimic să producă pentru succesul vestivelor din clasa de sus și din clasa de mijloc. [My translation]

However, there can be no such thing in Romania, which means that the postfeminist agenda cannot be supported by social arguments, but it can be upheld through intra-literary discourse, which suggests the presence of a multi-layered feminism. Here the feminist subject's hyper-awareness of previous international feminisms (facilitated by the circulation of ideas within a neoliberal capitalist market) and second wave militancy overlap. In other words, there is no postfeminist society in Romania or postfeminism as a distinct wave, but there is, however, a postfeminist mindset among young female poets, who produce feminist literary discourses as social narratives, not just as cultural manifestos, entailing both the prescriptive character and the self-reflexive dimension of the functionality of this rhetoric. Secondly, the purity of the dual feminism, based on a binary gender structure, synchronises with the queer plurality that often embodies feminism as a statement. If we consider the main Romanian feminist writers, Elena Vlădăreanu, Medeea Iancu, Cătălina Stanislav, and Gabriela Feceoru would fit into the first category, while Nóra Ugron, Saşa Zare, Ileana Negrea are not *only* feminists, rather engendering a specific ideological outlook, namely queer (eco)feminism. New (out)looks are emerging, overlapping a one-sided feminism, which confirms the further hypothesis: postfeminism is seen as “a post-second wave” movement “to signal a generational shift in feminist thinking and in understanding social relations between men and women, beyond traditional feminist politics and its supposed threat to heterosexual relationships” (Genz, Brabon 11). Here we see some steps towards an intersectional perspective in Romanian culture. Otherwise, the purity could represent a blockade and a bodiless, if not ethereal, characteristic insufficient to ‘the new feminism’ (Genz, Brabon 67), a form of materialist feminism, as the writer Natasha Walter points out: “In her opinion, pragmatism, not purity, is the watchword of a flexible, contemporary kind of feminism that focuses on political, social and economic reforms and is not framed in ‘the reductive language of victim or oppressor.’” (Genz, Brabon 67).

Moreover, although the current local feminism attempts to embody a collective female voice, many volumes are focused on individuality, and therefore on a subject (feminist and/or queer), which is in line with a postfeminism that was been criticized exactly for this reason, having been taken to task for “its supposed indifference towards (or worse, opposition to) a collective, pragmatic and activist feminist politics” (Genz,

Brabon 32). Ileana Negrea, in *Jumătate din viața mea de acum* [Half of My Life So Far], discusses the difficulty of living as a woman with mental health issues, as well as the painful history of the women in her family; but the poetical discourse is fundamentally about a subjectivity which struggles with a disorder. In her debut collection *Nu mă întrerupe* [Do Not Interrupt Me], Cătălina Stanislav equally explores a female identity whose feminist awareness is disillusioned, sarcastic and critical. However, in both cases, a self-centred discourse creates a confessional narrative of traumatic experiences, suffering and disappointments. However, this is a second-wave strategy called “consciousness-raising” used by these feminist poets, which allows them to begin with a private space and thus arrive at a common feminine experience – emancipation seen as a process: “[the strategy] might have started in the private sphere where women shared personal experiences of sexual and material subjugation, but these individual grievances were soon related to a broader context of social injustice affecting all women” (Genz, Brabon 168). This method entails two steps: the first one is the women’s direct victimization and the second one is the politicisation of “their personal outlooks, to pave the way for a wider politics of engagement” (Genz, Brabon 168). For these poets, personal *pain* is the most politicised element of all.

Nóra Ugron’s book *Orlando Postuman* [Posthuman Orlando] sets up a feminist subjectivity who draws the variables of pain as a political weapon in radical and belligerent contradiction to grief viewed seriously and heroically as a feature or a quality, rather than adjudicated by men, and thus belonging to male writers. For Ugron, female pain demands the right to be considered profound, important, and as artistically and politically fertile as male pain. Moreover, because it is a feeling of weakness *par excellence*, feminist poetry also implies empowerment through assumed vulnerability. As a kind of ethics of marginality the subtext of Ugron’s poems is the following: pain should be neither hierarchized, nor classified according to criteria of gender, race, sex or class. In the same vein, the metatextual dimension is wrought into what Hélène Cixous calls *écriture féminine*, which determines that writing is a morphology of pain, and the purity of pain, of its direct, pathetically programmed expression, is one of the ways of overturning normative poetic structures, according to the heteronormative literary field. Excess in exposing grief is another major feature of these poetic discourses. The tendency of this new literature, which claims to be revolutionary, is to express itself as

obviously as possible, as directly and excessively as possible. Moreover, this writing also aims to be non-systematic and non-architectural. The morphology of the volume *Posthuman Orlando* is one programmatically unsteady, because it refuses a typical structure of (self-)representation. In Ileana Negrea's *Jumătate din viața mea acum* [Half of My Life So Far], the fluidity of confessions and the flexibility of intimate, familiar narratives polemicise with the pre-established structures of living within a conservative society or, more precisely, within a traditional family.

In the Footsteps of the Second Wave: a Bellicose Feminist Network

Although the postfeminist approach enables the establishment of a theoretical framework for the hybridisation of several directions within Romanian feminist poetry, it also embodies the major feature of the poetic phenomenon, which, as I noted above, is specific to second-wave feminism and not to postfeminism itself. Why? Because postfeminism must be “post-revolutionary” as Judith Stacey mentioned (Genz, Brabon 11). On the contrary, Romanian feminist poetry is congealed precisely as a revolutionary network. From Mariana Marin, a female poet from the '80s generation (and one of the few canonical female poets of the communist period), who is not a feminist, but whose radicalism is inherited by the poets of the 2000 generation as Ruxandra Novac, Cristina Ispas, and, above all, Elena Vlădăreanu), to Ileana Negrea, the belligerent character is the primary mode of expression engaged within feminist poetry.

Mariana Marin's first poetry book, *Un război de o sută de ani* [A Hundred Year War], seems to be the turning point for the belligerent manifestations of post-communist radical poets. Although Mariana Marin's poetry could have some feminist overtones only insofar as we consider that the female subject fully assumes her identity, war and the insurrection are the driving forces of the Marin's entire poetic project. Another sample of *avant la lettre* feminism in the cultural field is the sisterhood, which Mariana Marin outlines according to some female authors. Sympathetically attached to a tragic life and posture (Farmatu 44), she creates an exclusively female landscape with Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Anna Akhmatova, Maria Tsvetaeva, Else-Lasker Schüller, Sappho, and Emily Dickinson (Marin 216). In contemporary feminist poetry, Ileana Negrea takes these two configurations of the female subject's expression to a higher level, instrumentalising them ideologically. Firstly, the sisterhood is both weapon and

self-legitimation, but, more nuanced, the legitimation takes place by referring exclusively to international women writers, even if the technique is formally and politically rooted in Mariana Marin's poetry:

I have no place in Romanian literature
My godmother is Anne Sexton,
Adrienne Rich,
Sylvia Plath,
I claim myself from them. (Negrea 24)

Secondly, the entire book *Jumătate din viața mea de acum* [Half of My Life So Far] constructs the feminist subject as a revolutionary woman among other embodiments:

We have only one life
One
I'll spend it at war
Like a Zapatista with a gun on my shoulder
We'll educate each other
You'll read Alexandra Kollontai and Jeanette Winterson (Negrea 72)

or

To see me waging a war by now
Unglorified
By anyone
Still shameful (...)
I am powerful
and this power
must mean something" (Negrea 86)

or

This thirst to destroy the world
To rebuild it
To fight for the ones like you
The marginal ones
What will you leave behind

What kind of world

Not to whom

The temptation of a perfectly folded little hand. (Negrea 85)

The volume is also designed as a handbook to help and to empower a deeply and doubly marginalised woman, who is both *mad* and *feminist-queer*. In fact, a general feature of this poetry can be inferred: given the failure to metabolise Western feminist waves in time (the second wave and even the intersectional third wave), as well as the incapacity to coordinate the Romanian feminists in sociological and political studies with those in literature and the performing arts, poetry also assumed a role of public literacy. Hence the postmodernist character of the phenomenon, because *intertext* and *metatext* are used as strategies, both to make international feminist writers popular, and to deconstruct an imported, male canon. This feature is based on the resemblance between feminism and postmodernism:

The principal thrust of the feminist argument is that the subject has been conceived as inherently masculine, and thus, it has been a significant factor in maintaining the inferior status of women. (...) In this way, there are profound similarities and affinities between postmodernism and feminism attacks on universalism, foundationalism and dichotomous thinking. (Genz, Brabon 108)

However, there is also a huge difference: while postmodernist intertextuality was an argument and a technique for the hegemony of discourse, and the selective criterion was rather a weakness (see the more interweaved nodes, the greater the *Text-ure*), in the case of feminist intertextuality based on postmodernist essence, the selection criterion is hegemonic, aiming to change the society's structures, not just to be aware of them as much as possible. According to Nancy Hartsock, it is important to know that "for those of us who want to understand the world systematically in order to change it, postmodern theories at their best give little guidance" (Genz, Brabon 110). The aim of feminist intertextuality and metadiscourse is both to criticise, as postmodernism did, and especially to bring about change to which postmodernism was rather distrustful of, and which it treated either ironically or playfully. It is not by chance that one of Medeea

Iancu's quasi-theoretical texts, which opens a recent anthology of feminist poetry (*Arta revendicării* [The Art of Claiming]), is entitled *Preface to a literary-feminist revolution*. On the one hand, the marginality of the phenomenon in the Romanian literary field nurtures its radicalism to demolish the heteronormative structure; on the other hand, the problem is that the fiercest battles are fought mostly at the level of the text. It is not coincidental that many of today's feminist poems are consonant to Cixous's notion of "écriture feminine" as an extension of the female body or, more precisely, a body-writing continuum based on female identity empowerment: "And why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it. I know why you haven't written. (...) Because writing is at once too high, too great for you, it's reserved for the great – that is, for "great men"; and it's 'silly'. Besides, you've written a little, but in secret." (Cixous 876). The quoted fragment is subtly embedded in the following piece from the Medeea Iancu's foreword which is more conceptualised than Cixous's statement:

We [women] were taught that confessional literature is simply not literature; we were taught that literature written by women is not really literature; we were thought that political literature is propaganda. We have been taught that the Great Literature is and must remain heterosexual, national, masculine (...); we have been taught that Great Literature, that which praises the objectification of women, which promotes rape culture and violence, is the only one accepted and valid."⁴ (Iancu 9)

The central issue resides elsewhere, namely in what happens beyond this local battle for hegemony within the literary/cultural field. Nevertheless, Medeea Iancu points out some patriarchal configurative patterns, because of which women's authorship and their authority have been almost methodically annihilated, leading to internalised misogyny – hence the concept of "patriarchal femininities" (Iancu 18, 2020) – and various

⁴ "Am fost învățate că literatura confesivă nu e, pur și simplu, literatură; am fost învățate că literatura scrisă de femei nu e cu adevărat literatură; am fost învățate că literatura politică este propagandă și ode pentru conducător. Am fost învățate că Marea Literatură este și trebuie să rămână heterosexuală, națională, masculină; (...) am fost învățate că Marea Literatură, cea care elogiaza obiectificarea femeii, care promovează cultura violului și a violenței, este singura acceptată și validă." (My translation)

unfortunate overlaps such as that between *feminine* and *feminist*⁵ or *feminism* and *communism*⁶:

Another answer would be the lack of feminist education, as well as the mix-ups around feminism and feminist literature: calling literature written by women as feminine literature, equating the so-called feminine literature with feminist literature, calling books written by certain women authors as feminist without having anything to do with feminist literature. (Iancu 26, 2020).

Moreover, in a confessional moment, Medeea Iancu declares: “When I firstly said ‘I am a feminist’, I was asked by male writers: ‘So what? Are you a communist?’” (Iancu 24, 2020). The first confusing binomial (feminine-feminist) that she highlights relates to a theoretical tripartition, whose functionality is operational to the extent that each woman author is analysed individually, as a case study. In Aimee Armande Wilson’s words:

In sum, debates can be placed into three categories: those addressing ‘writing’ as a literary tradition (recovery of writing by women as well as patterns in the depiction of female characters); those addressing ‘writing’ as a gendered style (whether women write differently than men); and those questioning the validity or utility of gender as a concept for analyzing writing. (Goodman, 181).

Broadly conceived, Medeea Iancu’s belligerent advocacy is firstly situated within the antinomy of the male-female binary, and secondly it is set up against the patriarchy, employing the famous second wave technique “consciousness rising”. However, my issue could be formulated thus: doesn’t belligerent discourse become an industrial product, a mass-produced object that circulates on behalf of the neoliberal rhetoric, running to make its aims brittle? I think so, because Cătălina Stanislav seems to be most

⁵ “Un alt răspuns ar fi lipsa educației feministe, dar și confuziile create în jurul feminismului și a literaturii feministe: de la numirea literaturii scrise de femei ca literatură feminină, la echivalarea așa-zisei literaturi feminine cu literatura feministă, la numirea unor cărți scrise de autoare ca fiind feministe, fără a avea nicio legătură cu literatura feministă.” [from naming the literature written by women as ‘feminine literature’ to equating the so-called ‘feminine literature with feminist literature, to naming books written by women authors as feminist books, without any connection to feminist literature’. (My translation)

⁶ “Când am spus prima dată că sunt feministă, am fost întrebată de scriitori dar ce, ești comunistă?” (My translation)

aware of the limits of warlike pleading. In her first volume, she explores a narrative in which both women and men are vulnerable human beings. Moreover, Stanislav's discourse could be suspected of what certain theorists has been called "victim feminism", but the essential point lies in handling problematisation. According to the post-second wave theorists like Naomi Wolf, Katie Roiphe, and Rene Denfeld, there must be a distinction between 'victim feminism' and 'power feminism', suggesting that women have the power for self-definition and simply need to exploit it. The second wave's reliance on women's victim status as a unifying political factor is seen as disempowering and outdated, and should therefore be replaced with 'power feminism' that is 'unapologetically sexual', 'free-thinking', 'pleasure-loving' and 'self-assertive' (Genez, Brabon 64). Thus, Stanislav instrumentalises the victim status not as feminism's main weapon, but as an object of hyper-awareness of the layered hypostasis of the feminist subject, hence the less vociferous revolt focused on what it has failed to do. Cătălina Stanislav's disabused confessional discourse becomes a form of manifesto, also intertextually embodying some references to Allen Ginsberg, Elena Ferrante, or Lorrie Moore by recontextualising some of these authors' most famous phrases. Ginsberg's popular Beat statement "the best minds of my generation", rooted in *Howl*, is critically updated through a feminist perspective:

and yet the best minds of my generation still ask me if women can be firemen
 the best minds of my generation are Gwyneth Paltrow,
 who doesn't know the difference between a vulva and a vagina
 the best minds of my generation are also me,
 waiting for you to finish a slice of greasy cheese pizza
 so we can go to your room and not fuck each other
 because you're too drunk
 and I'm too tired⁷ (Stanislav 42-43).

⁷ "și totuși cele mai bune minți ale generației mele încă mă întreabă/ dacă femeile pot fi pompieri/ cele mai bune minți ale generației mele sunt Gwyneth Paltrow, care nu știe diferența dintre vulvă și vagin/ cele mai bune minți ale generației mele sunt și eu,/ așteptând să termin o bucată de pizza cu brânză unsuroasă/ ca să putem să mergem la tine în camera și să nu ne futem pentru că ești prea beat/ și eu prea obosită" (My translation)

Smoothly captured, Ferrante's novel title *The Lying Life of Adults* focuses on uncovering melodrama at the end of a relationship:

we blow smoke from closed balconies
we are looking at each other and the spark at the end
of the cigarette butt is getting bigger
Guys, we're all lying adults here.⁸ (Stanislav 48)

Then, Moore's short story, *How to be an other woman* as the favourite narrative of this feminist-feminine subject sadly refreshes the failure of self-help discourse:

ironically my favourite story in the world is called
how to be an other woman
it's kind of a handbook for
sad girls who are the second option
but it didn't teach me what to do
after it is upheld to you
that you don't deserve love⁹ (Stanislav 47).

To sum up, it is a passive-aggressive, rather than aggressive lyric discourse, sarcastically expressed yet at the same time self-ironically. Further, the ideological status is no longer radical:

What describes your political beliefs?
Liberal
left wearing Zara shoes
Are you a morning person?
You need to know that I'm gonna want to have sex in the morning
but I'm not gonna know how to tell you

⁸ "suflam fum închiși în balcoane/ ne uitam unii la ceilalți și scânteia din capătul/ țigării se făcea tot mai mare/ băieți, suntem toți adulți mincinoși aici." (My translation)

⁹ "în mod ironic povestea mea preferată din lume se cheamă/ *how to be an other woman*/ e un fel de manual de instrucțiuni pentru/ fete triste care sunt a doua opțiune/ dar nu m-a învățat ce să fac/ după ce îți se confirmă/ că nu meriți iubire" (My translation)

Do you believe in the power of prayer?
 No, but sometimes I made a cross with my tongue on the palate
 when I slip down the stairs.¹⁰ (Stanislav 24)

Towards Glitter Materialist Feminism: Alina Purcaru's *Tot mai multă splendoare* [More and More Splendour]

The last case study that helps outline the layers of extreme contemporary feminist poetry in Romania is Alina Purcaru's latest poetry book. *Tot mai multă splendoare* [More and More Splendour] (2022) seems to be, as Mihnea Bâlici mentions, "the missing link between contemporary feminist literature in Romania and the more sensorial and cosmopolitan poetry of poets who debuted after 2010" (Bâlici). Indeed, Purcaru reconciles and homogenises both the "social discourse and rhetorics of the self" (Kinnahan, xiii) by mapping public spaces such as the streets, the football field, and the schoolyard, all of which remain unsafe places for women. By gently recalling traumatic childhood experiences, the female poet highlights some shared experiences, in which the self becomes one who has gone through a collective experience, not the only one who has. Purcaru therefore seeks to trace what may be universally relevant for vulnerable, excluded, or discriminated subjects, thereby dissolving the vehemence of a self-sufficient subject that Nikolas Rose sees as a product of neoliberal discourse: "The presupposition of the 'autonomous, choosing, free self as the value, ideal and objective underpinning and legitimating political activity' has imbued the political mentalities of the modern West, in particular those informed by neo-liberal rhetoric" (Genz, Brabon 170).

From another point of view, Alina Purcaru's major influence appears to be a particular materialist feminist branch theorized especially by Rebecca Coleman as a methodology engaging with the agency theory within social sciences: "A new materialist approach theorized not only the agency of humans but also of matter, materials, and objects. That is, the material of glitter itself has agency-is alive, animated – and participates in methodological decision-making" (Coleman 4, 2019). As theorized by

¹⁰ "What describes your political beliefs?/ Liberal/left În pantofi Zara/ Are you a morning person?/ Trebuie să știi că voi vrea să facem sex dimineața,/ dar n-o să știu să-ți spun/ Do you believe in the power of prayer?/ Nu, dar uneori îmi fac cruce cu limba pe cerul gurii/ când alunec pe scări" (My translation)

Coleman, glitter seems to be weak because its symbolic and decorative functions that are the most powerful, despite its political charge:

During the 2012 US presidential election campaign, a number of Republican candidates, including Mitt Romney, Newt Gingrich and Rick Santorum, found themselves covered in glitter. LGBTQ activists, protesting against homophobic and antichoice ideas and policies, attended public events where the candidates were appearing and glitter-bombed them, throwing or sprinkling glitter over them.” (Coleman 192, 2020)

Purcaru’s lyric project is engaging both on an ecological and queer-feminist level. Critically, but gently debating, the woman author proposes, on the one hand, the glitter’s agency as a way of protesting, but, on the other hand, she denounces the damaging effects that glitter elicits on the natural environment. By using the epistolary form, writing to the famous Danish woman vlogger Gitte, Alina Purcaru is exercising a *mea culpa* self-awareness regarding the glitter praxis beyond its political function in “alternative and protest cultures, and especially those concerned with LGBTQ rights” (Coleman 6, 2019). In Purcaru’s words: “The Barbie dolls boxes I know all about what they’re really like, the jars of slime, which I also bought, the same. The floor is covered in glitter. Kids love glitter, love to sprinkle it over poop, in the toilet, and then they call you to see it. (...) I can say *no* to zootechnics, but not to kids. Glitter is murderous for the planet, it kills fish”¹¹ (Purcaru 71).

To conclude, a relevant remark concerning Alina Purcaru’s approach is the critical subtext to the concept of glitter as a Western product, like veganism, aligned to Western feminism; glitter has a political, symbolic function in *Tot mai multă splendoare* [More and More Splendor], acting similar to an invasion or an avalanche oriented indeed towards a more acceptable and comfortable future as outlined by Coleman. An invasion of glitter to counterbalance, if not to decentralise male power:

¹¹ “Cutiiile cu păpuși Barbie știu totul despre cum sunt cu adevărat, borcanele de *slime*, pe care tot eu le-am cumpărat, la fel. Podeaua e plină de *glitter*. Copiii adoră *glitterul*, adoră să-l pudreze peste caca, în toaletă, și apoi să te cheme să vezi. (...) Pot spune nu zootehniei, nu și copiilor. *Glitterul* e criminal pentru planetă, omoară peștii.” (My translation)

To fall asleep to the voice of an imaginary friend,
 telling me that Little Fat Ronaldo doesn't exist,
 nor trucks driven by a steady hand
 by strong and intangible men
 who love beer and speed
 they don't exist
 any more than the brief clatter of keys
 when all of this fades from the screen
 doesn't exist
 not even in a dream
 that now exists
 only this magic dust
 to lay in the popular
 to sink into
 like a huge powder case¹² (Purcaru 16).

Conclusions

Hopefully, Romanian feminist poetry will begin to move beyond the morphology and the goals of the second wave of Western feminism, with a socialist feminist project waiting to be captured in literature. Laura Sandu, Iulia Militaru, Nóra Ugron, Mihaela Michailov, Oana Uiorean are the main protagonists of the Romanian socialist feminist movement now. Nevertheless, postfeminism continues to remain a framework for examining Romanian feminist strands and not an imported wave, embedding the historicity that local feminism can draw upon, as well as the fractures that have occurred, so that the recovery of feminist waves can be framed as a catalysis of Western waves. After all, postfeminism comes with the paradox of its concrete non-existence, as it underplays the fact that the feminist agenda has served its purposes. However, especially in a post-communist society that is only now catching up with the feminist

¹² "Să adorm cu vocea unui prieten imaginar/ care-mi spune că Ronaldo Grăsuțul nu există,/ și nici camioane conduse cu o mână sigură/ se bărbații puternici/ și intangibili/ iubitori de bere și viteză/ nu există,/ cum nici zgomotul scurt al tastelor/ când toate astea se vor șterge de pe ecran/ nu există/ nici măcar în vis." (My translation)

waves, it is inappropriate, even misguided, to contextualise the postfeminist wave while it still is, even in Western societies, a controversial one.

Regarding the relationship with international feminism, it seems that some links to voices of black feminism are woven, which is even more desirable as Romanian literature is still quite unresponsive to the literature of black writers. As a marginal and marginalised left-wing phenomenon, feminist poetry also extends its realm into queer identities, thereby providing shelter to them and reinforcing the principle of inclusiveness. However, despite of its marginal/ized status (more or less self-chosen) and of the import of black writers, Romanian feminist poetry is still more attached to figures from the core literatures – especially from the female canon of North-American literature: Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Adrienne Rich –, which are becoming its guiding *auctoritas*.

All in all, my article attempted to integrate postfeminism into Romanian feminist thought as mapped by the poetic phenomenon. The result is that postfeminism is not a solution (or could not be one) for a still patriarchal society where feminism is either misrepresented or demonised. However, as a theoretical framework, postfeminism can work insofar as it highlights both the efforts of local feminists to assimilate foreign feminist waves, and to create a local feminism with its own agenda. The double-marginal status of this poetic phenomenon resists a liberal postfeminist wave that would divert the specific urgencies of local feminism.

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