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CHARTING GENDER DIFFERENCE IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN FEMINIST POETRY

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to investigate the assertion of gender difference and gender identity in contemporary Romanian feminist poetry, taking the works of Medeea Iancu, Iuliana Lungu, Mădălina Oprea, and Nóra Ugron as its starting point. This study will underline recurring thematic patterns, highlighting the priority awarded, within these poetry collections, to matters pertaining to textuality, as well as to the peripheral position of women writers within the literary field. As a result of the uneven development of Eastern Europe’s women’s movement(s) during the post-communist transition, Romanian feminism can be described as a synthesis between Second- and Third Wave feminist themes (Miroiu), namely as having haphazardly imported both issues pertaining to “difference-” and to intersectional feminism. The emphasis local feminist poets place on positing difference, as well as on embracing a fluid identity, has motivated the usage of a theoretical framework based on the concepts of “sexual/gender difference”, and justified the attempt of linking these literary projects to the tradition of so-called “French post-structuralist feminism”. Lastly, this study proposes an overview of the possible political relevance that “neomaterialist” (Braidotti) strands of feminism may hold today, as well as an outline of some of the limitations that they pose.

Keywords: Romanian feminist poetry, Eastern Europe, post-communist feminism, difference feminism, French feminism, gender difference, sexual difference.

Introduction. Notes on the emergence of Romanian feminist poetry

The landscape of Romanian feminism, marked by the absence of a solid theoretical basis after the fall of communism, has in recent years attempted to make up for this theoretical gap through contemporary poetry. Despite efforts to strengthen and unify a national feminist movement via academic and sociological research, as well as initiatives by NGOs, the disparity between feminism as portrayed in academia and feminist activism continues to grow (*Theorizing* 256). Moreover, due to the establishment of communism in the twentieth century, Romanian feminism has developed unevenly compared to Western feminisms. The hybrid nature of national feminism should thus be understood as the product of ideological constraints imposed by totalitarianism, which regarded feminism as a bourgeois movement.

This statement is not meant to deny the existence of local feminism before the communist regime, nor to disprove the existence of a powerful feminist tradition before 1989. Romanian movements dedicated to women's emancipation were initially rooted in larger causes, such as nationalism, to gain ground and credibility in the public sphere. Before the Great Union of 1918, socialist and liberal feminists, despite differing views on women's emancipation, saw feminism as intertwined with the national cause. Consequently, feminist claims for women's emancipation were often framed within the conservative language of women's roles as mothers and citizens. Even the writings of more radical feminists, such as the socialist Sofia Nădejde, must be understood within this context. Statements such as "the level of civilization and morality of a people hangs by the culture and morality of women. And how could a mother, like the one described above, ever rear vigorous citizens?"¹ (Nădejde apud Cernat, Mocanu 80-81) point to the sometimes traditional views adopted by feminists to further their emancipatory claims. Nevertheless, this does not mean that leftist feminism before the imposition of totalitarianism did not fight to improve women's livelihoods. For example, during the interwar period, socialist feminists strongly advocated for reproductive rights, arguing for the right to abortion in articles such as "Woman is not a children factory. Conscious maternity" [*Femeia nu e fabrică de copii. Maternitatea conștientă*] (*Femeia Muncitoare* nr. 12 apud Mihăilescu 162-164). As a consequence, abortion rights were granted (albeit only in

¹ "civilizația și moralitatea unui popor atîrnă de cultura și moralitatea femeii. Și cum s-ar putea ca o mamă, ca cea mai sus citată, să dea vreodată cetățeni energici?" (All translations from Romanian to English, unless otherwise stated, belong to me).

certain circumstances) in the 1930s. Additionally, feminist efforts to resist totalitarian regimes are also documented. In 1936, for example, feminists united in the Feminist Front [*Frontul Feminin*] to oppose the expansion of fascism (Mihăilescu 50).

During the post-communist transition period, when feminism could reaffirm itself, second and third-wave feminist themes and political goals were haphazardly imported from the West (Iancu et al. 183-216, *Drumul* 253), leading to the stunted growth of autochthonous feminism. Consequently, when examining the ideological delays of local feminisms, researchers such as Laura Grunberg and Mihaela Miroiu talk about the existence of a “room-service feminism” rooted in “top-down emancipation” strategies (*Drumul* 257) and critique the underdeveloped nature of a national women’s movement, which appears more as “civic exotism” than a “politically relevant movement” (Grunberg apud *Drumul* 258). Modelling Romanian feminism by mirroring Western political tendencies also results in ambivalent national attitudes towards gender inequality. Even though gender discrimination is recognized as problematic, statistics such as the 2018 “Gender Barometer” [*Barometrul de gen*] show that traditional or even “parochial” attitudes towards women’s roles in society and within the family unit prevail (16).

The emergence of radical feminist poetics occurs in this political milieu, attempting to translate feminist discourse from activism into literature. This study focuses on some radical feminist poets (Medeea Iancu, Iuliana Lungu, Madalina Oprea, Nóra Ugron) whose work underscores the systemic nature of gender inequality and highlights the peripheral status of women in society and women writers on the literary scene.

Systemic oppression, while being a thematic connector in these works of poetry, has also sparked numerous extra-literary debates in local feminist communities. The year 2022 is a notable example, marked by the publishing of *Towards a Gentler, Non-oppressive Literary World. The Manifesto of Leftist Feminist Writers* [*Către o lume literară mai blândă, neasupritoare. Manifestul scriitoarelor feministe de stânga*]. This manifesto aimed to give voice to the feminist community following the controversy surrounding the “Mihai Eminescu” prize awarded for poetic debuts in 2021, specifically to Ileana Negrea, a queer, mad feminist, and after another feminist poet, Cătălina Stanislav, was criticised for the obscene nature of her poetry. This was not the first time feminist writers faced

attacks in the media or by jury members of the “Mihai Eminescu” prize after the awards ceremony. For example, Medeea Iancu experienced similar criticism in 2018 after reading one of her poems, deemed too vulgar to have any *real* aesthetic value. Consequently, the manifesto constituted an affirmation of solidarity, a way for women writers to denounce “the profoundly patriarchal character of society, and, especially, of the literary scene”² (4). The central idea underlying this manifesto is building a feminist alternative to mainstream, masculine literature and forming a *nexus* between literature and activism: “a literary world that we build through our texts, books, collective visions, each different and unique; a literary world where hope means action, critical thinking and demystifying reality”³ (11). This *text-centric* vision of emancipation and feminist activism adopted by these writers justifies the idea behind the research presented in this paper, namely connecting the work of these poets to the tradition of what is known as “French poststructuralist feminism,” sensitive to patriarchal encodings within language and aspects pertaining to textuality.

“French feminism” itself does not represent a unified movement that developed organically in France but rather an Anglo-American invention with questionable truly feminist aims (cf. Delphy, Spivak, Goldberg). Moreover, it has been reductively associated with the concept of “feminine writing” [*écriture féminine*] and used in a homogenising fashion to group the work of Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray as a unified corpus. Nevertheless, the main focus of this paper is neither “French feminism’s” contestations nor its roots. Therefore, my study will limit itself to linking contemporary Romanian feminist poetry to this strand of feminism by analysing the centrality awarded to the emancipatory possibility of language and text. The emphasis on the idea of text and textuality (perceived as a suitable medium through which one can affirm sexual/gender difference) connects the dots between the work of militant Romanian feminist poets and this feminist derivative of French post-structuralist thought.

Navigating gender/sexual difference. Theoretical explorations

With the onset of the Second Wave, which evolved under the slogan of “difference and liberation” (*Feminismul* 138), the notion of difference began gaining ground in

² “caracterul profund patriarhal al societății și, în special, al mediului literar”.

³ “o lume literară pe care o construim prin textele, cărțile, viziunile noastre multiple, diferite și unice; o lume literară pentru care speranța înseamnă acțiune, gândire critică și demistificarea realității.”

feminist thought. Despite its ties to leftist movements and protests in countries such as the US, France, and England (139), the transnational development of Second-wave feminism was far from even, as feminists in these countries adopted various standpoints on the idea of difference. In the '70s, Susan Sontag, a representative figure of American feminism, stated that moving past sexual differences was essential for advancing the women's liberation movement (52), affirming the androgynous society (51) as a feminist ideal. So-called "French feminists" (Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva), on the other hand, viewed "difference" as a pathway towards subverting the oppressive and circular logic of phallogocentrism. The juxtaposition of these two perspectives—sexual egalitarianism (Sontag) and sexual difference (Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva)—hints at the clash between separate strands of feminism and may explain why the ideas promoted by post-May '68 feminism were regarded as anachronous in transatlantic feminist circles. Even so, this paper proposes a reading of contemporary Romanian feminist poetry from a double perspective—both that of gender difference and that of sexual difference. The reasoning behind this double approach lies in an attempt to move past the dangers of a biologically essentialist analysis while allowing for an analysis of gender identity as depicted in feminist poetry.

The issues posed by delineating sexual difference from gender difference are rooted in the very terminology used to express these concepts, the pair of sex/gender. The imbalanced relationship between sex and gender ensues from positioning gender as superior because it represents a marker that encodes sex with social meaning. As such, this perspective has been scrutinised by some feminist theorists for reiterating the age-old dichotomy of nature *vs.* culture (Butler 9, Haraway 592). In Butler's theory of gender performativity, for example, gender cannot be thought of as wholly separate from the materiality of sexual difference (15). Corporeality is not defined as static materiality (9) but as a concept belonging to a larger history of sexual and bodily hierarchies (49). Owing to this explanation, the category of "sex," in Butler's view, retains an important function alongside gender. Adopting Foucault's notion of the "regulatory ideal" (1), Butler described "sex" as a normative force operating according to heterosexual logic by privileging certain types of bodies over others. Similarly, Elizabeth Grosz sees established cultural norms as polarising the sexes by dismissing certain bodies and body parts as undesirable and abject (192). Grosz's theory of a corporeal feminism rests on a critique of the phenomenological body,

designated as male, and equated to being “universal” (188). In this sense, sexual difference works to counteract masculine universalism and acts according to a “pre-ontological” principle that encourages the assertion of different sexual and sexed identities (208-9).

Despite the positive connotations awarded to sexual difference within “neomaterialist” feminist theories (Braidotti 124), the functionality of this term remains debatable. De Lauretis critiques the usefulness of an interpretation undertaken from the point of view of difference as it risks to reproduce a binary perception, a “frame of universal sex opposition (woman as the difference from man, both universalized; or woman as difference *tout court* ...)” (2). By overly emphasising the oppositional relationship between the sexes, difference theories would render themselves incapable of investigating the deeper differences “among women” or “*within* women” (2) and would hence offer a monolithic depiction of women’s oppression.

“French feminism”. An overview of French difference theories

Difference, asserted through language and writing, represents one of the pivotal ideas promoted by so-called “French feminism.” Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray, influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis, developed theories postulating the existence of a repressed feminine discourse in language and, by extension, in the fibre of the text.

In Luce Irigaray’s view, language is a mechanism capable of censoring or allowing certain modes of representation to enter the Symbolic Order, the realm that, according to Lacan, is responsible for shaping human subjectivity. Women, on account of not possessing the means—specifically the language—to forge accurate self-representations, are positioned outside of discourse (*Speculum* 140). Language can, therefore, only render means of expression that remain fixed inside the limits imposed by phallogocentric logic. Irigaray’s writing stresses the idea of sexual difference as a consequence of recognizing the lack of linguistic and textual strategies through which the female subject could assert herself and her image. This idea can again be partially attributed to Lacan. The French psychoanalyst talks about the non-existence of women, in the sense that women are obliged to comply with the dominant (masculine) Symbolic Order and are therefore stripped of a subjectivity of their own. Similarly, for Irigaray, the failure of discourse and the Symbolic to

recognize female specificity implies that “Subjectivity is [denied] to woman” (133) and that “any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the ‘masculine’” (133), which is why women turn to mirroring the phallic principle.

Nevertheless, Irigaray insists on the possibility of a constructive, non-hierarchical sexual difference, one that would rework the antagonistic relationship between the two sexes (*Ethics* 86). Even though Irigaray’s metaphor of the two lips (signifying sexual difference) has often been interpreted in the key of biological essentialism, understanding this image as opposed to that of the phallus and as a means to find a way out of hegemonic masculine discourse could propose a divergent interpretation.

Hélène Cixous, possibly the most renowned “French feminist,” gained popularity with the term “feminine writing” [*écriture féminine*] that she introduced. Her seminal text, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, affirms the necessity of finding a new way of writing, one apt to render female specificity, for “there has not yet been any writing that inscribes femininity” (878) and “woman must write woman” (877). *Écriture féminine* stands for a corporeal type of writing, manifold and unpredictable, but not wholly gendered, since it has also been ascribed to modernist writers such as James Joyce. By embracing sexual difference through writing, women could find a way out of patriarchal limits, out of “the horrifying myths (...) the Medusa and the abyss” (885) between which they have been placed. Along the lines of what is proposed by Irigaray, Cixous finds it necessary for the feminine to step out of the dominant masculine for a fertile relationship between the sexes to be possible. By undoing uneven power structures based on the fear of castration and, respectively, that of decapitation (*Castration* 43), the tie between the sexes could become more dynamic and less restrictive.

As with Irigaray, Cixous’s writing is built upon an overstatement of the potency of language, not merely viewed as a means of expression but as an emancipatory tool. The subversive quality that Cixous attributes to writing comes as a result of its political connotations: “writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*” (879). Irigaray’s conception of language is rooted in the discourse theory upheld by Lacanian psychoanalysis, which understands discourse as the structuring element of reality and the unconscious. Despite both Irigaray and Cixous’s efforts to highlight the political nature of language, the unrealistic amount of significance awarded to language and the notion of symbolic oppression has been criticised by

various strands of feminism. Most notably, materialist, or Marxist feminists have scrutinised the ties between feminism and poststructuralism as being ignorant of the real socio-economic forms of injustice that have led to the marginalisation of women.

Writing as a politically liberating act: the case of contemporary Romanian feminist poetry

While taking the limits of the possibility of true emancipation through language into account (Nye 328), contemporary Romanian feminist poetry poses an interesting case study, deriving from its juxtaposition of leftist political engagement with a sometimes text-centric view on women's peripheral status.

Looking at local feminism's genealogy, it is important to stress that Romania's post-communist feminist tradition is not limited to the poetic sphere, nor to the academe for that matter. Even though constituted through academic research at first, post-communist Romanian feminism developed into a more concrete social, activism-based movement after the 2000s, following the debut of street protests (*Mișcări feministe* 200).

The end of the '90s and beginning of the 2000s register significant contributions to academic feminism: the launch of *Analyses—the Journal for Feminist Studies*, the first feminist academic publication in Romania (1998), the emergence of the FILIA centre (2000), and the appearance of Polirom's "Gender Studies" collection coordinated by Mihaela Miroiu (2001). Leftist feminist discourse started to gain ground with the onset of the 2010s through alternative projects such as *Free Pages [Pagini Libere]* (2018), self-described as a libertarian editorial collective dedicated to making alternative knowledge accessible, or through activist platforms such as GAS, the Group for Social Action [*Grupul pentru Acțiune Socială*]. Such initiatives contributed to the development of intersectional activism as they were dedicated to carving out zones of discourse unscripted within the mainstream neoliberal viewpoint. Concerning GAS's role in promoting alternative political solutions, Lucian Butaru talks about the suffocating nature of pervading neoliberalism, criticising "the monopoly of right-wing discourse in terms of identifying [political] problems, which excludes alternative solutions from the start" (*Criticatac*).

When discussing the common points between French poststructuralist feminism and certain works of contemporary Romanian feminist poetry, I am not

implying that there is a direct influence, as the links between the Romanian cultural sphere and this strand of feminism are relatively weak (keeping in mind, for example, that the Romanian translation of *The Laugh of the Medusa* was only published in 2021). Rather, I am attempting to point out that, despite a lack of direct correlation between these two paradigms, their vision of women's emancipation overlaps in crucial aspects, namely through the liberating qualities awarded to the possibility of textual emancipation, and through the insistence on difference.

frACTalia's affinity for experimental writing could have contributed to the development of a text-centric view on women's emancipation, as the very possibility to experiment through writing and to subvert dominant discourse through the structure of the text is what informs French feminism's idea of the revolutionary quality of text. In this sense, frACTalia's commitment to experimentalism is noticeable through the launching of the Experimental Writing collection in 2018. This collection was initiated by the publishing of works such as Iuliana Lungu's *KOMMOS: Procession for Hysterectomy* [*KOMMOS: procesiune pentru histerectomie*] in the same year. Later, poetry collections such as Medeea Iancu's *Delacroix is tabu: Lyrical Amendments* [*Delacroix este tabu: Amendamentele lirice*] (2019), *The Weaver. Instrumental Opera* [*Țesătoarea. Opera instrumentală*] (2023), and Mădălina Oprea's *Curriculum: Choruses of Retrieval and Memory* [*Curriculum: refrene ale recuperării și memoriei*] (2023) were added to the collection. At the same time, frACTalia's dedication to promoting an intersectional approach to feminism can be traced to the pre-2020 period, particularly to the emergence of collections such as "Bread & Roses," which contains essays and manifestos on the topics of feminism and Marxism, or socialism, and "Pansophie," coordinated by Iulia Militaru and centred on the exploration and dissemination of queer knowledge production. Moreover, the publishing house's adherence to leftist ideology has been further cemented by its becoming a member of the IULP (International Union of Left Publishers) in May 2024.

Despite feminism's ties to activism and intersectionality after the 2000s, the theoretical gap after the fall of the communist regime in Romania resulted in feminism being assimilated in the shape of literary projects, instead of taking form as proper theoretical studies. Moreover, many of the feminist poets' attempts to chart Romania's feminist landscape have been inserted as paratexts to their writing instead of being developed into comprehensive research projects. Therefore, when

analysing contemporary Romanian feminist poetry, one notices that prefaces, footnotes, and endnotes provide the necessary space for theoretical explanations regarding the feminist aims of said volumes.

By using the term “theoretical gap,” I do not imply that autochthonous feminist manifestations or initiatives should aim to synchronise themselves with Western feminist discourse. Rather, I am arguing, in line with Farmatu, that Romanian feminist discourse has “materialised (...) most strongly in poetry” (140), leading to a weak production of local feminist theory outside the bounds of the literary sphere (through paratexts, manifestos, and literary projects, as outlined above) or the academe. Even these zones of discourse, however, have not given rise to ample projects of feminist theory. Concerning academia, theoretical endeavours have been mostly located in the area of sociological and statistical research. Moreover, scholars such as Vlase and Terian argue that Gender Studies have been weakly institutionalised at the level of higher education programs and research production⁴.

Taking a look at the feminist projects undertaken within the literary sphere, the first anthology of Romanian feminist poetry, *The Art of Reclaiming [Arta revendicării]*, published in 2019, highlights the obstacles that Romanian feminism has had to face both at a national and literary level: “We have been taught that confessional writing is not, simply put, literature; we have been taught that women’s writing is not truly literature... We have been taught that Great Literature is and must remain heterosexual, national, masculine”⁵ (9). The wordplay implied through “author-ity” [*autor-itate*], a term that occurs multiple times in the preface to emphasise the sexist nature of the national literary scene, further reinforces the idea that misogyny experienced in society blends over into the literary sphere. As such, it underlines the permeable boundaries between man’s privileged status *quo* as man inside the patriarchy and the “superior” status of the male author in comparison to the female writer deprived of literary and cultural “author-ity.”

⁴ For further explanation see Vlase, Ionela, and Terian, Andrei. “The Production of Gender-Specific Scholarly Literature in Romania: The Weak Institutionalisation of Gender Studies in Higher Education.” *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 48, issue 12, pp. 1825–40. DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2023.2215813.

⁵ “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 Marea Literatură este și trebuie să rămână heterosexuale, națională, masculină”.

Feminist Writings [*Scieri feministe*], published in 2022, brings together essays, fragments, diaristic excerpts, and poems signed by Laura Sandu, which tackle feminism from the viewpoint of an anticapitalist sensibility. Similar to Medeea Iancu's preface in *The Art of Reclaiming*, Sandu writes about the relationship between the societal and literary marginalisation that women face, showcasing the profoundly masculine nature of the "literary field and writing"⁶ (64) and the existence "in literature [of a] certain sign of power"⁷ (60). This comparison further begs the question of the emancipatory possibilities of writing: "is there a political relevance of writing and publishing, a real way in which these activities could contribute to subverting [dominant order], within given conditions?"⁸ (25). Moreover, in the vein of Cixous's view on the bodily nature of women's writing, Sandu adopts a profoundly materialist perspective on both feminism (described as a "network of bodies") and on poetry, thought of as a "permeable body" (295). The insistence on using the label *feminist* literature, and not *feminine* (a point that I will return to later), is symptomatic for Romanian feminist writers, and the similarities between Sandu's definition of writing and that of Cixous must be understood as only partially overlapping and stemming from different thought paradigms.

The general points of comparison that this study attempts to delineate between "French feminism" and contemporary Romanian feminist poetry are based on the recurring theme of the *textual* and *discursive* oppression of women in both bodies of work. Or, as Teona Farmatu puts it, it seems that "the fiercest battles are fought mostly at the level of the text" (152). Nevertheless, it is important to note that the poetry collections included in this study do not adopt a singular standpoint on women's marginalisation (something that "French feminism" can be accused of), but instead opt for an intersectional approach that suggests a more holistic view of the status of women in a patriarchal society: "To us, literature is feminist, meaning political, meaning intersectional"⁹ (220).

⁶ "Câmpul[ui] literar și al scrisului".

⁷ "în literatură" [a unui] „anume semn al puterii".

⁸ "există oare o relevanță politică a scrisului și a publicării, un mod real în care aceste activități pot contribui la subminare, în condițiile date?".

⁹ "Pentru noi, literatura este feministă, deci politică, deci intersecțională".

“I am literature’s marginal theme”. Liberation and gender difference in contemporary Romanian feminist poetry

Iuliana Lungu, the first poet that this study will focus on, has published two volumes of poetry with the printing house frACTalia: *KOMMOS: Procession for Hysterectomy* [*KOMMOS: procesiune pentru histerectomie*] (2018) and *CantoHondo. Loba Sings on* [*CantoHondo. Loba cântă mai departe*] (2021). Both works centre on similar themes such as the potency of writing, female corporeality, and the problem of gender identity, and can be considered part of the tradition of experimental writing. In *KOMMOS*, experimentation can be observed at the level of syntax, specifically in the use of split and fragmented phrases, the uneven distribution of verse on paper, the use of multiple parentheses, and the insertion of prominent figures from Greek tragedy, such as Creon, Antigone, or the Coryphée (a term that also becomes feminised into Coryphéa [*Corifeea*]). On the other hand, the second volume, *CantoHondo*, employs a conspicuous musical structure, as the titles of each poem are accompanied by a tone indicator (falsetto, oratorio, nocturne, dissonance, etc.). Comparable to theorists of “French feminism,” Lungu emphasises the need for women to write for themselves, with the artistic act being awarded the power to help forge an identity outside of dominant masculine discourse:

Woman:
 (a secretary?
 the same as being a girl,
 the same as being without virtue,
 [outside of that of
 serving man]
 to mechanically reproduce art¹⁰ (*KOMMOS* 141).

Masculine author-ity, recognised as a master discourse, is described as being the governing force of the literary field, silencing the voices of women writers:

lack of culture, because I don’t technically know
 what poetry is
 because I don’t technically know
 what literature is¹¹ (*KOMMOS* 190).

¹⁰ „Femeia:/ (secretară?/ egal să fii fată,/ egal să fii fără virtuți,/ [în afara celei de/ a-l sluji pe bărbat]/ să reproduci mecanic arta”.

or

and they would have spoken about a woman's work
if they would not have talked about
Eminescu's work and influence¹² (*CantoHondo* 15).

The masculine-authoritative discourse promoted by Great Literature finds its equivalent in another discourse of power, medicine, which attempts to repress the otherness of the female body:

the poets wrote to me.
the doctor told me://
put an end to this!¹³ (KOMMOS 127).

Therefore, poetry becomes an instrument that allows women to access and reclaim the specificity of their bodies, as well as to affirm their gender identity, something that is necessary in order to avoid the forced imposition of the "universal" male artistic model:

maybe I shouldn't
have used words such as
hysterectomy, uterus, ovaries,
I should not have said that *woman is born*
*with all of her eggs inside her*¹⁴ (*CantoHondo* 64)

Iuliana Lungu questions the so-called androgynous artistic paradigm, according to which the writing process is neutral and neuter, uninfluenced by gender identity. Lungu's second volume takes the critique against the autonomy of art even further, as it attempts to distance itself from male literary models and from the reductive representations of womanhood that they offer:

¹¹"incultură, că nu știu tehnic/ ce-i aia poezie/ că nu știu tehnic/ ce-i aia literatură".

¹² "și s-ar fi spus despre opera unei femei/ dacă nu s-ar fi spus despre/ eminescianism". The Romanian word "eminescianism" does not have a direct English equivalent, and, as such, my translation is approximate. The term is used to designate the specificity of Eminescu's thought as reflected in his literary work, but is also used to highlight the fact that Eminescu's writing was so impactful in Romanian literature that he came to be regarded as a literary phenomenon.

¹³ "poetii mi-au scris./ doctorul mi-a spus:// terminați cu de-astea!".

¹⁴ "poate nu trebuia/ să folosesc cuvinte ca/ *histerectomie, uter, ovare,*/ să nu spun că *femeia/ se naște cu toate ovulele-n ea*".

Dan C. Mihăilescu
asks us
in *how men read*
women's writing,//
who is guilty
and for what?//
that we are
women
or men?//
literature is not written
with genitals.
literature is androgynous"¹⁵ (KOMMOS 114).

or

so what if
it's whitman's verse.
I don't like it. so what if it's "*song*//
of myself."
I don't like it.¹⁶ (*CantoHondo* 52).

All of the poets that this study centres on prioritise the need to break away from patriarchal literature by consciously opting for alternative literary models. Cixous and Irigaray were both critical of women's lack of identification with canonical male models, be they literary or philosophical. Creating a new language, at least in the view upheld by "French feminism," would help surmount the obstacles imposed by patriarchal culture. Turning back to Romanian feminist poets, this new language seems to be poetry itself, understood less as a medium and more as being a network capable of laying the groundwork for an alternative literary model. The works of Mihai Eminescu, Romania's national poet and, thus, a literary phenomenon whose influence is dubbed through the term *eminescianism*, represent just one of the pillars of the literary and textual patriarchy that feminist poetry wants to deconstruct. The constraints that the work of other male writers have imposed over time are, however, also noted:

¹⁵ "Dan C. Mihăilescu/ ne-ntreabă/ în *cum citeșc bărbații/ cărțile femeilor*,// cine-i vinovat/ pentru ce?// că sîntem/ femei/ sau bărbați?// literatura nu se scrie/ cu organe genitale./ literatura e androgină".

¹⁶ "...și ce dacă/ e versul lui whitman./ nu-mi place. și ce dacă e „*cîntec*// *despre mine*”./ nu-mi place”.

and they would have talked about her
 if it hadn't been about them
 (Mircea Ivănescu,
 Noica,
 Lucian Raicu,
 Marin Preda,
 Emil Botta,
 Virgil Mazilescu
 și Blake)¹⁷ (CantoHondo 19).

A similar intention to reclaim women's writing as important can be noticed throughout Mădălina Oprea's volume, *Curriculum: Choruses of Retrieval and Memory* [*Curriculum: refrene ale recuperării și memoriei*], a wish to lay the basis for a literature "with which [woman] could really identify/ - that is my dream" (228). Oprea's work explores the theme of gender difference through the lens of intersectionality, weaving it together with descriptions of life lived in rural Romania and in a precarious familial environment. She is conscious of not romanticising these realities, mystifying them ("I do not want to mystify family,"¹⁸ 103) by choosing a poetic approach focused on the historical and socio-cultural factors that have led to women's marginalisation. The poems from the first part of the volume, "Historical, documentary & political corpus of my memories" [*Corpus istoric, documentar & politic al amintirilor mele*], are explicitly modelled around the idea of "historical consciousness" and centre on deconstructing societal attitudes concerning the role of women, virginity, family, and childhood.

This way in which I have been perceived
 as a girl
 inside the family,
 in school,
 in the world
 — is not natural,
 it's historical,

¹⁷ "și s-ar fi spus despre ea/ dacă nu s-ar fi spus despre ei/ (Mircea Ivănescu,/ Noica,/ Lucian Raicu,/ Marin Preda,/ Emil Botta,/ Virgil Mazilescu/ și Blake)".

¹⁸ "nu vreau să mistific familia".

it's old,
but it's not natural,
it's historical¹⁹ (Oprea 113).

Similar to Iuliana Lungu's view on androcentrism and androgyny, Mădălina Oprea sees the depolarization of the sexes as another way that would allow for the imposition of a singular, masculine worldview on pleasure, literature, and reality.

Deconstructing androcentrism is too much in a world that does everything in its power to protect it.
To deconstruct androcentrism means to integrate the fact that there exists a world of pleasure that does not only imply the pleasure of Man²⁰ (Oprea 200).

Feminine and female identity is associated to performativity, to conforming to the foucauldian "regulatory ideal" (Butler 1) that only privileges the experiences lived in a "perfect body" (Oprea 133).

In the body
in reality,
on the internet
It's difficult to live as a teenager.
I curate my image,
I perform my body
in reality and online²¹ (Oprea 132).

The revolt against the marginalisation of female poetic discourse, dismissed as secondary and weak, is geared towards masculine aesthetics that suffocate

¹⁹ "Acest fel în care am fost privită/ ca fată/ în interiorul familiei,/ în școală,/ în lume/ — nu e natural,/ e istoric,/ e vechi,/ dar nu e natural,/ e istoric".

²⁰ "Deconstruirea androcentrismului e prea mult într-o lume care face tot posi-/ bilul să îl protejeze./ Să deconstruiști androcentrismul înseamnă să integrezi faptul că există o/ lume a plăcerii/ ce nu implică exclusiv plăcerea/ Bărbatului".

²¹ "În corp,/ în realitate,/ pe internet/ e greu de trăit ca adolescentă./ Îmi curatoriez imaginea,/ îmi performez corpul/ în realitate și în online".

alternative modes of expression. Concurrently, what is emphasised is the need for empathy, directed towards the validation of women's writing:

«I like to write»

and they answer with

«How sweet! Do you want to become Mihai Eminescu?»²² (Oprea 135).

or

I want to read all of the poetry written by those who did not have the courage to label their texts as *poetry*.

I want to read all of the poetry written by those who did not have the courage to label themselves *poets*²³ (Oprea 143).

The statement “I want to write for closeness and retrieval, not for competition”²⁴ (144), contributes to the feminist effort of constructing an alternative literary model built on equality and intertextuality. Militating for texts formed by adding onto other writers' works, not through aesthetic competition, differs from the traditional understanding of literature that privileges the individual's authorial mark on the text and considers that “the aesthetic and the agonistic are one” (Bloom 8). The poets involved in the project of Literature and Feminism [*Literatură și feminism*] (a Romanian platform dedicated to publishing feminist literature) promote a view of literary creation detached from the coordinates provided by the romantic model of the genius or the masterpiece, a model accepting of “imitations, copying [and] deconstructing language, [one in which rewritings are seen] as valid and potentially valuable”²⁵ (*Literatură și Feminism*). Language, by not having to reproduce canonical male literary models, can become revolutionary.

These discussions do not allow me to articulate my
existence,
other than through Their words (...)//

²² «Mie îmi place să scriu»/ și mi se răspunde cu/ «Ce drăguț! Vrei să fii Mihai Eminescu?».

²³ “Vreau să citesc toată poezia scrisă de toate cele care nu au avut curajul să își/ numească textele *poezie*./ Vreau să citesc toată poezia scrisă de toate cele care nu au avut curajul să se/ numească *poete*”.

²⁴ “Vreau să scriu pentru apropiere și recuperare, nu pentru competiție”.

²⁵ “imitațiile, copiatul [...] destructurarea limbajului [...] „drept valide și potențial valoroase”.

I am the splinter that doesn't want to reproduce the violence of the Father's poems²⁶
(Oprea 145).

The intention behind these poems is to give value to female experience as aesthetic material, to affirm the "biographical lens" [*biografismul*] (Oprea 140) as valuable in women's writing. As such, the poetry collections analysed in this study render female corporeality as a productive epistemological site. Consequently, the descriptions of corporeality depict a localised (Rich) or situated feminist subject (Haraway). Building on the ideas outlined by Adrienne Rich, the body is perceived as its own geography (212) that allows for specific epistemological contextualization, because the body "plunges (...) [one] into lived experience, particularity" (Rich 214), into a concrete spatio-temporality. In a somewhat similar way, Donna Haraway talks about "situated knowledge" (581) as a marker of a feminist worldview: "Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge" (583). Seeing the body as an epistemic site reduces, therefore, the dangers associated with totalizing narratives. Mădălina Oprea's poems depict the body as a container of psycho-somatic information through which one can access personal experiences and memories: "The body has memory, it remembers"²⁷ (112). Writing about the body, therefore, becomes a collective act of reclaiming experiences: "These memories have also been stored by other bodies/ that don't look like mine"²⁸ (13). On the other hand, corporeality is also shown to restrict affirmations of gender identity as a result of the limits imposed by the existence of a historical consciousness regarding the body that limits authentic somatic self-expression:

To always be put together,
to be shaved,
to smell well
to stimulate
to excite
for man's final orgasm²⁹ (Oprea 184).

²⁶ "Aceste discuții nu mă lasă să îmi articulez/ existența,/ altfel decât prin cuvintele Lor. (...) // Sunt așchia ce nu vrea să reproducă violența din poemele Tatălui".

²⁷ "Corpul are memorie, își amintește".

²⁸ "Aceste amintiri au fost memorate și de alte corpuri/ care nu arată ca al meu".

²⁹ "Să fiu mereu aranjată,/ să fiu epilată,/ să miros bine,/ să stimulez,/ să excit/ pentru orgasmul final al bărbatului".

In Medeea Iancu's most recent book, *The Weaver. Instrumental Opera* [*Țesătoarea. Opera instrumentală*], affirming gender difference becomes a subversive gesture that leads to the emergence of feminist discourses in the literary field. The volume is constructed in the spirit of performative writing, containing an ample musical structure rendered through repetitions that underlie the entirety of the text. Iancu brings forth aesthetically peripheral themes and highlights the marginal status of women writers on the national literary scene:

Me, «the incompetent», «the idiot» born at the periphery of field landscapes & of those beautifully rocky [structures] described by poets in their poems on supremacy & masculine odes. (Țesătoarea 15).³⁰

or

Because I am literature's marginal theme (...)//
Because I am the danger & deficit of the
Education system. Because I am «pathogenic» lyricism,
The nightmare of the normal & of aesthetic autonomy³¹ (Țesătoarea 53).

The rhythm of these poems is conveyed through the obsessive repetition of themes and certain syntactic structures. This paper focuses on this volume published by Medeea Iancu not only because it is her most recent collection, but also because it represents a synthesis of her poetical work up to the present moment. Iancu's perception of literature stems from a socio-cultural understanding of the power dynamics within the literary field, as well as from a literary conception opposed to the argument of "aesthetic autonomy" and the ideological neutrality of art. Moreover, Iancu also insists on the impurity of writing, on the contamination between literary discourses, between prose and poetry (57).

Analogous to Mădălina Oprea's literary outlook, Iancu positions her poetry inside the lived experience of women, questioning the factors that have led to the devaluation of women's literary contributions:

THIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY IS RESTRICTED BY PATRIARCHAL-SUPREMACIST
STANDARDS AND LITERARY PRACTICES³² (Țesătoarea 19).

³⁰ "Eu, «incapabila», «idioata» născută la periferia peisajelor de câmpie & a celor stîncos-frumoase descrise de poeți în poeziile despre supremație & elogiul masculinității".

³¹ "Pentru că sînt tema marginală a literaturii. (...)// Pentru că sînt pericolul & deficitul sistemului de Învățămînt. Pentru că sînt lirica «patogenă»,/ Coșmarul normalității & autonomiei esteticului".

or

In the novels of «world literature» the girl overcomes her «miserable condition». In the novels of «world literature» the girl almost becomes legitimate. In the novels of «world literature» the girl almost becomes legitimate in a racist & patriarchal culture³³ (Țeșătoarea 224).

Medeea Iancu's poetry exposes the implicit violence of artistic discourse, sustained by the mechanisms of patriarchal power: "Oftentimes fascism is considered poetry (...) Oftentimes the role of art is mistaken for supremacy"³⁴ (59). The title of her poetry collection, *The Weaver*, could then refer to the weaving of different sources (taken from theoretical, queer, and feminist sources) in the efforts to build an alternative, feminist literature. Even though every poetry collection mentioned in this study uses intertextuality consciously, the amount of references inserted in *The Weaver* is overwhelming, as they are used systematically to reclaim the work of feminist writers. "The index of invisible work" [*Indexul muncii invizibile*], found on the last pages of the book, compiles an alphabetical list of all the citations and references introduced throughout the book, an act that further emphasises the importance of intertextuality in Iancu's work. Authors such as Adrienne Rich, Annie Ernaux, Virginia Woolf, Ocean Vuong, or bell hooks constitute the new genealogy of feminist poetry that intends to surpass the canon of supremacist writers, promoters of oppressive literary discourses. The contributions of Romanian feminists, grouped around the publishing house frACTalia, are also acknowledged, usually in the endnotes of these volumes, a gesture that underlines the collective effort behind feminist literature. Oprea's volume, for example, ends with the acknowledgment of influences stemming from the works of "Medee[a] Iancu, Carmen Maria Machado, Olivia Laing, Nora Ugron, Sașa Zare, Ocean Vuong, Iuliana Lungu (...)", a statement that justifies interpreting recent feminist literature (or, at least, feminist literature published with frACTalia) as a *collective poetic phenomenon* that tries to impose itself as an alternative literary discourse by constructing a network of feminist writers tackling similar themes.

³² "ACEASTĂ AUTOBIOGRAFIE ESTE RESTRICȚIONATĂ DE STANDARDELE ȘI PRACTICILE LITERARE PATRIARHAL-SUPREMATISTE".

³³ "În romanele «universale» fata își depășește «condiția mizeră». În romanele «universale» fata devine aproape legitimă. În romanele «universale» fata devine aproape legitimă într-o cultură rasistă & patriarhală."

³⁴ "Adesea fascismul este considerat poezie (...) Adesea rolul artei se confundă cu supremația".

Following a similar line of thought, Teona Farmatu talks about the “postmodern” character of recent Romanian feminist poetry, highlighting the fact that intertext and metatext become strategies “to make international feminist writers popular, and to deconstruct an imported, male canon” (Farmatu 134). Moreover, as Farmatu highlights, there are key differences between the practice of postmodern and feminist intertextuality. When it comes to postmodernism, intertext “was an argument and a technique for the hegemony of discourse,” whereas, in the case of feminist intertextuality, the goal is to subvert dominant structures by establishing links to alternative discourses (151). While feminist metatext and intertext overlap with postmodernism’s uses of the same textual strategies through their critical component, Farmatu rightfully points out that, for feminist literature, these tactics contain an important revolutionary dimension, aiming “to bring about change to which postmodernism was rather distrustful of, and which it treated either ironically or playfully” (151).

Implementing the same pattern of intertextual citation, *Posthuman Orlando* [*Orlando Postuman*] by Nóra Ugron ends with a list of both international writers who left their mark on her work. Even though Ugron makes use of standard references to feminist literature (such as Virginia Woolf or Audre Lorde), these are integrated within a larger “queer-feminist” (114), posthuman, and antispecist sensibility that exceeds the simple affirmation of gender difference. As Teona Farmatu also states, Romanian feminist writers seem to fit into two categories: those operating with “a binary gender structure,” and those who incorporate the wider view of “queer plurality” (130) into their work. Taking this point of view into account, I found it important for this study to also include a reference to a poetry book that goes beyond simply charting the polarised dynamics imposed by gender difference. If the poems found at the beginning of the volume, “the girl who always feels inadequate” [*fetița care se simte mereu inadecvată*] and “Letter to girls like me” [*Scrisoare pentru fete ca mine*] centre on female gender identity and on anxieties characteristic of this subjectivity, the following texts work in the vein of posthumanism, depicting the subject in relation to its environment.

when you will mourn me
 mourn the death manifested by
 capitalism
 that costs us millions of lives

human and non-human
 that contaminates us
 on all levels
 from individual cells
 to whole maritime ecosystems³⁵ (Ugron 94).

The feminist perspective, combined with the awareness of the generative relationship between human and environment, provides the lens through which the theme of corporeality is illustrated. In poems analysed beforehand, female corporeality was explored in relation to the problem of being objectified, and to instances of performing gender identity. In contrast, the poetry of Nóra Ugron depicts the body as forming a network of relationships. The body is perceived as an energetic point that works as a link to establish connections to other bodies: “But our common, fragile lichen body is made up of relations, thousands of channels through which tears and blood mingle. Thousands of channels through which knowledge, curiosity, and love flow like rivers”³⁶ (110).

Taking Woolf’s novel, *Orlando*, as her literary model, Ugron’s intention was to write a series of posthuman mourning poems (126) that provide both a meditation on the relationship between man and other species and a lamentation of the planetary destruction caused by capitalism. It is important to note that, even though this volume, as opposed to the others, exceeds the paradigm of anthropocentrism, it adopts a similar stance regarding the issue of the peripheral status of women writers in the literary field:

When I was younger,
 the Great poets, the
 Patriarchs of Literature told me
 that: there will come a Time
 when you won’t write
 about Love (...)//
 Journalistic writing,
 love poetry,

³⁵ “când mă veți jeli/ să jeliți moartea manifestată a/ capitalismului/ care ne costă milioane de vieți/ umane și non-umane/ care ne contaminează/ la toate nivelurile/ de la celule individuale/ până în ecosisteme maritime întregi”.

³⁶ “Dar corpul nostru comun de lichen delicat este alcătuit din relații, mii de canale prin care lacrimile și sângele se încălesc. Mii de canale prin care răurează cunoașterea, curiozitatea și iubirea”.

Feminine sentimentality
 in Great & Patriarchal Literature
 are all subordinated³⁷ (Ugron 65).

Comparable to Medeea Iancu, Mădălina Oprea, or Iuliana Lungu, Ugron deconstructs the idea that women's life-writing, or poetry centred on exploring feelings and vulnerability, cannot constitute legitimate forms of literary expression. Love and mourning (8), emotional states stereotypically associated with the "feminine," form the poetic vertebra of this volume, pointing towards the author's intent to reconfigure the limits imposed on literature written by women. Not only that, but Ugron also underscores the search for a new, personal language that could transgress the norms of masculine writing and give rise to a situated poetic subject:

I have not written in years
 after the Great poets taught me
 Shame
 unless I Wrote about the Great Sufferings of the Subject (...)//
 I have not written in years
 when I couldn't find my Language
 when I lost my language³⁸ (Ugron 79-80).

"French feminism" and contemporary Romanian feminist poetry: converging lines

In spite of the different poetic strategies employed by these writers, the conclusions of the analyses outlined above point towards the existence of a common thematic element between these poems, namely the assertion of gender difference through text and textuality. From this angle, there is an observable, recurring thematic pattern and intention underlying all of these poetry collections: the deconstruction of power dynamics present in the literary field from a feminist point of view. In this light, these poems seem to share more than the stereotypical manifesto formula

³⁷ "Când eram mai tânără,/ mi-au zis Marii poeți,/ Patriarhii Literaturii/ că: va veni Timpul/ când nu vei mai scrie/ despre Iubire (...)// Scrisul jurnalistic,/ poeziile de dragoste,/ sentimentalitatea Feminină/ în Literatura Mare & Patriarhală/ sunt subordonate".

³⁸ "nu am mai scris de ani de zile/ după ce Marii poeți m-au învățat/ de Rușine/ dacă nu Scriu despre Marile Suferințe ale Subiectului (...)// nu am scris de ani de zile/ când nu-mi găseam Limbajul/ când mi-am pierdut limbajul meu (...)"

(Farmatu 123), relying on common themes to form a sense of cohesiveness and coherence.

Similarities between these poems and the theories of “French feminism” are mainly traceable to the mutual preoccupation with the liberating qualities of language. This sometimes text-centric lens translates women’s societally peripheral position into the language of male literary domination. Hegemonic literary discourse can be found in Eminescu’s aesthetics (Oprea, Lungu), in the “world literature,” “universal” novel (Iancu), in the works of “The Great Poets” (Ugron), or in the language of violence inbuilt into the “Father’s poems” (Oprea). All of these instances of literary domination represent the textual avatars of patriarchal society. Both Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray consider that forging a new, “authentic,” feminine or female-centric language could constitute a viable option for women to create their own representations and, consequently, break away from the male canon. The poets that this study has chosen to focus on seem to adopt a similar view, insisting on the necessity of women writers to express themselves freely and to invent their own style, untainted by the norms imposed by mainstream literary discourse.

For Cixous, as for Irigaray, this new language is also capable of giving voice to women’s censored somatic experiences. In the case of contemporary Romanian feminist poets, language in itself is not inherently perceived as being corporeal, but many of these texts centre around discussions of the female body. In these poems, corporeality is appreciated as another means (other than the *text*) of affirming or performing one’s gender.

Even though Cixous and Irigaray develop different theories concerning the possibilities of a new language—Cixous works with the notion of feminine writing, whereas Irigaray talks about a “double syntax” (*Speculum* 138)—their ideas overlap in many ways. Moreover, the two writers share a common aim, that of deconstructing masculinist logic. The concept of the “double syntax” developed by Irigaray is based on syntactic insubordination, on the deliberate use of ellipses and blind spots within discourse (142). The weak point in her explanation lies, however, in her overstatement of the liberatory possibilities awarded by an encoded feminine discourse (143). Promoting the idea that women should develop a different language, one not easily decodable by men, poses serious problems when it comes to expanding on politically relevant solutions for women’s liberation. From this point of view, the language of contemporary feminist Romanian poetry wholly differs, as the transitive,

clear-cut style that is employed facilitates the dissemination and circulation of these texts.

A symptomatic aspect for Romanian feminist writers, and one that raises problems when linking their work to “French feminism,” is their refusal to associate themselves with feminine writing. This stems both from denying the equivalence between the quality of one’s writing and one’s gender, and from the disavowal of culturally conservative uses of the term. “Feminine literature,” as used in national conservative literary spheres, is not the equivalent of the Anglo-Saxon “women’s writing,” as it is not used to delineate an area of literature/study, but instead denotes a derogatory attitude towards women’s literature. Despite the fact that some of these writers acknowledge the difference between “feminine writing” (as theorised by Cixous) and “feminine literature” (a term that carries pejorative connotations), Cixous’s *écriture féminine* is never fully explored. The culprit for that could be either the weak circulation of “French feminist” theory in Romania, or the label “feminine” itself, viewed as constrictive (even though, as mentioned earlier, Cixous did not intend it as limiting literature to the gender or sex of the author, but as a means to denote a corporeal, visceral writing style). Scepticism towards a “feminine” style/literature and what that implies appears as follows:

The term “feminine literature” is characteristic to our area and differs from that of “feminine writing.” It is linked to conservative zones of discourse, especially because of the confusion surrounding the label “feminine”, used both to mark sex and specify gender; leading to the “natural” association between women and femininity³⁹ (Sandu 289).

or

[there have been] confusions created around feminism and feminist literature: from labelling literature written by women as feminine literature, from placing so-called feminine literature on equal grounds with feminist literature, to describing certain books written by female authors as being feminist, without them being connected to feminist literature⁴⁰ (*Arta* 26).

³⁹ “Sintagma «literatură feminină» este specifică spațiului nostru și este diferită de cea de «scriitură feminină». Ea se asociază cu zona de discurs conservator, în special din cauza confuziei din interiorul termenului «feminin» care este folosit și pentru desemnarea sexului și pentru precizarea genului; se reproduce astfel în interiorul acestei sintagme «naturalul» asocierii dintre femei și feminitate”.

⁴⁰ “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

Furthermore, another important aspect to point out when discussing “feminine writing” is Cixous’s systematic refusal to theorise the term, describing it without offering a clear definition: “It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorised” (*The Laugh* 883). The alleged impossibility to access the theory behind this concept raises many issues when it comes to its operability and usefulness. As opposed to this anti-theoretical attitude, Romanian feminist poetry does not mystify the act of writing, relying instead on the terms of power relations to depict the process of literary production. Moreover, contemporary feminist poetry circumvents the allegations of ahistoricism that “French feminism” has been accused of. By opting for an intersectional standpoint and emphasising the need for a localised/situated feminist subject, these poetry collections prioritise feminist matters that are not strictly limited to the gender binary or to sexual difference but encompass a wide array of other concerns such as ecofeminism, queer identity, family dynamics, precarity, etc.

With all this being said, the centrality awarded to affirming sexual/gender difference in contemporary Romanian feminist poetry justifies the aims of this research and motivates a return to the aims of difference feminism in order to investigate the assimilation of its goals by a national, post-communist feminism. Rosi Braidotti, a prominent contemporary feminist theorist, advocates for readjusting the ideas promoted by “French feminism” (specifically the ideas found in the work of Irigaray) to current social realities. Braidotti considers that reevaluating certain notions promoted by difference feminism would constitute an important political gesture, as it would scrutinise the “identification of the thinking subject with the universal and both of them with the masculine” (256). To Braidotti’s mind, returning to the matter of corporeality central to sexual difference would be beneficial for the construction of a situated subject. Therefore, speaking from the position of woman, “although the subject «woman» is not a monolithic essence” could “activate sociosymbolic changes” (25), because it would imply adopting a concrete stance or speaking position. Sexed reality and the materiality of corporeality are not inextricably linked to a biologically essentialist or deterministic stance, but could afford a rethinking of embodiment as an element “overlapping between the

numirea unor cărți scrise de autoare ca fiind feministe, fără a avea însă nicio legătură cu literatura feministă”.

physical, the symbolic, and the sociological” (25). Viewed from this lens, Braidotti’s ideas intersect with those of Butler, who perceived sex as a normative category, as well as those of Grosz, who made a case for sexual difference in the attempts of disassociating the “universal” subject and body from the masculine. Braidotti, Butler, and Grosz all take the socio-cultural realities of embodiment into account and recognize the constraints imposed by them. These limits create hierarchies between societally and aesthetically valuable bodies and those regarded as invaluable and, consequently, confine gender identity within the boundaries of normative criteria. The volumes of poetry analysed in this paper stress the links between performativity and the body either by highlighting the positive ways in which corporeality can contribute to affirming one’s gender identity:

#nodetails
 there are two organs the size of a pea//
 #nodetails
 under the skin around women’s genital area//
 #nodetails
 on each side of the labia
 #nodetails
 around the vagina⁴¹ (*CantoHondo* 43).

or by critiquing the objectification of women’s bodies:

You have to become the female body that the “masters” entertain themselves with
 That the “masters” entertain themselves with⁴² (*Țesătoarea* 140).

Conclusions

This paper has attempted to analyse recently published feminist poetry collections from Romania by underlining the commonalities between the subject matters reworked by Iuliana Lungu, Mădălina Oprea, Medeea Iancu, and Nóra Ugron. These poetry books seem to incorporate the characteristics of Romanian feminism, as they tend to blend themes from Second Wave feminism (sexual difference) with concerns

⁴¹ “#fărădetalii/ sînt două organe cît un bob de mazăre/ #fărădetalii/ sub pielea zonei genitale la femei.// #fărădetalii/ de fiecare parte a labiilor/ #fărădetalii/ înconjoară vaginul”.

⁴² “Trebuie să devii corpul de fată cu care se distrează «maestrii» Cu care se distrează «maestrii»”.

raised by Third Wave feminism, such as gender identity, the need for intersectionality, and the awareness of multiple differences that go beyond the masculine-feminine binary. The absence of an organically developed grassroots Romanian feminist movement after the fall of communism, coupled with the simultaneous integration of Second- and Third Wave political goals from the West, turns contemporary feminist poetry into an interesting case for analysing the uneven national import of chronologically differing feminist themes.

In spite of the weak integration of feminist post-structuralist theory into Romania's cultural scene (the lack of translations/delayed translations of "French feminist" theory) there are points where contemporary local feminist poetry intersects with the ideas of "French feminism." The reworking of literary power dynamics to a central theme, the overestimation of the emancipatory qualities of writing, and the emphasis placed on female corporeality are all such converging lines between these two different paradigms.

If post-May '68 French feminism adopts a strictly *textual* or text-centric view on women's oppression, this could, at least partially, be a result of the prestige awarded to figures such as Roland Barthes or Jacques Lacan at the time (both interested in the fibre of language and issues pertaining to textuality). The limits that naturally occur from such an attitude towards women's oppression are, however, surmounted by contemporary Romanian feminist poetry through an intersectional approach. By virtue of the insistence on localised, or "situated" knowledge(s) in the sense promoted by Haraway, and through the exploration of power relations present outside the literary scene, local contemporary feminist poetry cannot be accused of perpetuating the same errors as "French feminism," namely ahistoricism and apoliticism.

In any case, the focus awarded to sexual/gender difference in these poems (with the exception of those written by Nóra Ugron) has justified making use of some theoretical ideas put forth by Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz, and Rosi Braidotti in order to critically reevaluate the relevance of difference feminism in our times. However, as a result of remodelling similar themes, these poetry collections tend to form a homogenised corpus of texts, particularly with regard to subject matter. Therefore, the unanswered questions that remain refer to the possibilities for future artistic innovation within this framework.

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