

WOMEN WRITERS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROMANIAN INTERWAR DRAMA

CARMEN D. CARAIMAN¹

Abstract

During the interwar period, feminine literature² was no longer perceived as a bizarre cultural phenomenon in Romania, at least not by mature and balanced critics, such as E. Lovinescu, G. Ibrăileanu and Tudor Vianu. At the time, Romanian drama and theatre life³ developed considerably and feminine playwriting benefited from the creative spirit of the epoch and from a more flexible political, social and cultural context.

Although it did not fundamentally innovate Romanian dramatic discourse, feminine interwar playwriting furthered the literary tradition initiated by their 19th century predecessors and managed to come up with new topics and typologies.

The re-interpretation of past and often forgotten texts is a necessary task for literary history whereby critics complete the information upon which we rely to depict an epoch.

Keywords: Romanian interwar drama, women writers, innovative topics, female characters, feminine writing.

Introduction

The concept of *feminine literature / writing* has been differently approached in the course of time: from a sociological, historical, political, religious or cultural point of view. As far as literary critics are concerned, we can identify oscillating positions among specialists: the extremists (who either support the existence of an undoubtedly particular stylistic pattern in literary texts, which they decode by means of gendered practices⁴, or who deny⁵ any functional value of the concept) and the balanced critics (such as: Elena Zaharia-Filipas⁶, Ioana Pârvulescu⁷, Sultana Craia⁸, Bianca Burța-Cernat⁹ a.o., who primarily make use of the aesthetic criterion when interpreting literary texts).

The method of investigation we have adopted in our paper is the latter one. Consequently, the aesthetic value was the main principle we used when selecting the texts¹⁰ that we have analysed in

¹ Senior Lecturer, „Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest, (email: cdcaraiman@univnt.ro / caraiman_carmen@yahoo.com).

² In our paper, we use the phrase *feminine literature/writing* to refer to literary works created by women writers.

³ During the interwar period, theatre life flourished in Romania. New private theatre companies were set up (*Compania Excelsior, Teatrul Maria Filotti, Teatrul Maria Ventura, Teatrul Popular, Teatrul Ligii Culturale, Teatrul Mic, Teatrul Fantazio, Teatrul 13 plus 1* and others). Private theatres came up with a fresh vision over topics, stage interpretation and stage direction and they managed to survive despite the “anticultural” taxes imposed by the state upon private theatres. A new generation of young stage directors appeared – Camil Petrescu (supporter of “total stage direction”), V.I. Popa, Ion Marin Sadoveanu, Haig Acterian, Soare Z. Soare, Mihai Zirra and Ion Șahighian (supporters of expressionism) – who approached the dramatic text in a new way.

⁴ For a straightforward presentation of the main terms used to define gender writing, we recommend Anne Cranny-Francis, Wendy Waring, Pam Stravropoulos, Joan Kirkby. *Gender Studies. Terms and Debates*, Palgrave Macmillan, NY, 2003.

⁵ Eugen Negrici, *Iluziile literaturii române*, București: Editura Cartea Românească, 2008.

⁶ Zaharia-Filipas, Elena, *Studii de literatură feminină*, București: Editura Paideia, 2004.

⁷ Ioana Pârvulescu, *Alfabetul doamnelor*, București: Editura Crater, 1999.

⁸ Sultana Craia, *Îngeri, demoni și femei*, București: Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 1999.

⁹ Burța-Cernat, Bianca, *Fotografie de grup cu scriitoare uitate: proza feminină interbelică*, București: Cartea Românească, 2011.

¹⁰ In our paper, we have analysed two plays that we consider representative for Romanian interwar playwriting: *Luminița* by Ticu Archip and *Bătrânul [The Old Man]* by Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu.

our paper. Finally, we have pointed out the main particularities that interwar feminine dramatic discourse acquired in the two most representative dramas written by Romanian female playwrights: typologies (basically the feminine ones, which are unique), topics (which can be coined as feminist since they attack patriarchal mentality) and the structure of the dialogue (the way in which replies function in the text: as a mirror that establishes the dominant position in dialogue).

If the first Romanian women playwrights (Constanța Dunca-Schiau, Sofia Nădejde, Nelli Cornea a.o.) regarded theatre as an instrument by which they could directly send the audience their feminist message while sacrificing the aesthetical value of their literary works, the second generation of Romanian women playwrights – represented by Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, Ticu Archip and Igena Floru¹¹ – brought psychological depth to the profile of their feminine characters and also created well-built and coherent dramatic conflicts. Thus, feminine characters were depicted in relation to the social condition of Romanian women during the interwar period and in relation to their particular psychological profile. Moreover, the stage evolution of feminine characters was no longer a merely dull illustration of several dramatic destinies, but rather an in-depth depiction of the feminine universe and its particular characteristics in Romanian interwar patriarchal society.

The topics developed by the two writers were in part considered taboo (see the debaucherous life of Suzana and her husband in *Luminița*¹² or the immorally destructive influence of parents upon their child) or inadequate for traditionalist Romanian society (see Gina's critical attitude to patriarchal family in *Bătrânul*¹³).

The male dramatis personae were no longer the key characters in the plays written by women playwrights. On the contrary, the female character was brought into the centre of the dramatic universe.

Our attempt to bring into evidence the original typologies, topic and language innovations brought by the Romanian interwar feminine playwriting is meant to complete a fictional space which is insufficiently explored by literary Romanian criticism. Finally, our goal was to re-evaluate forgotten aesthetically valuable plays – *Bătrânul* and *Luminița* – which could be successfully represented on the stage today.

Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu. Social drama

One of the main reasons for which Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu¹⁴'s playwriting is less popular with the Romanian readers / theatre amateurs can be justified by her remarkable success as a prose writer. However, the author manifested a particular interest in playwriting from the very beginning of her literary career, perhaps under the influence of her uncle¹⁵, Bengescu-Dabija¹⁶ (an important playwright at the time). In fact, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's first publications dealt with theatre life: *Sur la mort de Pierre Liciu* in *La Politique* magazine, 1912, followed by an article on Bataille's literary work and several attempts to write theatre. Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu wrote her first play *Povârnișul* [*The Slope*], later on known as *A căzut o stea* (1939) [*A Star Has Fallen*], in

¹¹ Igena, Floru, *Fără reazem*. București: Editura Librăriei Socec & Co., 1922.

¹² Ticu Archip, *Luminița*, București: Editura S.A.D.R., 1928.

¹³ Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Teatru*, București: Editura pentru Literatură, 1965; the volume *Teatru* [Theatre] includes the following plays: *A căzut o stea* [*A Star Has Fallen*], *Bătrânul* [*The Old Man*], *Medievală* [*Medieval Play*], *Sora mea, Ana* [*My Sister, Ana*]. The first night of *Bătrânul* [*The Old Man*] was in 1920, at the National Theatre from Bucharest, on 2nd March 1920; the play also enjoyed appreciation in Iași, in 1983 – see Ioan Holban, *Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu*, Editura Albatros, București, 1995;

¹⁴ In 1923, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu becomes a member of the Romanian Playwrights Society.

¹⁵ According to Florin Mihăilescu, *Introducere în opera Hortensiei Papadat-Bengescu*, Editura Minerva, București, 1975;

¹⁶ see Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Autobiografie*, in *Adevărul literar și artistic*, 11 July, 1937, no. 866, page 5;

1915. 31 years later she made the last attempt to write drama - *Medievală* (1946) [*Medieval Play*]. Between 1915 and 1946, the author published the social drama *Bătrânul* [*The Old Man*], which we regard as her masterpiece, followed by a mediocre play *Lulu*, inspired by E. Lovinescu's similarly entitled novel, and the unfinished drama *Sora mea, Ana* [*My Sister, Ana*].

Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's constant effort to publish theatre is also mirrored in her letters to G. Ibrăileanu and Camil Baltazar. The author considered that the difficult political context our country was undergoing at the time was an important inconvenient for building a career as a playwright: "I think that now it is not the right time for fairly assessing an intellectual work because currently the events are too intense and no one is ready to make a right evaluation. I think that now a good work (everyone hopes to have written well) might be regarded with a sort of anger and unstable indifference."¹⁷ (our translation)

In an interview with Felix Aderca, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu confesses that technical problems she came across in the attempt to represent a play on the stage constituted another obstacle in her career as a playwright: "... if the obstacles a play comes across /.../ wouldn't be so big, maybe I would write only theatre".¹⁸ (our translation)

According to the information we have concerning theatre¹⁹ performances, the social plays written by Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu and the psychological plays written by Ticu Archip and Igena Floru were rarely represented on the stage. The best plays published by Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu and Ticu Archip (*Bătrânul* and *Luminita*) shocked literary critics and the theatre audience that found them abominable. The less aesthetically valuable plays written by the three women writers (*Fără reazem* [*Without Support*], *Inelul*²⁰ [*The Ring*] and *Lulu*) did not disturb the patriarchal mentality of the time and did not impress critics or theatre amateurs either; in fact, they had no echo.

During the interwar period, the most successful plays were comedies (Al. Kirițescu, Th. Mușatescu), "pitoresque and sentimental theatre"²¹ (V.I. Popa, G.M. Zamfirescu) and "intellectualized farse"²² (Mihail Sebastian). In this context, feminine playwriting must have appeared isolated since it did not fit the mainstream voice.

Besides political context and technical difficulties involved by the attempt to represent a play on the stage, the audience was in Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's opinion another obstacle that a playwright had to face: "Then, after you have enjoyed the play, you have to confront the audience, which is a quite appalling experience. Many playwrights know this feeling especially those who do not write in order to flatter the audience..."²³

¹⁷ *Scrisori către G. Ibrăileanu*, M. Bordeianu, Gr. Botez, I. Lazarescu and Al. Teodorescu; preface Al. Dima and N. Popa, București: Editura pentru Literatură, 1966, pag. 67: „Cred că nu e deloc timpul bun pentru o evaluare justă a unei lucrări intelectuale, spectacolul evenimentelor e încă mult prea viu, interesul fiecăruia e prea dislocat pentru o apreciere. Cred că acum o lucrare bună (fiecare speră că a făcut bine) s-ar pierde într-o indiferență nervoasă și mobilă.” (original text);

¹⁸ Felix Aderca, *Mărturia unei generații*, Editura „Națională” S. Ciomei, București, 1929, pag. 217: „...dacă piedicile ce se pun în calea unei piese...n-ar fi atât de mari, cine știe dacă n-aș scrie numai teatru.” (original text);

¹⁹ See Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul românesc*, vol. V, Editura Minerva, București, 1974; see the following journals: *Rampa* (1920-1939), *Teatrul* (1923), *Sburătorul* (1920-1922, 1926-1927);

²⁰ Ticu Archip, *Inelul*, Editura Socec et Co., București, 1922;

²¹ Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, *Literatura română între cele două războaie mondiale*, volumul III, București: Editura Minerva, 1975, pag. 9.

²² Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, op. cit., pag. 91;

²³ I. Valerian, *De vorbă cu doamna Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu*, in *Viața Literară*, an I, 1926, nr. 29, pag. 1: „Apoi cu teatrul după ce te-ai delectat, mai rămâne publicul, adică ceva foarte înspăimântător. E un sentiment cunoscut de mulți confrăți dramaturgi și probabil de acei anume care atunci când scriu nu se gândesc să măgulească publicul...” (original text);

Although Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's plays do not have a stable aesthetic value, they have unitary topics: "marital disagreements"²⁴ and the analysis of matrimonial conflicts are psychologically investigated in all the plays written by the author.

Povârnișul [The Slope] illustrates the marital drama of a woman, Simona Demir, who fails to be happy in all her love affairs. After falling apart with Radu Demir, her first husband, she has to face another disappointment – her marriage to Ian Balli: "Deeply disappointed with her marriage to a lawyer, Radu Demir, who offends her dignity, considering her to be his own <<property>>, Simona, the main character in *A Star Has Fallen*, falls out with her husband hoping to recover affectively."²⁵

The novelty of the play consists in the writer's attempt to create a complex feminine psychology characterized by obscurity, unpredictability, soul fragility and the permanent feeling that she is a misfit in her marriages and in her role as a mother.

Simona Demir illustrates the inadaptation of a woman to the patriarchal background that marriage confines her to. The feeling that her sentimental life is a failure and her emotional unbalance gradually isolate Simona Demir from her family and friends: "Simona's drama is the drama of moral solitude because she can no longer live <<with or without people>>."²⁶ Her suicide is a desperate gesture by which she attempts to free herself from social clichés and her mind labyrinth.

The topic of the play and the typology of the feminine character are specific for psychological drama and should have been represented on the stage by adequate dramatic techniques. Unfortunately, the way the text is conceived reduces the characters' psychological complexity so that the dramatic conflict lacks force: Simona's psychological decline is represented indirectly by means of dialogues between the secondary characters in the play or by means of long and boring monologues. Thus, the reader has the impression that Simona's psychological evolution is perceived at the surface of the text without being illustrated by the heroine's play and stage evolution. The suicidal scene puzzles the reader/audience and it is perceived as a surprise by the other dramatis personae, too.

Simona's husbands are quite different in nature. Radu wishes to succeed in his career by all means and is ready to sacrifice his wife's happiness to see his dream come true. In his opinion, his wife is part of his fortune alongside with his property – a commonly shared view at the time:

Radu: "I do not have to be cautious to my wife...I am tired of having to handle the others with gloves...

Simona: Yes! Let us spare the others...Wife is a property...You do not have to be cautious to her...She is insured...she eats and sleeps...What else can she wish for?"²⁷

Ian, her second husband, though generous and sincere in his feelings, fails to make Simona happy, too.

The first modest attempts to write theatre were followed by Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's masterpiece - *Bătrânul [The Old Man]*, in which the author approaches her favourite topics: woman's condition in a patriarchal society, degenerescence and upstartness.

Bătrânul [The Old Man] innovates Romanian feminine character with Gina Delescu, an intellectual and contradictory woman, oscillating between sense and sensibility, a defensive and offensive attitude towards life misfortunes. Gina verbally sanctions and defies everything which

²⁴ *Dicționarul scriitorilor români*, Editura Albatros, București, 2000, pag. 609;

²⁵ Constantin Ciopraga, *Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu*, București: Editura Cartea Românească, 1973, pag. 89: „Profund decepționată de mariajul cu un avocat (Radu Demir) care-i ofensează demnitatea, considerând-o <<proprietate>>, Simona din *A căzut o stea* se desparte, sperând într-o redresare alături de armatorul Ian Balli. Noua experiență nu e mai fericită, fluidul sentimental care s-o apropie de Balli, om delicat de altfel, lipsește.” (original text);

²⁶ Constantin Ciopraga, op. cit., pag. 89-90.

²⁷ Original text: „**Radu:** N-am nevoie să fiu prudent cu nevastă-mea...Destul trebuie să-ți pui mânuși cu alții...

Simona: Da! Să menajăm străinii...Nevasta e o proprietate...Pentru ea nici o precauțiune...E asigurată...mănâncă și doarme...Ce mai poate dori?”;

seems ridiculous or false to her, from patriarchal morality to political upstartness. Her husband seems to epitomise everything she criticizes most: shallowness, lie and lack of principles. The stage representation of this feminine character shocked the theatre audience and some of the literary critics²⁸ because of her direct, unscrupulous attitude towards her husband.

Many of those who read or saw the stage representation of Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's play noticed that the writer's style is quite aggressive and virile: "dealing with feminine topics, Mrs. Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu writes about them in an incisive, almost scientific manner and with *Bătrânul* she created the most mature and virile work that a Romanian brain has ever produced."²⁹

Most critics interpreted the play unfavourably. E. Lovinescu³⁰ was one of the few who praised it underlining the author's objectivity in approaching her topics.³¹

The main conflict of the play (between, on the one hand, Gina and Luca Delescu, symbolically known as *Bătrânul* [The Old Man] and, on the other hand, all the family members – Mrs. Delescu, Cleo and Jean – the uninstructed, penniless backbiters living on Luca's money) is multiplied and gives birth to a series of other subconflicts (between Gina and her husband, Dinu Delescu; between Cleo, Dinu's sister, and the Old Man; between Dinu and his brothers).

The social topic of the play is represented in a determinist manner. The naturalist echoes of Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's literary work can be identified in *Bătrânul* in Luca Deleanu. The existential aversion Luca feels to having a mentally alienated child (Codea) makes him hate his wife and family. Hence his refuge in science.

Similarly, Gina is trapped in an unhappy marriage. Brought up by Luca Delescu (the Old Man)'s family after her parents died, Gina gets married Luca's son, Dinu Delescu, the successful, unprincipled politician and her unfaithful husband. This marriage makes her feel as if she were a commodity which is exchanged between her husband, Dinu, and her supposedly lover, Sandu:

"**Dinu:** ... You love my wife and she loves you (*Sandu tries to protest gently*). You are her friend and she has found a refuge in your arms. I imagine I were in your place. Things would not be different. It happens that we are rivals. It is a domain in which hierarchies do not exist. Now I want your friend. In politics, you may be in the opposition fighting against me with my own weapons. This is how I understand life... (Act IV, sc. VI)"³²

Gina's presence in Luca's laboratory helps her develop her universe of knowledge. Thus, she evolves intellectually and adopts a polemical attitude towards vanity, snobism, hypocrisy, demagoguery and prejudice. The contrast between the group represented by Gina-Luca Delescu and the other characters constitute the main frame upon which the author builds her ironical discourse.

In the author's opinion, woman's unhappiness is mainly caused by her soul solitude to which she is condemned by patriarchal society:

"**Gina:** You are talking of divorced women or women whose husbands died. I was talking about *widows*. About women who find no comfort for their souls in the moral support that their husbands should offer them. I was talking about modern odalisques."³³

²⁸ see Felix Aderca, op.cit., pag. 216-217;

²⁹ Const. Ciopraga, op.cit., pag. 13: „ocupându-se de feminități, d-na Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu le tratează cu o aprigă inciziune, aproape științifică, iar în *Bătrânul* ne-a dat una din cele mai mature și mai virile opere pe care le-a produs un creier românesc.”;

³⁰ E. Lovinescu, *Bătrânul*, in *Sburătorul*, an II, No. 45, 19th March, 1921, pag. 289;

³¹ E. Lovinescu, *Bătrânul* (II), in *Sburătorul*, an I, no. 51, 1st May, 1920, pag. 553-554.

³² Original text: „**Dinu:** ... Iubești pe nevastă-mea și te iubește (*Sandu protestează slab*). Ești amicul ei și s-a refugiat în brațele dumitale. Îmi închipuiesc că eu aș fi dumneata. Lucrurile nu s-ar fi petrecut altfel. Întâmplarea ne face rivali. E un domeniu unde nu sunt ierarhii. Pe amica dumitale o vreau eu acum. În politică mâine vei putea fi dumneata la tribuna adversă, luptând împotriva mea cu armele date de mine. Așa înțeleg eu viața ... (Actul IV, sc. VI);

³³ Original text: „**Gina:** Dumneata vorbești de femeile divorțate sau cărora le-au murit bărbații. Eu vorbeam de *văduve*. De femeile care nu găsesc sprijinul sufletesc, nici sprijinul moral pe care au dreptul să-l ceară de la bărbatul lor. De cadănele moderne.” (Actul IV, sc. V).

The discussion on the ordinary sin for which woman is considered to be responsible becomes an opportunity for Gina Delescu to cast doubt upon the biblical myth:

”**Dinu:** Man, after Eve committed the original sin, covered woman [with a veil] in order to reduce the number of serpents.

Gina: The first woman may have invented it [the veil] after having seen the real face of her man and instinctively covered her eyes.” (Act V, Scene II)³⁴

The scene in which Gina compares demagoguery with puppet games is very suggestive; in fact she criticizes their lack of sincerity:

”**Gina:** Discourses have a strange effect on me. The effect which puppets had on me when I was a child. Something empty of real meaning... We cannot take politics for granted.” (Act III, Scene IV)³⁵

Gina’s and Luca’s running away from home represent the climax of the dramatic conflict. Their predictable return home mirrors the impossibility to change anything in their lives. Thus, Gina’s evolution – apparently circular (from an unhappy wife to a potential frivolous woman and back to the statute of the unhappy betrayed wife) – illustrates the inner stages she follows, from revolt to resignation:

Gina: Let us go home. I am not made for love or for ambitions. These storms require stronger natures. I was brought up in the middle of ... test tubes, among two old persons...I’m afraid! I am so happy to have you! Let us proceed our work...and leave the other do their own. I have tried to prove my power. When I think of Sandu, of Dinu’s lover, of him...Their lives seem so difficult...It is so difficult to live...Let us vegetate... (*The Old Man is ridden by thoughts*) Dad! Judging by their laws it seems to me that I have sinned.

The Old Man (*takes her head in his hands*): Does it?...It seems to you, my dear daughter. You have not lived according to their laws to consider that you’ve made a mistake. You didn’t have their joys to be punished with their punishments. They didn’t give you anything so that you should feel indebted to them. You’ve lived according to your own law, alone, like a spider. (Act V, Scene IV)³⁶

Bătrânul [The Old Man] is a play about solitude and human condition, in general. However, even if the central character of the play is Luca, the main dramatis persona is Gina. The communication crisis between the couple members and degenerescence bring into evidence woman’s soul solitude and the writer’s nihilist vision as to human destiny. One cannot ignore the writer’s own lifelong regret not to have been allowed to further her studies at the university and her being compelled to accept marriage as the only choice in life for a woman. From this point of view, Gina undoubtedly is an alter ego of the writer.

According to Constantin Ciopraga, the literary work published by Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu managed to do more than a feminist campaign for Romanian culture: ”Hortensia Papadat-

³⁴ Original text: „**Dinu:** Bărbatul, după păcatul Evei, a acoperit femeia [cu un văl] ca să micșoreze numărul șerpilor.

Gina: Poate că [vălul] l-a inventat prima femeie care a văzut adevărata față a bărbatului ei și a făcut gestul instinctiv de a-și acoperi ochii.” (Actul V, sc. II)

³⁵ Original text: „**Gina:** Discursurile îmi fac un efect ciudat. Efectul pe care mi-l făceau în copilărie păpușile. Ceva vid de sens real... Nu putem lua în serios politica...” (Actul II, sc. IV)

³⁶ Original text: „**Gina:** Aidem acasă. Nu sunt nici femeie de iubire, nici de ambiție. Furtunile astea cer temperamente mai puternice. Eu prea am crescut...în mijlocul eprubetelor, între doi bătrâni...mi-e frică! Ce fericire că te am! Să ne vedem de treabă...să-i lăsăm la treburile lor. Mi-am încercat puterea. Când mă gândesc la Sandu, la amanta lui Dinu, la el...Ce greu e traiul lor...Ce greu e să trăiești...Aidem să vegetăm... (*Bătrânul e gânditor*). Tată! Mi se pare că după legile obișnuite am păcătuțit.

Bătrânul (*îi ia capul între mâini*): Ți se pare?...Ți se pare, fata tatii. N-ai trăit după legile lor, ca să greșești după ele. N-ai avut bucuriile lor, ca să primești pedepsele lor. Nu ți-au dat, ca să le fii datoare. Ai trăit între ei după legea ta, singură, ca un păianjen.” (Actul V, sc. IV)

Bengescu did not directly support feminist campaigns but her entire literature (comprising many instances in which women are disadvantaged) is subservient to the cause, doing more than some simple campaigns. Structurally, she belongs to the category illustrated by Simone de Beauvoir whose similarly deep perspective illustrates a prolific spirituality.³⁷

The feminine issue in Ticu Archip's theatre

At present, Ticu Archip's theatre is hardly ever mentioned by theatre amateurs, critics or the common reader. The main reason for which her theatre is currently so rarely mentioned can be explained by the wrong reception of her masterpiece, *Luminița*³⁸, whose topic was labelled as being unacceptably scandalous by the interwar theatre audience.

Her first plays - *Inelul*³⁹ and *Gură de leu*⁴⁰ (represented on the National Theatre stage in 1935-1936) - did not convince literary critics or the theatre audience of her dramatic gift⁴¹ and for good reason. Thus, Eugenia Tudor Anton⁴² regards Ticu Archip's theatre as a temporary stage in her prose writer career. On the other hand, E. Lovinescu regards her style as *symbolist*, i.e. using suggestion as a manner of expressing her topics (in both prose and theatre)⁴³. The only literary critic who appreciated Ticu Archip as a playwright was Felix Aderca: "One is amazed to discover how a writer with a gentle look and inclination is concerned in her mind's laboratory with such an essential problem as the slow decomposing of a family because of one woman's lusts which are probably stirred by her unluck or simply by her sheer nature... We witness a real talent which is still developing."⁴⁴ (our translation)

All the plays written by Ticu Archip deal with woman's psychology and her condition in the Romanian interwar society. Ana in *Inelul* [*The Ring*], Suza and Luminița in the similarly entitled play, Dolly in *Gură de leu* [*Lion's Mouth*] – all illustrate feminine soul which is approached in relation to the bourgeoisie social background, to their moral and spiritual profile and to the degree of independence they assume as women.

E. Lovinescu⁴⁵ and Felix Aderca⁴⁶ notice that the author is inclined towards creating rare feminine characters whose behaviour is scandalous (see Suza in *Luminița* and Dolly in *Gură de leu*) or passionate and inclined towards sacrifice (Ana in *Inelul*).

³⁷ Constantin Ciopraga, op.cit., pag. 10: „Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu nu a întreținut campanii feministe directe, dar întreaga sa literatură (cu multe pagini din care femeile ies dezavantajate) servește tacit cauzei, făcând în acest sens mai mult decât campaniile propriu-zise. Structural, ea aparține categoriei ilustrate de ultimele decenii de Simone de Beauvoir ale cărei priviri, de o egală gravitate, atestă o spiritualitate fecundă.” (original text);

³⁸ Ticu Archip, *Luminița*, București: Editura Societății Autorilor Dramatici Români, 1928;

³⁹ Ticu Archip, *Inelul*, București: Editura Librăriei Soccec & Co. S. A., 1922.

⁴⁰ Manuscrisul piesei *Gură de leu* nu este disponibil în bibliotecă. Deocamdată nu avem date despre existența lui; un fragment critic despre acest text dramatic, semnat H. Lazu, a fost publicat în *Adevărul literar și artistic* - anul XIV, 3-XI-1935, nr. 778, pag. 8;

⁴¹ Dezamăgit de piesă, E. Lovinescu a apreciat că titlul acesteia, *Gură de leu*, ar fi trebuit înlocuit cu *Bâlci sentimental*, pentru a ilustra tematica ei siropoasă - Eugen Lovinescu, *Memorii. Aqauforte*, București: Editura Minerva, 1998, pag. 242-243;

⁴² Eugenia Tudor Anton, *Prefața* la vol. Ticu Archip, *Soarele negru*, București: Editura Minerva, 1983;

⁴³ E. Lovinescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane*, București: Editura Minerva, 1989, pag. 296;

⁴⁴ Felix Aderca, *Un debut*, în *Viața literară*, anul III, 21-I-1928, No. 68-70, pag. 17: „Rămâi uimit văzând cum o scriitoare cu înfățișare și apucături blânde e preocupată în laboratorul creierului ei de probleme atât de esențiale ca aceea a descompunerii lente a unei familii prin morbul unei femei cu pofta avivată poate de prea mult nenoroc sau numai de firea ei...Ne aflăm în fața unui talent real, în plină dezvoltare” (text original);

⁴⁵ Idem;

⁴⁶ Felix Aderca, *De vorbă cu Ticu Archip*, în *Adevărul literar și artistic*, anul IX, seria a II-a, 6-X-1929, no. 461, 1929, pag. 1-2;

Theatre critics⁴⁷ who considered that the topic of *Luminița* is outrageous referred only to the image of the debauched wife and her destructive spirit (Suza), leaving out the husband's frivolity (Șerban) and his responsibility for his wife's and daughter's unhappiness.

Returning home after 15 years of absence – in which she lived as an adulterous woman – Suza attempts to convince her husband to accept her back home near him and their daughter, Luminița, but in vain. Being refused, Suza triggers between the family members a psychological war whose effects have a dramatic ending. Three conflictual triangles are built: father-daughter, daughter-fiancee and mother-daughter.

The dramatic conflict is settled through the sacrifice of the most fragile family member, Luminița. The author's message is that the hypocrit morality of society – which accuses woman of frivolity, disregarding the same sin when it comes to males, – is responsible for Luminița's death.

Moreover, Suza's frivolous behaviour after returning home – illustrated by her attempt to seduce her daughter's fiancé, Vania – must have seemed unacceptable by the bourgeoisie theatre audience. Throughout the play Suza adopts a dissimulated behaviour, trying to identify each one's weak points and to convince herself that she can manipulate the others. Shortly before the play ends, the readers / theatre audience are convinced that Suza is to blame for all her family's unhappiness. However, in the end, we find the real story of the couple. We learn of the real cause which led to the couple's fallout. Considering Șerban guilty of the family disintegration, Suza accuses him of adultery and holds him responsible for her moral decline:

"**Suza:** ...I was brought up at your school...I was 16 when you married me...I was younger than Luminița...remember, and you did not even call my name, you did not call me any name, in fact...a few days later you replaced me...(faster). First with a friend, then with a servant...the third must have been a woman from an important family...the fourth..." (Act III, Scene V)⁴⁸

Suza's final discourse brutally destroys the pure image Șerban has built about himself and his wife's past. The effect is that Luminița's inner universe is broken:

"**Suza:** ...Look at me (to Luminița)...I'm dying for the second time in my life... I died for the first time when I left you...Șerban told you...you were little, you couldn't see me...(distinctively). /.../ I leave my daughter, Luminița, my whole soul fortune...my huge soul fortune...I was the lover (Șerban wants to intervene) of how many men, Șerban, do you know?...the number is not important, many, many, many. /.../ Listen to me, Luminița, listen to me...my mother used to unsew an old coat when she wanted to make a new one... Make a new soul for yourself upon my broken and dirty one... I can no longer hope to do this for me...it's over..." (Act III, Scene V)⁴⁹

Betrayed by her own fiancé, disappointed with her own father, confused by the appearance of her frivolous mother whom she thought dead, Luminița feels that all her reasons for living are lost. The image of the fallen apart family and of the adulterous parents cancel in the young woman's pure soul any reason for living and any hope in an honest and sincere love/relationship.

⁴⁷ Alex. Călin, *Luminița, piesă în 3 acte de domnișoara Ticu Archip la Teatrul Național*, în *Adevărul literar și artistic*, anul IX, no. 372, 22-I-1928, pag. 6; Nicu, *Premiera dela Teatrul Național. O femeie criminală. Numeroși morți și răniți. Incendiul unei magazi [sic!]. Șoarecele enigmatic*, în *Rampa*, anul XIII, no. 2992, pag.2; Scarlat Froda, *Cronica dramatică. Teatrul Național: Luminița, dramă în 3 acte de d-ra Ticu Archip*, în *Rampa*, anul XIII, no. 2992, pag.4.

⁴⁸ „**Suza:** ...la școala ta am crescut...aveam 16 ani când m-ai luat...eram mai tânără ca Luminița...adu-ți aminte, nici nu-mi spuneai pe nume, nu-mi spuneai în nici un fel...peste câteva zile m-ai schimbat ...(mai repede). Întâi cu o prietenă, pe urmă cu o servitoare...a treia trebuie să fi fost de neam... a patra..." (Actul III, sc. V)

(original text);

⁴⁹ „**Suza:** ...Uită-te la mine (Luminiței)...mor pentru a doua oară...Întâi a fost când te-am părăsit pe tine...ți-a spus Șerban...erau mică și nu puteai să mă vezi...(clar). /.../ Las fiecei mele, Luminița, întreaga mea avere sufletească...uriașa mea avere sufletească...Am fost amanta (gest al lui Șerban)...am fost amanta a câți bărbați, Șerban, tu știi?...numărul nu importă, mulți, mulți, mulți. /.../ Ascultă-mă, Luminița, ascultă-mă, mama când își cosea o haină nouă, descosea alta veche după care croia... După sufletul meu zdrențuit și soios, croiește-ți tu altul din stofă nouă și scumpă... eu nu mai pot spera într-asta, s-a isprăvit..." (Actul III, sc. V) – original text;

The topic of the play was perceived as an abominable offence by theatre critics and the audience and, consequently, they felt obliged to criticise the author fiercely.⁵⁰

The play comes up with an original perspective over the feminine and the masculine characters as well. Șerban and Vania represent new male dramatic personae in Romanian theatre.

Șerban is the image of the coward father who cannot recognize his faults and the negative consequences his behaviour had over his wife and child. On the other hand, Vania's gloomy nature predicts the dramatic end of his fiancée and adoptive family. Suza and Vania are the "intruders" who break the apparent harmony between Șerban and his daughter. Suza and Vania communicate well because they share a common feeling of hatred to Șerban and perceive themselves as outcasts. Suza's frivolous nature encourages Vania's taste for revolt. Moreover, Vania feels only resentment to Șerban:

"**Suza:** Why do you hate him?

Vania: He told me that my dad died because of a mental illness...if he had remained silent about this, I wouldn't have known anything and I wouldn't have been afraid...I would have lived quietly or I would have gone mad, all the same to me. /.../ I owe him my present weakness and that's why I hate him..." (Act II, Scene V)⁵¹

The dramatic discourse of the play is crystal clear. The geometrical organization of the scenes in the play leaves the impression that nothing can be added or removed from the text. Finally, it is the dramatic strength of the play which persists and convinces the reader of its aesthetic value.

Conclusions

The interwar dramatic discourse was superior to the 19th century one from an aesthetical point of view.

During the 19th century, the discourse of male-female characters, He-She, could be regarded as comprising *a stimulus – an answer*⁵² (i.e. *authoritative statement – obedient reply*). As to interwar feminine playwriting, the male character is almost permanently criticized by his life partner's ironical comments which are actually oriented against prejudices. In fact, the male discourse is permanently sabotaged by women's revolting attitude.

As many literary critics noticed (E. Lovinescu, Felix Aderca, Bianca Burța-Cernat), male characters created by women writers are no longer predominantly depicted as superior personalities or as models to be followed. In fact, they are in an overwhelming percentage depicted as immoral, hypocrite and aggressive. Women are most depicted as victims of the unhappy marriages in which they are trapped or as victims of their fragile inner structure or of a society that confines them to the domestic universe without offering them the chance to further education⁵³. We could conclude that a negative perception of reality dominated the two writers we have referred to in our study.

⁵⁰ Felix Aderca, *De vorbă cu domnișoara Ticu Archip*, în *Adevărul literar și artistic*, anul IX, seria a II-a, no. 461, 6-X-1929, pag. 1-2.

⁵¹ „**Suza:** De ce îl urăști?

Vania: El mi-a spus că tata a murit nebun...dacă ar fi tăcut, n-aș fi știut nimic și nu mi-ar fi fost teamă...aș fi trăit liniștit, ori aș fi înnebunit, tot una. /.../ Lui îi datorez slăbiciunea mea de acum, și de asta îl urăsc..." (Actul II, Scena a V-a);

⁵² Maria Cvasnăi-Cățănescu, *Structura dialogului din textul dramatic cu aplicare la dramaturgia românească*, Universitatea din București, Facultatea de limba și literatura română, București, 1982.

⁵³ As we have mentioned above, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu was not allowed by her family to further studies and was compelled to accept the marriage to a magistrate; her huge literary success was the result of her effort and the support of G. Ibraileanu and E. Lovinescu; on the other hand, Ticu Archip (her real name was Sevastița Archip), the second woman writer we refer to in our paper, used to work as a teaching assistant at the Faculty of Mathematics – The University of Bucharest;

Feminine dramatis personae created by women playwrights during the interwar period hint at a different statute – they refuse to remain obedient to tradition and confined to routine housework activities; they aspire to an independent statute without identifying themselves with the aggressive profile of Tofana in *Patima roșie*⁵⁴; the new feminine characters (Gina and Suzana) are involved in an *ideological fight* against contemporary biases. The two characters (Gina and Suzana) adopt a non-conformist attitude to couple problems. Thus, the new feminine characters depart from the traditional perspective proposed by famous contemporary writers (V.I. Popa, Th. Mușatescu, Al. Kirițescu, Camil Petrescu and others). The 'new woman' answers to her husbands' infidelity with adultery or by simply fleeing from home in a gesture of desperate rebellion. However, the woman's refusal to accept reality as an already made pattern leads to dramatic situations for all family members (see Suzana, Luminita and Serban in *Luminița*, Simona in *A căzut o stea*, Lola in *Fără reazem*⁵⁵ [*Without Support*]) or proves to be futile (see Gina's evolution in *Bătrânul*).

All in all, the short analysis we have developed in the pages of our paper offers a glimpse to texts that could be included in articles/studies on Romanian feminine playwriting and that might determine stage directors to select for future representations. On the other hand, the curious reader may also discover forgotten masterpieces which remained almost unknown to theatre amateurs mainly because of the unfavourable review they received when written or when represented on the stage.

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⁵⁴ Mihail Sorbul, *Patima roșie*, București: Editura Librăriei și Tipografiei H. Steinberg, , 1916;

⁵⁵ Igena Floru, *Fără reazem*, Editura Librăriei Socec & Co., București, 1922.

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