

The Representation of Female Character in the Literature of Gheorghe Craciun

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Abstract: This essay it's a short presentation of a new era in Romanian postmodern literature, and this wave of change, that is represented by a young group of writers, it's embodied in an attempt of representing the female from a male's point of view. I chose the prose of Gheorghe Craciun to be the most representative because it provides us a whole new category of female characters. His females move across his writings changing clothes, bodies, soul, pain, but the aim of this paper is to reveal if the narrator succeeds to transpose himself into a female's mind and body and to provide the lecturer real experiences. The purpose of this paper is to deconstruct these roles and especially what they have valid and transformable in them. There is no such integrative, satisfying, comprehensive perspective, still a male perspective on the world cannot explain life in its complexity.

Keywords: postmodernism; feminism; gender gap; identity; women

The work of Gheorghe Crăciun falls under the category of Romanian postmodernism of the 1980s; this category bears the mark of the socio-political framework in which it appeared. In this paper, I will try to put aside the features of the narrative substance by characterizing his work and I will review the construction of female character which is quite recurrent in his writings. Essentially, his writings are defined as an exploration of the unspeakable, the plurality of objects and language, a narrative investigation of states of mind, feelings, thoughts and dramas that define human existence. My goal is to show the unusual of usual, the freshness of what seems banal, the hypnotic nature of daylight states, the endless metaphysics of gestures and sensations of the smallest. This type of knowledge becomes an epiphany of senses, and polyphonies of both senses and

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language reflect author's vision on polyphonies of life Carmen Musat (Foreword to Craciun, 2013).

Ingenious realism of Gheorghe Crăciun is one of the most comprehensive to human nature, and destinies of the characters open to an interpretative plurality, their portraits are built in motion, on the background of alienated reality. In fact, the relevance of epic speech assumes this realistic rhetorics, adjudging two cumulative requirements of the text, namely registration and confession (Boldea, 1993).

We are interested in the accelerated succession of male portraits, slightly deformed by the magnetic attraction of femme fatale. As she has no power to impose the painful presence of body of flesh, the woman cannot claim the right to enjoy truly a literal body: she is just a chimera, a mere pretext for the man's eye that sees it, the voice that speaks it, the hand that touches it. Each time, that which takes the form of a Camil Petrescu amorous dilemma turns out to be just the pretext for the exclusive and obsessive record of a writer's adventure: (Ciocarlie, 1998).

Based on these observations, it is necessary for us to talk about the identities that becomes tangible through transcription and thus become constituent parts of the text. It is difficult to distinguish the concept of identity because of multiple connotations. The identity gathers various theoretical binomials: self and otherness, similarity and difference, singular and plural. It is a paradoxical concept and it can have opposite definitions in its semantics. It is a concept that makes use of both denotation and mostly connotation (in most cases, identity is metaphorical, metonymic, oxymoronic). Michel Foucault considers that any concrete, stable and individual identity is linked to a lot of fictitious, superimposed, moving identities. Identity is always polyhedral, multifaceted.

On the other hand, our identity is always recognizable, despite the intrinsic dynamism and permanent development. It is also a permanent redefinition, transformation, because any being records perceptible or infinitesimal changes. From another point of view, identity is placed as a negotiation between public and private; it is governed by a principle of uncertainty and it is within this concept where we shall introduce the notion of "gender identity", that crosses all forms of civilization, all walks of life, and it is based on the two major biological roles: male and female, but also on some cultural roles: woman as a mother, wife, prostitute, career woman etc.

The purpose of this paper is to deconstruct these roles and especially what they have valid and transformable in them. There is no such integrative, satisfying,

comprehensive perspective, still a male perspective on the world cannot explain life in its complexity.

One can hardly imagine a study of contemporary culture and civilization spirit without referring to a fundamental concept of XX-XXI centuries, namely postmodernism. It is a cultural term that applies to all artistic manifestations but it also represents the development of a feminist vein of thinking that revolves around gender identity. During postmodern dialogue, the feminine speech plays a crucial role as it updates the main ideological and social traits of postmodernism: association with the democratic society in which men's voice can be polyphonically accompanied by the voices of the "other sex"; anesthetization and moralization of existence in the light of a manifesting hedonism and for new identities generated by feminist movements. Decanonization of classical culture, which is one of the basic principles of postmodernism, leads to denaturalization of traditional Western European model and secondly to imposing of new values belonging to the other sex. Just as postmodern text invites the reader to review and re-analyze, feminist writing is also characterized by polyphony and deconstruction of linguistic norms.

Barbara Johnson asserted that the problem of gender is a problem of language, of linguistic coding. This type of reasoning characterizes the poststructuralist feminism philosophy, which was strongly marked by Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. They start from the premise that gender gap has nothing "natural" within, that it is not a so clearly defined category in biological life as it is in language. It is the language that places the referent in the male condition representing the norm, the centre. The female is seen as a derivative, a complement, a hybrid. This patriarchal thinking that honours the masculine to the detriment of feminine is reflected throughout the history of literature, philosophy, sciences and language shaping. In this respect, the fundamental goal of feminism becomes re-thinking of life identity.

Nowadays feminism is part of the thinking system of emancipated human being, so we will not make a diachronic insight into current history; instead we will try to answer the issues involved. In this regard, our aim is to find out if it involves a coherent discourse or its entire concern is precisely to legitimate its own discourse by resorting to extraliterary or extracultural arguments. What are the limits in which feminism can operate as critical theory? Are they justified its intrusions in the matter of literary history and canon?

We cannot leave this phenomenon suddenly just by using and thinking of some terms that disregard the rules of patriarchy simply because language and speech have included such rules for century. Luce Irigaray believed that patriarchy worked as a virus which was inoculated in all forms of contemporary thinking, so it is a dead end to entirely rewrite the history of human thought and civilization (Irigaray, 1974) *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Cornell University Press) ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman (de Beauvoir, 1949) – this is the phrase that best captures the need to redefine identity. It is legitimate to act towards awareness of these phenomena and the establishment of speeches to attract the specific difference of feminism. There must be a speech about feminine emotion, women’s behaviour inside the femininity and especially about women unconsciousness. We are at the point where female identity claims its assertion, therefore the new approach tries to bring into focus a new prototype – the Woman. The fundamental goal is not overcoming an entire literary history, but its reassessment and rewrite into a feminist key. From this point of view feminism is becoming a general cultural and not just literary project.

The dilemma still faced by feminist theory is that the very definition of feminism is based on a concept that must be deconstructed and unessentialized in all aspects. Cultural feminism had defied the male definitions of the concept of femininity, assuming a reversal of the old hierarchies, traditional attributes.

“Gender gap” or Differences between Genders

Women and men are judged in terms of gender stereotypes and unfortunately this is a constant of modern mentality. Almost nothing has changed in defining the feminine from Greeks onward, Pythagoras himself believed “There is a good principle which has created order, light and man; and a bad principle which has created chaos, darkness and woman”. Traditional gender stereotypes still persist, and family, school and the media play a major role.

Biologically, males and females are two types of individuals who, within a species, differ for reproduction purposes; they can only be defined as correlated. Regarding the woman, her body is one of the key elements of the position she holds in this world, but it is not enough to define it. Her body does not imply an experienced reality unless it is assumed in a society. Thus, the female is a woman to the extent that she lives as such and defines herself by resuming nature on her own, in her affection (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 253)

Traditionally the feminine is symbolically associated to matter, immanence, body, sensitivity, emotion, weakness, dependency, impurity, chaos, fear and the masculine to spirit, transcendence, rationality, strength, independence, cosmos, invariance, courage. The world is made up of men and women, influenced by what the culture calls feminine and masculine. Feminism turns into political and civil emancipation because women were inventoried as men annexes, parts of their possession, household items, with a dubious status oscillating between servant and cattle.

It is interesting to note from the perspective of gender gap, the definitions provided by Romanian language dictionary for this topic. Thus the man is defined as follows:

1. An adult male human being. **2.** Person full of energy and determination; a grown man; statesman – notable figure, which is in a leading position. **3.** Married male person, considered in relation to the woman who became his wife¹; and the woman: (pop.) female, wife, (fig. and ironically) skirt. (A ~ with a child.) **2.** cleaning woman see *maid*. **3.** Woman of the streets see *prostitute*.²

What we notice is that women are still inferior to men; the woman is seen as his shadow, in constant dependence on his outstanding personality. It is clear that gender gap is not imposed by statute of involuntary ideology due to cultural background that continues to promote the supremacy of a kind even in the linguistic substrate.

Psychoanalytically, our unconsciousness has been marked by certain experiences from childhood because we come on this world with an innate psychic structure which makes it possible for us to live what is typical for our species. Thus the whole nature of man contains woman, both physically and spiritually. Its system is being modulated for the woman from the very beginning, as it is ready for a well-defined world. These *a priori* categories have by nature an inner personality; they are generic images of parents, wife and children (Stevens, 2013). Science helps us understand that certain behaviours typical of social species, including the human species, depend on genetically transmitted response strategies (Jung, 1994). Jung's theory on the existence of common archetypical patterns – which are fundamental in Self shaping – has totally changed the modern perception on the development of individuals and personality. In this psychoanalytical insight of understanding

¹ <http://dexonline.ro/definitie/b%C4%83rbat>.

² <http://dexonline.ro/definitie/femeie>.

masculine and feminine we cannot ignore Freud's theories which have played an important role in triggering the feminist movement. He believed that the moral norm in women is different than in men. Their superego is never so inexorable, impersonal as we see it in men. Their personality traits which have always been criticized are the sense of justice lower than in men, the difficulty to obey the imperatives of life and the fact of being more frequently and more easily influenced in their judgments by feelings of affection or hostility. All this should be considered as caused by change in their superego formation (Freud acc. to (Dolto, 2005).

First of all, gender differences are established biologically, before self-assertion. Initially Freud described the girl's history in a symmetrical manner, and then he named the feminine form of infantile complex "Electra complex", but it is obvious that defined it based on the male form. At the beginning she has a maternal fixation, while the boy is not for a single moment sexually attracted by the father. At the age of five, she discovers the anatomical difference between sexes and reacts to the absence of penis through a castration process: she imagines that she was mutilated and suffers. At this point she must quit virile demands, and then she identifies with her mother and tries to seduce her father. Therefore, Freud comes to the conclusion that the woman feels like a mutilated man.

The existing entity is a sexed body and in relationships with others sexuality is therefore engaged; for psychoanalysts, sexuality is only an essential aspect of a deeper search of the being. But it is not enough to say that woman is a female, we cannot exclusively define her through awareness of her femininity: this self-awareness arises within the society to which it belongs. The individual is only defined by successive choices in the world horizon and the personal experience does nothing else but activates an already potential existing in itself.

The woman is presented to us as bearing the request of two modes of alienation: it is obvious that trying to act like a man will end in a failure for her, but the game of being a woman is both challenge and deception: "To be a woman would mean to be the object, the Other, and the Other remains subject within its own abandonment".

The one that comes to contradict Freud's theory and revolutionize the system (de Beauvoir, 1949) of thinking is the French feminist Luce Irigaray who perceives infantile sexuality as phallogocentric and so she denies the specificity of female eroticism. She is the first to dare to ridicule the theory according to which women

are inferior due to lack of the sexual organ. This lack would be the reason for which women are considered inferior and always on the second place in society: "Only the man is an erotic life open to research, while the erotic life of the woman, because of atrophy from civilization, partly and because of some conventional reserves and a certain lack of sincerity, she is still surrounded by an opaque veil." (Freud acc. to Gatens, 2001). Unfortunately, this matter persists today and is supported by Freud's writings, where the focus is on the biological side regarded as a mechanism to sabotage efforts of women assertion. Luce Irigaray notifies that this theoretical approach of female sexuality and her social position has always been judged with male parameters, from where it appears the error. Men have always dominated, all the information we have access to be obtained through them, even the female genitals were described from the male perspective. Thus the woman is below the standard, where the standard is masculine. The theorist rejects these ideas by saying that only a woman can understand her own anatomy, and encourages the rediscovery of one's body, by hauling off with the male perspectivism because women need to consider and analyze the multiple mechanisms of oppression that were used to define and limit their potential, not only in terms of sex, but also politically or socio-culturally. Until this happens we cannot talk about any imaginary sex or female language (Irigaray, 1974).

Differences between man and woman are extremely obvious, furthermore they are logical, natural; it is in our nature to be different, but the society must stop perceiving the woman as a shadow, as the "other". In most collective representations, stereotypes related to femininity build the negative, ephemeral, undesirable pole. This binary thinking that is basically the patriarchy must be eliminated.

Feminist Philosophy

Feminist philosophy raises a wave of ignorance sitting on women experiences as women, on cultural, natural, social, political differences between being a human-woman and human-man. The contribution of women in philosophy cannot be a mere "add" theorizing women experiences, but involves more than a radical reconstruction of the fundamental expressions of the field.

Regarding philosophy, there are some questions about the status of women. Neither fundamental hostility of conscience nor the hostility between sexes is the issues, since it is expected that the duality of sexes, like any other duality, creates

conflicts. The concern is why both trans-historically and transculturally the woman consistently holds the position of the Other. It is natural that the woman is the Other for the man, and the man is the Other for the woman: this is inherent to duality of the sexes. However, the dual relationship should be mutual. What really needs an explanation is the immutably status of Subject's absolute position: why there is no reciprocity in the relation between the sexes? (The issue of reciprocity between the sexes is central in feminist philosophy and is extensively debated by Moira Gatens (2001) in *Feminism and philosophy. Perspectives on Difference and Equality*, Iasi: Polirom).

As we could see in the section dedicated to gender gap, the traditional ideals of femininity and female life contradict the reality lived by XXI century woman. It is necessary to replace the old dominant ways to interpret life and values. To understand the cultural devaluation of women, we first have to understand how the devaluation operates at an unconscious level.

The role of feminist philosophy is to establish the role and position of woman in society, based on equality. Culturally, women are strongly related to nature, to living world. Them being associated with birth is not a handicap but rather an advantage of perspective. If we take a look at history of philosophy, we see that modern man is in an involution state relative to the first steps of theories of gender equality. Plato established as a condition of equality that men and women can have the same mind and the same soul. In the ideal state, they may engage in the same direction, for the same purposes, if the nature of their soul is identical. As sons of the state, all children will receive an equal education, and later they will pass some tests that will classify them in society classes. Plato does not value women negatively, but certain feminine values (Plato, 2005).

Subsequently women were perceived as non-men, which does not even provide them the gender autonomy. The laws on gender equality have not been efficient enough in meeting women for a creative life, mental security and minimal respect and dignity. Performance standards have always been set by masculine qualities, and defining women capabilities to compete under the rule of gender neutrality has always been based on roles defined by men.

Feminist philosophy does nothing but introducing the world by women eyes, thoughts and experience, because they are as human as men. According to Alison Jaggar (Jaggar, 1983) feminism has three regulatory purposes:

1. To critically analyze the activity perpetuating women subjugation;

2. To formulate morally justifiable ways for the resistance foundation to such practices;
3. To promote morally undesirable alternatives for the promotion of women emancipation.

Women no longer want to be seen as “footnotes” to men interests. Paradigmatically they are seen as dependent, attracted by immanence and non-hierarchical emotional structures. To remove this false perception, feminists felt the need to deconstruct the system of domination developed by men and based on gender gap.

Most theories of equality talk about a possible society organized without gender variable. This leads to the sketch of a new-man, half male, half female, having a neutral gender (Feminists of the second wave, such as Millet or Firestone stood by an ideological radicalism, debated in detail in the book of Miroiu, 1995).

The distinction between sex and gender entails biological-social distinctions, so that a solution could be re-socialization, re-education by existing oppressive-patriarchal codes. It is not the gender relations that determine inferiority of women belonging to “secondary” dimension of existence, but relations between human individuals, as the sex is a natural gift, while the gender can be a choice.

We often ask ourselves why feminist studies, whether philosophical or not, have an aggressive touch and always look for arguments to support gender equality in social, political, cultural, artistic and literary terms (mostly literature is the best teaching material to exemplify male domination; literary speech is almost entirely male, as female authors fail to give unique, individual expression to the speech they oversensitize). The efforts of feminist movements should be appreciated not only for having led to the revaluation of the feminine roles but for having fought against name such as Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Freud. Their steps have found motivation in the multitude of negative assessment of woman. Nietzsche was by far one of the worst misogynist. For him, this metaphysical fiction – woman is abundantly gifted with qualities that transfer it without appeal right in the category of beings that fall under the power of strong will, metaphysical fiction called man. The woman is made just to satisfy the first and last call: to give birth to vigorous children and if they claim emancipation all they do is to show male foolishness. Their lack of scruples went in so far as they even wrote books. Between woman and man there is an abysmal antagonism in which the woman must obey and be silent, because the man has the will for power and the woman should be afraid of. Man-woman relationship is one of exclusive domination of woman by man

(Nietzsche, faithful to his ideas about *eternal return and superhuman creation*, in the matter of women, his thinking remains constrained in ancient and feudal patterns. In *Thus spoke Zarathustra* he gives it a space of three pages called *Old and young woman*).

Modernity allows women to act, to come out from under this “spell”, from this condition of subjection and the above examples quite clearly motivate the reason for which they have been developed over time several alternatives to overcome gender structures. Nietzsche is not the only one who wrote about women nor the only one who wrote in a misogynistic manner; if only the oppression on women would only include philosophy and literature. To recognize in the woman a human being is not to poor the man’s experience. The differences are those that confer beauty. We can no longer accept the female inferiority, on any level. The two poles, male and female, are two opposites that attract, that is why it is necessary to accept a double perspectivism without judging in terms of gender deficit.

I thought we needed this introductory chapter about male and female identity, about gender differences and feminist philosophy, in order to view literature in key proposed by feminist movement. We will not deny previous concepts but we will broaden the reader’s expectations considering the the female character by feminine reality. When the descriptor does not share the same sex, the picture built is hypertrophied because the experiences are only a mirage, an imagination, not disclosed to conscience. We will see on the way to what extent women and men differently appreciate similar experiences.

Identity constructions occupied a central position in the last quarter century both in literary and cultural criticism, particularly as a result of postmodernist reconstructions and rapid rise of cultural studies. Identities are now perceived as being both imposed by configurations of various power structures and built by each individual, through negotiation with them and reference to an always different “other”. Among the many definitions of cultural identity, the idea of identity as a construct conditioned by positioning the subject and variants of history textualization is clearly expressed in the already classic definition of Stuart Hall: “identities are names that we give to different ways in which past narrations place us and we place ourselves within them”.

Postmodernism interest for identity issues was supported to a great extent by the assertion of feminist theory and criticism, focusing on the construction of female identity and its social, political and cultural implications.

It is worth noting that in the great postmodernist review of classic literary canon, which starts in the United States in the 1980s, literary approaches of female characters have an essential contribution both to re-consideration of classical writers and construction of an alternative multicultural canon, which highlights the socio-cultural impact of some writers, especially female writers, which were partially or totally ignored until then.

What is by far visible in Gheorghe Crăciun prose is the relationship between genders, male and female, woman and man. The narrator is undoubtedly the man looking for the ideal woman, a perfect beauty, of which copy, with more or less imperfections, is the real woman.

This unique mixture between Don Juan and Don Quixote, a hunter of images, equally greedy of reality and illusion of reality, is concerned to transfer factual situations in fictional register. This consciousness of reality which is photographically represented becomes in e.g. "Femei albastre" - an awareness of the represented and especially played in cinema reality.

The narrator is greedy, thirsty of flavours, sounds, signs of life and world, of silhouettes of women watched with the imagination and obscure desires hard to confess. He gathers in his arms the beauty without body and at the same time he is animated by the woman's presence/search. He rakishly moves in a world beset with images: pictures of real but inaccessible women, faces of women loved or glimpsed, film frames dangerously overlapping sequences of immediate reality; all of them are imprinted in narrator's memory. Thereby it appears as a being haunted by phantasms, mistrust, isolation, failures and secret aspirations.

Femei Albastre/Blue Women

We should stop on the opposite side of feminine representation in literature of Gheorghe Crăciun. After analyzing the titles of his novels: *Puppa Russa*, *Frumoasa fără corp (Disembodied beauty)*, *Femei albastre (Blue women)*, we might be tempted to believe that the centre of gravity of his prose is the eternal feminine mystery. But as the reading goes on, we amazingly note that she is still perceived as *a second sex*, as a man appendix, which strengthens the reflective self-referential nature of Gheorghe Crăciun prose.

Feminine silhouettes are brought into scene as in a competition, and the authorial justice adopts an eminently misogynist tone. Postmodernism, which is by definition

the expression of change in attitudes, comes back, contrary to expectations, to the archaic feminine patterns. Women's bodies, their sketches are the element that makes them resemble with phantasms. They are beautiful, mysterious, ugly or unmysterious and suddenly removed from their reality and attracted to the viewer's reality. Thus the woman, as entity, becomes the disembodied beauty.

In relation to the omniscient narrator, the woman is presented as being unable to overcome her intellectual limits: "they are just beings who carry beneath the belly the curly stigma of sin" (Crăciun, 2013, p. 47)

At the same time, we can perceive her as a disturbing element, which triggers a series of contradictory reactions: "I was contemplating her delighted, like I was watching a wild thing captive who knew she did not deserve her fate" (Crăciun, 2013, p. 26) and on the other hand "her presence aroused in me a kind of aggressive compassion that I could not repress" (Crăciun, 2013, p. 28).

Women in his life perform multiple roles, and the purpose for which he hunts them is to know himself, to test his limits. Thus, they become in turn: wife, mother, sister-in-law, friend. "Ondina knocks sense into me like a careful mother" (Crăciun, 2013, p. 30) while Ada "was mine and I barely cared for her soul. I had defeated her and that was all". The man is dominated by the primary feeling of possession and the woman becomes an accessory, a trophy: "Some of them lay hands on a chick with the frustrations of unhappy child who has finally found a temporary accomplishment, and goes with her everywhere, in theatres, at restaurants, at bachelors, and even at dissertation defence" (Crăciun, 2013, p. 32).

What is even more interesting to note is the narrator's interest to other male individuals. This interest comes from vanity, from the desire to improve, from an inner struggle. He makes a clear difference between what he considers decadent and what he would like it to be. Without clearly expressing his appreciation, he manages to transpose some great personalities into a positive aura, because it would be beneath his dignity to admit his shortcomings. But only male individuals enjoy this appreciation. In contrast, women are emptied and rendered as empty bodiless entities. "Their refusal to individualize them seemed amusing to me. They cultivated a kind of gregarious spirit, self-locking and ironic at the same time... they enjoyed laughing like fools" (Crăciun, 2013, p. 47)

The narrator is insensible to the name of the woman with whom he shares his privacy, it does not matter if it is Ada or Ondina, still she does not have to cut no figure. He likes intelligent women, still no more intelligent than he is. He likes to

see them subjugated in his presence, he likes to dominate them. He aims to become a Teacher, a guru for those women who do nothing else but reveal frustrations of a failed existence.

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