

A FEMINIST EXPLORATION OF MEDEEA IANCU'S POETRY

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Abstract. Since 2010, ideology has become more present in Romanian contemporary literature, denouncing the literary canon and its function in nowadays society. Female authors started to be more committed to a feminist agenda, which resulted into a process of (re)claiming female identities and experiences and also creating new forms of defining what being a woman means. After the 1989 Romanian Revolution, artists finally use their right to freedom of speech, being more involved into the social and political aspects of art and society. In this paper, I shall focus on Medeea Iancu's poetry, analysing her discourse and how she develops a feminist agenda in Romania. I shall also point out the fact that her discourse evolves from *Divina tragedie* [*The Divine Tragedy*] (2011) and *Cîntarea care a biruit toate cîntările* [*The Song that Overcame All Songs*] (2015) to what is known as a feminist manifesto in *Delacroix este tabu: Suita romînească* [*Delacroix is Taboo: The Romanian Suite*] (2017) and *Delacroix este tabu: Amendamentele lirice* [*Delacroix is Taboo: The Lyrical Amendments*] (2019). Nevertheless, in this research I shall showcase the aspects that are representative for the feminist literary movement in Romania, focusing mainly on Medeea Iancu, as she embodies the image of the feminist poet.

Keywords: feminist poetry; Medeea Iancu; feminist criticism; discourse analysis; Romanian contemporary literature.

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1. Introduction

Since postmodernity and postmodernism have emerged, selfhood and self-expression began to change drastically. Not only were the social norms inquired, but also each narrative that was once considered normative. As Gerard Hoffmann stated “postmodernism is a complex phenomenon” (2005: 13), that superseded modernity, it embodies a new sensibility “that is not uniform, but plural” (Hoffmann 2005: 13), and deeply influenced by “the liberation from the restraints of the Fifties, [i]t extends into the past and future” (Hoffmann 2005: 13). Postmodernism can be defined as a reaction “against what was conceived as the general mood and the dominant notes of the Fifties: materialism, moralism, individualism, self-consciousness, domesticity, and privacy, de-politicization, anxiety, [...] it was a spirit of destruction that prevailed; its complement, the spirit of reconstruction” (Hoffman 2005: 13). The postmodern era is determined by pluralism and multi-perspectivism, by destruction and reconstruction of meanings.

The Romanian postmodernism is related to the 1980s; Mircea Cărtărescu divides it into two categories: the first one focuses on the pragmatic function of the text, and the latter focuses on reality (Cărtărescu 1999: 150). In the 2000s, the literary field is marked by a change of form, narratives, aesthetics, and sensibilities. After the 1989 Romanian Revolution, society tried to recover what was once suppressed by more than forty years of totalitarian regime. Grațiela Benga (2016: 112-113) noticed that The Millennials’ (2000s Generation) *Zeitgeist* was characterized by anger, fury, rebellion, trauma, vulgarity, aggression, sex, drugs, and violence, as they were rejecting the ‘norms’ and trying to find new meanings and new forms of expression. After the 1989’s Revolution and after 45 years of totalitarianism and censorship, the Romanian society is now exposed to new ideas and new practices such as political pluralism, free speech, and so on (Moloea 2015: 21). As theoretical fields progress, postmodernism remains at the core of what we experience, but it started to switch to post-postmodernism, which could be explained by an immediate need for action, by a sense of urgency, as Jeffrey T. Nealon stated “it’s not a difference in *kind* as much as it is a difference in *intensity*” (Nealon 2012: X). Even though

postmodernism is strongly related to the political and social changes, post-postmodernism almost demands a recognition of ideological implications. The slogan "The personal is political" was popularized through second wave feminism and especially through Carol Hanisch's paper published in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* (1969), where she states that "personal problems are political problems". This motto influences to this day feminists' means of expression. Even though we shall distinguish between text and author, we cannot turn a blind eye to aspects such as privilege, biases, and discriminating processes that constructed an altered form of reality.

Even though the 2000s are known for their non-conforming energy and liberalization, many writers were ignored or diminished by the many critics, such as LGBTQ+ literature, mostly because there was a lack of understanding (Dima 2020: 94). Although women writers could publish and write easily, they did not really embed a feminist agenda in the 2000s, and their works were analysed through a male-gaze, failing to comprehend the complexity of female identity and experience. But such methods are due to the transition through which Romania went, from a totalitarian system to a democratic one. The feminist agenda is not a newly-rooted idea, but it became more visible in 2010s, as this moment marks the beginning of the third-wave feminism in Romania (Miroiu 2015: 195-196). Female authors begin to be more engaged in a political agenda, and one of the most remarkable moments is when the poet Medeea Iancu recites a political poem at the "Mihai Eminescu National Days", where the more conservative participants reacted negatively and even called the Police. Clearly, this is not a new reaction, as literature and politics influence one another, but activism became a necessity into the process of recovering many female authors that were ignored, because they did not conform with what was considered high Literature (such as the works of Sofia Nădejde, Cella Serghi, Yvonne Henriette Stahl, etc.) As stated by the critic Mihai Iovănel (2021: 318), even if thematically speaking, the LGBTQ+ communities have a relatively vast history in literature, they suffered from biased perceptions of queerness. Ramona Dima (2020: 94) affirms that in Romania, there are little to none studies related to queer imaginaries, but progresses are still to be made. In the 1990s queerness was perceived through homophobic and machismo

lenses (Iovănel 2021: 321), but after the abrogation of the Article 200, inside perspectives of queerness started to be explored (Iovănel 2021: 323).

As for the confessional poetry, many women writers chose this form of expression, because it easily could express the complexity of their experience, as it raises the level of awareness on these issues (Felski 1989: 87). Thought to be a genre within women's reach, and also because feminist literature defines confession and autobiography as self-representative texts (Felski 1989: 91-95), many male critics started judging the texts through a patriarchal point of view, so women writers were judged for their personal lives, not for their literary texts. There is a strong relation between language and power, it can either empower or subdue, and in a patriarchal society, men own the power, as women are thought to have a more passive position (Lakoff 2004). As femininity is limited to a weaker form of expression, in comparison to masculinity, the feminine identity is thought to be fragile, yet beautiful, caring, mysterious, yet evil when not controlled, and those stereotypes are also taken into account when male critics write about women's literature (Morris 1993: 20). Robin T. Lakoff (2004) differentiates between masculine discourse and feminine discourse, underlining that women's language might be understood similarly to what patriarchy considers to be women's experience (a mysterious, caring, motherly, weaker form of expression). Feminist theory acknowledges that "the relationship between gender and language is determined not by the repressive nature of language, but by structures of power, exemplified in institutional frameworks which serve to legitimate and to privilege certain forms of discourse traditionally reserved for men" (Felski 1989: 62). But moreover, there is also a distinction between feminine and feminist discourse, as the first could embody also a patriarchal form of femininity, the latter will generate forms of resilience and empowerment.

Elaine Showalter considers that there are three phases of women's literature: feminine, feminist, and female. The feminine phase happened "from about 1840 to 1880, women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalized its assumptions about female nature" (Showalter 2012 [1979]: 35), then the feminist phase took place from 1880 to 1920, when women were "historically enabled to reject the accommodating postures of femininity and to use literature to

dramatize the ordeals of wronged womanhood" (Showalter 2012 [1979]: 35). The third phase that Showalter mentioned is the female phase, that is ongoing from the 1920s, where "women reject both imitation and protest – two forms of dependency – and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature" (Showalter 2012 [1979]: 36). Hélène Cixous (2021 [1975]) coined the term *écriture féminine*, meaning women's writing, and not a feminine style of writing. By using *femininity* or *feminine*, many critics talk from a stereotyped idea of what femininity is and how it must be performed. For Hélène Cixous it is important that women write about their own experiences (2021 [1975]: 5). She questions the idea of womanhood, and the subject of woman, stating that "as a subject of history, the woman happens in multiple places simultaneously" (Cixous 2021 [1975]: 21). She also considers that "it is impossible to define a feminine style of writing" (Cixous 2021 [1975]: 22), as it takes many different forms. It is important to differentiate between what a feminine discourse might impose, by understanding the social conventions that revolve around terms like feminine and femininity, and what a feminist discourse propose, as it conveys the urgency of social change.

Confessional poetry conveys a need for liberation, giving a voice to internal feelings of frustration, trauma and it is also strongly related to the influences of the external world (social and political changes). Even though it could be considered a form of biographical expression, illustrating a particular experience, it could easily embody a general feeling. Confessional poetry is defined by authenticity, biography, and the use of "I", making feminist confessional poetry almost a political genre.

2. Confessional Poetry – Subversive Feminism

In the Romanian contemporary literary field, Medeea Iancu is one of the most influential feminist poets, as she is actively engaged in changing the perception not only of the canonical literature, but also the one around literature written by women or non-conforming identities through journalistic texts, manifestos and different projects and workshops in which she participates. Her first two books *Divina tragedie*

(‘*The Divine Tragedy*’, 2011) and *Cântarea care a biruit toate cântările* (‘*The Song that Overcame All Songs*’, 2015) are deepened into the confessional style of poetry; the poetic universe is touched by death and trauma, similar to the confessional poetry practiced by Sylvia Plath or Anne Sexton.

Divina Tragedie (2011) perfectly illustrates the genre of confessional poetry, emulating the voice of a child, who represents an innocent point of view. The book has three parts: *Allegro*, *Allegro con Molto*, and *Largo*, and the poems are not chronologically written. As the voice of the adult woman overlaps the voice of the child, the reader cannot differentiate between the author and the poetic self, giving a sense of authenticity that exceeds reality. This voice becomes the author’s alter-ego, as the world conforms to her point of view, which is defined by death. The discourse oscillates between the voice of the little girl and the adult woman, that tries to reimagine the trauma she faced.

Confessional poetry exposes vulnerability, not weakness, and as for the ways in which vulnerability is revealed in *Divina Tragedie*, it showcases the strength in which the adult woman helps the little girl to overcome the loss and tragedy she had to face. The discourse does not embody the patriarchal idea of femininity, it outlines the struggles, the complexity and variety of feminine identity and experience. In *Divina Tragedie*, Medeea Iancu does not use a ‘feminine’ language, she refuses to conform to patriarchal norms, she uses the language as an emancipatory tool, in which she writes without ambiguities, she encapsulates the world in an authentic way, through a dual perspective – the child who tries to understand death, illness and loss, and the adult woman who mediates the child’s pain and her own. I would also like to point out that the child and the woman represent the face of the same experience.

Cântarea care a biruit toate cântările (2015) exposes through a confessional filter the ways in which reality influences identity. As in *Divina Tragedie*, Medeea Iancu and the poetic “I” tend to be confused, as she writes about her own experiences. The main difference between *Divina Tragedie* and *Cântarea care a biruit toate cântările* is that the latter demands from its poems to be spoken (Mihók 2016). The poetic voice is one of a woman that knows her strength, even though Medeea Iancu utilizes a more abstract language, it still underlines the necessity of recognizing the experiences which define the performance of identity:

Cuvintele mele/ Legate și-mpletite, strîns răsucite / Mi le trec peste / Gît ('My words / tied up and intertwined, tight twisted / I pass them over / my neck', Iancu 2015: 60, my transl.).

In *Cîntarea care a biruit toate cîntările* the discourse tends to be more abstract, but it does not reflect the patriarchal idea of women's language; it facilitates ways in which the images tend to reflect the grotesque reality that women face all the time. As they are demanded to act a certain way, and even though many of them confirm to patriarchal norms, they still have to suffer at the hand of man. The poems in *Cîntarea care a biruit toate cîntările* do not seek an escape from reality, instead they seek to understand the ways in which traumatic events, feeling of inadequacy define female identity. It also showcases the idea that female identity could not be defined through a general feeling or experience. Medeea Iancu reflects on the function of language and how words can subdue one's identity, and continue to discriminate against oneself. The reason I chose to mention her first books is that they clearly underline Medeea Iancu's intention to write against the patriarchal point of view, demanding a better understanding of women's literature. *Cîntarea care a biruit toate cîntările* could be read also as a meditation upon what it means to be defined through a patriarchal point of view, what the lack of representation and the loss of words could do to women's literature. Even though the abstract language could be linked to the meditative tone of the volume, it still reflects and accentuates the hurtful truth about women's experience Medeea Iancu's poems showcase this abusive behaviour against women are: *Cuvintele de dragoste / Împotriva ta se vor întoarce, / Ceea ce n-a fost nu va fi* ('The love words / they'll go against you / everything which was not meant to be will not be', Iancu 2015: 23, my transl.) or *Și sîngele meu de / Rai golit, de adn-ul / Tău, doamne, toți / Îngerii mînjindu-mi gura / Împușînându-mi / Părul, / Lăsându-mă o nadă / Omului* ('And my blood / emptied of heaven, of your/ dna, god, all / The Angels staining my mouth / thinning my / Hair / Luring me to the / Man, Iancu 2015: 38, my transl.).

When it comes to literature written by women or non-conforming identities, most critics and academic fields are biased, while they fail to understand the complexity of marginal identities and how it influences not only the discourse, but also the innovation and originality that these

perspectives bring to Romanian contemporary literature (Dima 2020: 94). Many great authors, that are non-conforming, fade in comparison to their cis male-counterparts and this practice is imprinted by the patriarchal framework. *Divina Tragedie* and *Cântarea care a biruit toate cântările* are more personal, they reflect a more particular type of experience than her following books, but nonetheless they still give a feminine perspective on how feminine identity is perceived and performed. As writers start to celebrate their diversity of identities, readers could feel closer to texts as they feel connected to an experience they also faced. I would like to mention that even though a marginal literature exists, it does not only embody their traumatic events, but also the moments of celebration and happiness. Feminist theory considers that language has an important role, it showcases the power relation that norms the social and political world, and, as the writers start to reclaim their words, they also reclaim their power.

Medeea Iancu is one of the most prominent feminist figures in Romania, as she disapproves with and rejects the values of patriarchy. She wrote poems like *Literatura a fost creată pe violarea drepturilor* ('*Literature was created by violating the rights of others*'), *Încă un poem în care vocea ta trebuie să sune hetero* ('*Another poem where your voice must sound hetero*'), *Poemul autonom. Alt manifest* ('*Autonomous poem. Another manifesto*') (Iancu 2019) or *Dragă literatură patriarhală* ('*Dear patriarchal literature*') (Iancu 2020). Also, she is actively engaged in redefining and rewriting women's literature, writing articles and essays about feminism and literature. Even if at first the feminist agenda is not so apparent, the implications are there. From the confessional style of writing that defines the relationship between personal and political, her writing discourse evolves in what can be perceived as a form of manifesto.

As Rita Felski stated, "feminist fiction can be understood as both a product of existing social conditions and a form of critical opposition to them" (Felski 1989: 1). In the case of Medeea Iancu's poetry, the evolution of the existing social condition drastically changed to a call to action. Even though critics consider feminist writings products of ideology, I think that it is necessary to question the idea of aesthetics and its values. Ideology could be evident or not, but it still influences the way the text is perceived by critics or readers. Even if "literature does not merely

constitute a self-referential and metalinguistic system, as some theorists appear to believe, but is also a medium which can profoundly influence individual and cultural self-understanding in the sphere of everyday life" (Felski 1989: 7). Feminist literature is a broad term, it is in relation not only with the literary implications of feminism, but also with the social implications. Rita Felski considers feminist literature "all those texts that reveal a critical awareness of women's subordinate position and of gender as a problematic category" (Felski 1989: 14), but from the critic's point of view. In Romania, many women writers refuse to label themselves as feminists, and still the feminist movement is becoming more visible. By assuming a feminist agenda, writers could reject the patriarchal values, which assume that cis-white men should have power over others. Pam Morris states that "women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny" (Morris 1993: 28-29), emphasising on the necessity of a literature written by women, so that they "can tell the story of the aspects of women's lives that have been erase, ignored, demeaned, mystified and idealized in the majority of traditional texts" (Morris 1993: 60), but she also clarifies that "not all women's writings is a record of unacknowledged work and suffering; equally important is its power to celebrate" (Morris 1993: 62).

3. From Confessional Poetry to Feminist Manifestos

Notable in Medeea Iancu's poetry is that she advocates for intersectional feminism and intersectional activism, which Sharon Deutsch-Kidder describes as an "activism that addresses more than one structure of oppression or form of discrimination (racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, ableism, nationalism, etc.)" (Deutsch-Kidder 2012: 3). After the 1989 Romanian Revolution, society faced different types of issues that were once hidden by the regime and society but become visible soon after the beginning of democratization, such as the discrimination of LGBTQ+ people, women or ethnic minorities. Romania struggles in understanding the needs of oppressed groups and it continues ignoring and silencing their voices, as the activism and empowering of

marginalized groups is perceived as a threat to national identity and national values. As Sharon-Deutsch-Kidder stated, social activism is “more than fighting for basic human needs such as adequate housing, food, healthcare, and clothing, multiracial feminists have sought to transform our souls” (Deutsch-Kidder 2012: 7). And without doubt Medeea Iancu’s latest book *Delacroix este tabu: Amendamentele lirice*, seeks to change the ways in which Romanian society treated its oppressed groups. Her poems are raising awareness on issues that must be addressed, calling out the oppressors and asking for accountability.

Thus, *Delacroix este tabu: Suita românească* (*Delacroix is Taboo: The Romanian Suite*) and *Delacroix este tabu: Amendamentele lirice* (*Delacroix is Taboo: The Lyrical Amendments*) are more likely to be received as feminist manifestos, as they constantly challenge the values and teaches of patriarchy. A literary manifesto has an important function to legitimate and negotiate the artist’s point of view regarding social and cultural activities (Luca Somigli, apud Yanoshevsky 2009: 260). In terms of form, “the principal characteristic assigned to the manifesto by Abtado is its ‘multiformity’, its versatility: that it can come in different shapes and forms” (Yanoshevsky 2009: 261). The manifestos should be perceived as texts that demand a change, that “may be viewed as a programmatic *discourse of power* because it aspires to change reality with words” (Yanoshevsky 2009: 264). As the political sphere and the literary sphere transcend each other, it is almost impossible to separate the two. Writers could choose between expressing their political views directly or in a more subversive way, and as for Medeea Iancu, I think that she embodies both of these stages.

Delacroix este tabu: Suita românească (2017) and *Delacroix este tabu: Amendamentele lirice* (2019) are highlighting the issues that women face in a patriarchal society. Medeea Iancu writes not only about the struggles of redefining what it means to be a woman, but also what it means to be a member of an oppressed group. She gives voices to not only women, but to other marginalized groups as well. Even though she practiced a more subversive form of feminist poetry in her previous books, as her discourse evolves, she fully commits herself to a feminist agenda, making her one of the most influential and representative feminist poets from Romania. Even though her previous books described personal

experiences, through *Delacroix este tabu: Suita românească* and *Delacroix este tabu: Amendamentele lirice*, feminism becomes the centre and the goal of her latest books. In an interview, Medeea Iancu stated that through her art she wants to create a world in which every person is recognized and acknowledged for their mark, a world which embraces humanity and diversity (Bădoi 2020).

Delacroix este tabu: Suita românească (2017) begins with *Poem about my rights* by June Jordan, and from that moment the stakes are clearly understood, this book will not only showcase some particular experiences, but it will enhance onto a greater and political meaning. The book is structured in two parts – *Uvertură* ('Overture') and *Feroce* ('Fierce'), describing the issues faced by Romanian women, as Medeea Iancu declares that she rewrites "the history of violence and abuse, the things which are still considered to this day taboos" (2017). It is important to point out the anti-patriarchal attitude, that contests not only gender binarism, but society as a whole. Medeea Iancu's poems work as political statements against sexism, misogyny, racism and other forms of oppression. Romanian critic Mihai Iovănel states that the volume subjects to accusation not only misogyny, but also bigotry, nationalism and racism (Iovănel 2021: 611).

Seen as the Other, the feminine identity is mystified, as well as feminine experience and sexuality, considered a taboo and often categorized as hysteria, "because men's cultural dominance is the norm – the views of men are taken as the universal human view of things" (Morris 1993: 15). Patriarchy limited not only women's possibilities to express their identities and experiences, but also their representation, requiring a complex process of redefining and rewriting these aspects. As Estelle B. Freedman stated "our common identities and heritage as women can provide enormous personal and political strength as long as we claim the power to define what women can be and what female institutions can achieve" (Freedman 2006: 35). In a patriarchal society, the feminine identity is otherized and mainly limited to gender norms; women have an important role only through their biological function.

Through *Delacroix este tabu: Suita românească*, Medeea Iancu envisions a literary pre-manifesto, in which she condemns the power men have over women, not only in the literary filed, but also in day-to-day activities.

The poems have two important functions: one of empowerment, and the other of awareness. Her poems showcase how patriarchy objectifies and silences not only women, but also other marginalized groups. Medeea Iancu raises awareness on issues like violence against women, rape culture, racism, and other oppressive forms of discrimination and identity annihilation: *CUVINTELE sînt la fel de importante / Precum un / Viol* ('WORDS are as important / as / rape', Iancu 2017: 66, my transl.), *Sîngele bărbatului nu este egal cu / Sîngele femeii* ('The man's blood is not equal with / the woman's blood', Iancu 2017: 88, my transl.).

Medeea Iancu's poems challenge how patriarchal values are strongly embedded in Romanian society, accusing it for blaming the victim when it comes to violence against women: *Corpul femeii nu valorează nimic, / a spus bărbatul* ('The woman's body has no value / said the man', Iancu 2017: 11, my transl.), *Tu ești / Nimic, nu valorezi nimic, / Tîrfă* ('You are / nothing / You are worthless / Slut', Iancu 2017: 83, my transl.). The poems also showcase how rape culture is another issue that Romanian society chooses to ignore, placing the blame on victims and discharging the oppressor. Anastasia Powell and Nicola Henry stated that "in a rape culture, violence against women is eroticized in literary, cinematic and media representations; victims are routinely disbelieved or blamed for their own victimizations; and perpetrators are rarely held accountable or their behaviors are seen as excusable or understandable" (Powell/Henry 2014: 2). Medeea Iancu's *Delacroix este tabu: Suita românească* held accountable those perpetrators, she gives a voice to the issues that women face and are thought to internalize or dismiss as their own fault.

Identity could not be limited to a particular situation, it is defined through a multi-spectre (historical, social, political, and economical aspects). Thus, femininity and feminine identity could not be defined only through motherhood, or other patriarchal constructs, while it would not reflect the complex process of identification. A patriarchal society teaches women that they are fragile, weaker than men, and that they should not showcase their bodies in any other way than through motherhood. Those values make women shameful and fearful, teaching women that they are victims. Medeea Iancu's poems work as *almost* testimonials of what women have to face in their everyday life. Her poems are a reaction against society's response to women's struggles, as

is it depicted in the poem *Și dacă vezi o femeie târâtă* ('And if you see a woman dragged', Iancu 2017: 24) or *Tatăl a spus* ('Father said', Iancu 2017: 75-77) or more prominently in *Furia mea este politică* ('My fury is political', Iancu 2017: 113-117).

Delacroix este tabu: Suita românească was received in a positive manner by the critics, but after a reading at an event of the Romanian "Mihai Eminescu" Days, the book was perceived not only by the media, but also by conservative critics as an anti-Romanian book, a pornographic book nonetheless (Zamfirache 2018). This reaction suggests that many groups are still very conservative and hold a tremendous amount of influence on what Literature should represent, as it could not accept the fact that themes like violence against women, rape, and different forms of oppression could be seen as poetry/literature. Mihai Iovănel states that Medeea Iancu's poem attacks the ideological implications of the publication *România literară* ('Literary Romanian'), and more precisely the aesthetic autonomy (Iovănel 2021: 315).

Delacroix este tabu: Suita românească explores this political side, in which Medeea Iancu writes about the traumatic events women have to face in Romania, but she also writes about the biased and double standards that women face in every field they try to activate (in this particular case – the literary field). The literary canon evokes the aesthetic autonomy; many writers are left out for being too vocal about political or social injustices (Ducille 2006: 39). When it comes to women's experiences, a patriarchal society expects that those were kept in the private sphere, silencing their struggles and bluntly ignoring them, but Medeea Iancu highlights those experiences, as she writes about issues that cannot be silenced and kept hidden: *Să fii femeie înseamnă să / Fii într-o continua stare de / Frică* ('Being a woman is / being in a constant state of / fear', Iancu 2017: 85, my transl.). She raises awareness on issues of violence against women, children, and other marginalized groups that suffer because patriarchy, thus the feminist agenda is merging with this volume. Even though the discourse is milder in *Delacroix este tabu: Suita românească*, Medeea Iancu still creates a pre-manifesto, but through *Delacroix este tabu: Amendamentele lirice*, she fully embodies the feminist agenda. A feminist poetry book could theorize feminism, but it should utilize its means to embody a more

diverse and complex experience. Other important functions ought to be to educate the reader and raise awareness on issues that were dismissed.

The second book, *Delacroix este tabu: Amendamentele lirice*, has two parts: *Uvertură* ('Overture') and *Manifest contemporan & intersecțional* ('Contemporary & Intersectional Manifesto'). The first one works as an introduction for the latter, which constitutes the manifesto. Suzane Juhasz states that "the feminist poet finds 'woman' and 'poet' to be political words" (Juhasz 1978: 161), while trying to redefine what being a woman means and how it is translated through literary work. She affirms that there are two steps that must be followed: "Step 1 has been to realize that women are not what we have been told about ourselves. Step 2 is to find out who we are" (Juhasz 1978: 161). Feminist literature and criticism are combating the idea of a patriarchal literature that embodies the life and experience of the white, straight, middle-class man. Feminine identity is also structured through patriarchal lenses, and for many women and women writers it becomes a burden and a constant inadequacy. Medeea Iancu's volume condemns different aspects of the Romanian society, such as domestic violence, discrimination, abuse and control, but it also takes into account the relationship between language and power and how women and other groups that were oppressed must (re)write and (re)define their history; such examples are the following poems: *Ars poetica* (Iancu 2019: 127-132), *Acesta este actul* ('This is the act', Iancu 2019: 144-151) or *E ușor să faci artă când poți să vorbești* ('You can easily make art when you can speak out', Iancu 2019: 170-171). There is a difference between feminist literary writings and feminine literature, thus the latter could be found in feminist writings, it might not always be an assumed act of activism. In feminist literary writings, the woman becomes the subject, changing the patriarchal perception that women must be objectified. Moreover, feminist literary writings have evolved, describing and reclaiming the space of many different marginalized groups, in poems like: *PRIMULUI MINSTRU, PREȘEDINTELUI ȚĂRII* ('TO THE PRIMEMINSTER, TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE COUNTRY', Iancu 2019: 77-86) or *REVOLUȚIA* ('REVOLUTION', Iancu 2019: 161-163).

According to a study from 2015, in Romania one in five women have suffered from domestic violence and at every 30 seconds a woman is physically or verbally abused (VIF 2015). Medeea Iancu's volume

takes into account issues that happened recently in Romania, such as the kidnapping and murder of Alexandra in 2019, which caused protests and calls for accountability for the tardive reaction of the police (MediaFax 2019). Even though those actions caused a significant reaction, they slowly faded. Medeea Iancu writes poems about the struggles women have to face and how society chooses to ignore their cries for help. She also showcases the fact that in a patriarchal society, women are always painted as victims; women are always in need of saving.

Medeea Iancu's *Delacroix este tabu: Amendamentele lirice* is a feminist manifesto against violence, advocating for equality and equity for all marginalized communities, that were ignored and silenced by the Romanian society: *Poezia mea este împotriva violenței. / Toate metaforele mele sînt împotriva violenței. / Majusculele mele sînt împotriva violenței* ('My poetry is against violence / All metaphors are against violence / My capital words are against violence', Iancu 2019: 19, my transl.). It is important to question the ideas of a rigid literary canon, because it is necessary to find new ways of understanding a text. Criticism, as many other fields, was male-oriented, and as Pam Morris stated it "frequently seem to attempt to control or to close off any threatening excess of meaning within literary texts, and to reimpose restricted masculine interpretation on potentially disruptive intimations of alternative possibilities" (Morris 1993: 42), because male critics would "impose the same kind of stereotypes that generally characterize thinking about women" (Morris 1993: 43). The book also condemns canonical interpretations of literature, which it, deliberately or not, secluded many writers of their rightful place, especially women writers.

In feminist writings, language must emancipate and liberate those who use it, because "language is the main means by which cultural values are recycled and sustained from generation to generation" (Morris 1993: 8). Language has an important role when it comes to understanding power relations, while language could work in favour of the privileged. Feminist writers are finding new meanings, they are reclaiming what was used against them and find their power by repurposing it. Feminist theory considers that language is a system which can inflect different meanings (Mills 2008: 124), thus language could easily be a form of protest, it embodies fury, courage, and power. Medeea Iancu's poems from *Delacroix este tabu: Amendamentele lirice*

challenge the idea of language, and how it revolves around men. In a patriarchal society, as Pam Morris stated the idea of being “‘woman’ becomes the imaginary location of male dreams, idealizations and fears, throughout different cultures ‘femininity’ is found to represent nature, beauty, purity and the goodness, but also evil, enchantment, corruption and death” (Morris 1993: 14), so those aspects will also be reflected in the use of language. Women’s language is more ambiguous, more formal and beautified than men’s. Medeea Iancu highlights how patriarchy envisions women’s and men’s language: *Limbajul meu este / Păcatul* (‘My language is / a Sin’, Iancu 2019: 24) or *Știința și / Limbajul sânt / Ale / Bărbatului* (‘Science and / Language / are man-made’, Iancu 2019: 25, my transl.).

The poems are made to be chanted, they are directly addressed to institutions, political persons, and to society as a whole. They are similar to protest writings, the rhythm and the use of capital words and the use of the poetic *I* generates a form of empathy, through which the reader could identify thyself, placing the reader *inside* the issues and struggles that women have to face each day of their lives. Poems that showcase this function are the following, but not limited to: *MANIFESTUL LIRIC AL EDUCAȚIEI. O REFORMĂ EDUAȚIONALĂ* (‘THE LYRICAL MANIFESTO OF EDUCATION. AN EDUCATIONAL REFORM’, Iancu 2019: 228-265) or *CÎNTEC PENTRU MARȘUL FEMEILOR & COPIILOR ÎN FAȚA M.A.I & A ORGANIZAȚIILOR DE SCRITORI* (‘SONG FOR WOMEN’S AND CHILDREN’S MARCH IN FRONT OF MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS & WRITER’S INSTITUTIONS’, Iancu 2019: 274-280). According to Mihai Iovănel the volume criticizes the educational system and its patriarchal values that removed women from the literary canon (Iovănel 2021: 612).

The second part of the book, *Manifest contemporan & intersecțional* (‘Contemporary & Intersectional Manifesto’), begins with the verse: *AICI PUTEȚI CITI POEMUL MANIFEST* (‘HERE YOU CAN READ THE MANIFESTO-POEM’, Iancu 2019: 107-112) and it condemns not only the political implications of patriarchy, but also its literary ones. Literature is strongly related to political and social changes, even though it might choose a more neutral stand, it will always be influenced by the *outside* changes. If the first part of the book would have worked as a preparation of the manifesto, in the latter the reader is placed right inside the demands and calls for actions that Medeea Iancu urges society to take. From this

moment on, the function of changing reality through words is predominant, the poems are enabling the revolutionary side of the manifesto, the change will not happen without it. The poems are written with uppercased words, emphasising the urgency and the necessity of a real change in the ways we perceive women's lives and their complex identities and experiences. As the title suggests, this part is not only for women, but for all marginalized communities, the poet asks for accountability. The values of oppression and discrimination are considered to be embedded in the Romanian society, as the writer becomes more and more politically engaged, it is clear that the actions must take into consideration the multiple forms of oppression that were practiced upon others. Medeea Iancu uses an intersectional approach to explain the ways in which people suffered in this patriarchal society, as long as identity could not be bound to one definition, we shall take into account every respect of upbringing. The poem *CÎND MĂ GÎNDESC LA FEMINISM* ('WHEN I THINK ABOUT FEMINISM', Iancu 2019: 196-200) gives an intersectional perspective of a world in which every individual is free to perform their identity and traditions.

Medeea Iancu writes about the political body as well, and while a person's rights and liberties are violated, then its own private life becomes political. Patriarchy promotes heteronormativity, and it forces individuals to envision life through a binary system; it regulates the ways in which a person should present itself in order to be integrated in society. Medeea Iancu is one of most prominent feminist voices in Romania, she uses her poems as vessels for the struggles of marginalized identities, she gives them a space and a voice through which they could empower themselves. *Delacroix este tabu: Amendamentele lirice* has been perceived as an act of courage by many critics, but I think courage is not the most appropriate word, because her poems have a more important role – to emancipate, educate, and give its readers new perspectives in understanding the world around them.

4. Conclusions

Medeea Iancu's discourse has evolved from the subversive manner, in which she explored her personal experiences, to what could potentially be read as a feminist manifesto. The most predominant themes are

relevant to what women experience in a patriarchal world (feelings of inadequacy, rebellion against heteronormativity and gender norms), but they also merge with personal tragedies. Confessional writings could be understood as a political statement; thus, the writer invites the reader *in*, giving him/her permission to explore spaces that most of us would not like to be seen. Furthermore, the private sphere becomes political, when the individual's liberties are violated. Even though, confessional writings are thought to be more feminine, they have great power over readers through the poetic "I", generating a process of identification, as it showcases subjective experiences of everyday life (Felski 1989: 95). Feminist politics changed the idea of subjectivity, and as many women writers started to liberate themselves from conservative norms, their personal experiences became the most important subject. The feminist approach of confession represents an important point of view, while "feminist confession exemplifies the intersection between the autobiographical imperative to communicate the truth of unique individuality, and the feminist concern with the representative and intersubjective element of women's experience" (Felski 1989: 93). Changing the perspective from a personal "I" to a more general one, could accelerate the process of identification, while the issues or the experiences begin to be more familiar to the reader.

Feminism changes the perspective on literature, while it aims to recover and redefine an entire history defined by ignorance and abuse. Feminist literature equals resistance, writers who choose this path will put their work in favour of liberating others, even. Medeea Iancu's poetry is a great example of feminist writing, and, as an author, she is the most representative one when it comes to activism, engagement, and calls to action. Her volumes, as Adrienne Rich (1972) would put it, are an act of "re-vision", thus they represent "more than a chapter of cultural history: it is an act of survival; [u]ntil we can understand the assumptions in which we have been drenched we cannot know ourselves" (Morris 1993: 51). Medeea Iancu's poems could be uncomfortable or shocking for a public that is used to a more traditional type of poetry, as she writes about experiences that will never reflect the idealization of patriarchy. Nonetheless, her poems must be acknowledged as a manifesto, as an act of liberation and emancipation, showcasing how women's and non-gender confirming persons' lives are affected on multiple levels by discrimination and oppression.

Through her poetry Medeea Iancu influences and encourages a wide range of poets to express their personal experiences, to use poetry as a cathartic instrument and also to denounce patriarchy's violent acts against women and non-heteronormative persons. Medeea Iancu's influence is unquestionable for the feminist movement in today's poetry, as she was one of the main poets that was ostracized publicly by the traditional critics, especially by men. However, her influence has not yet been thoroughly analysed. In the last years, more and more poets are declaring themselves feminists, such as Ileana Negrea, Iuliana Lungu, Iulia Militaru, Daniela Hendea, Gabriela Feceoru, Elena Vlădăreanu, Alina Purcaru, and so on.

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