

WRITING THE LIFE OF SERVANTS IN EARLY ROMANIAN FEMINIST NOVELS

Carolyn Gold Heilbrun argues in her 1979 *Reinventing Womanhood* that “women’s ‘search for identity has been even less successful within the world of fiction than outside it’”³. Here, she refers, of course, to the fact that many literary characters portraying women are defined by their relation to men. Women’s emancipation had been a long and arduous process, with the agency of self-representation most frequently at the heart of the struggle. This leads us to the most significant issue in modern fiction, especially in semiperipheral cultures, where women had no voice of their own until the late nineteenth century. Due to patriarchal policies in education and literacy, whereby women were either denied the right to formal education or trained in *beaux-arts* only to ensure they become suitable companions for men⁴, women’s autobiographical writings are



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³ Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Reinventing Womanhood*, New York, Norton, 1979, p. 72.

⁴ And most often they are represented as such in novels as well. See how, for example, novelists describe women playing the piano during the period: “The piano illustrates that being a nobleman or a bourgeois is not that easy. In his 1880 *Brazi și purtegaiu* [*Fir Trees and Putrefaction*], N.D. Xenopol likewise illustrates the difficulty of playing the piano: ‘apparently you didn’t have enough of reading and playing the piano...’; ‘she was either very sickly or she would not stand up from the piano or the writing table for hours’. In *Domnișoara Ursuza* [*The Morose Young Lady*] (1881) by Iulia Hasdeu, there is even a chapter titled ‘Urâsc pianul!’ [‘I hate the piano!’] where young Elisa’s piano teacher tells her mother that the girl does not seem to like playing the piano and that it would perhaps be better for her to quit, to which the mother replies that ‘a young lady, not playing the piano?! That is preposterous, it is absurd ...’. The girl who hates the piano is, in the narrator’s own words, ‘a naughty, moody, and mischievous child’. Apart from being the hallmark of dedicated work, the piano is, by the same token, a sign of intelligence. In *Strada Carmen Silva* [*The Carmen Silva Street*], Alexi Teochar’s 1893 novel, when asked ‘so are you saying she’s a tad boncheaded’, Traian’s friend replies with ‘Oh, God, no, quite the contrary! She speaks French, German, Greek, she can play the piano, she sings with her voice’” – see Ștefan Baghiu, Cosmin Borza, “The Sickie and the Piano. A Distant Reading of Work in the Nineteenth Century Romanian Novel”, *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 6, 2020, 2, pp. 107-128.

conspicuously absent. Not only are autobiographical works missing from modern literary cultures, but Daiana Gârdan has also shown through quantitative methods that novels written by women writers are few and far between, even during the first half of the twentieth century⁵.

However, a similar phenomenon affected more experienced or larger cultures as well. In the Kingdom of Poland, Narcyza Żmichowska's 1864 *Poganka*, one of the earliest examples of Polish women's fiction written in the first person, features a male protagonist. As noted by Grażyna Borkowska in her 2001 *Alienated Women: A Study on Polish Women's Fiction*, Żmichowska wrote "in an environment in which women's identity was hidden even from themselves, in which women were forced to adapt themselves to traditional female roles"⁶. Yet the same Żmichowska wrote *Biała róża* [*White Rose*], published three years earlier in 1861, with a clear understanding of the importance of a subjective women's voice. Although a sentimental and sensationalist novel heavily influenced by romantic practices – thus pushing the subject of women's emancipation into the realm of aristocratic practices –, *Biała róża* set a precedent for several first-person narratives by Polish women writers, such as Eliza Orzeszkowa's 1884 *Pamiętnik Waclawy* [*The Diary of Waclawy*].

What is interesting, however, is that, in Polish and Romanian cultures alike, the scarcity of women's first-person works encouraged the release of several epistolary novels during the second half of the nineteenth century, with the amendment that Romanian literature experienced a notable delay in the emergence of women writers due to its limited literary practice.

The defining case for modern Romanian literature in this respect is Alba Monte's 1880 *O soartă stranie* [*A Strange Fate*], originally published in French, but the novels of Constanța Dunca-Schiau can also be viewed as a significant precursor for women's writing in point of narratorial agency. Although described by Bianca Burța-Cernat as "(rightfully) ignored as a poet, prose writer, or playwright"⁷, there is nothing "right" in Dunca-Schiau's critical reception. Women's writing in nineteenth-century Romania is not only scarce but also overlooked⁸, not just by foreign scholars, which is structurally understandable in a

⁵ See Daiana Gârdan, "The Great Female Unread: Romanian Women Novelists in the First Half of the Twentieth Century: A Quantitative Approach", *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 2018, 1, pp. 109-1924.

⁶ Grażyna Borkowska, *Alienated Women: A Study on Polish Women's Fiction*, Budapest, CEU Press, 2001, p. 25.

⁷ Bianca Burța-Cernat, *Fotografie de grup cu scriitoare uitate* [*Group Photograph with Forgotten Women Writers*], București, Cartea Românească, 2011, p. 16. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the authors of this paper.

⁸ The reasons for this remain the same as two decades ago, as described by Andrea Peto in "Writing Women's History in Eastern Europe: Toward a 'Terra Cognita'?", *Journal of Women's History*, 16, 2004, 4, pp. 173-181.

cynical way, since places such as Romania tend to receive less recognition in any global literary framework or transnational methodology, but also by local research. Even when not ignored, women's writing of the early modern period – in Romania, it is considered to have begun close to the second half of the nineteenth century – is often mistreated or dismissed, even by scholars in women's writing studies, and in this article, we will explore some interesting cases.

As is evident from Burța-Cernat's aesthetic judgment, the disdain for Dunca-Schiau's work was influenced by the notion that Dunca-Schiau's literature was not "worthy" of attention due to its perceived naive narratives. However, it is important to recognize that there is nothing "rightful" about "ignoring" women's writing, and Dunca-Schiau holds a fundamental place in this respect, if only for offering the first novel written in the first person with a female protagonist in Romanian culture. Her 1863–1864 work, *Elena Mănescu. Romans național* [*Elena Mănescu: National Novel*], is an epistolary novel in which both the singer Elena Mănescu and the peasant character Floarea Carpaților take center stage. Similarly, in her 1868 *Sub vălul Bucureștilor: Fiica adoptată* [*Under the Veil of Bucharest: The Adopted Daughter*], Dunca-Schiau introduces the diary of a young Eliza, a girl who falls in love with young Alexandru after being adopted. While these narratives may not be rooted in the author's autobiography, they represent occasions in which Romanian women writers choose to "let women speak".

For this reason alone, it is disconcerting how contemporary Romanian women scholars dismiss key moments in the formation of women's writing in the local landscape using derogatory terms:

The author employs the artifice of the epistolary novel (as in *Elena Mănescu*) or that of journal fragments introduced into the narrative (as in *Sub vălul Bucureștilor*). Of course, these novels have a documentary value alone; what draws attention to the author – aside from her prolificacy and the ease of stringing together, at a certain pace of alertness, clichés from popular literature – is the attempt to densify a schematic and predictable narrative by creating milieus, with the model likely being that of Bolintineanu in his (also naive) novels *Manoil* (1855) and *Elena* (1862)⁹.

Burța-Cernat goes on to label the literature of feminist militant writer Maria Flechtenmacher as "sub-mediocre" and asserts that the literary endeavors of Alba Monte, Emilia Carlen, Maria Eschenazi, Eugenia Ianculescu de Reus, and even Sofia Nădejde are unworthy of critical attention.

Therefore, it is fair to say that the most oft-cited study of women's writing in contemporary Romanian literary studies actively overlooks and dismisses *all*

⁹ Bianca Burța-Cernat, *Fotografie de grup cu scriitoare uitate*, p. 17.

nineteenth and early twentieth-century women's writing¹⁰. Yet commendable efforts have been made to explore their works. For instance, Ioana Moroșan has recently studied the conditions influencing women's writing in modern Romania, and her research provides not only a framework for interpreting their unbalanced treatment but also an explanation for the typical representation of women writers in Romania:

[T]he occupation of writing remains tributary to the acceptance of the father's heritage and his literary capital. In this way, they [women] reproduce the cultural and social capital gained by the writer/intellectual – fathers or male relatives – without homologating their dominant position due to restrictions imposed by their gender identity. So, during the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, many important women from the Romanian literary field accede to the literary (liberal) professions through the status of their fathers', relatives', or husbands' intellectual affiliation, mobilising either paternal inherited capital or their relational capital. Thus, all those female authors and literary women such as Ermonia Asachi, Martha Bibesco, Anna de Noailles, Adela Xenopol, Iulia Hasdeu, Elena Văcărescu [...], or Sofia Nădejde, Matilda Poni, Natalia Negru, Sanda Movilă, Agatha Grigorescu or Bebs Delavrancea who contributed to the Romanian literary patrimonial heritage, were mostly introduced in the literary field due to the inherited educational and cultural capital, as well as [their] access had become realistic and favourable because of their bourgeois and upper-middle class origin. Writing is either an act of acceptance of the father's heritage, or it is regulated by the male relatives, mainly partners, and, as such, the access to writing and women's writing tradition remains mainly a bourgeois and urban calling¹¹.

There are two primary reasons why we consider our approach significant. Firstly, it provides an analysis of two novels that are virtually unknown in literary scholarship outside Romania. Secondly, it delves into the representation of women servants in novels authored by women through the lenses of life writing and intersectionality, where gender intersects with class in various *ideologemes*.

In this context, we understand this concept as defined by Fredric Jameson, namely “the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes”¹². We selected two examples that are both

¹⁰ See the weak institutionalization of gender studies in Romania in Ionela Vlase and Andrei Terian, “The Production of Gender-specific Scholarly Literature in Romania: The Weak Institutionalisation of Gender Studies in Higher Education”, *Studies in Higher Education*, 48, 2023, 12, pp. 1-16.

¹¹ Ioana Moroșan, “Romanian Women Writers and the Literary Profession during the First Half of the 20th Century: Exclusion, Feminisation and Professionalisation of Writing”, *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 8, 2022, 1, p. 108. See also Imre József Balázs, “Women Writers and the Possibility of a Women's Literary Tradition in Transylvanian Hungarian Literature”, *Hungarian Studies*, 36, 2023, 1–2, pp. 66-73.

¹² Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1981, p. 115. See a more detailed explanation in William Marling, “The Formal Ideologeme”, *Semiotica*, 98, 1994, 3–4, pp. 277-300. More recently, Costi Rogozanu has written a doctoral dissertation using this concept as

ideologically intriguing and thematically fascinating due to their potential for exploration in life writing: Sofia Nădejde's 1903 sentimental novel *Patimi* [*Passions*], often described as "the first feminist Romanian novel", and Elena Bacaloglu's 1906 *În luptă* [*In combat*] and its 1908 sequel, *Două forțe* [*Two Forces*], a romance novel with autobiographical undertones which evokes Bacaloglu's marriage to the Romanian author and literary critic Ovid Densușianu¹³. Both Nădejde and Bacaloglu are representatives of early modern Romanian fiction, even though they were writing as late as the beginning of the twentieth century.

Nădejde, a socialist militant in the 1880s and 1890s and a collaborator of socialist and populist magazines such as *Contemporanul* and *Era nouă*, turned liberal after 1899. In 1903, she took the side of small rural boyars in their struggle with urban mores¹⁴. She translated numerous novels, including works by women writers such as Matilde Serao¹⁵, and wrote several essays and novels that are primarily important as *social documents* on the situation of women in the late nineteenth century, covering topics such as abortion, medicine, rural areas, family formation and divorce, civil and economic rights of women, etc. Conversely, Bacaloglu, a prominent intellectual of the *belle époque*, had collaborated with

a main tool for the analysis of Romanian fiction. Some of his works in this respect can be consulted in English. See Costi Rogozanu, "The Socialist Realist Structure of Marin Preda's *Moromeții*", *Transilvania*, 2022, 5, pp. 76-80; Costi Rogozanu, "Reverse Socialist Realism: Three Recipes for Dissidence in Communist Regimes – Petru Dumitriu, Solzhenitsyn, Czesław Miłosz", in Ștefan Baghiu, Ovio Olaru, Andrei Terian (eds.), *Beyond the Iron Curtain: Revisiting the Literary System of Communist Romania*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2021, pp. 251-273.

¹³ See the most recent work in genre theory by Andrei Terian et al., "Genurile romanului românesc (1900–1932). O analiză cantitativă" ["The Genres of the Romanian Novel (1900–1932): A Quantitative Analysis"], *Transilvania*, 2020, 10, pp. 53-64; Cosmin Borza, Alex Goldiș, Adrian Tudurachi, "Subgenurile romanului Românesc. Laboratorul unei tipologii" ["The Subgenres of the Romanian Novel: The Laboratory of a Typology"], *Dacoromania literaria*, 2020, 7, pp. 205-220.

¹⁴ As Ștefan Baghiu describes the situation in his preface to the 2021 second edition of the novel, "[t]he 'social' story written by the socialist author from Iași revolves around the drama of the landowner Mustea, deceived, robbed, and abandoned by his wife, and the failed relationship of the cunning clerk Iliescu and Matilda. It is quite challenging to understand why one of the central figures of socialism at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century would choose to 'take the side', through a novel, of the old boyar classes and portray the Flaubertian 'good husband' and 'adulterous and cunning wife'. Because, from beginning to end, the only moral of the story seems to be that the persistence of the old order is more moral than the pursuit of gain by the new bureaucratic and petty-bourgeois classes. [...] Although often described as the 'first feminist novel', *Patimi* seems more like the 'last novel' about rural aristocracy" – see Ștefan Baghiu, "Patimile și banii" ["Passions and Money"], in Sofia Nădejde, *Patimi* [*Passions*], 2nd ed., București, Publisol, 2021, p. 21.

¹⁵ See Ștefan Baghiu, "Romanierele: traducere de romane scrise de femei în cultura română (1841–1918)" ["Women Novelists: The Translations of Novels Written by Women in the Romanian Culture (1841–1918)"], *Transilvania*, 2021, 6, pp. 11-21.

Universul before turning to fascism in Italy during Mussolini's ascent to power and returning to Romania to create the first fascist organizations.

Intriguingly, both novels can be interpreted as bearing (auto)biographical motifs¹⁶. Sofia Nădejde had been accused by Romanian authors like Duiliu Zamfirescu of being a hypocrite leftist – while espousing a progressive discourse on class struggle, she and her husband allegedly mistreated their servants. Thus, her novel *Patimi* can be seen as a response to this attack and an attempt on Nădejde's part to give voice to servants in both rural and urban areas and counter their stereotypical representations up to that date. Similarly, Bacaloglu's marriages with both Radu D. Rosetti and Ovid Densusianu became subjects of gossip in the Romanian literary circles of the early twentieth century, and according to Const. Mille in his 1906 review of her *În luptă*, Bacaloglu's work seeks to *clarify* the story through a novel on romantic triangles. Consequently, both works must be read in connection with the authors' biographies to be understood as social documents.

Described by male authors as embodying a significant degree of modernity, women, especially in semiperipheral and peripheral cultures, lacked the means of self-representation. For this reason, studies in life writing and autobiography have seldom been afforded the opportunity to explore modern works by Romanian women writers. However, international scholarship has revealed a shift in the intersectional representation of gender and class, coinciding with the rise of modernism. For instance, Mary Wilson's 2013 *The Labors of Modernism: Domesticity, Servants, and Authorship in Modernist Fiction* correlates the emergence of the modern novel, using Virginia Woolf's argument in "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown", to the development of a distinct approach to representing servants. In Wilson's words,

the modern novel, she [Virginia Woolf] indicates, now has to take into account a new domestic reality, in which servants are no longer willing to remain simply background creatures. While recent critics have carefully studied the gender, racial, ethnic, and imperial coordinates of modernism, fewer have discussed class, and almost none has considered the close link between narrative structure and servants in modernist fiction¹⁷.

In the Romanian novels released before 1918, female servants typically emerge as quiet figures. Although fundamental in works such as Nicolae Filimon's 1863 *Ciocoi vechi și noi* [*Upstarts Old and New*], where they operate as plotters

¹⁶ The novels have been put forward for open access reading by *The Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel: 1900–1932*, Sibiu, Complexul Național Muzeal ASTRA, 2020, <https://revistatran-silvania.ro/mdrr1900-1932>. Accessed November 22, 2023.

¹⁷ Mary Wilson, *The Labors of Modernism Domesticity, Servants, and Authorship in Modernist Fiction*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2013, p. 1.

and spies, they are rarely given any narratorial attention in most other prose works of the period. Their duties, such as receiving guests and handling correspondence, along with their socio-economic predicament – marked by vulnerability to manipulation, especially due to their dependence on their employers, usually upper-class women – carry considerable narrative weight, which the authors leverage to introduce new characters into the storyline and propel the plot into intriguing twists. A devout companion such as in N. Petrașcu's 1905 *Marin Gelea* – “the servant [...] believed her mistress to be the most perfect being in the world, the most beautiful, [and] the kindest”¹⁸ –, a threat to their mistresses' face or, to the contrary, an accessory to their questionable actions – the spying servants of Dorina's mother-in-law in N. Rădulescu-Niger's 1908 *Magistrații noștri* [*Our Magistrates*] and Viorica's maid in V. Pop's 1910 *Cuza Vodă* [*Prince Cuza*] –, such characters, as women and members of the lower class, have a double subordinate role, which makes them more susceptible to abuse and less likely to achieve emancipation.

There are, however, instances where female servants have a speaking part, and in some cases, they even stand up against their mistresses' abuse. A tell-tale example in this regard is Ivanca, a fifty-year-old servant to four unmarried sisters in a similar age range, who takes a liking to Casandra, the protagonist of V. Demetrius' 1913 *Tinerețea Casandrei* [*Casandra's Youth*], a novel in which the author explores the struggles of a working woman, systematically betrayed by the men in her life and left to fend for herself. Depicted as entertaining “the crazed conviction that she would marry”¹⁹ before her mistresses, despite her status and “hundreds of wrinkles”²⁰, Ivanca becomes an object of fascination for Casandra, no less for her open defiance toward her mistresses, who ridiculed her appearance and, at times, even physically abused her for her unsatisfactory services – services for which she was not paid. Ivanca's narrative appears intentionally crafted to create a connection between Casandra and the schoolteacher Margareta, the divorced sister of Ivanca's employers, who, like the protagonist, is a single mother who suffers at the hand of her new partner, despite her more privileged background and formal education. However, the stories of the two women say something about the condition of the female servant, too; in a universe populated by women, Ivanca embodies what Casandra and Margareta, the two virtuous and eligible women, lack: the ability to express themselves openly.

So, our question was: how do the first feminist Romanian novels written by women represent domestic workers, and especially women servants?

¹⁸ N. Petrașcu, *Marin Gelea*, București, Imprimeria Albert Baer, 1905, p. 153.

¹⁹ V. Demetrius, *Tinerețea Casandrei* [*Casandra's Youth*], București, Leon Alcalay, 1913, p. 66.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

Sofia Nădejde's Conservative Feminist Fiction: The Drunk Casandra and the Flirty Rosa

When writing her novels in the early twentieth century, self-proclaimed socialist advocate Sofia Nădejde had already distanced herself from her socialist origins. In the 1870s, she achieved the remarkable feat of becoming the first woman to obtain a high school diploma and marry without a priest, sparking a significant scandal in Iași. Nădejde played a pivotal role in establishing the first feminist circles, leading discussions at workers' clubs, and contributing extensively to women's emancipation discourse in various magazines, predominantly socialist ones. In 1879, Sofia Nădejde notably responded to the controversial thesis proposed by the most prominent Romanian literary critic of the century, Titu Maiorescu, who argued that women could not engage in specific intellectual activities due to the size of their brains. Her response article, titled "Chestiunea femeilor" ["The Question of Women"], asserted that despite the emancipation of many minorities, half of humanity still lived in slavery, emphasizing that women remained enslaved. She questioned the shame of civilized humanity perpetuating this condition, stating, "Is it not a shame for our century that half of so-called civilized humanity is in slavery? The slaves were emancipated, gentlemen, but our predicament persists"²¹. Nădejde's arguments were also rooted in economic observations, pointing out that "[w]e [women] are looked down upon because we are uneducated, but do we have schools? For a woman to graduate high school, she must also have thousands of gold coins"²². Moreover, she expressed dismay that "a woman cannot bring a lawsuit without the man's consent"²³. Her radical activism was complemented by an ongoing struggle to establish socialist circles around the *Contemporanul* magazine, collaborating with Marxist thinker Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea and her husband, Ioan Nădejde, and her short stories from the 1880s abound in depictions of desperate situations involving poverty, illness, and a lack of societal support. It is crucial to note that, despite being strongly socialist, the intellectual circles of that period did not always align with contemporary progressive ideals, as Maria Cernat has recently shown that:

Sofia Nădejde harbors a genuine aversion for bourgeois women, often condemning them for the superficiality with which they handle their education, the way they unhesitatingly entrust their children to neglectful servants, the fact that... they dance! In today's hedonistic society, where everything Sofia Nădejde despised – such as the destruction of family ties for material interests, the sacrifice of friendships and

²¹ Sofia Nădejde, "Chestiunea femeilor" ["The Question of Women"], *Femeia română*, 2, 1879, 111, p. 177.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*. See also Baghiu, "Patimile și banii", p. 11.

partner relationships for personal pleasure – is often packaged and sold as progress, we might be tempted to relegate her to the corner of the outdated. But perhaps her thoughts were more nuanced than our interpretative framework would allow us to see, undoubtedly influenced by stereotypes and superficial judgments²⁴.

Her stance on the organization of society can today be described as conservative. Although nineteenth-century socialism had diverse perspectives on the concept of family, with one renowned viewpoint presented in Friedrich Engels' 1884 *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, the prevailing position of the European left asserted that complete emancipation could only be achieved by abolishing capitalist production relations. Ioan Nădejde, Sofia's husband, translated Engels' *The Origin of the Family* – as acknowledged by Engels himself in the preface to the fourth edition²⁵ – yet in the same context in which Engels defines the “single family as the economic unit of [civilized] society”, the German scholar also criticizes the drawbacks of this model, suggesting that “[t]he form of the family corresponding to civilization and coming to definite supremacy with it is monogamy, the domination of the man over the woman”. Engels evokes here Charles Fourier's insightful observations on civilization, which he describes as an instance of “brilliant criticism”²⁶. As Ștefan Baghiu has already explained in his preface to the second edition of Sofia Nădejde's 1907 *Părinți și copii* [*Parents and Children*],

[a]lthough Charles Fourier's critique of the “traditional family” became a cornerstone of continental critical theory, there was never a socialist or leftist consensus on this institution in the nineteenth century. A good example here is that voices such as the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin emphasized the importance of the “natural family” in society, while Marx and Engels dialectically examined the origin of the family to unveil the superstructures that decide on social institutions and micro-communities. As discussed by Richard Weikart in a 1994 article on “Marx, Engels, and the Abolition of the Family”, Marx and Engels “were not the instigators of the anti-family trend among socialists” – and Marx's biography is telling in this respect –, although Engels' writings “contributed mightily to it”. What is certain is that beyond

²⁴ Maria Cernat, “*Patimi – un roman despre patimi sociale!*” [“*Patimi – A Novel on Social Passions!*”], *Baricada România*, 2021, <https://ro.baricada.org/patimi/>. Accessed June 30, 2023; See also Sofia Nădejde, *Despre creierul femeii și alți demoni* [*On Women's Brain and Other Demons*]. Edited by Maria Cernat and Adina Mocanu, Pitești, Paralela 45, 2019.

²⁵ See Friedrich Engels, “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State”, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 3. Translated by Alick West, 1942, online version: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/index.htm>. Accessed June 30, 2023.

²⁶ *Ibidem*: “I originally intended to place the brilliant criticism of civilization which is found scattered through the work of Charles Fourier beside that of Morgan and my own. Unfortunately, I have not the time. I will only observe that Fourier already regards monogamy and private property in land as the chief characteristics of civilization, and that he calls civilization a war of the rich against the poor. We also find already in his work the profound recognition that in all societies which are imperfect and split into antagonisms single families (*les familles incohérentes*) are the economic units”.

the militant attitudes against the traditional family within the socialist and anarchist circles of the nineteenth century, materialist theory was primarily interested in the *production of families* in bourgeois and industrial societies²⁷.

While Marx and Engels were intensely preoccupied with the adverse impacts of alienation and the dispossession of the means of production – highlighting as early as *The German Ideology*, originally written in the 1840s, the destruction of the family by the industrial complex as one of those repercussions – the Nădejde family adopted a different stance in the early twentieth century. When discussing the responsibility of building a family, Sofia Nădejde vehemently opposed single individuals, consistently presenting the family as a moral prerequisite for societal existence:

The state [now] needs, more than ever, a clear, or at least vague, awareness of the obligations and rules that must be fulfilled or removed. However, celibacy, in addition to the threat of sterility, poses another significant danger in the contagion of selfishness, luxury, and depravity that it spreads²⁸.

Especially after 1899, the ideological positions of Sofia Nădejde and her husband, the politician and activist Ioan Nădejde, underwent even more significant changes. Faced with a political downturn, social democrats joined the Liberal Party and faced severe criticism for it, particularly from the founding figure of Romanian socialism and modern literary criticism, Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea. This shift rendered their initial critique of bourgeois society obsolete in light of their *nouveau* bourgeois praxis, thus becoming the target of harsh critique from other figures, including the conservative writer Duiliu Zamfirescu, who depicted them in *Lume nouă și lume veche* [*New World and Old World*] as demagogues espousing a socialist discourse while mistreating servants in real life²⁹.

This is the context in which “the first feminist novel in Romanian literature”, *Patimi* (1903), was released, bearing witness to the culturally and morally conservative tones of this shift. Bianca Burța-Cernat notes that Sofia Nădejde’s literature *consistently* featured these moral undertones as early as the 1880s. Despite her passion for scientific discoveries and her courage to deconstruct misogynistic theses, Burța-Cernat explains, Nădejde’s works do not mirror her critical perspectives: they are “traditionalist in form, lacking in imagination, and didactic. In this author’s prose, late echoes of romanticism emerge, and the

²⁷ Ștefan Baghiu, “Parenting”, in Sofia Nădejde, *Părinți și copii* [*Parents and Children*], 2nd ed., București, Publisol, 2022, p. 8.

²⁸ Sofia Nădejde, “Celibatul” [“Celibacy”], *Universul*, 17, 1899, 144, p. 1.

²⁹ See *DCRR – Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până la 1989* [*The Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel from Its Origins Until 1989*], București, Editura Academiei Române, 2003, pp. 1337-1338.

influences of naturalism are evident. A moralizing attitude openly condemns vices and injustices”³⁰.

Sofia Nădejde’s *Patimi* is, in certain aspects, a *retro* novel for its time. According to most literary studies experts, the sentimental novel represented the vogue of the eighteenth century which sparked the proliferation of the novel itself, and *Patimi* is no exception to the rule. On the centenary of the novel, Elena Zaharia-Filipaș noted in her article “Primul nostru roman feminin” [“Our First Feminine Novel”] that it “revives, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the naïve-moralizing narrative framework of the pioneers of the Romanian novel. Like Filimon, who attributed to Dinu Păturică [the main character of *Ciocoi vechi și noi*] all sorts of vices – venality, villainy, treason –, stigmatizing him through an explicit authorial discourse, Sofia Nădejde does the same thing to Matilda”³¹. In what was labeled as “the first feminist Romanian novel”, Sofia Nădejde’s story revolves around a good husband being cheated on and robbed by his wife. Matilda, the heroine, is a pioneering feminist character, rivaling Ioan Slavici’s *Mara* – serialized in 1894, released in a book-length format in 1906 –, a widow trying to keep her family on the right track while also becoming the first “businesswoman” in Romanian literature³². However, Matilda is an anti-hero because she gains independence from her husband through theft and adultery; in so portraying her protagonist, Nădejde seems to suggest that the only way in which a woman can become independent at the beginning of the twentieth century is by running away with another man. This cynical perspective reflects the general situation of women.

When analyzing the class situation in the novel, a different interpretation emerges. Nădejde provides a detailed portrayal of women’s lives during this era, which surpasses any other Romanian writer’s. The lives she depicts are documented and characterized by heavy materialism, in which finances play a vital role, and reality is understood through realist and naturalist means. The novel portrays the marriage of Mustea, a small rural landowner, with Matilda, a city woman compromising her urban life for a quasi-aristocratic one in the countryside. In struggling to keep his land profitable, Mustea brings a city paralegal to the house for paperwork, and Matilda falls in love with him. This new character, Iliescu, is a villain who uses Matilda to steal a significant amount of money from her husband, and then runs away with her. However, she soon discovers Iliescu’s true character when he begins to mistreat her, eventually leaving for Italy and Switzerland, where Matilda foolishly follows him, leading to her downfall and eventually to her death. The moral of the story is clear: passions – meaning vice –

³⁰ Bianca Burța-Cernat, *Fotografie de grup cu scriitoare uitate*, p. 18.

³¹ Elena Zaharia-Filipaș, “Primul nostru roman feminin” [“Our First Feminine Novel”], *România literară*, 35, 2002, 48, p. 19.

³² See Nicolae Manolescu, *Arca lui Noe. Eșeu despre romanul românesc* [Noah’s Ark. Essay on the Romanian Novel], București, Grammar+, 1998.

and bourgeois life are the death of family. Beyond the moralizing tones, women's situations in the period are extensively detailed in *Patimi*. One of the most impactful scenes in the novel is when Matilda undergoes an abortion procedure, an event that exposes various perspectives on abortion from female characters of different age groups. Despite Nădejde's rather stereotypical representation of women, Maria Cernat sheds light, in a recent article on the novel's second edition, on the special social role of servants in the novel, suggesting that their portrayal as autonomous working women is quite revolutionary:

Let us not forget that the first part of the novel dedicates entire pages to discussions among servants. Far from being "a form of communication between intellectual elites and economic elites about the common man", Sofia Nădejde's novel brings us the perspective of the servants on the elites through the discussions in Casandra's kitchen. Casandra, a very interesting character which unfortunately was systematically overlooked, is portrayed by Sofia Nădejde in a way that commands respect. Despite being an alcoholic, the cook Casandra has her own profession and never ceases to boast about it. She knows that she can find work for herself and earn a living independently. Maria is envious of her and the peasants on Mustea's estate"³³.

When Casandra, the house servant in *Patimi*, is introduced in the story, the episode occurs during one of the first interactions between Matilda and Iliescu. Casandra is described here as a "master" of cooking and cleaning. However, the second time the servant makes an entrance in the novel is when Matilda's daughter, Puica, announces that Casandra is drunk and has left the food on the stove:

"Mom, you know what? Casandra got drunk! The food is left alone on the stove, and she's sleeping in the barn. The rats are going to nibble on her nose, seriously, Mom", said the little girl laughing hysterically.

"Sit down, why are you laughing like a fool?"

"How can I not laugh? Besides being ugly, how will she be when she doesn't have a nose?"³⁴

The subsequent discussion between Matilda and Iliescu is ironically premonitory of what will happen between them. Matilda claims that in the city the advantage of having servants is that they are more professional and can also be changed more often. In the countryside, Matilda complains, she is stuck with a "drunk cooking woman", having to deal with more and more chores as time passes. "Any day now he will put me in the kitchen", she says to her new lover, who cynically does exactly this at the end of the novel. Casandra's depiction here is indicative of Nădejde's perspective on the dynamics within the household:

³³ Maria Cernat, "*Patimi* – un roman despre patimi sociale!".

³⁴ Sofia Nădejde, *Patimi*, p. 92.

Around five o'clock, Casandra woke up, yawned a few times, looked at the sun, pondered for a moment to remember whether she had put the food on the stove or not, then slowly made her way to the kitchen. She was a woman around fifty years old. The fire and kitchen work had left their mark on her, wrinkling her face more than it should have. Wearing worn-out clothes, a red apron, and simple slippers, she was determined enough to show something: that she wasn't a peasant who walked barefoot. Yawning continuously, she appeared at the kitchen door. Maria was instructing Raveica on how to make chicken for roasting. Nearby, the soup was simmering.

"There you go! Good! Let the ladies also cook! Casandra, poor thing, grows tired too, because, you see, she's human. But who believes her? Everyone, every fellow, has vacation time; she doesn't! When a public holiday comes, there are guests and plenty of work to do – dishes, roasts, strudels [by the dozen] – until I can't feel my bones in the evening!"³⁵

What stands out the most is the autonomous manner in which Casandra justifies her behavior. Indeed, this moment is probably one of the most interesting cases of self-determination and breaking the deal with the class gap. Her drunkenness is actually described by herself as a way to cope with the fact that her mistress, Matilda, seems to be involved in an affair with Iliescu:

"Listen, Raveică, I got drunk out of distress, really. He comes, well, scrawny as he is, with his dead game and tries to teach me how to cook for him! I've cooked steaks for other important people, not for a scoundrel like him, whose family hasn't seen a cook. The audacity of this city man, who hunts like he's on his father's estate when he doesn't even have to hunt! They shouldn't mess with me; I'll let them eat spoiled eggs until their souls turn sour. Let them fry the lad's dead game. Grey heron steak! I haven't heard of such a thing since my mother gave birth to me!"

"What the hell is he doing in the yard all day?" asked Raveica, looking the cook in the eyes.

"What do you mean? Good food, walks, hunting, and, Lord forgive me, who knows what else. The devil doesn't build monasteries"³⁶.

When Matilda finally leaves the house and steals the money, just as Casandra predicted, the servant is the one who helps Mustea recover. She finds him with red eyes, in the aftermath of a heart attack, which occurred after he had learned of the missing money and Matilda's unplanned trip to the city. She cries and runs from the kitchen yelling, "The poor boyar! She finished him!"³⁷ and claims that Matilda has cast spells on him. Matilda's character and infidelity are portrayed by the narrator in contrast to the servants, upon whom he directs her anger in the absence of her husband. Frustrated by her life in the countryside, she fails to comprehend why she cannot freely use her husband's money, and despite being the wife of a

³⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 94-95.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 96.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 286.

rural landowner, she perceives her status as inferior to that of a servant, asserting that her servants have more independence than her, primarily due to their wages:

In the kitchen of landowner Todiriță [Mustea], the quarrels between Iordache and Casandra persisted. And the same complaints about the masters. No matter how well Casandra cooked, skilled as she was in the kitchen, the lady of the house still didn't like it. In the morning, around nine or ten, she regularly came to the kitchen and gave each of them their share of scolding. Upstairs, the young man was targeted first. No matter how the coffee was, it was never good, that is, the lady never liked it. Either it was too cold, or it was not strong enough. Mistress Matilda needed to vent her frustrations, and since her husband, to his fortune, wasn't at home, she vented them on the servants. She claimed she was taking care of the household:

"With such animals, I'm shortening my life! And they call this living! Mustea is the biggest fool because he's never hired others."

That's what she thought and often said out loud.

"I'm poisoning my life for his wealth! What do I get in return? Less than a maid who gets paid regularly"³⁸.

The thesis takes a radical shift in the latter part of the novel, following Matilda's escape with Iliescu. After stealing a substantial sum from Todiriță and departing with her lover, she comes to the realization that he was merely interested in taking her money. Paradoxically, she expresses a diminished sense of freedom compared to her life with her husband: "Todiriță never kept track of the money he gave her; Iliescu always accounted for every last penny, treating her like a servant"³⁹. Furthermore, when Iliescu expresses dissatisfaction with the new maid's culinary skills, he vents her frustration toward the two women in the house – Matilda and the new maid, Rosa. Matilda feels humiliated by being mentioned in the same breath as the maid, insisting that their statuses should not be compared:

"These are dishes for drunkards. The two of you can't even make a proper soup!"

"Please, Iliescu, don't put me in the category of servants", said Matilda.

"Fine, dear, but why don't you go to the kitchen, too? After all, I'm spending money, and I believe I have the right to ask for a decent meal! What's the point of having a house?"

"Where have you seen a house without any mistakes? That doesn't mean you should treat me like a cook. I already suffer enough in the kitchen, hoping to please you! But it's hard to cater to the whims of someone like you"⁴⁰.

However, this new servant, Rosa, is unlike Casandra; she is young, attractive, well-dressed, and takes on numerous tasks around the house. This is how Nădejde's narrator characterizes her:

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 250.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 415.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 443.

She wasn't like the country maids, poorly dressed and dirty. When she brought something, it was a pleasure to look at her. Well-groomed, with clean clothes, and a white apron with lace, she made a good impression on anyone who saw her, and upon lying eyes on [Rosa], people believed that Iliescu kept a mistress, a cook, and a housekeeper. In the kitchen, Rosa wore two aprons: over the white one, she had one made of baize, but still clean. As soon as the bell rang and she was called upstairs, Rosa appeared as a coquettish lady, with a white apron, nicely groomed, ribbons in her hair, cheerful and smiling. With such a servant, Matilda had peace of mind⁴¹.

However, here lies the issue: Iliescu indulges in flirtation with Rosa and she enjoys it. Being much younger than Matilda at only eighteen, Rosa responds to Iliescu's advances and they initiate an affair. When Matilda catches them, she grabs the servant by the hair and forcibly throws her out of the house. Once again, the status of the servant is a crucial aspect: Matilda's humiliation has less to do with adultery, and more with the fact that Iliescu engaged in such behavior with a servant. Her feeling of betrayal is class-defined – “What about me? What will people say?” – since it bears witness to her intolerable downgrade to an inferior status.

Elena Bacaloglu's "Misunderstood Souls": The Emancipation of Tina

Conversely, in fascist advocate⁴² Elena Bacaloglu's novel, the female protagonist's struggle primarily unfolds through internal monologues, as noted in a 1906 review of *În luptă* [*In Combat*], the first volume of what should have been a three-part “psychological” novel:

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 440.

⁴² Her controversial political activity has been duly noted – after World War I, she “[aspired] to create a movement focused on the idea of achieving an ‘Italian-Romanian empire’, a movement whose presidency [was] offered to [Italian poet and politician] Gabriele D’Annunzio and later to Benito Mussolini” –, yet in the context of the present article, we wish to emphasize her views regarding “[women’s] innate ‘force’, which spurs ‘the loftiest of ideas and initiatives,’ [and] lie at the heart of [Bacaloglu’s] feminist advocacy. As for the ideal rapport between the sexes, [she] finds inspiration in the [allegedly platonic] relationship between [Italian patriot and artist] Bianca Milesi and [Moldavian-Romanian polymath] Gheorghe Asachi” – See Victor Durnea, “Elena Bacaloglu”, in Eugen Simion (ed.), *Dicționarul general al literaturii române A/B* [*The General Dictionary of Romanian Literature A/B*], București, Editura Muzeului General al Literaturii Române, 2016, pp. 481-4822. In her paper on Asachi, “the most daring and victorious of the soldiers”, who fought for his torn country’s cultural advancement, and Bianca Milesi, Bacaloglu suggests that the latter “had to love him beyond themselves, like a slave to an ideal that she wanted to serve at any cost”. It was she, the “intransigent revolutionary”, and “exemplary” mother and wife, who, like Dora Virgil, “would protect [Asachi] from the mistakes of youth, inspiring in him the purest and noblest actions” – see Elena Bacaloglu, *Bianca Milesi e Giorgio Asaky* [*Bianca Milesi and Gheorghe Asachi*], Roma, Tip. Armani & Stein, 1912, p. 16, 18, 21, 12.

[women] have no choice but [...] to appear content, tender, [and] affectionate, while in [their] soul there simmers a silent rebellion against the social laws that force [them] to stifle [their] abilities, vocation, [and] inclinations. [...] The *strength* of *În luptă* lies in the ambition of a noble woman's soul to convert a man's character – *hesitant* due to his pestilential milieu [and] *lost* because he inhaled the poison of malice and skepticism, which thrive abundantly like weeds in the fertile soil of social life – to the religion of virtue⁴³. (original emphasis)

This seems to suggest – at first glance, at least – that the struggle anticipated by the title of the first volume and the “two forces” which give the title of *Două forțe* (1908), the novel's second part, are Virgil Andrea – “a misunderstood soul, [...] isolated from all other souls, a true intellectual who is dissatisfied with others, but also with himself, and whose hypersensitivity makes him wander from place to place without finding rest [...] and strike harshly in [his partner's] love” – and Dora, his loving wife, “an intelligent, cultured woman, an artist of the piano”, who nonetheless “humbles herself in front of him”⁴⁴. Presumably the alter egos of “the author and an intellectual with some reputation, [...] whose mismatched and unhappy marriage caused a stir a few years ago”, according to another reviewer⁴⁵, Dora and Virgil live in an imperfect symbiosis, as the former

would open her soul and share it with [him] [with every small gesture] – just as you open a vein to give some of your life, your blood, to a dear patient. She became one with Virgil, breaking him away from his past, unfolding a new life for him as if [discovering] in him a being [...] from the distant age of an ancient race – a divine being, a shard of light torn from the abyss of the ages gone by [and] concluded in agony. This new life, amidst the many lives in our beings, legacies of nations, might very well be the spark of another individual, another soul, which, by setting fire to the past, gives light to the times yet to come⁴⁶.

Yet this new era, built by men like Virgil, who, through their intellectual pursuits, turned into “super-humans” who fail to reconcile their “dead [sciences]” with a “trained soul”⁴⁷ would require “a home where good examples strengthen and elevate, where fulfilling one's duties is the foremost obligation, where love is cautious and gentle” – in other words, to provide women, capable of “[opening] new and bright perspectives, not only for [themselves] but also for [their husband's] aspirations”⁴⁸, the necessary environment to help them strike “a

⁴³ Neli Cornea, “Sufletul femeii: Un cuvânt despre romanul d-nei Elena Bacaloglu” [“The Woman's Soul: A Word About Mrs. Elena Bacaloglu's Novel”], *Dimineața*, 3, 1906, 822, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Victor Anestin, “Cărți și reviste” [“Books and Magazines”], *Adevărul*, 20, 1907, 6590, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Const. Mille, “Letopisiți” [“Chronicles”], *Adevărul*, 19, 1906, 6019, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Elena Bacaloglu, *În luptă: Roman psihologic [In Combat: Psychological Novel]*, vol. 1, București, Librăria Socec & Comp., 1906, pp. 183-184.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 113-114.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 195.

balance between mind and soul, feelings and thoughts”. This “ideal merging of all the dormant homogeneities living in them” is – according to Dora – the way in which men “can shape a weapon of battle from their judgment and will” for what the narrator envisions as another struggle, “the battle of life”, thus “[becoming] truly superior” and creating a new world after “they had forged themselves *in* and *from* the past” (original emphasis)⁴⁹. Until then, however, wives are destined “[t]o suffer *with perfection*. That’s what elevated Dora’s feelings... They had [a] sense of *eternity* [in them], the tired, terrified soul of a woman!” (original emphasis)⁵⁰.

Unbeknownst to Dora, however, her suffering was also triggered by a third struggle, of which she becomes aware only toward the end of the second volume: that with her husband’s former lover, Anca Petrov. Older than Virgil and married with a child to a man whose finances she exploited to his ruin, Anca, “[realizing] well that [...] [Virgil was] an extraordinary man”, “had strengthened her will for a [...] certain victory”⁵¹ by flaunting her wealth, asking little of his time, and carefully planning their getaways while vilifying her husband and dotting on him in her love letters. In short order, Virgil found himself “drawn to her by [a] sincere, powerful force, [...] [s]he [dominating] him through something undefined, [...] [replying to] a call from deep within himself with an air of authority and a hint of affection, through the allure of the material well-being she always showcased”⁵². A few years later, Dora came into his life and after a whirlwind romance, which culminated with a shotgun engagement, he had no choice but to break the news to Anca; “estranged [at first] from everything related to his past”⁵³ by his feelings for Dora, Virgil initially withstood Anca’s emotional outpourings only for a “drop of venom [to creep] into the soul of this man, who did not yet know himself”⁵⁴ when Anca, possessed by “the perverse thought of not allowing herself to fail”⁵⁵, expressed her and his friends’ distrust of Virgil’s chances at ever finding happiness with the modest Dora, who was previously engaged.

“[Hating] Anca, in [that] moment, [feeling] as if he could have crushed her then and there”⁵⁶, Virgil would soon start to fantasize about her, the Anca “with a rough-edged, masculine face, devoid of any tenderness”⁵⁷ being replaced in his thoughts by the Anca from his dreams, “an elegant, voluptuous woman, with full hips and a smile on her face”⁵⁸. “From here to an obsession, there was only one

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 116-117.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 195.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 18.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

step: [...] [a] new pleasure crept into [his] soul, like a perverse, deceitful suffering”⁵⁹, for which Dora “knew she was neither responsible nor capable of finding an explanation”⁶⁰. And, as mentioned previously, she would remain oblivious to it – unlike all others inside and outside their inner circle – until the end of the second volume, when she found the love letters Anca had sent her husband before their engagement. Faced with the answer to all her questions, Dora finds support, involuntarily at first, in the wives of her husband’s friends when she visits one of them to ask for a loan – “Maria approached Dora and gently stroked her hair. Indifference or malice would have hardened Dora, this caress made it worse. It slid over her frozen soul, shaking it, [h]er eyes [filling] with tears”⁶¹ – yet she deliberately seeks comfort from Didia, “a kindred soul, [...] whose [warm] embrace was sweeter, in the face of great sorrows, than any other”⁶².

Notwithstanding the different trajectories of their lives – which bear testimony to their creators’ ideologies – Matilda’s and Dora’s stories share a common ground in their disregard of working-class women’s plight; both Matilda and Dora have female servants, but neither of them supports their employees in breaking the glass ceiling, nor do they acknowledge their equal right to self-representation and actualization. A tell-tale episode in this regard appears in Bacaloglu’s *Două forțe*, when Virgil and his wife, among others, debate whether “the country would perish”, and Dora supports her friend Mărioara’s opinion that “it will if women do not work harder”, adding that “one can no longer tell [their friends’ domestic worker], Ioana, [...] from a lady. A peasant from the depths of Buzău, who once donned a traditional wool skirt, now wears a corset, a feathered hat, and styles her hair in a bun”⁶³. The divide between Dora and Ioana becomes even clearer when, upon hearing the servant’s heartbreaking life story – abducted and forced to marry against her and her father’s wish to a man she didn’t love, who would later abuse her and her child, who wasted away and died, leaving her in a near-constant state of distress before he went to prison for theft –, Dora’s reaction is to complain of how difficult it is to find a domestic worker, failing to object to her husband’s decision to not hire a woman who, according to Virgil, belongs in “a hospital or an asylum”⁶⁴.

The paradox, however, is that the only woman who appears to have succeeded in emancipating herself in Bacaloglu’s novel is Tina, the German servant, who had worked for eleven years in the United States. When Dora was inquiring for a

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

⁶¹ Elena Bacaloglu, *În luptă: Două forțe [In Combat: Two Forces]*, vol. 2, București, Noua Tipografie Profesională Dim C. Ionescu, 1908, p. 201.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 207.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

helper at the domestic worker placement agency, Tina, “without being summoned, stood out from all others with an air of pride”, “striking a conversation” with Dora, “fixating” and “tagging along” with her even after being reprimanded by the agent for doing so⁶⁵. The servant – “tall, rather slim”, “with small, turquoise-colored eyes, lively and restless like a squirrel, [...] and false teeth” – “had something Semitic” in her “long face, [...] large somewhat bent nose”, and in “her pronunciation, which was not ordinary but rather original”⁶⁶. “Engageons-la, [...] elle est originale”, reiterated Virgil upon learning that “she came from abroad and was well-travelled”⁶⁷ and it was not long before Dora’s husband developed a relationship of “silent complicity”⁶⁸ with the servant – when the doctor visited his wife after finding Anca’s love letters, Tina, who “called the physician at Virgil’s request”, “was leaning against a door, while [he] was looking at her from [his spouse’s] bedside”⁶⁹.

In short order, Dora would lose her authority over the servant, with the latter eventually “[taking] on an air of protection or pity that affected [Dora] more than everything she had ever endured from [the servant]”⁷⁰. On the brink of her imminent divorce from Virgil, a situation Dora was still hesitant to embrace, confronted with “an adverse fate that seemed to be crushing her entire *vocation as a woman*” (original emphasis)⁷¹, “[Tina] managed virtually everything in the household, without consulting her, without listening to her anymore. [...] It appeared as though [the servant] had become the mistress of the house”⁷².

Conclusions

However, similar to Rosa in *Patimi*, Tina conspicuously vanishes from the novel after the demise of Dora and Virgil’s marriage, with neither Nădejde nor Bacaloglu providing any closure to their stories, despite the fact that they made their servant characters complicit in the downfall of their mistresses. It is, however, clear that Iliescu and Virgil do not pursue a relationship with the two servants, which, in turn, raises the question as to whether the domestic workers remained in service – Tina’s final appearance depicts her as lighting a candle while Dora meditates on the separation from Virgil – or, with their credentials

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 65-66.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 68.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 243.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 239.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 243.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 244.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 243.

compromised, they were forced to explore other means of making a living – the case of Rosa.

What does this say about the perspective of the first feminist Romanian novels written by women on domestic servants? That their fate mirrors that of their upper-class mistresses, with the amendment that the women servants' livelihood depends not only on their female employers but also on the latter's husbands, who pay, after all, for the servants' labor and who ultimately exploit them to regain their independence or to reassert their dominance over their wives. However, Tina's and Rosa's stories, although potentially more resourceful than their mistresses', merely scaffold the plight of upper-class women, being discarded to the fringes of their narrative universes after they fulfilled their purpose. In the early twentieth century, it was not yet the time to have their voices heard.

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WRITING THE LIFE OF SERVANTS IN EARLY ROMANIAN FEMINIST NOVELS

(Abstract)

Despite their potential to read as social documents on women's condition at the turn of the century, novels written by women writers in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century are, if not systematically overlooked, then severely understudied, at least in semiperipheral cultures, which by default have a young literary history. In this article, we explore two non-canon works, *Patimi* [*Passions*] (1903) and *În luptă* [*In Combat*] (1906–8), by Sofia Nădejde and Elena Bacaloglu respectively with a view to understanding whether they constitute glimpses into their authors' lives and the extent to which the ideological convictions of the writers influenced how they portray the plight of female servants, who, as women and domestic workers, have a double subordinate role. In the case of both novels, there is (circumstantial) evidence to suspect that shards of the authors' autobiographies and convictions made their way into their works, and by looking further into how Nădejde and Bacaloglu tackle the condition of women servants in *Patimi* and *În luptă*, a similar phenomenon can be observed: notwithstanding their political ethos – Nădejde espoused socialist views until her literary career started, when her views shifted toward a more conservative stance, whereas Bacaloglu contributed to the emergence of the first fascist organizations in Romania –, the two most prominent women writers of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century instrumentalized the female servant characters to give voice to the plight of their upper-class mistresses. This, in turn, bears testimony to the fact that their works operate as artefacts of women's condition at the turn of the century, and when corroborated with the authors' autobiographies, they show that the first attempts at feminist literature in Romania did not put forward a progressive perspective on the social mobility of workingwomen.

Keywords: Elena Bacaloglu, feminist literature, Romanian novel, servants, Sofia Nădejde.

SCRIEREA VIETII SERVITOARELOR ÎN ROMANUL FEMINIST
ROMÂNESC DE LA ÎNCEPUTUL SECOLULUI AL XX-LEA
(Rezumat)

În ciuda potențialului lor de a fi citite ca documente sociale despre condiția femeii, romanele scrise de scriitoare la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea și la începutul secolului al XX-lea sunt, dacă nu sistematic trecute cu vederea, foarte puțin studiate, cel puțin în culturile semiperiferice care, implicit, au o istorie literară tânără. În acest articol, analizăm două texte literare necanonice, *Patimi* (1903) de Sofia Nădejde și *În luptă* (1906–1908) de Elena Bacaloglu, cu scopul de a înțelege dacă romanele valorifică sau nu anumite aspecte din viața autoarelor, respectiv în ce măsură convingerile ideologice ale scriitoarelor au influențat modurile în care este reprezentată condiția dificilă a servitoarelor, care, în calitate de femei și de lucrătoare casnice, se află în situația unei duble subordonări. În cazul ambelor romane, există dovezi (circumstanțiale) care ne fac să bănuim că frânturi din autobiografiile și convingerile autoarelor au pătruns în operele lor, iar, dacă analizăm mai atent modul în care Nădejde și Bacaloglu abordează condiția femeilor servitoare în *Patimi* și *În luptă*, se poate observa un fenomen similar: în pofida etosului lor politic – Nădejde a îmbrățișat viziuni socialiste până la începutul carierei sale literare, când opiniile sale au evoluat spre o poziție mai conservatoare, în timp ce Bacaloglu a contribuit la apariția primelor organizații fasciste din România –, cele două scriitoare de seamă de la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea și începutul secolului al XX-lea au instrumentat imaginea servitoarei pentru a da glas situației dificile a femeilor din clasa superioară. Acest aspect atestă că ambele romane propun artefacte ale condiției femeii de la începutul secolului. Coroborate cu autobiografiile autoarelor, cele două romane arată că primele încercări de literatură feministă din România nu au prezentat o perspectivă progresistă asupra mobilității sociale a femeilor muncitoare.

Cuvinte-cheie: Elena Bacaloglu, literatură feministă, roman românesc, servitoare, Sofia Nădejde.