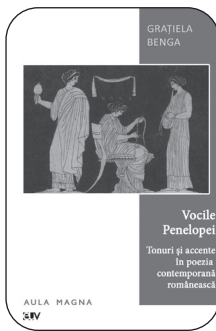


Grația Benga, *Vocile Penelopei. Tonuri și accente în poezia contemporană românească*, Timișoara, Editura Universității de Vest, 2023



Abstract: As the title indicates, Grația Benga scrutinizes *Vocile Penelopei, Tonuri și accente în poezia contemporană românească* [*Penelope's Voices. Tones and Accents in Contemporary Romanian Poetry*], within the first volume that aims to systematically analyze the production of recent Romanian poetry written by women. To preserve the metaphor, we have to say that not only the sounds, but also the silences of the poems are given insightful interpretations, in an attempt to understand what the (female) subject feels in relation to herself, the other, God, technology and other environments. The commented poems are grouped within eleven sections that highlight a thematic and stylistic kinship shared by Romanian women poets.

Keywords: Contemporary Romanian Poetry; Female Voices; Feminism; Maternity; Posthumanism; Masks.

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AN EXHAUSTIVE STUDY ON ROMANIAN CONTEMPORARY POETRY WRITTEN BY WOMEN

In *Vocile Penelopei, Tonuri și accente în poezia contemporană românească* [*Penelope's Voices. Tones and Accents in Contemporary Romanian Poetry*] (2023), Grația Benga examines contemporary Romanian poetry written by women, recording very diverse voices, from those heard during (late) communism, to ones that have recently debuted. It must be said that the present volume carries forward, from (partially) different focal points, an exploratory approach initiated in *Rețeaua. Poezia românească a anilor 2000* [*The Network. Romanian Poetry of the 2000s*] (2016), showing a sustained interest in contemporary poetry.

The first part of the study is based on several theoretical nodes, which emphasize the author's knack for synthesis. The first one analyzes the discussions in the Romanian literary field about literature written by women and their place in intellectual life, as they appear in various spaces of contemporary reflection, from collective volumes, surveys and interviews, to vlogs and other media platforms. The second one diachronically synthesizes the waves of feminism and the debates about postfeminism, intersectionality and posthumanism.

The second part of the work consists of 11 subchapters, in which Benga scrutinizes stylistic and thematic patterns, which determine specific voices (i.e., identities) in Romanian contemporary poetry. In *One nature, many natures*, she attributes Mariana Codruț the formula of *poetry-pulse*, in which emotion oscillates between cerebral and instinctual. The (sub)poetry of Angela

Marinescu is read as a reconfiguration of the self by constituting a new center, in Jungian terms. Consuming the sacred within immanent experiences, the poetic subject alters the sensory borders with the world, in the vicinity of death and pleasure. The ten volumes published by Grete Tartler, mixing erudite, mythological elements with trivial matters, strike a balance between a “propensity for erudition” and an impression of being “alive”. In the case of Marta Petreu, the representation of the egocentric female identity intensifies from one volume to another, from the competition with the “male friends” - as declared in *Aduceți verbele* [‘Bring the verbs’] (1981) - to the destructive analysis of the self and of the relationship with God. Expressionist stringency is the watchword in the poet’s struggle to replace the Creator in the gesture of (poetic) creation.

The following voices are situated *Between the Human and the Sacred*. Ilena Mălăncioiu’s poems are assimilated to funeral songs intertwined with erotic plots, in order to explore (ontological) freedom. The next section is dedicated to poetry that transcends the immanent through metaphysical aspiration, in a comprehensive formula that valorizes matter. Thus, Ioana Nicolaie’s *Noctiluca* (2023) corroborates this sensitivity with the attention paid to the universe of objects and technology, and *Poemele de trecut praguri* [‘Poems to Cross Thresholds’] (2022) by Doina Ioanid manifests the same “little theodicy” of things that have not lost their symbolic substrate, reverberating microhistories and *topoi* of (cultural) memory. The next sub-chapter maps different forms of marginality (understood as eccentricity in relation to various canons) explored poetically,

considering especially the ascendant vector. This is nourished by mythical intarsia in Moni Stănilă’s poetry, which “lives the places”, whose symbolic value is widely commented on.

In *Bodies and signs*, the author talks about the corporeality of poetry, looking at Magdalena Ghica/ Magdea Cârnecki’s visionar openings, derived from a bodily assemblage in which the human and the cosmic intertwine, as in *Haosmos* (1992). In the interpretation of *Poem trans-neuronal* [‘Trans-neuronal Poem’] (2012), the researcher offers a hermeneutic trace of the graphic spaces left between the names of the listed divinities, marking the active intervention of the poetic subject, which “does not allow itself to be dominated by tradition, or tempted by exoticisms. It makes an absorbing and unifying cognitive effort, incited by the individual limitations of the journey” (p. 180). Rodica Draghinescu plays with the visible and the intuitive regimes. To see is, for her, a form of ontological constitution, oscillating between identity (corporeal) and alterity as a simulacrum (photograph, doll). Judith Mészáros is discussed for her explosive language, with its oneiric and textualist influences, reminiscent of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, through her “quasi-mystical” recompositions of the everyday and the self-sacrificial impetus. Floarea Țuțuianu is included here due to the questioning of the language-body relationship (as mediated-unmediated) from *Corp de literă* [‘Body of letter’] (2017). This is followed by a discussion of Nora Iuga’s poems, in which affect and representation are (un)masked through self-fiction, and then by an analysis of Ruxandra Cesereanu’s work, which is imbued with a similar assumption

of (female) masks, in a process of self-reconfiguration. Fertilely traversed by crises (ruptures, delusions, trances and neuroses) and nourished by a mythical imaginary, poetry facilitates the totalizing knowledge of the self. The chapter ends with the poetry of Ioana Vintilă, with its obsessive, demystified body images, designed to criticize social conventions.

Maps: layers and intersections groups different “poetics of shadows” (Simona Popescu, Irina Nechit and Ioana Geacăr), as a rewriting of the traces left in various layers of reality. The brutal imaginary, oscillating between mythical and real, with the political and civic anchorage, is discussed from a topographical perspective in Ruxandra Cesereanu’s poems. *The ethical turn* sums up the voices of Teodora Coman, Elena Vlădăreanu, Alexandra Pîzgu, Livia Ștefan and Daniela Rațiu, characterized by the problematization of generational vulnerabilities, revolt, disenchantment and disappointment in relation to various ideologies.

Silence, a Broken Sign presents the movements of memory and the ambiguities of crisis reflected in the narrative and descriptive notations of Cristina Ispas, respectively in the “narrative minimalism” of Alina Purcaru. The representational interplays are captured between sincerity and (post)irony in the works of Alexandra Turcu, Alexandra Bodnaru, Laura Francisca Pavel and Ana Săndulescu. Further on, the author analyzes poems that put the accent on *Identity and Relating*, shifting from the *self* to text in the identitarian formula of Svetlana Cârsteian’s poems, imprinted by the consciousness of femininity. Also, Olga Ștefan’s poetics (characterized by object-body associations) takes shape

through the oscillating imaginary between retractile and eruptive representations, which highlight the theme of inadequacy.

The eighth section captures the agonies and ecstasies of *motherhood* poems, with their postural and identitarian implications for Elena Vlădăreanu, Lia Faur, Daniela Hendea, Diana Geacăr, Daniela Rațiu, Ștefania Mihalache, and Anastasia Gavrilovici. *The Archives* store the cultural and Hollywood memory of Laura Francisca Pavel, the erotic memories, of a variable geometry, of Ana Donțu, the traumatic memory from the last volume of Ștefania Mihalache and the fragmented memories which short-circuit the ontological and the sensorial in Luminița Amarie’s most recent volume. The author also reflects on the subversive hypostasis of collective memory, made by Teodora Coman in *Lucy* (2021), a hominid from whom a female descent, opposed to the biblical one, is traced.

In *Feminist Poetry: The Scream and the Rage?* the voices that deliberately challenge the patriarchal order are grouped together, ranging from the shocking unconventionality of Miruna Vlada to the brutal way Medeea Iancu debunks taboos surrounding femininity. The softer but equally percussive voices of Alina Purcaru and Gabriela Feceoru are recorded, the latter with accents of feminist manifesto. In *Posthuman Hybridizations*, Cristina Stancu’s reification and impersonalism are examined from the perspective of a fluid-Protean identity, which encompasses both the human and the technological. The tension real-virtual, human-digital (socio-politically anchored) of Ruxandra Cesereanu’s *Sofia Romania* (2022) offers a reflection on the existential meaning of poetry. The following comments privilege the fresh sense of subjectivity in

Cosmina Moroșan's *Beatitudine (Bliss)* (2017), in Daniela Hendea's *H2X* (2021) and in Monica Stoica's poems, tending to a "posthuman ataraxia". Finally, Benga focuses on Adelina Pascale's transformative subject-object relations, the basis for a bodily form of knowledge which embraces very different spaces and environments.

Although we appreciate the (quasi) exhaustiveness of the repertory, we would have expected an explicit justification of the selections made in the chapters of the book, respectively of the criteria according to which the poets were grouped. Not all of the explanations succeed in summarizing the affinities between the poetic formulas put together and the specific differences between them. Instead, the differences of some individual trajectories, from one volume to another, are well captured.

I will conclude by saying that this study offers very relevant close-readings, accompanied by well-thought out contextual (generational) reflections. Moreover, the author pursues the object of study from a panoramic perspective, exploring even the subterranean communication between the poetic and the extra-poetic. For example, Marta Petreu's latest volume of poems is read as an extension of the novel *Acasă, pe câmpia Armageddonului* ['At Home, on the Field of Armageddon'] (2012) for deepening and translating lyrically the same archetypal themes. Ilena Mălăncioiu's poetry reflects her interest in tragic guilt, which she exploited in her doctoral thesis, and in the case of Ruxandra Cesereanu, we can see her mentality essays irrigating the lexical registers and imaginary axes of her poems.