

## The French Feminine Pattern in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Romanian Prose

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**Résumé :** Cet article essaie d'analyser les facteurs modeleurs de la construction de l'identité des personnages féminins dans la prose roumaine du XIX<sup>e</sup> à travers un modèle français qui apparaît dans plusieurs écrits. Je vais développer ce sujet à travers trois perspectives : une perspective socioculturelle et historique qui met en discussion la transition de la société rurale/agraire à la société urbaine/industrielle; une perspective qui met en discussion l'estompage des conventions et des stéréotypes dans la représentation de la féminité moyennant le passage du romantisme au réalisme et une perspective comparative entre la littérature et la culture roumaine et la littérature et la culture française : perspectives comparatives des sujets que les écrivains roumains et français ont choisis: stratégies du discours féministe, indépendance économique des femmes, conformité sociale et accomplissement personnel ou personnages féminins et milieu rural/urbaine.

**Mots-clés :** personnages féminins dans la prose roumaine du XIX<sup>e</sup>, modèle français

The nineteenth Romanian society is a patriarchal one, which does not accept women's emancipation or the construction of their individual identity. Being a wife and a mother are the only achievements women are allowed in such a society. A woman can define herself only in comparison with her parents, her husband, and her children. In most cases, the female character is a lover, and rarely a mother. This is a normal approach, considering that, for a long period, the 19<sup>th</sup> century literature is influenced by the Romantic Movement, and therefore there is a certain pattern of analyzing women.

Count de Langeron who visited the Romanian principalities three times during the Russian Turkish war witnessed the process of Europeanization of the upper classes and "the rapid changes which have taken place in the clothes and manners of these ladies, and even in their education. In 1806, we found many of these ladies dressed in Oriental clothes living in unfurnished houses, with extremely jealous husbands. But the revolution accomplished first at Iassy and then at Bucharest and in the provinces was as rapid as complete. A year later, all ladies in Moldavia and Wallachia, had adopted European clothes and left the Oriental ones. In both capitals, fashionable merchants, dressmakers and tailors from Vienna and Paris began to arrive, and did away with all the old fashion things that were treated as novelty in Iassy. Elegant carriages appeared, French chefs were imported and nothing but French was spoken in the drawing room and boudoirs." He also writes about peasant women: "A short skirt, a shirt and a wide jacket are the clothes worn by peasant to look at than their faces. They are all tall and slender, but dark and prematurely withered. A white veil distinguishes married women from girls." [1]

Vasile Panopol wrote about this period of great change influenced by the Russian armies: "In the course of that campaign, Russian officers – including many French émigrés – invaded Iassy, particularly in winter, when military operations were interrupted. Many Moldavian aristocrats and their wives were enthusiastically pro-Russian, and received with open arms these guests, whose good looks, manners impressed the women. It appears that they forced the men to permit them... a rather too free attitude, which in certain cases degenerated. Wishing to advance towards European civilization in gigantic strides, they outran their husbands." [2]

Saint-Marc Girardin noticed that "the education of girls consists in teaching them French, music, and dancing. When they know all these, we consider them to have completed their education and marry them off ... Once married, our women do nothing, spend their time wallowing on couches, adorn themselves, pay and receive calls. The more active ones read novels ... from these they learn how to behave ... And yet, they are better than we are and much superior to us. This is generally the case in a not fully civilized society, either because women are more capable of adopting civilized customs, because their weaker nature is more flexible, or because they need only half-civilization, as the addition of their delicacy lifts them without delay to the highest level of civilization." [3]

The woman's juridic-civil status and her inferior role were emphasized by the adoption of the *Codul Civil napoleonian* - 1865 (*The Napoleonean Civil Code*) that granted men a superior position and limited women to a passive role of being only a mother, tutor and administrator of the family's income. The adoption of this code meant a regress for the woman's civil role in Romanian Principalities. Even if *Codul Calimach* (*The Calimach Code*, 1817) in Moldavia and *Codul Caragea* (*The Caragea Code*, 1818) in Wallachia situated the family under man's authority, they also granted women little autonomy in family.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century is marked by the fact that women are regarded as objects in all the social categories. They are condemned to resign themselves and to become what social institutions based on moral and religion expect them to be. This society not only represents the background for women but also a powerful force that tries to make them obey. The images of a woman and her feminine nature, presented and required by the society, are very old: her images as a wife and as a mother. But the alienation of women is more relevant as they accept these images and do not intend to change anything. The woman who starts to ask questions about her destiny or tries to discover herself as a personality and "live her life" will be unhappy. However, she tries, because from deep inside emerges an unexpected will to "live", which is an expression of her desire for liberty and freedom.

According to Teodor Vîrgolici, the novel *Elena*, written by Dimitrie Bolintineanu "is on the trend of the romantic effort of those times, which is to rehabilitate the woman and her feelings against the social environment in which she was forced to live." [4] Elena is "a wonder, a total perfection. Youth, beauty, spirit, upbringing, delicate feelings were representing Elena in the highest degree. She was one of the rare, maybe unique human beings created by God from time to time in a degenerated society, with the purpose of reminding the people that He did not desert them." [5] As the author confessed, she was "sacrificed" three years before, in order to become the wife of court marshal George, a man of 50 years old. "She agreed, because that was the will of her parents. She agreed as if she got into a monastery or as if she died, because she wanted to please her parents." (p. 115)

The 19<sup>th</sup> century society described by most of the writers is the one in which money represents the supreme good. The values and conventions of the lost aristocratic society that appears in most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century writings are constructed around the mixture of opposite terms and relations, marriageable and unmarried girls, conventional and unconventional women, entrapped and free female statute, poor and rich people. The author, also, criticizes the marriage system that is limited to the economic dependency of women. Women in this world can achieve recognition only through marriage with a wealthy man. Dimitrie Bolintineanu criticizes the marital system, which gives the father an absolute power of decision regarding the future son-in-law. There are many examples in which the father, or both parents, express their will without consulting their daughter that was about to marry:

"Sofia has no right to say something ...she mustn't have! ...I will have the final word, and she will comply!

"But how about her mother?"

"In my house the hen does not sing... I'm going to inform them now about this good novelty, as well as about my wish." (p. 159)

The way to escape from the world of conventions was only through open rebellion, thus adultery becomes in the Romantic literature a right of the married woman against her will. Loving Alexandru, Elena rediscovers herself as a woman. Although she is a romantic heroine and, according to this status she is melancholic, restless, enthusiastic or sad, she does not lose her reason when she falls in love. She is not one of the high-class society women who have lovers from boredom. She is truly in love and she continuously analyses herself. In the beginning, she tries to evade love because her education and the precepts of society do not allow her to love someone else except her husband, even if he had a mistress. According to Dimitrie Pacurariu, although it is written in a romantic manner, in the novel *Elena* there is "a

predilection for the analysis of the soul tribulations, of the love psychology, as well as for the nuanced description of the feminine soul. In this respect, Bolintineanu precedes Duiliu Zamfirescu, whose heroine, Tincuta, is prefigured by Elena.” [6]

It has been noticed that many women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century fell into resignation, finding their comfort in reverie. This is another way of living, that is maintained through reading novels, poetry or drawing-room ballads. Most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century women live closed, in their homes. The heroines who do not play by the rules the society has set for women are eliminated. The idealized heroines in the literature exercise on them a compensatory function and contribute to the maintaining of their frustration feeling, as well as to send away their boredom. Some of them will dream and cry, others will try to evade the narrow circle and live a real life.

Elena reads *Le lys de la vallee*, the novel written by Honoré de Balzac. She identifies herself with Henrietta, the heroine of this novel. On the cover of the book she wrote about her feelings: “My soul is sad in the center of joys. I wonder why, and I don’t find the reason. It seems to me that I miss the life ... And the worst of all is that I cannot complain, because what I can say if I don’t know why I am suffering for. And to whom am I supposed to complain? My poor heart, you should break into tears! This is my only consolation in this life! Oh, I would rather die! ...” (p. 142).

Olga, *O alergare de cai* (*A Horse Race*), Costache Negruzzi, is presented as “a portrait of a lady among books.” She reads poetry in foreign languages (Russian and Polish), J.J. Rousseau, *La nouvelle Heloise*, from *Il Canzoniere* by Petrarca and from *Kabale und Liebe*, by Friedrich von Schiller, and Honoré de Balzac was Mrs. B’s “the favorite author.”

Iulica, I. A. Bassarabescu, *Pe drezină* (*On the Rail Cart*), about whom Teodor Virgolici says that this female character has Madame Bovary’s features, lives her monotone life and her frustration of being married at her mother’s will with an ordinary chief of a small railway station. She is reading all day long (she bought all the novels from the news-stand). Her husband would do everything for her, but he cannot understand her desires and her desperation.

She had been married for one year when she met a former suitor. The man threatens to throw himself in front of the train if she does not elope with him. “In that moment, Iulica remembered a similar scene from a novel; not even in the novel the countess allowed the marquis to leave. Moreover, she remembered the heroine’s words, which she repeated:

“Well, sir; you can do whatever you like with me! My destiny, my future, as well as my immaculate past are in your hands... Just order, sir...” [7] The two lovers chose a “poetic escape: on Saturday, at midnight, with a rail cart.” While she is packing, Iulica is tortured by remorse and, in several moments, she is tempted to change her mind, but: “she promised. Not even the countess in the novel acted in another way with the marquis” (she identifies herself again with the character from the novel).

Elena, Bolintineanu’s heroine, refers real life to the bookish happenings, but she is pragmatically and she does not allow her life to be guided by characters from novels. Elescu asks her:

“Therefore, you allow me to ask for your life?”

“Yes”, says Elena.

“Nothing else?”

“What else?”

“What if I’ve asked for your heart?”

Without being uneasy, Elena answers:

“There were cases when a woman loved the man who saved her life, in the novels...But let’s skip these jokes...because, in reality there are nothing but jokes...and let’s get on” (p. 157).

Another theme in the 19<sup>th</sup> century literature is the rehabilitation through love of the decayed courtesans that become exemplary women. After living a life full of pleasures, these women try to find for themselves a new identity through love.

In the short story *Un sacrificiu al vietii* (*A Sacrifice to life*) written by Ioan Slavici, Aurel Chintes, Ph.D. in law at Paris, meets one day “a young lady, Miss Marcelina Calami, who is beautiful and elegant as well as lively and neat. He is convinced that she is the victim of the unjust society and a sacrifice both of the people that tempted her, and of the education which made her consider that her deeds were normal.” [8] In order to win a process, Chintes accepts to get involved in a world of merchants who sell professional secrets, a world populated by people who used influence traffic and blackmail. While he morally decays, she rehabilitates her position in the society, “she did not wander anymore in the world smiling to everyone; she just wandered confused, like a human being that did not know what to search for. She spent her life in an exhausting waiting, because he visited her more rarely and he did not behave with her with the same affectionate decency that he manifested before, when she was elegant, easy-fitting and neat.” (p. 86)

She is not leaving the house anymore, unless it is evening, when she walks alone, without a precise target, on the most secluded streets. “She couldn’t have the life that she used to live, and she was shivering when she thought of her condition. She couldn’t see another life opening for her, since the man to whom she was ready to become a slave did not exist anymore. In spite all these, she considered herself better now than she once used to be, and she was regarding with contempt to the people that were passing her running after the vainly pleasures of life” (p. 110). The child that she wants becomes the ideal of her life, but being deserted by her lover, Marcelina gives up to everything, thinking that is not her sacrifice, but <<the sacrifice of life>> (p. 101).

Eleonora, the main character in the short story *Privighetoarea Socolei* (*Socola’s Nightingale*) written by Nicolae Gane, is “the sweetest human being that ever existed between the walls of Iassy city.” [9] During daytime she worked as a bonnet-maker, and during the night time “she did not reject the young men who made a glory for themselves by compromising her; she was giving to a young man a look, to another one a smile, a handshake to the third, and being a spender comparable with a generous child, she shared to everyone something from her graces. Only her heart did not take part in this playful game of her youth.”

As Marguerite Gautier (Alexandre Dumas, *The Lady of the Camellias*) she falls in love for the first time and wants to become an exemplary person through this pure love: “I will break these ties. As long as I wandered the world, it gave me everything and I was poor; today, when I gave up on it, I’m rich, because I have you. My past is a terrible witness against me. I have made many mistakes, but in the day that I loved you, I was baptized again and I’m totally forgiven” (p. 71). Yet, after one year of love, Petru leaves her in order to marry with another woman. Nicolae Gane solves the end of the short story according to the romantic tradition. Eleonora dresses in a bride’s suit, swallows poison and goes to sing for the last time <<under the big linden tree in the garden of Socola>>.

The ethics of men in the rural environment can also change in contact with urban civilization. Corporal Dragan bets with the boys from the village that he will conquer Sultanica, the heroine of the short story with the same title, written by Barbu Stefanescu Delavrancea.

By falling in love and giving up with the corporal, Sultanica is convinced that she will end up in hell for her sins: “I cheat on my mother, I’m dishonoring her immaculate old age, I cheat on the holy things! Suddenly, the light in her eyes sparkles. The fireside is getting brighter, it’s earthly lips are getting red and stretch like a dragon neck, the flames are like fire tongues that wriggle and unbind, and the quake inside the stove starts like a torrent of grief.” [10].

Marioara, the heroine of the short story with the same title, written by Sofia Nadejde, is also the victim of a bet. Although Nicu falls in love with the girl, he enforces himself to quit on her, in order to win this bet between men. Marioara shares the same tragic fate of the deserted women, which is a short love story with a predictable end just from the first signs.

In other occasions, the mentality of the society is the one that determines the husband to abandon his wife. In the short story *Diploma lui Guta* (*Guta's Diploma*), C. Mille depicts the case of a family that sends their son to study in Paris, but he does not succeed in finishing his studies not even in ten years and, therefore, his father refuses to send money any more and he is forced to return home. Meanwhile, the boy has been married a French woman and they have a child. His parents and his two sisters who remained unmarried because their dowry was used to pay Guta's staying in France try to determine him to leave his wife and to marry a wealthy girl.

The cold behavior manifested initially by his mother and sisters against their daughter-in-law soon becomes hatred. "Hardened by the old age of maids, the sisters blamed the woman who determined Guta not to work and to spend the money of the old man for the decay of the future. Mother saw in this woman the source for all the bad things that came upon the whole household." [11]

In the end, his family separates them, and the whole society in the city of Iasi was very content. When they heard about Guta's separation, the people in Iassy "praised his gesture in one voice <<Can you believe: the French woman confused him, but he remained a good boy. She sent his Madame back home and he married as a brave son of his honest father...As if there were no more girls left in Moldavia!... Should we wait for the French women to take us all the good boys and our daughters become maids?... And what a trick they played to the French woman!>>...And the slum was laughing with joy about the farce." (p. 146)

In the short story *Pe drezină* (*On the railcart*), I.A. Bassarabescu approaches the issue of the girls' lack of education, in this case generated by the concepts of a widow mother who refuses to send her daughter to study, being under the influence of the bad mentality of those times, according to which the girl would have got there in contact with a corrupt environment. Therefore, her daughter did not take lessons anymore and started playing piano only by ear. She got the piano by random. Her mother, Madam Luxita, the moneylender, acquired it from a debtor that pawned the piano. She gave it as a dowry to her daughter, but "she did not hire a professor. Why should she spend money for this? She did not enroll her daughter at conservatory, in order she did not << get in contact>> with all <<the tramps>>. For the same reason, she did not allowed Luxita to graduate the vocational school, so she withdrew her." (p. 61) In exchange, she sealed her fate, marrying her with a stationmaster:

"My daughter has dowry: I won't make her neither a professor, nor a telegraph operator or an actress. May God give her a good destiny, without vices; because, her little education and the piano knowledge she has... it is enough for her. According to Luxita, *Fate* meant a husband" (p. 62)

In the short story *Calugarita* (*The Nun*), Grigore Alexandrescu rises the issue of a new social aspect, that is aiming at the forced monasticism, considered an abuse committed by many parents, either step parents or not (C.D. Aricescu, *Sora Agapia, Calugaria sau Căsătorie* (*Sister Agapia or Monastic Life and Marriage*). In this case, a mystical mother, the wife of Corbeanu chancellor – one of the most trusted people of voivode Constantin Brancoveanu, falls gravely ill and because "she had very little trust in human medicine, her favorite doctors were the nuns that surrounded her bed day and night. They gave her all the soul help that was needed, and kept telling that her good deeds would bring back her health. The nuns also told her that many people regained their health, sending one of their children or their single child in monasticism, and advice her to proceed in a similar manner." [12] Once recovered, she convinces her husband to send Elena, their older daughter, to become a nun.

Approaching, in principle, the same theme as Grigore Alexandrescu, C.D. Aricescu forces, probably deliberately, the note of disclosure regarding of what is happening inside the walls of the monastery, where the orphan girls or the girls imprisoned there by their parents have to spent the rest of their lives: "in O...hermitage, just under the Carpathians, Maria, a nun, who is 15 years old, is seen by a 50 years old rich gentleman, D.D..., that pays to the abbess in order to have her". And this story gets more complicated, because "after two years,

satiated by Maria's love, D.D... gives her a dowry and marries her with one of his friends...Mariuca, that was the day before yesterday promised to Christ, yesterday was D.D's...mistress, today is D.X's...wife, tomorrow becomes D.D's...fancy woman – not ceasing to be D.X's...wife – and after D.D's...death she becomes the fancy woman, still in her capacity of Mrs. X." [13]

Here, also, sister Agapia warns a cousin that wanted to take the veil: "by dressing the surplice, you will give up not only to all your womanly tastes and to your bodily lusts, but even to your heart of woman, even to your human being reasoning. You will become an automat, without a will in the hands of everyone who wants to insult you, to humiliate you, to despise you, even to offend you because you bound yourself to obey in a blindly manner to your superior and to all your sisters. Let's assume that a certain man or confessor has a taste that might harm your honor and your dignity, if you dare to convince them that they are wandering, that you promised to be pure and humble, that you bound in front of the altar accepting the surplice, to chase away even the darkest thoughts, keeping in mind only the thought of death. The man or the confessor might answer to you: <<believe and not examine, because what I command you is for the salvation of your soul>>".

In 1866, after the Great Union of the Romanian Principalities, G. Le Cler wrote that "Eastern laws, customs and particularly Eastern defects have left a deep imprint on Moldavians and Wallachians while the most striking feature is lack of respect for women. No one here bow before the dignity of a wife or the authority of the mother. The innocence of girls is not spared. The inferior position of women is a carry-over from centuries of barbarity. The abuse made of divorce perpetuates this regrettable humiliation. Woman is not respected. She only receives consideration if she is rich, she is sought only if she is young and beautiful. [...] in Romania, women are superior to men in respect of intelligence, education and heart. " [14]

The second half of the century is the epoch of the *artistic and literary salons* organized by rich and respectable women. They find their social identity. "To keep" a salon becomes for women a modality to get rid of anonymity. They were competing to invite all the artists and writers in fashion. In the same time, it was a competition meant to present an elegant salon, with a "fancy taste". In *Iașii și locuitorii lui în 1840 (Iassy City and Its Inhabitants, in 1840)*, Alecu Russo describes the salon of lady Elena Sturza as being "the champion of the European bone tone and elegance," [15] and N. Petrascu, in his novel *Marin Gelea* writes about a soiree that is taking place in lady Secaly's salon, which was

"one of the best, if not the best in Bucharest. Only the nobility entered the salon, only families claiming to be aristocratic and bearing historical names, as well as, through lady Secaly's friend, the nationalist Zoe Taut, some known Romanian artists and writers, in other words <<le Bucarest connu>>. People were preparing for her soirees in a totally special way. With one or even two weeks before the events, the *A l'Etoile de la mode* and *Aux villes de France* shops, in front of which the participants were standing on two rows, were tossed up to their ceilings by the invited families. On their counters there could be seen mountains of silk, atlases, taffetas, muslins, tulles and ribbons each and all more thin. [...] At her soirees people were listening to music and French theaters, once in a while there was a conference in French, and after 12 hours people started to dance. Among those who were eager to come to her house, there were foreign artists that passed through the country irrespective of their mediocrity. (You could hardly see something Romanian sneaking into the soirees from time to time) Hardly, from time to time, something in Romanian sneaked into the soirees." [16]

In the same novel it is described a salon in which the mistress of the house, a woman with literary inclinations, wanted to transform it into a space meant for cultural meetings, following the French model:

"in the old house, with two rows and with a garden in the rear of the courtyard. The highest row - made up of three salons that communicated between them, and had everywhere high doors colored on a golden background – was dressed up in modern pieces of furniture, some of them with an artistically pretenses. The walls of the middle salon, in which the stair was

placed, were painted in yellow silk, on which some landscapes painted by foreign painters were hanging in black frameworks. In the small salon from the right, her intimate room, the walls were from green silk; on the floor, Persian carpets; on the racks, sculpted vessels; light colored chairs, some precious cloths and thin embroideries. In the salon from the left wing, wallpapered in red, there was her desk; small ebony bookshelves; on one of the walls there was an old tapestry where there it was displayed a love scene between a knight and a damsel near a rail, as well as some copies after Watteau, in old frames, depicting dances under giant trees; in the corners, small lamps covered with silks and colored papers, which conferred the light something mysteriously; on the tables, there were albums and books adorned with miniatures; on the parquet, small carpets of Bukara, in muffled and harmonized colors.

"My intention was to gather something precious and, after that, to invite in my salon, once a week, our intelligent people, persons of spirit, poets, young artists, if they were to be... a sort of imitation of the salons in France... But, for a single woman, it is too difficult!... Though, the most famous salon in our century belonged precisely to a single woman, to princess Matilda, *le Ministere des Graces*, as it was named by Sainte-Beuve and its illustrious guests, among which, sometimes, Napoleon III could be enumerated."

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one of the certitudes regarding a young woman's education was her piano performance. The instrument became very fashionable around 1815, a period of decadence for the harp, the violin, and the cello, instruments that were considered indecent. The same history is reserved for the piano, which, around 1870, is considered vulgar in a certain degree. The young woman's virtuosity was part of the matrimonial strategy. Edmond de Goncourt names the piano "the women's welter." The piano could be a preamble of the erotic thoughts when a drawing-room romance was played; it could record the intense feelings of the woman in the moments when her lover is not with her; or it could simply be a partner against boredom.

In the same time, the woman tries to cultivate her own image. She is always a companion, a carrier: she is a wife, a mistress, a mother, and practically she represents someone else. She is rarely just her own representation; this could be only the case of actresses, writers, women that perform in the fine arts and bind their destinies with people from the same environment who encourage them in their endeavors. When they become objects of visual representation (a partial one – in the case of a family painting, a total one – in the case of a portrait), women are very preoccupied by their attire, which is thought as a reflection of the position they have.

In the Romanian space, this collection of images from the beginning of the century preserves a very interesting penetration of the elements linked to the Western fashion, which the boyars from the Romanian States are superposing to the Oriental fashion; the interpenetration that also survives to the second half of the century is noticed by every westerner that crosses this land, such as the French journalist and literate Ulysse de Marsillac:

"The women's clothing was not with anything behind the men's clothing, especially when it came to originality and opulence. Over the heavy braided hair, they wore with courage an expensive fur cap adorned with a necklace of diamonds, fitted with an emerald clip. In their feet they wore shoes with bent extremities and perforated stockings, fixed with a garter of red ribbons [...] They were also wearing a "surplice", a bulky cloth toga, and on top a breastplate embroidered with gold. Their belt was exuberantly adorned: just imagine a huge bracelet squeezing the waist. The delicate and transparent shirt exposed, through its elegant embroidery, the nudity of the breast. A necklace, more often a gold necklace according to the Byzantine fashion, hanged over their chests."

The fashionable actions of the boyar-woman on the exterior-interior direction of her home's space were limited. The scheduled visits were the most common occasions for meeting, but they took place without maximum requirements in terms of clothing luxury. Only the ballroom, which replaces the banal salon, can provide the space that is necessary to a "luxury" competition (the ballroom, the salons and the moments lived within these spaces make more and more the object of visual representations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). It is not accidentally that, Emile Zola chooses the title *My Salons* and Stendhal names *Armance (Or Several Scenes from*

a *Parisian Salon in 1827*) one of his novels. Ulysse de Marsillac remarks: “What differentiates the balls in Bucharest is the great luxury exhibited by women and by the crowd of uniforms and decorations” (*op. cit.*, p. 176). On the other hand, Mihail Kogălniceanu makes, with much humor but also with irony, a ranking of the “thousands of women specialties,” one can encounter at most of the

“dancing soirees. For example: married women who like to lure with bachelors. Those who are 45 years old and wear in their breast a cuckoo head, in order to remain forever young and lovely. Those who are continuously asking their partners questions. Those who say: my husband is in Eforie city. Those whose husbands are fair captains or bailiffs over convicts. Those who smell like incense and wear collars with folds, while they have a long and slim neck, like the cranes. Or the fur-lined coats, worn by the peasants, with bulged eyes, like those of the crab, only in the proportion of boa’s eyes – the Homeric expression. Or the skeins of grease, full of diamonds, which are jumping like balloons under the candelabra, sweating from their heads to their feet and saying continuously: “It’s incredible! I am not tired at all; I would dance all night without getting tired>>. And the women who wear a lot of make up and dare to dance even if they are over 40 years old. And the 30 years old women who still dance only ... to please others.”

The poor woman was not allowed to live in these spaces. She populated the slums in Bucharest, involuntarily trying to preserve the identity of her place of provenance. Her life evolved between home, household, care for the children, marts and seldom fair-grounds. On another scale than the boyar woman she wears the good clothes only in the moments of feast and celebration days. These clothes represent her, but through affiliation and not through personalization as in the case of rich women. Accidentally, she can be portrayed too, but this extraordinary circumstance is due to the interest for the group that she belongs to and, moreover, for the clothes that she wears (the engravings and watercolors collections depicting folk costumes, made by Carol Pop de Szathmary and Gheorghe Tăttărăscu).

In the novel *Hoții și hagiul* [*The thieves and the pilgrim*], Al. Pelimon proclaims himself as an admirer of the beauties of the villatic festivals in the detriment of the masquerade balls:

“The love in the countryside begins from the Romanian round dances, to social, to statute labors, to the field. The country lads are laughing with the girls, they joke, play, see each other, love each other, while in the city the love starts from reunions, the sun, gardens, and more often from a masquerade ball.

The masquerade ball, this phantasm that drags with it in the middle of the illuminated salons all the transvestite people, makes the hearts of the young sweethearts to frisk, [...] because the lover finds there his lover under a silk domino, with a mask made of netting or of darkened canvas on her eyes.” [19]

The French count Auguste de Lagarde who visited Wallachia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century wrote about the elegance and the beauty of the Romanian women who

“are beautiful and most of them have talents for entertainment. They try to show the foreigners how hard they bear the restraints that are imposed to them while they are in public. Their clothes resemble with the ones of the Greek ladies in Constantinople, adorned with a larger abundance of jewels, but now only the old women and the ones belonging to the third class boyars wear them. The others chose the models in Paris and Vienna, and compete in matters of taste and coquetry with the elegant women in the foreign capitals.” [20]

## Notes

[1] Count de Langeron, apud. Vasile Panopol, *Românece văzute de străini* [*Romanian Women Viewed by Foreigners*], The Romanian Book Publishing House, Bucharest, 1848, p. 81

[2] Girardin, Saint-Marc, apud. Vasile Panopol, *op.cit.* p. 121



- [3] Vasile Panopol, *Românce văzute de străini* [*Romanian Women Viewed by Foreigners*], The Romanian Book Publishing House, Bucharest, 1848, p. 91
- [4] Virgolici, Teodor, *Introducere în opera lui Dimitrie Bolintineanu* (*Introduction to the Works of Dimitrie Bolintineanu*), Bucharest, Minerva Publishing House, 1972, p. 153
- [5] Bolintineanu, Dimitrie, "Elena," *Manoil. Elena*. Afterword and bibliography by Teodor Virgolici, Minerva Publishing House, 1988, p. 114
- [6] Păcurariu, Dumitru, "Dimitrie Bolintineanu," in *Istoria literaturii române* (*The History of the Romanian Literature*). The Publishing House of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, 1968, p. 557
- [7] Bassarabescu, I.A., "Pe drezină" ("On the rail cart") in *Un om în toată firea* (*A Mature Man*), foreword by Teodor Virgolici, Albatros Publishing House, Bucharest, 1988, p. 60
- [8] Slavici, Ioan, "Un sacrificiu al vieții" ("A Sacrifice to Life"), in *Opere* (*Complete Works*), vol. IV, Romanian Academy Publishing House, p. 82
- [9] Gane, Nicolae, "Privighetoea Socolei" ("Socola's Nightingale") in *Scrieri* (*Writings*), edition edited, notes and bibliography by Ilie Dan, preface by St. Cazimir, Minerva Printing House, Bucharest, 1979, p. 64
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- [13] Aricescu, C.D., *Sora Agapia, Calugaria sau Casatoria* (*Sister Agapia or The Monastic Life and the Marriage*), Jon Weiss Printing House, Bucharest, 1871, p. 76.
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- [16] Petrașcu, N., *Marin Gelea*, Albert Baer Printing Office, Bucharest, 1897, p. 103
- [17] Marsillac, de Ulysse, *Bucureștiul în veacul al XIX-lea* [*Bucharest in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*], Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, p. 149
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- [19] Pelimon, Alexandru, *Hoții și hagiul* [*The thieves and the Pilgrim*], The Sacred Metropolitan Church Printing House, Bucharest, 1853, p. 11
- [20] De Lagarde, Auguste, apud. Vasile Panopol, *op. cit.*, p. 57.