

**“GEORGE EMIL PALADE” UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE, PHARMACY  
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY OF TÂRGU MUREŞ  
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF LETTERS, HUMANITIES AND APPLIED  
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**REPRESENTATIONS OF CORPOREALITY  
IN THE POST-1990 FEMALE PROSE**

**ABSTRACT**

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Proposing multiple ways of representing corporeality, the female prose written after 1990 represents a fertile ground for discovering the meanings with which this concept of corporeality was endowed by the post-December prose writers. Therefore, the main objective of the thesis entitled *Reprezentări ale corporalității în proza feminină de după 1990* is to capture the ways and circumstances in which corporeality was represented, the post-communist period being marked by a significant change in the way the body, especially the female one, has been explored and represented in literature. Starting from the complexity of the relationship between the body, identity and society, through a series of representative novels, we will highlight the authenticity and depth of the new bodily representations, undoubtedly marked by the period before the fall of communism, when political power destroyed the privacy of the individual, and social pressure imposed on the body specific forms of manifestation. In this sense, we aim to illustrate a new perspective on corporeality located on the border between the communist past and the post-December present and to discover the ways of verbalizing the intimate body, capable of unexpected experiences.

From a methodological point of view, hermeneutics will allow us to work with the text to discover the valences that corporeality wears, its meanings, the way in which it is illustrated and represented. Thus, we have selected some representative novels of the post-communist period, which we have analyzed and interpreted in detail in order to discover the ways of representing and valorizing the body, most of the time captive of a declining time and space – the novels *Întâlnirea*, *Provizorat*, *Fontana di Trevi*, written by Gabriela Adameșteanu, *Scrisori către Monalisa*, *Windermere: Dragoste la a doua vedere*, by Anamaria Beligan, *FEM* by Magdei Cârneli, *ca și cum nimic nu s-ar fi întâmplat*, by Alina Nelega, *Exuvii*, by Simona Popescu, *Complezență: Înălțarea la Ortopedie: Musafir pe viață: roman*, by Simonei Sora, *De ce fierbe copilul în mămăligă* and *Raftul cu ultimele suflări*, the novels of Aglaja Veteranyi. We aim to follow in the selected works some key aspects that justify their inclusion among body writings, namely the exploration of identity and the capture of the metamorphoses of body identity, the authentic and unreserved representation of the female body, the approach to "taboo" themes starting from exclusively female experiences, respectively the exploration of the multiple bodily experiences of the characters through the detailed description of the sensations and through an intense experientialism. We will also study social criticism and satire, as women's literature after 1989

often uses bodily representations to criticize gender stereotypes, standards placed on women, social pressures and norms imposed on the individual for whom freedom of any kind has lost its true meanings.

Starting from the particularities of female literature and the positioning of women in the Romanian communist society, we will discover the characteristics of the postmodern body and its forms of representation. For this, we will explore the complex connection between literature, corporeality and intimacy, placing our attention especially on the process of (re)construction and (re)discovery of identity, of the self. We will analyze the close connection between the flesh body and the inner one, following their experiences, and we will investigate the individual's path to the imprisonment of his own body. We will not omit studying women seen as being the second and the feeling of otherness. In this context, we will also refer to a series of other aspects, such as the theory of the soul body, the concept of intimacy, the valorization of the body considered the vault of memory, the metamorphoses of bodily identity, within which we will also address the exuvial vision that will bring back to the surface the idea of multiple bodies existing within an apparently single body, all as manifestations of the post-communist female condition. To present these aspects, we will refer to a series of works belonging to important names such as Simone de Beauvoir, Mihaela Miroiu, Elena Zaharia-Filipaș, Sanda Cordoș, Simona Sora. The hermeneutic approach is completed by leaning towards the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and the theories of David le Breton, Max Blecher and Bachelard, respectively towards Jungian and Freudian psychoanalysis, the bodily experiences being thus explored in a profound way.

The innovative element of the thesis finds its roots precisely in the valorization of corporeality as the epicenter of post-December female literature, a literature-testimony in which the fictional world is permeated by the real one, in which the individual's identity center is undermined by the trauma generated by a monolithic ideology captured apothetically in the novels of the selected writers who subjectively process the truth. Our thesis captures the real world, dominated by communist ideology, at the spectral interference with the fictional one, the body being a repository of individual and collective experiences at the same time. In this sense, we studied the body from two distinct angles: we captured the states of the inner body, but we did not fail to analyze these states through the prism of the outer body. In other words, we followed the way in which the two bodies, the flesh and the inner, the soul, communicate leading to profound meanings.

The research, based mainly on the hermeneutics of the text, brought to the surface the existence of various bodies, representative of the post-December society, irreparably marked by the past. We extended the research to the metamorphoses of bodily identity. We captured the body as a means of (re)discovering or (re)constructing the self in the context of the close body-identity relationship and highlighted the individual's dependence on the body. We analyzed the exuvial vision and the multiplicity of beings, in order to then present the body as a way of knowing oneself and the world. Also, the bodily side of writing, the recall in interiority and bodily memory, respectively the revelation of the body's ways of verbalizing its states give a certain kind of value to our research. We would like to mention the fact that our thesis does not propose an exhaustive approach, the aspects captured in the research can be completed by new and new meanings.

Before turning our attention to the representations of corporeality captured in the bibliography of the thesis, it is necessary to create a preliminary framework that facilitates our understanding of the thematic universe of the post-December novels, in the center of which corporeality is located. Thus, the first chapter entitled *Literatura feminină la granița dintre două lumi* illustrates the difficult journey of the female writer in the Romanian literary space, starting from a few constants of female literature fixed by some of the important voices of that time. However, we did not limit our research only to the literary sphere, but went further to the status of women in the Romanian society governed by the written and unwritten laws of the patriarchy. Thus, we presented some relevant aspects regarding the female experience in communism, referring in particular to self-censorship, and we reflected on the obligations of women in the communist society and exclusively female experiences, as these become themes in the post-December novels, the prose writers lamenting their oppressed femininity through the word.

Regarding female prose in the Romanian literary space after 1990, we notice the change of perspective in literary writings, the year 1989 representing an important date in the evolution of Romanian literature. Escaping from the ideological domination of the party, the post-December writers become reclaimers of the past. Reclaiming literature becomes the weapon of those who could not give voice to their creative beginnings, and the proof of the writing's escape from captivity will be represented by a disinhibition in thematic, stylistic, lexical terms, the novels containing in a nutshell all the themes and obsessions of the previous decades that we will certainly analyze thorough our thesis.

We will then get to know the prose writers whose novels are the subject of our research - Gabriela Adameșteanu, Magda Cârneci, Anamaria Beligan, Aglaja Veteranyi, Alina Nelega, Simona Popescu and Simona Sora. Once the significant elements of their literary universe, the openings and thematic orientations of these representative personalities of post-December female prose have been discovered, anticipating at the same time the importance that corporeality holds within the selected works, we turn our attention to autobiography, fiction, autofiction. Studying the autobiographical inclination of the post-December novels, as well as the intrusion of fiction in the unfolding and narration of events, we come to the conclusion that autobiographical elements are carefully sprinkled in a fictional prose, because in the post-December novels it is not so much a softening of reality as of highlighting it, of bringing it to light after a long period of darkness in which it was unwittingly camouflaged.

The second chapter, *Literatură, corporalitate, intimitate*, is tailored around the body of postmodernity. After a few incursions into the bodily dimension of writing, starting from the reception of the act of writing as an adventure of searching the body, we will expose the main bodily representations capitalized in post-December female prose. We are discussing, in this context, the political body, the vulnerable body, the controlled body, the pregnant body, most of which are representations of the submission of the being to the communist society. The novels of chosen for the research will provide significant examples in order to understand each representation. Since the body is one of the essential elements of the woman's positioning in the world, we later analyze, in the subchapter *Le corps objet*, the characteristics of the object body, the situations in which the body becomes an erotic, utilitarian tool, as well as the consequences of this reception embodied in the alienation and estrangement from one's own body. We will discover the abandoned body and the prey body, completing the notations from the previous part of the thesis regarding the human condition of being a woman in a society built on sexism, discrimination and stereotypes.

Along with the de-ideologization of literature, the writings after 1989 gradually began to capitalize on two concepts that were little explored in the previous period, but interconnected – corporeality and intimacy. Therefore, in the third subchapter, *Intimitatea ca modalitate de asumare a corporalității*, we will analyze two important processes that intimacy involves: internalization and externalization. We will understand the two processes in the sense of a journey to the depths of the being, to the place where it can shelter and find itself, so that it can then return to the world

and give voice to the new self. Internalization will be seen as a descent into the being, and verbalization will represent a way of liberation that finds its absolute realization through the word.

Since we are talking about interiority, we cannot omit the existence of the inner body. It is therefore appropriate to bring up the phrase *trup sufletesc*, taken from Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, whose meanings are transferred this time to the post-December novels. We are going to draw some distinctions between the physical body and the inner one, starting from the Husserlian and Heideggerian theories, with the main purpose of noticing the connection between the two, the way in which the inner experiences of the body reflect on the body of flesh. We will then focus on the important role of the confession, which became the main way of expressing the censored self during the regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu. Letters, diaries, notebooks with full pages of confessions become ways to rediscover personal intimacy, as well as the way to establish an intimate connection with the lost self. From the long process of assuming femininity, we will discover the body brought back to life through love between two old partners, and then reflect on the sincere confessions of two characters who embrace the act of writing in order to (re)discover the lost self.

Starting from the hypothesis that literature often has the mission of recovering the significant past, in the third chapter, *Corpul – sediul memoriei: umbrele trecutului în proza feminină postdecembristă*, we analyze the body as a repository of living memories, generating emotions, experiences and distinct states, which, despite the temporal distance, turn out to be more present than the protagonists might imagine. In this context, we capture the body as a social currency, as an expression of the loneliness and oppression of the individual, respectively the body as a place of remembering, and we analyze the provisional body, caught in the net of an illusory love that condemns the woman's body to an eternal inexistence by illustrating a forbidden love story between two women who had the misfortune of being born in a society governed by heteronormativity.

Later, in the sub-chapter *Sensurile complezenței*, we meet again the norms and standards of the communist society mentioned in the first part of the thesis and we capture them this time starting from the scenario of illegal abortions in the communist Romania and continuing with another European country, where rescuing patients in cardio-respiratory attack was a violation of the senses of complacency.

We end the subchapter with a swing between the present and the past. Unable to enjoy the present, the characters turn to memory to reconstruct the past. In this context, we turn our attention

to the temporal regression in the novel *Fontana di Trevi*, the protagonist Letitia plunging into the web of memories despite all efforts to detach herself from her previous life. Exile turns out to be useless, because by returning to the country, the female character rediscovers the feelings that once caused her suffering and disappointment. Memory cancels temporal boundaries and the present moment is destroyed by the process of an endless remembering. Then, in the last part of this chapter, we face a way of blocking memories, called amnesia. This time we will accompany a male character in his struggle with the reconstruction of the past, discovering the typology of the emigrant who faces a violent amnesia that carries a hidden trauma. We will not ignore the history of the country and we will capture the events characteristic of the period before the 90s, when fraudulent border crossings, beyond the borders of the communist states, mirrored the image of an unfettered life.

The fourth chapter reveals, as the title suggests, the states of the body, since, whether we are talking about the body of flesh or of the inner body, hunger, fear of death, alienation, anguish definitively affect both the outer and the inner one universe of the individual. Focusing on the novels of Aglaja Veteranyi, we follow the way in which death darkens the existence of the main character and analyze her slide towards the dramatic end, imagined since childhood. We recall *ființa întru moarte* from Heidegger's studies, considering that in the novels of this prose writer existence is not separated from death at any moment.

Related to death, anguish takes over the inner universe of the characters who face events that cannot be erased from their memory. A relevant example is the earthquake of 1977 due to which death becomes omnipresent. As our central focus is corporeality, we will illustrate in this part of the research the moments of awareness of the perishable nature of the body, as well as how the body's sensors perceive death as a palpable reality. We continue with another state specific to post-December novels, alienation, mainly caused by exile. The exiled being undergoes the cathartic exercise of returning to the past. If in the novel *De ce fierbe copilul în mămăligă* the longing for the country is intertwined with the feeling of inferiority of the emigrant Romanians, in the novel *Întâlnirea*, the return to Romania of the male character, exiled during the communist regime, turns into a real disappointment. What he encounters once he returns to the country describes the image of the degradation of the individual in captivity. We will therefore follow the uprooting of the character on a path of alienation from his own existence and his own body.

As the political intrusion has cracked their outer universe, the characters are tempted by the strong need to retreat into the inner world. Therefore, another state that the body goes through is that of the need to take refuge. For this concealment, the characters either withdraw into protective spaces, hidden from the eyes of the world, like the dungeons in the novel *Exuvii*, or they take refuge in the act of writing as a way of escaping from the reality that is no longer able to generate the soul fulfillment necessary for the being. Both ways of refuge subsidiarily conceal the identity journeys of the self. We discover in the subchapter *Văgăunile* the penetration of the body into an overwhelming world of sensations and the stubbornness of the being to preserve the exuvia of its becomings, so that later, in the subchapter *Maia și terapia prin scris*, we perceive writing as a way of healing fragmented identities. The words will also give rise to some world-creating stories in the next sub-chapter, the characters being in fact alter-egos of the protagonist who transforms her frustrations, anger, revolt, anxiety into words, and words into worlds. It is certain that the characters in the post-December novels are forced to find or create a place of seclusion, where the outside world can withdraw, leaving room for the inner world.

The last chapter of the thesis is symbolically titled *Metamorfozele identității corporale în proza feminină de după 1990*. We will follow the corporeal identity through a process of continuous transformation, referring to some essential aspects of this becoming, such as the transition from the stage of child to adult, with all the trials and changes that this transformation entails, the reconstruction of the self from corporeal foils, the existence of several body types in a story of corporeal avatars, respectively the passage of a new existential stage – that of motherhood.

For instance, in the novel *FEM*, we discover the first awakening of the being, imagined by Magda Cârneci as an exit from increate and as an abandonment of the mother's protective womb. We accompany the character through the journey of her transformation from child to teenager and then to adult, living experiences specific to each metamorphosis. Not only the individual suffers multiple transformations, but also the corporeal identity fluctuates according to each stage of the existential path penciled by the author, with this metamorphosis also being captured the journey of discovering femininity.

We then analyze a corporeal identity cracked by trauma, condemned to a permanent schism. Through the trauma of the child-adult in Aglaja Veteranyi's novels, we will immerse ourselves in the murky waters of a traumatized self. Because of the continuous running with the mother's circus troupe from one place to another, the child does not know the feeling of stability,

the first years of her life being associated with chaos, the inability to have a family, the impossibility of growing up harmoniously in a loving home. The atrocious scenes which she witnesses from an early age, the endless fear of death, transforms the child into an adult for whom it is impossible to find happiness, to live in a present that is no longer haunted by the shadows of the past.

For a thorough study of the rediscovery or reconstruction of the self through corporeality, we will start from the postmodern subject's absence of unity to illustrate multiplicity. Since it is impossible for the being to find itself in singularity, in uniqueness, in the condition of being one, the self follows the path of multiple beings and transforms its corporeality into a tool for finding or reconstructing the self. For instance, in *Exuvii* and *FEM*, we encounter the exuvial being, the being made up of all its past, present and future foils. We will discover in the proposed novels the genesis of the ego in a long story of the metamorphoses of age and mentalities, the becomings of femininity actually representing the becomings of corporeal fields.

In the last part of the chapter, we will explore motherhood perceived either as a revival or as fatality. If from one point of view, motherhood is represented as a way of (re)discovering the existence fulfilled by love, of accepting one's own body, from another point of view, motherhood is the equivalent of despair, the child representing a danger, an obstacle that must be destroyed. In *Hotel Universal*, we will follow the processes of the formation of the fetus, continuing with the process of birth, an opportunity to analyze the feeling of *regressus ad uterum* through the eyes of the newly borne child. Later, in Magda Cârneci's novel, we see the experience of motherhood as a woman's revitalization, an experience that elevates her, a tribute to corporeality itself. Then, at the opposite pole, the pages of the novel *Fontana di Trevi* will take us through the traumatic experience of abortion. This last part will symmetrically close the thesis, because we will remember the frightening background of an era in which the privacy of the human being is shattered and politically conditioned, aspects discussed and analyzed in the beginning of the research.

Through this research we reached an undeniable truth regarding the thematic universe of female prose after 1990 - corporeality is a central and complex subject, a point of major interest in the vision of female prose writers who explored the body in the context of identity, power and oppression. Since the year 1990 marked, as we could observe, the transition to various social, political and cultural changes, many of the post-communist prose writers approached the body on a political battlefield, expressing their dissatisfaction with the social and cultural norms that

governed and limited woman's body. Women writers explored previously censored topics, such as sexuality, motherhood, gender discrimination, illustrating the body as an object of desire or social submission. The novels brought to light the body used as a tool of control and domination within institutions, both social and political ones, investigating how the female body was condemned to constant scrutiny and unparalleled pressure to conform to beauty standards, thinking and acting. Writers have also thoroughly explored the intimate, personal aspects of female corporeal experience, tracing the relationship between body and soul, body and memory or body and cultural identity. The analyzed novels thus challenged us to a long journey through the mysteries of femininity.

However, still closely related to the past, the prose writers did not turn their attention only to the female body. The oppression of the communist era also marked the male body. Going through the pages of the novels, we therefore analyzed the individual and not just the woman. In this context, the shadows of the past, the traumas felt like nightmares proved to be as present and alive as possible in the memory of those who left Romania long ago.

Therefore, we demonstrated the complexity of corporeality by studying it from two different angles: external and internal. We made the distinction between the body of flesh and the inner body, reaching the conclusion that the two communicate incessantly in the female novel after 1990. We found that both bodies are marked by an accentuated experientialism. In other words, the experiences of the outer body constantly reflect on the inner one and vice versa. Like communicating vessels, the two bodies inform the being and engage it in this more or less welcoming existence, left as it were on the temporal border between communism and post-communism.

Although they could have always been accused of a militant feminism, we believe that the purpose of the prose writers was rather one directed towards an awareness of the scenario that individuals, especially women, played in the communist society for which the body lost its essence. In addition to the desire to emphasize the individual's autonomy and rights over his or her own body, the novels also plead for a redefinition of social norms regarding the body and sexuality, for a rediscovery of the lost or forgotten identity. It is important to recognize the diversity of women's literature and not to limit the novels read to a single label or interpretation. Feminine prose after 1990 goes beyond the strictly feminist framework, offering complex perspectives on human existence, closely related to individual and collective memory at the same time. The being is

analyzed through the prism of its corporeality, in a universe marked by sensations and deep experiences, limitations and constraints, desires and ideals that are often shattered.

Escaping from the ideological domination of the party, the literary field experienced total freedom of creation, this aspect also involving the approach of previously avoided themes. Thus, the present research proposed an interpretation of the post-December literary landscape especially from the perspective of reporting to the past, perceiving literature as an instrument of cultural memory. The analysis of the novels that constitute the object of the research followed the mnemonic path of individual and collective essential moments. Due to living in this time of memory, the post-December prose writers used the word as a faithful way of exposing biographical tensions, aspects of life that marked their development, creating a literature with a strong autobiographical substratum that we did not ignore along our hermeneutic approach. Research has demonstrated the close connection between literature, corporeality and intimacy. Post-December female prose proved to be one of searching for lost corporeality. In this context, we focused on the act of writing as an adventure of searching for the body and, constantly working with the text, we demonstrated the inclination of the prose writers to the study of corporeality, to the exploration of corporeal materiality, to the progressive deconstruction and reconstruction of the body. Within the analyzed novels, the close contingency between the text and the body turned into a certainty.

The corporeifying character of the writings brought us the opportunity to carefully study otherness. It was interesting to understand and discuss otherness through the lens of multiplicity. We followed the sensory and intuitive plurality of the being in order to discover the predominant corporeal representations of the writings. The experiences of the characters represented a way to meet temporary bodies, vulnerable bodies, political bodies, utilitarian bodies. We interwoven the intimacy and personal life of the characters with politics and society, in other words, the inner universe with the outer one, to inscribe these multiple representations in the sphere of corporeal alterity. Placing corporeality in close relation with intimacy, we gave the research a special note due to the filtering of the discussed aspects through the two essential and distinct processes – internalization and verbalization.

The interconnectedness of body, mind and soul has allowed us to observe the states of the body. In an interdisciplinary climate, we joined Husserlian, Heideggerian, Bachelardian, Blecherian theories to hermeneutics and directed our attention to the individual's confrontation with death, with anguish and alienation, but also with the need for seclusion or escape from the

imprisonment of one's own body. Continuous internalization guided our steps towards the therapeutic power of the word, writing and stories proving to be creators of selves, bodies and worlds. We followed in detail the evolution of the characters' corporeal identity in an environment marked by change, but also by uncertainty.

The present research thus becomes a testimony of the corporeifying valences of post-December female prose. Transforming corporeality into a kind of axis mundi, the prose writers after 1990 impress with their original view upon the meanings of corporeality, so eloquent for the period immediately following the fall of communism. With the year 1990, these corporeifying writings open the way to the valorization of the body, to its hypostatization, to the study of its forms of manifestation. The post-December prose writers, whose novels were included in this research, interweave the past with the present, the outer universe with the inner one, fulfillment with trauma, becoming true exegetes of corporeality.