

Corina Mariana Mitrulescu,
*Politics and Poetics of Gender
in the Early 20th Century – Case
Studies in Romania and United
Kingdom*, Berlin, Peter Lang,
2022, 215 p.

Diana Sopon

Corina Mariana Mitrulescu's book, *Politics and Poetics of Gender in the Early 20th Century – Case Studies in Romania and United Kingdom*, is a notable milestone in feminist theory and cultural criticism. The book is an introspection in the feminist movement and offers a new perspective on how gender roles are constructed, preserved, and challenged through literature.

Poetics of gender; politics; feminism; gender role; gender epistemology.

Corina Mariana Mitrulescu's book, titled *Politics and Poetics of Gender in the Early 20th Century – Case Studies in Romania and United Kingdom*, published at Peter Lang editorial house in 2022, is one of the newest, yet one of the most comprehensive books on the history of feminism at the beginning of the 20th century. Besides being a fine and minute introspection into the "*querelle de femmes*" issue, the book is also a comparative approach that allows for a better understanding of how political and social environments shaped gender ideas differently in Romania and the UK, particularly through the lens of literary works, journals, and diaries.

In the first chapter, *Gender and Politics: Attitudes, Beliefs and Behaviour in Early 20th Century Europe*, the feminist movements in Britain, Ireland and Romania are presented along with the struggle of the women's voice "to be heard, in terms of both politics and gender" (Mitrulescu, 2022, p. 21) at the end of the 19th century. Sagaciously selecting the examples from an abundant literature review, the author offers numerous

glaring stances of women's role, portrayed by the patriarchal society of the time as child bearers, mothers and wives only.

The roots of these immutable centuries long beliefs are investigated in the second chapter, *Gender Epistemology: The Masculinity of Change, Evolution and Revolution, and the Femminity of Immanence*. Here, the author addresses the question of the socially active "transcendence" of men versus the socially passive "immanence" of women. Thus, she presents the women's conflict generated by the requirements of the society and by them being "prohibited access to transcendence" and "forced to remain in a permanent state of immanence" (Mitrulescu, 2022, p. 65). Kaleidoscopic facets of women's role and lack of any status in society are presented, ranging from being "a shadow of the husband" (Mitrulescu, 2022, p. 68) to a mere reflection in the mirror – the so-called "Lancanian stage" (Mitrulescu, 2022, p. 70).

The idea of women being an object is considered in the third chapter, titled *The Mirror and the Mold: Confronting Gender in Early Modernist Narrative. Constructions of Gender Identities*. As it comes out from the book, the "objectification" of women is explained by the societal conviction that "Women must mold their personalities according to the pattern provided by the patriarchal society: they are objects used to embellish men's life and bodies used for their procreative purpose" (Mitrulescu, 2022, p. 93). This chapter also scrutinizes the gender "misfits" of women of that time through the lenses of sexual deviance and gender empowerment.

The fourth chapter, *A European Women's Dream in the Twentieth Century: From Confinement to Public Dignity – Case Study: Women in Ireland and Romania at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, offers an image of the political and social changes that took place at the beginning of the 20th century which shaped the status and representations of women in both the public and private spheres. It examines the evolution of feminist thought in early 20th-century Romania and the UK and explores the contrasting development of feminism in these two contexts, focusing on case studies represented by modernist writings. Authors such as Camil Petrescu and Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, who influenced Romanian gender discourse, and novelists such as Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence or Elizabeth Bowen have been taken into account.

Altogether, besides picturing the political and social changes that took place at the beginning of the 20th century, which shaped the status and representations of women in both the public and private spheres, the book offers a vivid image of the evolution of the feminist movement in this epoch. On the other hand, the modernist texts chosen for analysis underscore early feminist discourse and demonstrate how gender issues intersect national and cultural identities in this period, leading to a broader illustration of the landscape of feminist history and literature in European contexts.

Both the unique challenges and contributions of Romanian feminism during this period – which are often underrepresented in gender issues – are highlighted in the book through an analysis of literary texts, social and historical records. In our opinion, as the

author herself states, the importance of the book resides in bringing to light “the historical filiation of gender and politics at the beginning of the twentieth century” (Mitrulescu, 2022, p. 193), which is crucial in understanding contemporary related gender issues. Last but important is to mention that the main contribution of this book, according to the author, is represented by the extended research dedicated to the beginnings of the Romanian feminism “which has not yet been sufficiently emphasised by others authors.” (Mitrulescu, 2022, p. 193)

The end of the book is an invitation for the reader to become better acquainted with Romanian personalities such as Elisa Leonida Zamfirescu, Smaranda Brăescu, Princess Ileana, Cecilia Cuțescu-Storck, Martha Bibescu, Ella Negruzzi, Virginia Andreescu Haret, who are considered to be pioneers in their field of work and in the Romanian feminist movement.

References

Mitrulescu, Corina Mariana (2022). *Politics and Poetics of Gender in the Early 20th Century – Case Studies in Romania and United Kingdom*. Berlin: Peter Lang

Diana Sopen is a Lecturer at the Land Forces Academy in Sibiu, where she teaches English language. Her main research topics, resulting in contributions to national and international journals and volumes, focus on applied linguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis and contrastive studies on English and Romance languages. (diasopen@yahoo.it)